

LIVERPOOL MARITIME MERCANTILE CITY

INSCRIBED UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE IN 2004

Engage Liverpool is a civil society actor and not-for-profit social enterprise representing and working with the city centre resident population which currently stands at about 40,000. This brief report will reflect from that perspective and not from the position of the State Party (DCMS) with whom we have little or no influence. We very much would like to share with the members of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee our deeply held conviction that many people in the city would like to see Liverpool hold on to and value our inscription on the World Heritage List.

It is a sad reality that even in a democratic society as ours the levers of power are not always sensitive to the values and perspectives of its citizens. There are other concerns and priorities which often take precedence over the views and feelings of ordinary people. However it is true to say that if we are deleted from the List of World Heritage Sites it will be mourned mostly by those people of the city who care about our heritage and value and appreciate the honour conferred on us by UNESCO in 2004. There will be others, among them those who are currently engaged in the planning process, who will find any deletion from the List to be to their advantage. Citizens find it extremely difficult to make their voice heard when the media and the leaders of business, commerce and politics are agreed that the city needs the development which they perceive UNESCO to be curtailing. It is extremely unfortunate that the debate has been framed in this one-sided way.

It seems fair to say that UNESCO's voice has never been properly heard in the city, except perhaps in the negative way the 2012 decision to put the city on the List of World Heritage in Danger has been reported. Had we invited UNESCO to speak to people in the intervening years then we might not have ended up with the debate being framed in an either/or, binary position between economic development or heritage, growth or stagnation, progress or being held hostage to the past. Is it too late for civil actors to attempt to enable UNESCO's voice to be heard in the city and to see if there is a possibility of shifting the debate to clarify what is genuinely at stake with the present In-Danger Listing? Much of the debate around WHS status seems to have been conducted mostly between officials on both sides which has meant in practice that during what has been termed 'delicate negotiations' citizens have in effect been side-lined and excluded from having a say during this important period. We have in reality been waiting for others to make a decision that will safeguard our WHS status.

In this period stories have been carefully placed in both local and national media outlets that reflect the dominant political and developer viewpoint. As stated for many years people trusted that the State Party (National and Local Government) has wanted the best for the city and that involved protecting the World Heritage Site inscription. It has taken a long time for citizens to realise that by leaving everything in the hands of the State Party and allowing them the space and time for differences to be worked out it seems to us now that nothing has in fact been resolved in these intervening years and we continue to be at risk of losing our WHS status.

We understand the difficulties involved in organising public engagement in world heritage. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee rightly has its own processes and procedures and these we respect. However it saddens us that the effect and impact of this process in Liverpool means that the UNESCO voice we have heard sounds discordant to our ears. We are told by UNESCO that the only way we have of securing removal from the list of World Heritage in Danger is to rescind the Planning Approval for Liverpool Waters and develop a new Master Plan. This position was accompanied by a call for the City Council to agree a moratorium on all new planning decisions within the WHS. Sadly this is both unhelpful and unrealistic – for some it was seen as antagonistic, which for the many who want to be supportive of our WHS status is deeply regrettable.

Even though as a civil actor in the city we are not party to the serious negotiations between the State Party (DCMS) and UNESCO we are aware that much work has been put into reaching a compromise with Liverpool City Council, Peel Holdings and Historic England. It was hoped that compromise would be acceptable but despite everyone's best efforts so far nothing has been resolved. We feel that there is genuine openness on the part of most people in this process who want to be able to continue dialoguing and engaging with a view to a resolution that satisfies all parties.

We wonder if it might be possible to consider another option, not explored as far as we are aware, and that is the example of the Design Commission for Wales¹ which if brought across to the Liverpool WHS could offer robust and highly professional guidance with regard to design quality and heritage considerations. There needs to be an independent body that is respected and accepted by all parties that can offer serious and reputable scrutiny to preserve and protect WHS assets going forward. Also we think it is important that we not only think about the architectural and structural content of the built environment but also that intangible value of 'place' which is so important to people like us who live within the WHS area. It is crucial to us that we start creating neighbourhoods within the city centre and waterfront that are places for health and wellbeing and not just places of high land-value for the enrichment of a few. We believe it is possible to design a new neighbourhood area of growth and development for the city on the WHS land and buffer zone at Liverpool Waters that truly benefits the future health and wellbeing needs of a growing city centre residential and worker population. Contemporary development needs to support and add to the outstanding universal value of the asset, the urban fabric, and not merely be neutral.

It is unfortunate that it appears that the entire UNESCO World Heritage status is being held hostage to this one part of the site on the Waterfront, when the whole site is extensive and spread across many different areas of the city centre none of whose owners have expressed the desire to see World Heritage status removed from the city. It isn't clear to citizens what is really going on behind the scenes, in the corridors of power, behind closed doors where decisions are made. However what is clear is that the time has come to express our feelings and to make the civic case for preserving and protecting the status UNESCO has conferred on the city. It is obvious to everyone that we haven't made the most of the status that we have as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

On a very positive note Liverpool WHS Steering Group is belatedly publishing a WHS Management Plan which is very welcome and though we would have preferred a longer and better organised consultation process it contains some excellent recommendations and guidelines that we are keen to support and work with. At this stage it isn't yet clear what resources will be required to implement the various suggestions and strategies in the Plan. We are indeed glad to see that something is happening at last and there appears to be in some quarters a renewed will to try and turn a page on the recent past.

There have been few if any attempts to connect the WHS with tourism and the visitor economy and no figures are available to show the potential financial asset that the WHS status is to the city economy. This has meant that many businesses in the city and city region are unaware of the value of heritage assets to their annual turnover. We don't have a dedicated WHS Officer and it is a sad fact that with such serious cuts from national government to the city budget this will be a difficult position for the city council to fund. However there is no doubt that we need this level of resource if we are to be taken seriously in our determination to protect WHS status. The University of Liverpool has a Heritage Theme Lead who is determined to engage academics in the issues surrounding the World Heritage Site and this is to be welcomed. Perhaps a greater involvement from academics will mean that the Historic Urban Landscape standards and processes will be better understood in the city and they will be used to improve our management of the site.

¹ <http://dcfw.org/design-review>

City centre residents and citizens from across the Liverpool City Region need to know more about the basic principles of the Heritage Cycle. The virtuous cyclical process aims to make the past part of the future by showing that by understanding the historic environment people value it, by valuing it they will care for it, through caring for it people enjoy it and from enjoying the historic environment there comes a desire to understand more about it. This is something we can all work with and indeed are committed to realising. The first stage is understanding, which then leads to valuing.

Engage Liverpool is organising a number of activities to promote both the understanding and valuing of the World Heritage Site. Every year in the autumn we facilitate a three-part seminar series bringing international and national speakers to contribute to an issue that residents feel concerned about and this year the decision was made to focus on the World Heritage Site status because it is so obviously at risk. We have agreed that we will bring UNESCO-connected speakers to the city in order that UNESCO can have an unrivalled opportunity to share their perspective and concerns with the general public. Speakers confirmed are Isabelle Anatole-Gabriel, UNESCO Chief of the Europe and North America Unit at the World Heritage Centre, Paris; Michael Turner, UNESCO Chair in Urban Design and Conservation Studies at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem; and Minja Yang, former Deputy Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Paris and Director of the UNESCO WHS Regional Office in Delhi currently President and Professor at Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium.

They will be accompanied by speakers with a national perspective including Henry Owen-John, Head of International Advice, Historic England; Adam Wilkinson, Director Edinburgh World Heritage; and Sarah McLeod: CEO Arkwright Society, Derwent Valley Mills WHS. We would expect to have between 120-150 participants in each seminar. We have been fundraising to enable us to mount a strong media campaign to support the seminar series. But this isn't all. We have agreed to bring Jekaterina Lavrinec, Associate Professor in Urban Studies at the Faculty of Creative Industries, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Lithuania, who has designed a Board Game called Urbingo that is a most creative way of achieving participatory engagement between the urban population and the historic built environment. Workshops will be organised in the city between August and September to deliver a unique project that will be available for the use of students, young people and families as well as tourists and visitors. This will be financed from resources we have been able to draw down from European funders.

Liverpool City Council and probably DCMS (the State Party) will already have informed UNESCO about the workshop being organised with the help of Prof Foxhall, the Heritage Theme Lead at the University of Liverpool on 28th June. This is a clear indication of the efforts being made to turn a page on the recent past and Engage Liverpool supports all these efforts and will work with them to add to the growing number of voices in the city who want to make sure we are not deleted from the prestigious UNESCO WHS List. As citizens and residents we are trying to encourage our council to show a real commitment to the assets we hold in trust and to work with them to change perceptions and make greater use of the WHS listing to add value to the economic and social fabric of the city.

In the light of Engage's programme, and the many other efforts that are being made to keep our Listing as a World Heritage Site, we respectfully ask that UNESCO World Heritage Committee make a decision that gives us time to bring about some of the changes that both yourselves and ourselves as cultural and civic actors desire. You hold the future of our status in your hands and it is the people of the city who ask you today to think of us and not only of the official parties that you continually work with and in whose hands also lies the future direction of Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City UNESCO World Heritage Site. This is our city as much as theirs and our status as much as if not more than, theirs. Can you possibly send out a signal that UNESCO supports the efforts of ordinary people to play a significant part in protecting and preserving a status that means so much to us? We cannot change that which we have no power to change but we can change that which is within our remit to change and that is what we want to do. Please assist our efforts and give us a reason to hope and to work hard.

BIOGRAPHY:

Gerry Proctor gained his first degree at the University of Durham with an Honours in Theology and that was complemented by a Masters in Philosophy at Liverpool Hope University with a thesis entitled 'A Commitment to Neighbourhood'. He has worked for 8 years with young people in the town of St Helens and then spent 6 years living and working in Latin America in poor communities in Ecuador and Bolivia. He then returned to the UK to Liverpool where he was born and worked for 12 years in charge of one of the largest Roman Catholic communities in the city. In the past decade he has lived in the apartment complexes of the city centre and waterfront working with residents and founding Engage Liverpool which works to improve the quality of life for everyone and raise the profile of urban issues to improve the sustainability of city living. He sits on the Liverpool World Heritage Site Steering Group.