

# Public Forum

## D C Committee B

21 February 2024



**1. Members of the Development Control Committee B**

Councillors: Ani Stafford-Townsend (Chair), Lesley Alexander, Amal Ali, Fabian Breckels, Sarah Classick, Lorraine Francis, Katja Hornchen and Guy Poultney and Chris Windows.

**2. Officers:**

Simone Harding, Phillipa Howson, John Smith, DSO



No.	Speaking	Name
		<b>23/04315/LA - Statue Of Edward Colston Colston Avenue Bristol</b>
1	No	Tim Cole
2	No	Julian Hill



I was pleased to read the very thorough officer's report and am in full agreement with their recommendations.

I note that community consultation is not a formal requirement for this kind of application, but this is a case where a very thorough consultation exercise was undertaken given the importance of the statue and its toppling to people in the city and the results of this are contained in the History Commission report that the officer's report refers to. I was very happy to chair that Commission and was delighted by the response of people across the city who visited the temporary display of the statue in M-Shed and engaged in thoughtful and often lengthy responses to the consultation. Particularly important to me was that this consultation reached out to a broadly representative group of people across the city. The results of that were a clear majority of the thousands of Bristol residents consulted were in favour of the statue entering into the permanent collection of the city museum and the events of June 2020 being marked in some way through a plaque on the plinth.

Reading the thousands of responses from Bristol residents, what struck me was how many were aware that the statue's historical significance had increased as a result of its toppling, and therefore that the statue should be preserved and displayed in its now-toppled state (as well as briefly retelling that recent history on the now-empty plinth). Some did wish to see the statue restored to the plinth and some wished to see it returned to the harbour or melted down. However, most (80% of Bristol residents who responded) felt that the statue was an object with an important and yet complex and contested history that needs the space for contextualisation and critical reflection that is best achieved in a museum. I am very pleased that the officer's report recommends this, and I encourage elected officials to endorse these recommendations that echo the opinions garnered through careful and extensive community consultation by the History Commission

Tim Cole  
Chair 'We are Bristol' History Commission  
Professor of Social History, University of Bristol

The second of the 'Objections to the application' in the Officer's Report summarises my objection (27 Nov 2023 objection and brief 5 Dec follow up) but omits important details provided to back up the assertions in my second bullet point. Here are the highlights:

### **The 'Retain and Explain' plan for the statue at the time of the toppling**

There is a miniscule reference to this "18/03688/LA – Addition of a new bronze plaque to the stone pedestal. Granted subject to conditions 13th November 2018" in the RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY section of the Officer's Report.

Documents (including 2 from Historic England) for this application are still available on the Planning Portal where the HERITAGE AND DESIGN STATEMENT includes this supporting statement for the plan:

"There have been calls to remove the statue to a museum that can provide this historic context. The view of the council is that keeping the statue in the public realm with the additional context provided by a plaque encourages further debate about these important issues concerning Bristol's heritage."

In early 2019 all was ready for this positive plan to go ahead, with the second plaque cast with wording agreed after lengthy discussions I was a major player in. Unfortunately, the Mayor blocked this at the last moment, employing a conspiracy theory I completely refute, stating that a reworded plaque would be installed instead at a later date. We were still waiting for this reworded plaque in June 2020 when the toppling event happened.

### **The flawed / unsafe consultation and survey used to justify the new 'Move' plan**

Two of the major flaws in these, of the many listed In my 27 Nov objection, were:

- the exclusion of the council's 'retain and explain' plan for the statue at the time of the toppling from the options covered (the only mentions were in a timeline for the statue, and these were incorrect!) meant that the public were denied information they needed to make an informed choice when completing the survey. This was a part of a wider disinformation campaign against 'retain and explain' which continues to this day.
- The History Commission used outreach sessions to drum up interest in the survey but were highly selective in their choices, focusing on areas more likely to be receptive to their obvious preference. The Chair of the History Commission has attempted to justify this as a means to level up responses across the city but this does not bear scrutiny, e.g. not one was in South Bristol which had many of the lowest responses.

'Guidance for custodians on how to deal with commemorative heritage assets that have become contested' prepared by a Heritage Advisory Board with significant input from Historic England, mentioned in my 5 Dec follow up, shows how badly this consultation and survey falls down.

### **Alternative suggestion**

In my 27 Nov objection I also suggested a comprehensive alternative plan based on the reinstatement of the pre-toppling 'retain and explain' plan (amended to incorporate the toppling event as part of the statue's history) after a cooling off period during which the statue would be kept in the Museum and cleaned and repaired in readiness, plus an improved 'fit for purpose' wording for a plaque for the empty plinth in the meantime.

Julian Hill, Knowle, Bristol, 20 February 2024