Liverpool One: remaking a city centre

Liverpool is one of the most famous trading cities in the world. The view of its Pier Head with the Liver Building has become iconic: it has been called the second city of the British Empire and in the 1930s it became the model for Shanghai's Bund. The city suffered a slow decline in the latter half of the 20th century; industries closed or moved away, postwar architecture was mostly mediocre and the city's population fell as citizens sought employment further afield. Local people even began to shop elsewhere. As Manchester's star ascended in the late 1990s, the heart of Liverpool was in danger of becoming economically inconsequential. In 1999, the city council set out a challenge for international developers as part of an ambitious initiative to reverse this trend and encourage people to visit, live in and invest in Liverpool once again. The vision was for a reimagined and extended city centre, one that rethought the vast and under-used space between the principal shopping area and the city's historic docks. Forty-seven developers expressed an interest and, after a rigorous selection process, the job went to Grosvenor. The result is a 42-acre transformation, a mixed-use, retail-led development that embodies both contemporary urban design thinking and a deep sensitivity to ideas of place, identity and scale. Containing more than 30 individually designed buildings – including department stores, a bus station, apartments, hotels and a five acre park – this complex project was completed within an ambitious timetable to exceptionally high-quality thresholds. Grosvenor, and its 26 firms of architects, have created an entirely new, but uniquely Liverpudlian, urban district. This book tells the story of this Herculean project, its origins, its design and its delivery.

Liverpool: Shaping the City, Stephen Bayley. Two books that seek to document aspects of recent city centre redevelopment in Liverpool with a particular focus on design have recently been published - David Littlefield's Liverpool One: Remaking a City Centre and the RIBA and Liverpool City Council published Liverpool: Shaping the City. Their review forms the centrepiece of this article, but the context for the city's regeneration in recent decades is important and so an overview of the city's urban development and post-World War II city centre redevelopment is first provided.