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## Editorial

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The word 'leisure' prompts images of free time, time spent with friends and family, vacations and recreation. Leisure is a key determinant of quality of life. Most people work hard to reach a position where they can spend a significant proportion of their time in leisure-related activities. They are also willing to pay for the benefits afforded by various leisure services. In the context of an ageing and relatively well-off society such as that of the United Kingdom, leisure activities take up a significant proportion of people's time and money. Leisure is a booming industry and engineers play a key role in enabling people to enjoy leisure services.

Engineering is primarily about people. Hence professional bodies such as the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) are involved in exploring issues related to human aspirations. Nonetheless, there are very few academic or professional journal issues dedicated to leisure. Do professionals feel *uncomfortable* discussing public toilets, surfing, sightseeing, boating, walking, cycling and people's perspectives and expectations on such issues? Another angle is that discussions around leisure may be relatively new to engineering circles. The focus of this issue therefore, is on recreational services. Readers will find a variety of policy and practice issues covered, all of which are important for leisure activities.

Clara Greed reminds us that in the UK local authorities do not have a statutory duty to provide public toilets, but may do so if they wish. Because expenditure on their provision is optional, the status of public toilets has declined, even though people spend more time away from home on leisure activities. Proper provision is a measure of the quality of leisure services. The author also notes that 'lack of provision [of public toilets] affects some groups more than others, especially women, the elderly and people with disabilities'. The paper provides an interesting account of the status of public toilets and how neglecting such an important service can have social and economic impacts. The institutional aspects of developing a strategy are also discussed, as are the implications of such a strategy on professionals such as engineers and planners.

In the second paper, Anthony Weight proposes that the development of artificial reefs to generate suitable waves would allow people to surf year-round. Beaches attract tourists, including surfers, and good waves attract more surfers and hence more tourists. It is exciting to know that 'it is possible to design a reef that under common swell and wind conditions would

produce waves of very high quality for surfing'. However, the technological, socio-economic and environmental impacts all need to be understood if the overall development of a local area is to be optimised.

Geoff Nickolds tells us that water reservoirs are not just for holding water; they also have recreational, socio-economic, educational and environmental functions. The private sector is prepared to work with the public sector in partnership to improve the leisure-related role of water reservoirs, which (as the paper highlights) can attract people and development to local areas. Still, issues related to climate change will need to be considered in developing reservoirs; it is also important that an appropriate balance between social and economic objectives be maintained.

In a later paper, Gareth Maeer and Glenn Millar trace the history of waterways and their regeneration. Waterways are not just part of the UK's cultural heritage, they are also vital to leisure activities such as boating, fishing, recreational walking and cycling, sightseeing and festival events. Lesson learning, as part of a monitoring and evaluation exercise, is crucial to the improvement of waterway-related leisure. The authors report that a 'benefits led' approach could be used in identifying and quantifying economic, social and environmental impacts.

Jacquetta Fewster then presents the case for walking, a popular activity that is not only good for health but also creates employment (200,000 full-time jobs) and opportunities in local economies. However, in England, '35 per cent of the paths are difficult or impossible to use', hence the 'challenge for local authorities is to bring rights of way and other means of public access into good condition, by recognising the value of public access, reviewing management procedures, allocating sufficient resources from the ground settlement and making use of [other] sources of support'.

Brenda Clough sketches the contrast in approach to public access between England and Scotland. While it is predicted that in England new areas of land will become open for public use, the situation in Scotland is not so clear. In Scotland, as a result of new legislation, the idea that 'private property [can be] equated to private pleasure' will no longer be applicable.

In the next piece Edward Chorlton describes efforts being made in Devon to develop and sustain support for leisure activities such as walking, cycling and leisure travel. There is a growing

understanding that an increased volume of tourism can have negative environmental impacts. The author argues that understanding these impacts would lead to more protective measures being taken by planners, engineers and environmental specialists leading to a more sustainable approach. 'Customer satisfaction lies at the heart of successful implementation of sustainable tourism policies.' The author concludes with a list of lessons learned from his experience in Devon.

In her paper Leigh Robinson points out an interesting dilemma: that any increase in the quality of services in response to customer expectations then increases the level of those expectations. Is it a public duty, then, to keep on satisfying ever-growing customer expectations? The paper argues for a shift in emphasis 'from the management of service quality, to a focus on the management of the expectations of their customers' in the context of existing constraints.

Finally, John Thackray, Wendy Otter and Robert Huxford report on 'the status of rural routes' and argue for the provision of better rural roads. Here there is an interesting move of emphasis from infrastructure to services. They argue that engineers should broaden their vision from just 'management of the asset, to embrace the management of the experience people have of using the network'. Approaches to demand assessment are discussed and it is noted that there is a huge demand for 'quiet recreation'. Should engineers be governed by consideration of the needs of motorists only? A system for management and improvement of rural routes is proposed to address these issues.

People-centred engineering is about engineering for people. This issue of *Municipal Engineer* deals with an important aspect of people's activities—leisure. I hope that this will generate an informed and passionate discussion on leisure activities and services in the context of the important role that engineers play.