

needs or to adopt the sorts of innovative park practices that are common elsewhere such as separate pet-friendly areas or teenage skating areas. Given the long-term success of the parks system in Minneapolis, the laissez-faire attitude of MPRB towards planning is surprising. Being an elected board with one responsibility only – to manage the parks system – and with guaranteed income through its own tax raising powers probably explains how the MPRB has been able to achieve such levels of success, with single-mindedness substituting for long-term planning.

#### POLITICAL WILL

These advantages are not shared by the other ten cities included in the study, although in different ways each confirms the importance of political will and vision to delivering well managed urban open spaces. The experience across the eleven cities has generally been that the commitment and performance of individual local administrations is more important for the quality and quantity of urban open spaces than the national legislation, reflecting the largely devolved nature of powers and responsibilities in these areas.

Perhaps the most obvious demonstration of this local political dimension is provided by Paris, where policy for open spaces is defined exclusively by the Mayor of Paris and under him by the Deputy Mayor for Green Spaces, subject to approval by the city council. Because there are no other stakeholders statutorily involved in deciding on open space policy, lines of political accountability and responsibility are very clear and helped by the fact that open spaces together with public transportation have consistently been the main priorities of the municipality. This commitment to open space was demonstrated by the elected mayor's pledge in 2001 that at the end of his term there would be 100,000 trees along the streets of Paris and that new open spaces would be created wherever possible, so that no one would live more than 500 metres from one.

Linking local open space agendas to broader national policies and priorities can also be important in raising the profile of open space management. In Århus, politicians have long given priority to environmental issues, reflecting such concerns in the plans and practices of the municipality, as demonstrated through the adoption of eco-accounting. This emphasis on sustainability has influenced open spaces management in the city and has led to a strong emphasis on open space management issues in the Agenda 21 strategy for 2002–2005. It has also meant that open space management issues themselves have become a political priority, with the Århus Green Structure Plan benefiting from a wide cross-political consensus (Box 7.3).

In Curitiba, the open space vision dates back to the 1940s. Since that time, open spaces in the city have been conceived as places not only for

leisure, but for the protection of native forest, waterways and for flood control, and have become a major political priority. Consequently there has been a continued effort by the city administration to convince citizens in general and businesses in particular of the importance of investing in open spaces. This open space consciousness has now become a part of the city's self image.

Likewise, in Hannover open space policies rank high amongst city council policies even if they are not included amongst the statutory duties of local government. The main vision for open spaces is summarised in the slogan 'Hannover – City of Gardens' which underpins the political vision and physical strategies of the council. All the political parties see open spaces and their management as important to the image of Hannover, and therefore a political consensus on this issue has emerged.

In Malmö and Melbourne the open space managers themselves have successfully taken the initiative to raise open space issues up the local political agenda. Malmö Streets and Parks Department, for example, has been very successful in marketing the benefits of parks and open spaces to their local politicians by ensuring that every opportunity is taken for securing positive headlines for their work, and by inviting politicians to launch events arranged to mark the opening of new or refurbished local spaces. In this way, they argue, public open space is not simply seen as a drain on resources, but instead as a way of actively improving the city's quality of life. In Melbourne, Parks Victoria has tried to demonstrate and quantify the wider benefits that accrue from parks, from environmental, cultural, economic and health benefits, to benefits in community cohesiveness, as a means to influence government funding priorities and increase community support. Their report *Healthy Parks/Healthy People* was commissioned and launched as part of a marketing campaign to demonstrate the health benefits of interacting with nature and which successfully partnered the agency with the National Heart Foundation, Asthma Victoria, Arthritis Victoria and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

#### Stakeholder involvement

Together with political commitment, the issue of user involvement in the management of public open spaces was taken seriously by most of the eleven cities, not least as a means to garner public support for open space and thereby raise the issue up the local political agenda. Issues vary from place to place, but amongst recent concerns have been social issues such as safety and security in Malmö, a demand for more and better play spaces in intensely populated Paris, and the issue of improving accessibility to the widest possible section of the public in Curitiba.

A wide range of mechanisms are being used across the eleven cities to encourage involvement, and range from one-off initiatives or tokenistic