

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

17 MAY 2012

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Arts, Leisure & Culture – Lead Cabinet Member – Cllr Dixon

STOCKTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HERITAGE PLAQUE SCHEME

1. Summary

Stockton Borough Council has an agreed commemoration procedure for the acknowledgement of significant individuals, overseen by the Commemoration Working Group.

There is a strong appetite for the commemoration of individuals, events and important achievements in the history of the Borough through the adoption of a Heritage Plaques Scheme, in line with the previously agreed Heritage Strategy. The scheme would provide the opportunity to widen awareness of the rich history of the local area, inspiring a sense of pride and aspiration and potentially attracting new visitors.

This paper sets out the proposed detailed Heritage Plaques Scheme based on similar schemes operating elsewhere, and proposes an inaugural plaque dedicated to Dr M'Gonigle.

2. Recommendations

1. To adopt a Heritage Plaques Scheme for Stockton which would celebrate physical links to historical figures and events in the Borough's history.
2. For final approval for any individual plaque to be subject to Cabinet authorisation.
3. Seek to inaugurate the Scheme with a plaque to Dr M'Gonigle.

3. Reasons For Recommendations

In order to progress the commemoration of Stockton's Heritage through the positioning of blue plaques on buildings associated with famous residents and events it's necessary to adopt a consistent approach. This report proposes a Heritage Plaques Scheme which will ensure this is achieved.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct

(paragraph 8) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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There is a strong appetite for the commemoration of individuals, events and important achievements in the history of the Borough through the adoption of a Heritage Plaques Scheme, in line with the previously agreed Heritage Strategy. The scheme would provide the opportunity to widen awareness of the rich history of the local area, inspiring a sense of pride and aspiration and potentially attracting new visitors.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To adopt a Heritage Plaques Scheme for Stockton which would celebrate physical links to historical figures and events in the Borough's history.
2. For final approval for any individual plaque to be subject to Cabinet authorisation.
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DETAIL

4. Stockton Borough Council has an agreed commemoration procedure for the acknowledgement of significant individuals. That procedure is overseen by the Commemoration Working Group, supported by Democratic Services.
5. At the time of adoption of this procedure consideration was given to a variety of means to acknowledge individuals, including plaques, interpretive panels, portraits or statues. In the first instance it was agreed that all successful nominations could be included in the virtual Stockton Hall of Fame, and a new area was developed on the SBC website.
6. Nominees already inducted to the Hall of Fame include Brass Crosby, George Stephenson, John Walker, Harold Macmillan, Alexander Fleck, Will Hay, Thomas Sheraton, Ivy Close and Dr M'Gonigle.
7. The particular appetite for plaques as a means of acknowledging an individual was also noted at the time of the establishment of the Commemoration Working Group. It was accepted, however, that a number of issues present themselves in relation to this and a

detailed scheme would be required, addressing such things as design, building selection, ownership and maintenance, legal and resource implications.

8. This report summarises the proposed commemorative plaque scheme for Stockton and the full schedule of the scheme is attached as an appendix for information.

The Scheme

9. The aims of the Stockton Heritage Plaque Scheme are as follows
 - Raise awareness of our local history and heritage
 - Stimulate pride and aspiration
 - Highlight particular achievements or periods, including those that are less well known
 - Connect people and events of the past to the buildings and sites that remain in place today
10. Plaques will be targeted at the general public and will represent the widest interests of the community.
11. Plaque design is proposed to follow closely the form, content arrangement and colours familiar in the English Heritage Scheme. The recommended material for plaques and fixings in Stockton will be a surface mounted ceramic format, except where building conditions or related conditions might suggest otherwise.
12. Ownership of the plaques and responsibility for maintenance will be addressed in each individual case.
13. Consideration of siting and content for Heritage Plaques will follow the already agreed commemoration route through the Commemoration Working Group, who will work with Officers to assess proposals for both individuals and for events or places against the guidelines set out in the Plaques Scheme.
14. Recommendations by the Commemoration Working Group will go to Cabinet for authorisation.

Resources required

15. The resource implications are likely to be between £1000 and £4000 per plaque depending on their location and any local factors such as footpath closures. This includes the manufacture and installation costs and also allows for potential legal fees where agreements and permissions with building owners are complex, and planning fees where listed buildings are affected.
16. In addition there will be considerable SBC staff time in relation to the selection process, research, design and commissioning production and installation work, organising a launch event and associated promotions. It is acknowledged, however, that there are a number of local history groups who can be a good source of research into the history of the Borough. This source of expertise could reduce the burden on SBC staff, increase community engagement and provide public endorsement for the nomination in question. Every effort will be made to utilise this resource.
17. The EH scheme is administered by a dedicated staff team of 5 people and backed by a much larger team of historical experts, it aims to install about a 10 -12 plaques each year.
18. Recognising financial and human resource pressures within SBC at this time, it may be reasonable to target one or two installations per annum under this scheme, and to review progress annually. Subject to the specific costs of each example, it is envisaged that this

number of installations per annum can be funded through existing Libraries and Heritage budgets.

19. Every effort will also be made to secure contributions from building owners or interested sponsors, including any institutions with which an individual may have had an association. Where such funds become available it may be possible to increase the number of installations per annum.

Getting Started

20. The adoption of a formal Stockton Heritage Plaque Scheme by Stockton Borough Council will be a newsworthy event likely to stimulate interest and media coverage. We should aim to use this coverage to refresh the invitation to the general public to nominate individuals, sites, and events for commemoration.
21. In addition, we seek approval to use a first plaque as an example, setting the tone and illustrating our intent. Such a first plaque would ideally be to a person of genuinely national repute and a person with a substantial connection with the area. The plaque should be placed on a building which is accessible, reasonably distinctive, and which has a very strong association with the individual.
22. The most notable figures already inducted to the Stockton Hall of Fame are people whose contributions were not easily connected with a single remaining building. It may be possible to establish a connection between John Walker and a town centre building, though his druggist store and workshop were thought to have been on the east of the High Street in the area now occupied by the Castlegate Centre. George Stephenson's association with the Stockton is with the 1825 Stockton to Darlington line and the event of the first use of steam locomotives to transport passengers. Although the building at 48 Bridge Road is often described as the S&D ticket office, it probably played no part in the first passenger rail journey or had any direct association with Stephenson. Brass Crosby was born here and his place of birth may be a suitable building, however, his most notable achievements were in London and he died in Kent.
23. Dr M'Gonigle undoubtedly made a nationally significant contribution to the understanding of public health and the connection between poverty and ill health. He has now been inducted to the Stockton Hall of Fame, the building he is believed to have lived and died in still stands in Norton, and the owner is keen to see a plaque erected. Furthermore the owner has expressed a willingness to make a financial contribution.
24. A plaque to Dr M'Gonigle would provide a very useful illustration of our intentions. It would raise the profile of a figure who is less widely known than his contribution to society arguably warrants, making a connection to an existing building, and demonstrating the involvement we are seeking to encourage from the community and building owners. This will also echo the transfer of responsibility for Public Health to the Council from 2013.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

25. Costs of installation of the plaques range from approximately £1000- £4000 including installation depending on the materials used and their method of fixing. Although it is suggested that some of these costs may in future be funded by sponsorship or contributions from building owners, the funding for the first installation may need to come from Council funds.
26. Costs of maintenance of the plaques will need to be factored into calculations, although, depending on the material selected, these may be relatively minor.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

27. Plaques can only be installed on buildings where owner consent has been obtained and in addition, consent may also be necessary from the Planning Authority. Written proof of consent from owners is necessary to remove the possibility of future legal action. Once installed, plaques becomes part of the property of the owner.

28. There is no legal control over plaques once they have been installed, unless there is a formal agreement signed by the building owner stating otherwise.

RISK ASSESSMENT

29. This project is categorised as low risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

30. Contributes to the following Sustainable Community Strategy themes:

Stronger Communities
Arts Leisure and Culture
Economic Regeneration and Transport
Children and Young People

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

31. In discussions with the Diversity team, an EIA is not required for this report as the changes will have no impact on any of the strands of diversity.

CORPORATE PARENTING

32. Not Applicable

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

33. A paper was taken to Urban Environment Task Group in June 2011

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Background Papers

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, Blue Plaque Scheme, Feasibility Report
Stockton Borough Council Heritage Plaques Scheme

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors

None

Property

None

