



Report of the Abolition 200 Steering Group

To Bristol City Council Cabinet,

January 2008

Letter from Steering Group:

We enclose a brief report containing many outcomes and recommendations to the City Council, concerning the sustainability of the many successful initiatives undertaken by Bristol's African and African-Caribbean communities, in recognising the need to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

We hope you will read the report in full and let us know of your observations regarding the content and recommendations.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you feel there are any gaps in the report that need highlighting.

Paul Stephenson

On behalf of the Abolition 200 Steering Group

Please make your views heard by either:

e-mailing us at: abolition200@bristol.gov.uk

writing to us at: Abolition 200
C/o Culture and Leisure Services
Colston 33
Colston Avenue
Bristol BS1 4UA

Or attending the public meeting on Monday 12th November at the Malcolm X Centre between 6.30 and 8.30.

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(DRAFT for consultation during November)

Introduction

It was a pleasant surprise when in November 2005 John Prescott came to St. Paul's to ask how 2007 should be marked nationally. He met a large group of young people and elders in a long session ably facilitated by Rob Mitchell, and attended by the then Leader of the Council, Cllr Barbara Janke. The young people had been well prepared by St. Paul's Youth Promotion and articulated their priorities with clarity and passion. As a result, the Deputy Prime Minister set up a national advisory group including representation from Bristol, Hull, Liverpool (and later London) local authorities, chaired by himself and regularly attended by other, mainly black, ministers including the Culture Secretary, David Lammy, and the leader of the House of Lords, Valerie Amos.

He encouraged the three cities centrally involved in the history of the slave trade in England, Bristol, Liverpool and Hull, to organise commemorative programmes and improve provision for the African-Caribbean communities. Government would seek to identify funding, and coordinate national events and policies.

John Prescott returned to Bristol a few months later, for his European Conference on Sustainable Development, and met again Simba Tongogara and a few of the young people from St. Paul's Youth Promotion, and promised to invite them to meet him in London as part of the year.

Bristol City Council responded to this Government invitation by asking the Culture and Leisure Department to lead the organisation of the year, and the Head of Cultural Services was then asked by Government to attend the National Advisory Group. A small team of BME staff within the Culture and Leisure Department were seconded to manage the project, and community members were asked to lead a number of working groups focusing on education, culture and employment issues.

A public meeting at the Malcolm X Centre in January 2006 was packed with local residents eager to quiz the Leader of the Council about arrangements for the year. Amongst the passionate contributions, there were specific requests to ensure that the programme should be black-led, focused on the long-term impact and properly funded. Bristol City Council allocated a budget for £250,000 and a national representative from the Heritage Lottery Fund (Stephen Boyce) committed them to working with communities to achieve just this.

An Abolition 200 office was established for the seconded team (Asif Khan, Tammi Redman and Heather Arthur) and a series of meetings took place with community members to discuss plans. No agreement was reached and

instead the Consortium of Black Groups tabled a vision document for 2007, and also a statement of non-compliance.

This led to a period of uncertainty where planning was difficult but eventually by September 2006 an Abolition 200 Steering Group was formed. This consisted of a wide range of community members and councillors (see Appendix 1), supported by Council officers. This group has remained remarkably consistent and most of the same people have attended monthly meetings since, initially providing leadership and direction to the emerging programme, and more recently turning their attention to the challenge of ensuring a sustainable legacy from the year.

So this is their report. It attempts to summarise the achievements of Abolition 200 to date, consider the lessons learned and propose priorities for the future.

This group has not been paid, yet has worked hard to try and respect the views of all parts of the community in Bristol. It is almost impossible to quantify the hours of dedicated work individuals have committed and the success of the Abolition year is very much their success achieved for all of us to benefit from. Now, as the year comes to an end, the steering group are determined to consult widely in order to ensure that the City Council's ruling Cabinet understand fully the views of Bristol's African and African-Caribbean community.

This is just a draft at this stage. It sets out a series of recommendations. But its final impact depends on your responses. These can be expressed at a public meeting organised for Monday 12th November 6.30-8.30pm at the Malcolm X Centre, or in writing to abolition200@bristol.gov.uk by the 30th November. The report will then be revised to incorporate these responses and presented to the Cabinet on 10th January 2008.

Highlights of the year so far

2007 has seen so many events and funded projects that it is hard to do justice to the extraordinary outpouring of energy, passion and talent, seen by many as the most significant platform ever in Bristol for the African and African-Caribbean communities. The turnout at events has been tremendous and from a wide cross-section of Bristolians as well: over 100 programmes and events, experienced by 200,000 people – over half the population of Bristol. This has not been just a year of inward looking reflection! Here are some of the highlights so far:

1. December 2006

a) Bristol City Council debated and agreed to a motion at the council meeting on 5th December committing to a range of activities, including support materials for schools, improved academic performance, and to commemorate prominent people in consultation with local communities. These actions reflected many of the issues raised by community members, including COBG, during 2006 (see Appendix 2).

b) Abolition 200 steering group began the process of allocating £150,000 for community projects and strategic priorities. Applications were invited for activities focussed on three priorities that support the steering group's main objectives for Abolition 200:

- To increase understanding and awareness of slavery, it's contemporary resonance, and the achievements of black and ethnic minority communities.
- To improve educational attainment and aspirations for young people in BME communities.
- To establish a sustainable legacy from 2007 by developing mainstream services to better respond to the needs of BME communities.

c) Bristol Black Archive Project publish Bristol's first calendar featuring Black achievers from the city. It is so popular that all copies go in days.

d) St. Paul's Youth Promotion take 15 young people to London for 2 days, meeting John Prescott, Valerie Amos and David Lammy at 10 Downing Street, the House of Lords and the National Maritime Museum. Young people also attended from Hull, London and Liverpool, and the Minister of Culture was challenged on his views on the curriculum by several articulate young Bristolians! For many of the young people involved, this event provided the first opportunity for them to engage in discussion with a politician, and in the process feel that their views could have an impact on the outcome of the year.

2. January 2007

- a) The Black Churches Council assisted 11 civic leaders to sign a statement of regret at the Council House. This was widely reported and ensured that 2007 got off to a high profile start in the media (see Appendix 3). Princess Campbell was able to discuss directly with Tony Blair issues of concern for Black Elders in Bristol.
- b) National launch for Abolition 200 at 10 Downing Street, attended by a wide range of Bristol representatives, including Princess Campbell, Paul Stephenson and young people from St Bede's school. This conference enabled CYPS to lead the way in setting out how the Council could mainstream issues pertinent to Abolition 200.
- c) Year of Black Achievement launched by the City Council's Education Department with funding from Abolition 200. A well-attended conference organised by Ruth Pickersgill at Ashton Court Mansion debated priorities for young people's education in Bristol.

3. February 2007

- a) Dinner for Mozambique organised by the Bristol Beira Link and attended by Dawn Primarolo MP – focus on how Bristol could offer long term support to help achieve sustainable development for the only Mozambiquan city twinned with a UK city.
- b) Abolition 200 steering group agreed funding for the first round of community-led projects, (for a full list of projects supported during 2007 please see Appendix 4).
- c) A busy week of launch events in Bristol included Great Black Music series launched at St. Georges by El Tanbura (Sufi music from Egypt), Othello at the Tobacco Factory, and on one evening a Duke Ellington tribute by the City of Bristol Choir at the Council House and a stunning showcase of Bristol talent 'African Focus', organised by the Walter Tull Foundation at BECM. All these events were full (1600 people over 3 nights).
- d) Bristol press and media launch of Abolition 200 at Cabot School in St. Paul's, with special performances by Dennis Rollins (trombone) and Miles Chambers (poet), and the combined pupils of the school who had covered the school walls with material reflecting their special curriculum focus on the history of black achievement.
- e) The following week was another busy one, with the public launch of Abolition 200 at African Soul Rebels concert at Colston Hall, (with a petition being signed on the steps campaigning for a change of name for the venue), Fairtrade launch including special Abolition 200 focus, preview performance of Amazing Grace at the Watershed (an American film of the life of William Wilberforce), and talk by Andrea Levy, author of the Bristol Reading

Adventure book *Small Island*. This was a literacy project run by the Bristol Cultural Development Partnership and Bristol Libraries and over 3000 people read the book.

4. March

a) Events at Kuumba (Black Atlas) and the Colston Hall (Black Heroes in the Hall of Fame), the latter attended by a wide cross-section of over 1000 community members. This event brought new audiences to the Colston Hall and to the theatre, including young peoples and Elders groups.

b) Commemoration weekend (23rd – 25th), included a well-attended exhibition, book launch and debate at the Pierian Centre, a BBC debate broadcast from the Arnolfini and a People's Service of Commemoration and Reconciliation at Bristol Cathedral, attended by the Duchess of Gloucester and 1000 Bristolians of all backgrounds. This was organised jointly with the leaders of the city's black churches, and featured performances by Yemaya. It was a moving and thoughtful service but a protest outside reflected the views of those concerned that civic events for Abolition 200 could gloss over the real priorities for permanent change, and many tickets distributed by black churches were not used.

c) National service of commemoration at Westminster Abbey was attended by the Queen and Prime Minister, and several representatives from Bristol. It was broadcast live by BBC TV and disrupted by those wanting to draw attention to the concerns of some community members.

d) David Lammy's visit to meet steering group members, artists, the Black Police Association, Walter Tull Foundation and others. The Minister, after several hours of stimulating debate (and lunch at the St. Paul's Family and Learning Centre) left saying Bristol was at 'year zero' and had it all to play for.

e) Launch of Bristol Black Archives Project at a packed Bar 130 attended by Tony Benn, the Lord Mayor of Bristol, founder member/ patron Paul Stephenson, Sherrie Eugene, and BBAP chair Rob Mitchell, with contributions from Breathing Fire and David Dravie John of Pax Productions.

5. April

a) Opening of Breaking the Chains, a major exhibition at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in partnership with the city's Museums Service. £1 million was raised to support this unique project, including an award of £700,000 from the Heritage Lottery fund and £50,000 from the Museum of Bristol.

b) Events at St. Georges (history of New Orleans music) and Kuumba (first in a series of films by Clive Smith, asking "Has Anything Changed?" This ended, as so many events have this year, with a passionate debate and considerable frustration about the lack of opportunity for similar discussion).

6. May

a) Adisa project open their exhibition at the City Museum and Art Gallery. This exceptional project was a partnership between The Mill, Full Circle, and Bread Youth Projects, and Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives, and involved 8 young people exploring their heritage in Ghana. The lively opening event transformed the City Museum and Art Gallery with dynamic contributions from all 8, in addition to the more usual opening speeches from MP Stephen Williams and others.

b) Kofi Annan addresses the House of Commons, but no government funding is available for Abolition 200 projects. Lottery distributors are asked to support events but the response is patchy.

c) Bristol attends Eurocities meeting in Brussels to plan the Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008, a project to share and disseminate good practice by 25 cities across Europe, including progress on the Year of Black Achievement and the Harbour Festival in Bristol. All involved spoke of the fundamental impact this project had made on the young people, including enhanced self-esteem and personal development skills.

7. June

a) David Lammy visits again, this time to see the Adisa Project and Egypt Gallery at the City Museum and Art Gallery, and to visit the work in progress at the new Museum of Bristol site. He was especially impressed by a presentation by Karen Garvey on the Bristol Black Archives Project, and suggested that this example of best practice should be shared with other cities to inspire more such projects.

b) Eurocities conference in Dublin receives a new draft European policy on Culture, which focuses on promoting diversity and reflecting Europe's relationships with the rest of the world.

c) International concert of South African music at the Elim@bristol Church, organised by Paul Stephenson, and attended by the South African High Commissioner and the new Leader of Bristol City Council, Councillor Helen Holland.

8. July

a) Harbour Festival opens with Toots and the Maytals direct from Jamaica. Their concert attracted a record attendance of 6000, and ensured that the massively popular weekend was attended by a good number of people from Bristol's black communities. Other performances over the weekend reflected the BME talents from Bristol on both the Queens Square and REMIX stages, and guest sets from star Beira band Mussodji, as part of the marking of Beira's 100th Birthday. However, as with many events this year, there was a reluctance to promote Abolition 200 in the event's marketing materials.

9. August

a) Jesse Jackson visits Bristol as part of an Operation Black Vote event, attended by 400 people. Other speakers included the Leader of the Council, Paul Stephenson and Tim Campbell (winner of the first *Apprentice* programme). Efforts were made by the BDA and VOSCUR to include businesses, white communities from areas of deprivation in Bristol. This proved successful, and the positive feedback from attendees demonstrated how Abolition 200 issues had relevance for all sections of the community.

b) UNESCO International Slavery Day marked by two major events nationally. Liverpool opened the new National Museum of Slavery and Ken Livingstone made a moving apology at a special service of commemoration at City Hall in London. This was attended by Jesse Jackson, many leading musicians and artists and the Deputy Leader of Bristol City Council, Councillor Peter Hammond, who discussed future cooperation with the Greater London Authority.

c) Several Bristol representatives, including Paul Stephenson, Pax Nindi and Helen Wilson-Roe attended Notting Hill Carnival as guests of the chair, Chris Mullard, who hopes to build links with Bristol, and especially St. Paul's Carnival. He also leads a national Slavery Memorial Trust, whose aim is to secure permanent memorials in Liverpool, Bristol and Hull.

d) Amistad finally arrived in Bristol! This extraordinary project started with a suggestion from Asif Khan (who was later seconded to a national Abolition 200 role with the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council) to the Deputy Prime Minister, and ended with a government-sponsored journey re-tracing the triangular trade route, crewed by young people from the USA and Bristol. Amistad reported that their welcome in Bristol was the best they had received in the UK! Pax Productions performed a moving extract from their play about Sierra Leone at the new Pavilion on the Harbourside, and the Captain visited Cabot School. 5000 people visited the ship during its six days in Bristol.

10. September

a) Opening of Benin artist Romauld Hamouze's sculpture *La Bouche du Roi* at the City Museum and Art Gallery. The Director of the British Museum attended to introduce the artist and discussed with Paul Stephenson future collaboration.

b) Port Cities exhibition opened at Arnolfini, to excellent national reviews, bringing together 20 artists from around the world to reflect on Bristol's position as a key gateway to global culture. There is a busy support programme of workshops and events considering issues about contemporary slavery.

c) Visit by 50 community members to see *Rough Crossings* in Birmingham. This powerful new play by Carryl Phillips was intended to start its tour in Bristol but had to switch due to the closure of the Bristol Old Vic. The Bristol

presence was recognised by the cast who were clearly moved to find that so many people had made the journey to see the production in Birmingham.

d) First in a series of debates arranged by Africa in One – focussing on Edward Colston and his legacy to Bristol.

11. October to December

a) Black History Month – this is the busiest ever programme in Bristol with over 70 events taking place throughout October. The Black Police Association also hold their national AGM in Bristol climaxing in a March of Solidarity along Stapleton Road. This month-long programme reflects the interest in Abolition 200 from key city services such as Libraries and Archives, as well as from voluntary sector organisations. Many of the projects supported earlier in the year are now presenting their work, having needed this time to raise other funding and prepare.

b) Public debate on Abolition 200 Legacy priorities at Malcolm X Centre on Monday 12th November 2007 at 6.30pm. An opportunity to help shape the future agenda for Bristol.

c) Walter Tull Foundation launches their new supplementary school at The Park, in Knowle West, adding much needed focus for families, especially in South Bristol.

d) Culture and Freedom, an international conference at the South Bank, London, on 10th November. This will present a wide range of work by leading British artists and musicians, and will feature international figures including Angela Davis.

e) Closing events in the Great Black Music Series at St. Georges in November feature *Vieux Farka Touré* from Mali and Joshua Redman from the USA.

f) Closing weekend of events and debate at the Pierian Centre, St. Paul's, on 14th and 15th December.

A complete list of events and attendances during 2007 is attached in Appendix 5.

Lessons Learned This Year

This full programme of events and projects has stimulated much debate. What has been learned as a result? The Abolition 200 steering group has collectively and individually raised a wide range of issues and quotes (below, in bold) from members of the steering group illustrate this.

Firstly the preparation for such a momentous year was inadequate. There was insufficient time for proper debate and consultation, and this led to considerable frustration and anger from some in the African and African-Caribbean communities.

How the year started led to a reaction, which has persisted in some quarters throughout the year. It is important to recognise this, and (even allowing for the reality that for some in Bristol, this year would always present a problem), for public agencies, especially Bristol City Council, to demonstrate that it has learnt and moved on accordingly.

Therefore the consultation process in preparing a final report needs to be extensive, thoughtful and genuine. Views received during the consultation must be incorporated in the final report so that it is not just the steering group's priorities that are conveyed to the Cabinet.

It is obvious that one of the reasons for the suspicion around some arrangements for the year is because of a long history of mistrust between some individuals and organisations in the community on one hand, and the public sector and Bristol City Council on the other. No one in Bristol talks about a golden era in the past for race relations and many feel the city has never adequately stood firm against the racist behaviour still evident. The perceived reluctance to address the re-naming of Merchants Quarter, for example, impacted on people's perceptions in the lead up to the Abolition 200 year.

So even if there has been much progress in understanding the needs and providing more appropriate services, there is so clearly still much to do that many in the community remain to be convinced that the public sector are sufficiently determined to make this happen.

How can trust be built between key players in the city?

'We walk around with a lot of baggage'

Firstly by recognising what it means (for many) being black in Bristol. There is such history that a sense of ownership for the past still pervades and with this comes a feeling of responsibility to change things – described as **'feeling a weight on us, and also a lightness'**.

A more sustained and high profile cultural representation for black communities here would help address this, and build a sense that having

