

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
23rd JUNE 2020**

STATUE OF SIR FRANCIS DRAKE

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council will be aware of recent national and international events, together with their links to the history of slavery and slave trading in the indigenous populations of Africa prior to abolition in the United Kingdom in 1807.
- 1.2 More locally there has been activity on social media, and in the mainstream media, inviting a reassessment of the connection between Sir Francis Drake (1540/3-1596 who was born nearby) with that practice and petitioning for removal (and retention) of statues¹. A copy of the Councils press statement is available at <https://www.tavistock.gov.uk/news/statement-regarding-drake-statue>
- 1.3 A statue to Drake is located at the Western end of Plymouth Road, erected in 1883 and scheduled as a Grade II listed monument in 1951.

2. CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1 The debate has opened a timely, if at times divisive and polarising discourse into the extent to which the teaching and understanding of history, and its artefacts, is sufficiently rounded to reflect the diversity of issues it encompasses. Not only at the time of historic events themselves, but also in the changing contemporary world and the legacy that some events may leave.
- 2.2 Respecting the strength of feeling on all sides the opportunity has been taken to review the position appreciating it will likely always be common ground that whilst (absent new evidence) historic facts may not change, their relevance, interpretation and application to different ages certainly can.

¹ Including those of Sir Francis Drake

- 2.3 There are no plans to remove the statue of Sir Francis Drake but in the interests of historic completeness it is clear that more could, and should, be done to portray the whole history of Sir Francis Drake alongside his better known achievements, recognising the (previously) less well known links to early English slave trading.
- 2.4 To that end, and having listened to representations on all sides of the debate, the Council is working to partner with a local heritage/history group to develop that less well known strand of interpretation² in an intellectually credible and historically responsible way in order that the community can make their own assessment. To do so it will:
- a) Add either a plaque³ or an information board⁴, safely located,⁵ interpreting and explaining the links of Sir Francis Drake to slavery;
 - b) Work with local schools during Coronavirus, to seek to present a 'virtual' lesson covering this topic and engage with students as to how the content of the plaque can be informed for a contemporary audience;
 - c) Seek to link to the National Modern Day Slavery Police Transformation Unit based in Exmouth regarding the contemporary significance of modern slavery;
 - d) Through Tavistock Rotary and Rotary in Great Britain and Ireland, identify if it is possible, working with the branches of that organisation overseas where slave trading previously occurred, to provide a contemporary perspective from former victim nations and descendants whose families were affected by the sixteenth century English slave trade;
 - e) Develop greater information and interpretation of the links of the Town to slavery for inclusion in the ongoing future heritage offer being developed in the Town;

² The statement refers to 'how wealth was created through practices such as slavery, oppression and conquest - the associated suffering and its continuing legacy to help everyone appreciate the complicated and often dark and difficult heritage of our modern society'.

³ Consistent with the approach being adopted by Plymouth City Council.

⁴ Which has the benefit of being capable of being updated and including both pictures and narrative;

⁵ The statue itself is located in the middle of a busy roundabout;

f) Contribute to the developing WDBC initiative, and any DCC⁶ initiatives in this regard.

2.5 Some of these initiatives are potentially straightforward and achievable in short order (eg (a)). Others would no doubt need to be either contingent on work elsewhere⁷ and/or accompanied by applications for funding to respective heritage bodies working with and through partners. However, given the level of public engagement on the theme it is reasonable to anticipate a well framed proposal promoting community cohesion could have a good chance of receiving support.

2.6 Furthermore, prospective partners have been positive and the accompanying commitment to constructive and collaborative action provides a meaningful opportunity to grow knowledge, understanding and tolerance within our community and link back across the world to those very communities in Africa most impacted by the slave trade and its legacy.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 As the foregoing actions are developed further reporting will be made to Council on the progress made.

**CARL HEARN
TOWN CLERK
JUNE 2020
TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL**

⁶ See also Devon and the Slave Trade (DCC sponsored Publication 2007 – commemorating the bicentenary of the 1807 Act abolishing the Slave Trade (Todd Gray)).

⁷ Eg the anticipated WDBC initiative

