

public space

the management dimension

Matthew Carmona, Claudio de Magalhães and Leo Hammond

Public Space

In both the UK and the US there is a sense of dissatisfaction and pessimism about the state of urban environments and particularly with the quality of everyday public spaces. Explanations for this have emphasised the poor quality of design that characterises many new public spaces; spaces that are dominated by parking, roads infrastructure, introspective buildings, a poor sense of place, and which in different ways for different groups are too often exclusionary.

Yet many well designed public spaces have also experienced decline and neglect, as the services and activities upon which the continuing quality of those spaces depends have been subject to the same cuts and constraints as public services in general. These issues touch upon the daily management of public space, that is, the coordination of the many different activities that constantly define and redefine the characteristics and quality of public space.

This book draws on four empirical research projects to examine the questions of public space management on an international stage. They are set within a context of theoretical debates about public space, its history, contemporary patterns of use, and the changing nature of Western society; and about the new management approaches that are increasingly being adopted.

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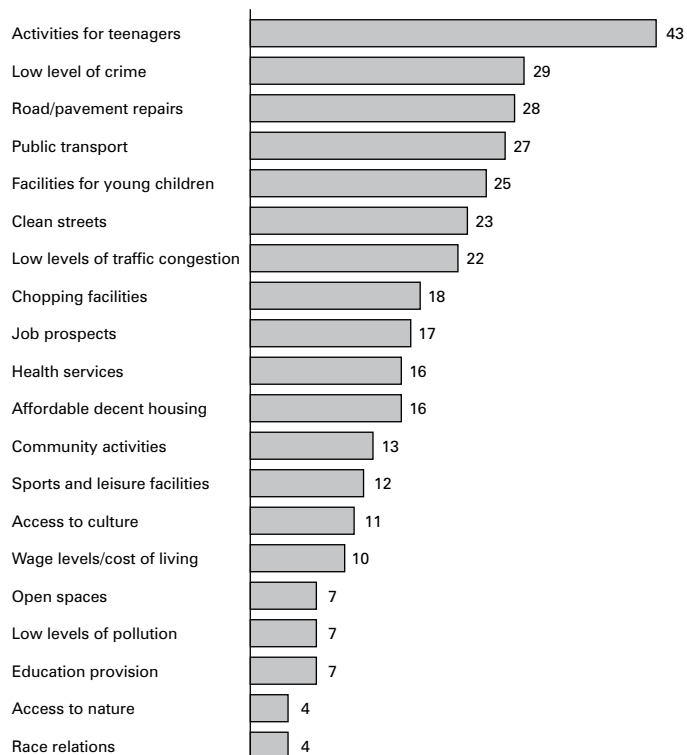
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Part ONE

Conceptualising public space and its management

Most need improving in this local area

Q Thinking about this local area, which of these things, if any, do you think most need improving? Again you may choose up to 5.



Base: 2,031 GB adults, 15+, 18-22 October 2001
Source: MORI

1.1 Liveability: a top priority

Chapter 1

The use and nature of public space

This first chapter introduces the concept of public space and seeks to explore the complexity of both public space as a concept, its use and users, and the management of public space as an aspiration and set of activities. The chapter is in three parts. In the first section, the inspirations and objectives underpinning the writing of the book are presented in order to establish the purpose of the book, and equally its limitations. A brief overview of how the book is structured is included here. This is followed by a second section in which public space is deconstructed. This is done in order to draw out and understand the physical and human components of urban public space, in other words, the subjects of management. The third section draws out and discusses the welter of roles and responsibilities for actually managing public space.

The chapter begins the process of unpacking (at least conceptually) the issues that provide the focus for the rest of the book.

The book

Inspirations and objectives

In recent years there has been considerable and growing interest amongst academics worldwide concerning the role of public spaces in urban life. Works emanating from disciplines such as geography, cultural studies, politics, criminology, planning and architecture have tried to define and explore that role, and understand current changes and their consequences. In part, it would seem, this interest was sparked by the almost complete absence of interest in the subject amongst the policy community in many parts of the world in the last decades of the twentieth century, and the impact this disinterest has had.

But recent research has demonstrated that people place the quality of their local environment high on the agenda of issues that concern them and most need improving, and often higher than the 'headline' public services such as education and health (MORI 2002 – Figure 1.1).

This reflects the fact that people use the street outside their front door, their local neighbourhood and the environment around their workplace on a daily basis, and as a result, the quality of streets, parks and other public spaces affects everyone's daily life, and directly contributes to their sense of wellbeing.

Yet, in many parts of the world, considerable evidence has been gathered to demonstrate a shared sense of dissatisfaction and pessimism about the state of urban environments, particularly with the quality of everyday public spaces. Explanations for this dissatisfaction have emphasised the poor quality of design that characterises many new public spaces; spaces that are typically dominated by parking, roads infrastructure, introspective buildings, a poor sense of place, and which in different ways, for different groups in society, are often exclusionary.

However, the research upon which this book draws suggests that this is not the whole story. Many contemporary and historic spaces are well designed but have nevertheless experienced decline and neglect. In part this is because the services and investment upon which the continuing quality of those spaces depends have been subject to the same constraints and pressures as public services in general. Changes in the roles of the state and civil society, of government and the governed, shifts in modes of provision of public services, and so forth, have all played a part. These issues touch upon the management of public space, and reflect the impact (positive or negative) of the many different activities that constantly define and redefine the characteristics and quality of that space.

The basis of the book

The book draws upon four empirical research projects as well as a wide body of literature to examine questions of public space management on an international stage. The first project examined the management of everyday urban public spaces in England, the second, the management of green parks and open spaces in eleven cities around the world, the third, three iconic public spaces in New York and London, and the fourth, real users' perceptions and aspirations for public space in England. The empirical research is set within a context of theoretical debates about public space, its history, contemporary patterns of use and its changing nature in Western society, and about new management approaches that are increasingly being adopted as a response to public space problems in an evolving urban governance scenario.

In undertaking the research over a period of five years, the authors have become increasingly aware that despite the many critiques of public space, its generation and evolution, and despite the voluminous tomes on how to design new public space, relatively little academic literature exists on the subject of its long-term management. In a very real sense, public space management has been a forgotten dimension of the policy discourse, perhaps because so many of the solutions are, on the face of it, quite prosaic: designing with maintenance in mind; regular street cleaning; coordinating management responsibilities; and so forth. Yet, proper management, or the absence of it, can impact in a profound way on the key urban qualities that other policy areas increasingly espouse: connection; free movement; provision of social space; health and safety; public realm vitality; and the economic viability of urban areas.

The four projects were an attempt to understand these issues. In reporting on them, the book addresses one of the big cross-disciplinary debates: how to deal more effectively with the quality of public spaces? In the process it aims to forward a range of practical and sometimes more fundamental solutions to better manage public space.

Defining public space ... and the research limitations

Unfortunately, debates about public space are situated within a literature characterised by a host of overlapping and poorly defined terms: liveability, quality of place, quality of life, environmental exclusion/equity, local environmental quality, physical capital, well-being, and even urban design and sustainability. These are all concepts that overlap and which are often used as synonyms, but equally are frequently contrasted, or used as repositories in which almost anything fits (van Kamp *et al.* 2003: 6; Brook Lyndhurst 2004a).

Broadly, the different concepts owe their origins to different policy-making traditions, each being multi-dimensional and multi-objective. Thus Rybczynski (1986, cited in Moore 2000) describes them as being like an onion: 'It appears simple on the outside, but it's deceptive, for it has many layers. If it is cut apart there are just onion-skins left and the original form has disappeared. If each layer is described separately, we lose sight of the whole'. To add to the complexity, some aspects are clearly subjective, related to the way places are perceived and to how individual memories and meanings attach to and inform perception of particular places. Others are objective, and concerned with the physical and indisputable realities of place (Massam 2002:145; Myers 1987: 109).

Van Kamp *et al.* (2003: 11) usefully distinguish between the various concepts by arguing that some are primarily related to the environment, whilst others are primarily related to the person (liveability and quality of place being in the former camp, and quality of life and well-being in the latter). Moreover, some concepts are clearly future-oriented (i.e. sustainability), whilst others are about the here and now (i.e. liveability and environmental equity).

What is clear is that the quality of the physical environment, and therefore physical public space and space as a social milieu, relates centrally to each of these, yet each is also much broader than a concern for public space management. In this regard, defining public space too widely may result in a nebulous concept that is difficult for those charged with its management to address. Conversely, defining the concept too narrowly may exclude important areas for action which, once omitted from policy, may undermine the overall objective of delivering better managed public space.

Debates about the nature and limits of public space will be discussed in some depth later in the book (see in particular Chapters 2 and 3), but for the purposes of defining the limits of this book it is worth presenting, up front, the definition adopted in the various research projects on which Part Two of the book is based. Two definitions are offered. First, an all-encompassing definition of public space that defines the absolute limits of the subject area, and second, the narrower definition, that was adopted as the focus of the empirical research.

A broad definition of public space could be constructed as follows:

Public space (broadly defined) relates to all those parts of the built and natural environment, public and private, internal and external, urban and rural, where the public have free, although not necessarily unrestricted, access. It encompasses: all the streets, squares and other rights of way, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or community/civic uses; the open spaces and parks; the open countryside; the 'public/private'

spaces both internal and external where public access is welcomed – if controlled – such as private shopping centres or rail and bus stations; and the interiors of key public and civic buildings such as libraries, churches, or town halls.

This wide definition, encompasses a broad range of contexts that can be considered ‘public’, from the everyday street, to covered shopping centres, to the open countryside. Inevitably the management of these different types of context will vary greatly; not least because:

- the latter two examples are likely to be privately owned and managed, and therefore subject to private property rights, including the right to exclude;
- the shopping centre is internal rather than external and likely to be closed at certain times of the day and night;
- the intensity of activity in the open countryside is likely to be vastly less (at least by people) than in the other two contexts.

For these reasons, a narrower definition of public space would exclude private and internal space, as well as the open countryside. This definition provides the basis for the work:

Public space (narrowly defined) relates to all those parts of the built and natural environment where the public has free access. It encompasses: all the streets, squares and other rights of way, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or community/civic uses; the open spaces and parks; and the ‘public/private’ spaces where public access is unrestricted (at least during daylight hours). It includes the interfaces with key internal and external and private spaces to which the public normally has free access.

This second definition does not imply that the wider definition is invalid; merely that it is possible to interpret a term such as public space in many different ways. For the purposes of this book, the narrower definition helps to focus attention on the areas where many have argued the real challenge for enhancing public space lies, in the publicly managed, external, urban space. It sets the limits and limitations of this book, which are further limited by a focus on public space in the context of (predominantly) Western, developed countries.

How the book is structured

The structure of the book aims to gradually unpack the range of issues discussed so far, initially by focusing in greater detail on the nature and evolution of public space, and then on its management. To do this, the book is structured in two parts. *Part One: Conceptualising public space and its management*, constitutes the first four chapters of the book and sets the scene for the empirical research that follows in Part Two. It airs a range of theoretical and practical debates around public space and its management.

In Part One, this first chapter introduces the concept of public space and explores issues surrounding its inherent complexity and the complexity of its management. Chapter 2 then provides a historic context for the discussions that follow by tracing the evolution of public space through history from antiquity to the modern era. Examples of public spaces in London – the historic market place, Georgian residential square and the grand civic square – are contrasted with spaces from New York – the town square, downtown space and the corporate plaza. The historical discussion draws out the changing balance between public and private in the production, use and management of urban space, and key issues for the contemporary management of public space.

The historical review is followed in Chapter 3 by a discussion of contemporary debates and theories concerning public space. The intention here is to draw from a range of literature from different scholarly traditions – cultural geography, urban design, property investment, urban sociology, etc. – to establish the key tensions at the heart of public space discourse. Conflicting definitions of public space will be discussed, and evidence presented about the use and changing nature of contemporary public spaces. The chapter concludes with a new classification of urban space types.

The final chapter in Part One focuses on the management literature, aiming to draw out discussions about the nature of public sector management as an activity and a policy field, and how it relates to public space. A typology of approaches is presented encompassing the paternalistic management of public space by the state, privatised models of public space management, and devolved community-based models. Drawing from the literature, the pros and cons of the different models are articulated, as well as the implications of each for some of the debates discussed in Chapter 3.

Part Two: Investigating public space management presents the four empirical research projects in turn, projects that have systematically addressed the different challenges for public space management identified through the literature discussed in Part One. Together, the projects extend across the national and international stages, and from strategic to local dimensions of public space and its management.

In Chapter 5, a first research project examining the management of everyday urban public spaces in England is introduced. This, the first of two chapters dealing with the project, examines typical practice through interrogating the results of a national survey of local authorities in England and findings from interviews with a range of key stakeholder groups. The intention is to understand the multiple drivers and barriers confronting public space decision-makers in their attempts to improve the quality of public space. Chapter 6 is a second linked chapter which examines a range of innovative practice via case studies identified through the national survey and interviews. Each case study featured one or more initiatives intended to address the perceived decline in public space quality. Lessons with wider application to the barriers identified in Chapter 5 are drawn out from the experiences.

In Chapter 7 discussion moves on to the international stage but focuses on a research project that examined the management of a particular type of public space – urban public open spaces. In this chapter, the stories of eleven cities from around the world with a reputation for the high quality of their open space environments are begun. The particular focus here is the context within which open space management occurs. Chapter 8 is the second chapter in this pair which re-focuses the discussions of the eleven cities onto the day-to-day practice of open space management as a means to extract common lessons with wider application elsewhere. In both chapters a common structure is used to aid comparison and to enable key lessons to be extracted.

A third project is examined in Chapters 9 and 10, focusing in some depth on three internationally iconic public spaces. In these chapters, discussion moves from strategic management concerns to a focus on particular spaces and their place-specific requirements. Chapter 9 focuses on Times Square in New York and also includes an overview of the research methodology for both chapters. Chapter 10 focuses on Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus in London. In both, an in-depth analysis of the spaces based on detailed on-site observation and related interviews is presented. The chapters discuss how new management vehicles are challenging the status quo, but also raising profound questions about exclusion, ownership and the future of public space.

Chapter 11, the final chapter in the book, revisits the previous discussion and attempts to link in a systematic manner the theoretical discussions in Part One with the empirical findings presented in Part Two. The use and nature of public space is discussed, and the argument is made that too often academic discourse has seen public space in black-and-white terms, whereas public space management is in practice far more complex and nuanced. As a postscript to the book, the results of a fourth and final empirical research study are used to illustrate this. The project addressed the issue of what the users of public space actually want, as

opposed to what academics, public space managers, politicians, or other interested parties think is good for them.

Understanding public space

Why is public space and its management important?

Most writers on public space issues recognise a general decline in this realm, although the causes and the cures prescribed are often very different. Broadly, the literature demonstrates a dichotomy amongst critics.

Many of the best-known critics choose to focus on what they view as the over-management of some types of external (and internal) public spaces that manifests itself in what they see as the commodification and homogenisation of space (for example, Sorkin 1992; Boyer 1994; Zukin 1995; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee, 1998 – see Figure 1.2). Others focus on what they view as the under-management of external public spaces and paint a picture of a rubbish-strewn, poorly designed and insecure public realm (Figure 1.3). Many of the former set of concerns revolve around formal, high profile public space types that, through a wide variety of development and policy processes, have become increasingly privatised and therefore more or less exclusionary. These are very real concerns which are dealt with in some depth in Chapter 3, and which underpin critiques of some of the recent trends in public space management that are discussed in Chapter 4.

Critics of the latter type are not new. Classic urban design texts such as Jane Jacobs (1961) and Oscar Newman (1973) have long since bemoaned the tendency to design environments that encourage uncivil behaviour and a heightened fear of crime. In this tradition, Alice Coleman's (1985) work examined how the design of the built environment could support activities such as littering, graffiti, vandalism and other anti-social behaviour, leading all too quickly to a degraded environment and a disadvantaged community. A huge literature has spawned from these pioneering studies, much of which challenges the details, although perhaps not the fundamentals, of the early work.

THE VALUE OF PUBLIC SPACE

The existence of literature from both sides of the Atlantic making essentially the same observations about the deterioration of public space illustrates the portability of such concerns. In fact, as shall be demonstrated in Chapters 7 and 8, these concerns about public space quality and its better management are shared across the developed world; and in many parts



1.2 Privatised public space: Euston, London

of the developing world (Zetter and Butina-Watson 2006). Arguably they are underpinned by a growing awareness of the value of public space that now reaches to the highest political levels.

In the UK, for example, in his Croydon speech of April 2001, former Prime Minister Tony Blair marked a decisive shift in national policy by calling for cleaner and safer streets where communities are given the opportunity to thrive and not just survive. This interest from the very top reflects an increasing perception about the importance of public space issues as a political concern (see Chapter 5), but also an awareness of a growing body of evidence that public space is able to deliver a range of benefits across economic, social and environmental spheres (see Woolley *et al.*, n.d.). Empirical evidence now strongly suggests that public space:

Economically,

- can have a positive impact on property prices – research suggests variously by between 5 per cent (Colin Buchanan and Partners 2007) 8 per cent (Luttik 2000) and 15 per cent (Peiser and Schwann 1993) or even up to 34 per cent in some circumstances (CABE 2005a);
- is good for business – boosting commercial trading by 40 per cent in one case (DoE and ATCM 1997);
- raises land value and levels of investment (Luther and Gruelin 2001; Phillips 2000);
- helps boost regional economic performance (Frontier Economics 2004).

For human health,

- can encourage exercise with associated health benefits – for example reducing the risk of heart attack, diabetes, colon cancer and bone fractures (Hakim 1999; Diabetes Prevention Group 2002; Slaterry, Potter and Caan 1997; Grisso, Kelsey and Stom 1991);
- can influence a longer life (Takano *et al.* 2002);



1.3 Deteriorating public space: The Bund, Shanghai

- provides a space for formal and informal sports and games (Woolley 2003; Woolley and Johns 2001);
- reduces stress and enhances mental health (Hartig *et al.* 2003; Halpern 1995);
- enhances child health – for example helping parents manage children with attention deficit disorder (Taylor *et al.* 2001).

Socially,

- delivers learning benefits to children, creative play, and reduces absenteeism (Fjortoft 2001; Taylor *et al.* 1998);
- nurtures social and cognitive skills (Pellegrini and Blatchford 1993);
- can help to reduce incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour (McKay 1998; Conolly 2002; Painter 1996; Loukaitou-Sideris *et al.* 2001; CABE 2005b);
- promotes neighbourliness and social cohesion (Baulkwill 2002; Massey 2002; Quayle and Driessen van der Lieck 1997; Kuo *et al.* 1998; Appleyard 1981);
- provides a venue for social events (Schuster 1995);
- reduces child mortality – by avoiding car-dominated environments (Living Streets 2001; Maconachie and Elliston 2002);
- provides a venue for social interchange and for supporting the social life of communities (Mean and Tims 2005; Dines and Cattell 2006; Jones *et al.* 2007; Watson 2006).

Environmentally,

- can encourage the use of sustainable modes of transport (Gehl and Gemzøe 1996; 2000);
- improves air quality, reduces heat island effects, pollution and water run-off (Littlefair *et al.* 2000; Whitford *et al.* 2001; Shashua-Bar and Hoffman 2000; Upmanis 2000);
- creates opportunities for urban wildlife to flourish (Shoard 2003).

Public space therefore has the potential to influence a wide range of benefits: as a stage to encourage social cohesion and interaction and



1.4 Inadvertent impacts: the humble wheelie bin

build social capital; as a venue for economic exchange and element in determining economic competitiveness and investment decisions; as an environmental resource and direct influence on energy use; and as an important contributor to the liveability of urban places and influence on the health and well-being of local populations.

The nature of public space

Of course not all public space is deteriorating and much is well-designed and managed. Nevertheless, if a general perception exists that the 'quality' of public space is deteriorating, then it can be argued that it is beholden on those responsible for its up-keep to understand why this is so, and what can be done about it. It may be, for example, that a lack of understanding of the nature of public space is a root cause behind the deterioration, perhaps because the delivery of space quality does not feature as a significant objective of many key stakeholders (see below).

It seems that in order to manage public space more efficiently, there has been a tendency to carve up the field into smaller units of responsibility, sometimes contracted out to a multitude of private contractors. This has replaced multi-tasking and holistic approaches to public space management that were epitomised in the guise of, for example, the park keeper or estate caretaker. A consequence seems to be the loss of key individuals who take an overview across all the elements of public space and its management, and a culture of delivering only what is specifically contracted or specified. This issue of the disaggregation of responsibilities for public space and its management will be a key theme, supported through empirical evidence, that is returned to throughout the book.

For now, the failure to understand the connections between different public space management objectives can be illustrated by way of a simple example effecting residential streets throughout the UK. Efficient refuse collection is a vitally important component in managing the urban environment by keeping streets sanitary and clean. In order to more efficiently (and cheaply) manage this process, many local authorities have given their residents wheelie bins that not only securely hold significant quantities of rubbish (so avoiding the problem of rubbish spilling onto streets), but also allow operatives to clear rubbish with less chance of injuries to themselves. Despite these benefits, in some environments



1.5 A standards-based approach to public space design

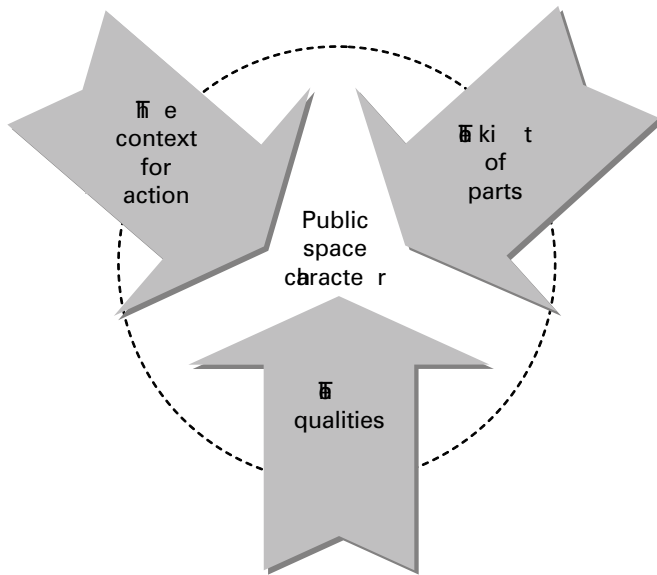
where houses open directly onto the street, the inadvertent side effect has been a negative impact on the urban environment as wheelie bins come to visually dominate the street scene, as pavement space for play is reduced, and as accessibility, particularly for those with disabilities, is compromised (see Figure 1.4).

The illustration demonstrates the need to carefully consider the impact of one policy decision upon others, to consider their impact in different contexts, and to be able to predict where conflicts might occur. In other words, to make the connections.

The illustration also demonstrates the need for a deep awareness of outcomes, the optimisation of which might be seen as the first and overriding public space management objective, but which needs managers who understand the interlinkages between different policy responses. Unfortunately, it seems that rather than skilling-up to meet the challenges, coping methods have often been found to simply avoid the worst effects of contemporary public space pressures, whilst still maintaining functionality. The inevitable result is the crude application of standards-based approaches to service delivery: planning and highways standards, road adoption specifications, police 'designing out crime' principles, accessibility regulations, road safety markings and signage, corporate street furniture, public transport infrastructure, and so forth, with little real understanding of the overall impact (Figure 1.5). This question of skills will also be returned to throughout the book.

A DESIGN-LED MANAGEMENT PROCESS?

Some have argued that what is required is a design-led approach to public space management in order that the complexities are fully understood. In England, the government-convened Urban Task Force (1999) contended that 'More than 90 per cent of our urban fabric will be with us in 30 years time' and that as a consequence this is where the real 'urban quality' challenge lies, rather than with the much smaller proportion of newly designed spaces created each year. They argued, however, that the way spaces look and feel today and the ease with which they can be managed relates fundamentally to how they were designed in the first place. Moreover, because every subsequent intervention in space (following its initial development) has an impact upon its overall quality, the importance of design skills remains fundamental.



1.6 The dimensions of public space character

This does not imply that all those involved in the management of public space need to be designers in an artistic sense, and some have argued that the over-design of spaces to the detriment of other factors can be problematic when much everyday space is often (and quite appropriately) banal or untidy in order to be functional and versatile, for example, street markets (Worpole and Knox 2007: 3). It does imply, however, that interventions (no matter how small) should be considered creatively and sensitively, involving weighing-up and balancing options and impacts in order to find the 'optimum' given solution within the constraints set by context and resources. As the wheelie bin example indicates (alongside countless other more significant public space management decisions taken every day), this frequently does not happen.

Focusing on the issue, the Urban Design Skills Working Group (2001) argued that rectification of the problem must begin with four things:

- on the demand side, reawakening the public's interest in the quality of public space through adequate community participation and the stimulation of grassroots involvement;
- on the supply side, increasing the skills base available to design and produce better places;
- reaching a position where local authorities make use of those skills in administering their functions;
- bridging the divide between the different disciplines concerned with the built environment by focusing on the common ground – the public realm.

However, given the range and diversity of activities required to successfully manage public space (see below), it may be that for the majority of those involved, all that is required is an 'awareness' of their role in, and responsibilities to, the overall and ongoing design process. For others, a more complete understanding of the total urban environment and all the contributions to its upkeep is necessary in order to establish

a vision, define the roles and responsibilities of constituent services, and reconcile possible conflicts.

This is likely to require a good understanding of the nature and complexity of public space, which, for the purposes of this book, is conceptualised in terms of three key dimensions that together define its character (Figure 1.6):

- the key elements that constitute public space – in other words, the 'kit of parts';
- the particular characteristics of public spaces – the 'qualities' that different spaces possess;
- the range of socio/economic and physical/spatial contexts – or the 'context for action'.

A similar division was used by Bell (2000: 21) in her work developing Urban Amenity Indicators for New Zealand in which she usefully distinguishes between 'amenity attributes', representing the tangible and measurable elements, and 'amenity values', or the less tangible perceptions people have about these. In each case, she argues, context is vital: 'We all know what amenity means to us, but it means different things to different people depending on where we live work and play'. In England, government guidance on design also adopts a similar division (DETR and CABE 2000). As well as defining seven 'Objectives for Urban Design', the guidance distinguishes between eight 'Aspects of Development Form' to which the objectives relate, and argues that the patterning together of the two in different places can help in understanding the local context and therefore in drawing up appropriately responsive policy and guidance frameworks for different areas.

The kit of parts

Starting therefore with the 'kit of parts', this first element of public space character is on the face of it the most basic, representing the constituent components of public space. Taking a pseudo-morphological approach to the character of public space (see Carmona *et al.* 2003: 61–6), it is possible to envisage a kit of parts that disaggregates space into four key elements (Box 1.1):

- 1 buildings
- 2 landscape (hard and soft)
- 3 infrastructure
- 4 uses.

BOX 1.1 PUBLIC SPACE, THE KIT OF PARTS

Buildings

Walls
Structure
Windows
Entrances/exits
Balconies/projections
Shopfronts
Signage
Building lighting
Floodlighting
Artwork
Decoration
Canopies
Colonnades
Skyline/roofscape
Corners
Flags and banners
Monuments/landmarks

Infrastructure

Roads and cycle lanes
Bus stops/shelters
Tram/bus lanes
Traffic lights/road signage
Telegraph polls
Telecommunications equipment
Street lighting
Telematics
Parking bays/meters/car parks
Public toilets
Waste and recycling bins
CCTV polls and cameras
Telephone/post boxes
Gutters/drainage
Utilities boxes
Underground services
Servicing bays/turning heads

Landscape

Trees
Planting beds and areas
Lawns and verges
Planters/hanging baskets
Paving
Road surfaces
Traffic calming
Steps
Boundary walls/fences/railings
Fountains/water features
Public art
Signage
Advertising
Street furniture
Bollards
Shelters/band stands
Festive decorations

Uses

Events
Gatherings
Street entertainment
Street trading
Markets
External eating/drinking
Kiosks
Play grounds
Parks
Sports facilities
Retail uses
Leisure uses (active/passive)
Community uses
Homes
Workplaces
Industrial uses
Tourism



The first three categories are entirely physical in nature, whilst the last encompasses a set of human activities and is therefore perhaps the most challenging to manage, and also – arguably – the most significant in giving public space its character. The first three also delineate the physical urban form (the streets, spaces, urban blocks, and key routes and connections) that define the limits of external public space, and which between them create the venues for human activity.

When considered by management responsibility, buildings and uses tend to be privately owned, with responsibility for their upkeep largely in the hands of companies, institutions and individuals. Motivations for

managing these assets will therefore be influenced by an assessment of their economic value and the costs and benefits of maintaining them. Conversely, most of the landscape between buildings in urban areas, and much (although not all) of the infrastructure will be owned and managed by the public sector, whose motivations for its management will be determined by competing local and national priorities and available resources. The distinction reinforces the fact that despite perceptions to the contrary, in almost all environments effective management will be a direct result of a formal or informal partnership between public and private interests.

The issue of time also distinguishes the different elements of the kit of parts, as the buildings and much of the infrastructure will tend to change only very slowly over long periods of time, emphasising, with regard to its long-term management, the need to get the design right in the first place. By contrast, elements of the landscape, and in some environments the uses in and surrounding external public space, will tend to change more quickly (Buchanan 1988: 33). It is these elements that can have the most decisive short-term impact on the way public space is perceived by its users. Therefore, although at any one time most of the physical environment already exists and changes only very slowly, the way the different elements are cared for, and the impact of those elements that change most frequently – the paving, street furniture, shop-fronts, signage, soft landscaping, building uses, and public space activities, etc. – are likely to be decisive in determining users' perceptions of quality.

Moreover, in an evermore complex built environment, the 'kit of parts' that contemporary public spaces need to accommodate have increased dramatically, whilst the intensity with which many spaces are used and the hours in the day over which activities happen have also multiplied. The result is inevitable conflicts that are difficult to resolve and which can undermine quality (Audit Commission 2002a: 3–5). This is hardly surprising when one considers the range of functions that many streets and spaces accommodate:

- 1 pedestrian thoroughfares
- 2 traffic arteries
- 3 retail destinations
- 4 market venues
- 5 venues for civic functions
- 6 places of relaxation
- 7 places to congregate
- 8 venues for public and political meetings
- 9 places for cultural exchange
- 10 opportunities for car parking
- 11 gateways to the private realm
- 12 places for social interaction
- 13 servicing arteries (gas, water, electric, cable, telephone)
- 14 play spaces
- 15 venues for eating and drinking
- 16 public transport arteries (bus, tram, taxis)
- 17 containers for landscaping
- 18 sources of information and communication (signs, advertisements, public phones)
- 19 opportunities for building servicing
- 20 breaks for light, sun and air penetration..

Examples of conflict include: between the needs of drivers and public transport versus the needs of pedestrians; the needs of utility providers to supply and maintain underground infrastructure versus the space required for street trees to grow and flourish; or the needs of commercial and entertainment premises versus the needs of local residents for peace and quiet. When the functions that spaces accommodate conflict, the overall quality of the space is often the first casualty. The challenge is therefore to manage the conflicts whilst enhancing quality and maintaining functionality. This question of managing conflict within public space represents another overarching theme of the book.

Public space qualities

Awareness of the kit of parts is by itself of little value without an awareness of how the parts are patterned together to optimise the 'qualities' of public space that make it conducive to human activity. The influential Copenhagen-based architect Jan Gehl (credited with the transformation of much of his own city) has argued that public space activities are particularly important in perceptions of public space. They are also particularly sensitive to the physical quality of environments. Gehl (1996) has characterised outdoor activities into three categories:

- necessary activities that we have to engage in – walking to work or school, waiting for a bus, shopping for food, etc.;
- optional activities that we choose to do if the time and place is conducive – walking for the sake of it, watching the world go by, sunbathing, window shopping, sitting at a pavement cafe, etc.;
- resultant (social) activities which are dependent on the presence of others in public space – children playing, casual greetings, conversations, communal activities, etc.; social activities are resultant because they occur spontaneously as a direct result of the other two forms of activity.

Based on extensive research across the world, Gehl has concluded that necessary activities are influenced only slightly by the physical quality of the environment because they are necessary for life to continue. Optional activities, by contrast, only take place when conditions are optimal, and are therefore a direct barometer of the quality of public space. They also effect users' perception of space because if people are choosing to stay in spaces rather than hurrying through, the space itself seems more 'liveable'. Finally, social activities happen whatever the physical context, although their quality and intensity will be affected by both the numbers of people in a space, and by the extent to which the quality of space encourages users to linger.

It is therefore a mistake to think of better quality public space as purely a visual concern, of interest only to a minority of aesthetes. Instead, these are fundamental issues that impact directly on the way all users perceive, function, and socialise in public space, and by implication on the viability of public space for different economic activities.

TANGIBLE QUALITIES

A wide range of publications focus on the design of urban space, setting out key aspirational principles for designing new and enhancing existing public spaces. Some of these are summarised in Table 1.1, which indicates that most converge on a set of widely accepted urban design principles. However, managing rather than designing public space is a broader concern that encompasses, but extends beyond, design objectives. It is also constrained by the fact that in most environments, the 'kit of parts' is already in place and unlikely to substantially change over the short or medium term.

Successive polls from MORI have focused on what residents perceive will most improve their areas, work which repeatedly throws up a consistent range of factors (MORI 2002), including:

- crime reduction
- activities for young people
- removal of rubbish/litter
- reduction in noise/disturbance
- better lighting
- reduced traffic
- better parks and open space
- less dog mess
- better street cleaning
- better maintenance i.e. of pavements.

The Association of Town Centre Managers have also attempted to gauge public perception of factors that make for a 'good' local environment through assessment of local authority enhancement initiatives. As well as basic 'Objectives of Urban Design', they cite cleanliness, a lack of graffiti, low transport emissions, safety and security, access for all, and quietness as preferred qualities, as well as a desire for basic amenities, including: good pedestrian routes and car parks, cycle routes, benches, places to meet and shelter, toilets, and clear signage. Indeed these represent reoccurring issues across a range of research projects (Williams and Green 2001: 4).

MORI (2000), for example, found that in the case of parks, people expect safety, cleanliness, tidiness, access for all, and provision for dogs; the University of Sheffield (1994) found that when looking specifically at children's requirements for good public space, they wanted clean streets,

less litter, graffiti and traffic, places to meet, better street furniture, and a reduction of anti-social behaviour, especially alcoholics in city centres. Pan-European research, discovered that factors that make public spaces popular include, places for sitting and relaxing, something to watch (preferably other people), sufficient pedestrian through-flow, and 'ambience', whilst low levels of vehicular traffic was not viewed as a problem (Hass-Klau *et al.* 1999).

Llewelyn Davies (2000: 99–105) confirms the importance of a good ambience, arguing that a comfortable and stimulating public realm requires activity, with uses related to public spaces in such a way that animation, diversity and versatility results. They call for public space that stimulates the senses, visually, but also by sound, touch and smell; places that are distinctive and interesting, building on local character; places free of clutter, but which nevertheless exploit the power of public art; and places with are legible through good lighting and signage.

The Audit Commission (2002a: 3–6) define this as the 'liveability agenda' which to them aims to strengthen local communities, to make streets safer, cleaner and better managed and to provide high quality public spaces. Their analysis shows that people want streets that are:

- pleasant
- attractive
- well designed
- free from danger pollution and noise
- functional
- litter free
- not repeatedly dug up
- diverse, to cater for all needs – peaceful and lively, business and play.

By contrast, the Project for Public Space (2000), based on their analysis of hundreds of public spaces around the world, conclude that four key qualities are required for a high-quality environment:

- access and linkage – convenient to use, visible, easy to get to and move within;
- uses and activities – providing a reason to be there, vital and unique;
- comfort and image – safe, clean, green, full of character and attractive;
- sociability – fostering neighbourliness, friendship, interaction, diversity, pride.

Table 1.1 Conceptualisations of urban space design

Lynch (1981)	Jacobs and Appleyard (1987)	Bentley <i>et al.</i> (1985)	Tibbalds (1988)	Congress for New Urbanism (1993)	Urban Task Force (1999)	DETR and CABE (2000)	Llewellyn Davies (2000)	Carmona <i>et al.</i> (2002)
Control	Identity and control community and public life	Personalisation	Cater for all sections of the community and consult them	Cities and towns shaped by community institutions				
	Urban self-reliance	Robustness	Build to last and adapt	Design for pedestrians and transit	Building to last, sustainable buildings, environmental responsibility	Adaptability	Manage the investment Design for change	Sustainable urban design
	Imagination and joy	Richness	Human scale, intricacy, joy and visual delight		Context, scale and character	Character	Work with the landscape	Townscape
Fit			Avoid change on too great a scale	Physically defined public spaces	Optimising land use and density	Continuity and enclosure	Mix forms	Urban form
Sense	Liveability		Places before buildings		Public realm	Quality of the public realm	Places for people	Public realm
	Authenticity and meaning	Legibility	Legible environments			Legibility		
Vitality	Access to opportunities	Variety	Mixing of uses	Diversity in use and population	Mixing activities, mixing tenures	Diversity	Mix uses	Mixed use and tenure
Access	An environment for all	Permeability	Freedom to walk about	Universal accessibility	Access and permeability	Ease of movement	Make connections	Connection and movement
	Visual appropriateness	Visual	Learn from the past and respect context	Celebrate local history, climate, ecology and building practice	Site and setting	(Application through eight aspects of urban form)	Enrich the existing	Application to context

For them, places without these characteristics are likely to be alienating, uncomfortable or simply unusable, indicating that something is wrong with the design, management or both. Smith *et al.* (1997), based on an extensive analysis of place-based physical visions, developed a similar list of qualities that urban environments should fulfil: liveability, character, connection, mobility, personal freedom and diversity; whilst Carr *et al.* (1992: 87–136) conclude that five types of reason account for people's needs in public spaces: comfort, relaxation, passive engagement with the environment, active engagement, and discovery (the desire for stimulation), and that any one encounter with a place may satisfy more than one purpose. They argue,

it is important to examine needs, not only because they explain the use of places, but also because use is important to success. Places that do not meet people's needs or that serve no important functions for people will be underused and unsuccessful.

(Carr *et al.* 1992: 91–2)

Numerous physical prescriptions have also been established for what makes a good space. William Whyte (1980), for example, concluded his observations of public squares in New York with the following requirements, that:

- public spaces should be in a good location (preferably on a busy route and both physically and visually accessible);
- streets should be part of the 'social' space (cutting off a space from the street with railings or walls will isolate it and reduce its use);
- the space should be level or almost level with the pavement (spaces raised significantly above or below the pavement were less used);
- there should be places to sit – both integral (e.g., steps, low walls, etc.) and explicit (e.g., benches, seats, etc.);
- moveable seats facilitated choice and the opportunity to communicate character and personality.

Less important factors included sun penetration, the aesthetics of the space, and the shapes and sizes of spaces. By contrast Amos Rapoport (1990: 288) identified 36 supportive characteristics of successful street spaces that are almost all to do with their size and shape. These he grouped into six categories, successful streets are likely to: have high levels of enclosure; be narrow; have complex profiles (i.e. variation in width, turns and twists, subspaces, projections, etc.); have short blocked views; have highly articulated surfaces and enclosing elements; and be part of a complex pattern of routes and sequences of space.

Other writers, Bill Hillier (1996) for instance, have focused on the interconnectivity (visually and physically) of spaces as the key determinant

of their functional success, whilst Jan Gehl (1996: 135), amongst others, has argued that all these factors – size, shape, connections, the disposition of elements within space, and their detailed design – are important in determining the quality of public space and therefore the types of human activities they will sustain. For him, moreover, all are both measurable and tangible.

INTANGIBLE QUALITIES

Despite the level of agreement across the literature, research undertaken by DEMOS (2005) has shown that many of the needs that determine how the public environment is perceived are often intangible, reflecting the diverse motivations, needs and resources available to different groups and users. Moreover, they argue the core ideal of public space being free and open to all is increasingly being undermined by a focus on safety, creating bland places with no real ability to draw or retain people. Elsewhere, environments are becoming 'specialised' in order to cater for diverse lifestyles, incomes, ages, ethnicities and tastes. The findings are particularly valuable in highlighting the dangers of over-emphasising particular qualities to the detriment of others, or of taking a narrow view of what constitutes the 'public environment'. Solutions include:

- spaces that enable users to participate in the space, by creating activities of their own;
- environments that encourage a diversity of user groups, and avoid domination by one group or use;
- creating spaces that were available 'on tap', at any time.

The research supports the historically important role of public space for social exchange, and suggests that non-traditional public spaces – the car-boot sale or skate park, for example – have an increasingly important role in encouraging socialisation, although the environmental qualities sought by users of such spaces may be very different from traditional public space.

Lloyd and Auld (2003) confirm the central importance of social space as a dimension of quality. For them, the extent to which environments encourage socialisation impacts directly on the quality of life of those who use them. In this regard, trends of commercialisation, privatisation and commodification in public spaces and facilities (see Chapter 3) can act to undermine this vital role by making the use of many spaces transitory, linked solely to commercial rather than social exchange. Their answer to the problem is the need, as they see it, to create or refurbish local environments, to make them conducive to social interactions that extend across successive visits. They argue that 'research must go beyond counting heads and observing

Table 1.2 Universal positive qualities for public space

Clean and tidy	Well cared for	Clear of litter, fly tipping, fly posting, abandoned cars, bad smells, detritus and grime; adequate waste-collection facilities; provision for dogs
Accessible	Easy to get to and move around	Ease of movement, walkability; barrier-free pavements; accessible by foot, bike, and public transport at all times; good quality parking; continuity of space; lack of congestion
Attractive	Visually pleasing	Aesthetic quality; visually stimulating; uncluttered; well-maintained paving, street furniture, landscaping, grass/verges, front gardens; clear of vandalism and graffiti; use of public art; coordinated street furniture
Comfortable	Comfortable to spend time in	Free of heavy traffic, rail/aircraft noise, intrusive industry; provision of street furniture, incidental sitting surfaces, public toilets, shelter; legible; clear signage; space enclosure
Inclusive	Welcoming to all, free, open and tolerant	Access and equity for all by gender, age, race, disability; encouraging engagement in public life; activities for young people; unrestricted
Vital and viable	Well-used and thriving	Absence of vacant/derelict sites, vacant/boarded-up buildings; encouraging a diversity of uses, meeting places, animation; availability of play facilities; fostering interaction with space
Functional	Functions without conflict	Houses compatible uses, activities, vehicle/pedestrian relationships; provides ease of maintenance, servicing; absence of street parking nuisance
Distinctive	A positive, identifiable character	Sense of place and character; positive ambience; stimulating sound, touch and smell; reinforcing existing character/history; authentic; individual
Safe and secure	Feels and is safe and secure	Reduced vehicle speeds, pedestrian, cyclist safety; low street crime, anti-social behaviour; well lit and good surveillance, availability of authority figures; perception of security
Robust	Stands up to the pressures of everyday use	High-quality public realm, not repeatedly dug up; resilient street furniture, paving materials, boundaries, soft landscaping, street furniture; well-maintained buildings; adaptable, versatile space
Green and unpolluted	Healthy and natural	Better parks and open space; greening buildings and spaces; biodiversity; unpolluted water, air and soil; access to nature; absence of vehicle emissions
Fulfilling	A sense of ownership and belonging	Giving people a stake (individually or collectively); fostering pride, citizenship and neighbourliness; allowing personal freedom; opportunities for self-sufficiency

behaviour. It must illuminate the lived experience of individuals and groups in relation to public leisure spaces' (Lloyd and Auld 2003: 354).

The trends raised by Lloyd and Auld (2003) also reflect the dangers of the social exclusion of key groups (i.e. the young or economically inactive) from some types of contemporary public space such as shopping centres, reinforcing for the researchers the key principles of equity, citizenship and access as qualities to be nurtured in the local environment. Related research examining the use of public space in the East End of London confirmed the importance of these social roles (Dines and Cattell 2006: xii). The study concluded that 'people need a variety of public open spaces within a local area to meet a range of everyday needs: spaces to linger as well as spaces of transit; spaces that bring people together as well as spaces of retreat'. Queens Market, for example, a long-established street market has evolved to reflect the different needs of the populations arriving in the area. As such it has provided (Dines and Cattell 2006: 32–3):

- a strong and enduring element in the area's identity and peoples' attachment to it;
- an important local social arena and venue for unexpected encounters;
- a local place where people felt comfortable, safe and able to linger;
- a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual place of interaction between different communities;
- a familiar and uplifting place that contributed directly to a sense of well-being in users.

Although these perceptions were not shared equally by all groups in the area (younger people and children were far more negative about the market as a social space), they nevertheless demonstrate the importance of seeing public spaces as social venues and as an important resource for individuals and communities; not just as physical containers. These qualities were considered fragile, raising concerns that they could easily be damaged by otherwise well-meaning processes of 'regeneration' or management that are often unaware and unconcerned about this important social role (Dines and Cattell 2006: 17–18).

DESIRABLE QUALITIES

The discussion above presents just the tip of the iceberg of literature dealing with the desirable qualities of public space. Combined with the range of urban design objectives drawn from various sources (see Table 1.1), it is possible to identify a set of – arguably – 'universal positive qualities' for public space that reflect the complex and overlapping social, economic, and environmental characteristics of local places (see Table 1.2).

Inevitably, as writers such as Kevin Lynch and many others have long since argued, relative judgements about the importance of various qualities are matters of individual perception, and different users will value different qualities more or less highly. Consequently, the emphasis placed on different qualities by local public space services will be matters for local judgement. But, just as Lynch (1960: 48–9) argued that the component images of place pattern together to create one overall image of place in users minds, so will the qualities pattern together to form an overall

experience of public space. Therefore, concentrating on some qualities to the detriment of others may simply undermine attempts to improve the overall quality of space.

The context for action

The final conceptualised dimension of public space character adds yet further complexity to the management of public space by introducing the notion of a range of physical/spatial 'contexts for action' to which public space management processes need to respond. The contexts are initially generated by the patterning together of the different elements from the 'kit of parts' to create the networks, densities, mixes, urban typologies (urban, suburban, rural) and urban forms that constitute particular places.

For example, perceptions will vary considerably depending on whether the area being described is rural or urban. Rural areas are – perhaps unsurprisingly – considered to be more friendly, safer and greener by their residents (by a factor of two, three and three respectively). They are also much less likely to be characterised as shabby, dangerous or run down (MORI 2005: 23). Perceptions that higher density or mixed-use environments offer lower environmental quality are also well established in the literature (Carmona 2001a: 201–5).

The socio-economic context also dictates a separate set of factors that are likely to impact on local environmental quality. Such factors include:

- choice and opportunity open to residents
- levels of owner occupation
- child density levels
- levels of economic activity and employment
- levels of community engagement.

A range of research provides powerful evidence to back up these relationships. For example, evidence gathered together to test the concept of environmental exclusion (Brook Lyndhurst 2004b) indicated a particularly strong relationship between levels of deprivation in an area and the quality of the immediate local environment. Drawing on the English Housing Condition Survey, the report suggested that twice as many dwellings in areas characterised by multiple deprivation are effected by worse air quality than other districts; with litter, rubbish, graffiti and dumping experienced fourfold in deprived areas. A sister report (Brook Lyndhurst 2004a) suggested that two fundamental factors underpin perceptions of local environmental quality in deprived areas: public safety and public health. Parks and play areas, for example were only seen as

benefits if residents could also be confident that such spaces were secure from crime (the overriding concern), clean (from litter, dog fouling, broken glass, and drug needles), and safe from road traffic.

Other research has demonstrated how the socio-economic context can impact on the ability to deliver neighbourhood environmental services. Hastings *et al.* (2005), for example, have found that there is a gap between the environmental amenity of deprived and non-deprived neighbourhoods. They show that poor neighbourhoods have more environmental problems than affluent neighbourhoods, and that these include a greater range of problems, and problems that are more severe, particularly graffiti, litter, fly-tipping, and generally the poor maintenance of public and open spaces. They identify a complex range of reasons (Hastings *et al.* 2005: viii):

- greater use of the neighbourhood environment with associated rubbish and wear and tear, due to higher rates of economic inactivity and higher population densities, particularly child densities;
- built forms that are more difficult to manage, including large open spaces, undefined front gardens and high housing densities and a predominance of flats;
- the presence of a higher proportion of vulnerable households, less able to manage their neighbourhood environment;
- diminishing social responsibility within the community, and less motivation amongst residents to tackle the up-keep of their neighbourhood, leading to less effort amongst residents to control their local environment;
- reduced concern amongst frontline workers for deprived neighbourhoods because of the scale of problems and the difficulties in working in some places – fear, threats, violence, etc.

By contrast, the research recoded the increased motivation amongst operatives when working in affluent areas, driven as much by the fear of complaints following shoddy work as by the knowledge that they could work effectively in such areas (Hastings *et al.* 2005: ix). The result was further polarisation between poor and wealthy neighbourhoods.

MORI's work on physical capital (2005: 23) supports these findings. Their polling reveals residents of deprived areas are three times more likely to consider their area noisy and four times more likely to describe their area as shabby, whilst residents of affluent areas are significantly more likely to describe their areas as friendly, safe and green.

Other contextual factors are also important. The argument has already been made that policy approaches that are both effective and efficient in one circumstance may have unintended consequences in others, and therefore that sensitivity to context is required. Streets in predominantly