of public space: 'committed leadership, strong partnerships, active community involvement, the desire for quality and innovation; and better communicating of ideas' (ODPM 2002: 14). In so doing it confirmed that local government retains the decisive role in their delivery, effectively endorsing the state-centred model of public space management into the future (see Chapter 4). However, both government policy, and the range of research, reports and policy statements from government and non-government organisations (see above), universally reflected a pragmatic view on delivery, arguing the case for partnership and involvement from as wide a range of parties as possible, and effectively endorsing market- and community-centred models as viable alternatives (or supplements to the state-centred model), where appropriate.

From government, this pragmatic approach might be seen on the one hand in the rolling back of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) requirements, that in the 1980s and 1990s had forced local authorities to contract out much of their public space management responsibilities to the private sector on the basis of lowest price, and almost regardless of quality (see Chapter 4). On the other, the enabling of BIDs through legislation can be seen as a leap forward in the rights of local business interests to manage their local environment in a manner that best suits their own private interests.

Living Places: Cleaner, Safer, Greener concluded that 'local government is vital to the creation and maintenance of good public spaces', thus 'many of the successful schemes to improve the quality of local environments across the country are driven by strong local political leadership, clearly defined local targets, successful local consultation and productive local partnerships' (ODPM 2002: 18). The research reported in the remainder of this chapter examines how this was being done.

Managing public space in England – what can be done?

The research methodology for the 20 case studies is briefly discussed in Chapter 5. Interview findings were recorded at length before summaries were prepared following a common structure to enable comparison. Broad subjects for discussion which also structure this section of the chapter included:

- aspirations for public space
- public space management structures and coordination
- stakeholder involvement in public space management
- challenges facing local authorities.

Aspirations for public space

Authorities' aspirations began with their conceptualisations of what constituted public space. From the national postal survey it was found that no local authority in England had a holistic definition of public space, and indeed many were anxious for central government to provide one. The 20 authorities did, however, cite different types of public space in their various policy documents, with some definitions combining two or more typologies to form a more holistic definition of public space. The best example was Newcastle which combined the management of the street scene, open space, and parks in its 'Urban Housekeeping Plan'.

Despite not having their own definitions, most of the authorities agreed with the definition of public space provided in the interview pro-forma, based on that offered in Chapter 1. However, several local authorities considered that public space did not always benefit from unrestricted access, citing temporal access restrictions through the day, week, or year. Examples include urban parks, many of which have railings and are closed at night; public/private spaces, such as those framed by large private institutions that own the external public space but provide public access during office hours/days of the week; and public/private interfaces, such as those between the internal private spaces of stations or shopping centres and external public space that can also be closed at night. North Tyneside also argued that any space that could be seen from a public environment – internal or external – was to some degree public space by virtue of its 'visual accessibility', adding a further dimension to the definition.

Most of the 20 local authorities argued that the critical element determining whether external space was 'public' was its relative ease of access, rather than its ownership or necessarily responsibilities for its management. For example, the Corporation of London described numerous external spaces in private ownership which it has either negotiated access to, or has agreed to manage on behalf of a private landowner. They described external routes through the City as containing patterns of ownership and management that are invisible to users, a characteristic that applies to many central urban environments, and to a lesser extent to rural environments through public rights of way. The key aspiration of some authorities has therefore been to create a seamless public space network, rather than necessarily a continuous management regime or continuous public ownership.

LOCAL AUTHORITY OBJECTIVES

A number of objectives for better public space quality were repeated across authorities, demonstrating that, at least amongst the 20 selected authorities, a clear idea about how they would improve public space