

Decision Pathway – Report



PURPOSE: Key decision

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 05 April 2022

TITLE	Recommendations of the We Are Bristol History Commission		
Ward(s)	Central		
Author: Fiona Gilmour	Job title: Project Manager		
Cabinet lead: Mayor	Executive Director lead: Stephen Peacock		
Proposal origin: City Partner			
Decision maker: Cabinet Member Decision forum: Cabinet			
Purpose of Report:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To seek endorsement of and authority to explore the steps required to implement the six recommendations contained within the We Are Bristol History Commission’s report “Colston Statue: What Next?”. 2. The recommendations are based on the data gathered from the public survey which ran for four months alongside the temporary display of the same name at M Shed Museum which was open from June 2021 to January 2022. There was also an online version of the display. 			
Evidence Base:			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On 7th June 2020, during global protests for the Black Lives Matter movement, the brass Victorian statue of Edward Colston situated in the centre of Bristol since 1895 was pulled from its plinth, daubed in graffiti, rolled to the harbour’s edge, and pushed into the water. The damaged statue was retrieved from the harbour three days later and taken into the care of the museum service where conservation work was undertaken to stabilise the object. The events attracted worldwide attention. 2. In September 2020 the mayor set up the We Are Bristol History Commission, an independent group of academics and historians to help Bristol better understand its history and how it became the city it is today; to work with citizens and community groups to make sure everyone in the city can share their views on Bristol’s history, and to build a shared understanding of Bristol’s story for future generations. 3. Following a lengthy period of development delayed by Covid-19 restrictions, on 4th June 2021 a temporary display co-created by the museum service and members of the History Commission opened at M Shed Museum. An online version of the display was also developed for those unwilling or unable to visit M Shed in person. Alongside these displays a short survey was opened to gather views and ideas and encouraged people from Bristol and beyond to share their thoughts. Participants had a chance to see the statue and learn about its history and then take part in the survey which was open for four months until September – the displays continued. Three questions were asked: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Do you agree or disagree that the Colston statue should be put on display in a museum in Bristol? b. What should be in the plinth space? c. How do you feel about the statue being pulled down? 4. The museum display closed on 3rd January and a month later the History Commission published a report based on the data gathered from nearly 14,000 completed surveys, 55% of which were from Bristol area postcodes. A shorter, more accessible report was also published in conjunction with Bridging Histories. 5. The results generated pointed to a considerable shared thinking and feeling in the city about the events of June 2020 and the future of the plinth and statue with a majority expressing positivity about the statue being pulled down. 6. The report also highlighted the broader issues which have emerged from the data gathered during the consultation which the Council and other national bodies have been asked to consider. Whilst these are not specific recommendations, the thoughts expressed, particularly those specifically in relation to the city’s involvement in the transatlantic enslavement of African people, could assist in supporting the Council’s wider equality and diversity work and the work being identified by the Legacy Steering Group in Project Truth. This is a significant opportunity to include this work in the wider approach to embedding equality and inclusion in the Council’s corporate strategy and in tying the different strands together in a coherent and meaningful way. 7. This work could also include reviewing or changing the current policy for renaming streets, buildings and other 			

structures where allowed by legislation; or implementation of a new policy which could take a more resident led approach and reflect the broader call to rename streets.

8. In addition, the significant amount of information provided in the survey represents a unique data set the History Commission feels important to be made available as a valuable resource for the public and academics for reviewing and researching in depth. The option of providing comments in the free text boxes has led to a great deal of content that could be of interest to researchers. Due to the method by which the data was collected there will be a process needed to manually work through in to redact any identifiable data. This will need to be done in conjunction with Bristol Archives who are able to store the results and make available appropriately in accordance with Data Protection legislation. There is the possibility of external funding available to fund this type of archival records work considered to be of national importance.
9. Bristol City Council finances to date:

Element	Cost
Costs of retrieval & exhibition	£41,000
Costs of consultation survey & analysis	£29,000

10. These costs were absorbed as business as usual from existing budgets by the various departments involved, specifically the Harbour Master, Museums, Consultation & Engagement and Neighbourhoods.
11. It is not possible to identify at this stage the future costs and resources needed to implement each recommendation. For example, a new permanent exhibition of the statue (recommendation 3) within a contextual display could start in the region of £250,000 but knowledge will develop as we move forward in the process and different options are explored. External funding would be explored to support this work to reflect the importance of the issue to the city and the nation. Funders such as Arts Council England and Heritage Lottery Fund would be approached as ideal partners in the statue project and to build on our good working relationships.

Recommendations as set out in the report:

Future of the statue

1. We recommend that the Colston statue enters the permanent collection of the Bristol City Council Museums service.
2. We recommend that the statue is preserved in its current state and the opportunity to reflect this in the listing description is explored with Historic England.
3. We recommend that the statue be exhibited drawing on the principles and practice of the temporary M Shed display where the statue was lying horizontally. We recommend that attention is paid to presenting the history in a nuanced, contextualised and engaging way, including information on the broader history of the enslavement of people of African descent.

Future of the plinth

4. We recommend that the former Colston statue plinth, along with the original plaques, remain in place and that a new plaque is installed that briefly and factually explains when and why the statue was put and taken down. (Suggested working drafted by the History Commission is laid out in the report)
5. We recommend that the Conservation Area Character Appraisal is updated to include a) the events of 7th June 2020; b) this process of public engagement; and c) the decision to locate the statue within Bristol City Council's Museums service. We recommend that the opportunity to reflect the current state of the plinth in the National List description is explored.
6. We recommend that the city think creatively about the empty plinth and its immediate vicinity. We recommend that funding is sought from public and private sources to commission temporary artworks and activities. These might take a digital or physical form, on or around the plinth. We recommend that two principles guide future use of the plinth
 - a. That there be periods of intentional emptiness and presence;
 - b. That this is a space for dialogue and conversation about things that matter in and for the city including the legacy of transatlantic slavery

Broader issues emerging from the consultation (not recommendations)

- We see the need for a city-wide commitment to creating opportunities for younger and older generations to interact, share experiences and perspectives and develop greater empathy and mutual understanding, including sharing views on the city's past, present and future
- We see the need to develop processes and practices, both locally and nationally, that encourage active engagement in creating more representative public space. When making decisions around contested heritage, public bodies should develop and follow processes that are fair and transparent, inclusive, participatory, evidence-based and committed to justice

- The history of the city's involvement with the transatlantic enslavement of African people is not an issue that can or should be consigned to the past, but rather remains embedded in present-day concerns. Strong feelings remain on this topic, and the toppling of the Colston statue has opened the opportunity for the history to be addressed urgently, appropriately and sensitively. We recognised the leadership of the Legacy Steering Group on the question on how Bristol might best memorialise and respond to the transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of African people.

Cabinet Member / Officer Recommendations:

That Cabinet:

- Notes the content of the We Are Bristol History Commission "Colston Statue: What Next?" report including the six recommendations and three broader considerations, as outlined in this report.
- Subject to recommendation 3, the Mayor and Cabinet will further consider which of the remaining recommendations will be taken forward and updated reports will be brought to a future Cabinet meeting with information on the steps and resources required to implement those recommendations in accordance with the decision-making pathway.
- Authorises the Executive Director of Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Mayor to implementing the statutory processes for regularising the removal of the statue, and accession of the object into the museum collection.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

- Equality and Inclusion – work to ensure that everyone in Bristol feels they belong, has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive, proactively and intentionally improving inclusion across the city by designing it into everything we do

City Benefits:

- The toppling of the statue and what happens next has been of great interest to the city as evidenced by the high number of completed surveys. The mayor from the outset wanted this to be a city conversation to gather evidence to determine the future of the statue and plinth and that citizens of Bristol would be included in the decision.

Consultation Details:

- "Colston Statue: What Next" survey results formed the basis for the report

Background Documents:

Full report: [Microsoft Word - History Commission Full Report Final.docx \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#)

Shorter report: [The Colston Statue What Next? \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#)

Revenue Cost	£70k	Source of Revenue Funding	Existing Harbour Master, Museums, Consultation & Engagement and Neighbourhoods Services budgets
Capital Cost	£0	Source of Capital Funding	
One off cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	Income generation proposal <input type="checkbox"/>

Required information to be completed by Financial/Legal/ICT/ HR partners:

Finance Advice:

- The report updates Cabinet on the recent developments in relation to the We Are Bristol History Commission "Colston Statue: What Next?" initiative and seeks Cabinet's guidance towards the next steps.
- The report details costs incurred to date of £70k and confirms that these have been absorbed within existing 2021/22 revenue budgets and therefore no funding is sought for these costs.
- Future costs will obviously depend on the exact proposal(s) that are chosen. Some indicative future costs are provided should the consultations result in a permanent display. Initial estimates for this option suggest potential costs of at least £250k. There is no approved budget to cover these costs and therefore funding will have to be secured. The report suggests the proposals result in a recommendation that will lead to costs being incurred of the amount and nature illustrated in the report, then funding for this will be sought externally.
- Further details on the future costs and funding implications will from the subject of a future report to Cabinet, as a result there are no new financial implications resulting from this report.

Finance Business Partner: Kayode Olagundoye, Interim Finance Business Partner, Growth and Regeneration, 11th March 2022.

2. Legal Advice: For certain recommendations, there will be a need to engage with Historic England and the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Levelling Up and to undertake the various formal statutory processes to undertake these steps including amending the listing description, seeking planning permission and listed building consent for any alternative uses for the plinth and a formal public consultation process for any updating of the Conservation Character Appraisal for the College

Green Conservation Area.		
Legal Team Leader: Joanne Mansfield Team Leader 28 March 2022		
3. Implications on IT: I can see no implications on IT in regards to this activity.		
IT Team Leader: Gavin Arbuckle, Head of Service Improvement and Performance 14th February 2022		
4. HR Advice: Whilst there are no HR implications evident in this report, the decisions taken on the future of the statue, plinth and wider aspects may require additional resource to implement.		
HR Partner: Celia Williams, HR Business Partner 15 March 2022		
EDM Sign-off	Stephen Peacock	16 th February 2022
Cabinet Member sign-off	Cllr Craig Cheney	28 th February 2022
For Key Decisions - Mayor's Office sign-off	Mayor's office	7 th March 2022

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal Use this section to provide more details to expand upon the points made in this report.	NO
Appendix B – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external Microsoft Word - History Commission Full Report Final.docx (bristol.gov.uk)	YES
Appendix C – Summary of any engagement with scrutiny	NO
Appendix D – Risk assessment	NO
Appendix E – Equalities screening / impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix F – Eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal	NO
Appendix G – Financial Advice	NO
Appendix H – Legal Advice	NO
Appendix I – Exempt Information	No
Appendix J – HR advice	NO
Appendix K – ICT	NO
Appendix L – Procurement	NO