

About the TOOLKIT

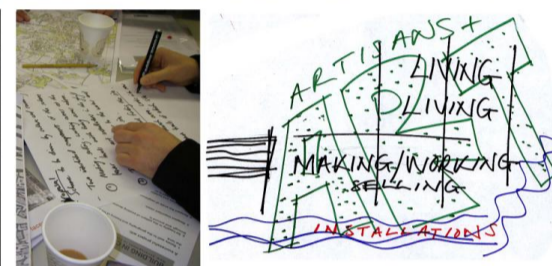
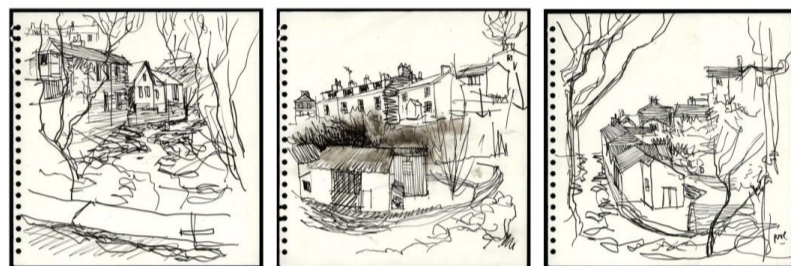
The Building in Context toolkit has been developed by EH, CABE and the Kent Architecture Centre. It grew out of the publication 'Building in Context' published by EH and CABE in 2001. The purpose of the publication was to stimulate a high standard of design when development takes place in historically sensitive contexts. The founding principle is that all successful design solutions depend on allowing time for a thorough site analysis and character appraisal of context. Building in Context TOOLKIT training aims to help those making decisions to reach effective and balanced design decisions.

It is proven to be useful in communicating issues of development in complex situations; helping convey the depth of expertise required in adopting a holistic approach to site development and reduced 'silo mentality'. Through the analysis of a case study, wider design issues than 'how it looks' are explored.

Each workshop consists of a presentation looking at the key issues covered in Building in Context, followed by local and regional case studies, a practical, hands-on drawing activity, and an opportunity to discuss the complex issues associated with successfully incorporating contemporary design in sensitive locations.

The Building in Context Toolkit Programme aims to:

- Enable wider understanding of the principles of developing appropriate contemporary design in historic areas to a range of professional and community groups
- Enable those involved in making decisions affecting historic areas in their attainment of a more effective, balanced and efficient service resulting in improvement of those decisions affecting the quality of the historic environment for future generations.
- Promote sustainable new and re-used development that doesn't sacrifice what future generations will value for the sake of short-term and often illusory gains so that we use already developed areas in the most efficient way, while making them more attractive places in which to live and work and conserving our cultural heritage



The study area included both sides of Stock Beck, to the East of the main road. As the oldest part of Ambleside, 'Above Stock' retains some of its historic charm, but its relative isolation from [despite its proximity to] the rest of the town centre presents a series of problems that were the basis of the day's study. It was suggested that increases in both the density and permeability of the area could be beneficial, but that these issues would have to be handled with care. A specific small site, in a prominent position on the North side of Stock Beck, was put forward as having potential for further development, and this was considered in the group sessions.

After exploring the area, the groups came forward with various suggestions for increasing permeability, as well as improving specific connections. These included the links West across the main road to the car park and East to the footpath leading up through woods to the waterfall, Stock Ghyll Force. They also discussed the potential for a new building next to Stock Beck. Some suggested a new pedestrian bridge. This would link the footpath from Stock Ghyll Force, through the 'Above Stock' area, offering a new direct route down to the main car park. It would also be a decisive increase in permeability, which would be expected to lead to increased activity and movement within the area. The dramatic potential of a new bridge, revealing views up and down the ghyll, were reflected in diagrams and sketches.

The appropriate character for potential new buildings were discussed. Ideas included the use of natural materials and colour, as well as making the best of the views up and down the beck. Proposals for the use of the building included mixing commercial and residential activity. A suggestion from one group was a combination of artistic activities, allowing artists and artisans to live, work, display [including temporary installations] and sell on a single site. There were references to sustainability, and several groups were enthused by the notion of restoring the beck's historic role in generating power for the locality. There seemed to be a general view that some new development could be beneficial, although there would have to be some give and take in resolving the access requirements for vehicles and servicing.

The session was successful in focussing on significant problems at the heart of an area that is already perceived to be attractive. The group discussions threw light on a range of issues, from the relatively low priority given to pedestrian movement, to the opportunity to increase economic and social activity in this part of the town. Above all, the groups developed a common understanding of concepts such as permeability and sustainability, and their relevance in further enhancing the quality of a place that is already valued for its enduring character.

About the Speakers

Paul Holdsworth is Town Centre Manager for several Lake District towns, including Ambleside. He described the historic street pattern, the influence of Stock Beck and how it had been used as a source of power, how the streets had come to be managed for traffic rather than people, and how the old town 'Above Stock' had a distinctive style, but had become disconnected from the centre. He introduced the study area, with a particular emphasis on a site, alongside Stock Beck, that might be suitable for future development.

Annie Atkins is Programme Director for Places Matter!, the Architecture and Built Environment Centre for North-West England. She spoke about the Policy aspects of 'Building in Context', referring to material produced by English Heritage. Starting from the statement that 'Everywhere is Somewhere', she described the definitions of context, illustrated with examples from Cumbria, and spoke about policy documents, including PPS1 [the promotion of high quality design, including the potential for local distinctiveness] and PPG15 [development opportunities in conservation areas].

Ken Martin is an architect, who lives in Appleby. He described a number of projects from his days as Professor of Architecture at Liverpool's John Moores University. These included the rescue of the Albert Dock and the building of the National Conservation Centre. He showed an intriguing modern vertical extension of the historic Melbourne Buildings in Old Hall Street, and brought us up-to-date with his recently completed Floral Pavilion Theatre in the art deco context of New Brighton's promenade. His postscript included a challenging view on the proposals to rebuild the 'Purple House' in the Newlands Valley. During the afternoon, Ken Martin produced several characteristic sketches of the site, utilising these in an inspiring contribution to the group sessions.

Trevor Skempton is an architect, who has spent the last five years advising Liverpool City Council on urban design in the city centre. He was a former Chief Architect in Barrow-in-Furness and City Architect in Newcastle upon Tyne. As facilitator of the Ambleside event, he explained the nine principles of the Building in Context toolkit. He also emphasised the importance of establishing a common language for dealing with key issues, not just leaving it to professionals in their separate disciplines. With this in mind, he highlighted the importance of - and the difference between - 'connectivity' and 'permeability', and 'size' and 'scale'. In the same way, he spoke of the significance of collective 'memory' and the need to 're-cycle' structures as well as materials.