

A recurring theme in public space objectives was the desire to better engage external stakeholders. An example was Westminster, which is well aware of the difficulties in reconciling public space activities between local residents, businesses and visitors, and has put plans in place to address all three stakeholder groups in proposals for Leicester Square and the surrounding area. Great Yarmouth, for its part, had an objective to actively pursue formal partnership working with the private sector to improve public space management, whilst Bristol had developed this further by stating its objective 'to respond to, and consult more effectively with, end user demands on and of public space'. In Sandwell, the objective was to actively engage local people in public space issues and to look for designed solutions to public space problems.

Another prominent theme was the use of standards and indicators. In some cases, local authorities were very aware of how their public spaces stand comparison against international standards. In one case – Kensington and Chelsea – an explicit objective of the borough has been to deliver the best streets in Europe, an objective illustrated through its work regenerating Kensington High Street. Other local authorities use a more down-to-earth set of standards to establish their quality aspirations in the form of indicators developed by the environmental campaigning organisation ENCAMS. Others have developed their own standards for litter, crime, graffiti, and other public space issues, including Coventry through its public/private city centre company CV One.

Many local authority public space objectives covered context-specific issues. Examples include objectives to better address crime and safety, as well as user perceptions of crime and safety; to reduce street clutter; to improve maintenance regimes; to rejuvenate commercial areas (Box 6.2) and to increase the commercial opportunities provided by public spaces. Some local authorities described objectives to develop a fully integrated public space strategy, bringing together different public space types, strategy/policy and operations, and professional disciplines within councils. Leeds, East Riding of Yorkshire, and Bristol all share these objectives, with Leeds also adding an objective to maintain the uniqueness of its public spaces, and Bristol aiming to reconcile the functions and users of public space by addressing apparent conflicts within the city. Collectively, the range of public space objectives ranged from strategic to operational concerns, and covered both outcome and process-based dimensions of management.

Public space management structures and coordination

The national survey suggested that the majority of local authorities in England do not have fully integrated coordinating structures for managing

BOX 6.2 WARRINGTON: ATTRACTING INVESTMENT



Marketgate, Warrington

Warrington Borough Council saw the need to enhance their town centre public space, initially to reverse the retail competition from neighbouring centres and out-of-town retail schemes, and latterly following the 1993 IRA bomb that had a devastating effect on the vitality of the town centre. Strong political support backed an initiative to improve the public realm in the town centre which became possible when in 1996 the council received unitary status and inherited a windfall tax from the county council. Part of the windfall was put towards the regeneration of the town centre after match funding was received from the Regional Development Agency.

An innovative high-quality scheme was completed by the American artist Howard Ben Tre and the Landscape Design Consultancy in January 2002 within an overall budget of £3.25m. The centre of the town centre is now the focus of a pedestrianised retail quarter with steps, a water feature, and an impressive lighting scheme. Marketgate links to a series of 'commons and garden spaces' set within two other streets, each with its own character, providing a wide variety of visual and sensory experiences.

Strong political support was crucial in seeing the scheme through, not least for ensuring that the quality of the initial vision was reflected in the execution and post-completion management. Initial scepticism from the local press and some residents has been replaced by a recognition that the scheme is unique and greatly enhances the town centre, and that it is beginning to fulfil what it was commissioned for, to attract new investment to the town. Recent research shows increased numbers of users in the town centre and renewed interest from private developers.