

BOX 6.3 LEEDS: GREEN SPACE IMPLEMENTATION GROUP*Hyde Park, Leeds*

Leeds has undergone a widely publicised urban renaissance in recent years. One of its corporate targets was to create more green space for the city. However, in working towards this objective, officers found a mismatch between the resources generated through Section 106 contributions and what was being spent on the ground by the Leisure Department who are responsible for green spaces. Resources were not being channelled efficiently. The Green Space Implementation Group was set up in 1999 and operates at two levels with a strategic group and a site-specific group. The strategic group meets quarterly and is attended by staff from leisure, regeneration and community involvement teams. This group includes high-level decision makers and deals with broader strategic issues such as play space policy. It has demonstrated a high level of effective decision making and is increasingly the focus of external lobbying.

The site-specific group deals with individual schemes coming onto or actually on site. Its membership includes representatives from the Leisure Department, planning staff, landscape design staff, and financial project officers, and, where relevant, representatives from the Regeneration Unit and Community Involvement Teams. The groups aim to improve coordination but have found that overall working relationships have also improved as a result of the regular meetings between previously 'silo'-based officers. They also provide forums for liaising with key stakeholder groups and bodies such as British Waterways.

Having two levels of group allows decision making to remain relevant to those attending. The emphasis at site-specific level is on coordination, but it has also proved important for the lessons shared in the site-specific group to be channelled to higher-level staff on the strategic group, whose members have appropriate decision-making authority.

THE COMMUNITY

Five of the 20 local authorities perceived the community to be a crucial part of their system for managing public space. These authorities tended to involve the local community in public space management in three main ways.

First, by putting systems in place for the local community to channel and report problems, for example through council hotlines; the argument being that one point of contact within the council for all public-space-related issues greatly improves internal and external coordination. In Greenwich, for example, the Cleansweep hotline is now the single point of contact for all public space matters across the borough. A further example was the integrated IT system in East Riding that allows the community to ring, email, fax, use a video kiosk, or personally submit enquiries relating to public space to a specialised team who can track and coordinate problems and their solutions through GIS software (Box 6.4). The same IT system has also been implemented in an urban context across the whole of Newcastle. Here the council has used similar technology to field enquires and solve public space management problems from the private sector and visitors to the city, as well as from the local population. In this regard, a number of authorities showed a heightened awareness of who the users of their public spaces were, in some cases extending well beyond the local population, such as in Westminster where the built heritage is truly international in significance, and so are the users.

The second main method to engage the local community was through active consultation about public space, including through local meetings or liaison officers. An example was the Community Forums in Southwark, which through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP – see p. 85) are encouraging ward councillors and their local communities to discuss local environmental and community safety issues. It is envisaged that this will extend in the future to devolving powers to the forums for those functions that impact on public space, such as development control and licensing, as well as the monitoring of public space. The national survey suggested that those authorities that give public space issues a lower priority generally consult the community less, choosing to use passive forms of consultation, such as generic annual surveys, and therefore tend to be less responsive to local community needs and aspirations.

The third means through which the authorities were engaging the local community was through initiatives for direct proactive local participation in public space management, such as voluntary park wardens or graffiti cleaning groups. Only in this latter category is there potential for a real shift to a community-centred model of management. Typically, however, the role is one of involvement in, rather than responsibility for, service provision.