

Our Policy on Liverpool's World Heritage Site





1. Foreword

1.1.

Liverpool's World Heritage Site is facing a critical period. The Merseyside Civic Society [MCS] is represented on the World Heritage Site Steering Group and has consistently supported the notion that exciting new development can, and should, co-exist with and support a rigorous conservation programme.

1.2.

The MCS applauds the tremendous conservation work that has been carried out in Liverpool in recent years, but recognises those arguments that have arisen over the skyline and waterfront, notably in relation to the 'Liverpool Waters' proposals, which include tall buildings and a new waterfront stadium.

1.3.

Peel have released a revised set of Computer Generated Images [CGIs] for Liverpool Waters. These are obviously intended to allay some of the fears that have been expressed on behalf of UNESCO. The trouble with CGIs is that, unlike sketches and diagrams, they leave little to the imagination and what you actually see can look dull and strangely empty. Nevertheless, there is still an allowance for taller buildings on Clarence Dock, and it is noted that the water channel between Nelson Dock and the working North Docks is to be preserved at Bramley-Moore Dock. The real test will be when individual projects are worked-up and scrutinised in detail, with an effective Design Review process in place.

1.4.

Accordingly, the three paragraphs that make up this White Paper have been edited and revised, following the well-attended public meeting at RIBA North on 18th April 2018. They are based on the first three paragraphs of the much longer Draft Green Paper that was circulated at that event. This new short White Paper represents agreed MCS policy, and it sits alongside our previous White Papers on Urban Design and Terraced Housing. The original MCS Draft Green Paper, with its extensive background information, is still available as a Discussion Document.



2. Decline, Evolution and Authenticity



Remarkable Conservation: White Star Line Building, St Georges Hall, Albert Dock.

2.1.

In the post-war years, Liverpool's decline was marked by a gradual thinning out of historic commercial buildings in the City Centre and the loss of many huge warehouses and structures along each side of the Dock Road. However, much of what remains has been the subject of remarkable conservation in recent years.

2.2.

Nevertheless, there are some people that are tempted by the promise of a new suburban future for the City Centre and Waterfront, a future without the powerful urban character that embodies the restless spirit of Liverpool. We need to guard against this – against the World Heritage Site, particularly the former Central Docks, being re-invented as a customised version of history, comfortable for some visitors, but lacking authenticity.

2.3.

Many of us remember the very intense urban experience, when most of the buildings were soot-black and the sky was glimpsed between overhead wires and the girders of the overhead railway. This collective memory includes tall chimneys, plumes of smoke, cranes, towers, and - of course - more ships. The city was distinctive, noisy and ever-changing. There was quality and wealth in the detail, and many layers of history – some of the stories were exciting and others were disturbing, but they all had their place in making Liverpool what it is.

2.4.

A place on the UNESCO World Heritage list is an undoubted honour - international recognition of the unique character of Liverpool, together with an inevitable international concern over its future. However, the living city cannot be treated as pure archaeology - it should seek to thrive in accordance with the best of its outgoing, ambitious and forward-looking traditions, and re-develop accordingly. Anything less would be a betrayal of the true legacy.



Towering structures lost: New Brighton, Brunswick Dock, Clarence Dock, Bibby's.

2.5.

The maritime mercantile city of the Nineteenth Century was later graced by an adventurous Twentieth Century waterfront and skyline (the Pier Head and the Cathedrals). The Twenty-first Century should also be allowed to make its mark on Liverpool's evolving waterfront, as its 'Window on the World.' Blanket restrictions on height and density are likely to frustrate the quest for imagination and high quality. Liverpool is not a fixed historical composition like some other 'horizontal' World Heritage cities; in that sense, it has more in common with New York or Shanghai. For example, new towers may be more appropriate here [replacing huge lost structures beside a wide river] than they are in London.

2.6.

Our continued support for the World Heritage Site is implicit in the six principles listed below. We are determined to ensure rigorous protection of the historic buildings and artefacts and, at the same time, strive to ensure that permanent new development is of the highest quality – or, in appropriate 'temporary' cases, is reversible.

2.7.

In addition, we urge the incorporation of two additional areas that lie outside the present Buffer Zone, both of which we believe to be a critical part of the story of the Maritime Mercantile City - the Georgian terraces between and around the two Cathedrals, and the area around Woodside Ferry, including the Tunnel Portals and Ventilation Towers, Birkenhead Priory and Hamilton Square.

3. Six Principles for Liverpool's World Heritage Site

3.1. Integrated Approach

The MCS seeks an integrated approach to development and conservation in the World Heritage Site, which respects the unique cultural, social and architectural history of the site. This approach co-exists with published MCS policies on Urban Design, which argue for sustainable urban densities, mixed-use and permeability.

3.2. Nature and Spirit of the City

Unlike most other World Heritage Sites, Liverpool's designation is not based primarily on individual monuments or natural landscapes. It embraces a swathe of the City Centre and, by implication, the nature and spirit of the city itself. This is not static, it remains restless and outward-looking, and the city has a history of innovation. This distinctive character should be nurtured and celebrated throughout the World Heritage Site.

3.3. Education, Interpretation and Involvement

The MCS strongly supports a greater emphasis on education, interpretation and involvement, to engage local people and visitors in the history, significance, and understanding of Liverpool's 'Maritime Mercantile City' World Heritage Site.

3.4. Imaginative Proposals

Whilst we acknowledge UNESCO has expressed anxieties over the waterfront and skyline, we believe there should be an opportunity to examine individual imaginative proposals, which embrace Liverpool's authentic heritage and spirit, on their own merits and specific context. Peer review is an established process in academic work, and we advocate a rigorous Design Review process to help in pursuing design quality, as well as to ensure that basic 'objective' policies are met, instead of applying prescriptive rules on matters such as height and density.

3.5. Consolidation and Coherence

We would like to open a debate about selective innovative long-term projects to consolidate and enrich the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage Site. These could include [a] reconstructing the Albert Dock Clock Tower, as an essential landmark, [b] adjustments to St George's Plateau, to fulfill its potential as one of Europe's greatest public places, and [c] carefully modifying and reconstructing sections of Jesse Hartley's Dock Wall, in order to re-establish its visual coherence and continuity, and its image as a 'citadel', whilst reconciling it with the new urban design demands for permeability between the former enclosed dock estate and adjacent communities.

3.6. Both Sides of the River

Given the formal establishment of the Liverpool City Region, covering both sides of the river, there is an opportunity for a review of the existing World Heritage Site boundaries, to take in both the historic Mersey Ferry and the Birkenhead infrastructure of the Mersey Rail Tunnel and the Queensway Road Tunnel. The river flows through the Port of Liverpool, not past one side of it. A second area of potential expansion is the Georgian Quarter and the Cathedrals, as an integral part of the Mercantile Maritime City. Bearing such expansion in mind, we recommend that responsibility for management of the World Heritage Site should pass to the Liverpool City Region and its elected Mayor.



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