

Students work with city to reinvigorate the Foreshore

UCT has teamed up with the City of Cape Town in a World Design Capital 2014 initiative to revive the precinct, writes **John Scharges**

RESUSCITATING the neglected Foreshore, defined by its bleak, unfinished freeways, is the objective of a pioneering partnership between the city and UCT's faculty of engineering and built environment.

The partnership, a first for Cape Town, is a World Design Capital 2014 initiative, and is seeing students from different departments in the faculty collaborating on unlocking the potential of the derelict area.

After an exhibition of the student projects in April next year, the city will decide how to pursue the project.

Professor Vanessa Watson, deputy dean of the faculty of engineering and built environment, says the Future Foreshore project came about at the end of last year when UCT was approached by the city's department of transport with a proposal to work together on a vision for an area of the city to become a World Design Capital project.

"We saw it as a great opportunity for us to partner with the city on a live project, but also to try to pull all departments in the faculty together on an interdisciplinary project.

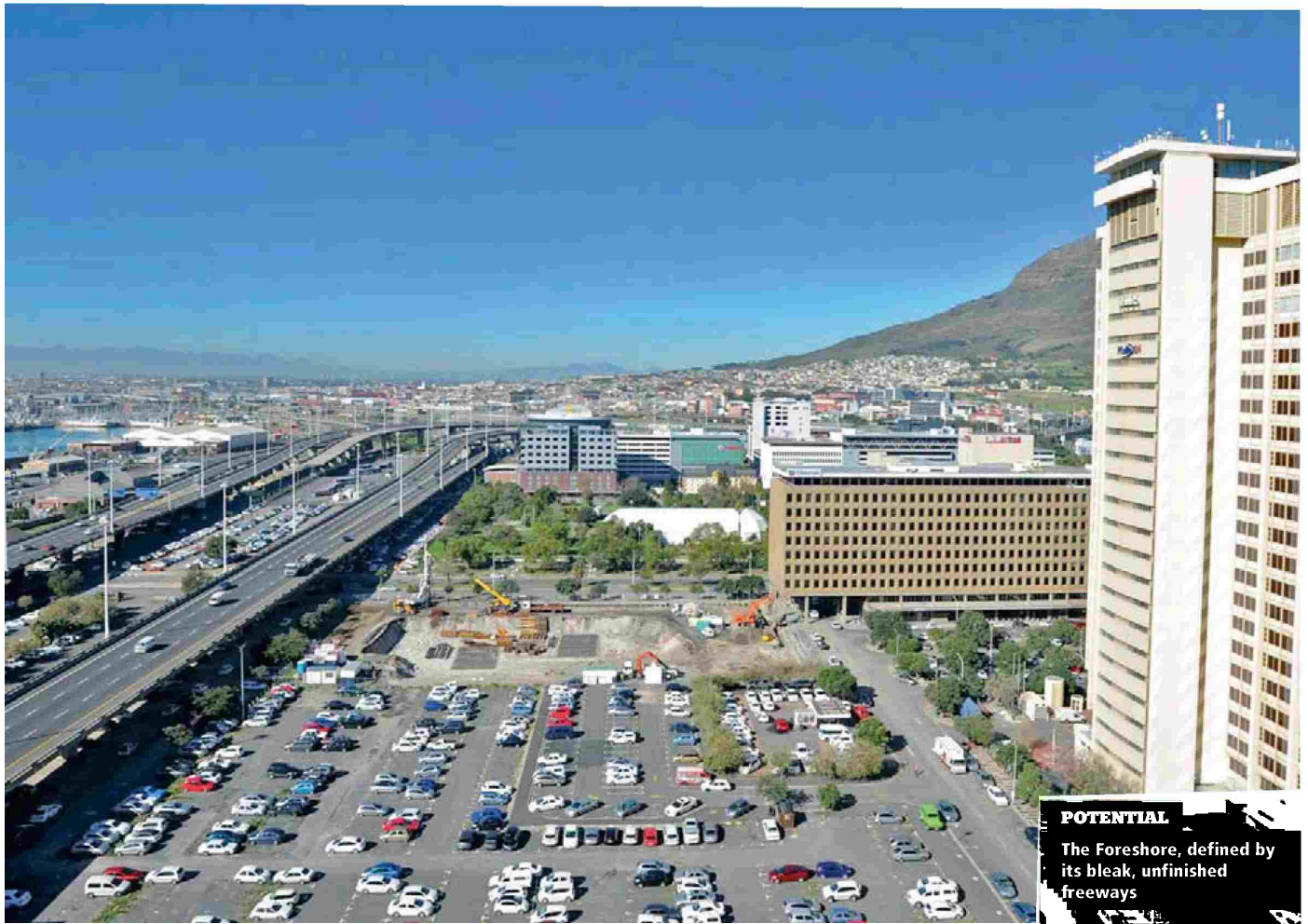
"This has never before been done on such a large scale, with more than 250 students and five departments participating."

The north Foreshore, characterised by neglect, with unused open spaces and the remnants of an older freeway-building era, was identified as offering the most potential.

"We recognised the area's great possibility to become a vibrant, mixed use area, open and attractive to all Capetonians, demonstrating principles of integration and sustainability, and as a site for the possible re-establishment of the historical link between central Cape Town and the sea," says Watson.

Student work on the project was started in January, following the signing of a memorandum of agreement between the city and the faculty.

"In briefing the students, we specifically left it open for them to explore many different projects – rather than saying that there's one solution – to seek a creative approach to the problems plaguing the area, in particular the raised and unfinished highways. To do so, students are exploring the area from the city's point of view – assessing what role the Foreshore could play in the future of Cape Town, while at the same time recognising that it is a derelict part of the city with wasted but valuable land," says Watson.



For the first six months of the university year, architecture Honours level students as well as city planning, landscape and urban design Masters students, worked on this area to come up with ideas, with input from others studying construction economics and management.

The baton was then passed to civil engineering students – working with construction management, and electrical engineering students, who are now taking the initial ideas to the next stage.

"Through this we are encouraging important interdisciplinary learning as students in each department draw on, and make use of, information and ideas developed in other departments and programmes.

We're also holding cross-faculty student presentations and talks to expose students to the perspectives and insights from disciplines other than their own.

"Moreover, students engage with the city, NGOs, consultants and other interest groups around the project,"

says Watson.

Rebecca Vaughan, a Masters student in regional planning who worked on the initiative during her first semester, says the project has been exciting and she is eager to see the city take the initiative forward.

Vaughan's proposal looked to drop the Foreshore freeway and sink the railway lines from the direction of Woodstock – thereby opening up 31 hectares of unused space.

It also included developing the

Culemborg District, which would provide a further 30ha.

"The area needs people, so I considered how to open up the area to enable the creation of more affordable housing, which in turn would create a more 'normalised' area, not just one that people drive through to work, or on their way somewhere else.

"In designing this, and in taking the project forward, there are many different elements to take into account.

"Public transportation issues, parking issues, spatial planning – this is why inter-departmental communication within UCT and in the city and with other interested parties is so important," she says.

Watson notes that, just as the university is using the exercise to promote interdisciplinary work between faculties, the Future Foreshore project is an opportunity for line function departments in the city to

collaborate, in the partnership-driven, legacy spirit of the World Design Capital enterprise.

"Representatives from the different city departments have been giving wonderful feedback. Some have commented that they rarely have the opportunity to think about big visions for the future of Cape Town or communicate across departments – so they appreciate this opportunity.

"At the end of the year our students will move on to something else, but we wanted to leave something embedded in the city that could be taken into a full project: and opening up ongoing communication will allow them to take the project forward."

● *John Scharges is an account executive with marketing, design and PR agency Rothko Cape Town. This article was written for UCT's faculty of engineering and built environment.*



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