

# Heritage as a Catalyst for Urban Regeneration

**Interrogations and Propositions for the  
World Heritage Site of Liverpool**

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## Introduction

A study of designation, categorisation and consequence of world heritage assets will inevitably throw up quite different interrogations and propositions. The statutory framework for the protection of the historic environment, in terms of selection process and policy guidance, has resulted in a collection of processes that are a subject for criticism. Likewise, identifying and prioritising heritage values has proved to be a very complex practice. In particular, the commodification of heritage brings with it contention. The assessment of new introductions to a heritage setting has proved to be one of the most critical problems in urban design. The crux of the challenge therefore is the development of natural and cultural heritage, including all its associated values, in a sustainable way.

This article addresses the criteria and the impacts of the designation of world heritage assets, briefly highlighting the United Kingdom (UK) current situation. This article's aim is to underline the contemporary challenges and opportunities for the world heritage site of Liverpool, which exemplifies a critical example of safeguarding historical patrimony in a sustainable way.

## World Heritage Site

When a site is inscribed on the World Heritage List (WHL), it is recognised as having outstanding universal value along with authenticity and integrity values. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) criteria addressed in the, periodically revised, Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (1972): the designation can be cultural, natural or mixed (cultural and natural) heritage, if a site meets one or more of the ten criteria shown opposite.

Each country or 'State Party' who signed The Convention recognises its primary duty to ensure the identification,

<p><b>Cultural Heritage Designation Criteria: the asset must...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;</li> <li>(ii) Exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;</li> <li>(iii) Bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;</li> <li>(iv) Be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;</li> <li>(v) Be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;</li> <li>(vi) Be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Natural Heritage Designation Criteria: the asset must...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(vii) Contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;</li> <li>(viii) Be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;</li> <li>(ix) Be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;</li> <li>(x) Contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.</li> </ul>

protection, and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage situated on its territory (Feilden and Jokilehto 1998).

**Above:** Table (1) Heritage designation Criteria  
Source: (UNESCO 2008)

The nomination of a site implies changes and identifies challenges. Along with the Operational Guidelines, a significant number of international policy documents are guiding the process of revitalising heritage environments; these documents were promulgated as charters, conventions,

recommendations or resolutions by pioneer organisations such as UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM and the Council of Europe, in conjunction with national strategies authorised by each State Party for safeguarding its local heritage built environment. However, a number of documents are not clear and some are ambiguous in their recommendations, which has led to inappropriate application when conserving heritage properties (Hardy 2009).

Increased numbers of visitors require new facilities, and attract opportunities for investments; new developments driven by economic profit, along with possible inappropriate contemporary uses and interpretations of heritage, might generate disregard for significant aspects of character, such as intrinsic, intangible and social values. Globalisation pressures that favour common branding and standardisation has been a particular issue (Lehtimäki 2006; EAHTR, 2007). Likewise, despite the economic and reviving impacts offered by new interventions (single and urban) within heritage contexts, consequences on the visual character and on the defining spirit of the places concerned have been arisen. Thus, in some cases, heritage has been perceived as producing instrumental benefits, rather than being conceptualised as important for its own sake. The set of values assigned have often been driven by the economic benefits that can occur either from the material reality of the historic environment, or from the image of age and 'historicness' it conveys (Pendlebury 2009). The critical challenge, consequently, is to ensure safeguarding all values associated with heritage assets when conserving, regenerating or investing in heritage development that facilitates its employment in a current context. What is most important is to hand it to future generations with all its key defining characteristics preserved.

The UK, among European countries, has a wide experience in investing in its heritage properties. This article will



investigate the heritage-led regeneration concerns, with particular reference to the world heritage site of Liverpool.

**Above:** Figure 1, Southgate Project in Bath under construction 2009

### World Heritage Sites In The United Kingdom

The UK is fortunate to have thirty eight world heritage sites, along with a considerable number of conservation areas and listed buildings. Conservation became established as a major objective of planning policy in the 1970s and 1980s. Regenerating historic inheritance has been one of the cornerstones of economic and social revival of historic towns and cities in the UK (Pendlebury 2009; Rodwell 2007). A number of regeneration paradigms exemplify the different themes of investing in various heritage environments and categories. An example of conserving historic layers is perhaps best illustrated by the JORVIK archaeological site in York. A case of single building led a transformation of its surrounding area is presented by the revival of the

Monastery of St Francis in Gorton Lane, Manchester. Urban regeneration practice for commercial and development, along with an employment of historic buildings in social life has been accomplished by the regeneration of Grainger Town, Newcastle upon Tyne (Alsalloum & Sibley 2009). Moreover, the Southgate scheme in Bath (figure 1), and Hungate project in York demonstrate examples of urban interventions in heritage settings. However, a number of deficient implementations of conservation and regeneration practice have occurred. A report issued in 2006, by English Heritage & Heritage Works highlighted the most frequent reasons for cases where heritage-based regeneration projects have faltered due to unexpected costs, unfortunate use of a listed building, or abortive attempts to attract sufficient public interest or a combination of all these (EH & HW, 2006). Heritage-led regeneration practice in the world heritage site of Liverpool raises quite a number of challenges and opportunities for safeguarding its significant heritage in a sustainable way.

### **The World Heritage Site Of Liverpool**

The world heritage site of Liverpool, designated in 2004, has been a subject to a number of revitalising projects and interventions. The city had suffered from industrial decline and population loss during the second half of the 20th century, but in recent years it has been the focus of a number of regeneration and growth initiatives. Culture and heritage have historically played a constructive role in the representation of the city. In the 1960s, Liverpool regained some national and international significance as a centre for street fashion and for youth and popular culture, demonstrating a significant role for its intangible heritage and identity values as catalysts for revitalization. However, in the 1980s, the city was unable to harness the full potential of its considerable cultural vitality for place marketing purposes. Yet cultural tourism expanded enormously in Liverpool in the 1980s, and the waterfront was substantially improved (Parkinson and Bianchini 1993).

Again, the city's wider cultural and historical infrastructure, architecture and art collections were vital factors in the designation of six areas on the World Heritage List as Heritage Sites in 2004. Moreover the city was branded as the European Capital of Culture for 2008.

The six areas, comprising the world heritage site of the maritime City of Liverpool, bear witness to the development of one of the world's major trading centres in the 18th and 19th centuries. The city was awarded this accolade for the following UNESCO designation criteria:

(i): Liverpool was a major centre generating innovative technologies and methods in dock construction and port management in the 18th and 19th centuries. It thus contributed to the building up of the international mercantile systems throughout the British Commonwealth.

(ii): the city and the port of Liverpool are an exceptional testimony to the development of maritime mercantile culture in the 18th and 19th centuries, contributing to the building up of the British Empire.

(iii): Liverpool is an outstanding example of a world mercantile port city, which represents the early development of global trading and cultural connections throughout the British Empire.

The listed sites feature a great number of commercial, civic and public buildings (see figure 2).

The listed sites feature a great number of commercial, civic and public buildings. The six conservation areas are:

**Character Area 1: The Pier Head:** this is an early 20th century designed ensemble centred around three monumental commercial buildings that define Liverpool's waterfront.

**Character Area 2: Albert Dock and Wapping Dock:** this area retains its mid 19th century docks as well as many of its warehouses, water spaces and associated buildings.





**Left:** Figure 2: WHS and Buffer Zone Boundary

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**Character Area 3: Stanley Dock Conservation Area:**

this conservation area encompasses the northern part of the docks. The area is subject to current development proposals.

**Character Area 4: Castle Street / Dale Street / Old Hall Street:**

the Commercial District, as it is known, covers the historic mercantile, commercial and civic centre of Liverpool.

**Character Area 5: William Brown Street Cultural Quarter:**

this important core area encompasses the historic cultural heart of the City.

**Character Area 6: Lower Duke Street:** this forms part of the Ropewalks Area and represents an unusual survival of an area of 18th and 19th trading townscape.

Consequently, the city began to attract more visitors, and new development promoting tourism and economic benefit were rapidly established. A number of heritage-led regeneration projects have been delivered inside and on the periphery of the current heritage site as well, generating investments and improvement. Examples include the restoration of Albert Dock, the Canning Georgian Quarter, St George's Hall, and the Bluecoat Chambers, along with a number of introductions contemporary low rise, medium rise and tall buildings within the heritage areas of Liverpool (see figures 2, 3, 4 & 5). In this context, more challenges for urban planning and conservation of cultural heritage have emerged which include: providing sustainable solutions for the city's building and sites at risk; and achieving an equitable balance between regeneration and conservation.

The joint UNESCO/ICOMOS Monitoring Mission to Liverpool, in 2006, stressed the importance of producing advice and guidance documents for future development. Consequently, Liverpool City Council issued the 'Liverpool - Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site Supplementary Planning Document' (SPD) in April 2009, as a key tool for managing



### Top:

Figure 3. Introducing tall structures within Liverpool heritage fabric

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### Bottom:

Figure 4. Introducing contemporary architecture within Liverpool heritage fabric: White Star building / Pier Head area

### Top Facing:

Figure 5. Introducing contemporary architecture within Liverpool heritage fabric: Castle Street / Pier Head area



### Bottom Facing:

Figure 6. Introducing contemporary architecture within Liverpool heritage fabric: Pier Head and New Museum



the World Heritage Site (WHS). This was approved following extensive public consultation by Liverpool City Council and it noted that; “The overarching aim of this Supplementary Planning Document is to provide guidance for protecting and enhancing the outstanding universal value (OUV) of Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site, whilst encouraging investment and development which secures a healthy economy and supports regeneration”(Liverpool City Council 2009, p1).

Although the SPD underlines various interrogations and propositions for safeguarding and sustaining the WHS, in addition to presenting particular recommendations for each heritage area, there are more challenges to be addressed and more specific strategies to be adopted.

The SPD encourages replacement of existing buildings and sites that have a negative or neutral impact on the character of the WHS. Moreover, it supports delivery of viable long-term uses for historic buildings (whether listed or not) in the WHS. It enforces a very highest standard of building conservation and repair work. In addition the document urged the city to find suitable maintenance strategies and usage for a number of heritage buildings and sites at risk. The SPD required particular consideration of proposals for significant alterations to the roofscape of historic buildings. It must be clearly demonstrated that there is no suitable alternative approach to delivering an economically viable use for the building in such cases. The document also recommended safeguarding the archaeological remains in line with particular national and international policy documents.

The general guidance for development in the WHS and Buffer Zone takes into accounts the following objectives: character, continuity and enclosure, ease of movement, quality of the public realm, diversity, legibility and sustainability. In addition it proposes establishing a number of questions to assess the

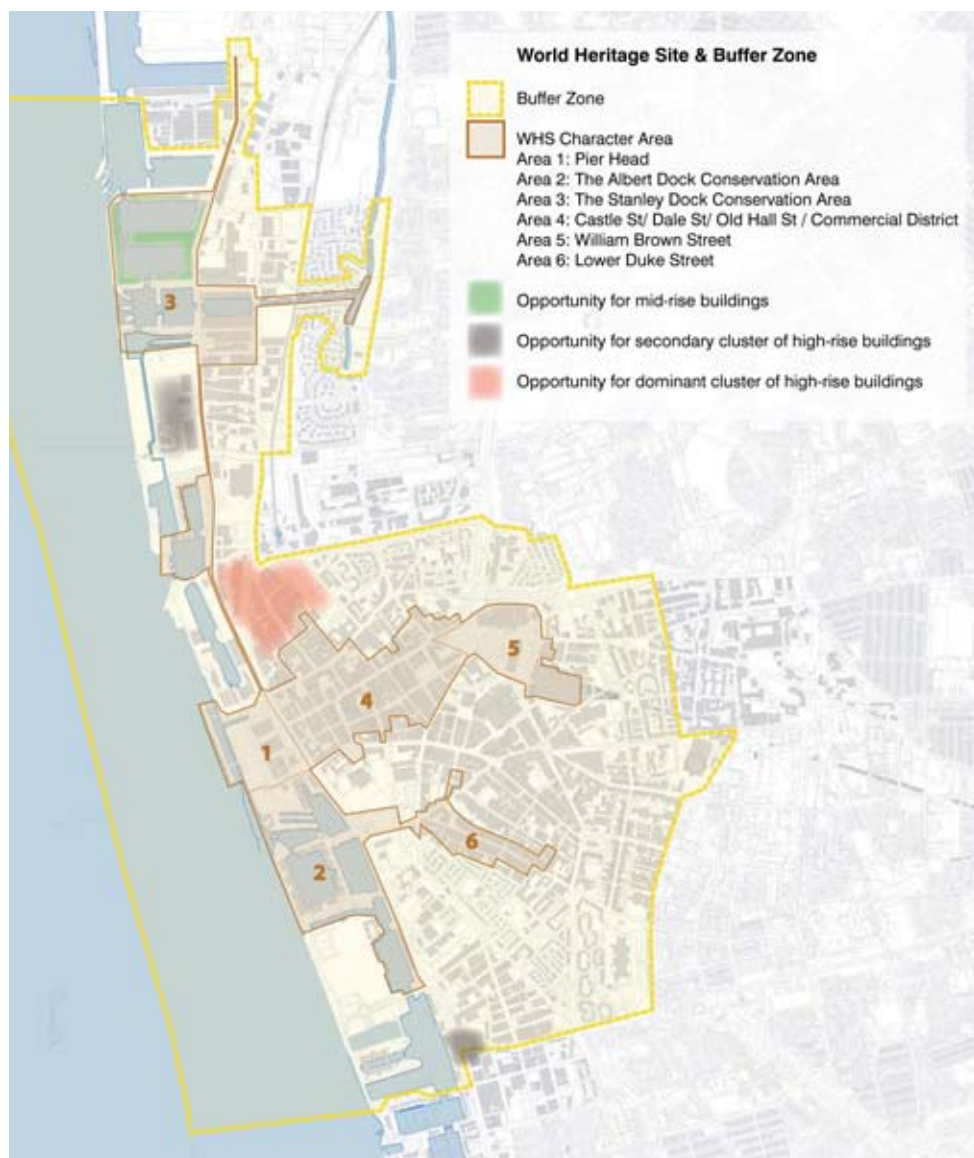
validity of any proposed reworking of the public realm. It also suggests précising of any development that affect the views to, from and within the WHS, to guarantee consideration of the WHS's OUV, along with particular proposals for constructing Tall Buildings within the WHS and Buffer Zone. However, there is no reference to the other values associated with the heritage context of Liverpool, such as social, identity, integrity, historical, settings, intrinsic, intangible, spiritual, human and educational characteristics, that are referred to in other national and international guidelines.

Furthermore, the SPD raises issues in relation to the impact of tall buildings on the character and OUV of the heritage site. UNESCO have noted concern about tall buildings within the heritage sites of the UK: "As such it is critical that, in accordance with international, national and local planning policy, future tall building developments are appropriately sited and designed to ensure that their impact on the World Heritage Site and other designated heritage assets such as listed buildings and conservation areas is minimised" (Liverpool City Council 2009, p56).

But it would be wrong and too restrictive to rule out the addition of new tall buildings on, or close to, the Liverpool WHS. In fact the document encourages introducing tall buildings within particular zones of the heritage site (Figure 7), in cases where they might enhance the values associated with the WHS. New architectural interventions that recognise the importance of local heritage and historical context of Liverpool have been able to exploit heritage as valuable commodity.

### Current Interventions

It is true that the historical context of Liverpool is a mix of 18th, 19th and 20th century architectural styles buildings, forming an interesting fabric of qualities and characteristics. However, a number of contemporary architectural structures



**Above:** Figure 7:  
Opportunities for Tall  
Buildings

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have already been introduced within the heritage fabric of Liverpool. This might raise the following questions: Are the recently introduced buildings of an appropriate 21st century architectural quality? Do they help establish and refresh the current identity of Liverpool? If so, how do they relate to the surrounding heritage settings, in terms of its associated values? For example, do they enhance the integrity and social values, in addition to the pride of the place that already help subsist in the surrounding heritage? Are they creating harmony with the existing structures, in terms of materials, colours, height, and style? How do these structures enhance the authentic historical context?

The directives posed by UNESCO and ICOMOS documents, presents a particular challenge particularly the Operational Guidelines 2008 that called for safeguarding the authenticity of the place throughout creating a harmony with the existing in terms of:

- Form and design;
  - Materials and substance;
  - Use and function;
  - Traditions, techniques and management systems;
  - Location and setting;
  - Language and other forms of intangible heritage;
  - Spirit and feeling; and
  - Other internal and external factors
- (ICOMOS 1994; ICOMOS 1996; ICCROM & UNESCO 2000; ICOMOS 2003; INTBAU 2007; ICOMOS 2008; UNESCO 2008).

As researchers, architects and planners, we should support the introductions of appropriate new architecture in the future by providing more appropriate guidelines and indicators for assessing new interventions (single or urban) in heritage areas, that take into consideration all heritage values, along with meeting sustainability criteria. We should also work to support the heritage of our past along with good quality



contemporary development that will become the heritage of the future, associated with all its attributed values, and at the same time sustaining it to meet the need of our future generations.

At Liverpool University School of Architecture we are reviewing and evaluating all of the existing documentations on issues related to appropriate development in a heritage context. Some of this work is already published, and a comprehensive study will be reported shortly.

Again, as researchers, architects and planners we could establish cooperation between different heritage cities facing or that have faced similar challenges, facilitating exchange of lessons learned. For example, and to name a few, what could Liverpool learn from the case of Gorton Monastery in Manchester, in terms of revitalising significant structures associated with the identity and integrity of local communities, and employ them again in contemporary social life: and how could the regeneration experience of Grainger town in Newcastle support the regeneration approach in Liverpool, in terms of reusing historic buildings and enhancing roof space/scape?

## Conclusion

The historical sediments that a city lays down can be envisaged as an urban grammar of continuity. They include rich, though often fragmented, environmental knowledge on architectural forms, regional materials and skill, local details and craftsmanship, patterns of circulation, potential of use, built vocabulary of associations as well as references to meanings (Lehtimäki 2006); it enriches a city to be aware of and respond to this 'urban geology'.

Hence, there is a need for a careful approach when managing heritage assets and investing in heritage to retain heritage as a valued and valuable commodity. Moreover, there is

need for a well devised local policy that identifies all values associated with the heritage site of cities such as Liverpool, concentrating on the local benefits as an important priority. This can be aided by a particular set of indicators to assess the validity of any new intervention (single and urban) in term of safeguarding heritage values in a sustainable way; and in a way that support the addition of high quality contemporary architecture.

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## Ataa Alsalloum

Ataa's interest in Heritage started about a decade ago when she was undergraduate student at Homs University in Syria. Studying the bazaars of the historic city Aleppo in her fourth year, she undertook a design-based research graduation project to design a Phoenician village in the archaeological site of Amrit.

Subsequently, she carried out research during her Diploma degree on how traditions and customs affect the planning design of historic Arabic cities. Concurrently, she worked as an architect in the Ministry of Tourism, being involved in the tourism management of the archeological site of Palmyra.

Appointed in 2001 as a Teaching Assistant at the University of Damascus School of Architecture, Atta taught architectural design and town planning. Her involvement with a number of management projects led to a master degree investigating factors affecting the decisions for choosing and designing new neighbourhoods adjacent to historic cities.

In 2007 she was awarded a scholarship from the University of Damascus to study a PhD at the University of Liverpool's School of Architecture. She is currently undertaking her PhD research project; Cultural Heritage led Sustainable Urban Regeneration, with the ultimate aim of fostering a more precise understanding of cultural heritage issues, and to facilitate a contribution to safeguarding heritage towns and cities.