

## Book review

### Waterways for tomorrow.

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. June 2000.

Britain's inland waterways are diverse: canals, the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads, navigable drains of the Fens and navigable sections of the Thames, Severn, Trent and smaller rivers. For a very long time, water has been regarded as an attractive feature of urban development, even when there was no expectation of using it for transport. In the past 10–15 years there have been many regeneration projects in industrial towns and cities featuring canals as a significant part of the design, and in most cases they are also used for leisure purposes: examples are in Birmingham, Manchester, Salford, Sheffield and Nottingham, to mention just a few.

*Waterways for tomorrow* is another daughter publication of the Government White Paper (*A new deal for transport: better for everyone*, July 1998). Quite a lot of attention is devoted to regeneration and conservation without taking these policies much further than is already well-known. This is not a work of authoritative and innovative leadership; often it leaves the impression of following rather than leading.

Several times, waterways are described as a 'catalyst' for urban, social or economic regeneration (for example in paragraphs 2.16, 6.43 and 6.54). This is a rather sweeping analogy which makes a number of unsubstantiated and questionable assumptions about connections between waterways and regeneration. The part played by waterways in regeneration is too important to be left to hyperbole and dubious metaphor; it deserves more thought and analysis than it has been given in this document.

Readers of a policy statement on regeneration will look for guidance on what kind of development is proposed and for whom it is intended. They might be confused by the tension between hopes and practice reflected in 'The improvement and restoration of waterways is improving the environment and bringing back life back to deprived areas' (paragraph 2.16) and

'Leeds Waterfront is now one of the most desirable residential areas in the north of England' (paragraph 6.47). Partnership is the theme underlying implementation throughout this document. It should be recognized that partnership means that there must be something for all the parties needed to secure implementation and this means that there will be compromise of policies.

Safety receives little attention. 'Safety on the inland waterways is important and we want the highest standards to be achieved' (paragraph 5.2)—a remarkably scanty policy for a document proposing to use waterways to promote housing development, sport and recreation. The document is not much more innovative about resolving conflicts between navigation and the environment: 'The Government believes that the different parties should work together constructively to resolve these difficulties' (paragraph 6.35).

'Catalyst' is not the only expression used loosely. 'System', 'sustainable' and 'integrated' are all used liberally and in contexts where their interpretation is left unclear. 'The inland waterways system has its origins in local initiatives and has never formed a fully integrated national network' (paragraph 5.1); that is, the waterways system was never a system. But why should it be? Waterside occupiers might be alarmed at the prospect of a 'vibrant waterway system' (paragraph 3.8).

This is not a very helpful document. It does not have a lot to say; it is too much like an attempt to promote the waterways rather than an attempt to set out a rigorous and balanced analysis of their potential. However, it does express a Government interest in the use of waterways as a focus for regeneration and therefore could be used to support a case for planning permission, for example. It also gives some useful contacts for organizations involved in waterways and reviews some of their recent work.

B. J. SIMPSON

*Proc. Instn Civ. Engrs Mun. Engr*,  
2000, **139**, Dec.,  
275