of the public space (residents, visitors and local businesses) in the English case-study areas discussed in Chapter 6 were illuminating (Figure 1.8). They revealed that:

- users place a high priority on how local authorities look after public space;
- almost nobody considers public space to be a low priority;
- users do not feel involved in decision making;
- users are not knowledgeable about who makes decisions, although they knew how to make a complaint when necessary.

Most revealing was the finding that over half (56 per cent) of users felt that the management of public space was the sole responsibility of their local council, and that whether they perceived that their council was doing a good job, or not, it was the council that was responsible for the state of public space. In this regard, a clear misapprehension was evident concerning the responsibility for, and extent of influence of, local authorities for public space.

A smaller percentage (29 per cent) regarded space management as a joint civic responsibility in which individuals, businesses and other organisations also had a role to play.

A clear incentive for local politicians was therefore revealed. Namely, if authorities are going to get the blame whenever things go wrong (and the credit when things go right), there should be a direct political incentive for councillors to prioritise public space quality through the actions of their local authority, whilst doing all they can to encourage other stakeholders to do the same. Users of public space most frequently considered that councils could improve public space through additional cleaning, a range of place-specific physical interventions and through safety initiatives, including CCTV and street wardens.

Polls conducted for CABE (2002) reinforce the finding. They reveal that almost half of those who say they vote in council elections said they would be more inclined to support a different party if there was a significant deterioration in the quality of the local environment. A similar proportion of non-voters said that the issue alone would make them more inclined to vote. Clearly this is – or has the potential to be – a live political issue.

The multiplicity of stakeholders

Many current public space management regimes are still largely based on the 'traditional' local government model (see Chapter 5). This presents a range of challenges and restrictions, principal among which are the uncertainties inherent in local political contexts for what are typically discretionary services. In reality, however, much of the management of public space lies outside the direct control of local authorities. Instead, responsibilities lie across a wide range of stakeholders, both public and private. Therefore, although public perceptions may be that urban space is the sole responsibility of the public sector, in most contexts, the delivery of high-quality public space will be dependent on a diversity of interests working together (or not).

Moreover, the increasing complexity of public spaces as physical entities is mirrored by the increasing complexity of the stakeholders engaged – either positively or negatively – in public space management. In part this is a result of the impact of the increasing numbers of private stakeholders with a part to play, including contractors engaged by, and working for, local authorities. It also reflects the diversity of public and semi-public agencies involved in managing public space, and the complex range of public space types (see Chapter 3).

Broadly, stakeholders might be split into four groups:

1 Private, including private property owners and developers, but also utility providers
2 Public/private, including the range of arms-length pseudo-government agencies and operators (e.g. of public transport)
3 Local government, including a wide range of services across one or more tiers of local government
4 Community, including residents and special interest societies and local groups.

Significantly, each of these stakeholders is likely to have a very different set of motivations informing their approach to public space, and few will have the overall quality of space as a primary motivation. Based on a range of recent research undertaken in England (Audit Commission 2002a; CABE and ODPM 2002; Stewart 2001; ICE 2002; ODPM 2002), Table 1.3 postulates on what these might be.

Finding means to ensure that 'outcome quality' is factored into the decision-making processes of key players is therefore likely to be an important prerequisite for enhancing public spaces; and to achieve this, it may be that as the dominant player, the public sector will need to take the lead role through the processes discussed in Part 2 of this book. Sometimes this will require direct action, and sometimes the guidance, incentive or control of others, but if authorities are not there to lead, then it is hypothesised that widespread public space quality is unlikely to be secured outside of private enclaves. This issue of the balance between different stakeholders, and particularly between the public and private sectors, is another theme of the book.