

Committee(s): Policy & Resources – For Information Culture, Heritage and Libraries – For Information	Dated: 7 July 2022 18 July 2022
Subject: Update: 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
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Summary

This report provides an interim update to the Beckford and Cass Statues Interpretation Project.

On 17 February 2022 Policy & Resources Committee approved the proposal for a co-creation/collaborative approach across age groups to develop the statues’ interpretation. This proposal was also endorsed by Members of CHL and included a recommendation that officers work with an intergenerational panel and a separate youth panel.

Delivery of this next phase is now underway. Following a competitive selection process, Culture& have been appointed. Culture& is a leading Black led arts and education charity. They work in partnership with institutions and artists to develop programmes that promote diversity in the workforce and expand audiences.

To provide information in the interim, temporary signs have been produced and are currently on display alongside the statues. These enable visitors to Guildhall to understand the historical context of the statues and learn about plans for interpretation.

Progress has also been made in relation to how external partners educate visitors about the statues and their historical context, with City of London Guides now including these topics during their tours of the Great Hall.

Recommendation(s)

Members of the Policy & Resources Committee (P&R) and Culture, Heritage, and Libraries Committee (CHL) are asked to:

- Note the contents of this report

Main Report

Background

1. In October 2021, the Court of Common Council endorsed the recommendation of the Statues Working Group to retain the William Beckford and John Cass statues in Guildhall. This recommendation instructed 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 using QR coding so that further information is available for those who wish to seek it. All other actions within the Court report, including arrangements for educational activities are being, or will be, considered separately by relevant officers and Committees.
3. Officers presented options to Members of the CHL Committee over two separate meetings in December and January.
4. At these meetings, Members raised concerns requesting that statue consultation panels not be limited to youth audiences.
5. Members also raised concerns around the use of QR codes which, it felt, are likely to be superseded in a short space of time by technological advances.
6. The agreed approach was subsequently endorsed by CHL in January and approved by P&R in February. The proposal is as follows:
 - a. Officers and a consultant work with a youth panel and intergenerational panel to examine and interpret the two statues. These groups will be representative, including special educational needs and disability (SEND) communities, additionally amplifying the voices of those whose lives are most affected by Beckford and Cass's legacy today.
 - b. Both panels work with the consultant and Head of Gallery 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 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 6b above).
 - d. A QR code be featured on the plaque which links to further information about the historical context of the statues, as well as further artistic responses. These are hosted on the City Corporation's website (on the Gallery's and/or Great Hall's webpages).

- e. Officers with the City Surveyor and Historic England to agree a high-quality plaque design that is fabricated but could be easily updated in a cost-effective way as and when required.
7. At February P&R, it was also requested that temporary signs be installed at both Cass and Beckford statues. This would provide interim information on the statues and their historical context in Guildhall.

Current Position

8. Sufficient time must be given for the development, consultation and commissioning process which must be treated with appropriate sensitivity due to the nature of the project and the Grade I listed setting. However, interim informative devices have been introduced.
9. In time for Court of Common Council in March, officers designed and installed temporary, freestanding signs next to the Cass and Beckford statue at Guildhall (see appendix 1). These included information on:
 - a. The significance of the Transatlantic Slave Trade within the City's history
 - b. The connection between the subject of each statue (e.g. Beckford or Cass), the City and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.
 - c. Plans for future interpretation of the Beckford and Cass statues.
 - d. The City Corporation 's commitment to equality, inclusivity and diversity and tackling slavery and racism in all its forms.
10. To support the interpretation of these statues, officers have also been engaging with City of London Guides who regularly conduct tours of the Great Hall. Since April, they have been including content on the Beckford statue in their tours and its historical context within the City of London.
11. One of the artistic responses is also underway. A performance by artists Enam Gbewonyo and Liz Gre has been co-commissioned between Guildhall Art Gallery and Arts&Heritage. The performance takes audiences on a journey through space and time. The physical act of the performance is to reanimate the past lives of The Guildhall, unearthing the part(s) it played in the legacies of slavery and colonisation. It premiered at an evening event in Guildhall on 8 April and will be filmed in June. The performance will be one of the artistic responses made available via the QR code on the plaques.
12. Delivery for the future interpretation of the statues is also underway. Following a competitive selection process, Culture& has been appointed. Culture& is a leading Black led arts and education charity devoted to diversifying the arts.
13. They deliver their aims through partnerships with world class arts and heritage organisations. Programmes are aimed at expanding underserved audiences.
14. Culture& has experience working in partnership with the City Corporation and its institutions, including LMA and Keats House. They have also worked with organisations across the sector, including Museum of London, Tate, and

Sotheby's.

15. Culture& will help to recruit intergenerational panel members and youth panel members. They will also coordinate and work with the youth panel and intergenerational panel to deliver the plaques (from content development and commissioning the poet, to creation and graphic design). They will also design the governance structure, and build in areas of support to develop participants during the programme.
16. While the installation of temporary signs could be introduced swiftly, it is anticipated that any more permanent fixtures will take longer to implement, due to the Grade I listed setting and depending on the approach agreed with City Surveyor's and Historic England.
17. Costs for this programme of work to date were taken out of Culture and Visitor Services local risk budget for the 2021/22 financial year. To deliver the next phase of the project, a carry forward request has been made.
18. Culture& have proposed a 9-12 month timeline. Whilst the City Corporation is keen to progress swiftly, it is mindful that the project must move forward at an appropriate pace for the participants to ensure trust is built. Therefore, officers have sought the experience and expertise of the invited consultants to propose this timetable. This will enable the plaques to be produced with a focus on inclusivity and with suitable sensitivity. The Listed Building Consent application process will take eight weeks.

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 theme of inclusion in the City Corporation's Recovery Strategy [Square Mile: Future City](#). They note 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:** Work to date has been met by the Cultural and Visitor Services local risk budget in the budget year 2021/22. A request for a carryover of £30,000 to the 2022/23 year has been 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 require a modest bid for funding later this financial year.

- **Resource implications:** Gallery staff were stretched during the first period of the project due to other major initiatives. Between January and March 2022, the Gallery was closed for essential maintenance. The Gallery also launched a major temporary exhibition.
- **Legal implications:** an application for Listed Building Consent will 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. This process must be treated with appropriate sensitivity (e.g., other similar projects have taken 12 months and are still ongoing). Temporary freestanding signs have been placed in front of both statues which 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. Additionally they aim 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

19. This report provides an interim update to the Beckford and Cass Statues Interpretation Project. Interim plaques have been placed at the Guildhall to inform the public about the statues and their future interpretation. This next phase will bring in the voices of intergenerational communities to co-create the content of plaques and any artistic output.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Design of temporary plaques for Beckford and Cass statues

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