

Transcript: Keynote by Nick Small – AESOP Head of Schools Meeting 2025

University of Liverpool, 13 March 2025

Nick Small (Councillor, Cabinet Member for Growth and Economy, Liverpool City Council):

My name's Nick Small. I'm a councillor based in Liverpool City Centre and a Cabinet member for Growth and Economy. That role includes planning, the local plan, property, business support, economic development—all of that kind of work we do with the City Council.

It's a really significant time at the moment in Liverpool. We're going through a local plan refresh, which has taken up a lot of my time over the last year or so, largely working with elected members, stakeholders, and businesses around land use policy across the city.

I wanted to talk about inclusive growth and how that informs some of this. We've taken the view, really, as a City Council, that it's not the local plan that's going to drive some of this—it's the inclusive growth strategy. Alongside the local plan refresh, we've also published a draft of an inclusive growth strategy. I very much see this as the overarching document about what we mean by growth, why we're doing growth as a city, and what we want growth to achieve for the citizens of Liverpool.

We also have other strategies, like an investment and development prospectus, but this inclusive growth strategy is the main document. There's a QR code that links to the live consultation we're doing. We've published the draft strategy, and we're really going out for public input.

For me, it's about doing growth for people. It has to benefit people—that's what should drive everything. The economy should work for people, not the other way around. It's about how we get the benefits to the citizens of Liverpool.

Liverpool is a young and vibrant city. We've got active universities, a large student and graduate population, and we see that as a big opportunity—especially in terms of graduate retention and attracting businesses and high-value jobs. We're also culturally rich and diverse. We say that we are the world in one city, and we see that as a strength.

Despite all this, we face many challenges—some legacy issues from deindustrialisation and depopulation. We've got relatively low employment rates, poor health outcomes, and lower life expectancy. Child poverty and life chances in some parts of the city are major concerns.

This map shows indices of multiple deprivation in Liverpool. The city centre and much of South Liverpool are relatively prosperous, but North Liverpool is a structural challenge. If you take North Liverpool out, the city looks statistically better. That's why we're focusing development efforts there—we call this "Opportunity North Liverpool."

A lot is aligning right now—with a new government and ambitious housing targets, plus planning reform—so North Liverpool is in a strong position. We want to create better communities, build new and improve existing housing, and generate jobs and opportunities.

One initiative is a new town bid for North Liverpool, jointly with South Sefton. It's a contiguous urban area—residents can't really tell where Liverpool ends and Sefton begins. This area includes Liverpool

Waters and the Central Docks, with potential for 10,000 new homes and retrofitting existing ones. There's also scope to address fuel poverty and attract business investment.

This builds on earlier work, including a proposal for a locally led urban development corporation (LLUDC), which came out of the Strategic Futures Panel. We're actively recruiting for a regeneration partnership board to bring in investment and drive this agenda.

Planning reform offers us a chance to fast-track development while maintaining democratic accountability. One idea is to allow de-delegation—so where there's significant concern, the council's planning committee can step in.

The LLUDC would cover Liverpool's commercial district, the waterfront, and the Bramley-Moore Stadium area. Some visitors will tour the area tomorrow. The Pumpfields area—largely warehouses—is another opportunity zone where we're drafting a supplementary planning document.

Projects include the new stadium, expansion of the Great Homer Street Market with residential and business space, and the Goodison Park legacy. Everton is moving to a new stadium, and we want to preserve and redevelop the existing high street and community space in County Road. There's also work in Anfield, where we want to boost investment and create local jobs through the football club's presence.

We've even worked with women entrepreneurs in Anfield, mostly on Instagram-based small businesses. Their work was really inspiring. We want to support that kind of grassroots economic activity in the local plan.

I'll also mention the waterfront strategy. It's a 10-kilometre stretch that we believe is world-class, but underused. There's no continuous walking or cycling route from the Pier Head to the new stadium yet, and hard physical barriers—dock walls, railway lines—limit access to nearby deprived communities.

We need to find ways to unlock value behind the dock wall and connect it to the wider city. The waterfront should function as a coherent system with different neighbourhoods and a clear sense of place. That links directly to the work we're doing in North Liverpool.

That's all I wanted to say. I'll be around now and tomorrow morning at Peel for the Liverpool Waters part of the programme. Thanks for listening.