

2011–2012

**Gravesend Heritage Quarter concept and design development with
We Are Define**

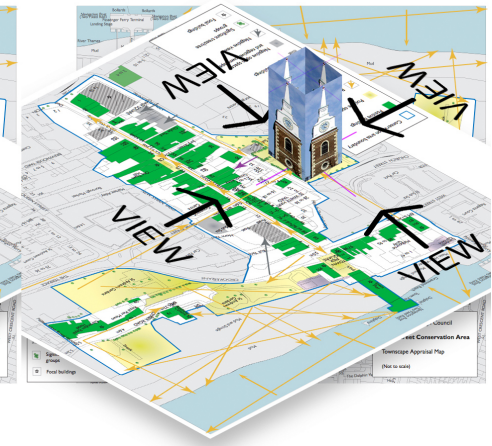
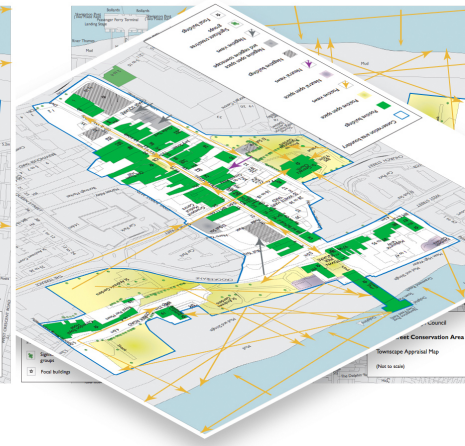
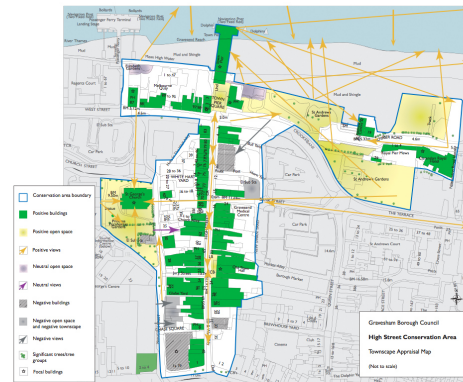
TILT
+
PITCH, TAR & ROSIN
+
CHALK

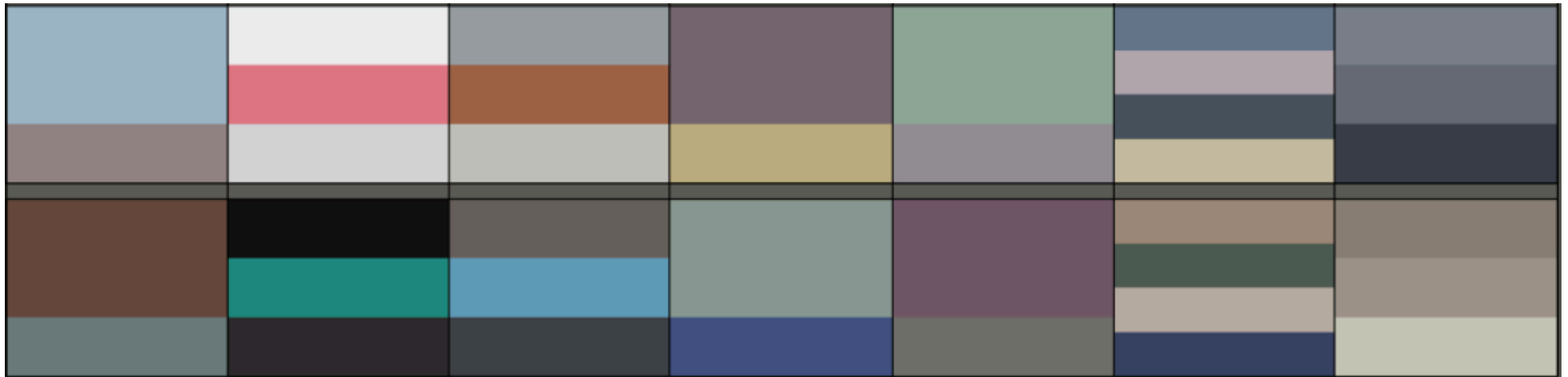
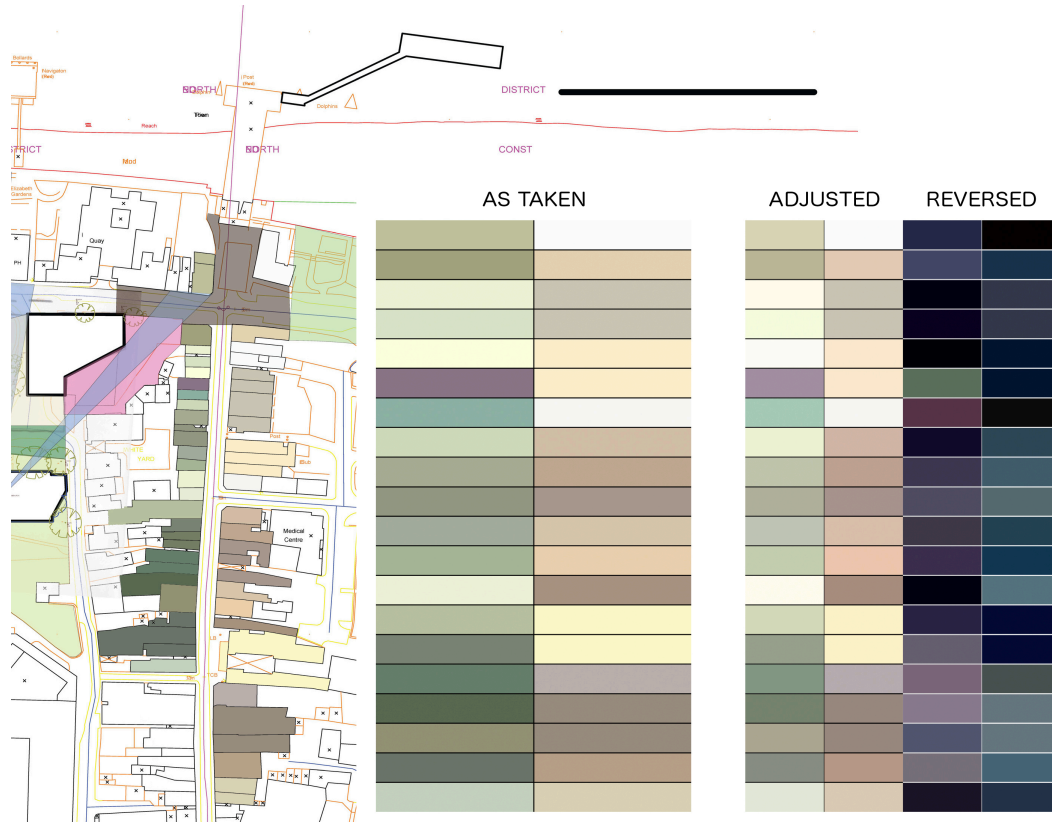
*"A conspicuous church spire, the first seen distinctly coming from the sea,
has a thoughtful grace, the serenity of a fine form above the chaotic
disorder of men's houses."*

– Joseph Conrad: 'The Mirror of the Sea'

*image: J.M.W. Turner: Shipping off Gravesend; St George's Church in Right
Distance, circa 1805-6, Tate Gallery*







TILT
+
PITCH, TAR & ROSIN
+
CHALK

1. Context

The importance of culture to successful and sustainable place-shaping is captured in the Local Development Framework [1], which is currently under review:

"In taking forward our vision for Gravesham through the Local Development Framework, it is important to remember that places are not simply about development but about people and how they relate to them. Culture shapes the way in which we view places, use them, and value them. In turn, the places we create serve to shape relationships between people and between the different groups that make up our wider community. ... Culture, in its very broadest sense, should therefore be seen as central to the process of regeneration and not something which can be thought of as an 'add on'. It adds richness and interest to our lives and can be a powerful tool in making Gravesham a 'place of choice' in which to live, work, recreate, and invest."

This understanding of culture's role within development was confirmed in December 2011 when the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee stated that there is "a compelling case" for the inclusion of "a cultural dimension as part of the social pillar of the definition of sustainable development" in the Coalition Government's proposed National Planning Policy Framework.

2. Art as Landscape / Landscape as Art

The Gravesham Local Plan defines Public Art as "any art sited within the public realm and can include not just statues, sculptures and murals but hard and soft landscaping, street furniture, lighting, etc. It should be used to influence the design of the development as a whole, rather than merely being additive or decorative. Its primary purpose is to focus attention on the historical and social context of an area and to encourage developers to create public environments of high quality. Importantly, incorporating public art into a development scheme at an early stage of the design process may

assist in raising the quality of the design and in determining the final form and layout and its context within the wider area" [2].

In [**ADD NAME OF SCHEME**] artists and designers have worked together from day one to ensure that art is not an 'add on'. Instead, art is tightly woven into the designed public realm to express Gravesend as a 'riverside heritage town' and to create the future 'place of choice'.

In this 'Art as Landscape / Landscape as Art' strategy, artist and designer have a shared vision for a new public realm that is guided by the immediate character context and associated heritage connections to ensure that the design is firmly embedded in Gravesend. In some locations, the balance tips in favour of good design and art plays a secondary role in the orchestration of colour and materials. Elsewhere, art dominates landscape to reveal narrative and content, and to make more of what the painter J. M. W. Turner and the writer Joseph Conrad each portrayed at different points in Gravesend's history.

By way of example, 'Art as Landscape / Landscape as Art' organises the public realm against the plot divisions of the High Street; it sets the planting distances for trees against the high/low tide measurements for the date of the annual Gravesend Maritime Festival; it emphasises the horizontality of weatherboarding against the verticality of St George's Church spire; it accentuates views; and it details the townscape in exactly the same way that a ship chandler would equip vessels sailing to and from Gravesend.

It also tells stories. Of the Bawley Boats, the Starbuck family, of 'Cleopatra's Needle' passing through Gravesend en route to London's Victoria Embankment, the Poet Keats boarding the sailing brig Maria Crowther for his final journey to Rome, the "large bone of a prehistoric monster" found in Sea Reach in 1938. Of the many fires that have changed Gravesend's townscape over the centuries, and of the firework displays that have celebrated royal visits and other important events in the town's history.

It also ensures that the design of the public realm accommodates the full spectrum of social activities, from the individual user lost in his/her thoughts to casual gathering to large-scale public events, and how this part of Gravesend provides the resident and visitor with a rich experience of place.

3. Art as Programme

In recent years, Gravesend has benefitted from “community engagement through the arts” programmes as part of Gravesham Borough Council’s inclusion in the North Kent Local Authority Arts Partnership [NK-LAAP]. The strategic objectives of the NK-LAPP emphasise community engagement via festivals, public art and the built environment, and as a means of consultation, all of which are important to taking forward [**ADD NAME OF SCHEME**].

As the Local Development Framework states, “places are...about people and how they relate to them”, and the building of a relationship between a development and its residents and users is about programming. Programming is also about being forward-facing about the ‘riverside heritage town’, about how Gravesend sits within the Thames Gateway and creates future heritage.

In [**ADD NAME OF SCHEME**] programming can switch consultation to participation to create new narratives and to ensure meaningful engagement with residents. Programming is also about designing the public realm as ‘a piece of kit’ that supports public activity, from ensuring that the railings to the River are designed to support fishing rods and the launching of fireworks, to the provision of carefully considered places to sit and/or take shelter.

Key to this is the development of a digital platform and the use of QR Codes in later stages.

[**ADD TEXT FROM SUBSTRACT**]

1. Borough of Gravesham Local Development Framework, Core Strategy Key Issues and Options: ‘Culture, Leisure and Tourism’.

2. Gravesham Local Plan 2nd Review, Deposit Version, 10.16 ‘Public Art’.