

Princes Boulevard Regeneration

The regeneration works to Princes Boulevard are now complete, the whole scheme including the public realm and road improvements came to a to an eye-watering £4 million. This scheme is part of Liverpool City Region's Sustainable Transport Enhancement Package (STEP). Principal designers for the Princes Avenue/Road scheme were Amey Consulting. Landscape architects were BCA Landscaping with principal contractor – nmcn Plc. It includes a new cycle path, footpath, planting, sculptures and interpretation panels as well as resurfaced roads and changes to the Boulevard. I took a little walk down it recently and read the plaques and have tried out the cycle route a few times too. Here are some pictures and thoughts of my wander. It has been looking lovely in the autumnal colours.



Princes Road was completed in 1846, not long after Princes Park (1842-43) designed by Joseph Paxton. The Boulevard was very grand, the "Park Lane" of Liverpool it has been dubbed. Its Victorian elegance is still very striking today, even if some of the houses are now in not so fine fettle.

It is made up of Princes Road (northbound) /Ave (southbound) /Boulevard (central reservation) This often results in some confusion. I can understand that the different carriageways might not be known to everyone but recently I've also seen many on social media refer to it as 'Princess' Avenue and 'Princess' Park!



Beginning at the end closest to Princes Road Synagogue is the first interpretation plaque on the central boulevard and this relates to the empty Huskisson plinth. The plaque explains Huskisson's role in defending slavery in Parliament and in 1826 championing the Consolidated Slave Law as a compromise of sorts between the abolitionists and the planters, rather than supporting calls for immediate abolition. The original statue here was taken down by activists in 1982. So our toppling much pre-dates recent events in Bristol. The statue was re-sited in Duke's Terrace on a new plinth, the original plinth remaining here in L8.

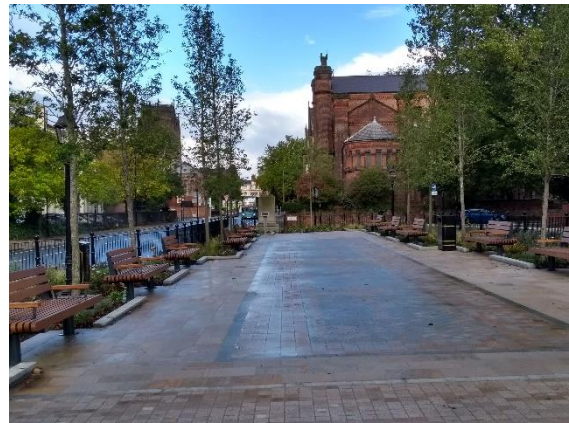
There is also a newly planted sweet chestnut tree, which grows all over the world, and a plaque reading "Paths of peace, trees of knowledge, birds of freedom, leaves of hope". This is in reference to a conversation that came out of the community engagement process:

"During the engagement a member of the local Buddhist group attended, along with members of the other churches from on and near the boulevard. He explained that the Boulevard is used as a meditation walk by members of the Buddhist group. Other Faiths on the Avenue have also used the boulevard for 'Faith Walks', meeting together to walk and chat. Our Buddhist



friend left us a quote from Thich Nhat Hahn which says, '*We are all leaves on one tree*'.¹

In this area there is some decorative planting and a herb garden. I spotted fennel, sage, rosemary and parsley. I do think they've rather overdone the benches here: no fewer than 12 benches in this area, right in the centre of a noisy dual carriageway. I cannot imagine it is a place where people would want to congregate or spend some time reclining for long as the traffic noise is quite intrusive. I think they've missed a trick here: maybe it could have been made into a boudrome or petanque court as you see in public squares in France.



Faiths The next interpretive plaque is about faith. It reminded me of our 'Faith' walk, led ably by Les and Dianne Cox on our Blue Badge training course.

It details a little about several religious buildings and communities in the area, including the 'Welsh cathedral' - an estimated 120,000 Welsh migrated to Liverpool between 1857 and 1911. The building was the tallest in Liverpool when it was constructed but it has seen a sad demise. My son Jackson is quite confounded by this building, "Why doesn't a builder come and fix the roof?" he says with the inquisitive and beautifully naïve outlook of a six year-old. Ah, if only life were that simple! Apparently there are plans for the charity "KIND", who have a site off Hope Street, to develop it but who knows in these times if that will come to fruition. Also mentioned on the Faith plaque is the Al Rahma mosque, the original building from 1974.

There is also the words on the floor "Princes Boulevard. Our home, our life, our future"



L8 garden



The original '8' chain sculpture, which has been moved here from its position near the Huskisson plinth, has been joined by a large 'L', which is hand-etched with a map of the area from the 1800s. I had always assumed the chain number 8 referenced slavery but the plaque says it was designed by schoolchildren to represent the connection between a ship and its anchor. There are also granite blocks with words such as "Ebbs and flows", "diaspora", underlining links with the sea and inward migration. It is a

¹ <https://www.cultureliverpool.co.uk/tree-of-life-2/>

poignant addition referencing the diverse community in the surrounding area, L8 of course being home to Britain's oldest black community, with some Liverpoolians being able to trace their black heritage for as many as ten generations.

Culture Liverpool led on the creative engagement process, which saw them working alongside the Friends of Princes Avenue and Mandela 8 to commission contributions from local arts organisations. These include Writing on the Wall, Toxteth TV and artist Helen Davies, who worked with over 150 children from Windsor Primary, Princes Primary, Kingsley Primary, St Patricks and St Silas Primary schools, helping shape the design of public artwork, the granite paving and inscriptions, and interpretational signage.

A full website accompanies the scheme... <https://www.cultureliverpool.co.uk/princes-avenue/>

This concludes the first island with Upper Warwick Street on the right.



On the next island of the Boulevard is a plaque on **Activism** in L8 detailing the establishment and works of the Liverpool 8 Law Centre – formed originally as the L8 Defence Committee on the second day of uprisings in Toxteth to monitor police behaviour. It also pays tribute to the Liverpool Black Sisters, whose home for a time was in the basement of the L8 law centre on 33-36 Princes Ave. Their dream for their own building was realised in the development of the Kuumba Imani Millennium centre, also located on Princes Ave.

The Victorian drinking fountain has not been renovated but I have read that plans exist for this.



There has been no prettying up of the electricity huts and their benches which now stand out like a sore thumb– murals by local artists would have been an option. Maybe this is in the pipeline but I am guessing or rather hoping now



To the left is Arthur Dooley's 'Black Christ' on the Methodist Church. Also murals on the side of the BEES education and training centre including Toxteth born footballer Nikita Parris in her England strip. The junction with North Hill street is on the opposite side.



If you are cycling this path, as I have done with my son (who recently relinquished his stabilisers to his great delight!) it is a pleasantly quiet and smooth path. However, you do get stuck at several crossing points when

joining and leaving the different parts of the boulevard and the islands, often waiting for a long time for the “green bike” (green man symbol for cyclists) to appear. I have seen several keen cyclists and riders for services such as Uber Eats etc just preferring to cycle down the main carriageway instead for ease and speed. In fact when I was inserting my photos into this document I found I had accidentally captured someone doing just that! There have been complaints from cyclists that it was obviously not designed by a cyclist. There is certainly a myriad of road markings as shown here that end up looking a bit over the top and confusing. I think the original intention was for cycle path to continue uninterrupted but the turning points and access for cars needed to be maintained. I would welcome more cycling routes in Liverpool but they do need to be useful. It’s calm and good for people building up confidence to ride though.



Views through to Granby Four Streets, some renovated, some in progress.

Plaque number 5 details the nightclubs in the area and their contribution to the music scene – 40 clubs were present in a two-mile radius. It highlights the influence and contribution from music of black origin and different countries. Also highlighting the influence on the Mersey sound/Merseybeat scene. The panel shows the former location of several of these along the carriageway.



Next a panel about history, where I was stunned to find out that Streatlam Tower next to St Margaret’s church held the first dedicated public museum of Japanese art in the western world! The museum was paid for by James Lord Bowes, a wealthy wool merchant and art collector. A fancy fair in 1891 attracted 20,000 people in six days! The building was taken over by the Igbo Community Association in the 1980s, and more recently converted to student accommodation. We also find information on the Adult Deaf and Dumb Institute, 1887, designed by EH Banner, in an octagonal shape. Another interesting building which you wish was still in use today but sits seemingly uncared for.

At the end of the boulevard is a paved area with quotes from Nelson Mandela. This will be a nice gateway to the future Nelson Mandela memorial planned for Princes Park which is being coordinated by the Mandela8 organisation, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and designed by ‘Wayward’. It will encompass permanent artworks reflecting themes from Mandela’s life. One will be a bridge linking an island in Princes Park to the path, referencing Robben island and the fact that Mandela’s work and struggles were about building bridges and connecting people. The Memorial will be installed in a garden setting and Nelson Mandela established gardens in Pollsmoor prison and it was one of the few things he could control; The Memorial will be made of limestone and limestone was the stone Nelson Mandela quarried in prison; There are 32 cylindrical pillars for seating and Nelson Mandela used 16 oil drums cut in half to cultivate 32 planters to make his gardens in prison. These planters were cleverly used to hide and get his manuscripts out of prison. 32 also represents the

size of a UK classroom; The pavilion represents the tutor and in prison people would gather round in a circle to listen and be taught disguising or hiding the tutor.²



The 3 chosen Nelson Mandela quotes engraved on the floor on the boulevard are:

‘The greatest glory in living is not in falling but rising every time we fall’

‘When people are determined they can overcome everything’

‘There can be no greater gift than that of giving one’s time and energy to helping others without expecting anything in return’

There are stone/granite features at the end reflecting the emblem from the Sunburst gates of Princes Park, here in gold, silver and bronze. The original designed by Sir James Pennethorne, is visible opposite. A charming finish to the scheme. Walking and cycling is not forbidden, yet (!) so why not enjoy a stroll along the Boulevard yourself?

As a further ode to Toxteth, the neighbourhood I call home, I would like to share with you these fabulous and quirky things.



² <https://www.mandela8.org.uk/about/>



You may spot this wacky swan head in the garden of number 150 Princes Ave!

How about buying some “Tocky Chocky” as a Christmas gift? Toxteth Chocolate is the creation of Rebecca Birtwistle, a Liverpool-based chocolatier living and working in Toxteth, who says

“I want to inject some fun and innovation into the world of chocolate - and a little bit of Liverpool flavour, too! I’m inspired by the vibrancy, variety and colour of my neighbourhood everyday, and hopefully my chocolates reflect that” .



They certainly look like fun pops of colour, I am yet to sample them but hope to soon. Available online from <https://www.toxtethchocolate.com/> or in store in ‘Merseymade ‘, L1.

Lastly this gorgeous print of Princes Park is designed by Sumuyya Khader , a Liverpool-based artist and the founder of Granby Press, a community-led risograph printing press. The print is available to buy from her online shop here:

<https://sumuyya.bigcartel.com/product/princes-park>



PRINCES PARK