

management was emerging. This contrasted with the findings from the national postal survey from which it was clear that most local authorities have given little thought to a coherent vision for their public spaces, and relied instead on highly generalised and aspirational statements in their corporate plans and community strategies (see Chapter 5).

Best value processes usually provided the impetus for the 20 local authorities to review their public space objectives. For example, Harlow set out an objective for public space in its Street Scene Best Value Review for a ‘town that is clean, green and safe for people to live and work’. The local

authorities often had such generic corporate statements on public space, but these aspirations were backed up with other documents describing public space strategies and operations, often containing examples of exemplar spaces to further inspire practice. Birmingham for instance had a vision for ‘high quality, accessible, pedestrian friendly, and attractive public spaces’, operationalised through its Best Value Performance Plan and other strategic documents relating to public space. These in turn were related to examples of high quality public spaces that the council had delivered and now manages (Box 6.1).

BOX 6.1 BIRMINGHAM: STREETS AND SQUARES STRATEGY



Centenary Square, Birmingham

In the late 1980s Birmingham had to address the loss of its manufacturing base and reinvent itself. The city had inherited a highways-dominated environment, and the council through the Streets and Squares Strategy sought to restore the fractured environment and link the centre to the distinctive quarters surrounding the city’s core. Political continuity and ongoing commitment to the strategy has enabled Birmingham to implement the wider vision after the initial impetus and early successes of Centenary Square and Victoria Square in the early 1990s. These early successes ensured that the initiative received budgetary priority driven by the long-term need to lever in new private investment into the city.

The initial commitment amounted to £5 million per year over five years, including money from the European Fund to prime pump the project and as a lever for private sector investment. Private-sector involvement in delivering the Streets and Squares Strategy began in the early 1990s at a time when the business community still lacked the confidence to locate in the city centre. Following the city’s lead, the developer of Brindleyplace recognised the value of high-quality external

space as a showcase for the development and provided the public spaces before the rest of the development was delivered. The move proved to be a very successful marketing strategy.

In Brindleyplace the developer has built the external spaces to a very high specification and has set up long-term management structures to safeguard the initial investment as well as the environmental quality of the development. The high levels of maintenance have set a new benchmark for the rest of the city and show what extra resources can achieve, setting the scene for a future BID in Birmingham as a mechanism for raising revenue.

When devising their Streets and Squares Strategy, Birmingham City Council was in the exceptional position that much of the city centre had been allocated to the highways network of roundabouts, underpasses and elevated roads several lanes wide. This gave the council the opportunity to become a major player in the regeneration process, leading the transformation of the centre into a pedestrian friendly environment where safe streets link attractive squares which become civic spaces in their own right and the backdrop to events that contribute to the vitality of the city.