

2010-2020 - the decade of city centre

The Rochester venue for this year's WCC was justified by the ambitious plan to rewater the enlarged Erie Canal aqueduct. The Flour City's preferred scheme does not provide for connection with the Genesee Arm of the Erie Barge Canal, but restores the aqueduct and enhances it by setting it in the context of a linear water park, suggesting the path of the historic canal. Many cities throughout the world are showing an increasing awareness of the value of going one step further, by restoring navigation in their heart, and investing accordingly...

The Rochester plan is of huge importance for the city, and represents a giant leap for planning of downtown urban renewal in the USA. To give some context, and assist the planners in fine-tuning the scheme, let's look at the context, with examples from other cities.

As in many other areas, the UK has been in the forefront of what is now a world trend. **Birmingham** was celebrated by the WCC in 1996, **Glasgow** and **Edinburgh** in 2003 and **Liverpool** in 2007. The last three have in common the addition of substantial new infrastructure to tap into the navigable network, without which the 'waterfront' would be deprived of the vitality which only animated water space can give.

Animation comes from use of the water space that is directly related to its historic function of waterborne commerce. It is adaptive reuse at its best, underlining the value of the heritage of quays, warehouses, cranes, locks and all the appurtenant features.

IWI is not a boating organisation, but it believes in the value of inland navigations forming a network, to be enjoyed by the greatest number; at the top of the pyramid of waterway users are the long-distance boaters who give the network its justification, its image and appeal to those visiting on the river bank or canal towpath.

The boldest scheme of all is probably **Tokyo's Nihonbashi River revival**. This is not a canal but a river which was historically used like a canal for transporting goods to the central market area close to the Emperor's Palace. Tokyo hoped to host the Olympic Games in 2016 by making the historic Edo period centre a sensitively restored and landscaped waterfront, demolishing the expressway which at present casts its forbidding shadow over a 5km length of the river. The 1625 bridge, with boats moving up and down the river, would be the future magnet for tourists and completely change the city's image. Water quality improvement is also a critical issue, and great progress has already been made, involving the population in voluntary clean-up activities which would make even the UK's Waterway Recovery Group pale with envy: where else would you have an annual bridge-scrubbing day, or a day for throwing hundreds of thousands of purifying mud-balls into the river bed?



inals?



We could have included **Milan** in this feature, but plans for the Universal Exhibition in 2015 contain no significant development on the Lombardy canals as navigations. A canal surrounding the exhibition site (like a modern moat) is closer in its design and functions to the Rochester 'water park' development.

After many years of hesitation on its waterfront projects, **Lille** is likely to be in the news in the coming years, thanks to its bold plans for restoring 'three arms' of the old canalised river Deûle. The most ambitious is the 'Avenue du Peuple Belge' rewatering **1**, which in its second phase will bring boats right into the historic centre of Lille. The Cantelieu Arm and Bois Blancs basin **2** are easier to achieve in navigation terms, but could also have a major impact by including a boat harbour and waterfront development giving the quarter the aspect of an alternative city centre, combining heritage with the modern image of the 'Euratechnologies' business park. Restoration of the link to the most central 'arm', the Bassin de Wauit **3** will be much more difficult to achieve because of the major road works required, as will the link from the Moyenne Deûle to the Basse Deûle, with a lock **4**.

Ghent is also setting a fine example with its restored link and new lock (see News p.13), while **Toulouse** is preparing grand designs for its two canals and the navigable length of the river Garonne, to be linked more effectively than in the past.

A spectacular networking project is **Leipzig's** link to the Saale, which is being promoted by our corporate member the Saale-Elster Kanal Vörderverein. This has three separate components, and the promoters are to be commended for their vision in bringing the three together into a single comprehensive project. The plan identifies the first two. South-east of the Linden Harbour, built as part of the high-capacity waterway during World War II but left uncompleted for two-thirds of a century, is the *Durchstich* or cut through **5** to the Karl-Heine Kanal which runs on towards the city centre. The limits of the new section of canal are shown on the plan. It includes a widening in the 'double bend' to form an attractive basin, opening on to an extensive public

park **6**. A second cut is required to link with the completed section of the canal beyond the harbour **7**. The third component is the proposed new boat lift, inspired by the Falkirk Wheel, dropping the 23m to the level of the Saale. The lift would be erected beside the remains of the two imposing locks which bear testimony to engineering prowess and would be preserved as monuments. **see 11**

