

Foreword



The generation of economic benefit is not the primary reason for the provision of urban green space. Parks, gardens and squares are places of relaxation, recreation, refreshment and relief; but these are qualities that are in short supply in our towns and cities, and things that are in short supply are valued. Whether this civic and social value is translated into economic return is the subject of this report.

The report is not based on theory, but on case studies of real places. It reaches conclusions that offer real encouragement to those charged with creating new communities or revitalising established ones, by showing how expenditure on green space really does represent an investment that produces a long-term dividend. This dividend comes in the form of direct expenditure in the green space itself, in the increased expenditure enjoyed by local businesses as a consequence of the attraction of greater numbers of people, and in the raised property prices that accompany a valued amenity.

Time and again, perceptions of the value of a local area and confidence in its future have been enhanced because of the physical improvements to the park. It has been an important factor in increasing confidence to stay in the area rather than to relocate elsewhere. By contrast, under-investment over previous decades in parks and green spaces has deterred investment in the area. Investing in green spaces reverses this spiral of decline enhancing the social, economic and environmental well-being of our communities.

At a policy level, this contribution to a higher quality of urban life is being increasingly recognised, and the provision of well integrated, well designed green space must be an essential part of serving the objective of delivering *Cleaner Safer Greener* communities where people will want to live and not leave.

On the basis that people vote with their feet (and their money) the improved property values and economic activity that surround green space are a measure of confidence in a neighbourhood's future: an indicator that we are getting things right. We need more of the same.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Morrell'.

PAUL MORRELL,
CABE COMMISSIONER

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BOSTON SQUARE SENSORY PARK HUNSTANTON

CASE STUDY

The creation of Hunstanton's new 'Sensory Park' has been the catalyst for the revival of Boston Square, kick-starting the redevelopment of the Square's Garden House Hotel and boosting business for many of the existing local guesthouses. Property values overlooking the square command a 7% premium over property values away from the gardens.

DATE: 1998 - 2000

IMPLEMENTED BY: KING'S LYNN & WEST
NORFOLK BOROUGH COUNCIL

FUNDING: £0.26 MILLION
(FROM HUNSTANTON CAPITAL
CHALLENGE FUND)

SIZE OF SITE: 0.5 HECTARES

PARK MANAGEMENT: KING'S LYNN &
WEST NORFOLK BOROUGH COUNCIL

MAINTENANCE: VISITS BY THE
COUNCIL'S PARKS MAINTENANCE TEAM

ANNUAL COST: £10,500 APPROX



£0.26 million of the Hunstanton Capital Challenge Fund was devoted to purchasing and improving Boston Square

Attracting new visitors

The compact seaside town of Hunstanton in Norfolk commands a loyal following of visitors who come back year after year for the sea air, the promenade, the bowling greens and trips to the nearby Norfolk Lavender farm. Hunstanton's supporters would have been reluctant to admit a few years ago that the town was starting to look a little frayed. One corner, in particular, was lowering the tone. Boston Square, had the appearance of an acre of inner city that had been lifted up and dropped right into the town's Conservation Area and most genteel neighbourhood.

A few years later, however, this blot on Hunstanton's landscape has been transformed. Boston Square Sensory Garden is giving the town's loyal daytrippers and holidaymakers another reason to stick with the town. Its imaginative plantings and inclusively-designed features

are drawing in new visitors too, according to the guest houses on the square. And the elimination of one eyesore has led to the removal of another, with the conversion of one of Hunstanton's least favourite buildings.

A local eyesore

The Garden House Hotel, on the corner of the square, had originally owned the central space. When the hotel was vacated and left to decay, so was the square.

According to Ruth Hyde, Head of Tourism at King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council, the effect of the deteriorating space on the neighbourhood was stark.

'Boston Square was a real eyesore in the more genteel, well looked-after part of town... Hunstanton is a small town, too, which increased its impact... Boston Square really stuck out.'

RUTH HYDE,
KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Creating an asset

In 1997, a Capital Challenge grant of £1 million gave the town the chance to smarten itself up. The programme of works included improvements to shop fronts, car parks and other facilities, new ramps and railings on the seafront, as well as commissions from local artists. A quarter of the fund was devoted to purchasing and rehabilitating Boston Square.

The windfall presented the opportunity, not simply to tidy up the square, but to provide something of real quality that would be seen as an asset and not a liability, something new, enlightened and different, that would hopefully delight the town's core elderly market as well as attract younger visitors with an eye for the original and innovative.

The idea of a 'sensory' garden aimed at stimulating sight, smell, hearing and touch soon gained support within the borough council. Locally-based Jeremy Stacey Architects was appointed to design the gardens, and organised a series of discussions and workshops with potential users to garner their ideas and support for the project.

The garden has three main zones, each themed to reflect an aspect of Hunstanton's geology and landscape.

A cliff-top area at the higher end of the square represents the district's chalk meadow grassland. An 'arrival court' offers a drop-off point for parties of people with disabilities and a circular stilt hedge encloses a protected seating area. The central lawned garden rolls downhill in a series of gentle terraces, designed for picnicking and sunbathing.

A fragrant camomile and sage path leads to a circle of small standing stones with plant shapes engraved and named in braille. In the lower part of the gardens, gravel, shingle and water dominate, harbouring plants that enjoy an exposed beachside aspect. A rock pool with fountains triggered by sensors in the wooden path is overlooked by shaded seating.

The square has provided the resort with a unique selling point, of the kind a small tourist economy needs if it is to survive. Hunstanton's identity, which lost something when

its pier was destroyed, has been reinvigorated and this has lent a new competitive edge to the town.

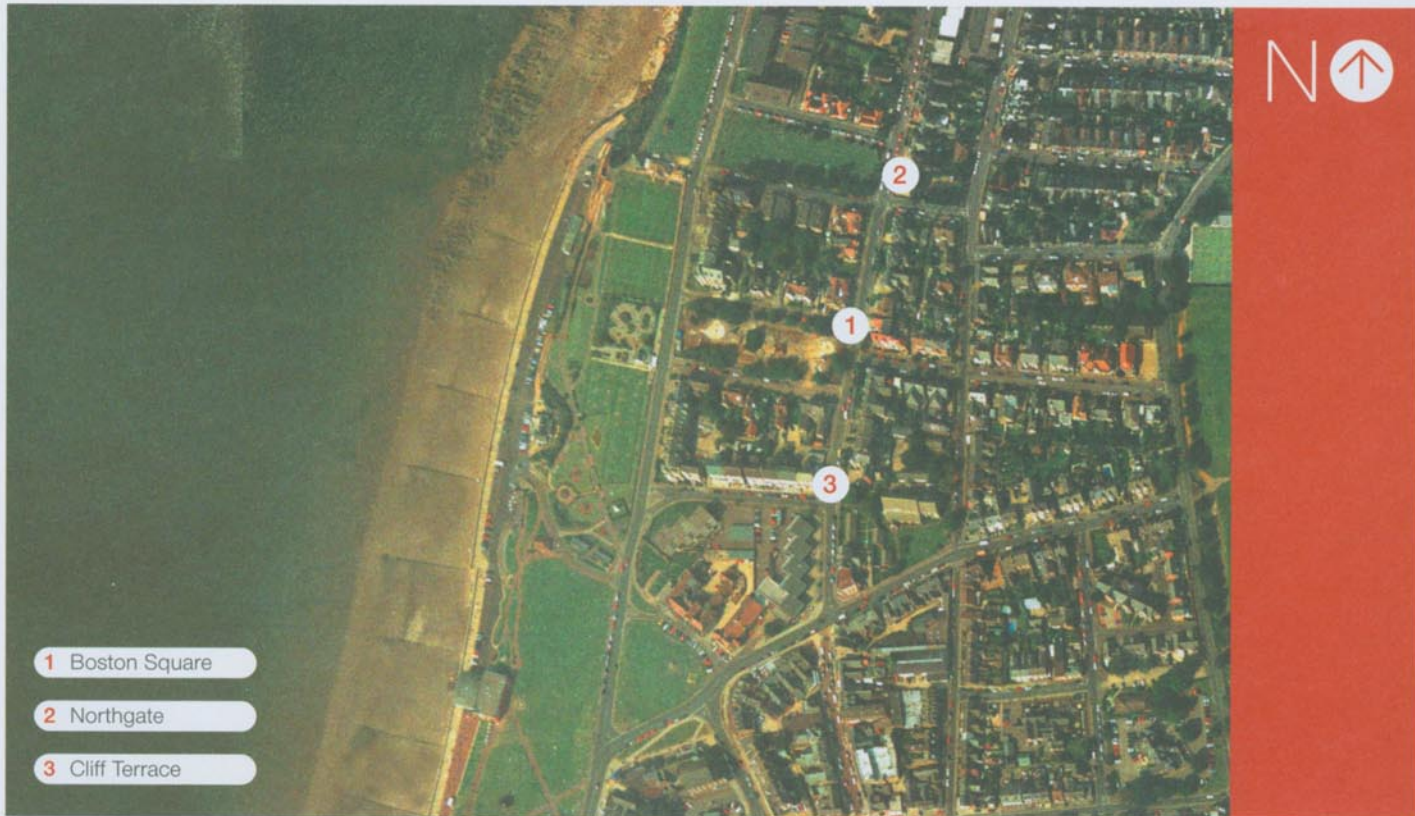
But is the treasure too hidden? Although the gardens are prominently signposted on the seafront, there could be more in the way of marketing the square to visitors and residents. 'When we have disabled parties here for the day we always recommend the sensory garden,' says Nicola Almey-Parish, of the local tourist office.

However, the square succeeds in being totally inclusive appealing across all ages and including both people with disabilities and those without. It is a space with lots to see, smell, touch and hear. And it is making a lot of sense to the community around it.



The design of the park aims to reflect aspects of Hunstanton's landscape and geology

BOSTON SQUARE SENSORY PARK PROPERTY VALUATION LOCATIONS



The housing market area

The Gardens are located in an area known as Old Hunstanton which is characterised by older Edwardian properties, many of which have been converted into hotels and B&Bs. The area is south of the quieter, northern end of town and buyers there are often looking for retirement or holiday homes.

Large Edwardian houses are the predominant property type. Boston Square consists mainly of detached Edwardian villas while the market area is dominated by semi-detached homes, often converted into private flats for elderly people, who account for nearly 40% of all households.

Residential property values

The table overleaf reveals a 7% difference between property values on the park and off the park, with average values of £231,667 for a five bedroom semi-detached Edwardian property on the park, compared to £216,667 off the park. But there is no difference between values near the park and those within the same market area but some distance away.

There are a number of possible explanations for this. Firstly, Boston Square Sensory Park is relatively small which may be limiting its impact on value. It is also possible that the Gardens are not subject to sufficiently high profile marketing to both visitors and residents. But most important of all appears to be the influence of the sea, lending value to each of the properties in the three positions selected and overriding all the other benefits of being near the park.

'People have a choice about where they go on holiday... Hunstanton isn't a Great Yarmouth or a Blackpool, but some people have gone there year after year, and they might easily have started going somewhere else if Boston Square had remained as it was... I think the gardens are a bit of a treasure.'

RUTH HYDE,
KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**BOSTON SQUARE
SENSORY PARK,
PROPERTY VALUATIONS**
Average values for 5
bedroom semi-detached house

	Location 1 'On park'	Location 2 'Off park'	Location 3 'In area'
	Boston Square	Northgate	Cliff Terrace
Average value	£231,667	£216,667	£216,667
Value indexed	107	100	100
Premium for being on/off park	7%	0%	



Parts of the park are gravel, shingle and planting appropriate to the coastal location

All the experts spoken to felt that the impact of Sensory Gardens is localised to the properties found directly on the square and all said that they would mention the gardens in the marketing of those properties.

The commercial property market

Several guest houses and holiday homes look out over Boston Square Sensory Park. Most of them now mention the garden in their advertising. Armando Guardado has run the Miramar Guest House on the north side of the square for 10 years.

'Obviously, it's a big improvement. It's created a talking point for this part of the town. From my point of view, I see people coming and having a look at the square, and it helps to advertise my business. I get a lot more passing trade. They say, 'We saw your place when we came to see the square'. The mood for making improvements is spreading', says Guardado. 'Appearances are everything... people are now trying to do more with their properties to stay in keeping with the square'

Not long after the square was completed, the dilapidated Garden House Hotel was purchased by a local building company and extensively refurbished to a high standard as flats. Now known simply as Garden House, the building completes the view of the square from the seafront.

Local property experts believe the improvements to the square were instrumental in encouraging the redevelopment, as the building had stood empty for over a decade.

Jill Cairns of Birds Estate Agents in the town centre has no doubts about the square's value. 'If the square hadn't happened I don't think Garden House would have been converted to that high a standard, or for the market it's aimed at,' she explains.

There has been a 7% uplift in value on properties overlooking the square



'It does help, if you're building luxury apartments, to offer a nice view. Who wants to buy a £200,000 flat that overlooks a rubbish tip?'

JILL CAIRNS,
LOCAL ESTATE AGENT

KEY FINDINGS FOR BOSTON SQUARE SENSORY PARK, HUNSTANTON

- 7% uplift in value on properties overlooking the square.
- The improvements have boosted local businesses such as B&Bs and holiday homes with the gardens providing a unique selling point for visitors.
- The creation of the gardens has kick-started redevelopment on the square, with the renovation of the square's formerly derelict Garden House Hotel, now refurbished to a high standard as residential apartments.
- There is some evidence that the impact of the square is limited due to insufficient marketing to visitors and residents.