

# ARCHITECTURE CENTRES

## Involving the community

During the last decade, architecture centres have been set up in cities and towns to provide local communities with information about their built environment. English Heritage is keen to work with these centres, to help ensure that the historic environment is celebrated, debated and understood

Centres for architecture and the built environment have been established throughout Europe in the last decade as sites for the provision of information and the exchange of ideas about our cities and towns. The Architecture Foundation was established in 1991 as Britain's first independent architecture centre, and there are now 15 centres in the UK. More are under development, including a proposed new centre for Liverpool in which English Heritage is a major partner.

Architecture centres strive to promote the cultural importance of issues relating to architecture and the environment and to serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas and information about the past, present and future of our cities. Through exhibitions, websites, workshops, lectures, discussions and walking tours, children can tell authorities what they think about their schools, residents associations can express insights into the layout of the neighbourhood, and planners, designers and historians can share their knowledge, all in the spirit of collectively understanding and shaping our world. Architecture centres enable people to participate more fully in decision-making processes and encourage decision-makers to listen.

### Diverse activities

The form and activities of architecture centres are as diverse as the cities and communities they

serve. In Manchester, the Centre for Understanding the Built Environment (CUBE) offers 'Culture, Community, Construction' through architectural exhibitions, a young person's art gallery, and the opportunity to work with construction professionals. Bristol's architecture centre has held workshops on straw bale construction and recently launched English Heritage's *Building in Context* with our South West Region to highlight regional projects. Kent's architecture centre is developing programmes of architecture studies for schools with the Sight Specific Residency Programme. Particularly innovative is The Building Exploratory in Hackney, London, partly funded by English Heritage, which uses interactive models, displays, and activities to encourage imaginative thought about the immediate area and issues beyond.

The English Heritage-led review of the historic environment, *Power of Place* (December 2000), and the Government's response, *The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future* (December 2001) both highlight the need for additional architecture centres to encourage understanding and participation at the local level on decisions about the built environment. The Architecture Centre Network was recently launched as a national advocate to raise the profile of architecture centres and develop funding initiatives. It will provide a forum through which centres can engage with Government agendas of learning and social inclusion, regeneration, housing, culture and heritage.

### A range of support

At the June 2002 international conference, 'The Value of Architecture Centres', English Heritage offered support for architecture centres in the shape of grants, content, educational resources and partnership.

### Heritage Grant Fund programme

Through the Heritage Grant Fund programme, English Heritage provides financial support for voluntary and community groups. We are now extending this programme to provide funding to support regional and local capacity building. In 2002/2003 we will offer £2.4 million, which will be increased to £3.5 million by 2004/2005.

The Building Exploratory in Hackney, London, is an education and resource centre with a unique, interactive exhibition designed to engage young and old in understanding and shaping their local environment



Reproduced by permission of The Building Exploratory, Hackney

## The NMR

The National Monuments Record (NMR), English Heritage's public archive, is keen to explore opportunities for collaborating with architecture centres, particularly on exhibitions and digital projects. It can supply information and illustrative material from its vast collections, including aerial photographs, measured drawings and reports, as well as stunning historic and contemporary architectural photography. Recently, for example, the NMR supplied The Building Exploratory with a scanned set of wartime air photographs, providing a complete aerial image of Hackney as it was in 1946. This will be incorporated in The Building Exploratory's Geographical Information System (GIS), where it will complement other map-based information sources. More conventionally, over a hundred of the NMR's historic photographs of buildings in Exeter were recently used in a locally organised exhibition that explored the effect of the Blitz and post-war planning policy on the architecture of the city centre.

## English Heritage Education

English Heritage Education provides free courses for teachers, helping them to deliver citizenship requirements by working on local projects on the historic environment (see Spicer, 30–1). The Education team also offers a wide range of free support materials for teachers, such as *Building in Stone*, to encourage the study of buildings.



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## Liverpool project

As part of the Historic Environment of Liverpool Project (HELP!) launched in March 2001, English Heritage is working with local partners on the development of a new architecture centre in Liverpool. HELP! will produce innovative research into the history of the urban landscape and engage local communities in the process, making the results accessible in the new architecture centre. In a recent MORI poll, 30% of the respondents indicated that an interactive centre would be the means by which they would most like to learn about Liverpool's historic environment. The survey also showed how interested people are about actively determining the future of their neighbourhoods and city, and how much they already know about the fabric and the issues. English Heritage and its partners aim to provide a city-wide centre that engages the diverse community of Liverpool with its equally diverse historic environment. □

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Published jointly by English Heritage and CABE, *Building in Context* (Product Code XH20186) may be ordered free of charge from English Heritage, Customer Services, PO Box 569, Swindon, Wiltshire SN2 2YP; [customers@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:customers@english-heritage.org.uk) The report can also be found on [www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk) and [www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)

For a free copy of *Building in Stone*, ring English Heritage Education on 020 7973 3442 or visit [www.english-heritage.org.uk/education](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/education) to download a copy

*The bombed facade of a Georgian terrace in Southernhay West in Exeter, Devon, was used in a locally organised exhibition exploring the effect of the Blitz and post-World War II planning policy on the city's architecture*

*In Liverpool, English Heritage is working with partners to create a place where residents can learn about the historic environment, celebrate their city and participate in its regeneration. Local children in a typical Liverpool street of terrace houses, with Anfield Football Stadium in the background*