**A breath of fresh air on the Norfolk Coast**

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| [Great Yarmouth](http://www.rudi.net/system/files/images/37_0001_l.jpg) *Great Yarmouth today - Marine Parade is cut off from the beach* | Case Studies usually feature either local authority projects or consultants plans. This one is different in that it is about a student project, but one for which there was a real client, and which offers possibilities for positive collaborations elsewhere. Postgraduate Town Planning students specialising in Urban Design at South Bank University's Faculty of the Built Environment have just finished working on a live project for Great Yarmouth Seafront Partnership. They visited Great Yarmouth in October to see the problems the town faces and worked on their projects over the whole semester. In January members of Great Yarmouth Seafront Partnership saw the projects; now they will be considering how they might be taken further.  Great Yarmouth is one of England's beleaguered seaside towns, its economy and its character undermined by the shifts of the holiday market. The seafront grew and styled itself as an east coast Brighton and flourished with the railway connections to the East Midlands. Grand theatres, carefully composed terraces, two piers and a Winter Garden were built on the sandpits beyond the town walls facing the North Sea. Now the town's golden years are past; caravans and holiday villages along the unspoilt coast draw the visitors; those who stay in Great Yarmouth today come with one shirt and a fiver and don't change either in the words of Jim Davidson who leases one of stubby piers for the summer season.  A Seafront Partnership of local authority, traders and operators of the visitor attractions had begun to attract regeneration funding but felt they needed a wider vision and some fresh ideas. The project originated with the suggestion that students work on a design competition for one or two very closely specified schemes on the seafront and a brief to recreate a Victorian atmosphere. After discussion between the project tutors and sponsors, a wider ranging brief evolved, with the prize money reallocated to pay for the students' visit. The students worked on the whole of the seafront area and prepared their design projects in the context of a wider urban design and conservation strategy. |
| [Attractions](http://www.rudi.net/system/files/images/37_0002_l.jpg) *Visitors' attractions hide the Edwardian architecture in the back* | The programme of urban design teaching at South Bank meant that the students could include a broad view of the seaside environment. Their work started by developing projects for the future of Great Yarmouth in the manner of famous urban designers - the styles of Gordon Cullen, Robert Krier, Colin Rowe, Kevin Lynch and Christopher Alexander offered ways of generating ideas and possibilities that were much more vivid and creative than the two dimensional version of the Local Plan.  At the same time they looked at seafronts and their patterns and routines as performances, and with choreographer Struan Leslie charted a seafront of experiences, events and time. Students looked at a typical day at the seaside, the cruising of boy racers, the beach in winter and images of the seaside's Edwardian heyday as sources of getting beyond the merely physical aspects of design. They drew on a range of sources and models that go beyond the language of most planning work but which are the essence of real life and understanding of a place. |

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| [Sea front](http://www.rudi.net/system/files/images/38_0001_l.jpg)  *Student proposal emphasising  the sequence of spaces along the sea front and connecting the sea to the Hippodrome*  [Student project](http://www.rudi.net/system/files/images/38_0002_l.jpg) *Student project based on Gordon Cullen's serial vision* | Though these exploratory pieces led into the more practical work of area character analysis, identifying problems and strategic approaches to urban design and conservation on the seafront, and eventually to sketching individual projects for spaces, buildings and development opportunities, the influence of this wider scope to urban design could be seen in the projects and ideas that resulted.  Several key themes emerged from the projects:  *- look at the seafront as a whole and to reconnect the beach to the strip of amusement arcades, - strengthen the circulation and open space links between the seafront and the town, - accept and relish the contrasting design languages of the seafronts Victorian and Edwardian heritage and the bold and ephemeral neon of the present; the real eyesores are the bland bleak boxes of the past thirty years.*  Individual proposals involved some radical rethinking of spaces and buildings along the seafront, opening up views of grand Edwardian buildings, removing the clutter of short-term leases and car parks that obscure the sea and the beach.  Students were able to bring to the town and the seafront a new sense of vision and to see connections and possibilities not realised in the conventions of two dimensional local plans and project orientated programmes. Some of the students ideas may be difficult to realise in practice, others may require real long term design planning rather than ad-hoc treatment. But their work will be an inspiration and a challenge that the town will do well to meet, even if it is only to say, have you thought about doing it this way? A full set of the projects has been sent to Great Yarmouth, and it is hoped to organise an exhibition of them. Meanwhile Great Yarmouth have just appointed a Project Offficer for the Seafront regeneration project.  It remains to be seen whether this exercise has opened a Pandora's box of dashed hopes or a new horizon of possibility for Great Yarmouth. There is no doubt that the project gave the students the sense of purpose, and the feeling that someone in the real world was interested, led to work of a very high standard. The question for South Bank University is where and what to do next year to build on this progress. #  *Dr Bob Jarvis*    **Project Team**  Dr. Bob Jarvis, Mary Jane Rooney (Architecture Division, SBU), Eddie Booth (The Conservation Studio), Struan Leslie (Choreographer). **Urban Design Students**:  Steve Carrington, Shahida Manjlai, Ellen Reith; Hanna Moore, Shona Archer; Junko Iwaya; Giles Hewson, Tim Day, Ben Wrighton. **Great Yarmouth Seafront Partnership:** John Ashton, Chairman; Alan Carr, Tourism Officer, Great Yarmouth Borough Council; Ed Gilder, Planning Department, Great Yarmouth Borough Council. |

Urban Design (Quarterly) Issue 79: Summer 2001 - Small towns

**Angelheaded Hipsters** Bob Jarvis

The discourse that is “urban design” is dominated by academics and

professionals, speaking conventional tongues of abstraction and

considered judgment. The “Urban Design Skills Summit” was no

exception: agendas, syllabi and research were reported, but little was

heard of the experience of learning. My paper Milord, I am from a

foreign country partly written in the form of Allen Ginsberg’s Howl offered

a personal voice, describing those extra-curricula moments where insight

transcends technical “skills” and remembers those:

*who on the corner of New Conduit and Purfleet in the fading November*

*fenlight mists at 5pm, between the Whisky-a-go-go and L’année dernier à*

*Marienbad – wonder on this moment and everyothereveryday like it, and*

*how the are made,*

*and so were sent on the last cold steam trains, unbriefed and unprepared*

*to understand secondary shopping streets and country market towns in the*

*snow, to seek clues in places,*

*to plunge into the black and white darkness of the Quayside and the bare*

*bulb paper stacked smoke dark Bremen Line offices and urine yards and*

*from that cut up spread to diagram the connections of the city,*

*whose collages and postcards of Carnaby Street and alleyways and vast*

*tin sheds by the by-pass and cathedrals at sunset was refused a mark,*

*except by committee,*

*and walked with Pete in three wild days: clear wind, cliff beating storms*

*and fog from Blyth past boarded coffee bars and amusement halls to*

*Shields; their report: Not Quite Summer on not quite Bredon was not the*

*language of professional work and would get them nowhere,*

*who sat on the tea room hardbacked benches, turning Houghton le*

*Spring’s image map into a wondrous mind warped distorted swirl – more*

*Revolver than Image of the City – and lay there long haired, starry eyed*

*and laughing in the corners,*

*who sat all those lunchtimes eating pasties on the footsteps of war*

*memorials, deliberately not revising because they knew even then that the*

*real subject of planning was everyday life – even though they had no*

*words for it,*

*who were told their thesis on LSD and the city would not work and went*

*back to wander in demolition’s debris behind the Jewish Cemetery, saw*

*the tides creep up the ferry steps and the snow melting in the gutters and*

*the market giving way to the Mart and turned all this to a secondhand*

*theory of constant change,*

*whose seminar paper began with a drive-by Durham and ended strolling*

*in a twittern in Chichester and asked who was a stranger here and who*

*had more time than money and was stopped as being irrelevant,*

*but who came back to turn: those all night drives and mists and running for*

*a bus and waiting on the corner, climbing staircases in daylight and*

*blindfolded and with bags of shopping... each footfall, to fragments of a*

*theory that was never written, checking each wordnormal and all the time*

*a nightschool poet making the night roads into science fiction chanting,*

*who, years later, speechless at the convention, could only utter their*

*names: Boulevards of Coma and Allées of Despair, knowing such lists*

*could never be that sublime moment when the sun touched some magical*

*alignment and the snow suddenly slipped across the avenue in the*

*abandoned parklands,*

*who, back in their offices, confronted a babel of incomprehensible codes,*

*everyday rhetorics and technical neologisms, listened to Dave and Chris*

*and Keith and Andrew and Hugh and Pete talking about special places*

*and every night and wrote it up, and wrote it again in the first person*

*telling tales and true stories of love and money and unbuilt dreams and*

*forgotten unnamed local government officers that still raises the question*

*“I didn’t know urban design was like that”.*

Urban Design Quarterly / Winter 2003 / Issue 85 51