

Heritage, Pride and Place

Exploring the contribution of World Heritage Site status to Liverpool's sense of place and future development

Appendix D: Focus Groups

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Introduction

Focus groups were held to explore residents' views and opinions concerning:

- Liverpool World's Heritage Site, how it is understood and its profile locally
- Buildings and heritage sites that invoke feelings of pride and sense of place.

Three focus groups were held, two with city centre residents and one with residents from the Anfield area of Liverpool. Focus groups at the city centre sessions involved two groups of eight people, all of whom were either working or retired professionals living in or around the WHS. All were white, middle-to-higher working class /middle class, of mixed age and gender, and predominantly originating from the city region.¹ The Anfield focus group was held at a community-led regeneration activity focussed around a local bakery. Five women of mixed age attended this group; four originated from the Anfield area, and one had moved to Liverpool from another city.

The research team sought to conduct further focus groups in the south of the city and with residents from other cultural backgrounds and ethnic groups. Although these efforts were not successful, it was ultimately decided that that further focus groups were unlikely to contribute new ideas or produce new channels for investigation, due to the weak 'WHS literacy' and preoccupation with heritage versus development debates that were evident in the initial focus groups.

¹ The city centre focus groups were held in the Artist's Club, within the World Heritage Site. As intended, it was apparent that, for some respondents, this was a strong attraction for attending the discussion.

Conducting the focus groups

Prior to initiating the discussion, all focus group members were asked to complete a trial of the online survey used within this research, with their feedback on the design, format and questioning style of the survey used to inform the final design and also to provoke discussion within the focus group on the subject of WHS literacy.

The focus group design aimed to organise discussions around the following themes:

- WHS and Sense of Pride of Place
- WHS and The City's Reputation
- The Future of WHS in Liverpool

In order to initiate discussion, all participants were asked to give a brief overview of their personal biography in relation to the city of Liverpool.

Following this introduction, discussions tended to be more fluid, allowing participants to take their own direction, and enabling the researchers to explore key concepts more widely. Thereon, questions were posed, when needed, to gather data on emerging themes or topics.

The focus group findings corroborated findings gathered from the stakeholder interviews, whilst also providing some new insights into topics such as heritage in the wider city region and public participation in the WHS title's future sustainability.

Focus group analysis is organised according to three interconnected themes:

1. The link between city centre regeneration and sense of pride of place
2. Whose heritage is being protected?
3. WHS and neighbourhood heritage as interlinked strategies

The research team found that, in similar fashion to the stakeholders interviewed, focus group participants tended to steer discussion of the WHS towards the role of the title in relation to the Liverpool Waters development. Whilst clearly some of the city centre respondents were well informed and supportive of the proposed development, others were more sceptical. Our analysis does not highlight these opinions but uses the points raised to exemplify our themes.

Regenerating pride in place and heritage

The city centre focus groups stressed that regeneration of the city centre had had a positive impact on their sense of pride of place and also on their confidence to celebrate their heritage. Whilst this latter point was more pertinent for people with family and roots in the region and its maritime culture, for respondents who had moved to Liverpool, the regeneration had strengthened their appreciation of the city's architectural and cultural heritage, highlighting the distinctiveness of the city and consequently their pride in it.

'And I've had friends – through various times, I've brought friends of friends back to visit, and they're always, kind of, surprised, a) by the beauty of the city, by the richness of the buildings, but also 'cause it brought them back from the 80's 90's onwards. I've seen the difference, because when you're showing people round there's actually nothing more to show them, but as you say, the colour's come back to the city. Things that were grey and dark and empty, life has come back. People are using them again, and they're actually not just a nice, pretty building or an amusement park.' **(Male 1, Liverpudlian, City Centre)**²

'And over the last 12, 15 years, it's been an amazing change. And I'm actually very, very proud to be a Scouser. Quite emotional. It's only over the last ten years that I've been able to say that ...' **(Male 2, Liverpudlian, City Centre)**

'In fact, I didn't really want to come here [laughter]. Well, largely because of the reputation, I suppose. But I have to say, my first experience of coming to Liverpool, which was in, what, early 90s, was it was a tip. And the people who lived here were tits. And the whole feel was a real loser all round./.../ And what has really impressed me is how the city has changed over the last 20 years./.../When I think of art, and I say to myself, well, let's go somewhere else, you know. But then, I can't think of anywhere else that I'd rather be. I'm a cheapskate, and I feel comfortable here. And it is this mixture of very ordinariness, if you like, and then this, sort of, aura of historical Victorian culture, really. It's a little bit better than Victorian, really, culture and the mix is – I find particularly attractive, and I think that to lose either of them would be terrible. And this is why I think the focus of being a Heritage Site with an international status is important to us, because it's about how we feel about ourselves, in my view, or ought to be.' **(Male 3, Newcomer, City Centre)**

Some of the participants had lived outside of Liverpool during their childhood or adult life and were therefore able to compare the city centre with others in the United Kingdom and beyond. It was interesting to find that, similar to participants in stakeholder interviews, those who had originated from outside the city tended to be more supportive of the WHS title, as they recognised that it distinguished Liverpool from their previous city of residence. However, amongst the participants who originated from Liverpool and had returned to reside in the city centre, there was the feeling that the WHS title had bolstered their pride in their own heritage and subsequently the city, even when their understanding of its true meaning was minimal.

² 'Liverpudlian' was a term used to denote a participant who identified as being from the city, with the term 'newcomer' used to denote participants who identified themselves as being from elsewhere.

'I was born in Liverpool. Both my parents were born in Liverpool city centre and lived there until the 60s. I've lived away in various places. I've lived in London and Manchester, Scotland for four years, Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol - So, I've moved round the UK quite a bit, and I've come back to Liverpool 'cause I think it's a great place to live. And also, my dad was a docker and I've moved into Wapping Dock. My dad used to work down at the Albert Dock when it was still a working dock, so I remember me going there as a kid. So, it's, kind of, like one of those - I just remember it being, like, castle-like and big. So I've moved into, like, my kind of dream home, kind of thing' (**Male 1, Liverpoolian, City Centre**)

'I think people, more and more are coming to the city and seeing what it's about. And I think that can be only a good thing, and I think people like the Heritage Society, World Heritage Group, UNESCO and that, can only be good, because without your heritage, you're nothing. 'Cause my family are all mariners, through my dad, my two uncles, my grandfather, and I was brought up just on, basically, the docks, through the wars, through the 50s, the 60s, up until the containers were brought in, everything and basically, it's everything to the city. 'Cause what happened to me, personally, without your heritage, you've got nothing.' (**Male 4, Liverpoolian, City Centre**)

While it was evident that city centre participants appreciated the regeneration of the city centre and, to some extent, understood the WHS title as symbolic of Liverpool's revival, the same could not be said of the Anfield residents, who felt that their neighbourhood had been neglected in the prioritisation and allocation of public resources, in favour of the city centre and South Liverpool.

'There's also an argument on my side that all the money in the city goes to the South of Liverpool. So when you've got the World Heritage, right, or whatever, it wouldn't affect us, because all the money just gets ploughed down South because it's easier, because the people there are more recipient of it, they're more acceptant of it, any arts projects, everything like that goes South, and nothing comes here. The Giants is the first thing that has ever come here.' (**Female 1, Liverpoolian, Anfield**)

The Anfield participants did not make personal connections to the regeneration of the city centre or the WHS title. During discussions it became evident that neither initiative was held in high regard and was without association to their everyday lives. Therefore, neither development contributed to their sense of pride in the city.

Female 1, Liverpoolian, Anfield: 'The World Heritage thing, like, I don't even know when we got it. I don't even know where it started. I've just, like, lived in Bath for a year, and I know that Bath's - they're World Heritage and they kept banging on about it. But if someone took away that certificate, people aren't going to stop going to Bath. And people who, like -people, like, come here 'cause they love the Beatles, and it's almost like - and all that stuff, the footie and duh, duh, duh, duh, and because it's got a good reputation on its own now as being somewhere for a good night out, blah, blah, blah, blah. And it's like, the World Heritage thing might have put it on - helped put it on the map, but I think if you speak to most locals...'

Female 2, Liverpoolian, Anfield: 'It doesn't really mean anything'

Female 3, Liverpoolian, Anfield: '...they wouldn't know if we'd had it or we hadn't had it'

Whose world heritage?

The two focus group settings provided an opportunity to explore the relationship between:

- The regeneration of historic physical environments connected to intangible person-centred heritage; and
- The rejuvenated confidence and abilities to make connections to lived experiences and family history in relation to place and neighbourhoods, drawing comparisons' between these two aspects.

In focus group discussions, the participants with personal connections to heritage preservation and regeneration were more likely to consider *whose* heritage is being regenerated by the WHS, which, in turn, influenced their attitudes to the title. For example, while it was clear that regeneration of the city centre had bolstered city centre residents' appreciation of their cultural heritage – and, for some, their support of the title – this was not found to be true of residents in Anfield. Instead, the allocation of resources to the city centre and the focus on its regeneration was seen, correctly or incorrectly, to come at the expense of tangible heritage in the north of the city. The title was associated with this process, and hence support for the title among Anfield residents was weak. These residents were no less proud of their heritage than city centre residents; this pride simply materialised differently, as the following passage exemplifies.

Female 4, Liverpoolian, Anfield: 'But it means nothing else and we've got the Police Station, haven't we? And that's been closed down now. It's not being used anymore. It's a Victorian Police Station, you know, which is part of our heritage and part of this Northern heritage, and I was talking to one of our local Councillors, which I won't name, and I said to him/.../ "What is going to happen with the Police Station?" And he went, "Ah, knock it down, won't they? Do you know what I mean? It's not worth it." And I was just horrified. They would knock it down because you've got your – you know, can't really – there's no wheelchair access, and it was just like/.../the fact that he's our local Councillor. He's the Councillor in this area'

Female 5, Newcomer, Anfield: 'But I read Private Eye, and they have a column called Nooks and Crannies or Nooks and Corners, which is about architecture. And they're constantly talking about the stuff that's happening in Liverpool, and it's just like, what are they doing now? And they describe Liverpool's attitude to building as neophilic, 'cause they just want new stuff'

Female 1, Liverpoolian, Anfield: 'Which is bizarre, considering all this recognition is for our old stuff'

Female 5, Newcomer, Anfield: 'Yeah'

Female 1, Liverpoolian, Anfield: 'But if it's around here, then the land acquired is worth more than the actual building itself. Just blast them all, and replace them with shit, do you know what I mean?'

Female 5, Newcomer, Anfield: 'Well, they're like McDonalds, in that they'll put the vegetarian label on the chips, promote they're vegetarian, or they'll put, you know, like, contains natural fruit juices in the fizzy stuff that's, like, seven teaspoons of sugar. And it's like, they can put a World Heritage Status sign up and say, "Look, we're doing all the stuff," and behind the scenes,

knock stuff down, because it's about being seen to be something as opposed to actually being it. But, yeah, this building, the Police Station, there are amazing buildings all over the North of Liverpool that have no value to the people that manage that'

Discussions within the focus groups also revealed differing opinions with regards to the role of the WHS in relation to the renaissance of the city centre. City centre residents that participated in the focus groups were able to appropriate the title in terms of it encompassing the overall regeneration and rejuvenation of the city. Conversely, Anfield residents saw the WHS title as epitomising, and becoming a tool for, the city's neglect of North Liverpool and its heritage assets. Underpinning the latter viewpoint was the perception that there had been a lack of spill-over benefits for areas such as Anfield from the European Capital of Culture in 2008, and the claim that Liverpool Football Club's presence in the local community is wavering.

'And everyone – and I do agree, to a certain extent, that there's supposed to be this trickle-down effect. You know, they've spent all the money on the town centre. It makes more sense, get the people in, and then wait for that trickle-down. But when that trickle-down – look at it. Where's it trickled to? Do you know what I mean? That's where people – when you mentioned, then, World Heritage, blah, blah, and most people go, "Well, I didn't" – so, I still don't know, when did we get it?' (**Female 2, Liverpoolian, Anfield**)

'The latest owners [of LFC], I still think you've got to give them some time, because they've been here for two years. And, as my dad always points out, any other – at the end of the day, they're a business. So they've bought the club because they were supposed to get the team playing well, and suddenly, they've found out that they're actually the most hated people in the area, 'cause of 20 years of backlash and treating the community like shit' (**Female 1, Liverpoolian, Anfield**)

The Liverpool Waters development of the Northern Docks intends to positively improve the economic situation in the north of the city. With this crucial consideration in mind, and in light of the lengthy processes already undertaken in the neighbourhood concerning housing stock and the relocation (or non-relocation) of Anfield Football Stadium, it is not surprising that the Anfield participants were generally supportive of the Liverpool Waters project. They directly correlated potential positive benefits to their personal circumstances. Moreover, none cited the potential loss of the WHS title as significant to the prosperity of their area or its built heritage. This was in contrast to city centre residents, who debated strongly the potential threat to the title posed by the proposed development.

Local heritage and maintaining distinctiveness

Intangible and built heritage is embedded within our social fabric and can be a resource that residents draw upon to construct their sense of self and place in the present, even when social problems prevail (Dicks 2003, Smith 2006). This notion was exemplified in discussions with the Anfield focus group regarding the empty Victorian police station under threat of demolition. Likewise, the Anfield resident group's project to resurrect and open a bakery to service the local community could be identified as an action to reaffirm their heritage. The bakery has a long history, and its regeneration and opening could produce a physical space where shared histories and heritage can be created for future generations. The locality of heritage and its importance to communities was considered by one of the Anfield residents in the following passage.

'But it's that thing of – like, obviously, I come from a village, and there's a completely different attitude towards the built environment. It's like, obviously, this place is worth looking after, because either it's 1,000 years old or because it's the only pub in the village or because, you know, it's somebody's farmhouse or, you know, barn conversions or whatever. And it's like, well, we deserve exactly the same in the centre of the city and the North of the city' (**Female 5, Newcomer, Anfield**)

Such comments support the argument that the uses of heritage are often much broader than those designated by heritage organisations and the policy-makers from whom they take advice (Smith 2006). Indeed, official heritage designations of nationally or globally important buildings, monuments, streets and landscapes may not confer with, and are unlikely to fully encapsulate, local notions and definitions of heritage (Di Giovine 2009, Rakic & Chamber 2008).

Female 1, Liverpoolian, Anfield: 'I think it's criminal to knock down the...'

Female 2, Liverpoolian, Anfield: 'terraced houses down, you see, and I think its criminal knocking down these, because they are heritage'

Female 3, Liverpoolian, Anfield: 'You know, this street and Tancred, off Rockfield, should have been the model that everybody followed, 'cause this street proved what redeveloping existing houses could look like. Skerries is one of the nicest streets I've seen, and what's Tancred like? It's lovely, isn't it?'

Female 4, Liverpoolian, Anfield: 'Yeah'

The increasingly polarised debate between heritage and development was evident in both city centre focus groups, restricting, at times, the nuance and depth of the discussions. However, it was clear that there was no majority for or against development or, similarly, for maintaining the WHS title. While it was clear that a few participants were clearly entrenched in either the heritage or development camps – with women participants tending to side more with heritage – the majority were supportive of an alternative that would see development of the northern docks and the retention of the title. Many saw the title not only as an authentication of the city's historical significance, but also as a protection against the city losing its distinctiveness and becoming a

replica of other cities with high-rise modern development (Dicks 2003). In agreement with the report by the World Bank (2012) on the *Economics of Uniqueness*, many city centre discussants saw the distinctiveness of the city and its people as crucial to its future success.

‘What strikes me about being the most distinctive thing about Liverpool is it’s an amazing city of contrasts, which I think is unique, really, in some respects. I mean, if you think about when you used to come out at Lime Street, have these most amazing buildings, St George’s Hall there, and if you walked up Lime Street a few years ago, there was all those horrible shops, all boarded up. And I think you, sort of, get a bit desensitised to it. So you could walk past these fantastic buildings and not appreciate them, then you could walk past all of these boarded-up shops and not really notice that they were as boarded-up. And you said before that a lot of World Heritage Sites are in affluent areas. Well, we’re a World Heritage Site, but we have the most – the poorest area in Britain, jobs-wise and poverty-wise, you know. Knowsley always comes up at the top of the table as the worst place to live. And then, you have the people being renowned for being amazingly hospitable and really, really, friendly, but then on the other side, you have, “Oh, you don’t want to go to Liverpool, they’re all robbing Scousers.” And, you know, we have a terrible reputation in that respect. But it’s amazing, the contrast between the two. And I think if you have – if you’ve got this World Heritage Site, if you took it away, then in a way, there’s nothing to, sort of, bounce against, do you see what I mean? You’re, sort of, taking away one side. This Peel Holdings, would we be able to make it into something, so we have these beautiful buildings, then a fantastic new never-seen 21st Century? Or would it be, if we lost the World Heritage Site, would everything just become a bit, sort of, same-ish?’ **(Female 2, Liverpoolian, City Centre)**

‘I’m very concerned about the impact that the Peel development could have on the loss of the World Heritage Status. I think it would be an absolute disaster. And I recognise that what Peel could potentially be doing is bringing thousands of jobs and megabucks of income to the city, but at a cost’ **(Male 5, Liverpoolian, City Centre)**

When asked to describe Liverpool’s distinctiveness, the city centre discussions focused on the spirit and conviviality of residents, which make the city very hospitable and friendly. Participants also commented that the city treats all as equals and, consequently, will cut down with scything humour those professing to pursue greater things. Additionally, participants described Liverpool as a large ‘village’ with many close-knit ties between and across social networks, whilst also offering the cultural activities and resources of a big city. During discussions concerning the last 20 years of development within the city centre, the residents felt that the city now has more colour (life) and diversity, making it more cosmopolitan, which was seen as a positive development. They accredited Liverpool One and the growth of the university sector (student residences) within the city as assisting and continuing the renaissance, by creating and reanimating public spaces. Therefore, whilst some expressed fears that Liverpool Waters could diminish the distinctiveness of the city and simultaneously shift and dilute the city centre, this development was seen by many as something that would further symbolise the city’s revival.

‘I also think, and I’m probably very much in the minority here, that for the future and the long-term future, we have to have a heritage of 21st Century development, like the high-rises and the.../.../ You know, that’s the future. We can’t live in the past, and we can’t live in the small area and the small estate as it is now. It’s going to have to change’ **(Female 3, Liverpoolian, City Centre)**

Some city centre participants recognised the damage to the city’s reputation that could result from the loss of the title. Within this discussion, we found some overlap with the opinions found in stakeholder interviews, in terms of establishing the economic value of holding a WHS title. For example, a discussion amongst city centre participants demonstrated some recognition of the potential value of the WHS title within the tourism market.

Female 5, Liverpooldian, City Centre: ‘Well, but you’re looking at it as somebody who’s quite expert in that. Sorry, layperson writing to their mate, lives in Australia, World Heritage Centre, wow, isn’t that great? Tourist industry, World Heritage Centre; not going to put, here’s an old factory, insert name. You know, it’s a brand, it’s a label. These things cost millions to develop, millions./.../Do you know, I didn’t know Bath and Edinburgh was. If I was a tourist looking...’

Male 5, Liverpooldian, City Centre: ‘Well, that’s a demonstration of the fact that the World Heritage Site it not well’

Female 5, Liverpooldian, City Centre: ‘But that’s a marketing issue. Do you know, sorry, I’m just, you know, somebody who gets up, goes to work and all the rest of it. You know, I’m not Googling World Heritage Centres, but I know it as – I’ve been to it. You know, I’ve been to World Heritage Centres when I’ve gone abroad, and when somebody goes, “Oh, look, you know, you’re in Cuba, that’s a World Heritage Centre over there”, we’ll go and have a look. We weren’t going to go there. I wasn’t going to travel through the Cuban rainforest to, insert name of town that I didn’t know about. But it’s a World Heritage Centre. So, Louise got in her car, drove a couple of hours, saw what Che Guevara was doing and visited a World Heritage Centre. I wouldn’t have gone there otherwise’

Furthermore, there was a consensus among city centre participants concerning the lack of resources dedicated to the promotion of the WHS and the belief that the title had been eclipsed by other events in the city.

Conclusions

The focus group discussions provided an opportunity to qualitatively explore how the title relates to people's sense of pride in the city. For some participants, the title embodied the importance of regenerating built heritage to contribute to people's sense of place, with their support for the title inherently linked to the revival of civic pride demonstrated in descriptions of life experiences and family histories. However, while all discussants acknowledged the city's rich cultural heritage, it was only city centre participants that appropriated the WHS in a rejuvenation of their pride in the city. In Anfield, by contrast, the empty and under-threat heritage assets in the locality were seen to epitomise the wider socio-economic issues affecting the area and its neglect by public and private bodies. As a result, unlike city centre participants, their pride in their city and their neighbourhood was disjointed, with the latter strengthened not through regeneration but through the perceived prioritisation of other areas in the city.