PLACEMAKINGRESOURCE
Helping people to make great places

Incorporating **RR** **REGENERATION +RENEWAL**

Advice: Making town and city centres feel safe

29 June 2016 by Ben Kochan

Collaboration between urban designers, local police and business is key to creating safer places, finds Ben Kochan.

Ramped seating and a programme of events helped make Manchester's Exchange Square safe and inviting (Pic. NLP Planning)

Creating places where people feel safe requires a combination of good urban design, conscientious maintenance and the necessary law enforcement. That's how professor Cathy Parker, director of the Institute of Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), sums up the key ingredients. The goal should be to create lively interesting spaces, which attract people and where they feel safe, she explains.

Here are five tips for creating safe places.

1. Bring activity into public spaces

If there are a lot of people around in a public space, it will feel safe, says Paul Clement, managing director of Central Management Solutions, which manages several of England's business improvement districts (BIDs). It's important for BIDs and local authorities to enliven spaces to attract people there, he urges.

He points to the successful redevelopment of Exchange Square, in Manchester city centre. "Before it was a bland area, which had been taken over by skateboarders, deterring other users because they felt threatened there." The transformation in the early 2000s, with ramped seating and a programme of events, has helped to make it a highly popular venue where people choose to linger because they feel safe, he says.

In many city and town centres office blocks are being converted to apartments, which should help to make the centres feel safer because there are more people around, says MMU's Parker.

However, Richard Eastham, director of urban design consultancy, Feria Urbanism, says it's important to ensure that the ground floors of blocks generate activity on the street. "Councils should ensure that there are coffee shops and other leisure provision, which spill out on to the street."

2. Create well defined city routes

Eastham says that when town and city centre plans are drawn up, it's important to ensure that there are well defined routes into and through the centre. "People feel lost and unsafe if there are not clear sightlines, showing them where a street goes," he says.

He points to a strategy for Weymouth in Dorset, which linked the two sides of the town, and encouraged pedestrian movement through them into areas that they considered unsafe and would not have ventured into before.

3. Scrutinise new schemes to ensure they provide safe places

Stuart Craggs, manager at Experience Guildford business improvement district, says that it's important that the police, local authority planners and local businesses have a regular dialogue over the design of new city centre developments.

"They can help to identify areas and parts of developments where people might feel unsafe and agree measures to avoid it," he says. In Guildford there is a panel that regularly meets to review schemes.

4. Prioritise maintenance

Good maintenance of the public realm helps to make people feel safe, says Craggs. "If a shop or even a shopping centre closes down, the local authority or BID needs to ensure that the environment around it does not suffer."

He points to an initiative in Guildford where the local authority helped a small shopping centre, which had lost several tenants. "By putting planters in the public spaces around it and repairing the walkways, Guildford District Council has helped to avoid the area attracting anti-social behaviour," he says. He added that it has also helped the development to attract new tenants.

Everyday maintenance can also help make places feel safer, says MMU's Parker. "Litter strewn everywhere can make people feel unsafe, because it gives the message that an area is not loved."

5. Limit the use of CCTV

The use of CCTV should be seen as a last resort, says Parker. "The cameras can actually make people feel unsafe because they can alert people to the fact that an area may be subject to antisocial behaviour."

Matt Burdett, a police sergeant attached to Sheffield BID, however, suggests that CCTV is useful when enforcement is necessary. He says that the positioning of cameras needs to be considered carefully. "As the nature of areas changes, cameras needs to be moved around," he says. He says Sheffield City Council is currently reviewing the location of the 68 cameras in the city centre "to see where they are really needed".