

Business
Debt of gratitude owed for 'renaissance' Vision

BY BEN SCHOFIELD Daily Post Staff
1,160 words
28 March 2008
Daily Post (Liverpool)
7
English
(c) The Liverpool Daily Post & Echo Ltd, 2008.

Agency praised for huge impact on city centre

LIVERPOOL Vision's contribution to how the city "sees itself, sells itself and runs itself" is one of the overriding reasons for the city centre's "renaissance", according to a report published yesterday.

Professor Michael Parkinson's report says the city owes a **"debt of gratitude"** to the urban regeneration agency for its work on turning round the city centre.

Make No Small Plans chronicles the impact the agency has had since its inception in 1999.

At the launch, Prof Parkinson, who is director of the European Institute for Urban Affairs at Liverpool John Moores University, said he had "staked his reputation" when he accepted the job of assessing Vision's eight years of work. But he insisted his conclusions reflect the evidence.

Prof Parkinson wrote in the report: "It became clear to me very quickly there is common agreement that Liverpool Vision has been a real driving force behind it. It is unusual to find such consensus in any city about the part played by any particular body - unless it is bad news.

"But the extraordinary thing is that so many people from different parts of the Liverpool scene agree on the contribution that Liverpool Vision has made.

"It was not perfect. The job isn't finished. But Vision has made a huge contribution to the successes of Liverpool in the last 10 years."

The revived city centre is the economic powerhouse of the region, housing 50% of Liverpool's jobs and providing 50% of the city's economic contribution or gross value added GVA. It is also enjoying job growth that, at 16.3%, outstrips the national average of 4.4%. And the population is booming - up 32% between 2000 and 2005, while the British figure rose by 1.9% and Merseyside's total dipped by 1%.

Prof Parkinson detailed changes "on the ground in Liverpool city centre". But he said: "As - if not more - important is the contribution that Liverpool Vision has made to the way Liverpool sees itself, sells itself and runs itself. The changes in spirit and mood, although less tangible, are critical. The city is more ambitious, more confident, more market oriented. The private sector sees Liverpool as a place to invest and make money. It is developing a record of delivery - of being a 'can do' rather than a 'can't do' place."

One of its key strengths is its ability to forge lucrative partnerships in the private sector. It has overseen £589.5m spent in the city.

Vision is being wound up ahead of the launch of a new Liverpool Vision that will take on the old portfolio as well as work done by Liverpool Land Development Company and Business Liverpool.

Yesterday, it was revealed Prof Parkinson had come across top-level anticipation about how the new super-quango will be run.

A senior source at Vision said there are concerns about Liverpool City Council having too much control over the new body. Whereas the old Vision is a private company with no shareholders, the new vision will have three shareholders.

The North West Development Agency, English Partnerships and the city council each have shares, with the council holding the most.

It is possible, the source added, that councillors will interfere in the new body and disrupt a successful formula. With almost 90 elected members, the council was a potentially unpredictable shareholder.

Prof Parkinson highlighted three projects on which Vision failed to deliver or make significant progress. They are the proposed Everton stadium on the waterfront, the Fourth Grace and the improvements to the Lime Street gateway.

He wrote: "Liverpool Vision has achieved many things. But nothing is perfect. In the case of the Football Club all partners should have realised earlier the money was not really available and the technical traffic problems were probably too great.

"In the case of the Fourth Grace the key question about the function of the building should have been discussed more before considerations of its form, the public consultation could have been handled differently as should have been the announcement of the scheme's demise.

"In the case of Lime Street, with hindsight partners agreed that Liverpool Vision might have pushed on more quickly with the compulsory purchase order and run the development differently."

But in mitigation, Prof Parkinson added it would have been unrealistic to expect all projects to succeed and the Lime Street work will be delivered in 2009.

Successes

CITY centre population up by 32% between 2000 and 2005

50% of Liverpool's jobs in the city centre

50% of Liverpool's wealth generated in the city centre

16.3% job growth in city centre

Creating a central business district

Delivering a "knowledge quarter" around Hope Street and the university

Failures

THE Fourth Grace project

Everton stadium's proposed move to the waterfront

The Lime Street gateway makeover

What they said about Liverpool then and now:

"Only now can we admit how bad it really was. Markets had stopped working. It was like Poland," Sir Terry Leahy, chief executive, Tesco, Liverpool Vision board member

"Arriving at Lime Street was dismal. The quality of the built environment was visibly poor. More important the underpinning foundations were poor."

Colin Hilton, chief executive, Liverpool City Council

"We were mad to say that in six years we would build two million sq ft of retail, redo St George's and the Bluecoat, build a commercial district, transform the public realm, and transform the waterfront. Anywhere else would have taken 15 years. But we did it."

Cllr Mike Storey, executive member regeneration, Liverpool City Council, Liverpool Vision board member

"Vision was one of the factors that got us to be serious about Liverpool."

Rod Holmes, project director, Liverpool One

"Liverpool feels very different from nine years ago. The atmosphere was very negative - even if there was a glimmer of hope. Now it is completely different and there is optimism. Liverpool is becoming successful, even if there is a long way to go."

Louise Ellman, MP for Riverside, Liverpool Vision board member

"10 years ago £100,000 investment would be a coup for Liverpool. Now we get millions."

Cllr Warren Bradley, Leader, Liverpool City Council, Liverpool Vision board member

"The city centre acted as a catalyst to boost the confidence of the private sector."

Steve Broomhead, chief executive, Northwest Regional Development Agency, Liverpool Vision board member

"What does Liverpool Vision do? We coordinate. We persuade. We organise. We take potential investors through the whole process."

Sir Joe Dwyer, chairman, Liverpool Vision

"We were going around in circles. Liverpool Vision was one of the few organisations we could get sense out of."

John Milligan, developer, Metquarter

What do you think?

Email us with your views at letters@dailypost.co.uk, or write to us PO Box 48, Old Hall Street, Liverpool

benschofield@dailypost.co.uk

Document LIVERP0020080328e43s0000q