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The Capital of Culture programme in Liverpool **Will it benefit local neighbourhood regeneration?**

Background: What does 'Capital of Culture' mean?

On 4 June 2003 it was announced that the city of Liverpool had been chosen as the UK's nomination to be European Capital of Culture in 2008, as part of a European Union programme which aims both to recognise cultural excellence and to encourage new cultural innovation. The report on the six cities shortlisted for the title, issued by the government's [Department for Culture, Media and Sport](#), stated that 'The purpose of the title is not simply to highlight existing cultural excellence, but to encourage cities to develop and innovate in the cultural field. It will be an opportunity to show that culture is central to the life of a city, and demonstrate its contribution to regeneration, social inclusion, education and business.' Liverpool's bid was based on the theme of 'The World in One City' and included three supporting themes called Create, Participate and Regenerate.

The Capital of Culture programme

A new organisation, [The Liverpool Culture Company](#), was set up by [Liverpool City Council](#) in 2000 to coordinate the city's Capital of Culture bid and is now responsible for implementing an annual series of cultural programmes until 2010. Each programme is based on a particular theme, with 2005 being The Year of the Sea. As well as the many cultural events that are scheduled to take place, a multi-million pound programme to improve Liverpool's public open spaces is also underway. The other projected benefits for the city of winning the title Capital of Culture include an expected £2 billion of investment, 14,000 new jobs and an extra 1.7 million visitors. The Liverpool Culture Company believes that this will lead to massive regeneration and that Liverpool will be 'reborn as a premier European city'.

European Union investment into Liverpool

Some parts of Merseyside - the county or administrative area in which Liverpool is situated - have Objective 1 status because they are amongst the most economically deprived areas of the European Union. The current Objective 1 programme runs from 2000 – 2006 and a mid-term review took place in 2003. In October 2003 it was announced that Liverpool would receive an extra £82 million from the European Union's Objective 1 Fund. £65 million of this money was to be invested in prestigious waterfront developments (including a new arena at the

King's Dock), £10 million in the cultural festival to be held in 2008 and £7.5 million in the development of local tourism. However, some of this money came from the withdrawal of funding for local regeneration initiatives.

Recent trends in local property prices

In April 2005 the [Liverpool Daily Post](#) newspaper reported that the price of houses in the city had risen by 22% in the previous year, compared to a national increase of 9.7% and an average increase of around 15% in the North West of England as a whole. The rising property prices in Liverpool are seen as an indicator of economic confidence in the city and have been linked to the regeneration initiatives and improvements in infrastructure that have resulted from the Capital of Culture award. However, much of the new housing that is being built consists of luxury developments such as the Beetham Tower apartments. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that speculative house buying by outside investors is pushing up house prices in areas of Liverpool that have until now been affordable for lower-income purchasers.

Regeneration in the Toxteth area of Liverpool

The Toxteth area includes some of the most deprived local council wards in the UK, according to the Government's [Index of Deprivation](#). A number of regeneration initiatives are currently underway in Toxteth and are being run by partnerships that include government agencies, private business and non-profit organisations. The aim of the [Housing Market Renewal](#) Pathfinder scheme is to tackle issues of economic and social regeneration as well as housing improvements. These policies are designed to create improved living conditions and to enhance the physical and social environment in local neighbourhoods through landscaping and the demolition of derelict buildings. However, many people also believe that the preservation of buildings which have played an important historical role in the life of Toxteth's people is a vital part of local community regeneration. The Liverpool Culture Company has a Creative Neighbourhoods cultural programme and says that 'This is not just about homes, bricks and mortar, but about the people who live in them. Working with the Housing Market Renewal Initiative as well as the private and public sector, we will build and act on the aspirations of families whilst keeping hold of a history of their neighbourhoods to celebrate and share with the rest of the city.'

The 'Florrie'

The Florence Institute is a historically significant building in Toxteth that is currently in a state of dereliction. It was opened as a boy' club in Mill Street in 1890 and for nearly a hundred years it served the young people of the Toxteth area as a place of recreation, running many sporting and leisure activities and producing a number of boxing champions. The Florrie, as it is known by local people, eventually lost its sources of funding and closed in 1988. Since then it

has fallen into serious disrepair and has suffered from malicious damage. However, many local people want to save the building and restore it so that it can once again play a significant role in community life. They formed a pressure group called the [Friends of the Florrie](#) and in January 2005 set up The Florence Institute Trust Ltd, which is hoping to raise £4 million to fund the restoration.



The Florrie circa 1890 (Reproduced with permission of Liverpool City Libraries)



The Florrie now



The Hall in October 2004

Tom Calderbank is Project Development Officer for The Florence Institute restoration project. He lives in Toxteth and has been involved in voluntary and community work locally for many years, as well as being employed with the [Dingle Community Regeneration Trust](#) for 5 years until February 2005. The Florence Institute Trust is currently working on the development of a bid to the UK Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to fund its project. The bid focuses on the importance of regenerating local neighbourhoods and the Trust hopes to receive support from the Liverpool Culture Company for its application.

Tom believes that the Toxteth area of Liverpool can be seen as the 'Capital of the Capital of Culture' because of its longstanding ethnic and cultural diversity, and he regards the preservation of the Florrie as a 'litmus test' of the Capital of Culture programme's potential to benefit local community regeneration. As he says, 'The preservation of buildings like the Florrie is so important for local communities for a number of reasons. The main one is that of historic continuity. These major landmarks help define an area, its people, culture and urban landscape. They connect us to our shared past, and if productive uses can be found, meet the needs of the future.' A large scale community consultation on future uses for the Florrie has been taking place, and it is hoped to find a solution which will once again place the Florrie at the heart of its local community. From Tom's point of view the ideal outcome would be sole community ownership, occupation and management of the building, but because of its large size issues of sustainability need to be considered carefully and some form of partnership between the voluntary, private and/or public sectors may be the best solution. What is most important is that the end use should meet local needs and be community led.

So ... will the Capital of Culture award help neighbourhood regeneration?

The implications of Liverpool's Capital of Culture programme for local community and neighbourhood regeneration have so far been mixed. Clearly the programme is helping to regenerate the central business areas of the city and further enhance its world famous waterfront. Large scale business investment and increased economic confidence can only be beneficial for Liverpool's overall prosperity but widespread concerns remain about whether poorer local neighbourhoods will be adversely affected by rocketing house prices and the focusing of regeneration initiatives on the city centre and other areas that attract tourists. The Capital of Culture programme is only one of a number of important investment initiatives that are currently being implemented in Liverpool, including Housing Market Renewal, but it has the potential to benefit projects such as the proposed restoration of the Florrie which would bring social, economic and cultural rewards to local communities. We must wait to see whether this potential is fulfilled.

Web addresses to be inserted as hyperlinks:

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/>

The Liverpool Culture Company

<http://www.liverpool08.com/>

Liverpool City Council

<http://www.liverpool.gov.uk/>

Liverpool Daily Post

<http://icliverpool.icnetwork.co.uk/>

Index of Deprivation

<http://www.odpm.gov.uk>

Housing Market Renewal

<http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/>

Friends of the Florrie

<http://www.savetheflorrie.org.uk/>

Dingle Community Regeneration Trust

<http://www.dcrct.co.uk/>

Note:

The photographs used to illustrate this article were downloaded from the Friends of the Florrie website.