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Editorial

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Footbridges are an important part of our urban fabric, and in recent years there has been a step change in thinking and a realisation as to the impact such quality, well-maintained infrastructure can have on the places in which we live and our associated social and cultural well being.

The urban environment can be harsh and intimidating and can often make people feel ill at ease. For a long period of time our towns and cities were laid out on the basis of the car, often to the exclusion of those wishing to walk or cycle, and certainly not offering any encouragement to do so.

We all want our towns and cities to be places for people, built and maintained on the principle that people come first; to be places that contribute to the quality of life and encourage healthy and sustainable lifestyles. Footbridges, both new and old, as part of the urban fabric are a key contributor to such a sense of place.

There are many examples of catalysts for transformation, for instance the Gateshead Millennium Bridge. Since its construction, along with other key projects, there has been a vast injection of investment into the area creating a whole-scale urban renewal, making an impact not only locally but also regionally.

Such is the potential impact of footbridges be they large or small, new build or refurbishment; each can and does make an important contribution.

Within this special edition we focus exclusively on footbridges. There is an example of an award-winning landmark structure in the Sail Bridge in Swansea, a project which was a key element in the regeneration of the disused dock area. Papers are presented on timber footbridges, in which broad issues of sustainability are contemplated and discussed, and the international scene is represented with a contribution concerning a footbridge in Barcelona. In addition, there is a series of papers on the very important issue of the dynamics of pedestrian footbridges.

The call for papers on this subject has generated a great deal of interest, with many papers having been submitted. Unfortunately not all can be published in this single issue and therefore a number of papers will be carried forward into future editions in 2006. As always, further papers would be most welcome, with the Editorial Advisory Panel encouraging bridge engineers to share their experiences with the wider international bridge engineering community.