

Public Forum

D C Committee B

10 April 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, Guy Poultney, Chris Windows.
- 2. Officers:**
Simone Harding, Phillipa Howson, John Smith, DSO



Statements

No.	Speaking (s)	Name	
		24/01112/COND - Statue of Edward Colston, Colston Avenue Bristol BS1 4UA	
1		Tim Cole	
2		Suzanna Audrey	
3		Morayo Omogbenigun	
4		Councillor Asher Craig	



Below is a brief statement from myself as Chair of the 'We are Bristol' History Commission relating to:

Application No. 24/01112/COND

Site Address: Statue Of Edward Colston Colston Avenue Bristol BS1 4UA

for consideration by Development Control Committee B at its meeting on **Wednesday, 10 April 2024.**

I was Chair of the 'We are Bristol' History Commission that recommended the wording for a plaque to go on the empty Colston plinth following extensive consultation with the city in 2021. This consultation showed that most people in Bristol wish to see a plaque attached to the empty plinth briefly explaining why the plinth is now empty and what once stood there. Drawing on their comments, we developed some brief, factual wording that would explain to future generations as well as visitors a number of things that came through as of importance to people in the city in the comments in the consultation. Firstly, there was a concern that emptiness meant erasure, and so a desire to explicitly state that this plinth once held a statue of Edward Colston (first sentence). Secondly, alongside acknowledging the late 19th c. erection of the statue, there was a desire to acknowledge at this site the late 20th and early 21st c. opposition to the Colston statue leading to its removal in the specific context of BLM protest (second and third sentence). Thirdly, there was a desire to orient visitors interested in learning more and seeing the original statue to its current location in the city's museum (third sentence). The idea of adding a QR code that would enable an interested visitor to access more information on their mobile phone at the site is one that I support. What is critical, I think, is to keep the text of the plaque itself as short as possible and to keep its tone one of factual historical description.

Thanks,
Tim

Statement to Development Control B Committee, 10 April 2024

24/01112/COND - Statue Of Edward Colston, Colston Avenue Bristol BS1 4UA

I hope Development Control B Committee will defer the decision about the wording for an additional plaque on the plinth where the statue of Colston once stood until after the local elections, when we have a new administration.

Unfortunately, planning officers seem to have ignored a request from members of the Committee to review the wording despite the minutes indicating: The Chief Planner reported that the Committee could review the wording and a revised wording would come back to the next DC B Committee for approval. Instead, identical wording has been brought back to the committee:

On 13 November 1895, a statue of Edward Colston (1636 - 1721) was unveiled here celebrating him as a city benefactor. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the celebration of Colston was increasingly challenged given his prominent role in the enslavement of African people. On 7 June 2020, the statue was pulled down during Black Lives Matter protests and rolled into the harbour. Following consultation with the city in 2021, the statue entered the collections of Bristol City Council's museums. 2024

This apparent refusal to review the wording is justified by including a statement from Professor Tim Cole, Chair of the now defunct History Commission. But the History Commission appears to have been tightly controlled by the outgoing mayoral administration. The terms of reference include:

- The commission will report to the Mayor who will use it as a way of communicating and further engaging with the city.
- The chair will be appointed by the Mayor.
- The commission will comprise of members appointed by the chair in conjunction with the Mayor's Office.

Unfortunately, the History Commission was not as inclusive as it could have been. It was noted to have "an extreme lack of Bristolians" and it did not involve representatives of groups with considerable knowledge of the "cult of Colston" in the city.[1] For example, members of Bristol Radical History Group and Countering Colston were not included.

It is important to note what is currently on the plinth. The Historic England official list entry states:

On the south face, the words 'Erected by citizens of Bristol as a memorial of one of the most virtuous and wise sons of their city AD 1895' and 'John Cassidy fecit'. On the west face, Colston dispenses charity to poor children; on the north he is shown at the harbour; on the east is a scene with marine horses, mermaids, and anchors.[2]

Consequently, the plinth itself celebrates Colston. This may be why, for example, in 2018 the following wording for an additional plaque was agreed:

As a high official of the Royal African Company from 1680 to 1692, Edward Colston played an active role in the enslavement of over 84,000 Africans (including 12,000 children) of whom over 19,000 died en route to the Caribbean and America. Colston also invested in the Spanish slave trade and in slave-produced sugar. As Tory MP for Bristol (1710-1713), he defended the city's 'right' to trade in enslaved Africans. Bristolians who did not subscribe to his religious and political beliefs were not permitted to benefit from his charities.[3]

If the Victorian plaques remain, it is important to ensure that the wording of an additional plaque adequately addresses, in the public realm, Colston's involvement in the trafficking of enslaved Africans. Instead, the History Commission suggest: "The critical thing is that the plaque orients the visitor to the museum where a much richer and more dynamic display is possible."

Although members of Countering Colston were excluded from the History Commission, they were proved to be on the right side of history. This was acknowledged by Justin Gau, Chancellor of the Diocese of Bristol, when stained glass panels celebrating Colston were replaced at St Mary Redcliffe church:

To excuse or ignore the slave trade is a sin. To encourage parishioners to look at a memorial to a slave trader and to be encourage to 'Go thou and do likewise' is not only grotesque but entirely contrary to the Gospel command to love one another.[4]

He was not mincing his words. If the current bronze plaques celebrating Colston remain on the plinth in the public domain (referring to 'one of the most virtuous and wise sons of their city' and containing an image of Colston 'dispensing charity to poor children') surely a more forthright description of Colston's role in human trafficking is also required on any additional plaque?

Suzanne Audrey

References

[1] ['We Are Bristol' History Commission has 'extreme lack of Bristolians' involved - Bristol Live \(bristolpost.co.uk\)](https://www.bristolpost.co.uk)

[2] [STATUE OF EDWARD COLSTON, Non Civil Parish - 1202137 | Historic England](https://www.historicengland.org.uk/monuments-and-buildings/1202137)

[3] <https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/proposed-wording-new-plaque-colston-statue-revealed/>

[4] [SMR given permission to install new stained glass \(stmaryredcliffe.co.uk\)](https://www.stmaryredcliffe.co.uk)

The [Bristol Legacy Foundation](#) (BLF) is writing to express its support to grant planning permission for the installation of a new plaque on the Colston plinth. The plaque will serve as an important move towards addressing Bristol's history with the Transatlantic Trafficking of Enslaved Africans (TTEA) in the public realm, in line with the recommendations from the BLF's consultation with African Heritage Communities in 2021 ([Project T.R.U.T.H](#)).

According to the We Are Bristol History Commission, the Bristol Legacy Foundation has been recognised as the body responsible for delivering recommendation six:

"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 and around the plinth. We recommend that two principles guide future use of the plinth:

- *that there are periods of intentional emptiness and presence.*
- *that this is a space for dialogue and conversation about things that matter in and for the city, including the legacy of transatlantic slavery."*

The BLF is supportive of the wording of the new plaque, which was requested by the majority of respondents to the We Are Bristol History Commission report. Furthermore, a QR code will encourage visitors to learn more about the history behind the statue and Bristol's involvement with the TTEA.

The BLF request that this application is considered favourably, and planning permission is granted for the installation of the new plaque.

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Kind regards,
Morayo

Morayo Omogbenigun (she/her)
Project Co-ordinator
Bristol Legacy Foundation

I am writing to express my support to grant planning permission for the installation of a new plaque on the Colston plinth. This plaque will serve as an important symbol of inclusivity, diversity, and acknowledgment of the historical context surrounding the statue's removal.

After an extensive consultation process on the future of the Colston Statue, involving thousands of stakeholders, including community groups, historians, and local residents, it has become evident that there is a strong consensus to provide a balanced and accurate representation of history, ensuring that the site also becomes a space for education, reflection, and unity.

[The Bristol Legacy Foundation](#) is recognised as the body through which the work of the We Are Bristol History Commission will be taken forward and is specifically responsible for delivering recommendation, six:

“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 and around the plinth. We recommend that two principles guide future use of the plinth:

- *that there are periods of intentional emptiness and presence;*
- *that this is a space for dialogue and conversation about things that matter in and for the city, including the legacy of transatlantic slavery.”*

In 2021, BLF commissioned the

[Project T.R.U.T.H \(Telling, Restoring, Understanding our Tapestry & History\) report](#) produced by Black South West Network in partnership with Afrikan Connexions Consortium as a result of more than two years work by the council’s Legacy Steering Group Project TRUTH sub-group.

This report is groundbreaking in that the recommendations on how the ramifications and legacies of Bristol’s involvement in Transatlantic Trafficking and Enslavement of Afrikan’s (TTEA) should be recognised was led by and centres the voice of Bristol’s Afrikan Heritage communities for the very first time.

Though the Project Truth report does not directly address the future of the plinth or indeed statues, the proposed new plaque has been carefully designed to reflect the sentiments captured in both reports and the Reparations Motion (2021) which acknowledges that since 2016 Bristol City Council has *“gone further than any previous administrations in developing an understanding of and facing and addressing the legacies of the TTEA on Race and Racial hierarchy, both within the Council itself and the wider city”*.

The We are Bristol History Commission’s report findings show an overwhelming majority of respondents want an updated plaque placed on the plinth that will not only provide factual historical context but will also serve as a catalyst for dialogue and understanding.

The addition of a QR code will help visitors expand their knowledge on the full story of Colston’s leading role in the TTEA.

Granting planning permission for the new plaque on the Colston plinth aligns with the principles of promoting equity, inclusivity, and social cohesion within a city that is only beginning to face up to its dark past. A city where for over 200years its links to TTEA have been hiding in plain sight!

I kindly request that you consider this application favourably and grant planning permission for the installation of the new plaque on the Colston plinth. This decision will not only address the desires

and sentiments of the wider city but will also contribute to the broader narrative of progress, reconciliation and reparatory justice.

Cllr Asher Craig

Deputy Mayor of Bristol

Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Equalities