

Editorial

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Regeneration and conservation

Engineers are expert at solving problems but sometimes get caught up in the intricacies of bar bending schedules and neglect the whole picture. This issue of *Municipal Engineer* focuses on the subject of regeneration and conservation and looks at the contribution municipal engineers can make to the overall achievement of making the best use of resources. In particular, the articles explore innovative solutions to conservation and how funds and support can be obtained for regeneration.

The development background

Over the years central government has recognized the need to stimulate development and has taken several steps to achieve this aim. These include the Garden Cities, such as Welwyn, and the Development Corporations, such as Milton Keynes. Their aims were simply development and they tended to be on greenfield sites. New development on greenfield sites was a simple engineering solution but the subsidiary social effects were significant. New houses without work opportunities generated a desire to travel that was met mainly with new roads. Moving people out of the towns and cities to the new developments reduced the viability of the town centres.

The diminishing vitality in town centres and the clearance of derelict sites around towns has created new problems that now need to be confronted. Events such as the Toxteth riots in Liverpool have raised awareness of the social difficulties of urban dereliction. The Garden Festivals at places such as Liverpool took an area of dereliction and used the Garden Festival as a stimulus to remediation and regeneration. The later Development Corporations such as Trafford Park or Teeside concentrated their efforts on urban and industrial areas and brownfield sites.

The current state of the art

Regeneration is now high on the Government's agenda together with the concept of urban renaissance. The municipal engineer undoubtedly has the technical skills to contribute to regeneration but also needs to consider the social, financial and political implications of this work.

The first paper from K. Smith examines how to manage conservation projects to avoid catastrophes. He uses a graphical method to describe the interaction of technology, politics

and finance. He also concludes that a surfeit of any of these influences can be just as damaging as a shortage and the overview is absolutely essential to avoid the catastrophe.

A. Jackson looks at a case study of the long-term restoration of the South Stratford Canal. He examines the community, technical and funding issues and gives examples of sympathetic conservation and repairs.

The question of assessing the civil engineering heritage is covered in P. Cross-Rudkin's paper. The fact that some of our heritage is worth preserving and some is not is fundamental. The results enable funds to be directed at the most worthwhile schemes.

Langstone Oysterbeds is a practical restoration project explained in S. Mountain's paper. As a municipal engineer he explains the role of councillors and the community in delivering the project.

B. Simpson looks at Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 which sets out Government guidance on housing development. The guidance is aimed at planning authorities and includes advice on changing the modal split to encourage sustainable transport and the reuse of land.

The Huddersfield Canal is a restoration project that aims to regenerate its environs. A. Stopher examines the funding and political considerations that support the scheme and how the finished scheme will provide benefits to the community.

Regeneration is not confined to the urban area, and A. Wann looks at the rural scene and how it can be changed for the better by rural regeneration.

The short paper by S. Read looks at regeneration in the Black Country and further papers look at Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds.

The final paper is a more personal view from T. Williams who asks whether municipal engineers need to change to be relevant in a changing world. He sees changes as essential if municipal engineers are to take their place in the world of regeneration, conservation and urban renaissance.

Urban White Paper

The Government published its Urban White Paper on 16th November 2000. The report follows Lord Rodger's Urban Task Force which was created in 1998 and examined how to make towns and cities more attractive. Historically, cities were built for people but recently these needs have been ignored. Cities

are for people and the Task Force had three recommendations.

- Better planning and design.
- Bringing brownfield sites and empty property back into use.
- Looking after the urban environment better.

The White Paper follows the Task force and crystalizes the recommendations into three key aims.

- New sustainable homes that are attractive, safe and practical.
- Retaining people in urban areas and making them more desirable places to live.
- Improving the quality of life, opportunity and economic success through tailored solutions in towns and cities.

The Government sees the delivery of Urban Renaissance in England being delivered by the reformed Local Authorities and the Regional Development Agencies. The possibility of Urban Regeneration Companies to oversee the development of cities is suggested. Local Authorities have a key role to define community strategies that can help generate areas of renewal.

John Prescott summarized the Government's actions on Urban Renaissance by saying, 'We are establishing an urban policy unit and a new Cabinet committee to follow up the work. We will take stock at an Urban Summit in 2002, hosted by ministers, which will examine progress, make sure the strategy is on track and celebrate the achievements we have made. There is a lot of work to be done. We are

confident that, by working together, we can bring about a true urban renaissance for the benefit of us all.'

Without doubt the municipal engineer has an important role in this vision of urban renaissance to provide the designs that are attractive and innovative solutions to bring brownfield land back into use. Engineers are traditionally the deliverers of schemes and a positive involvement in the policy and implementation will be essential to achieve the vision of Urban Renaissance.

Rural White Paper

The Rural White Paper was published on 28th November 2000. The focus of the White Paper is to regenerate the rural scene and, particularly, the market towns. At the time of writing the Rural White Paper has just been published. The concept of affordable rural housing is expected to be a key element of the proposals. Public transport is also of concern in rural areas as its provision is essential to ensure the mobility of residents to reach places of work, shopping and entertainment.

Urban renaissance engineers

Regeneration and conservation is an important task for the municipal engineer. The papers in this issue look at how the engineer of the future needs to look not only at the technical aspects but also the social, political and financial influences and examine how projects fit into the community as a whole.