

Commemoration Working Group

A meeting of Commemoration Working Group was held on Friday, 22nd July, 2011.

Present: Cllr Eileen Johnson, Cllr Mrs Jean O'Donnell, Cllr Steve Walmsley.

Officers: J.Edmends, M.Gillson, R.Kench, G.Spence (DNS); P.K.Bell (LD).

Also in attendance:

Apologies: were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Apedaile and Woodhead.

CWG 1/11 Appointment of Chairman-Municipal Years 2011-15

RESOLVED that Cllr Johnson be appointed Chairman of the Commemoration Working Group for the Municipal Year period 2011-2015.

CWG 2/11 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest declared.

CWG 3/11 Stockton Borough Council Heritage Plaque Scheme

The Working Group was reminded of its remit regarding the commemoration procedure for the acknowledgement of significant individuals who were born, lived or achieved prominence within the Borough.

The procedure, overseen by the Working Group, was relatively simple; the nominator set out in writing why the individual deserved acknowledgement, the Museums Service provided an objective written comment or assessment of the nomination, and the Working Group considered the written submissions against criteria for the level of importance of the person and the relevance to Stockton. Once an individual was approved, the relevant Council Officers sought to provide appropriate commemoration and interpretation as resources and opportunities allow.

At the time of adoption of the procedure, consideration had also been given to a variety of means to acknowledge individuals, including 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.

The particular appetite for plaques as a means of acknowledging an individual was also noted, however, it was accepted that a number of issues presented themselves in relation to plaques and a detailed scheme would be required, addressing such things as plaque design, building selection, ownership and maintenance, legal and resource implications. Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Culture & Leisure suggesting the proposed detail for such a plaque scheme for Stockton on Tees Borough.

Reference was made to the success of the English Heritage (EH) Blue Plaque scheme and the fact that many towns and cities had developed similar schemes. In Stockton, it was hoped that a scheme would enhance the local community by generating interest in the history of the area and adding to and encouraging a

sense of local pride and promoting our heritage, thereby helping to attract visitors. Interest could be stimulated in not only a specific building, achievement, event or person but in a particular realm of endeavour or period of history, such as that of our railway heritage or our industrial strength in the mid nineteenth century.

Plaques related not only to the subject commemorated, but also to the structure to which they are affixed – where someone may have lived or died, or where something of note may have taken place. When a building was selected, terms would need to be agreed to cover any permissions such as listed building consent, and liabilities such as maintenance, and its removal and possible relocation should the building to which it is affixed be radically altered or demolished.

The target audience of the plaques was another important practical consideration. Almost invariably, this would (and should) be the general public, and thus it was vital to install plaques in positions which would be readily visible and legible to passers-by.

Reflecting the above reasons, the suggested aims of Stockton Heritage Plaque Scheme were;

- To raise awareness of our local history
- To stimulate pride and aspiration
- To highlight particular achievements or periods, including those that are less well known
- To connect people and events of the past to the buildings and sites that remain in place today

The English Heritage scheme was well known and enjoyed an international reputation. When a visitor sees a blue round plaque attached to a building they assume it provides information about the significance of that site, and that it is part of a much wider set of such plaques. The blue that is used is distinctive and establishes a quick visual association. It was therefore recommended that Stockton's plaque scheme should adopt the same basic form and colour in order to be seen by visitors as being part of the national heritage collection, benefiting from the strong promotion of the EH scheme by association.

In consideration of the material to be used for commemorative plaques, many schemes used ceramic discs with a high glaze finish which was very durable and required little or no maintenance. The most common alternative was cast metal (bronze, steel, iron or aluminium), in some cases including enamel treatment rather than paint. There was an obvious strong connection between cast iron and Stockton's industrial heritage, and it was likely that cast iron plaques could be manufactured locally. There was also a history of pottery in the area which would provide a connection for ceramic plaques. The estimated cost of ceramic plaques was in the region of £1500 and assuming much of the cost was in the production of a bespoke pattern, other cast materials should be similar in cost. Ceramic plaques with a high glaze finish seem likely to present the lowest maintenance requirements and the least risk of theft since the material has no intrinsic value.

Detailed costings had however not yet been produced for any design or material type for Stockton and therefore further research would be required to finalise

proposals for the form and construction of Stockton's plaques.

Members were advised that the typeface, layout and design issues for the plaques should also be carefully thought through as they have a considerable impact on the attractiveness and legibility of the final product. The length and content of the words carried on the plaque was also of particular importance. Standard EH Blue Plaques contained no more than 19 words including dates. The maximum EH recommended number of words for a plaque of this approximate size, based on experience, was 30 words with roundels generally 19 inches in diameter. It was proposed that Stockton's plaques should be approximately 20 inches or 500mm in diameter, and contain up to 30 words, subject to detailed design proposals, and should follow a similar approach regards form and content as that provided by the EH scheme.

The matter of ownership and responsibility for future maintenance would also need to be approached on a case by case basis, depending on the nature of the building to which the plaque is being affixed. However, it was usually understood that the plaque became part of the fabric of the building and thus became the responsibility of the property owner.

With regard to the receipt of nominations in respect of an individual as the subject to be commemorated, it was proposed that this Working Group consider written nominations as set out in the existing Commemoration Procedure and that in order to qualify, an individual should meet one or more of the following criteria;

- i. There shall be reasonable grounds for believing that the subjects are regarded as eminent by a majority of members of their own profession or calling.
- ii. They shall have made some important positive contribution to human welfare or happiness.
- iii. They shall have had such exceptional and outstanding personalities that the well-informed passer-by immediately recognises their names.
- iv. They deserve national recognition.

In addition to the already adopted Commemoration Procedure scoring matrix, the English Heritage publication "Conservation Principle" would be used to inform our assessments.

While the aims and basic principles of commemoration of individuals; their significance and relevance to the area, would remain broadly the same for historical events, a different approach may be needed for plaques which drew attention to the history and interest of certain sites or buildings. Considerations in defining their worthiness for a plaque included the following:

- The buildings significance within the history of an area, or within the country as a whole.
- The importance of its structure or design.
- The building's associations.
- The building's prominence within the streetscape.
- Whether or not the building's significance can be adequately and succinctly relayed by a plaque inscription.

The intention in establishing a Stockton Plaque scheme was not to use plaques to note every important facet of local history as it was recognised that there would be events, sites and people where other forms of commemoration were more appropriate. It may be appropriate to erect a statue to an individual in a prominent location whilst installing a plaque on that person's home where that is less accessible or visible. Alternatively, it may be appropriate to use panels or pictorial devices to provide more information and interpretation than was possible with a plaque. Electronic devices could also be used in the built landscape which trigger mobile technology recognition.

It was noted that a Stockton Heritage initiative Project (SHiP) funded project with Stockton Sixth Form College to provide information on the history of the scheme area on a mediascape platform, was currently underway. This could be treated as a pilot for a wider programme to provide information via digital and mobile technology. There were also already I-phone applications which locate and interpret significant historic sites in other UK towns and cities. Stockton may wish to invest in the development of an 'app' for our heritage. The potential for these wider forms of commemoration and interpretation were explored further in the Stockton Heritage Strategy.

As the aims of the Stockton Plaque Scheme were to raise awareness of our heritage and connect past events to current places, the process by which plaques were nominated, approved, created and installed should all be seen as opportunities to generate interest. There had already been a general invitation to nominate people to the Hall of Fame, but the launch of a formally adopted Stockton Plaque Scheme should incorporate an invitation to the general public to tell us what they want to see celebrated in this way. When a plaque was to be installed, an unveiling event would provide an opportunity to raise the profile of the subject.

It was estimated that costs were likely to be between £2000 and £5000 per plaque. This included the manufacture and installation costs and also allowed for potential legal fees where agreements and permissions with building owners were complex, and planning fees where listed buildings were affected. Subject to the specific costs of each example, it was envisaged that installations could be funded through available Libraries and Heritage budgets. Every effort would also be made to secure contributions from building owners or interested sponsors, including any institutions with which an individual may have had an association.

The adoption of a formal Stockton Heritage Plaque Scheme by Stockton Borough Council was likely to be a newsworthy event likely to stimulate interest and media coverage. It was suggested that the Council should aim to use this coverage to refresh the invitation to the general public to nominate individuals, sites, and events for commemoration. In addition, it may be appropriate to advocate 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 was accessible, reasonably distinctive, and which had a very strong association with the individual.

The most notable figures already inducted to the Stockton Hall of Fame were people whose contributions were not easily connected with a single remaining

building. Dr M'Gonigle undoubtedly made a nationally significant contribution to the understanding of public health and the connection between poverty and ill health. Although not yet 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 was keen to see a plaque erected. This therefore could provide a very useful illustration of our intentions, raising 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 the Council were seeking to encourage from the community and building owners.

RESOLVED that the content of the proposed Stockton Borough Council Heritage Plaque Scheme, be approved in principle, and be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

CWG 4/11 A1130 Bridge Road/A1305 Riverside Junction Naming - St John's Crossing

The views of this Working Group were invited regarding naming the A1130 Bridge Road/A1305 Riverside junction "St John's Crossing" as part of the major highway re-alignment scheme to be constructed as part of the Southern Gateway improvements in Stockton.

Central Government had provided significant grants to contribute to the costs of highway schemes across the Tees Valley to improve bus routes and infrastructure over a phased 4 year period which commenced in 2010. The business case for these schemes, collectively referred to as the "Tees Valley Bus Network Improvements" was submitted in August 2009 and awarded in 2010. The Southern Gateway re-alignment scheme was part of the package of improvements associated with the successful business case to be constructed as a Year 2-3 scheme.

The Southern Gateway comprised the Chandlers Wharf area adjacent to the River Tees and a development site to the south east of Stockton High Street. The major highway scheme was to be constructed to create an iconic gateway development, providing a sense of arrival and achieving better links between the riverside area and Stockton High Street with a programmed start of January 2012.

Naming junctions provided a sense of place and identity and also assisted with travelling directions. Access to Stockton Town Centre from the south of the Borough was improved in 2006 by the opening of the South Stockton Link, named The 1825 Way in acknowledgement of the historical official opening of the Stockton and Darlington railway on 27 September 1825. The A135 - The 1825 Way cut through the derelict site of the former North Eastern Railway goods station and had a traffic signal controlled junction at its northern end with A1130 Bridge Road. It was proposed to name this new junction "St John's Crossing" in acknowledgement of the significant local history of this specific area relating to the Stockton and Darlington railway. A small length of the old track bed and the original weigh house remained. The weigh house was built in 1826 near to St John's Well to weigh coal and mineral traffic in order to determine the required toll to be paid. The level crossing was called "St John's

Crossing" for that reason. The weigh house was known today as 48 Bridge Road and was also referred to as the first ticket office when the building became more involved as a passenger station from 1833.

Consultation had taken place regards the proposal with the Ward Councillors, with no objections raised, and a suggestion put forward that consideration be given as part of the detailed design to create an interpretation of the layout of the southern gateway area c 1825 explaining the historical significance of the name. Appropriate press articles would also be issued to inform the public.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The proposal to name the new junction 'St. John's Crossing' be supported.
2. The Southern Gateway Design Team be informed of the Working Group's recommendation.

**CWG
5/11**

Commemoration Request – Request to Rename Linear Park in Mandale

Members of the Working Group were reminded that the regeneration of the Mandale estate was a multi million pound housing-led regeneration project, scheduled to deliver £100m of private and public investment, the demolition of cc. 600 properties and the provision of new quality mixed tenure housing. The Councils private sector development partners were Barratt Homes and Keepmoat Homes, with the new affordable (social) housing being delivered by Nomad E5.

The project was initially instigated back in 2002 and following a period of extensive consultation carried out with the local community, a master plan was developed which ultimately lead to the appointment of the private developer partners. The late Councillor Alison Trainer was actively involved in the project since its inception; initially as a leading local resident, who campaigned for the need for regeneration, then as a member of the Local Resident Panel (the Group which lead on the appointment of the Council's private development partners) and more recently through her role as an elected member were she continued to actively support the scheme.

The Councils Housing Service had now been approached by its partners (Barratt Homes, Keepmoat Homes and Nomad E5) who would like to formally commemorate the role that Councillor Trainer played throughout the this project.

A number of potential commemoration options were initially proposed however after detailed discussion it was considered that the renaming of the Linear Park (and the dedication plaque) may be the most fitting option as the park was integral to the Mandale area and had benefited from £1m of investment via this regeneration project.

Views of internal council services areas had been sought (including for example planning, highways, culture) to ensure that the renaming of the park would be consistent with existing council protocol and no objections had been raised. As this would be a posthumous commemoration, views had also been sought from Councillor Trainer's family to ensure they approve for this proposal.

The Working Group was advised that there would be no cost implications to the Council arising from this proposal. As the park would be known locally as the 'Allison Trainer Park', it did not need to be registered with Land Registry and the costs of the dedication plaque (and its erection) would be met directly by the Council's appointed development partners. The Working Group was also asked to note that should they agree to this request then a commemoration/naming event would be held (potentially August 2011).

RESOLVED that the Commemoration Working Group support the proposed renaming of the park and the placing of a dedication plaque near the gateway entrance.