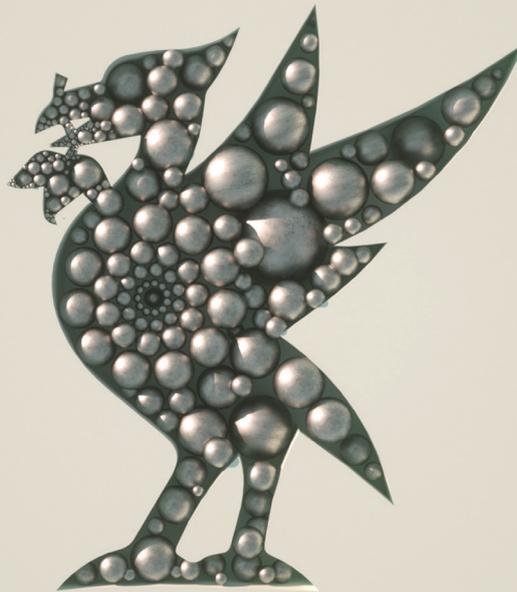


# THE LIVERPOOL BRAND

WHAT IS IT & WHY DOES IT MATTER SO MUCH NOW?

O U R B R A N D



A N A T O M Y

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A report to Marketing Liverpool | October 2017

## 1. WHAT'S IN THIS REPORT?

- 1.1 This report is the result of a project that the Heseltine Institute from the University of Liverpool undertook for Marketing Liverpool. The project was designed to promote discussion amongst key organisations and the private sector in the city about the important but elusive concept of the Liverpool brand. It was intended to be a point of departure not the end of the journey. This short report presents the findings of our consultation so far. It discusses the key questions the study raised and the answers that emerged. It ends with a recommendation that private and public partners in Liverpool should recognise the importance of the issue and try to develop a shared narrative brand about Liverpool that should inform the efforts of all organisations to promote their own products and reputations. The journey should continue.
- 1.2 This report answers four questions:
1. Why is a study of the Liverpool brand needed now?
  2. How did we do it?
  3. What did we find? Key messages
  4. What's next for the Liverpool story?

## 2. WHY IS A STUDY OF THE LIVERPOOL BRAND NEEDED NOW?

- 2.1 The Heseltine Institute has recently conducted reviews of many of the economic and institutional issues Liverpool city region now faces - including the performance of the elected mayor of Liverpool and the Albert Dock on Liverpool waterfront. It continues to do related pieces on the economic shape and performance of the city region. But its most significant contribution to the debate was 'The State of Liverpool City Region Report' (SOLCRR) in 2016. It raised many issues that connect with the current conversation about the Liverpool brand.

### Liverpool – much done, much to do

- 2.2 The SOLCRR reviewed the city region's achievements during the past decade but also identified some of its key future challenges. It showed there was widespread agreement inside and outside Liverpool across all sectors about how far the city region has come in recent years - but also how far it still has to go. There was agreement Liverpool has undergone a dramatic transformation. The city centre, the waterfront, Liverpool One are acknowledged as major transformations. The success of the port and advanced manufacturing, the contribution of the universities, the hospitals, professional & financial services and the visitor economy

are well recognised. Politics and relationships internally and externally have dramatically improved. The mood music across the city region is much improved and the leadership more confident and constructive than in the past. Nevertheless it is also recognised that levels of productivity, skills, employment and firm creation are too low and unemployment is too high. Too many places and people of the city region have not shared in the prosperity. There has been much done but there is still much to do. This presents a brand challenge.

### No clear brand narrative

- 2.3 A key finding of SOLCRR was that there were too many economic development and marketing organisations competing in the same space - which caused uncertainty in external investors' minds. Liverpool lacked a coherent strategy to integrate, exploit and market its many key economic assets. There was not a single compelling shared narrative about its long term economic future which it systematically presented to the different audiences it dealt with nationally and globally. There were competing messages which, although not necessarily contradictory, were not well aligned. Liverpool leaders, in both the public and private sectors, needed a single hymn sheet and a more assertive strategy for cultivating the interest and support of the potential investor class from outside the city region.

### Enter Marketing Liverpool

- 2.5 This was the context in which Marketing Liverpool approached the Heseltine Institute to conduct a project on the Liverpool brand. Initially I was uncertain whether my experience was relevant to the issues they raised about brand, marketing and image. But I recognised their concerns had already been raised by many partners in SOLCRR.
- 2.6 I also realised Marketing Liverpool's concerns overlapped with some I had been facing in my own work. In recent years I have often been asked to discuss the experience of Liverpool, nationally and internationally. I realised during the past decade that something had changed in the way people outside Liverpool perceive the city and hence the invitations I received. Historically the chair of a conference would say 'We are very lucky to have Professor Parkinson here today because he works in Liverpool and knows all about city failure.' But more recently I was being described as working on Liverpool - and therefore an expert on city success. I realised Liverpool at some point had become a good - not a bad - news story.
- 2.7 But this is a delicate balance. We have tipped over from the bad to the good side but we could fall back the

other way. How we manage the brand will be critical to staying on the positive side of the mountain top. It's also important to sustain the momentum of Liverpool's brand during the last decade. That means aligning brand communications and experience for investors, visitors, students. Regular brand tracking would provide the intelligence to support future decision-making. It would also help us understand where we really are in the eyes of our different audiences.

### Neither Eeyore nor Pollyanna

- 2.7 This shift in the perceptions of Liverpool was already posing me a challenge. I have written a lot about the city over 30 years, including 'Liverpool on the Brink' in 1985 at the nadir of our fortunes. I recognised I needed an honest, authentic account of what had happened in the city in recent years and how it should be told to an audience of outsiders - without being unduly pessimistic or unduly optimistic.

### Key questions

- 2.8 This had raised a series of questions in my mind which included:
- How do we explain to ourselves and the external world the extraordinary changes that have taken place in Liverpool during the past decade?
  - Do we really understand what has happened and is happening in the underlying economy and the social consequences for different people and places?
  - Do we know where the current economic trajectory is leading us?
  - Do we have a shared narrative about the city, its successes and its future?
  - Do we need such a hymn sheet in which the strategic ambitions of the city's individual organisations and businesses could be located?
- 2.9 Those questions obviously were not - do we have the right logo or strap line for and about Liverpool? They were about our future economic prospects and how we organise and mobilise all our assets to improve them. Given this convergence of interest amongst SOLCRR stakeholders, Marketing Liverpool and my own research, the Heseltine Institute agreed to lead a review of the Liverpool brand.

## 3. HOW DID WE DO IT?

- 3.1 The Institute recognised the need to lead the consultation in partnership with key organisations and individuals in Liverpool. We formed a small project leadership team consisting of the Director of Marketing Liverpool, Chris Brown, the Chief Executive of the Knowledge Quarter Liverpool, Colin Sinclair, the Vice President for Open Innovation at Unilever, Jon Hague, the Project Director in Peel Holdings, Ian Pollitt and the Executive Director of the Heseltine Institute, Michael Parkinson - the author of the SOLCRR. They have variously helped draft this report. We recognised it was important that as many partners as possible should contribute to the conversation. We also agreed that the private sector in particular needed to step up to the plate and exert more influence, with perhaps the LEP convening views from different parts of the private sector.
- 3.2 We recognised it was important that the review should not be seen as a public sector dominated event for several reasons. First, any emerging brand narrative about Liverpool had to be created and shared by all sectors and organisations. Second, the private sector had huge experience of marketing their own products and reputation and had a lot to contribute to the review. Third and most important, we believed that private sector organisations could promote their own products, reputations and brands more successfully if they were located in the wider context of the city region in which they operated.
- 3.3 We organised three consultations to discuss and define the agenda. A growing cast of characters from the private and public sectors got involved each time and developed an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the issues involved. The first meeting was with a small group of colleagues primarily involved in marketing their own organisation. A second wider group heard presentations from representatives of four different sectors of the Liverpool economy to get their different perspectives on the key issues involved - from Knowledge Quarter Liverpool, from Peel on Liverpool 2, ARUPS marketing of Liverpool in China for Liverpool City Council and the Kazimeir cultural and creative company. A third larger meeting discussed the Liverpool brand template that had been developed in the initial conversations. At this point we now propose to test the emerging findings on a wider group of individuals and organisations in Liverpool.

#### 4. WHAT DID WE FIND? KEY MESSAGES

##### The timing is right

- 4.1 Our initial discussions underlined that the timing of this review of the Liverpool brand was right for several reasons.
- Liverpool has been through a dramatic period of change which needed understanding, explaining and presenting to the internal and external world
  - There has been a huge shift in governance arrangements with the devolution of some key economic development powers to Liverpool City Region, the creation of an elected city region mayor and new strategies emerging from the Local Enterprise Partnership
  - 2018 will be the tenth anniversary of Liverpool's hugely successful European Capital of Culture year. The city will receive extensive popular and media attention and needs to be clear what messages Liverpool wants to present to that world about its achievements and progress during the past decade and its future ambitions
  - Liverpool was making a bid to host the Commonwealth games for 2022 created by Durban's withdrawal from the process. This again emphasised the need for different organisations and individuals to have a coherent interpretation of the city's progress and trajectory

All these factors convinced us it was time to look at the marketing and branding of Liverpool to see whether it matched these new realities.

##### Current brand not quite right

- 4.2 Some other key message emerged from the consultation. There were widely held concerns that the current brand narrative is not quite right for Liverpool today. It was not coherently or consistently expressed by all partners and it was increasingly dated. In particular there was a view that one current marketing approach which was 'Liverpool used to have huge problems but no longer does' might have been appropriate for an earlier period in its history. But it certainly would not be good enough for public presentation in future. The city needed a revised, bold, ambitious line which reflected its very changed circumstances. 'Better than we used to be' would not be good enough for the future.
- 4.3 Partners agreed there was too much complexity and too little coherence in the current economic development and marketing arrangements. Partners believed they could play a key role as positive ambassadors for Liverpool but needed an agreed narrative to help them 'tell the story and sell the place'.

But Liverpool did not need a new logo or strapline. Rather it should build upon the existing narrative about the place. Authenticity rather than novelty would be a key theme. Finally all partners had to recognise the value of the approach to them individually and to see the benefits of being presented as part of a more successful Liverpool. It had to meet an existing need.

##### Common fates for places and organisations

- 4.4 Partners also recognised that the fates of organisations and the places where they were located were intimately connected. The reputation of places affects the reputation of organisations inside those places - for better or for worse. A city could pull its constituent organisations down or up. Partners agreed that individual organisations would be more successful if they could locate their own strategic ambitions in the context of a common story about an increasingly successful, dynamic Liverpool economy. Each organisation would have its own individual narrative and branding. But they would be more powerful if they were aligned with an authentic city narrative. My own work on successful cities internationally underlines that having a common story to which organisations subscribe is not the central cause of their success. But it is an important supporting feature. Partners agreed that Liverpool needed such a realistic but confident shared narrative that they could use as a 'hymn sheet' as part of their pitch to internal and external markets and audiences.
- 4.5 One example discussed was the reciprocal relationships between Liverpool's universities and the city region. The University of Liverpool is a global player but also an anchor institution in the city region. Its global and local ambitions are mutually reinforcing. The University wants and needs Liverpool to succeed because many students choose to attend the University precisely because it is in Liverpool. But equally Liverpool needs the University to succeed. It is one of Liverpool's key global institutions. And globally significant places need globally significant players. Global and local actions are not zero-sum but win-win. A university can speak for its place as well as itself. So the scope for a shared story about performance and ambitions was obvious.

##### Reassuring agreement on current and future brand needs

- 4.6 Some reassuring messages emerged from our consultation. For example most organisations already use the Liverpool brand when marketing or promoting themselves. Importantly of those we reviewed, they play to the strengths of Liverpool and tend to be ambitious, innovative and forward looking rather than dwelling upon the past. They certainly

did not adopt the 'We used to be bad but no longer are' approach some partners had feared. There was also clarity on what the Liverpool brand should be in future. It should be ambitious but rooted in the reality of its current performance on key economic drivers - economic diversity, skills, innovation, place quality, connectivity, and strategic decision making capacity. The brand should ring true for different sectors that were important to the city's future – for example, potential investors, existing businesses, communities, residents, government, students and cultural organisations. And it must meet the different needs of the different audiences the city would need to address – for example, international, national and city or more and less mature markets. It was agreed that the brand should be an accurate reflection of four key dimensions of Liverpool - its assets, attitudes, achievements and ambitions.

### **Liverpool's assets are better than its brand**

- 4.7 There was good news about the scope and scale of Liverpool's economic assets. It was agreed that its assets are formidable and will make a big future contribution to the northern and national economy. But the perceptions of this contribution nationally - although not internationally - lagged. In that sense Liverpool's assets are actually better than its current brand. This provides real scope to improve its brand significantly. A second message was that there is an enormous amount of change and growth taking place within the different sectors of the Liverpool economy - whether logistics, digital and creative, health, knowledge and innovation - that even organisations involved did not fully appreciate. This scale of development underlined the need for better intelligence about what is happening in detail in the economy so that it can be incorporated more clearly into the brand narrative. It was also agreed Liverpool needs to be clearer and more vocal about its sectors, processes and firms which are genuinely world class and feature them more in the branding process - whether it is logistics, infectious diseases, advanced materials, personalised medicine, advanced manufacturing, sensors and digitalisation. The city must not fall into the city branding trap of saying or believing it was good at everything. It could best differentiate itself from competing cities by understanding and promoting what it was genuinely world class at - or could be in a relatively short timescale with increased focus and investment.

### **Key principles of the brand narrative**

- 4.8 There was a consensus on the key principles that should underpin any brand narrative. It should be robust, credible, ambitious and confident. It should be related to current performance on the key drivers of success. But it should also be future oriented - identifying emerging national and international trends, markets and opportunities. So it should be relevant to the needs not only of the current generation but also of the next generation of residents, workers and investors in Liverpool. The brand should have both reach and scale reflecting the global aspiration and opportunities of many of the key parts of the Liverpool economy. It should emphasise the current and potential positive contribution of the city to the northern and national economy. Partners also emphasised the need for honesty in the process. For example the scale of the city's social challenges should be recognised and addressed rather than ignored if the external world was to take the Liverpool brand narrative seriously.

### **So what do we now need?**

- 4.9 It was agreed that the brand should capture the differences of Liverpool - the classic edge and edgy city - without falling into the trap of sentimentalising the place or becoming professional Scousers. The consultation generated a huge number of examples of exciting processes, people, places and plans. It was agreed we needed a method to capture the essence of the place without rehearsing every detail of its structure and performance.
- 4.10 We agreed it was not a logo or a strapline - but neither a prospectus nor a book. It would need to be simple and elegant enough to be memorable and effective. But it would need to be backed with solid evidence of the claims made about current and future performance. It would be a multi-layered and continuing process.

### **A private sector approach to brand - Unilever's experience**

- 4.11 One advantage of having significant private sector engagement in the process was that we were able to call on the experience of colleagues who are responsible for marketing and protecting the reputation of their organisation's products. In particular we drew upon the experience of Unilever which has a well-developed 'Brand Key' from which flow all its brand communications. The Unilever model emphasises that a good brand definition positions that brand competitively. It helps define what the brand will do and how it will do it, as well as what it will not do. It encourages all who work on the brand to execute

brand actions in a consistent way that reinforces desired associations and build recognition and reputation. For Liverpool, the brand positioning must clearly be rooted in the history and future aspirations of the city, addressing its citizens and the many business and public sector stakeholders for whom the brand is a valuable asset. This requires building the brand authentically, for the long term, and sustainably, not just for one campaign or one major event. The brand positioning should be hardwired into and underpin all communication strategies. It is also the best springboard to define events and initiatives that create real value for the city and its people.

- 4.12 A good brand positioning is arrived at through a series of deep dives. The brand positioning needs a single point of ownership that has absolute authority over the content. Once set, changing a brand positioning should be a rare event, led by the brand owner, through a fresh set of deep dives. This safeguards the brand against misuse and inconsistency. Intangible assets such as brands are created over many years. But they can be destroyed in a single act of misuse. Unilever's experience indicated that Liverpool must put in place the right governance to ensure its brand positioning is owned and curated in this way.
- 4.13 We used Unilever's brand key to capture in a single format the wide range of comments, materials and proposals about Liverpool that the consultation had generated. The results are presented in the template on page 7.
- 4.14 Our group revised this template in the light of reactions from partners and also to build some other dimensions of Liverpool that were being used in marketing and branding documents. This different but related version is presented on page 8. This is not intended to be the defining brand narrative. This draft is intended to be a starting point for the crafting of a compelling story that partners could use in their presentations, socialise through their conversations, write into their bids and books and adapt into their advertising and marketing campaigns.

## 5. WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE LIVERPOOL BRAND NARRATIVE?

- 5.1 Both the templates below are work in progress designed to capture the key findings of the consultation process. More words, themes and issues could be added or subtracted. But we were struck that after many discussions with many partners, a consensus emerged on the key features that will surprise very few people. They are not brand new because they capture what many organisations in Liverpool believe should be the basis of our future representation to the outside world. We think this is a virtue not a weakness of the process. Authenticity not novelty is the key feature of our findings. We believe they sufficiently reflect the principal views of the partners we have consulted and should be circulated for wider consultation with more organisations, businesses and individuals across Liverpool. They provide firm foundations for a future brand narrative.
- 5.2 We believe the city and city regional mayors need to find the best way of capitalising upon the processes and the agreement that has emerged so far. There is an appetite to continue the process. Partners became more not less engaged as the consultation continued. We should not waste that agreement and goodwill. Once tested further the key elements should be turned into a brand narrative by the city regions brightest creative minds. Marketing Liverpool should manage the creation of the brand toolkit. It would contain narrative, message, proof points, slide deck, images and be maintained to ensure relevance.

### Last things

- 5.3 Many organisations and individuals recognise that the brand of Liverpool matters and we should re-examine how it is currently presented. The timing of this initiative is right for the many reasons identified at the start of this report. There is huge agreement upon both the content and themes of the brand of Liverpool. People agree that the brand narrative should reflect Liverpool's ambition, scale, transformation, self-confidence, levels of innovation and partnership. It should be about both roots and futures. It should reflect the many past achievements and distinctive features of Liverpool nationally and globally. History matters – but it must not be a prison. The narrative should also recognise and reflect the extraordinary pace and scale of the changes taking place in the global economy - and show that Liverpool is at the forefront of many of them. The brand narrative should be honest, authentic and accessible. It should make people who are already in Liverpool and those who are considering coming here say: 'This story of this city at this time feels right - and I want to live, work, study, play and invest there!'

**BRAND KEY**

**AMBITION**

A global and competitive city at the heart of the United Kingdom

**DISCRIMINATOR**

The western gateway to the world for trade, industry, people and knowledge.

**PERSONALITY**

Edgy and sharp witted, unconventional and resilient, universally welcoming and warm, funny and fun.

**TANGIBLE ASSETS**

Liverpool 2, Liverpool ONE, The Knowledge Quarter, Industry Growth Sectors\*, world class science and innovation. Great sporting arenas - Aintree, Goodison Park and Anfield.

\*Advanced Manufacturing, Digital and Creative, Financial and Professional Services, Health and Life Sciences, Low Carbon Energy, Maritime and Logistics, Visitor Economy.

**PURPOSE**

To offer a unique and inspiring living experience for every citizen, trader and visitor, today and in the future.

**INTANGIBLE ASSETS**

A leader internationally for art, culture, music and sport. A city of festivals and celebration, of fun. A great place to play.

**LIVERPOOL CITY TRUTHS**

A unique and compelling environment. A transformed cityscape. Grand architecture and an abundance of listed buildings. A UNESCO World Heritage waterfront and a stunning coastline.

**THE PEOPLE WE SERVE**

The citizens, traders and visitors of the world who seek Liverpool's unique living experience and find no joy in the South East rat-race or the daily Manchester gridlock.

**HUMAN TRUTHS**

Ordinary cities foster unremarkable lives, but great cities transform the experience of living, working, studying and raising families.

**ROOTS**

A pioneer. A place for pioneers. The world's first commercial dock. A proud maritime city, pivotal in the nation's history and prosperity. A great trading city. Resilient and able to re-invent when faced with adversity.

## A DRAFT BRAND NARRATIVE FOR LIVERPOOL

- Liverpool; a global and competitive city at the heart of the UK. A city for people, for business and for knowledge.
- With proud maritime roots, Liverpool is a gateway to the world of trade. From the world's first commercial wet dock, to Europe's first semi-automated Port, Liverpool2, it plays a pivotal role in the nation's history and prosperity.
- It's unconventional, resilient and able to re-invent in the face of adversity. It's a global crossroads for people and culture and bridges the gap between the old and new worlds.
- It's somewhere to play and stay. It's warm and universally welcoming. It's edgy and sharp witted. It's funny and fun. It's musical and arty. It's a city of festivals and celebrations. It's unique and inspiring. It's for business and for pleasure.
- Sitting on the banks of the River Mersey, the gateway to the Atlantic, Liverpool's UNESCO world heritage waterfront is a transformed cityscape full of vision and opportunity.
- There are two international airports within 45 minutes, and the capital is only two hours away by train.
- It's easy to get to, but difficult to leave behind.
- Liverpool has a thriving visitor economy, is globally recognised for art, culture, music and sport and with more listed buildings, museums and galleries than anywhere outside of London. There's the Tate Liverpool, the Walker Art Gallery, the Everyman & Playhouse Theatres, Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, two cathedrals, the Echo Arena, The Exhibition and Conference Centres, Liverpool and Everton's Football Stadiums and Aintree Racecourse, to name a few.
- Liverpool offers genuine strength and economic opportunity. Not only does it have global business and educational links through its universities, colleges and institutions, it has global brands, such as Unilever, Seqirus, Maersk and Jaguar Land Rover that are already doing business here.
- Once you combine the world-leading research in Knowledge Quarter Liverpool in infection, materials chemistry and sensor technology, with the high performance and cognitive computing at Daresbury, the Knowledge Quarter Liverpool's state-of-the-art hospitals and the city's booming creative, media and digital sector - you have a unique and compelling environment for every scientist, academic, clinician, student, citizen, business or visitor – current and future.
- Ordinary cities foster unremarkable lives, but great cities, like Liverpool, transform them. Liverpool is the city of opportunity. It's a creative force. A pioneer. An innovator.

## CONSULTEES

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