

Question from Ms Geraldine Onek:

***What steps will Lancaster City Council take to ensure the atrocities committed here in our district are brought to light and how will they honour those who lost their lives?***

Councillor Sinclair thanked Ms Onek for her speech and question. He said:

“We are currently reviewing all the statues and portraits and material relating to people involved in the slave trade on council land and council buildings and what we’re doing to highlight their involvement. We’re also gathering wider information about the slave trade in the Lancaster district and I have learned quite a lot recently. We’re engaged with our communities, supporting diversity of community conversations, this is part of the development of Plan 2020-2030 Recovery for a Safe, Sustainable and Socially Just District – recovery starts with honesty – to explore the steps that we will take together, so it’s us, together, to bring our past into the light and honour and name those who lost their lives.

So we will be developing, co-producing with our communities, a Recovering Our Histories workstream, focussed on what we can do to educate, connect, empower and enable communities across the district to an open and honest exploration of our past. We know very few names of slaves today. Two rare exceptions are the grave of ‘Sambo’ at Sunderland Point and Frances Elizabeth Johnson. The grave of the former is an unmarked, unconsecrated burial place of a slave who died in 1736. According to oral histories, he starved to death, either due to depression or as an act of suicide and was buried in a rabbit warren.

Frances Johnson lived with John Satterthwaite’s family on Castle Hill. Following her death, one of her hands was cut off and mummified and it was passed down among the Satterthwaite family until 1997, when it was buried in a memorial garden next to the Priory. We are aware of many eminent names in Lancaster. 23 Lancaster streets have so far been identified with links to slave trade activity and slave traders. 23 streets. We’ve identified 58 prominent Lancaster figures linked to slave trade activity including Miles Barber, Sir Richard Owen, the Gillows, William Lindow, the Rawlinsons, the Satterthwaites. The Robert Gillow Pub, mentioned by Geraldine, in its window today, you can see it when you walk past, says “trading in the unusual since 1720”. You can check out their website for their version of Robert Gillow’s history. There is no mention of the slave trade. John and Thomas Hodgson, from Caton, over their slaving careers, 1763 to 1796, bought 14,099 Africans to sell as slaves. 1,626 people died en route. They used the profit to set up mills in the Caton area. Slavery was the foundation on which the industrial revolution was built and it paid for many of the Georgian buildings of Lancaster and many subsequent Victorian buildings. More names – past Lancaster Mayors and MPs: Thomas Hind (Mayor) John Fenton Cawthorne (MP) Thomas Greene (MP) Samuel Gregson (Mayor and MP) Alderman Thomas Giles (Mayor) portrait in the Town Hall, many portraits in the Town Hall, John Bond (Mayor) George Burrow (Mayor) Abraham Rawlinson, son of Thomas (Mayor) John Taylor Wilson (Mayor) and we’ve also got portraits of John Gregg, James Williamson, Lord Ashton and Thomas and William Storey in the Town Hall. All used American cotton before the abolition of slavery in America in 1865. These people did many philanthropic things whilst they worked hard to erase their pasts, our pasts. They tore down big chunks of our heritage and built monuments to celebrate empire and conquest.

So today, we, working together, can learn, education, uncover and recover our history.”

Councillor Parr thanked Ms Onek for speaking to Councillors and replied:

“It is telling that the two Councillors responding to this question, like the Council itself, are both white. We can empathise and support you but cannot replicate your experience as a member of the BAME community. But you don’t want hand-wringing, you want action. It’s an

uncomfortable truth that most cities in the UK have a dark past built on the exploitation of the vulnerable; the poor, the weak, the disadvantaged. Those cities with a direct involvement in slavery have a past which is darker than most. Our local heritage must be examined with honest and open eyes and a willingness to tell the true story of Lancaster's dark past in slave trading. This work will begin with a discussion at a meeting of the Arts and Culture Cabinet Advisory Group on the 10th of July at 6pm to which you will be invited. This meeting is looking at the area's heritage in general, but the slavery heritage in the Lancaster area will be an important part of this. It is very important that visitors to the area are just as aware of our slavery past as they are to our relationship with the Pendle witches.

The museums service is uniquely placed to support and examination of the history of slavery in Lancaster. As Councillor Sinclair has said, they are reviewing artefacts and various portraits in the City and Maritime Museums, Judges Lodgings and the Town Hall. These vary, from pieces out of the Lancaster Dinner Service depicting clergy eating the profits of the slave trade to small items belong to slaver families, and the larger portraits in many Council buildings. I must say that the museum officers are very enthusiastic to be involved in this work. For the benefit of those who are unaware there is an exhibition by Lubaina Himid about a slaving voyage called Memorial to Zong which opens in September delayed from the original date of June 5th. Lubaina is the first artist of colour to win the Turner Prize and this event is a major feature in Lancaster's cultural calendar. There is already a slave trail, just updated, which is available from the museum, when it re-opens. The Captured African sculpture on St George's Quay, has been in situ since 2005 but should be given improved prominence. Its location is important but it is a bit off the beaten track and it needs to be highlighted more to visitors to the city. As a city, we cannot change or past but we must not hide from it. It is our mission to inform and educate those who are unaware of the true nature of our history."