



SHIFTING SANDS

DESIGN AND THE CHANGING IMAGE OF ENGLISH SEASIDE TOWNS



ENGLISH HERITAGE

cabe

A NEW GARDEN PROVIDES INSPIRATION FOR
REGENERATION IN A CONSERVATION AREA

PROJECT

Hunstanton, Norfolk
Boston Square
Sensory Park

CLIENT

Borough Council of King's Lynn
& West Norfolk

CONTRACT VALUE

£0.3 million

ARCHITECT

Jeremy Stacey Architects

Sculpted walls made
of gabions of flint



The works of art
extend the tactile
nature of the garden



THE SITE

Although forming a prominent part of the Hunstanton Conservation Area, the centre of Boston Square had fallen into a sad state of neglect, being used as a car park. Its condition reflected the dilapidation of some of the large Victorian properties, which form the three-sided square that looks west to The Wash.

THE BRIEF

The architects' brief was to create a stimulating garden environment, giving special emphasis to the needs of the elderly and people with disabilities. It was set within the Government's Capital Challenge initiative and the Council's Local Agenda 21 objectives for sustainability. The brief drew attention to the site's natural slope towards the sea, existing trees, and proximity to the seafront, public walks and residential area. Emphasis was placed on public consultation and the inclusion of works of art.

THE ARCHITECTS' RESPONSE

Central to the architects' approach was consultation with potential users, including special needs groups, local authority members and officers. An extensive analysis of the half-hectare site – its geology, history and landscape context – formed the basis of discussions with local people. The architects deliberately kept an open mind and allowed these meetings to shape and refine the plans. This helped develop a sense of community involvement and, subsequently, local ownership of the new park.

SHAPING THE SITE

The scheme divided the park into three main areas, reflecting the geology and soils of Hunstanton. At the highest part of the site a 'cliff top' area mirrors Hunstanton's chalk meadow grassland while the area nearest to the sea represents the shingle beach; in between a lawn in the form of waves reflects the unique

strata of chalk and carrstone of the local cliffs. The site has been sculpted by terraces, platforms and walls made of gabions of flint. The design has incorporated most of the existing trees, including two Holm oaks that frame the view from the paved 'arrival court', allowing disabled visitors to alight safely from their vehicles. Paths around and across the park provide easy access for visitors with impaired mobility or in wheelchairs, as well as for parents with small children.

PLANTING FOR THE SEASIDE

Two factors governed the choice of plants for the park. Most importantly, the planting had to be suitable for the seaside site. Secondly, the planting should stimulate the senses – touch, sound, sight and smell. Where possible, plants native to the area were used, especially in the shingle garden. Elsewhere grasses, evergreen shrubs, low maintenance perennials and bulbs give the garden year-round interest.



The materials used and the strong three-dimensional forms reinforce the park's sensory quality

ART IN THE PARK

In partnership with the artist Elizabeth-Jane Grose, the architects commissioned a number of art works that have been incorporated into the garden design. These include an interactive water installation and a 'human sundial' where the viewer acts as the gnomon and, for visually impaired visitors, electronic sensors cause bells to ring out the time. Garden furniture has been specially created for the site, making subsequent additions of standard local authority waste bins seem somewhat out of place.

HELPING REGENERATION

The garden opened in 2000 and subsequently won an award for its contribution to conservation and improvement in the countryside. The aim was to give new life to the centre of a square that had been allowed to decline. Enthusiastically supported by the district authority and the town council, the park has proved popular

with local residents and visitors. Importantly the presence of the new park has begun to help to regenerate the square itself. Significant improvements have been made to the two sentry houses that border the square on the seaward side.



Boston Square, a three-sided square with views to The Wash

CLACTON MARINE GARDENS

Clacton's seafront gardens date from 1921. One of 34 gardens in coastal towns included in English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens, they are set on a cliff top site stretching west from the Venetian Bridge which crosses Pier Gap, a cutting leading down to Clacton's 1871 pier. Recognising that Clacton's tourism market was changing, Tendring District Council's tourism and economic development departments reviewed a key stretch of seafront, visited by an estimated 2.5 million people each year. It was agreed to focus on improving Marine Gardens that, by the late 1990s, had become tired and overgrown. The authority successfully obtained a £416,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards a £554,000 project which included repairs to the Venetian Bridge.

The new gardens, designed by the Landscape Partnership, retain many of the original features, but the designers added a Mediterranean, and a Sensory Garden. Lighting improvements made the area safer at night, and access for disabled people was improved to all parts of the garden. A designated cycle path and play area were included with new interpretation panels providing information on planting.

Following the improvements, visitor numbers have increased and there are signs of new developments along the seafront road.