

## 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