BUILDING IN CONTEXT **TOOLKIT**

New development in historic areas

contents

foreword

This publication records the results of a series of design training events. It flags up other checklists and assessment tools in a form that we hope will reassure others that they can provide a helpful service to their community through the planning process. It is designed primarily for elected members, but we hope that the advice provided will assist other participants in the planning process to promote a wider appreciation of the context in which Councillors act and the factors that they are obliged to take into account.

Planning and the built environment has never had such a high profile. This is welcome, not just because the public is becoming more aware, and better informed, of the issues involved, but because political interest is beginning to direct additional resources to resolving them.

At the same time the pressures on local planning authorities have never been greater. The government is requiring decisions to be taken faster, developers rely on certainties that should be provided within the planning system in a period of rising land, property and rental values, and local people expect greater transparency and more involvement in decision making. This creates a charged atmosphere where tempers fray, costs rise, and fear of litigation is increasing.

However, like many areas of complex activity, professionals tend to rely on jargon and abstract concepts as shortcuts in debate and argument. At best these can promote understanding and speed up the process, at worst they can be used to obscure, confuse and mislead. This document seeks to clarify the meaning of some of these terms and concepts to avoid misuse and promote a common understanding.

English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) is increasing the priority it is putting on helping elected Councillors faced with complex decisions in the historic environment to understand the context, their responsibilities and the implications of their decisions. It is in this context that English Heritage's South East Regional team, in partnership with CABE, commissioned the Kent Architecture Centre in 2004 to conduct a series of training events designed to help Councillors feel more comfortable with issues relating to the historic environment, and give them greater confidence in the decisions they have to take.

We hope that this document and the BiC TOOLKIT training seminars that accompany it will add to your understanding of good practice. In so doing, we believe it will help you to create vibrant new buildings and places that will enrich their historic surroundings for future generations.

Steve Bee
English Heritage

Chris Murray
CABE

Barry Shaw MBE
Kent Architecture Centre

1   About the Building in Context TOOLKIT

The Building in Context TOOLKIT training programme grew out of the publication 'Building in Context' published by English Heritage and CABE in 2002 and arose from the need to bridge the gap between guidance and practical, everyday use.

The essence of the Building in Context publication and Building in Context (BiC) TOOLKIT training programme is that the 'right approach is to be found in examining the context for any proposed development in greater detail and relating the new building to its surroundings ...'. Participants of the training sessions described in this publication used a variety of tried and tested assessment tools widely available to design professionals to understand context.

In six individual BiC TOOLKIT training sessions that took place across the south east during 2004, key decision makers used the case studies and interrogative questions developed in Building in Context to explore topical issues that were raised by proposed new development in or adjacent to historic areas in their area.

The most important lesson from Building in Context and the basis for the training events is that all successful design solutions depend on allowing time for a thorough site analysis and careful character appraisal of the context. This highlights the need for planning applications to Local Authorities to include sufficient detail to indicate the quality of a scheme. The pullout in the front of this publication shows an award winning scheme that provided the level of detail as suggested in the planning application checklist provided in government guidance and reproduced in the back pocket of this publication. Also reproduced for ease of reference is the English Heritage checklist providing guidance on the greater level of detail required for schemes that affect conservation areas and Listed Buildings; the BiC checklist from the CABE/English Heritage publication providing a series of questions to help assess the quality and suitability of a scheme and; how to organise a BiC event. The Conclusions section contains a list of actions that can be taken to improve the quality of schemes and help inform decisions.

We consider the lessons from the case studies and training sessions to be invaluable to local organisations and individuals involved in making changes to the historic environment, whether as a landowner, developer, elected member, or

professional. 'Getting it right isn't easy', as one practitioner commented. We hope that the hands-on practice given in the BiC TOOLKIT training sessions will help get it right when making real decisions.

2   The continuing need for advice and training

The original purpose of Building in Context was to stimulate higher standards of design. Continued pressure for new building and redevelopment of existing areas shows the impetus is still necessary. The ODPM states its aim in its Sustainable Communities Plan as being to improve the quality of the built environment:


Kent County Council

'Some housing, such as this, meets planning and highway standards, but fails to create a sense of place or identity. We need to set our sights higher.' *Sustainable communities: building for the future (The Communities Plan, ODPM, 2003)*

The extent to which the planning process makes good design possible depends on the skills, knowledge and attitudes of the participants. Local authority skill shortages and recruitment difficulties for professional planning, conservation and design staff, coupled with the natural regular turnover of elected members ensures a continuing need for ongoing training and re-briefing. The BiC TOOLKIT training programme is one of several regional initiatives that include HELM, South East Regional Design Panel, Design Champions and Councillor's Toolbox, all of which are contributing to the government's drive to turn policies into action.

3   Aims of the BiC TOOLKIT training programme

- to communicate to professional and community groups a wider understanding of how new interventions (such as new buildings, structures and spaces) can take place more successfully in historic areas through bespoke training sessions
- to help those making decisions that affect historic areas to reach effective and balanced decisions and a more efficient service
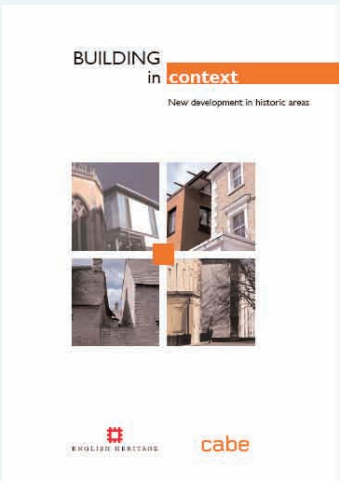
- to help local communities with the process of taking long term decisions about their historic built environment in a confident and sustainable way
- to promote sustainable conservation and ensure new development doesn't sacrifice what future generations will value for the sake of short-term and often illusory gains, and that we use already developed areas in the most efficient way. Thus creating attractive places in which to live and work whilst conserving our cultural heritage.

4 Core elements of the Building in Context TOOLKIT training programme

- bespoke training delivered in partnership with clients to meet specific requirements, usually based around a current, topical site or issue
- facilitation of the training session by a member of the team of BiC Facilitators selected from the South East Regional Design Panel and Kent Architecture Centre for their experience and ability to communicate design principles
- practical sessions that include discussions and/ or exercises using built environment assessment techniques focused on the core principles and techniques of BiC
- wider dissemination of event outcomes through the BiC website.

5   Uses and applications for Building in Context TOOLKIT training

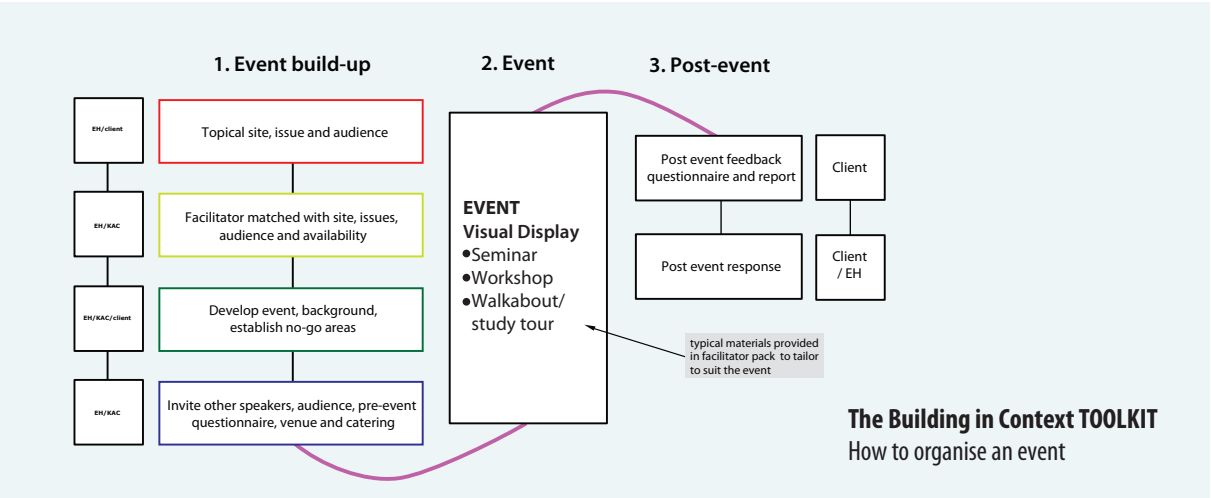### Acquiring new skills and refresher sessions

The training received in these events will assist with:
- acquiring new skills
- enhancing existing skills
- raising capacity of local authority staff and members
- adapting to change
- understanding regulatory requirements.

General design training

The adaptability of BiC TOOLKIT training sessions makes them useful for general design training, for groups such as:
- local authority professional staff and members with responsibilities for all aspects of the built environment including Planning, Heritage, Transport, Environmental Health and Building Control
- amenity groups, for example, Conservation Area Advisory Groups
- campaigning organisations, for example, CPRE
- town and parish councils, as landowners, developers and consultees for planning/ heritage applications
- interest groups, such as land and property owners affected by proposals for regeneration, funding and forthcoming planning strategies such as Local Development Frameworks
- community organisations, such as residents' associations
- Planning Aid.

1. Event build-up

EH/client
Topical site, issue and audience

EH/KAC
Facilitator matched with site, issues, audience and availability

EH/KAC/client
Develop event, background, establish no-go areas

EH/KAC
Invite other speakers, audience, pre-event questionnaire, venue and catering

2. Event

EVENT
Visual Display
• Seminar
• Workshop
• Walkabout/ study tour

3. Post-event

Post event feedback questionnaire and report

Post event response

Client

Client / EH

typical materials provided in facilitator pack to tailor to suit the event

The Building in Context TOOLKIT
How to organise an event

BiC TOOLKIT training sessions may be used for most instances of stakeholder involvement in the built environment. Training can be stand-alone or incorporated into existing training plans for local authority or other organisations.

6   Summary of tools used

Review and analysis

• case studies: to demonstrate better practice from elsewhere, showing positive and imaginative responses to any problems and constraints
• historic map sequences: to understand change over time and suggest future patterns of development
• figuregrounds: to highlight the built structure of an area, showing the relationship between built form and publicly accessible space (including streets). These involve tracing over buildings shown on a map to produce a silhouette. When produced from a number of different periods, figuregrounds can be effective in understanding the growth patterns of an area to inform future development
• exhibition: to show examples of better practice
• walkabout: to gain an understanding of how an area functions and its chief characteristics, for example gradient, building height, civic and informal spaces, relationship between different areas within a town, degree of permeability, etc.

Establishing outcomes

• applying analysis of an area and context to inform outcomes
• developing objective criteria for delivery, for example design or development briefs, or planning policy
• dissemination of summary and outcomes following the event to inform future decisions.

7   About the case studies

The case studies highlight a number of issues commonly experienced across the south east region, but are also applicable elsewhere. They illustrate a number of different themes, aspects of development, uses, locations, approaches, processes and audiences, demonstrating the flexibility that can be built into the robust structure of a BiC TOOLKIT event.

The activity line, on the facing page shows stages of the development process where the studies took place.

8   CONCLUSIONS

Feedback from BiC TOOLKIT training sessions demonstrated that participants gained a greater ability and understanding of:
• how to assess the wider surrounding, or context, of a development site
• how to translate this knowledge into assessing a proposal for an individual site
• greater use of guidelines and studies to inform decisions
• how the planning system can be used to influence a scheme
• arguments of style versus design
• design vocabulary
• the complexity of development and the nature of trade-offs
• the value of early consultation and negotiations.
The case studies demonstrate that to achieve something better than the average it is necessary to go beyond the minimum requirements of the statutory planning system. The following quote describes just how important the cumulative effect of planning decisions can be on the environment:

"Every day countless decisions are made that have the potential to make a piece of a city, town or village a little more lively, welcoming and pleasant, or a little more hostile, unpleasant or unsafe; or to enhance or erode its character". *The Councillor's Guide to Urban Design pg 3 (CABE 2003)*

"Any planning application has to be judged on its own merits. Officers and members represent the local population and stakeholders in allowing buildings to be constructed that will usually be around for far longer than they will, so they need to be able to assess the full context and content of any application. Workshops run by outsiders really do help although there is still a tendency to go for more of the same styles. A balance is needed between the traditional and the contemporary. However the Building in Context TOOLKIT training sessions with its facilitated workshops available to help councils over difficult decisions and/or consulting their local populations over areas such as developing local planning frameworks provides a very useful helping hand." *Cllr. Caroline Salmon, Mole Valley District Council and critical friend to the BiC TOOLKIT training programme*

What can you do to improve the quality of development?

Our workshop participants found the following list of actions useful:

adopt key principles from training sessions to assess future development

embed key principles from training sessions in a design brief for a particular site or policy theme

continue a practical, design based training programme: for example BiC TOOLKIT, HELM

seek independent qualified advice: for example from CABE Design Review Panel; The South East Regional Design Panel and; local design/architect panels

design statements: a planning application should take the council through the thought processes that have gone into the design

Conservation Area Appraisals: guidance is usefully provided English Heritage's Conservation Area Appraisals Policy document

urban design frameworks: provides guidance for an area undergoing change, or where change is promoted.

masterplans: for larger more complex areas utilise more extensively the planning process tools highlighted in 'Protecting Design Quality in Planning' CABE/ODPM

consult and negotiate early: where a development proposal is likely to affect important historic assets, is on a large scale, or raises novel or contentious issues, external advice may be sought. Depending on the nature of the proposal, English Heritage, CABE, the South East Regional Design Panel (SERDP) or your local architecture panel will often be able to help. Involving such bodies at the outset of the design process will make it much more likely that a fruitful dialogue can be established and lead to a successful outcome.

The aim is that all those who have responsibility for some aspect of development in conservation areas and other sensitive sites will find something here with which they can identify and help them achieve excellence in their work, whether it is an aspect of the design, the development or the planning process.

Planning Policy	Development feasibility	Planning application	Local Authority Decision
Lewes	Oxford	Leatherhead	Wallingford
Yateley			
Tall Buildings			

tall

Case study 1:
TALL BUILDINGS AND THE SOUTH EAST:
Small, medium, large and extra large

Purpose of event
The Tall Buildings workshop was targeted at helping local authority politicians and policy makers exchange ideas and develop understanding of this issue before seeking to help wider constituencies.

Client
English Heritage, CABE, Kent Architecture Centre

Participants
Planners, Conservation Officers, elected member and officer design champions from across the south east region.

Planning Policy   Development feasibility   Planning application   Local Authority Decision
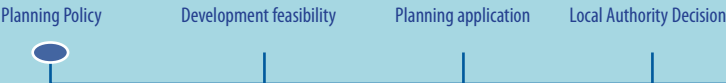
Background
Taller building proposals are coming forward in increasing numbers, in areas not previously considered likely to develop them which raises the question of their place in the south east context. The need for technical assistance on taller buildings for local authority staff and elected members was a key area of need highlighted through a number of channels, including CABE, English Heritage, South East Regional Design Panel cases and KAC consultancy. Recent high profile proposals for tall buildings in and around Brighton made the city a natural choice of venue for this event.

In the right place, tall buildings can make a positive contribution to urban life and can affect the image and identity of an area as a whole. Yet, by their very scale, tall buildings can have a far wider impact than intended and can also harm the qualities that people value about a place. In many cases, one of the principal failings is that they were designed with a lack of appreciation or understanding of the context in which they were to sit.

GUIDANCE ON
TALL BUILDINGS

ENGLISH HERITAGE   cabe
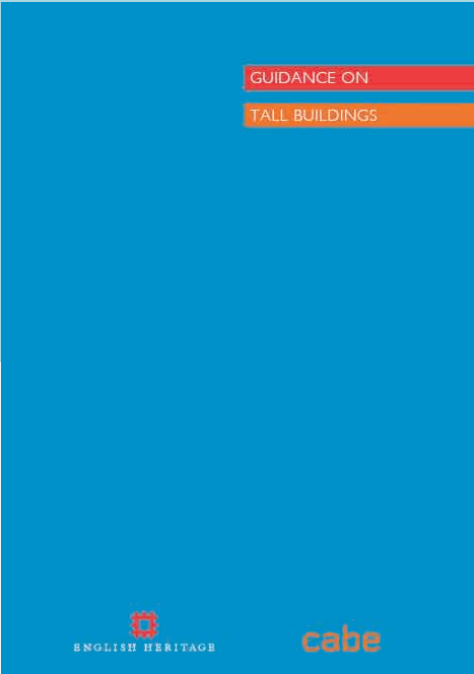
Guidance on Tall Buildings (English Heritage/CABE 2003)

A Welcome Home
A SENSE OF PLACE FOR A NEW THAMES GATEWAY

'A Welcome Home; A sense of place for a new Thames Gateway' was launched by Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage, on 25 March 2004.

This document is a strategic characterisation study of the Thames Gateway historic environment in partnership with Kent and Essex County Council and Chris Blandford Associates.

The aim of the characterisation project is to highlight positive opportunities for accommodating change that respect the historic environment. The work is focussing on developing a broad understanding of the historic landscapes, built heritage and buried archaeological sites. Ultimately, this will form a framework to aid English Heritage and its partners in responding to the plans and proposals for the Gateway.

The study has been developed to inform the government's Sustainable Communities Plan, announced in February 2003, that is to provide 120,000 new homes in the Thames Gateway area by 2016.

The south east region

March 2003 saw the publication of the CABE and English Heritage Guidance on Tall Buildings, providing advice on general approaches and principles. In response a small number of SE local authorities produced their own guidance to meet their specific needs.

The workshop provided an opportunity to learn from the experiences of others who are already meeting these challenges, and in particular asked the questions:

- is taller better in the SE context?
- how do we avoid repeating the mistakes of the past?
- how should we assess these important and complex proposals in the finer grained SE context?

Tools used
Review and analysis:
seminar: speakers presented a number of case studies and assessment tools, sharing best practice to aid assessment and decisionmaking. Presentations challenged what we mean by tall buildings and how they are measured, distinctions were made between big and tall buildings, and it was argued that big buildings have tended to be more acceptable. Questions were raised on the role of tall buildings – are they: tools or symbols; sustainable or indulgent; marks on the landscape or landmarks; are we building tall for economic reasons or to create a legacy? Speakers reminded the audience that building tall is not new. The symbolic importance of towers has a long history from the Tower of Babel to the Eiffel Tower, a city icon for Paris and the "Gherkin", becoming London's latest icon. Whatever their height, how we experience them from the street is crucially important. Speakers urged good urban design practice that will produce liveable streets, with buildings that define spaces and mix uses and density to animate space.

Establishing outcomes:
Workshop participants agreed upon the value of contextual studies, either independently commissioned, or as part of a planning proposal. As in the cases discussed of Brighton and Hove, Gravesham and Westminster, where there is a policy vacuum for dealing with tall buildings, studies can produce a clear and consistent approach and provide detail to supplement strategic guidance available. Another tool discussed for assessing tall buildings was that of Accurate Visual Representations (AVRs) that suggest an industry standard for developers, architects, modelers, Local Planning Authorities and third parties in producing images that show how a proposal will fit within its context. Further information on AVRs may be found in The Mayor of London document London View Management Framework Draft SPG www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/sds/docs/spg-views.pdf

Workshop participants recognised that once the principle of development has been established, quality in all aspects is the key to a successful development and this requires time and resources on behalf of the determining authority. Whilst tall buildings can act as catalysts for further development, they must still be right in terms of social and economic as well as physical context. 'Getting it right isn't easy', as mentioned earlier, and a clear long term vision of how an area should be developed is required.

Feedback
'May I say how much I enjoyed the event as there seemed to be a balance of opinion that challenged the mind and the thought process. It was a day well spent.'

9

Village

Case study 2:
YATELEY, HAMPSHIRE:
Village Design Framework

Purpose of event
To understand the historic growth and character of Yateley so this knowledge may be used to inform its future development through a Village Design Framework.

Location
The expanded village of Yateley, Hampshire, a low rise large settlement loosely grouped around attractive historic common areas.

### Client
Hampshire County Council, Hart District Council, Yateley Town Centre Management Group.

Participants
Local stakeholders for voluntary organisations, Town Council; Citizen's Advice Bureau; elected members; Churches Together; fire, housing and police services; businesses, including public houses and post office; others engaged in developing the Yateley Village Design Framework (YVDF).

Planning Policy   Development feasibility   Planning application   Local Authority Decision

Background
The YVDF was developed from established Urban Design Framework guidance, the Countryside Commission's Village Design Statement principles (refer to panel, right) and additionally incorporated area specific proposals based on earlier research, studies and public consultation. A significant amount of work had already focussed in and around the traditional centre of Yateley. The workshop was designed to help stakeholders link these proposals to the wider settlement through understanding its historic growth. The outcomes of the day were designed to inform the next stages of the YVDF before further public consultation and eventual adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document by Hart District Council.
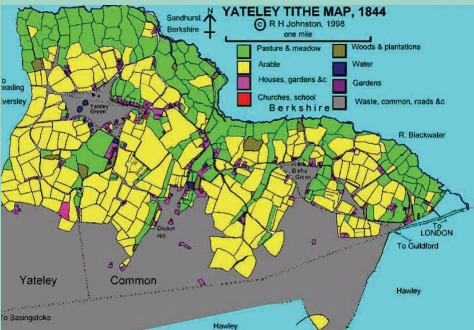
1844 Tithe map of Yateley Village

Workshop discussions

Tools used

Review and analysis:

recap: progress of the YVDF and outline of the day, given by the chair of the steering group

introduction: how successful places may be created based on a review of Yateley using the questions from BiC to begin to generate a set of objective criteria for assessment, given by the BiC Facilitator

tasks: participants were charged with various tasks, including mapping the evolution of the settlement using historic maps to produce a sequence of time slices showing patterns of change, patina of history and routes

virtual walkabouts: to record chief characteristics of present day Yateley. The resulting discussions highlighted a number of issues to inform the afternoon session on movement and identity

plenary session: participants applied their analysis in listing priorities and possible guidelines for future development, using the proposed YVDF topics, that would be tested later for feasibility by the YVDF group

exhibition: participants referred to key information throughout the day, including the draft YVDF, previous studies, images of Yateley and BiC image library.

Establishing outcomes:
Participants gained a greater understanding of how Yateley's inherited environment of historic road networks, landscape and building forms and economy work together and how to adapt to the changes required by 21st century living whilst maintaining the identity that has grown out of its development from an ancient settlement. The outcomes will inform measures in the YVDF to improve connectivity, increase use of existing facilities and support more considered new development designed to encourage Yateley to re-emerge as an attractive and well served settlement with a distinct identity. Follow-up tasks from the workshop include creation of a dedicated YVDF Steering Group to develop ideas from the workshop and test their feasibility before incorporation into the final draft Village Design Framework.

Feedback

- 'Useful to bring together a large group of interested people and providing a forum and time to discuss issues'
- 'Good to have two knowledgeable local people (presumably well known locally) putting the event in context throughout'
- facilitators got audience interested quickly; good to have few slides; especially liked the six English Heritage slides –big text, colourful, something to look at whilst allowing audience to be interested in what was being spoken.'
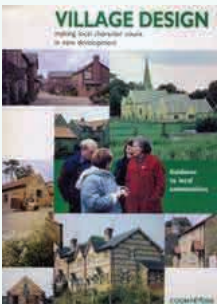
Village Design Statements versus Conservation Area Appraisals The Village Design Statement (VDS) process developed by the Countryside Agency is a tested, robust framework that unlike other grass roots initiatives, is intended to influence the operation of the statutory planning system. 'Many people feel that they have no say over what development takes place in their community; but Village Design Statements offer a constructive solution to this dilemma. Local communities have an unique appreciation and understanding of their own place, and a VDS is based on this knowledge. It describes the qualities that residents value in their village and its surroundings.' Countryside Agency.

Unlike Village Design Statements, Conservation Areas are an integral part of the statutory planning system. Local Authorities have a duty to designate a Conservation Area in 'any areas of special architectural and historic interest the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.' The designation will confer protection for certain types of buildings and trees as well as highlighting the character of the area to encourage, where changes are to be made, more sensitively considered development. Conservation Area Appraisals identify the special characteristics of an area.

However, unless carefully monitored, the content and boundaries of Conservation Area Assessments and Village Design Statements (VDS) can overlap, as both provide descriptive assessments of an area, to a greater or lesser degree. However whilst will naturally focus on the more historic areas, the value of a VDS is in the wider coverage of geographic area and age of development. Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council found that two potentially very useful and well put together documents covered the same area to the extent that their clarity and potential to influence and inform change did not reach its full promise. Closer liaison between Local Authorities and local VDS steering groups will ensure that information is shared, allowing them to focus on their particular areas of concern. www.countryside.gov.uk/LAR/Landscape/CC/landscape/village/index.asp
www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/conWebDoc.2407
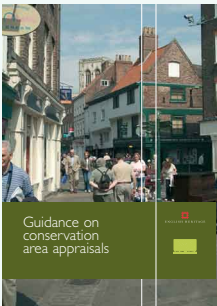
Case study 3:

LEWES, EAST SUSSEX:
*New housing within a historic town of traditionally high density.*

Purpose of event
To enable participants to identify and understand key ingredients of successful places that are historic, high density and popular that can be replicated elsewhere, throughout Lewes district. The topical case study for proposed new housing at Lewes House in the district town of Lewes would enable delegates to focus on strategic lessons from the study that could inform decision-making on other new developments in the district.

Location
The site is located within the historic town of Lewes, East Sussex which a has a strong commercial and civic identity that is evident in the fine quality of the town's buildings and spaces.

Site area
0.88ha (2.17 acres)

Client
Lewes District Council

Participants
Lewes District Council elected members and officers, members of the local architect panel, Lewes Town Councillors and, for part of the day, the Lewes House proposal design team.

Planning Policy   Development feasibility   Planning application   Local Authority Decision
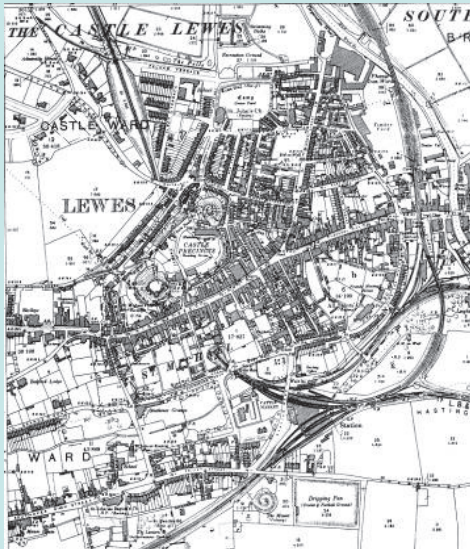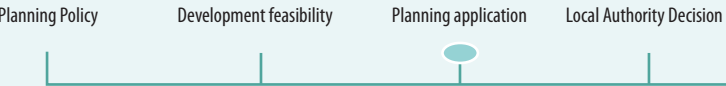
Early plan of Lewes showing the site and surroundings
Reproduced from the 1899 Ordnance Survey map

Creating figureground drawings

BiC Facilitator Mansell Jagger discussing the shape of Lewes using the groups figureground drawings

Lewes old and new
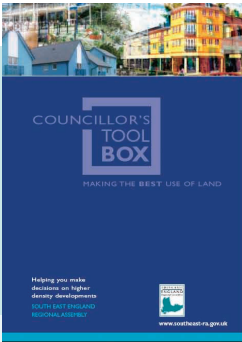
'Councillors Toolbox: Making the best use of land', developed by South East Regional Assembly in partnership with local authorities across the south east to suggest a range of actions in response to concerns about requirements for higher density development. The Toolbox refers to policy documents, and good practice guidance and provides examples from across the south east of good practice in higher density development. Images showing the comparative permutations of the same density of development are particularly useful and show that appearances can be deceptive.
www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/publications/policy.html

Background

Lewes and other historic towns raise particular issues of density that is an integral part of their undoubted character and charm, yet pose particular challenges for new development, as outlined below. Expectations of higher density in national planning guidance place greater challenges and tensions on maintaining the local character of expanding towns whilst ensuring that these towns and surrounding settlements can support the expansion within their infrastructure.

The event was set against a backdrop of increasing numbers of planning applications for housing and the Council's wish to improve the quality of development taking place within the district. Other issues arising from new developments are the need, highlighted in the Local Plan, for mixed use schemes in the right locations that match or complement the high quality surroundings. The Council, encouraged by the outcomes in its recent review of schemes built within the district, wishes to maintain the momentum of positive change.

Tools used

Review and analysis:
seminar: speakers, representing views from CABE, English Heritage and South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA), discussed issues relating to density and intensity of development

walkabout: themed groups were created to study character and permeability and walked, with local facilitators, to and around the site

drawings: the groups produced figureground drawings from historic maps, see image right, to begin to understand the structure and historic development of the area

plenary session: discussions were informed by earlier case studies and observations from the walkabout. The skills acquired in developing the figuregrounds led to understanding the importance of continuity and identification of historic context.

Establishing outcomes:
A key outcome of the event was participants resolve to increase the number of earlier negotiations, facilitate greater public involvement on important schemes, and encourage greater involvement of decision makers in the Architects Panel to augment understanding of design. Participants resolved to challenge and negotiate alternative solutions more intensively to reduce instances of harmful effects on the quality of development particularly where statutory services have pursued standard solutions. Participants voiced a universal problem experienced by decision makers: that of more energy spent in managing conflict rather than in achieving better design.

Feedback

'Working with new faces from various backgrounds to solve common problems and achieve common goals was particularly useful.'

13

Case study 4:
THE WEST END OXFORD:
Masterplanning - identifying the success factors

Purpose of event
To gain a greater understanding of the role of the design champion in relation to the use of masterplanning within a local authority. The session was based around the Oxford West End Project, developed by a partnership of Oxford City Council, Oxford County Council and SEEDA.

Location
The West End is within the historic university city of Oxford. Shaped by post war clearance and partly implemented 1960s designs, this part of Oxford is not characterised by dreaming spires and has been described as the 'forgotten quarter'. Considerable development pressure in the area focuses particularly on residential development.

Client
SEEDA Design Champions' Club, Oxford City Council

Participants
Officer and member design champions from across the region

Planning Policy   Development feasibility   Planning application   Local Authority Decision
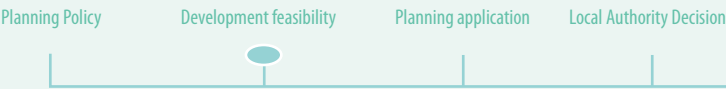
Background
Oxford City Council and CABE with partners wished to share their experience with others considering commissioning masterplans.

Tools used
Review and analysis:
seminar: review of the range of planning tools available to influence change, consideration of the key ingredients of a successful masterplan, and identification of the skills needed to fulfill the role of design champion, either as an officer or a member, in the procurement, development and delivery of a masterplan. Speakers were from CABE, the local authority, South East Regional Design Panel and regional consultant.
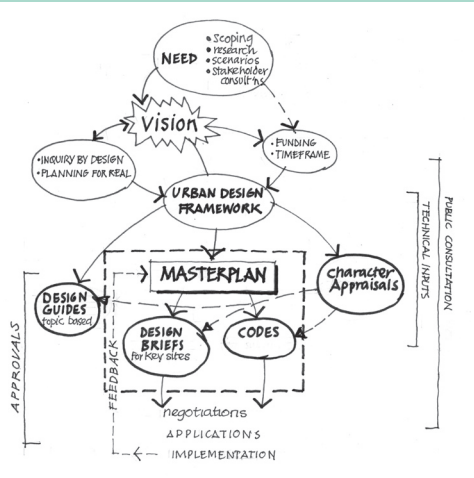
Where the Masterplan fits within planning tools.
Credit: Richard Guise, Context 4D

Guided walkabout

Creating Successful Masterplans
A Guide for Clients
cabe
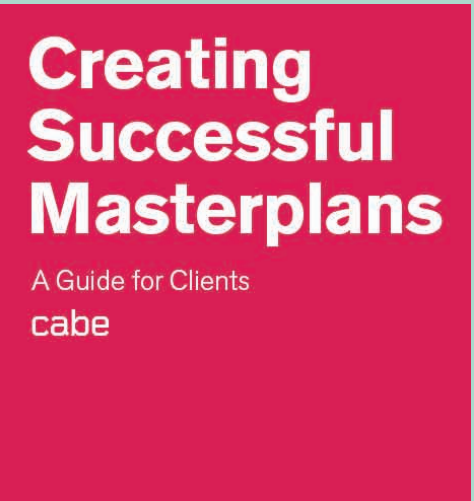
The publication 'Creating Successful Masterplans' formed the basis of the session

Workshop

speakers: highlighted where local authorities can use a masterplan as an effective planning tool. They offered several ways in which local authorities can encourage or require the production of a masterplan; influence its scope and content, and enhance its status through the formal approval process. Time was identified as a fourth dimension in Masterplanning in the ways of addressing the context of the past, present and future of a place, the need to allow enough time at early stages and the need for a plan to be adaptable over time, as circumstances change

case study: outline of the context of the West End of Oxford, with dominant features including the ice rink and shopping centre and 'forgotten' features such as watercourses that run through the area. Key partners in the redevelopment are the City and County Councils and SEEDA with involvement of CABE and the strategic rail authority. The steering group is advised by the ODPM. The Brief required consultants tendering for the work to look at deliverability, movement patterns and consider two options for the station. David Lock Associates was appointed through this tender process to prepare a development framework and undertake a feasibility study for the station

guided walkabout: the morning seminar concluded with a guided walkabout around the case study area

plenary session: informed by the earlier sessions, the groups identified and reported back on the key challenges and opportunities in relation to their theme, developed objective criteria for critically appraising a masterplan and reflected on where a Masterplan can be the best mechanism for delivery.

Establishing outcomes:
The plenary session drew several wider conclusions on integrating issues through the Masterplanning process, including the importance of understanding immediate context and also considering the wider context of whether the area is contracting, expanding, or changing; the need for Local authorities to become proactive rather than reactive and to have vision; difficulty in attracting the best talent due to a lack of respect and remuneration for planners and urban design professionals; local authorities' reticence in making use of their powers; conflict between counties and districts/ cities can cause problems; the value of taking members and staff to other places to explore issues on neutral ground; the importance of asking 'what if?' and taking risks; the need to exorcise the ghosts of the 60's; the need for intelligent debate and to identify the places we like: In summary, one of the key roles for design champions is to ask the questions.

Feedback
'Fewer examples in more depth would help.'
'I will share what I have learnt today through progressing a public realm strategy.'

15

The Broad Street Plan, Oxford. Broad Street in Oxford has been the focus of a £35,000 study to make recommendations for returning it to its former glory in response to recent criticisms about clutter and poor parking arrangements in this historic street.

The study examined all aspects of Broad Street, including paving surfaces, lighting and traffic. It assessed issues such as the past, present and future roles of the street, relationship within the wider city context. From this starting point the study suggests ways of working with existing businesses and landowners to make improvements to help the street achieve its potential both visually and functionally. More details can be found at: www.kimwilkie.com/pages/projects/uk/uk_broadst.html

The study was arranged by the Oxford Preservation Trust with backing from Oxford University, colleges along the street, Oxford Civic Society, English Heritage and the city and county councils and was undertaken by landscape and urban design consultant Kim Wilkie, former student at New College, Oxford.

Kim Wilkie Associates
www.kimwilkie.com
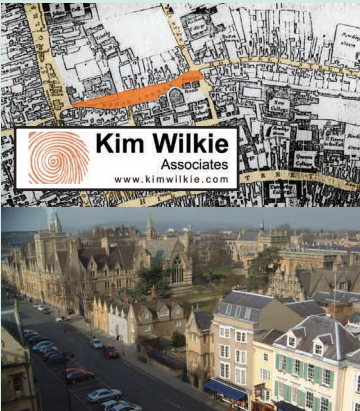
Case study 5:
LEATHERHEAD, SURREY:
*Accommodating larger commercial edge of centre developments in medium sized towns*

Purpose of event
To explore issues relating to commercial edge of centre developments in medium sized towns and villages to inform future decisions in the district, with a focus on a proposed supermarket in Leatherhead.

Location
Leatherhead is an historic market town and is the gateway to the nationally important and beautiful Surrey Hills. The site is on a junction of the busy one-way road system of Leatherhead within an area of mixed uses, architectural styles and condition, adjacent to the town centre conservation area.

Site Area
0.98 ha (2.42 acres)

Client
Mole Valley District Council

Participants
Mole Valley District Council and Surrey County Council elected members and officers and Leatherhead Town Forum representatives.

Planning Policy   Development feasibility   Planning application   Local Authority Decision
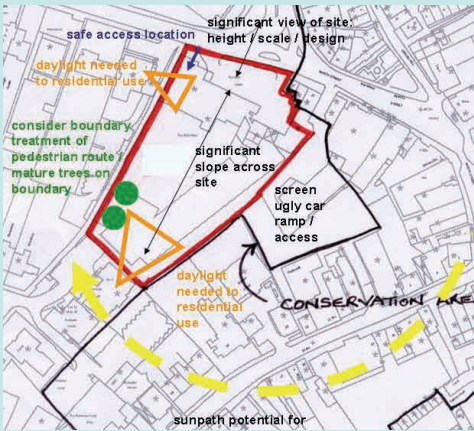
Site plan and analysis : credit Tony Ingram, Director Jestico + Whiles, BiC Facilitator © *Crown copyright. All rights reserved. English Heritage 100019088. 2006*

Leatherhead BiC TOOLKIT workshop

That good design does not stop at the front door; but extends into public areas beyond the building is a point well made in this case study that animates the public frontage. 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 crèche and is a key part of the revitalisation of the town centre. Winner of Wandsworth Council Design Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Borough.

The Hereford mixed use, waterfront scheme is a 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.

Background

A common issue faced by many towns across the south east is the need to accommodate large scale development in a medium to fine grained settlement and to respond to the global drive for more mixed use and sustainable patterns of new development.

Edge of centre sites in smaller towns can often have more prominence than their size initially suggests as, by their very nature, they are close to through routes or transport nodes. They can therefore be important in signalling a town's quality to present and future investors and residents. Yet the often tatty condition of 'edge' sites and areas obscures their quality and value to the wider area and attracts proposals for development of poorer quality design and lower value. This provides a low point from the outset from where local authorities must begin to negotiate for better quality development, as in the Leatherhead case study. Mole Valley District Council was able to progress the application using advice from the South East Regional Design Panel on the latest scheme for a supermarket.

Tools used

Review and analysis:
seminar: case studies from elsewhere, from Building in Context and the rise of supermarkets from grocery sales outlets through to destination points and regeneration catalysts in partnership with others (see panel right) were provided by speakers from English Heritage and a leading architectural practice

guided virtual walkabout: participants explored the site and its context through a sequence of plans and photographs and discussed lessons from elsewhere

plenary: participants were wary of modern design stating that it often didn't work, either functionally or aesthetically and often erred on a cautious, traditional, approach that they weren't entirely happy with either. Use of design 'jargon' was raised as a particular issue for new members. Various terms were discussed, such as permeability (defined as the ability, to varying degrees, to move through a site or area) that can start to enrich an understanding of how a particular site can link and work with its surroundings.

Establishing outcomes:
Participants revisited their aspirations for the town and the site. They developed general guidelines for development of the site to maximise its potential to advertise the quality of the town. Sustainability was identified as a key defining principle.

Feedback

'English Heritage presentations which made reference to the sites in historic areas and towns of direct relevance to Mole Valley were helpful.'

serdp

South East Regional Design Panel: Leatherhead
Mole Valley District Council sought advice from the South East Regional Design Panel to support their negotiations for a better scheme. The Panel discussed the scheme with the architects and Mole Valley District Council representatives. The Panel congratulated the developers for trying to satisfy local authority requirements for a modern building and mixed use to fit in with the existing urban context. Whilst the site appeared to be a good location for a small supermarket and the design well handled in terms of layout including car parking, the Panel were not convinced the scheme would be successful. The scheme failed to address issues of bulk and massing for this prominent site; the choice of materials for this traditional country town and it would have been helpful if the developers had shown details of the surrounding context. Following negotiations, the scheme was later withdrawn.

# Case study 6:
SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE:
Integrating new housing in a tightly knit historic town

Purpose of event
To evaluate the success of previous schemes in the town over the last 30 years to inform future decisions.

Location
Various sites within the Saxon town of Wallingford, in and adjacent to the commercial centre.

Client
South Oxfordshire District Council

Participants
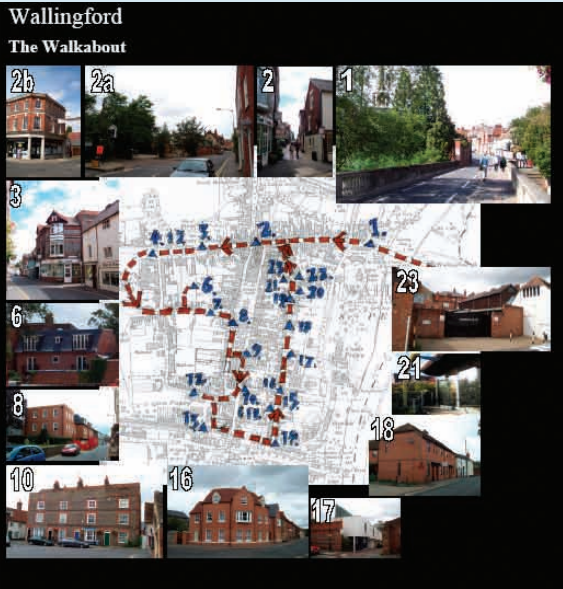Local authority elected members and officers and Town Councillors

Planning Policy   Development feasibility   Planning application   Local Authority Decision
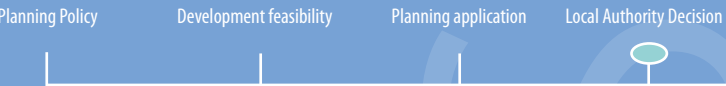
Figureground map of Wallingford
Reproduced from the 1938 Ordnance Survey map

Appraising a site

Discussions in the plenary session and the BiC Image Library in use.

A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT WILL:

1. Relate well to the geography and history of the place and the lie of the land.
2. Sit happily in the pattern of existing development and routes through and around it.
3. Respect important views.
4. Respect the scale of neighbouring buildings.
5. Use materials and building methodss which are as high in quality as those used in existing buildings.
6. Create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of the setting.

Six questions to ask of a scheme (from the Building in Context 2003 publication) that begin to assess the success of a project **www.buildingincontext.org**

Background

Pressure for new housing at the edge of Wallingford, seen against a background of district-wide pressure provided the impetus for the event. Key decision makers wished to continue improving the quality of design in the district and this BiC TOOLKIT event formed part of their ongoing training programme.

Tools used

Review and analysis:
seminar: review of the characteristics of Wallingford, its local vistas, buildings and public squares, using as a basis, six questions from BiC in assessing 'the right approach' (see panel, above)

walkabout: participants and facilitators walked a route around the town to assess the quality of recent development

plenary: groups drew together key points arising from the developments they visited, comparing and contrasting aspects with schemes from the BiC image library.

Establishing outcomes:
The walkabout showed that present day Wallingford is still largely determined by its mediaeval street plan, laid down from when the town was an important Saxon Burgh, or fortification. Developments that worked with this grain, or pattern, of existing development, and respected the resulting rules of scale and proportion were mostly successful. Those that didn't work so well attempted to address the underlying urban grain but failed to respond to neighbours and setting. Recent developments, for example opposite Waitrose, that tried to create new views and variety were thought to succeed in this aim, but participants questioned whether this aspect alone made them good. The outcomes of some otherwise well proportioned newer buildings were spoilt by poor understanding of historic precedents, or 'pastiche' design and resulted in diluting the inherent character of the area.

The walkabout and workshop concluded that all of the developments reviewed contained elements that are successful, such as position within a site, local materials and bonding. However lack of attention to detail – that is necessary particularly in attempting successful copies of traditional styles – let the developments down and spoilt the intention to contribute positively to the townscape. Future proposals will be carefully scrutinised to ensure details are appropriate.

Feedback

- 'The Facilitator explaining design issues was particularly helpful'
- 'Would like to see a case study of a poor design improved through CABE or other intervention and an analysis of why it is now better.'

19

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ODPM (2003) Sustainable communities: building for the future

ODPM PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development

ODPM/CABE PPS1 companion guide: By Design - Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice

ODPM PPG3: Housing

ODPM PPS 12: Local Development Frameworks

ODPM PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment

CABE/English Heritage (2002) Building in Context: New development in historic areas

ODPM PPG 16: Archaeology and Planning

Anthony Tugnutt and Mark Robertson, Batsford 1987 Making Townscape: A contextual approach to building in an urban setting

John Warren, John Worthington, Architectural Press 1998 Context: new buildings in historic settings

CABE (2003) Protecting Design Quality in Planning

CABE (2003) The Councillor's Guide to Urban Design

English Heritage (2000) Power of Place – the future of the historic environment

English Heritage (2003) 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 (2005) Retail Development in Historic Areas

English Heritage (2005) Growing Places: Heritage and a sustainable future for the Thames Gateway

CABE (2003) Building Sustainable Communities: Developing the skills we need

CABE (2004) Local Leadership for better public places: Building sustainable communities

CABE, Civic Trust, HBF (2002) Building for Life

CABE (2005) Design Review-ed – issue 2

CABE (2003) Creating Excellent Buildings

Urban Task Force (1999) But would you live there? Shaping attitudes to urban living

CABE and OPDM (2003) The value of housing design and layout

Llewelyn Davies for GOSE (1998) Sustainable Residential Quality in the South East

Royal Town Planning Institute with Bartlett School of Planning and Cardiff University (2002) From design policy to design quality

English Heritage (2004) Historic Environment Local Management

ENGLISH HERITAGE

the**architecture**centre

CABE

20