

CULTURE AND REGENERATION CONFERENCE
28 November 2002

Problems, Dreams and Solutions: Scarborough has been designated a Renaissance Town by Yorkshire Forward. While it has come to be regarded as a 'downmarket resort' the town's cultural, heritage and tourist assets - and the talents of its people - give it the potential to reinvent itself.

In autumn 2001 Yorkshire Forward, the Regional Development Agency for Yorkshire and Humberside, launched its Urban Renaissance programme in order to support the social and economic regeneration of major towns and cities in the region. One of these towns was Scarborough.

Britain's first seaside report: a spa by the sea

Scarborough is probably best known as a seaside resort on the east coast of Yorkshire. It used to be immensely popular in Victorian and Edwardian days with thousands of people flocking to the town as the railways made travel accessible to all. Although images of fish and chips, donkey rides and amusement arcades most immediately come to mind, Scarborough's origins as a holiday destination lie in the mineral waters that were discovered flowing from a spring near to the beach in the 17th century. It was believed the water had medicinal qualities and provided a cure for constipation. Sea bathing itself was promoted as a remedy for gout, so before long Scarborough developed a reputation as an important spa town for the rich and idle. An etching dated 1735 shows people bathing naked in the sea, with a bathing machine offering a discreet means of disrobing as close as possible to the water's edge.

Unfortunately, Scarborough's popularity as a 20th century resort was seriously dented by the arrival of cheap flights and package tour holidays to the Mediterranean. However beautiful the Yorkshire scenery, however charming the fishing harbour, it simply cannot compete when it comes to the weather. On a warm day, with the waves sparkling in the sunlight, Scarborough is idyllic. When there's a gale blowing and it's pouring down with rain, one yearns for the South of France. It's as simple as that.

Declining fortunes

So why was Scarborough selected as a Renaissance town, needing Yorkshire Forward's attention?

It is an attractive town in a stunning location but the reality is that there are serious social, physical and economic problems bubbling away under the surface.

Although you have the castle, the harbour, the beach, the sea, and some grand Victorian architecture, you also have two derelict theatres, an abandoned swimming pool and buildings deteriorating due to the lack of money and attention. Despite its location in the centre of Scarborough, statistical information places Castle Ward as the 37th poorest ward in the country. Buildings are falling apart due to lack of maintenance; hotels with a shortage of traditional guests find themselves forced to operate as Houses of Multiple Occupation in order to survive. Instead of holiday visitors enjoying a stroll along the beach and a visit to the theatre, residents may now be vulnerable and socially excluded youngsters, whose drug dependency inflicts chaos on themselves and others.

The sea itself is also a problem as it's constantly eroding the coast, and of course there was the famous incident of the Holbeck Hotel which suddenly lurched over the cliff a few years ago. This has resulted in a multimillion pound European funded coastal protection programme. There are currently huge rocks being shipped in from Norway to provide new sea defences for the town. Interestingly, this is even turning into a tourist attraction - people gather on Marine Drive to watch these vast lumps of stone being dumped strategically at the base of the headland.

A Vision for the Future

Scarborough's role as a seaside resort is no longer really viable. Change is in the air. But change into what? How should the town position itself in the 21st century? Are there enough jobs? Are there enough of the right kind of houses? What would attract people to move to the town? What makes people stay? How easy is it to get there by road and rail? There are some successful local businesses in the area but more are needed. If new firms relocate, would the local workforce be sufficiently skilled to be employed? Would the improvement of physical, natural and spatial environments generate a better quality of life for residents and visitors? These questions - and many more - needed to be asked - and answered.

From Yorkshire Forward's international Renaissance Panel of consultants, John Thompson & Partners from London and West 8 from the Netherlands were appointed to work with Scarborough Borough Council and local people to create an integrated Vision for the future of Scarborough and an Action Plan for its delivery. West 8 are landscape architects and urban designers based in Rotterdam. John Thompson & Partners are architects, urban designers and community planners who have carried out Vision building exercises throughout the UK and Europe. This has included working in Prague, Turin, Paris and a number of cities in Germany including Berlin.

Community Planning with John Thompson & Partners

I work on a freelance basis for John Thompson & Partners and have personally been involved in over 50 community planning events in a wide variety of spaces and places in Britain and abroad.

The client may be the local authority or a private developer. The site may be a former barracks, hospital or lunatic asylum. It could be an old sewage works, a seminary or a naval depot. It may be a greenfield area for which development is proposed - and usually opposed by local people. We've worked on the Shankill Road in Belfast, and with both Catholic and Protestant communities on the Crumlin Road. We've run events in market towns like Monmouth and Abergavenny as well as crumbling inner city districts in London, Liverpool, Nottingham and Newcastle. The community planning process is flexible enough to deal with different scales of participation. There may be 50 people attending or 500. In Scarborough we had over 1000 people take part in the Community Planning Weekend which was held at the Spa Complex at the end of April this year.

Community Planning: the philosophy

So what is community planning? When a new development is proposed, we believe it is essential to bring all the interested parties together, which must include the local community as well as experienced professionals. The principle is that everyone who lives or works in a particular area has something to contribute towards shaping its future. If you involve the local community from the start, it is more likely that people will get the surroundings they need and actually want. By focusing public attention on solving problems at the outset, solutions will hopefully be created which prevent the need for acrimonious and costly adversarial exchange later.

Obviously there will be people at any community planning event who come from very different backgrounds, they'll be of different ages, maybe different cultures, they'll have different earning power, some may be employed, some not. They'll have different concerns and enthusiasms. They may have a particular axe to grind, or a personal hobby-horse to promote. But the community planning techniques we use give people a chance to listen to each other, to share ideas and suggestions, to debate and discuss and try to solve problems at the start, by communicating directly with each other, and with the local authority, the developers and other stakeholders, in workshops and hands-on planning sessions.

Community Planning Weekends: the process

During the workshops we follow a process that has three phases: very simply we focus on problems, dreams and solutions. We move from negative criticism to positive ideas and suggestions, and finally how these can be implemented.

Participants contribute by jotting ideas down on post-it notes which are then grouped to identify key themes. Ideas are discussed as they arise, enabling a constructive dialogue to take place within a fully inclusive process.

In the Hands on planning sessions, groups of participants begin to develop ideas that have emerged from the workshops in a more physical form, working around large scale plans of a particular area. Although architects, urban designers and other professionals are there to assist, people are encouraged to work out potential solutions with other participants, who may, or may not, be in agreement.

Plenary sessions allow local people to report back on the results of their own workshops and for everyone to be kept informed of progress.

Community animation and information gathering

In terms of Scarborough, the Community Planning Weekend was the culmination of a Vision building process that included two months of fact finding and information gathering in which every aspect of the town was explored.

The aim was to create a consensus: how to throw off Scarborough's outdated image as a fading seaside resort and how to move confidently into the future as a revitalised town by the sea. But to create a consensus, you first of all have to make sure you have the opinions of the community who live and work there. And, of course, a town is not like a localised brownfield site, a housing estate or a defined district - it is in fact made up of hundreds, if not thousands of people living in different worlds, different communities. To involve them all in the community planning process was quite a challenge.

The formation of a Town Team is central to Yorkshire Forward's urban renaissance strategy. Scarborough's Town Team has representatives from all sections of the community who could therefore 'spread the word' about the Community Planning Weekend. Several explanatory leaflets were distributed through the free local paper prior to the event. In addition, we did our best to make contact with a wide range of local organisations and individuals, especially those who are hard to reach, or who would normally run a mile from attending meetings on regeneration proposals.

My job was to target those who might (or might not) come along to the public event, to ensure their views and aspirations would be taken into account; to mobilise enthusiasm for the urban renaissance programme and to encourage a large attendance at the planning weekend itself.

Scarborough - an arts and entertainment town?

I had never been to Scarborough before. I knew it was a seaside resort, near to other places I had heard of such as Filey, Whitby and Robin Hood's Bay. But for me its fame lay in being the home town of Sir Alan Ayckbourn. The fact that a world famous playwright and artistic director chooses to premier each new work in Scarborough, and then - only then - tours the play and brings it to London, to my mind says something very definite about the town. It has culture. Obviously.

Performers and entertainers used to be the lifeblood of UK seaside resorts. The 'summer season' was full of 'End of the Pier' shows, variety, song and dance, comedy revues, Punch and Judy, musical operettas, orchestral concerts, what was generally termed 'light entertainment'. So it's hardly surprising that repertory theatres sprang up in coastal towns, providing a mixed programme of serious drama as well as fluffy comedies. Scarborough is no exception. The Stephen Joseph Theatre was first established in 1955, a tiny theatre in the round on the first floor of the public library, before moving in 1976 into a supposedly temporary venue: the ground floor of the former Scarborough Boys' High School (now Westwood Campus of Yorkshire Coast College). It took twenty years for a permanent home to be found: but in 1996 the old Odeon Cinema was resurrected as the new Stephen Joseph Theatre. The town has a theatre as well as a playwright to be proud of.

However, when I started to investigate the town, I found that arts and culture had a surprisingly low profile. As a sector, it just didn't seem to be rated very much - by either the local authority or the local paper, and perhaps not even by the wider community. Arts practitioners certainly didn't seem to be getting the support or attention they deserved. Which seemed strange.

New uses for old buildings: The Stephen Joseph Theatre

The new Stephen Joseph Theatre, with Sir Alan Ayckbourn at the helm, has to be one of Scarborough's major assets. Other buildings may be suffering the indignities of neglect but here, in a prime position opposite the railway station, is an inspiring example of urban renewal: a classic listed building converted into a state-of-the-art theatre building. There are two auditoria: a proscenium arch theatre and Ayckbourn's famous 'theatre in the round'; there's a restaurant which can also be used as a performance space; there's exhibition, rehearsal and meeting rooms. Its very existence speaks volumes about what is possible in terms of the regeneration and re-use of buildings.

Yet despite its individual success in terms of audience attendance, it seemed that the theatre was not yet acting as a spur for other initiatives; it almost seemed to be treated as an outsider, not a leading player in the town at all. I'd heard that in places such as Walsall and St Ives, a new arts building has acted as the catalyst for town-wide regeneration. Why wasn't this happening in Scarborough?

The Arts in Scarborough - a lack of cohesion

During the following weeks I discovered a large number of people involved in many different aspects of the arts, but to some extent they all seemed to be operating in isolation. So although there were indeed a wide range of cultural activities in Scarborough, perhaps they weren't working together well enough to provide the 'critical mass' that was necessary.

This is not helped by the fact there is currently no senior Arts Officer within Scarborough Borough Council. Also, in my opinion 'arts and culture' as a category does not sit very comfortably under the departmental banner of 'Tourism and Leisure Services'

To me, as an outsider, it seemed obvious that the Stephen Joseph Theatre, along with all the other artistic and cultural activities happening within the town, could be key to providing Scarborough with a new image, one that would attract investment and help the town to once again become a successful seaside destination. But individuals and groups had to be more visible; they also had to work together.

Promoting the Arts

Yorkshire Forward's urban renaissance programme was an ideal opportunity for the artists and performers in Scarborough to show their colours, to elbow their way out of obscurity and promote their talents to the wider community.

To that end, it was crucial that representatives of the numerous art and performance groups that existed in Scarborough should come to the Community Planning Weekend at the end of April. But I was mindful that the very people who could contribute so much to the regeneration of the town through their individual and collective artistic talents are the very people who tend to shy away from public meetings. I was convinced that many would never attend the event unless encouraged to do so. And this would be a shame, as well as a missed opportunity.

Scarborough's cultural assets

I therefore set out on a personal odyssey to find and talk to Scarborough's artistic and cultural community. I had lunch with Alan Ayckbourn; I had meetings with actors, directors, musicians, conductors, arts advocates, community artists, teachers, university lecturers and professors; I met painters, sculptors and film-makers; I talked to digital artists and learned about Pixelism, a new art movement founded in Scarborough. I chatted to local theatre production companies and theatre managers, to hoteliers who provide in-house entertainment and those who promote theatre on their hotel website. I had chance conversations with a number of people - in taxis, in trains, in an amusement arcade, on the beach - who turned out to be connected in some way with the arts.

I met the DIY Collective, a group of disadvantaged young people who run their own arts and music venue. They organise the annual Soundwave music festival, which this year attracted 900 local teenagers who came to listen to local bands and take part in workshops on singing, song-writing, DJ'ing and performance poetry. The DIY Collective won the 2001 Philip Lawrence Award for outstanding achievements in good citizenship by young people, yet few people in Scarborough seemed to be aware of their existence. Until the Community Planning Weekend, when members spoke eloquently and passionately about their work. The public exposure was important: I think more local people know about them now!

Scarborough's status as an entertainment town may have declined with the demise of the Open Air Theatre, the Floral Hall and the Royal Opera House but plenty of live performance is still on offer. In fact, the variety of cultural activity is impressive, given that Scarborough is not a city, it's a small town on the Yorkshire Coast. There's new writing, old writing, comic, serious and experimental drama; there's pantomime, revue and opera, light or otherwise. There's a huge number of local bands playing many different types of music. There are two orchestras and several choirs. The National Student Drama Festival is a week-long annual event which brings 1500 students to the town to perform, see shows and take part in debates and masterclasses.

Scarborough has an enthusiastic and committed Museums and Gallery team, with amazing collections located in attractive 19th century buildings. Edith Sitwell was born in Scarborough; the Sitwell family owned what is now Wood End Natural History Museum. William Smith, known as 'the Father of Geology' was a famous former resident who designed Scarborough's unique, purpose-built Rotunda Museum. The Dinosaur Coast outreach project which teaches people about fossils through geologically-themed events and activities has been extremely popular with the wider community.

The town has a large number of talented and enthusiastic visual artists, working locally and selling nationally. The local Hospital has initiated a Percent for Art Scheme, with Artists in Residence and imaginative glass, ceramic and textile art works taking pride of place on the walls of the wards, as well as a sound installation in a corridor. There are many people involved in multimedia, digital arts, web design and music technology. Not forgetting photography, film and video. Creative writing too. The list is endless.

And what about all those people whose talents are as yet untapped. Community arts projects have been taking place in a number of local areas suffering from poverty and deprivation, giving confidence and pleasure to those for whom the arts were previously unfamiliar. There's the inspiration of history and heritage. And education too of course: the desire to learn, the talent to teach.

The Community Planning Weekend: Arts Workshop results

Arts and culture related matters were in fact mentioned in most of the workshops that took place during the Community Planning Weekend. Over 80 people took part in the workshop that focused specifically on arts, culture and entertainment. This began with an assessment of 'what is currently going on' and the extensive list of arts related ventures highlighted the variety and importance of the cultural sector within Scarborough. However, it was also apparent that participants were often unaware of other initiatives happening in the town.

The workshop went through the usual process of identifying problems, dreams and solutions. There was a strong feeling that the arts is indeed insufficiently appreciated whilst contributing considerably to the town's character and reputation. It was agreed that Scarborough has the potential to become an 'Edinburgh by the Sea', with year round festivals, performances, installations and exhibitions, focused around the Stephen Joseph Theatre and other existing venues which needed to be enlarged and rejuvenated, along with the creation of new spaces for smaller groups and organisations. The solution that emerged was that there is a definite need to co-ordinate, sustain and champion the cultural and physical resources that exist already, many of which are hidden away or under-valued.

Commitment to the Arts

Money isn't everything but financial commitment does matter. The arts do need to be accepted and understood in a serious way, whether as a form of cultural expression, a means of adding some aesthetic value to the streetscape or as a creator of employment and income for the town.

Festival events - with the opportunity to display a wide range of artistic enterprise - not only have a 'feel good factor' but they can bring the community together. A festival can encourage, develop and exhibit local talent, communicate ideas, attract people from far and wide and generate wealth. Cultural expression engenders pride, especially pride of place.

The urban renaissance initiative in Scarborough has provided an opportunity to generate a shift in thinking and attitude. Artistic activity may seem alien and irrelevant to some people, but if sensitively handled it can be an agent of social change and the bedrock of regeneration.

The Arts in Scarborough: ongoing cultural activity

The Community Planning Weekend came and went. So what has happened since?

- **Arts and Culture Forum**

As a result of the Arts and Culture Workshop, an Arts and Culture Forum was established which meets on a regular basis to discuss future projects. The Forum has more than seventy members and includes representatives from the voluntary sector, Hull University, Yorkshire Coast College, the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough Art Gallery, Blandsciff Gallery, the DIY Collective, Arkitex of Sound and many other interested individuals. It is chaired by Pete Massey of Create, which is now recognised as an important (though small) cultural development agency operating throughout the Borough of Scarborough.

- **Create**

Create is a not-for-profit voluntary organisation in the process of applying for charitable status. It is run by an executive committee made up of creative professionals and representatives from other arts organisations, the voluntary sector and academics. To quote its Mission Statement, "Create is dedicated to enhancing and developing the cultural and creative lives of the people of, and visitors to, the Borough of Scarborough through increased provision of, and access to, creative and artistic activity. Create intends to make a significant contribution to the social and economic regeneration of the Borough through enhancing Cultural Tourism, the development of creative industries, and by tackling social exclusion and neighbourhood renewal through creative means."

Create (and its part-time Development Director, Pete Massey) has been given a much higher profile as a result of the Urban Renaissance programme in Scarborough. There was no one specifically representing the Arts on the original Town Team that was brought together by the Borough Council in January to kick-start the renaissance process and carry forward the Vision and Action Plan that has been developed as a result of the Community Planning Weekend. Now there is.

- **Public Art installation and entertainment programme**

Yorkshire Forward's Urban Renaissance Conference was held in Scarborough at the beginning of September. To mark this event a three day temporary public art intervention took place in St Nicholas Street, outside the Town Hall. This was part of the "People Making Places" project initiated by Public Arts, Wakefield. The road was temporarily closed and grassed over, with an artwork created from grass-covered metal structures that could be lounged on or leaned against. They also became an instant jumping off point for toddlers!

A programme of entertainment on Sunday was co-ordinated by Create and the Arkitex of Sound. This included several appearances by Rounders, the Stephen Joseph Youth Theatre who performed their devised piece of theatre on the theme of 'regeneration', which had been commissioned to launch the Community Planning Weekend in April. Local musicians played throughout the day.

There was a digital art work installed in the window of the nearby Royal Hotel and the film "Little Voice" which was shot in Scarborough, was screened outside in the evening. For three days local residents and visitors could enjoy the temporary creation of a new public open space, with spectacular views over the bay, an area usually dominated by cars.

The road closure and the installation generated a certain amount of local indignation, but a large number of people of all ages nevertheless came to enjoy the novel experience. The project was paid for by Yorkshire Forward with the support of Scarborough Borough Council. It was viewed by most people as a very successful statement of support for the Arts in general, for public space in particular, and for the principle of change

- **A Beach Festival**

Scarborough's status as a Festival Town started gathering momentum in August when it was estimated over 6000 people attended the H2002: Beached Festival, with 30 acts, over 100 performers and 12 hours of live music, comedy and performing arts taking place on the South Bay beach. Toby Jepson, ex lead singer of the rock band the Little Angels and one of the key participants of the Community Planning Weekend, played with his new band to an estimated 4000 people. Scarborough Borough Council backed the event, awarding the organisers £2500 towards running costs.

The event was regarded as a great success and a definite asset for the town, not only on a financial basis, but as great entertainment for the people of Scarborough and the surrounding area. There are plans to expand Beached 2003 even further, with Toby Jepson in discussion with several major artists with a view to playing at the Festival next year.

- **Music and musicians**

Jepsons, Toby Jepson's music production company, has begun promoting bands into Murray's Bar (a music venue in Scarborough) in co-operation with the national Music Promotion Agency, the Mean Fiddler.

Mojos (a Music Cafe) and the Theatre in the Round, in Westwood Campus, are intending to establish a regular locally driven songwriters / acoustic night at the theatre, starting in December.

Arkitex of Sound is a music production company that moved from Ireland to Scarborough earlier this year. They have spent the last three years developing new economic models for artists, with the aim of promoting the viability of music cottage industry. They are heavily involved in local community arts and culture projects, and have been able to uncover a wealth of highly talented artists in Scarborough with whom they hope to work in the short and long term. Their ethos is to provide an educational and 'without prejudice' approach to developing young and inexperienced artists, and to offer them a fully professional production service that they might otherwise struggle to find. A number of CDs featuring Rae, a multi-talented singer/song-writer have recently been released.

- **Youth Culture**

The DIY Collective continues to be at the forefront of youth culture, with more and more projects in the pipeline, some of which Toby Jepson is himself involved with. These include an attempt to establish a 'Rock School' that will teach kids practical things about the music business. A CD called 'Shades of Volume' has recently been produced, featuring a number of artists connected with the DIY Collective. I believe this is selling well in Scarborough.

Following the expiry of the lease of The Warehouse, their former premises, the DIY Collective have now moved to a new venue, provided by the Council rent free. The central location will hopefully encourage more young people to get involved. They recently held a fundraising gig, which featured 4 local young bands, attracted about 120 young people and raised over £200. This is pretty good when you realise how difficult it is to get to a village hall on the outskirts of Scarborough.

Many useful connections were made at the Community Planning Weekend, which definitely brought disparate arts enthusiasts together and also brought the needs of youth culture to the attention of the Borough Council.

- **Festival of Light**

The now regularly funded Festival of Light will once again take place in December. Organised by Create, this is a celebration of light based visual art, projection, performance, film and community events. Last year around 15,000 people experienced one or other of the events which included a series of innovative light installations placed around the town and on the castle headland. MA dance students from the University of Hull, Scarborough Campus were commissioned to devise a work that interacted with the 60 ft high inflatable cones. A number of shops displayed digital art works, the purpose being to introduce local residents to the concept of digitally produced art work, while at the same time improving the appearance of derelict shop premises in the town centre.

This year will feature a devised performance / installation / live art piece which will take place - and be a response to - the South Bay Underground Car Park. Called 'Wanderlust' this will be a collaboration between Create and Talking Birds Theatre Company. They will occupy the car park for two weeks and transform it into a performance space using soundscape, digital projection and performance.

The car park is currently an archetypal example of ugly urban landscape. It was, however, formerly the site of a Victorian Aquarium, before being transformed in the 1920s into Gala Land, a spectacular subterranean amusement arcade, providing delight (and shelter from the rain) to thousands of young and old alike until it was closed down in 1966. Given its vibrant past, it does in many ways reflect the decline of Scarborough's civic spaces. The project will, albeit briefly, demonstrate the potential of art and imagination to transform an unloved space into a vision of beauty and optimism.

'Lights', an exhibition of artist designed domestic lighting, will be displayed at Crescent Arts Centre. There will also be a series of free lantern making workshops that culminate in a community lantern parade on the 21st December.

- **The Festival of Light Relief**

The Festival of Light Relief is also being organised for December, to tie in with the visual arts event, with professional artistes, such as Dave Gorman (the very successful comic and mathematician) being booked to perform. Due to the lack of a suitable venue in Scarborough the performance will take place in Whitby. The festival will see a series of both fee paying and free events in the Scarborough area, the result of a collaboration between Jepsongs and Create, run respectively by Toby Jepson and Pete Massey who only met at the Community Planning Weekend earlier this year.

Other plans include a series of contemporary film nights at the Westwood Theatre and an open air screening of "A Wonderful Life" in the centre of Scarborough, with deckchairs for seating, patio heaters for warmth, and roast chestnuts and soup for sustenance.

- **Public Art**

Other projects include a mural painted by local artists which is nearing completion in a small, steep, cobbled street leading to the seafront that in recent years has suffered from boarded up properties and graffiti. The presence of a new art gallery in Bland's Cliff has enlivened the street and given local artists valuable exposure. To date, vandals seem to be respecting the mural.

The Civic Society has also recently initiated a public art project for the town. The Arts and Culture Forum are trying to establish a strategy which will begin to embed public art into significant urban design initiatives, so that it is not seen as an 'add on', but rather as an integral part of any project.

- **Scarborough International Festival**

The first official meeting of the embryonic Scarborough Festival Trust took place at the end of October. A well attended open meeting was held at the Stephen Joseph Theatre for people interested in setting up an international festival in the town, and a smaller sub-group of the Arts and Culture Forum will look at vital issues such as aims and objectives, content and timing. Following suggestions emanating from the Community Planning Weekend, it was felt that the main areas of festival activity should be Oliver's Mount, Scarborough Castle and a variety of traditional and non-traditional venues throughout the town. Nick Stimson, the Artistic Director of the National Student Drama Festival (held annually in Scarborough) was also present and pledged the support of the NSDF. The desire to establish an international festival was one of the key outputs of the Community Planning Weekend. If the momentum is maintained, there is every likelihood that the town will soon take its rightful place as the home of 'Scarborough Fair'.

- **The Stephen Joseph Theatre**

Feedback from Sir Alan Ayckbourn and Stephen Wood, the General Administrator of the theatre, confirmed that the Urban Renaissance programme has definitely helped to improve relations between the SJT and the Council, who are now aware that the Stephen Joseph Theatre is their only current 'flagship' and as such needs to be supported more energetically. As a result, the small scale tour to Filey that took place this summer was a great success, due to a more positive attitude to the theatre's activities. This local touring will continue and will include other venues in the Borough. Money has also been found to support the presence of Rounders (the Youth Theatre) in Whitby, a project which had previously stalled due to lack of funding.

Epilogue: Understanding artists: a personal reflection

In my opinion, the arts really matter. But so often it seems that culture is defined as an elite activity, when in fact the arts are an accepted part of our everyday life. Most people watch television, read newspapers, go to the cinema or listen to the radio. Things are bought on the basis of advertisements in glossy magazines. Much of what we see, hear or read is some form of creative expression. From the popularity of reality TV programmes, it seems that everyone wants to be a star. But all too often it seems that a rather short-sighted attitude toward arts practitioners leads to tensions and an automatic rejection of the possibilities inherent in valuing the arts as a positive tool for urban regeneration.

As well as being a community planner with an architectural practice, I also work as a professional actor. To that extent I am relatively unique in being able to view the matter of regeneration from at least two perspectives. I am also aware that a barrier somehow gets artificially erected between the general public and artists and performers. For example, the grass sculpture project in Scarborough which provided a focus for musical entertainment and was enjoyed by many people of all ages and backgrounds, was nonetheless scoffed at by others as being 'stupid art' and a waste of tax payers money.

For some reason, many people are wary of those who work in the world of arts and entertainment. There can be accusations of elitism; expressions of disapproval; mockery and abuse. Maybe it's the way we dress and behave; perhaps there's a feeling we do not fit into an easily recognised box; maybe it's simply a matter of envy or conditioning. That's not to say that we can't be our own worst enemy. We may alienate people without meaning to, by perhaps being self-absorbed and seeming arrogant, when perhaps we're just on another wavelength. Creativity can produce strange bed-fellows.

But for culturally-driven regeneration to have an effect in Scarborough, there probably needs to be better communication between all parties involved. I'm not sure all Council Officers and Members really understand the aspirations and working patterns of artists and performers. Arts advocates are useful mediators, but they too may be misunderstood by one side or the other. The general public also has to be encouraged to accept the fact that money spent on the arts is

not simply an excuse for an increase in Council Tax but will have a positive effect on the quality of life and the long term future vitality of the town.

This will all take time, persuasion, commitment and patience, nothing ever happens over night. There will be tensions and frustrations, but I think the signs do augur well for the future of the arts in Scarborough.

The regional arts council is very supportive. Funded by Yorkshire Arts, Pete Massey of Create will be seconded to Scarborough Borough Council for two days a week for 12 months to help them look at ways of using creativity in the delivery of their diverse agendas. This initiative is designed to help the Council start to 'look up to quality and not down to price' by early interventions in the development of projects using creative means. It could involve artist led community design initiatives, creative consultation, or perhaps artist/architect collaborations. This initiative is a direct result of the Urban Renaissance programme in Scarborough.

There are also plans afoot to try to establish an Arts and Cultural Development Team within the Council to begin discussions with the arts sector on infrastructure and project development.

The energy of arts practitioners in Scarborough is already being harnessed. The assets are certainly there. They just need to be valued, supported and promoted. Other successful towns have built their regeneration around culture and the arts. I'm sure Scarborough can too.

Debbie Radcliffe
John Thompson & Partners
November 2002