

With the world famous Three Graces buildings, a great statement of Liverpool's civic pride, as a backdrop, a 2.5 hectare public space facing the river Mersey has become a vibrant destination and a triumph of regeneration. It is a piece of urban landscape with a broad appeal and varied uses, incorporating sunken water basins as part of a new canal link along with open-air performance areas for cultural celebration. The project has been enthusiastically received, winning no fewer than 11 national and regional awards since completion in 2009.

In 2000 Liverpool's Strategic Regeneration Framework identified improvements to the Pier Head as a key priority. With a range of major initiatives identified, a masterplan was prepared to maximise the benefits of the proposed extension of the Leeds Liverpool Canal into the city centre. A new Mersey ferry terminal, proposals for an iconic new museum of Liverpool, and a cruise liner facility were other areas of focus.

AN INTERNATIONAL GATEWAY

The public realm project, valued at £9m, was led by Liverpool City Council and implemented in a combined delivery with the Pier Head section of the Liverpool canal link, delivered for British Waterways by Balfour Beatty Civil Engineering Ltd. Funding came from NWDA and the Merseyside Objective One programme.

Urban designer AECOM Design and Planning (formerly EDAW) was charged with creating a distinctive and vibrant space as a new heart for the waterfront. A world-class stage for the city was called for: a place to enjoy festivities, host civic events and welcome visitors. The new space needed to reinvent the site as an international gateway to the city. On a practical level, the revived public realm was intended to strike a balance between canal users and those enjoying the public space year-round, together with the capability to accommodate large crowds at special events. The canal was designed to allow two open waterway basins separated by an expansive lawn.

The proposals were to respect the UNESCO World Heritage Site status and underwent rigorous scrutiny by English Heritage, the local planning authority and a local design review panel. It was important to reintegrate the city's historic statues and memorials into the new design. The council worked closely with the Canadian High Commission over the

A WORLD CLASS WATERFRONT

In 2008, Liverpool celebrated its year as European Capital of Culture. Public waterfronts, squares and streets transformed by quality design have helped to attract £1.6 billion of visitor spend to a now thriving city with international appeal. By **Rosey Paul**



In an epic feat of engineering, the canal extension has been excavated in front of the Three Grace buildings. While a large portion of the new waterway runs beneath the plaza, it becomes visible at two large open basins, separated by an expansive lawn. These three elements echo the scale and presence of the Three Graces, now reflected within the public realm. The scheme has awards from CABI Space and the Landscape Institute, among several others

