



Liverpool RIBA North: why here?

Interview with Suzy Jones, director of RIBA North

Why have you chosen Liverpool as the location for the RIBA North?

RIBA commissioned an independent study which considered 5 cities. This study took many things into account including visitor figures and tourism drivers as well as appropriate available sites. Liverpool came out as one of the top cities.

Architecturally Liverpool is globally significant, from RIBA North in one direction I can see the Liver Buildings and the Port of Liverpool Building, the cool classicism of the Cunard Building contrasting with the contemporary geometry of Mann Island, and the breather town – an Art Deco gem which services the tunnel under the Mersey. This alongside the rest of the iconic waterfront to the south and the density of other significant cultural partners such as Tate, National Museums Liverpool, Open Eye Gallery, The Beatles Story and the British Music Experience made Liverpool an ideal choice.

We were also actively encouraged by the local authority, we considered three sites in the city including a new build but in the end we were offered a very attractive

deal on the space we now occupy.

What led you to select Mann Island and that plot specifically?

RIBA considered three different sites in the city including a new build around Kings Dock and a site within the existing Albert Dock. In the end we were offered a very attractive deal on the space we now occupy at Mann Island and although some of the other options were very exciting it wasn't the right financial climate to take those more ambitious projects forward. Our new architecture centre at Mann Island is at the heart of existing cultural activity in the city, we amongst very good neighbours.

What's your vision for the role of the RIBA in Liverpool?

My hope is that RIBA North can play a role in advocating for the best design possible in the city. Through Places Matter, our independent design review panel which peer reviews new proposals, we strive for design excellence. The local authority has recently ensured that all proposed developments within Liverpool's World Heritage Sites go through this panel which includes heritage experts as well as architects and planning specialists. RIBA North also hosts the Digital City Model, a tool which can be used by the public to better understand the city past present and future, but that can also be used by the profession as a design tool to better understand the impact of new proposals on the broader cityscape and existing infrastructure.

What's your opinion on the future development of Liverpool including the new masterplan, development of the waterfront and the industrial area of Bootle?

Liverpool has not yet released its new city plan, I believe that will be released in early 2018, but my opinion on any new development is that it should be future

thinking and as such should be led by good design. Obviously there are always commercial factors but I firmly believe good design can accommodate these and any other factors.

The Liverpool Waterfront is a really significant debate especially over the next twelve months and not an easy thing to resolve. Of course all cities need investment and development, but part of what currently drives international investment in Liverpool is the World Heritage Status which applies to significant parts of the Waterfront, so there is a fine balance. RIBA North is now the official information hub of the World Heritage Site, which as you know spans large areas of the city. Our aim is to provide a platform for audiences to understand more about the cities World Heritage Sites, development within those sites, how cities work in general, and in the case of Liverpool how that impacts on, but also created, the World Heritage Site in the first place.

Main image: RIBA North (Broadway Malyan; on the right), Building and Museum of Liverpool (3XN; on the left)

About Author



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Laureata all'Università "La Sapienza" di Roma, è co-fondatrice dello studio di architettura Valari. Ha lavorato in studi internazionali come Haworth Tompkins e Allies & Morrison a Londra, VYA nei Paesi Bassi e Massimiliano Fuksas a Roma. Dal 2006 ha collaborato come giornalista freelance per diverse

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