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*CLÉS bulletin is a topical summary of articles which have appeared in the professional press. Its aim is to provide a pithy précis of a subject area, drawing out the specific and common issues raised in the individual articles.*

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## ***Green spaces in urban places***

The introduction of the Government organisation, *Cabe Space* - set up to champion the importance of public space - has renewed the debate on the value of green space in urban areas. It has also sparked discussions in the press on the importance of not only creating usable public spaces in urban areas as an aid to regeneration, but also developing and integrating strategies to make proper use of the ones we already have.

*New Start*<sup>1</sup> magazine highlights the current crisis with Britain's public spaces, and asks whether or not the new Government unit, C.A.B.E Space will be able to make a difference to the liveability agenda.

The initial plans of C.A.B.E Space include two campaigns:

- ❶ **Waste of space** will draw attention to unused land and property assets that blight the local environment
- ❷ **Pride of Place** aims to recruit more volunteers to care for and improve green space.

*New Start* discusses whether or not the funding provided for C.A.B.E Space will be enough to implement the necessary improvements. It suggests that any extra money will have to be a result of their lobbying power – one of their main tasks being, “to champion the need for a higher profile to influence funding decisions at national, regional and local levels.”

*New Start* shows that there is a need to diversify the range of what's available, with gaps in funding. It says that there is a sharp divide between the level of importance the public attaches to quality of the public realm, as evidenced by successive opinion polls and the level of political priority it receives. But there is hope this will change with the advent of the liveability agenda.

*Regeneration and Renewal*<sup>2</sup> magazine highlights the importance of public spaces in terms of people's priorities. Research shows that 22 per cent of people questioned put parks and open spaces in the top five most important services to their household (more than primary schools), whereas only 44 percent of local authorities actually have a strategy for public spaces, suggesting a need to develop a stronger link between supply and demand.

*Regeneration and Renewal* points out, however, that the concerns from the public have not gone unnoticed by the Government, who set aside £201 million for parks and open spaces in the **Communities Plan** (see CLÉS Bulletin No.8). A key aim of this funding is to help local authorities create green space strategies that will enable them to deliver places people want.

Integration seems to figure high among the priorities of local authorities that have already produced strategies and it is suggested that green space strategies will get the local authority liaising with its community much more strongly. The more they help the communities understand the potential of the space, the more they can contribute to the design and development of it.

*Regeneration and Renewal* highlights funding as the biggest hurdle for local authorities and says that some have sought to maximise private sector involvement in their strategies. However, they feel the new liveability fund is a step in the right direction.

*Inside Housing*<sup>3</sup> tells us that the revival of parks and urban open spaces is enjoying unprecedented political support with the Government setting aside money to enhance the liveability agenda.

It sets out how C.A.B.E Space will help local authorities to spend this money by publishing a series of best practice notes and helping local authorities develop a

<sup>1</sup> Lipman, Caron *Space programme* *New Start* 9 May 2003 p.14

<sup>2</sup> Schopen, Fay *The green space frontier* *Regeneration and Renewal* 13 June 2003 pp.19-20

<sup>3</sup> Ellery, Simon *Living and learning* *Inside Housing* pp.16-17

strategy by drawing on the advice of professionals who are experts in areas such as landscape design, community development and urban design.

*Inside Housing* also tells us that in its research role, CAGE Space will conduct studies to demonstrate the contribution that well-designed and managed parks and urban green spaces make to areas such as house prices, commercial activity and land values. It will also offer advice on community participation as well as how to source new funding from bodies such as the National Lottery.

*Inside Housing* highlights the scale of the challenge and links it into the housing agenda, highlighting good design as an important issue for the two agendas to work together, as there needs to be a balance between creating green spaces and providing the number of new homes required.

*Municipal Journal*<sup>4</sup> discusses recent efforts to reverse the trend of decline in Britain's parks and public spaces. It argues that for many years local authority heads of parks have been fighting a losing battle to defend their turf as their non-statutory service budgets have been repeatedly trimmed until many parks have gone from being assets to liabilities.

*MJ* reports on the hopes that the launch of CAGE Space will reverse this trend in decline and provides two case studies to demonstrate good practice in involving the community in the restoration of green space:

- ① Restoring a grand city park in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. This case study shows how community consultation and involvement played a big part in developing a green space strategy in the area.
- ② Creating community gardens – alleygating in East Manchester. This case study shows how a programme of alleygating is one of the cornerstones of East Manchester's environmental programme as part of the area's New Deal for Communities, and highlights the importance of resident involvement in applying for funding and to take on the maintenance of the area.

### **Conclusion: The importance of green space and urban place in the local economy**

In all of this CLES recognises the vital role that green space and urban place can play in regeneration and the local economy. It is evident, that aside from local enterprise, local skills and abilities, a successful economy needs decent local space. This environmental context and backdrop to the local

economy is in our view often forgotten. People do not have to be consumers all the time, but an economy needs places where people want to spend time and potentially money. Thus local places need to have spaces that local people enjoy and want to be in and are therefore potentially willing to spend time, energy and use services. Poor places are usually unattractive options as regards being places where people want to spend time. As such, the extent to which people want to spend money there is also limited.

Therefore, potentially, this emphasis on public space, creating spaces in which people want to spend time, is welcome and should be a significant facet in reviving local economies.

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<sup>4</sup> Richardson, Vicky *Watch this space* Street Scene in *Municipal Journal* May 2003 pp.6-7