



Historic England

From the Chairman

Sir Laurie Magnus

Mr Julian Knight MP
Chair
DCMS Select Committee
House of Commons
Westminster SW1A 0AA

08 October 2020

Dear Mr Knight,

Thank you for inviting me to appear as a witness at the Committee's hearing on physical heritage on 6th October, 2020 and for permitting me to appear in person. I am writing now to clarify two matters which arose during my session.

I was asked whether Historic England had sight of the Secretary of State's letter to DCMS Arm's Length Bodies on contested heritage prior to it being issued. On 14 September 2020, DCMS officials shared with us the following extract of the letter due to the reference to Historic England:

"History is ridden with moral complexity. Statues and other historical objects were created by generations with different perspectives and understandings of right and wrong. Some represent figures who have said or done things which we would not defend today. But though we may now disagree with those who created them or who they represent, they play an important role in teaching us about our past, with all its faults.

It is for this reason that the Government does not support the removal of statues, artwork and other historical objects. Historic England, as the Government's adviser on the historic environment, have said that removing difficult and contentious parts of it risks harming our understanding of our collective past."

We responded the same day to confirm it reflected our position as set out on our website. We did not see the full letter until we received it on 22 September 2020.

Cont'd

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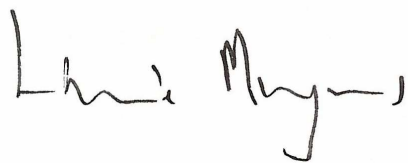


Secondly, there seemed to be some misunderstanding among Committee members about the list description for the Statue of Edward Colston. I did clarify this in response to your specific question but I thought it might be helpful to set it out in writing too. The list description can be found here <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1202137>. The statue was first listed in 1977 at Grade II and it remains Grade II. This list entry was amended in 2007 as part of the Bicentenary Commemorations of the 1807 Abolition Act. This was done as part of our work to consider how abolition and slavery were reflected on the List in 2007, and we amended the list description to give a more balanced view of Colston.

Below the list description, there are contributions from members of the public and Historic England in the 'Enrich the List' section that include photographs and descriptions of recent events.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear. I hope the session was useful to the Committee. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss these or related matters further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Magnus', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sir Laurie Magnus
Chairman of Historic England