6.3
Setting out to photograph

Success in site photography is down to more than point-and-shoot. It needs preplanning as well as a degree of luck on the day. An eye for detail and local distinctiveness can help the project team build a library of representative images of a site and its setting, such as public art, building details, local activities and people. These can breathe life into reports and convey the character of a place more effectively than words.

Watchpoints

- Pack spare batteries, memory sticks, films for the non-digital, lenses – even a spare camera.

- A site plan which has been marked up to identify key viewpoints and areas to be recorded, so that nothing of importance is missed.

- An APS format camera (non-digital) can prove useful on its 'panorama' setting to record a wider view without the need to stitch pictures together.

On-site watchpoints

- Views from a high vantage point can reveal the overall structure of the site.

- It is worth taking a series of sequential views of an urban site, so that these can later form the basis for a before-and-after sequence of views to illustrate design proposals.

6.4
Enhancing photography

Photographs taken on site or from a general library may turn out not to be entirely satisfactory for project or presentation use. In such cases, photo retouching and enhancing can be employed. These can often achieve dramatic improvements in image quality.

Photo enhancing and retouching

This is a process in which a digital image made from a scan or digital photograph is altered to meet an acceptable standard. This means generally correcting image flaws such as poor contrast, colour or sharpness. The process can also be used to change the mode or format of an image to suit different applications.

While there is no substitute for a well-taken photograph or flawless scan in the first place, problems are sometimes unavoidable. In these cases a photo-editing software package can be used to correct flaws, and provide the opportunity to enhance elements of the image or correct its size and resolution to provide the required output.

Once an image has been digitised it can be enhanced in many different ways. Common photo-enhancing methods include:

Cropping

To make the images look stronger as a composition and to concentrate on the area required, the image can be cropped using the selection tool. The image can also be rotated before cropping to adjust its vertical alignment.

Brightness and contrast

Adjusting brightness and contrast makes the light areas lighter and the dark areas darker. This can often help an image that looks 'flat' by bringing certain elements forward and others back. There is some danger of losing detail in the image if this technique is taken too far.

Hue and saturation

Adjusting the hue and saturation of the colour in an image can allow the colours to be made to look richer and more vibrant. It does this by identifying the dominate colour for an area of pixels and adding more of that colour. The colour balance can also be changed, allowing images which may have yellowed or browned through age to be restored.

Sharpness

Although the focus of an image that is already taken cannot be adjusted, it can be sharpened by using the sharpen filter. This works by decreasing the amount of colour detail in the image and, flattening some of the colours, making the image look sharper, but the capability of this facility is limited.

Correcting over and under-exposed photographs

Over- and under-exposed photographs are the result of either too much or too little light entering the lens. This can be corrected in some cases by adjusting the brightness and contrast, but the image can often emerge looking pixelated or grainy. Highlights, midtones and shadows need to be adjusted independently of each other by using the 'levels' control. This allows shadows to be made lighter while leaving the highlights or vice versa.

Watchpoints

- Enhancing and editing can only improve the image to a certain degree.

- Always compare the original image to the enhancement.

- Over-enhanced photographs can look artificial.