

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



Blackburn is a fine Victorian town set amongst hills, with grand villas stepping out along arterial roads, and sinuous housing terraces sweeping down towards the town centre. However it is also one of the most deprived locations in Britain, according to Director of Regeneration and Environment, Adam Scott, and is a town now adapting to changing needs and a diverse population. The borough's response to this has been to give paramount importance to promoting economic regeneration, in particular through a highly accessible and visually prominent expansion of warehousing and industry along the open moorland corridor of the M65 motorway.

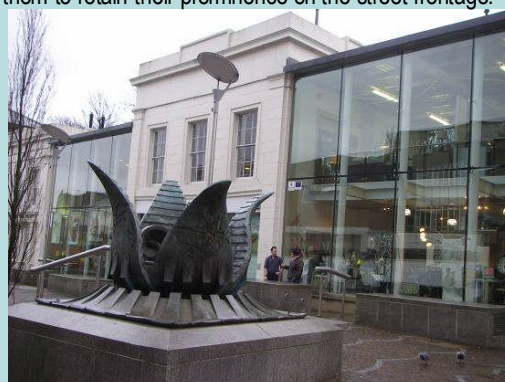
Paul Butler advised that for the town centre, a major mixed use redevelopment of the cathedral quarter beckons, and this will be guided by a comprehensive set of design codes, now being developed. Currently, the area around the cathedral contains fragments of a once diverse and rich Georgian and Victorian townscape which stand isolated amongst a profusion of surface car parks or brick clad retail sheds. The Georgian and Victorian core of this cathedral town has seen a trickle of repair schemes through a townscape heritage initiative, whilst an ambitious programme of townscape renewal has allowed the pedestrianisation of some central streets.

Many Building in Context participants felt that whilst recent phases of public realm investment are of a high standard of materials and finish, they encompass a rather ambitious mix of styles, and seem in places, a little over-engineered. The participants learned that further disruption to the historic street pattern is almost inevitable as more demolition, including that of a Georgian townhouse, will shortly be needed to make way for the inner ring road. However it was felt that perhaps this development, together with the Cathedral Quarter programme, will present opportunities to reclaim more of the inner core for a revival of the mixed commercial civic and residential uses that once allowed this area to thrive.

The case study: Waterloo Pavilions

Andrew Hawthorne explained that the three grade 2 listed pavilions had originally been linked by intervening development and the intention of the current architects was to create a unified and commercially useable space by linking them once more. The curtain wall glazing was selected to provide a contrast and as a neutral foil for the Georgian buildings. The light touch design has been set back slightly from the facades to allow them to retain their prominence on the street frontage.

The refurbishment was designed to be as adaptable as possible for different uses, and carefully modelled rear entrances and staircases have been created opening out on the rear elevation, to provide a positive reference point for the adjacent Cathedral Gardens.



About the Speakers

Jerry Spencer (Lead facilitator)

Jerry is a planner and urban designer who has helped deliver regeneration of historic environments, notably in Hackney, Nottingham, Gloucester and Stoke. Jerry is a former head of design for the NWDA and is now an independent consultant specialising in public sector capacity building and training.

Adam Scott

Adam Scott is Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment at Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. He is responsible for a wide range of functions, including planning, property, regeneration and environmental front line services.

Adrian Swift

Adrian Swift is a principal planner working in the Forward Planning and Transport Policy Group of Blackburn with Darwen Council and has extensive project experience in town centre regeneration.

Paul Butler

Paul's award winning practice, based in Salford advises on all aspects of the statutory planning system, including heritage and conservation appraisals, site and building analysis, planning applications, regeneration studies, urban design and Masterplanning.

About The Architects

Capita Symonds provides a broad range of professional and technical expertise in building design, civil engineering, environment, management and transport. The company has a base in Blackburn, and runs the engineering and highways functions of Lancashire County council. Andy Hawthorne is a member of its architectural team which carries out major public projects.

Our Facilitators

Thanks are extended to our other facilitators:
Annie Atkins, Manager Places Matter!
Andrew Rudge Conservation Officer Blackburn with Darwen Council
Joanne Clark Heritage Officer, Design and Heritage Pennine Lancashire
Darren Ratcliffe Manager design and Heritage Pennine Lancashire
Chris Standish Head of Design and Development Elevate East Lancashire
Nigel Barker English Heritage (observer).

The Workshop

Building in Context: Appraising a proposal

...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 a 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



The redevelopment site



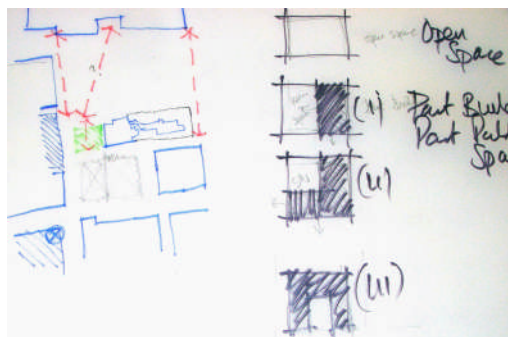
Repaired Georgian terrace opposite the site

The workshop groups explored the King Street 'shatter zone' west of the cathedral, and looked at opportunities for redevelopment of a street block currently occupied by a redundant retail shed.

In this area, blank walled sheds compete for primacy with upstanding, well windowed and deeply modelled buildings from earlier periods of the town's development. The groups felt that site has the potential to knit together these older fragments of a street and block layout, by re-establishing the primacy of outward looking, mixed use development. Participants felt it would be important to have active frontages opening out onto all sides, to connect with the neighbouring listed buildings and to provide much needed interest and overlooking for a recently completed public square next to St Anne's Church to the north.

The groups thought it desirable to ensure an interesting mix of uses for the new buildings on site, as these would help to attract people in from the nearby town centre. Suggestions included some form of market, small business starter units, a café and a library or other cultural activity. Most groups proposed residential accommodation for the upper floors, to ensure the street remained overlooked well into the evening. A variety of block layouts was put forward, most including a direct public access route through the development linking the Georgian courtyard to the south with the new square.

Options for a new street block, all with some form of open space



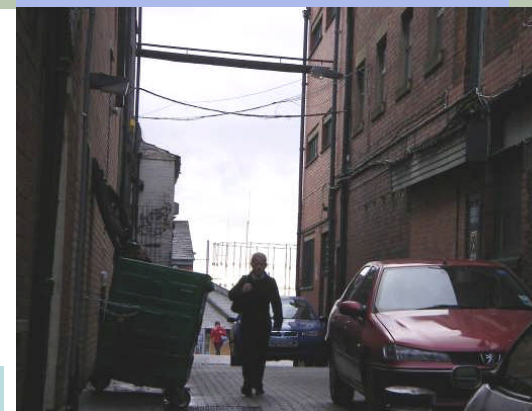
Participants studying street and block form in workshop groups.



Tall Buildings?

The issue of height raised differing opinions. The workshop groups were shown pictures of a recent Housing Design award winning building at Tachbrook Triangle, London SW1, illustrating an 8 storey building adjacent to a listed Georgian terrace. Whilst most participants felt that the new building in the King Street context should match the height of the 3 and 4 storey Georgian and Victorian listed buildings, one group proposed an 8 storey block, suggesting that a landmark was needed here in order to attract people into the area. Some group discussions concluded that perhaps a tall building could be justified to mark the gateway between one area and another, where the adjacent area was more open and had long views out and towards it. This might be appropriate for a site adjacent to the new inner relief road, where a landmark could complement the wide linear corridor of the new road. However the general consensus was that the most important role for new building on this site was to heal and not to further challenge the orthodoxy of King Street's fine, historic, urban grain.

Jerry Spencer 3.2.08



Lost In Blackburn by Jane Field

A beacon lights the way –
A rocket of light with changing hues
Stands to attention
Concrete forms suggest rest
Though their cold, stark forms
prevent it
So I pass by.

The town opens before me now
Dominated by a once grand hall
Pretending to be lit
But shrouded in gloom
Barriers shout at me
Blocking the way
An imposing statue keeps watch
Alone and desolate

A towering block looms threateningly
overhead
Below the bright facades compete
Confusion of street clutter
Battering the senses

Turning the corner, losing my way
Blank walls glaring gloomily at me
No welcome here, unsafe
The mall has turned its back on me
Defiant and unrelenting
Imaginative steel shapes
Evolving before me
Confront my senses
I pause and wonder...

Shattered fragments of past glories
Pervade the streets
Gems lost, depersonalised
Its heart ripped out
Quality struggles to make its
presence felt
New jars with old
Lost in a muddle of streets
Lost...
Searching to find a way forward.

Jane is a creative writer, and wrote 'Lost in Blackburn' on the training day, inspired in part by the spoken and written words of participants. Jane is also the Senior Learning Manager for BEAM and is the Northwest and Yorkshire co-ordinator for the Building in Context Programme. Jane also assisted in facilitating the Blackburn event.