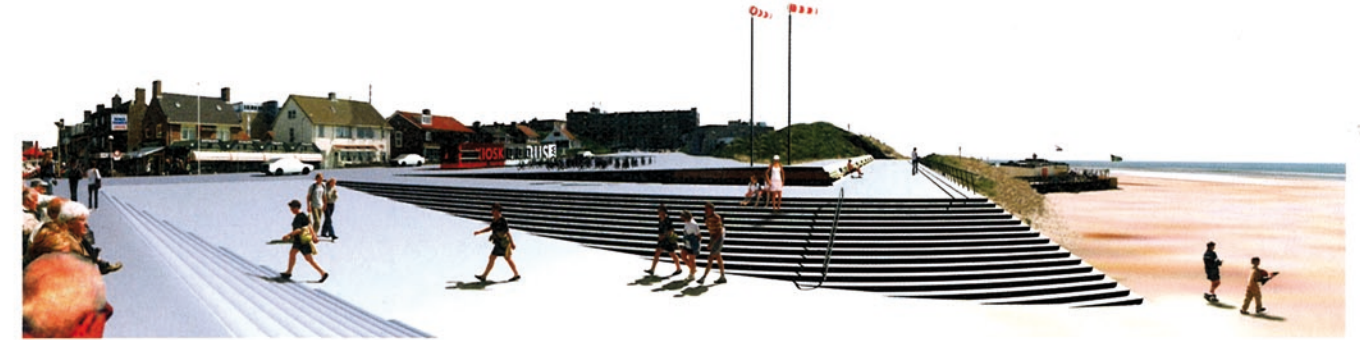




Photo: Han Singels



Impression of the square where the village street and the beach path cross.

Egmond's coastal strip under construction

Subject: renovation of coastal strip
Location: Egmond aan Zee, Netherlands
Designer: Veenbos en Bosch
landschapsarchitecten; Poppinga public design
Project designers: Jeroen Bosch, Wim Poppinga, Martijn Al, Joris Broekhuizen and Arjan Kool
Commissioned by: Municipality of Egmond /Municipality of Bergen
Study: 1997–2000
Execution: 2000–2003 (first and second phase)

Photos: Harry Harsema
 Illustrations: Veenbos en Bosch landschapsarchitecten

Even on a cold Saturday afternoon in April, there are plenty of people about in Egmond aan Zee. And not only in the shopping street that leads to the beach but also on the new sea-front promenade, which offers a wonderful view of the grey North Sea come rain or shine.

People can now stroll along the promenade in Egmond since the opening of part of the renovated coastal strip some time ago. The section still to be tackled shows clearly what the strip looked like in the past. The old promenade – which was more a long parking strip – had subsided, had been messed around with and had been taken over by cars. There was hardly any view of the sea and there was no room for strolling. Veenbos and Bosch's design, drawn up in cooperation with Poppinga, the industrial designer, moved the functional

requirements around in such a way that a much broader path was left on the side of the sea, using attractive natural stone tiles as paving. The design incorporates new paths to the beach, which are much broader and more prominent than the present ones, and a number of wooden dune balconies with eye-catching benches. These viewpoints are a surprising addition to the public areas along the coast. Placing them makes one wonder why they were not there all the time – their presence seems so normal.

The same can be said about the new path around the lighthouse dune with its attractive plinth and the well-laid out brick-paving and there is now a shell path leading to the southern coastal strip. The most important link, the boatyard square where the village street crosses the beach approach, has



The renovated walk around the lighthouse. The pavement in front is not renovated yet.

not been tackled yet and neither has the renovation of the village street.

Egmond opted for a style and a level of ambition which is completely in line with present approaches to the public space. Sober, empty, well-organised, attractive, stylised materials like stainless steel, natural stone, clinkers and wood.

But this is only one side of the story in Egmond. The buildings along the promenade emerge into view automatically, and this is when you see a collection of dingy-looking structures. People probably thought that the view of the sea was so much more important than the quality of the buildings facing it. And there is some truth in this; the sea and all its aspects are so predominant that architecture and public spaces are naturally of lesser

importance. But now that the local authority has decided to upgrade this strip of coast, the contrast has become noticeable. Has the renovation been a cosmetic measure for the rest of the promenade? What has induced the local authority to spend so much money on paving?

The former chairman of the urban planning committee, Stam, characterises this renovation as an about-turn in council thinking. The Second World War left Egmond badly damaged, and the sights of local administration were not set noticeably high in the following decades. Property developers could do what they wanted. A small photo exhibition set up by a local photographer sheds a sorry light on the losses suffered, even for those who do not want to glorify the 'good old times' too much. There is very little left of the stylish sea-



Plan for the coastline at Egmond aan Zee.



The northern part of the promenade, ready since 2001.



The plinth along the circular dune on which the Jan van Speyk lighthouse stands.



Widened beach access on the northern promenade.



... stroll along the promenade ...



Well-organized.



Wooden dune balconies with eye-catching benches.



Derelict buildings.



The southern strip.



The present, messy central square.



'..as many balconies per metre as possible..'

front buildings with much detail and an unmistakable grandeur. In their place, a collection of nondescript cheap blocks were built with apparently little more intent than as many balconies per metre as possible.

At the beginning of the Nineties, a plan for a new apartment building led to a minor revolution in the village, and the building plan had to be amended. Unfortunately, the result was a building that was no more than a little less cheap-looking.

But a side-effect was that greater attention was directed to the dilapidated condition of the coast at Egmond as a whole, and this fitted in very well with the spirit of the age. During a conference on the culture of Dutch seaside resorts – organised almost ten years ago by the Vormgevingsinstituut and Architectuur Lokaal – numerous innovative visions for coastal belts were presented. The local authority at Egmond became so enthusiastic that it invited one of the designers' associations to draw

up a design for its own coast. The result of this energetic action has now been largely carried out. This is the good news, but at the same time it has also become additionally clear that when it really matters no quality requirements have been set. Strictly speaking this is not Egmond's problem but it is a fact which few Dutch seaside resorts can avoid. In practice, building along the coastal strip is in the hands of property developers and apparently they see little profit in anything but mediocrity.

The merger with Bergen delayed the progress of the renovation. Hopefully the central section will be tackled soon and it is hoped that this quality impulse will lead to the awareness that building on the perimeters presents an important challenge. The vicious circle of the property developer who thinks that the consumer is not willing to pay more, the council who cannot compel the property developer, and the consumer who is presented with no alternatives to 'fish and chips' must be

broken. As an initial step, there could be no better renovation. The renovated coastal strip which is now ready shows that an efficient, attractive and self-assured approach is possible.

Noël van Dooren
Harry Harsema