

General Buller Task and Finish Group Elected Member Submissions

1. Councillor Ghusain

A. Recommendation & Justification

- The location of the Buller Statue is ***inappropriate***. The statue's position dominates and looms large at the front of the main entrance of Exeter College; a tertiary educational institution for mainly young people aged 16 & over.

If there were to be a statue in that specific location it should be one that ***inspires*** a more *collaborative and consensual future* rather than one that glorifies & upholds the values of an imperial and colonialist past.

- ***Relocating the statue should be an ultimate aim of the Council, but not necessarily an immediate one.*** The City Council and the residents of the Exeter face unprecedented financial crisis and hardships due to the pandemic and subsequent consequences of prolonged, total and partial lockdowns measures. Available funds are better utilised to alleviate immediate needs particularly those of the BAME Communities.

- **An interim action, at minimal cost**, could be to remove some of the wording on the plinth, eg "He saved Natal" and/or to affix laminated framed posters, or stands with boxed explanations of the life of Redvers Buller, in the context of the history of the British Empire.

- **A public consultation process on this issue at this time is not advisable**, as it could prove divisive and controversial at a time of heightened public health & economic concerns.

Given the current priorities of the Council, the public consultation process should be deferred until Spring 2021 at the earliest, but should not be put off indefinitely.

B. Possible questions to include in a public consultation

1. In your opinion, what is the role of statues in civic public spaces?
2. As an Exeter resident, in what way does the General Buller Statue relate to that role?
3. If the people of Exeter wanted to crowd fund a statue to be erected today fronting the main entrance of a learning institution, what, in your opinion, are the values such a statue should reflect?
4. Would you be in favour of a replacement for the Buller statue at this site, if this did not utilise City Council funds? (eg crowd-funded, lottery/arts/other funding?)

2. Councillor Foggin

I believe the statue of General Buller should stay where it is, because of the overwhelming response and wishes of Exeter people who did bother to write a response to the Council and many Exeter people that I have communicated with from the outset of the review wishes. As part of the Black Lives Matter awakening, I feel strongly that we **must** use the General Buller statue as an educational tool. To teach man's inhumanity to man, the complexity of history, and that ultimately good comes out of evil.

Let us place information boards, as the information panel on the back of the statue near Exeter College as stated to be offensive to students who are passing through the college, then we should remove the panels and put a large information board into the ECC owned Bury Meadow Park or on the wall of the park to make sure we contextualise all these interwoven strands as part of a powerful public information campaign. For example the life of General Buller's daughter who devoted all her life to public service for vulnerable people in Exeter thus against being a daughter of the military.

If we don't learn from the past we are condemned to make the same mistakes over and over again. Let us also use this opportunity to work together towards future living memorials, rather than hollow statues, such as tolerance, diversity, and positive change, for the BAME community and the wider society, such as combating and eliminating the scourge of modern day slavery.

So to include not only General Buller's time in the army but other things that he was involved in in Exeter--The building of Exwick Village, Village Inn public house for the Workers who worked on his farms - the Model village, St Andrews Road, Exwick Square in Station Road, not forgetting Exe View cottages and River View Drive, Buller Court. There is also the Buller memorial in St Thomas church yard that people of St Thomas value.

The information panel could be a family information board not just concentrating on the evils of war to include the above and the works of his daughter Georgina who was an important woman in what I would call a man's world a century ago and worthy of recognition this could be a good way of doing so.

Georgina Buller who was heavily involved in setting up a voluntary aid organisation, now the British Red Cross, also raised funds for the Building of the children's Orthopaedic Hospital and preserving the grounds for health use only to date.

Passionate about improving the prospects of the disabled people in 1937, she founded St Loyes College which was a training centre for the disabled to include people injured by war and including the famous Sir Douglas Bader WW2 hero. In communication with Ministry of Supply and the Air Ministry Ernie Bevin Minister of Labour who was founder of the NHS.

St Loyes employed and used by the people of Burnthouse Lane for their summer events which families still talk about today.

Bellair which was Georgina Buller's home in the grounds of County Hall was left to the people of Devon by Georgina. The County Hall was built on the grounds.

We have had one fatality in over 100 years on the statue, probably more people have died crossing the roads at this point.

3. Councillor D Moore

Buller Statue Recommendations Cllr Diana Moore

The process has been informative. I have welcomed the opportunity to learn more about Exeter's history and how the role of stature relates today to our culture and heritage in the city.

Buller has not had a role in the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans and his role is not widely understood – it is important to state that the working group is not looking nor sought to judge General Buller's life.

The statue is however symbolic of its time, celebrating the colonial role that Great Britain has had around the world. In the context of the Black Lives Matters movement, the statue, like many others around the country has added symbolism of the continued systemic racism in our institutions and communities and the lasting legacy of colonialism.

It should also be noted the statue in its current location outside Exeter college, has contributed to the death of a young man.

Recommendations

1. In recognition of the lack of information and understanding of the role of General Buller that interpretation and contextualisation should be provided, this should include:
 - Moving the statue and plinth panels to a location where it can be connected to a local, appropriately experienced organisation that can oversee and sustain ongoing education;
 - That working with a range of organisations, including community groups, the University and Council (RAMM), interpretation and education resources and programme should be co-created. This should be able to be delivered in a range of creative ways including as a resource for local schools, other organisations and included as part of the City of Literature programme.
2. In recognition of the placement of the statue and plinth in a high profile position, the plinth could remain and be an opportunity to engage the wider community, college and cultural sector in the development of a permanent or changing installation .
3. In recognition of the ongoing day to day reality of systemic racism that annual training is provided to all Councillors and staff on anti-racism and Equalities Legislation, unconscious bias and modern slavery.
4. The council should work with its community, 'customers' and staff to develop an anti-racism strategy and action plan to identify and address conscious and unconscious racism in its approaches and services.

Questions for consultation

Heritage

How can the city better provide interpretation and information about statues and monuments around the City for current and future generations?

What role would you like to see public art and statues play in public areas?

What positive opportunities do you see for celebrating a diverse range of people, issues or events that are core to Exeter as a place and its values?

Community (to inform strategy above) – a serious piece of engagement to work with all communities (geographically and of identity) across Exeter, organisations and businesses, and council staff, to hear their concerns and explore all the ways racism creates barriers to BAME people achieving equality, from jobs to housing, and access to services.

4. Councillor Quance

Exeter City Council has acknowledged the importance of Black Lives Matter, it is committed to examining all aspects of its operation in a timely manner with regard to all of the issues raised and to taking appropriate action without delay.

The Task and Finish group has been asked solely to consider questions raised by the prominent statue of Redvers Buller and his horse Biffin on the streets of our City. Inevitably, any decisions made will have implications for similar questions others may want to raise subsequently.

Our purpose is not to judge Buller the man or the values of the time in which he lived. They are for historians to interpret. What we can establish is that what is celebrated by the statue and the wording on the plinth, is a small part of a much larger history. The complete story can only be interpreted when all those with something to add are heard. Many voices were not heard at the time and continue to be ignored. Our role has to be to allow those voices to be heard.

Aside from the cultural issues, it must be remembered that the statue is a health and safety risk; we cannot afford another tragedy like the death of Tom Calloway.

The statue, as soon as is possible, should be moved, ideally to the RAMM, where it and the issues it raises, can be presented in context. Further consultation on the issue is unnecessary and may create divisions in the City that no one would want to encourage.

We need two positives to come out of this: Firstly, a debate about what should replace it; the idea of a 'fourth plinth' type of space has been a common suggestion with sponsored competition. Secondly, we need to encourage educational activity at all levels to better reinterpret our common history. Everyone should be allowed to contribute to this.

5. Councillor Mrs Y Henson

The Buller Statue was erected because the people of Exeter wished to commemorate General Sir Redvers Buller. The History books show that he was much loved by his men and the citizens of Exeter. This must not be forgotten by us who are the current custodians of the City.

It is right that we should condemn racism in all its forms including the taking of black lives by the armed US Police and that we should encourage every one of every generation to be tolerant of all.

To achieve this, we need to embrace aspiration and opportunity for everyone. If we were to erect a statue by public subscription today the criteria would clearly be very different.

The people of Exeter's decision should continue to be respected and the statue should remain.