

Committee(s): Culture, Heritage & Libraries – For decision Policy & Resources – For decision	Dated: 31/01/2022 17/02/2022
Subject: Beckford & Cass Statues Interpretation Project	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	3, 4, 10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Damian Nussbaum, Director Innovation & Growth	For Decision
Report authors: Elizabeth Scott, Head of Guildhall Art Gallery & London's Roman Amphitheatre	

Summary

In October 2021, your Court of Common Council endorsed the recommendation of your Statues Working Group to retain the William Beckford and John Cass statues in Guildhall, instructing officers to work collaboratively with the City Arts Initiative and in consultation with relevant stakeholders to develop appropriate explanatory plaques to be placed alongside them.

In November 2021, Guildhall Art Gallery officers proposed an approach to your City Arts Initiative which, in turn, recommended the approach to your December Committee.

At that meeting, your Committee raised concerns relating to greater inclusion in the development of the plaques (specifically requesting that consultation panels not be limited to youth audiences) and over the use of QR codes. These, it felt, were likely to be superseded in a short space of time by technological advances. As a result, officers were instructed to return a proposal to your Committee in consideration of these concerns.

This report sets out options in relation to the above, following research and discussions with cultural heritage organisations who have worked with young people and intergenerational panels. It recommends that a co-creation/collaborative approach is taken, both for the factual interpretation and artistic responses to the statues; that an historian be commissioned to work with groups comprising schools/young people and older people to facilitate delivery; and that officers work with the City Surveyor and Historic England to agree a high-quality plaque that may easily be updated and replaced in a cost-effective way as and when QR technology becomes outdated.

Recommendation(s)

Members of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee are asked to:

- Endorse the proposal for a co-creation/collaborative approach across age groups to develop the statues' interpretation to the Policy & Resources Committee.

Members of the Policy & Resources Committee are asked to:

- Approve the co-creation/collaborative approach across age groups as outlined above and under the proposals section of this report.

Main Report

Background

1. In October 2021, your Court of Common Council endorsed the recommendation of your Statues Working Group to retain the William Beckford and John Cass statues in Guildhall, instructing officers to work collaboratively with the City Arts Initiative, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, to develop appropriate explanatory plaques to be placed alongside them.
2. This report relates specifically to the actions endorsed by Court to arrange wording for the plaques and deliver further content through the use of QR coding so that further information is available for those who may wish to seek it. All other actions within the Court report, including arrangements for educational activities and the physical production of the plaques are being, or will be, considered separately by relevant officers and Committees.
3. In November 2021, Guildhall Art Gallery officers proposed an approach to this work to your City Arts Initiative which, in turn, recommended the approach to your December 2021 Committee. Specifically, this proposed that:
 - a. Your (Guildhall Art Gallery) Education Officer and a consultant work with a youth panel to examine and interpret the two statues.
 - b. The youth panel work with the Gallery's curatorial team to commission contemporary artists to create artistic responses to the statues (to include a poet but which may also include other art forms).
 - c. The plaques, located on the monument or on the wall near them, combine factual information, stating why the statue is present in Guildhall and discussing the subject's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade alongside a poetic response (as per item 3b above).
 - d. A QR code be featured on the plaque which links to further artistic responses that are hosted on the City Corporation's website (on the Gallery's and/or Great Hall's webpages) and which offers links to websites with further information about Beckford and Cass.

4. At that meeting, your Committee raised concerns requesting that statue consultation panels not be limited to youth audiences and over the use of QR codes which, it felt, are likely to be superseded in a short space of time by technological advances. As a result, officers were instructed to return a revised proposal to your Committee so that this may be endorsed for onward approval by your Policy & Resources Committee.

Current Position

5. Since your December meeting, Gallery officers have undertaken research and had discussions with colleagues in heritage organisations in order to gain insight and collect case studies from those who have experience of working with youth panels and/or intergenerational groups.
6. The majority of feedback from this research shows that intergenerational groups work well for long-term initiatives (for example, [Big Pit National Coal Museum's Intergenerational Group](#)). While differences in language and cultural assumptions between people of different generations can sometimes be barriers, sensitive facilitation, including allowing plenty of time for one-to-one conversations, can help create successful projects and challenge assumptions from both younger and older people.
7. Notably, there are opportunities and challenges of working with both groups, which are outlined in the options below.

Options

OPTION 1: Youth Panel / Intergenerational Panel

8. Working with youth panels reflects how many museums work with young people today and is considered best practice. It is something the Gallery has wanted to do for some time with this particular project providing the perfect opportunity to establish such a group. For example, [Leeds City Museum](#) has run a youth group for a decade. It is featured in the Kids in Museums' [Museum Youth Group Directory](#) which provides a comprehensive list of museum youth groups across the UK.
9. The age range of youth groups varies from 10 to 24 years, however most enlist young people aged 16-24. Working with a youth panel on this project would help recognise the valuable contribution that young people make to culture and heritage, ensuring their voices are heard and that they are able to take an active role in shaping the interpretation of the statues for which they are both current and future audiences.
10. A good example of such practice is the youth-led approach taken on the [Reframing Picton](#) project involving Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales – and community partner the Sub Saharan Advisory Panel. The museum's portrait of Thomas Picton (a Welsh military leader who became notorious for the cruelty of his reign as governor of Trinidad) has been removed and will be redisplayed and re-interpreted as part of the project.

11. While consulting directly with young people has been shown to have a very positive impact, connecting older adults with younger people can provide additional advantages. Intergenerational working can help build confidence, challenge assumptions and prejudices and help tackle social isolation and loneliness across groups.
12. However, intergenerational activities do not appeal to everyone and can cause anxiety for some. Older people may be daunted by the idea of interacting with younger people, particularly if they have not done so for many years. They may also feel worried about having 'nothing to give' or not being able to relate to younger generations. They may also feel concerned about being able to 'keep up' with the energy of the younger participants.
13. In turn, young people can often disengage in intergenerational projects as they feel their voices are not heard with older participants sometimes 'taking over' and dominating discussions.
14. Notably, participants will have different levels of confidence in participating in intergenerational activities. For this reason, the option of developing an intergenerational group is not recommended.

OPTION 2: Collaboration and co-creation with an artist

15. A second option – the recommended route – is the commissioning of an artist to work with different groups at different times to facilitate dialogue and to co-create an artwork. There are many successful examples of this approach, which was also recommended by Historic England during the research undertaken for this report.
16. There are a number of artists who have extensive experience and are extremely adept at being the facilitator between different age groups and diverse stakeholders. These artists usually work with the age groups separately and then bring their ideas together to create an artwork.
17. Examples include [*Where Light Falls*](#), an Historic-England-led project to commission two new poems to tell the story of those who risked their lives to protect St Paul's and Coventry Cathedral during the Second World War. Keith Jarrett (the poet commissioned to write London's poem for this project) worked with four schools, Exiled Writers Ink – a group of writers who have in common a background of immigrant, exile, refugee or migrant status – and the Creative Writes group – older writers who gather regularly in Islington. Jarrett's final poem mixed and incorporated the words from each group session: *'My idea was to bring them together, if not physically in the same room, then at least in their words.'*
18. Another example of this approach is [*The Reconciliation Reredos*](#) - a project to develop a major public artwork by St Stephen's Church, Bristol, in response to the church's complex historical legacy with slavery. Throughout the process, multi-media artist Graeme Mortimer Evelyn was in dialogue with a wide range of people delivering a community learning programme that engaged differing groups of Bristolians through workshops, forums and events. Community engagement

was an essential part of the project, with the objective to reconnect the church to its community. The resulting artwork responds to the church's past, reflects the voices of the city today, while representing the potential of the future.

Proposals

19. OPTION 2 - a co-creation/collaborative approach - is the recommended route, both for the factual interpretation and artistic responses to the Guildhall's statues.
20. If this option is approved by your Committee, the Gallery would commission an historian to work with groups comprising schoolchildren and young people and, separately, older people, on the interpretation (the explanation of the statues) which will also function as a foundation for the artistic responses. This would constitute stage 1 of the project.
21. For stage 2, the Gallery would commission artists to work with the different groups to facilitate discussions and co-create an artistic response to the statues.
22. This approach has proven to be successful for other projects and allows everyone to participate equally with their peers.
23. Regarding the use of QR codes and to future-proof the plaques, your officers will work with the City Surveyor and Historic England to agree a high-quality plaque design that is fabricated to be easily updated and replaced in a cost-effective way as and when required (this may – for example – see a more permanent pedestal, with a replaceable plaque face).
24. As per the original proposal, the QR code would link those seeking to find out more, to the artistic responses described in item 17, and to further information about Beckford and Cass and their involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- **Strategic implications** include alignment with the Corporate Plan at outcomes 3, 4, and 10 in that the proposals:
 - Provide access to world-class heritage, culture and learning to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.
 - Bring individuals and communities together to share experiences and promote wellbeing, mutual respect and tolerance.
 - Protect, curate and promote world-class heritage assets, cultural experiences and events.

The proposals also align with the cross-cutting theme of inclusion in the City Corporation's Recovery Strategy [*Square Mile: Future City*](#), noting that collaboration should be at the heart of what museums do, and that the statues' histories should be debated through a genuinely inclusive and ethical approach if the City Corporation is to successfully engage the next generation and the communities it serves.

- **Financial implications:** the cost of the proposals in this report is estimated at £17,000 which will be met by the Cultural and Visitor Services local risk budget in the budget year 2021/22. Should the work take longer, a request for a carryover to the 2022/23 year may be submitted. Some funding towards fabrication and installation of the plaques is included in this figure but the full cost of this may only be accurately estimated once the content of the plaques (including the artistic responses) has been determined. This may, therefore, require a modest bid for funding during the next financial year.
- **Resource implications:** Gallery staff may be stretched during the period of the project while they work on other major initiatives (between January and March 2022, the Gallery will be closed for essential maintenance, while installation of a new major temporary exhibition is planned). However, it is anticipated that a significant proportion of the work may be undertaken within the current financial year.
- **Legal implications:** an application for Listed Building Consent may need to be submitted via the City Surveyor's department to enable the installation of the plaques, subject to their format and fixtures.
- **Risk implications:** sufficient time must be given for the development and commissioning process which must be treated with appropriate sensitivity (for example, other similar projects in London and nationally have taken 12 months and are still ongoing). Temporary sign stands will be placed in front of both statues and will give the statues context and explain the re-interpretation project until the permanent plaques are ready for installation.
- **Equalities implications:** the proposals consider the opportunity to engage with communities across the spectrum and to commission artists who will consider Black experiences and amplify the voices of those whose lives are most affected by Beckford and Cass's legacy today.
- **Climate implications:** none
- **Security implications:** none

Conclusion

25. The proposals within this report offer a way forward for the re-interpretation of the Beckford and Cass statues using an inclusive approach that centres the voices of the communities who are most affected by Beckford and Cass's legacy today. The proposals also reflect best museum practice.

Appendices

- None

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