

Committee(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equality, Inclusion & Diversity Sub – For Discussion Communications & Corporate Affairs Sub – For Discussion Culture, Heritage and Libraries – For Decision 	Dated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 February 2025 5 February 2025 10 February 2025
Subject: Beckford and Cass Statue Project Webpages	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diverse Engaged Communities Flourishing Public Spaces Vibrant Thriving Destination
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
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 update on the Beckford and Cass statue plaques project (‘Revealing the City’s Past’). It defines the content and contains a preview of what would be published on the City Corporation’s webpages as part of the ‘Retain and Explain’ approach.

Recommendation(s)

Members of the **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and Communications & Corporate Affairs Sub-Committees** are requested to consider this report for discussion and provide recommendations for onward consideration by the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee.

Members of the **Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee (CHL)** are requested to:

- Approve the long historic texts for Beckford and Cass for publishing on the City Corporation’s website (Appendix 2).
- Approve the content that has been developed for publishing on the City Corporation’s website (Appendix 3).

- Note that any operational updates to the webpages (e.g. minor revisions, factual corrections) would be made under the direction of the Head of Profession for Culture.
- Note that any new commissions or ongoing commitment to additional work would need to be considered separate to this report and could risk further prolonging the project.

Main Report

Background

1. In October 2021, the Court of Common Council endorsed the recommendation of the Statues Working Group to ‘Retain and Explain’ 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 the statues.
2. This was in-line with the then Government’s recommended ‘Retain and Explain’ approach of keeping assets in situ, complemented with a comprehensive explanation which provides the whole story of the person or event depicted so that a fuller understanding of the historic context can be known, understood and debated. And likewise reflecting the need to consult the community and stakeholders as “integral to the discussion on decision-making”.
3. This report relates specifically to the actions endorsed by Court to arrange wording for the plaques and deliver content using QR codes so that further information is available for those who wish to seek it.
4. In November 2022, the Policy and Resources Committee (P&R) resolved, that Members
 - *Agreed to delegate authority over the project to Culture, Heritage, and Libraries Committee as elected by Court; noting the matter would come back to Policy and Resources Committee in the event that there was any significant slippage on the revised delivery date.*
5. Given the policy and strategic importance, P&R still maintains a locus on this work. At the time that this work started, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Sub-Committee (EDI) didn’t exist in its current form. Clearly the sub-committee has a particularly relevant role and EDI Members are invited to make recommendations to CHL. It is suggested that the EDI Sub-Committee is given the opportunity to input to any decisions on the remainder of this work.
6. Given the recent media interest on work in relation to the Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans, the Communications & Corporate Affairs Sub-Committee is being informed and invited to make recommendations to CHL on this report.

7. The approach on the plaque wording was endorsed by the CHL Committee in January 2022 and approved by P&R in February 2022, with the proposal as follows.
 - *Officers and a consultant to work with a youth panel and intergenerational panel to examine and interpret the two statues. These groups to 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 legacies today.*
 - *Both panels to work with the consultant and the 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).*
 - *The plaques, located on the monument or on a wall near them, to 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.*
 - *A QR code to be featured on the plaque which links to further information about the historical context of the statues, as well as further artistic responses, which will be hosted on the City Corporation's website (on the Gallery's and/or Great Hall's webpages).*
 - *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.*
8. Following a competitive process, Culture& was appointed as lead partner. Culture& is a leading Black led arts and education charity devoted to diversifying the arts. In November 2022, an external freelance Project Manager with experience running projects of this kind was also appointed to support the Head of Gallery in delivery. Together, they formed a Steering Group to advise on all content. An Intergenerational Panel and separate Accessibility Panel were established and consulted on all aspects of the project.
9. Between November 2022 to June 2024 a total of 10 reports went to P&R and CHL Committee to gain approvals on the approach to the project, mainly focussed on the short texts, poems and plaque designs. A significant milestone was achieved when Listed Building Consent was granted in August 2023 for the Beckford plaque.
10. In accordance with the recommendations endorsed by Court, the plaque design incorporated QR codes. The Court report specifically stated:
 - *They do however recommend that such a plaque take advantage of modern technology such as a QR code to allow for more cohesive, flexible and modern engagement with the contextual information. This would allow for the content to be adapted over time or for specific events, if appropriate, and include multi-media for enhanced engagement. It would also offer greater flexibility in meeting various accessibility requirements.*
11. A detailed outline of the virtual environment was not submitted to committee as the Court report reflected on the fact that the content linked to by the QR code would

be evolving and flexible, and it would reasonably be considered as falling into the day-to-day operational responsibility of Officers under the Scheme of Delegations (noting that Members always have the option to call in to committee if they would like to review or scrutinise).

Current Position

12. Poems for the Beckford and Cass plaques have been commissioned. These are now complete and have been approved at Committee. For reference, the final version of both poems is provided in Appendix 1.
13. Explanatory texts for the Beckford and Cass statues have been commissioned. The outcome was a short text for inclusion on each of the plaques which was approved in September 2023 at Committee. The Beckford short text was approved under the Delegated Authority process in April 2024. For reference, the final version of both short texts is provided in Appendix 1.
14. Owing to space limitations around what can be displayed on the plaques, a longer text was developed that contains more detail about Beckford and Cass (Appendix 2). A researcher was commissioned to develop the long historic texts for each statue in collaboration with the intergenerational panel. The long historic texts provide an informed, considered, and contextual reinterpretation of the history of both Beckford and Cass regarding their involvement in the Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans and what that might tell us about their legacy today. The texts were written in collaboration with the Intergenerational Panel and External Stakeholder Group. The texts have been academically peer reviewed.
15. Committee is requested to approve the long historic texts. The material is in accordance with the Court's endorsed recommendation to provide '*...cohesive, flexible and modern engagement with the contextual information...and include multi-media for enhanced engagement*', providing further information and context beyond the plaques.
16. Project webpages for 'Revealing the City's Past' have been created. The dedicated webpages include additional educational and creative content that complement and enrich the plaques. The project team wanted to ensure that at the heart of the webpages, they create a space of welcome and recognition for the African and Caribbean diaspora and communities with access needs to improve their understanding and visitor experience at the City of London. The content produced for the webpages is set out below.
 - i. Beckford – plaque short text (accessible video/BSL/subtitles)
 - ii. Beckford – plaque poem (accessible video/BSL/subtitles)
 - iii. Cass – plaque short text (accessible video/BSL/subtitles)
 - iv. Cass – plaque poem (accessible video/BSL/subtitles)
 - v. Beckford – an investigation with footnotes (accessible video/BSL/subtitles)
 - vi. Cass – an investigation with footnotes (accessible video/BSL/subtitles)
 - vii. Beckford statue – audio described tour (audio)
 - viii. Cass statue – audio described tour (audio)
 - ix. Great Hall – audio described tour (audio)

- x. Photoshoot – “I See You: A Reckoning” and write-ups of seven interviews and photography with key stakeholders.
 - xi. Project film (video)
 - xii. Blog post 1 – “Retain and Explain: Its Background and Uncertain Future”
 - xiii. Blog post 2 – “Where have all the women gone? Black women White spaces”
 - xiv. Blog post 3 – “Making Patterns and Hopefully, Breaking Patterns”
 - xv. Artistic commission – “Rendering the Alternative: Nine Nights” (video)
 - xvi. Pattern design – for use as branding (online and print) for the project, with the artist’s explanation in blog post 3.
17. The webpages are private and will not be made live until the plaques are formally launched. A preview is shared (Appendix 3) to enable Members to experience the content in context as members of the public would once the plaques are launched.
18. A web content guide, a brief description of each form of content, is provided in Appendix 3. The guide has been written by the Steering Group and includes the intention/purpose of each form of content, and feedback from the Intergenerational Panel and Accessibility Panel following testing. Members are encouraged to review the webpages alongside the web content guide.
19. Some of the material is artistic content and is open to interpretation. Careful consideration needs to be applied in terms of governance that is commensurate with that understanding. Governance should ensure that there is a balance of appropriateness of engagement and efficacy. **Crucially, the governance process must not censor any of this work.** As such, the City Corporation’s Communications team has not provided any editorial oversight of these webpages as it did not wish to dilute or misinterpret the narrative developed by our stakeholders and project partners.
20. The material represents the collective and creative efforts of many external stakeholders and collaborators from the Caribbean diaspora. The webpages are one way of giving more context to the plaques. The stakeholders consider it to be an essential part of the project and the Government’s recommended ‘Retain and Explain’ approach.
21. This content is one way that the groups have been able to have some creative input without the limiting constraints of Listed Building rules. This is in line with the ‘Retain and Explain’ guidance – which “encourages innovation in alternative media, including creative ways to explain and contextualise the story of the person or event that is commemorated”. The content also represents the original intention set-out early-on in the project: ‘amplifying the voices of those whose lives are most affected by Beckford and Cass’s legacies today’.
22. The webpages and content have been tested by the Intergenerational Panel and Accessibility Panel. An accredited BSL practitioner has been used to ensure that the BSL versions meet accessibility guidelines. Appendix 4 is the formal report produced by the access consultants. It collates and summarises the feedback and recommendations with notable comments including:

- *‘The tone of the narration in the provided text is formal, reflective and inclusive. It conveys a sense of responsibility and sensitivity, particularly in its approach to addressing the complex and painful legacies of figures like William Beckford and Sir John Cass, who are linked to the Transatlantic Trade of Enslaved Africans. I think it gives a sense of significant shift in the narrative, making a step towards greater inclusivity and recognition of those affected by these historical figure’s legacies.’*
- *‘The text feels professional, respectful and committed to social justice while also being accessible to [a] broad audience. It evokes a sense of importance and thoughtfulness, signalling a meaningful step towards addressing historical legacies in public spaces.’*
- *‘I found the webpages fascinating, and it has inspired me to learn more about Caribbean and West Indian culture having had a glimpse from the site.’*

23. The webpages will be linked to by the QR codes featured on the plaques. The QR codes would also be used on other associated material and link to the appropriate pages on the City Corporation website. All content will be available on handheld devices that can be collected from the Guildhall Art Gallery welcome desk.

24. The plaques have been produced and are in storage with the fabricator. The replaceable aluminium plaques which feature the QR codes will be manufactured once the webpages are approved. The plaques will be installed ahead of the launch.

Options

25. **Option 1 – all content is approved** as set out in the preview webpages.

26. **Option 2 – partial content is approved with edits.** Exceptional edits would be limited to improving factual accuracy and not altering the narrative. This may require further research, review and validation, and the project steering group’s recommendation is not to alter the content. If this option is selected then the launch may be partial or subject to further delay, and COL’s response may be considered as incomplete.

27. **Option 3 – no content to be hosted online.** The plaques would be installed with no accompanying web content and likely no launch event. The project steering group’s recommendation is not to split the physical and online content. This would reverse COL’s existing commitment, and this response would likely be considered inadequate.

Proposal

28. Officers recommend **Option 1 – all content is approved** as set out in the preview webpages. Approving the content enables the project team to focus on planning the next stage and launch.

29. At launch, the webpages would be made live on the City Corporation's public website, the plaques installed, and an event would take place to acknowledge this key milestone.
30. Whilst the content will be hosted on the City Corporation's website which is managed by the Corporate Communications team, Members are asked to note that the Head of Profession for Culture would be accountable for any future operational aspects of this work.

Potential for ongoing engagement

31. The legacy of the project is important and has been considered by the external Stakeholder Groups (see Appendix 3). The project team proposes that the artistic commission could become a bi-annual commission for Guildhall Art Gallery, with content added to the webpages every two years.
32. A further legacy piece is the blog posts. The blog posts explore themes, work and history relevant to the project, and provide a wider context. The blog posts are an important mechanism to foster understanding and collaboration between the project group, the collaborators and the communities that have been engaged throughout.
33. Further alternative formats to improve accessibility based on the recommendations of the accessibility panel. This includes requests that were suggested by the panel. Easy read versions of each of the short and long texts would be a resource for neurodiverse people and they are also beneficial for children and people whose first language is not English. And an audio description for all images featured. This would enable screen reader users to access the images.
34. Members are asked to note that this report does not seek approval for any specific ongoing engagement at this point in time. Any such work should not be considered in isolation and must fit into COL's overall journey. The suggested way to do this is to bring this project into broader work once there is output from other projects later in the year. Ongoing engagement would be considered by the Head of Profession for Culture. This oversight would ensure links with other related work that the City Corporation has committed to.

Other previous recommendations

35. Further recommendations were highlighted by Court and in Appendix 2 of the November 2022 report, including arrangements for educational activities. The team was proactive and took responsibility for several of the actions that are directly related to the plaques – for example – reframing the space in which the statues are located by hosting educational and cultural events that directly address the context of the statues and the contemporary issues they raise.
36. Some actions come under the responsibility of other departments. These should be progressed by the relevant departments and committees that were set out in November 2022. Officers will remind departments of their obligations and that these can be reviewed on the launch of the plaques.

Lancaster Research project

37. The City Corporation is commencing a separate but related project to begin its journey in relation to the research that has been conducted by the Universities of Lancaster and Manchester, and University College London. The London Archives is leading on this (with oversight from the Head of Profession for Culture). A project has been scoped to investigate the historic connection between the Corporation of London and the Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved African People. This would be a larger piece of work, and it is mentioned in this report to note the future connectivity of both projects. The timetable is to be finalised, and it would commence in early 2025 with initial outputs by late 2025.

Corporate and Strategic Implications

38. Strategic implications – This work supports the Corporate Plan outcomes – Diverse Engaged Communities, Flourishing Public Spaces and Vibrant Thriving Destination.

39. Financial implications

- In 2021, the initial budget for the statues project was requested to come from the Culture and Visitor Services¹ team, specifically the Guildhall Art Gallery's (GAG) local risk budget. However, the initial budget was for temporary signage, and it did not account for: permanent plaques; any future visual interpretation or counterpointing; or the education proposals. As the project developed into the installation of permanent plaques with additional content to be used as part of the 'Retain and Explain' approach, the GAG has managed to absorb the cost to deliver this project.
- Resourcing this work from GAG local budget has had significant limitations on other work in 2024/25 including the Gallery's public programme and a second temporary exhibition. It is no longer possible for the GAG to continue absorbing the budget for project delivery without significant impact on planned activity.

40. Resource implications – all resourcing requirements are scoped as part of departmental business planning for the Culture team (incorporating the GAG) and The London Archives. Other departments who accommodated this project into their plans include Communications, Planning, Remembrancer and Events (under Innovation & Growth).

41. Legal implications – the City Corporation's legal team will continue to be consulted on this work, as necessary.

42. Risk implications – if the webpages are not endorsed and published as part of the launch of the plaques, the City Corporation may be seen as doing the bare minimum under the 'Retain and Explain' policy and not doing enough to tackle racism and confront its own history. This would not be in line with what was previously agreed at the Court of Common Council.

¹ The Culture and Visitor Services team migrated to the original Destination City team and is now the Culture team.

43. The reputational risk on this project is mitigated through a consultative process both within the City Corporation (including our CLEAR Staff Network) and with external groups. The City Corporation's Communications team have been consulted as part of this.
44. Equalities implications – The statues work originated from the Tackling Racism Taskforce recommendations. Given the heightened societal tensions in terms of race relations more broadly, the City Corporation is actively committed to developments in this area and Members are asked to be mindful of the context and environment in which this decision is being asked. All work on this project has been mindful and supportive of the City of London Corporation's EDI commitments. The City Corporation's recently appointed Equalities Director has been consulted and is supportive of the approach and what has been achieved thus far.
45. Climate implications – None identified for this paper.
46. Security implications – None identified for this paper.

Conclusion

47. This report provides Members with a preview of the webpages that will accompany the Beckford and Cass statue plaques. The webpages and the context for each piece of content with a narrative on its intention and purpose is included. The report establishes a key milestone and decision for Members to advance this project, comprising a package created to enable the City Corporation to 'Retain and Explain' the statues of Beckford and Cass.

Background Papers

- [Update: Beckford & Cass Statues Interpretation Project](#) - 14 November 2022, Policy and Resources and 17 November 2022, Culture, Heritage and Libraries
- [Plaque Concept Designs: Beckford & Cass Statues Interpretation Project \(Under Urgency\)](#) - 12 December 2022, Culture, Heritage and Libraries
- [Plaque Concept Designs: Beckford & Cass Statues Interpretation Project](#) - 23 January 2023, Culture, Heritage and Libraries
- [Plaque Text & Update: Beckford & Cass Statues Interpretation Project \(Under Urgency\)](#) - 7 March 2023, Culture, Heritage and Libraries
- [Final Designs & Texts: Beckford & Cass Statues Interpretation Project \(Non-Public\)](#) - 23 March 2023, Policy and Resources and 27 March 2023 Culture, Heritage and Libraries

- Beckford and Cass statue plaque text amendments & Project Update (Non-Public) - 18 September 2023 Culture, Heritage and Libraries and 21 September 2023 Policy and Resources
- Beckford and Cass statue request for delegated authority (Non-Public) - 16 November 2023 Policy and Resources and 20 November 2023 Culture, Heritage and Libraries
- Beckford Plaque Text update (Under Urgency) - February 2024, Policy and Resources and Culture, Heritage and Libraries.
- Beckford plaque text – Report of action taken - 20 May 2024, Culture, Heritage and Libraries
- Amendment to Beckford plaque text - 6 June 2024, Policy and Resources

Appendices

- **Appendix 1 (non-public):** Final statue plaques short text and poems for Beckford & Cass (note these are complete and have been approved at Committee).
- **Appendix 2 (non-public):** Long historic texts for Beckford & Cass
- **Appendix 3 (non-public):** Link to preview webpages and web content guide
- **Appendix 4 (non-public):** Accessibility panel webpage testing

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