Leatherhead

BUILDING in context

New development in historic areas

ENGLISH HERITAGE   cabe

Related Guidance

Communities Plan (Sustainable Communities: Building for the future): ODPM
http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_communities/documents/page/odpm_comm_023261.hcsp

PPG1: General Policy and Principles

PPG1 companion guide: By Design- Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice

PPG3: Housing

PPG 12: Development Plans

PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment

Building in Context: New development in historic areas, CABE, English Heritage
http://www.english-heritage.org.uk

Protecting Design Quality in Planning: CABE
http://www.cabe.org.uk

The Councillor's Guide to Urban Design: CABE

Power of Place – the future of the historic environment: English Heritage

The Heritage Dividend: English Heritage

Changing Places…: What the historic environment can do for 21st century England: English Heritage

Looking after Conservation Areas: English Heritage

Building Sustainable Communities: Developing the skills we need: CABE

Local Leadership for better public places: Building sustainable communities: CABE

Building for Life: CABE, Civic Trust, HBF
www.buildingforlife.org

Design Review: CABE

Design Reviewed: CABE

Creating Excellent Buildings: CABE 2003

But would you live there? Shaping Attitudes to Urban Living: Urban Task Force
http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm_urbpol_608464.hcsp

The value of housing design and layout: CABE & OPDM
www.buildingforlife.org

Sustainable Residential Quality in the South East: Llewelyn Davies for GOSE
http://www.go-se.gov.uk/key%20business/publications/downloads/srq.pdf

Images
Wandsworth: Aukett Architects
http://www.aukett.com/
Hereford and Ludlow: Building in Context
Leatherhead: T. Ingram, Jestico and Whiles Architects
http://www.jesticowhiles.co.uk
Historic map: Leatherhead
http://www.old-maps.co.uk
Image produced from www.old-maps.co.uk service with permission of Landmark Information Group Ltd. and Ordnance Survey

Background

Elected members and officers at Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) explored issues relating to commercial edge of centre developments in medium sized towns and villages to inform future decisions in the Borough, with a focus for this event, on Leatherhead. The outcomes raised themes of re-use, sustainability, appropriate development form, movement and permeability, importance of the site to the town, the changing role of supermarkets as regeneration players, and enabling development for mixed use schemes.

The Building in Context Toolkit is an English Heritage South East regional initiative to help deliver better design solutions in historic areas across the South East. The event was organised by Kent Architecture Centre as part of the development of the Toolkit and facilitated by Tony Ingram, South East Regional Design Panel Member with contributions from Cllr. Tony Moore (MVDC); Clive Smith (MVDC); Nigel Barker, English Heritage (EH); and David Exeter, Aukett Architects.

Building in Context guidelines conclude that successful architecture can be created using various approaches: by following historic precedents closely, by adopting them closely, by adapting or by contrasting with them. Case studies chosen to inform this seminar broadly follow the latter two approaches to reflect the diverse nature of the site's surroundings. The following case studies and conclusions arising point to certain lessons for all involved in planning applications. Proposals will need to be considered from a number of different aspects including design quality as an integral part. As Lord Rooker said in the House of Lords on 25th March, 'without proper attention to design, we will not deliver sustainable development'.

Introduction

'Sustainable development of historic areas, reusing what we have already and at its best, not losing anything of significance that future generations would value', was the message from Nigel Barker. Local Authorities can insist on good architecture, and guidance on how to go about this is plentiful from ODPM, EH and CABE, refer to panel left. The functions of these organisations overlap on new interventions in the historic fabric, in seeking good design and questioning what makes a place.

The Ludlow supermarket case study in particular demonstrates how skill and care can introduce large modern structures within the grain of historic buildings and that sensitivity to context and the use of traditional materials are not incompatible with contemporary architecture.

The Hereford restaurant is a clear case of good architecture generated from difficult sites. Developing the site as warehouses would have been more visually obtrusive and an opportunity missed to contribute to an important view of the Cathedral.

The huge changes in the nature of supermarkets were outlined by David Exeter, who charted their development from grocery sales outlets through to supermarkets as destination points and regeneration catalysts in partnership with others.

That good design does not stop at the front door; but extends into public areas beyond the building is a point well made in the case of the South Thames College partnership with Sainsbury's, that animates the public frontage, as does the Ludlow example.

Discussions on site context, facilitated by Tony Ingram with contributions from earlier speakers drew on lessons from these case studies and the audience's experience that ranged from poorly designed commercial development spoiling an important town approach, to a scheme that responded to its context in replicating the form of a natural landscape feature.

Case studies:
Wandsworth
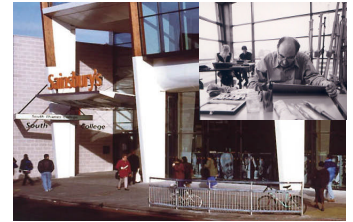
Landowner South Thames College partnered with Sainsbury's to provide a mixed use development of a supermarket with 23 teaching rooms, learning resource centre, café and creche and has further been used as a key part of the revitilisation of this town centre. Winner of Wandsworth Council Design Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Borough.
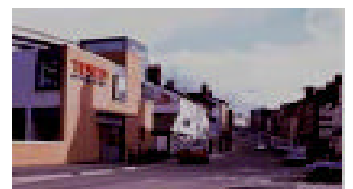
Hereford
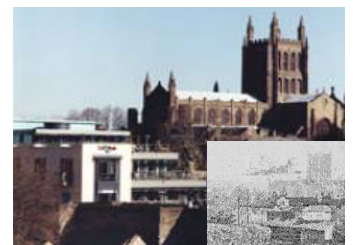
Detailed analysis of the evolution of the surrounding area informed the eventual shape and massing of the development to reflect the historic parallel rows following natural contours leading to the river (see etching). This enabled a design solution maintaining the view of the Cathedral and pattern of the surrounding development, providing a positive and imaginative response to the constraints of the site.

Ludlow

Contemporary materials, large footprint and form of the supermarket counterbalanced by incorporating elements drawn from site context; traditional materials, laid in a local bond; rhythm of existing street facades continued in the projecting two storey element that also signals presence of the building in the High Street; wavy roof attempting to imitate curves of the hills in the background setting and reduce bulk of the building.

Leatherhead

Leatherhead town

The case study

Leatherhead's Bull Hotel/Lidl site was chosen as a topical case study as such sites are relatively common and lessons can be replicated elsewhere within the district and the wider region. Similarly the need to accommodate large scale development in a medium to fine grained settlement and the global drive for more mixed use and sustainable patterns of new development are common issues faced by many towns.

Edge of centre sites in smaller towns can often be more prominent than their size initially suggests as, by their very nature, they are close to through routes or transport nodes, and can therefore be signifiers of a town's quality to present and future investors and residents.

1871-73 Leatherhead

Development background

The former Bull Hotel site is adjacent to Leatherhead Conservation Area and was cleared through a notice issued by MVDC. Local Authority encouragement of a well designed mixed use scheme resulted in receipt of a planning application for a hotel with supermarket below and associated car parking. When the proposed hotel located elsewhere in the town, the design of a new scheme solely consisting of supermarket premises with parking, was not supported by the South East Regional Design Panel, although the operator, Lidl, was commended on attempting to achieve something beyond the standard 'brick bungalow'.

Former Bull Hotel/ Lidl site viewed from one-way system

Context

Addressing site gradient successfully is important, so new development responds well to its surroundings. Addressing the public realm, of pedestrian and road to the front and flank of the site is a key issue. The road junction in front of the site is a very poor urban space and the possibility of removing most of the signage at this junction and re-surface using different materials should be investigated.

A walk around the site

The position of the site on the one way system and between the town, river and railway station, at edge of centre, ensures this site has a role of welcoming people into the town and any development will influence perceptions of the town. Living over the shop is characteristic of the town. New development within the town looked good when first completed but the materials have weathered poorly: quality and durability of materials for new buildings need close attention. Views into and out of the town can be obtained from surrounding countryside and add value to the town's appeal.
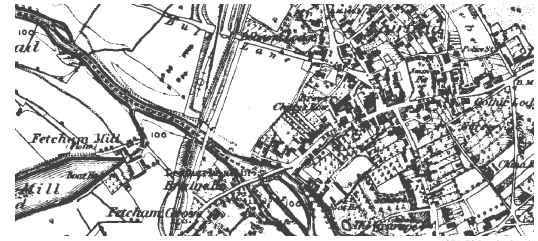
Aspirations for the town and site

Sustainability of development of this site in the context of the town, for its economy and residents, is a key defining principle for new development.

The town's needs were identified as: car parking close to the centre; a low-cost shopping outlet which doesn't mean poor quality development; more housing and affordable housing close to centre that can be an economic generator for development on site not just about planning gain; and things for people to do.

There is a need to reconcile, in terms of site planning and economic goals and other public aspirations such as placemaking and to back 'idealism with pragmatism'. Having regard to the case studies and the audience's experiences of development from elsewhere, caution should be exercised to not allow development that downgrades quality. New development should be encouraged that will enrich Leatherhead and the lead can be provided by the Local Planning Authority through creation of a Development Brief.
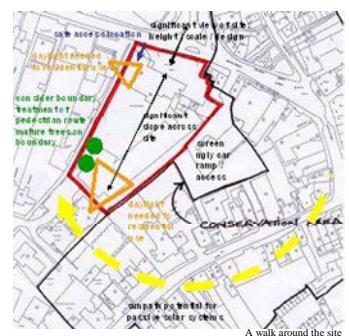

Building in Context: Appraising a proposal

It is true that there is a subjective element in judgements about design quality and people often disagree about what they like. Such differences of opinion and matters of personal taste should not be allowed to obscure the fact that it is possible to arrive at opinions about design quality that are based on objective criteria. There are many ways of doing this, but any such process is likely to include asking the following questions. They encompass both the quality of the building itself and its quality as a contribution to the urban design of the neighbourhood in which it is situated:

The site
- How does the proposed building relate to the site?
- Is there a positive and imaginative response to any problems and constraints?
- Have the physical aspects of the site been considered, such as any changes in level within or beyond it?
- Are access arrangements convenient and existing routes respected?
- Can the amount of accommodation required be fitted on the site in an elegant way?

Wider setting
- How does the proposal relate to its wider setting?
- Are the street pattern and grain of the surroundings respected?
- Are there changes in height between the existing and new development and if so how are they managed?
- Will the result enhance or damage the quality of the townscape?

Density
- How is the density of the proposal related to that of existing and neighbouring uses?
- If there are differences, are they acceptable?

Impact on close views
- Has the impact of the building in close views been assessed?
- Is it either weak or overpowering?
- Does it respect the scale and rhythm of its neighbours?

Materials
- What materials are used?
- How do they relate to those of the surrounding buildings?
- Is the quality as high?
- Are there interesting comparisons or contrasts in the use of materials?
- How will the colours work together?

Architecture suitable to its use
- Is the architecture of the building suitable for the uses it contains?
- Is it trying to be too grand or pretending to be more modest than it really is?

Composition
- How does the architecture present itself to the viewer?
- Is there a strong composition in the pattern of solid to opening in the façade?
- Does the detailing of the materials show signs of careful thought or originality in the way the building is put together?

Public realm
- What contribution, if any, does the proposal make to the public realm?
- If new open space is created, is it clear that it will provide a positive benefit and have a genuine use?

Vistas and views
- In the wider setting, has the impact of the building in views and vistas been considered?
- Does it make a positive or negative impact?
- Does it form an harmonious group or composition with existing buildings or features in the landscape?
- Does it distract the eye from the focus of the view and if so does it provide something better to look at?

From Building in Context, pg 37

Emerging guidelines

Emerging guidelines for the site emphasised the need for:

- Quality in new development in recognition of the impact the site has on perceptions of the town.
- Well designed sustainable development that contributes to surrounding townscape and countryside
- People and vehicle movement and quality of public realm maintained and enhanced
- Equal treatment of all facades that respond well to gradient
- Mixed land uses providing activity outside usual retail hours and meets local needs

The way ahead

A development brief for the former Bull Hotel/ Lidl site informed by the outcomes of the seminar.

A massing study to explore options for site development would inform future decisions and allay concerns of lack of visual enclosure, bulky development creating a canyon effect, framing views of countryside. The study could be carried out independently or as part of the contextual study for a planning application.

A thorough Context Study to support proposals.