deregulation of utilities as a major barrier to achieving good quality public spaces, as utilities companies can effectively ignore any public space strategy established by the local authority. This problem, it was argued, has been aggravated by the reduction in funding for highway schemes which means that too often only the strictly necessary maintenance gets done. The deregulation of bus services outside London has had a similar impact through the increased strain on public spaces around transport nodes.

With regard to the first of these problems, Oxford has commissioned and adopted a public realm strategy that includes a chapter on managing the public realm and managing private utilities. As part of the strategy the council is developing a maintenance manual setting out standards to ensure the correct reinstatement and replacement of materials when roads and pavements are dug up, as well as general principles for private utilities to adhere to. In the meantime the council has set up a 'Utilities Liaison Group' through which private utilities are requested to notify the council when they carry out works, in order to better monitor and coordinate the work (Box 6.7).

Some local authorities also saw the involvement of other stakeholder groups such as the private sector and the local community in public space management as a means to reduce the resources authorities need to commit to managing public spaces (see above). Other authorities are looking to educate users of public space into better behaviour, thereby reducing the need for public space management and enforcement in the first place. This, they admit, is a long-term objective.

REGULATION

The second main challenge for public space management was the regulation of public spaces and their users. Problems include anti-social behaviour and the general maintenance problems associated with increasingly heavily used spaces. Sandwell, for example, noted the problem of managing 24-hour public spaces for the local authority, which is not a 24-hour organisation. Others cited problems with enforcing byelaws to regulate users, and regulating the 'illegal' use of streets by shops and businesses.

Authorities identified a 'shopping list' of regulatory powers they wished to have, covering a broad range of public space activities. Many authorities described the need for byelaws to control activities such as music/busking, skateboarding and alcohol consumption, whilst admitting that the time and resources for enforcement would be limited. Other more commercial public space activities such as leafleters, fly-posting, and unauthorised trading have proved particularly difficult to regulate, although some local authorities are thinking their way around the problem. Newcastle,

BOX 6.7 OXFORD: PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY

Oxford Public Realm Strategy

After traffic was removed from Oxford city centre in 1999, a Public Realm Strategy was produced as a means to improve the centre. Whilst the city's historic college architecture provides a dramatic and distinctive street scene, increased traffic and a lack of investment in the city's public spaces left the streetscape looking tired.

Commissioned and adopted by the city council, the Public Realm Strategy analyses Oxford on a historic, urban design, and policy basis, and suggests design ideas and guidance on a range of improvements to the city centre. The strategy also includes thorough guidance on how to manage public realm improvements following completion, for example the need for maintenance manuals to ensure correct reinstatement and replacement, and principles to be followed by private utility companies

Despite the positive investment in the strategy, implementation has proved problematic. Historic antagonism between the county (who as the highways authority have a large part of the public space powers and resources) and the city council has in the past resulted in limited coordination on public space services. The Public Realm Strategy suffered the same fate and was never adopted by the county council, ultimately limiting its impact

Oxford have nevertheless succeeded in commissioning a high-quality public space design framework that covers important management and maintenance issues, and establishes a clear vision for the city's streets and spaces. Work has now also begun on implementing the new streetscapes envisaged in the document utilising both county and city resources. The experience indicates that despite strong backing within the council at councillor and officer level, without coordinated preparation and joint ownership, improving public space can be very challenging.