



REINVENTING EUROPE'S OLDEST CHINATOWN

LIVERPOOL HAS BIG PLANS FOR A 'NEW CHINATOWN' – BUT WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR THE AREA'S EXISTING CHINESE COMMUNITY?

As the Year of the Monkey gets underway, work is set to begin on an ambitious £200 million project to regenerate Liverpool's Chinatown.

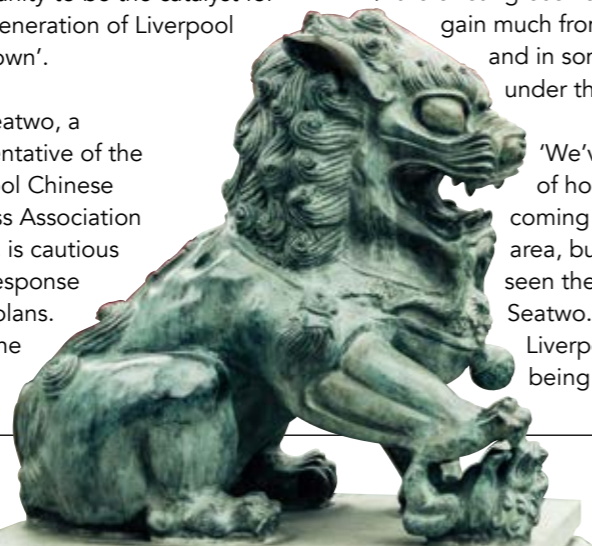
The plans for the long-vacant Tribeca fields site offer a modern vision for a 'New Chinatown', which will include 850 new residential units, a hotel, restaurants and a specialist Chinese-themed retail area. Developers North Point Global say that the scheme will aim to create an entirely new kind of Chinatown, inspired by modern China, and will act as a hub

for Chinese businesses and retailers in the UK. Antonio Garcia, Director of BLOK, the architecture firm behind the project, describes it as 'an historic opportunity to be the catalyst for the regeneration of Liverpool Chinatown'.

Alan Seatwo, a representative of the Liverpool Chinese Business Association (LCBA), is cautious in his response to the plans. 'After the initial

launch, the excitement, we were looking at what can we will gain out of the development. The more we think about it, the more it becomes apparent that the existing businesses, probably, won't gain much from the development, and in some ways are probably under threat.'

'We've had quite a lot of hopes about things coming into the Chinatown area, but we haven't actually seen the big impact,' says Seatwo. 'That's apart from the Liverpool Chinatown name being used to promote



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a number of things. We are happy to support this, to bring tourism, to bring optimism to the city, but it doesn't seem so far that the community has significantly benefited.'

Liverpool Chinatown is the oldest Chinatown in Europe, with migrants first settling in the area in the late 1850s. Remembering and respecting this cultural heritage and the historic identity of the area could be key to the success of the project, thinks Seatwo. 'Sometimes some members of the community do feel as if the branding of the "oldest Chinese community in Europe" is being used without benefits for us,' he says. 'We want to see more tangible outcomes and impact, to redevelop the area.'

Garcia paints an optimistic picture of the contribution that the futuristic development will make to the area and the potential opportunities it will generate for independent Chinese businesses. 'New Chinatown will offer over 120,000 square feet of commercial space for a variety of uses aimed at independent businesses,' he says. 'The Shanghai-inspired sunken street will be home to a variety of unique and authentic Asian food outlets, providing a gateway to the East in a futuristic, Blade Runner-inspired public realm.'

But Seatwo questions how he and other existing Chinese business owners in the area fit into this new vision. 'I'm quite uncomfortable when something is called "New Chinatown", as if sending a message to the existing one: sorry mate, you've expired now; you're the past, and now we are the new kids on the block. What bothers me is what's going to happen to the existing businesses? What's going to happen to the identity of the community? Are we being side-lined?'

The LCBA will welcome the plans, he explains, as long as the developers and the local authority don't neglect to involve the existing Chinese community at the grassroots level. 'The future for Liverpool Chinatown, we hope, can be bright,' he says. 'But,' he adds, 'we need to be cautious about the expectations, how we manage our own expectations, as well as those of the public.' **AR**

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