



We tried to challenge traditional thinking ... in our risk assessment, we didn't look simply at the risks inherent in creating the shared space, we also considered the risk of the alternative if we didn't
John Richfield, Bristol City Council

St Matthias park has been re-connected to the city centre. The new park and public spaces are already proving very popular with local residents, and with cyclists/pedestrians enjoying the new access route, gardens and seating areas



The new space has created a conduit through from the new public space, Champion Square, to the city centre. The new route represents a major change from plans for a standard highway scheme with carriageways and footways

PARTNERSHIP WORKING: TRUST, ADVICE AND DECISION-MAKING

The masterplanning of and detail design of the new space was worked out at a series of meetings. For Richard Matthews, Bristol City Council planner, collaborative working underpinned the project's successful delivery. 'As a result of the re-working of streets necessary for the Cabot Circus development, I had already formed a key group of practitioners that met fortnightly. It brought together disciplines from engineering to urban design to parking managers. We formed a relationship, and trust had been built.' This key group was specifically referred to as the street design group – not the highways group – and, led by three 'champions' (John Richfield from Bristol City Council's highways department, Richard Matthews from planning, and Ray Brown, a developer with the Bristol Alliance), it looked creatively and critically at the 'rules' of highway engineering. 'While we took every opportunity to get expert input into the project, we weren't asking other people to make decisions, although ultimately we needed complete buy-in when the time came for formal approvals' says Richfield. The core group of three fundamentally influenced the decision-making of the Street Design group, pushing through the necessary changes to existing outline highway scheme.

'In the past, there have been standard ways of designing roads,' says Matthews. 'We kept asking ourselves: what sits behind that rule or that standard approach? We sized up the objectives, and looked for ways to deliver them that were not necessarily standardised. We were also fortunate in having a developer on board who supported the scheme; that went a long way to making it happen.'

The space that is now Champion Square was formerly a space 'left over' after a large car park was built in the 1960s. So, the great opportunity was to create something that stitched the streets back together, says Matthews. The new spaces are much more flexible in terms of access and connecting busy Bond Street with this area. 'We were very keen to make sure that the major Cabot Circus development did its bit to try and connect, and did not turn its back on other areas of the city.'

For the developer, Ray Brown, representing (at the time) the Bristol Alliance, the space has enhanced the location and access for a new hotel on the site. 'I am very pleased with how it worked out. It's a great success in terms of enabling the sharing of space for living and working'. But he stresses that getting vital buy-in can be down to good communication and visualisation of the end results. 'At first, the hotel team found it difficult to appreciate the proposals because at the time we had road works, car park works and house building in progress, and it was difficult to visualise how the space would end up. But I feel that we have created a much better space at the rear of the hotel than was originally proposed.' By Juliana O'Rourke