

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	City Growth and Resources
DATE	10 November 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	History and Legacy of Enslavement
REPORT NUMBER	COM/21/250
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Richard Sweetnam
REPORT AUTHOR	Jenny Brown
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report responds to an instruction from the City Growth and Resources committee on 3 February 2021 to report on the practicalities and projected costs of identifying locations and street names in Aberdeen with links to the history of enslavement and its products and then erecting appropriate information plaques at each location.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 does not pursue the erection of information plaques relating to enslavement or products of enslavement at this time;
- 2.2 instructs the Chief Officer – City Growth to continue research and delivery of other public outputs in this field in line with existing programme and revenue budgets; and
- 2.3 instructs the Chief Officer – City Growth to explore external funding opportunities for wider work exploring the history and legacy of enslavement.

3. BACKGROUND

Definition of slavery

- 3.1 For the purposes of this report, slavery is defined as chattel slavery - the enslavement of people as property. People were enslaved by Britain, British territories and colonies with Scots playing a more significant role in these activities after the union of Scotland and England in 1707 to 1838 (when Britain abolished slavery in its colonies). The definition is explored further in Appendix A.

- 3.2 Consultation on the above, or any other definition, of slavery and slavery products is a necessary prerequisite to any activity to publicly recognise the history and legacy of enslavement in Aberdeen.

Practicalities

- 3.3 A thorough investigation of Aberdeen's role in slavery to identify locations requires dedicated staff time to undertake historical research and access to the records of private bodies such as the Society of Advocates and the Incorporated Trades, in addition to public archives. Historical research is within the skill set of existing officers at this grade however they are required to work across multiple programmes and are therefore unable to replicate the academic rigour of dedicated research staff. This work is never "finished", as new sources of information continuously come to light.
- 3.4 The University of Aberdeen is currently employing a lecturer on a two year contract to examine how the university has benefitted from slavery and officers are working closely with him to improve our understanding of the wider city perspective. Combined with previous work in 2007, officers have an initial list of 16 potential locations on which to estimate costs (see Appendix A – it should be noted these locations require further research). This is borne out by Edinburgh City Council's steering group (see Appendix B – case studies) which has identified 40 features.
- 3.5 Additional signage cannot easily be added to existing street names with limitations on legal requirements for clear visibility and height of new street name signage, and the historic nature of existing enamel street names. Identified locations could be marked by Place plaques, as described in the commemorative plaque policy to identify locations relating to the social, political or cultural heritage of Aberdeen. One such plaque currently marks Sugar House Lane, where sugar produced by enslaved people in the Americas was refined for resale (see Appendix C for image). However, it should be noted that permission to erect plaques on third-party properties is not guaranteed – of 17 applications for commemorative plaques since 2011, 5 have failed to secure owner permission.
- 3.6 Alternative methods of acknowledging the legacy of the slave trade and in particular the relationship with the physical experience of the city are explored in Appendix B: Case studies. These include public events, online map applications, exhibition and publication routes. As well as working with the University of Aberdeen, officers plan to seek external funding to support work in this area, which officers hope will include an exhibition exploring Aberdeen's role in slavery and colonialism, and an online element can be built upon in future.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The table below summarises the estimated costs of researching and erecting plaques. This table assumes permission would be secured for all 16 sites identified to date:

Cost area	Total	Cost per plaque
Historical research – 2 year FTE post at G11	£80,880	£5050
Additional staff hours to process erection of plaques – 2000 hours at G11	£50,400	£3150
Fabrication and installation of plaques at 16 locations	£10,400	£650
	£141,600	£8,850

- 4.2 These costs assume the time required for research only. External funding would need to be secured.
- 4.3 Officer time to process the erection of plaques includes ensuring all planning regulations are complied with, wording of the plaque is agreed with stakeholders, securing permission from building owners and occupants and ordering and administering the erection of the plaque. Officers estimate processing a single plaque application takes 150 hours over two years. The largest portion of this time is seeking to secure permission to erect plaques from the owners and occupants of the premises. Erecting a plaque on a listed building would require additional time to submit and review a planning application. External funding would need to be secured to avoid adverse impact on existing on the delivery of programming across archives, galleries and museums.
- 4.4 The unit cost of fabrication and erection is based on recent costs for the erection of a Place plaque as described in the Plaques Policy but increase in fabrication costs is anticipated. As stated elsewhere, around 30% of recent plaque applications fail to secure permission from building owners. If applied to the above table, this would mean a cost per plaque of £12,880.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Operational	Proceeding with the research and erection of plaques using existing resources will impact on the delivery of programming	L	Recommendation is for officers to proceed within existing resources and to seek additional external funds.

	across archives, galleries and museums with a negative impact on Delivery Plan objectives to increase city centre footfall.		
Financial	Erection of plaques is dependent on permission from property owners - of 17 applications for plaques since 2011, 5 have failed at this stage. Financial and staff resource investment in identification of sites could still result in no/not all plaques being erected.	H	A communications plan might promote awareness amongst property owners and increase permissions.
	Increase in costs of fabrication and erection.	M	
	No control on longevity of plaques affixed to private property – risk of loss, damage and theft.	L	A communications plan would be produced to promote awareness of the importance of acknowledging this history.
Reputational	Failure to undertake this work and acknowledge this history appropriately could lead to reputational damage.	H	Need to undertake community consultation to ensure that our decisions are transparent, informed and relevant. The Council would need to acknowledge it's own role and buildings in this history.
	Public expectations of rapid response. It is not uncommon for a plaque to take two years from application to erection.	M	A communications plan would be produced to ensure transparency and manage expectations.

	Highlighting specific sites related to this history risks damage as a potential target for protest.	L	Identifying sites also allows the Police to understand these risks.
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7. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The proposals within this report may impact on the delivery of Policy Statement 3 – Increase city centre footfall. The paper seeks approval for ongoing work to recognise the history and legacy of enslavement within the public realm, including city centre locations. Meaningful consultation is required to ensure this history is acknowledged appropriately so as not to negatively impact the wellbeing of local people and the economic benefits of tourism.
Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	The proposals within this report relates to the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 1 – 10% increase in employment across priority and volume growth sectors by 2026 through the development of programming at the Art Gallery and Museums.
Regional and City Strategies	The proposals within this report impact on the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan with a need to ensure that tourism is good for Aberdeenshire and its people through meaningful consultation around local heritage which impacts on the wellbeing of local people. It also supports the Cultural Strategy Ambition 3 through work to recognise the history and legacy of enslavement within the public realm.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Full impact assessment not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Scotland, Africa and Slavery in the Caribbean: a North East Story \(2007 partnership project\)](#)

[Sugar House Lane Place Plaque](#)

[Commemorative plaque policy](#)

[Edinburgh Slavery and Colonialism Legacy Review](#)

[Guidance-on-Industry-Standards.pdf \(creativescotland.com\)](#)

10. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Definition and potential locations

Appendix B: Case studies

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Jenny Brown
Title	Lead Curator (History)
Email Address	jenbrown@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Tel	01224 337719