

The Colston Statue

What Next?



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In the summer of 2021, the 'We Are Bristol' History Commission opened a public engagement about the future of the Colston statue and the plinth. Nearly 14,000 people joined in to share their ideas and views.

Participants had a chance to see the statue and learn about its history in a display at the M Shed museum. People also viewed the display online. Alongside the display was a survey that invited people from Bristol and beyond to share their views.

We have seen this survey as a chance for the city to speak and for people to listen to each other. This report summarises findings from this historic engagement. We are very grateful to all who took the time to participate, and in due course the millions of words people shared will be available in the city archives in an anonymised format, for anyone to read. The answers you have given will help to decide the future of the statue and plinth.

THE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree or disagree that the Colston statue should be put on display in a museum in Bristol? If you don't agree that the statue should be in a museum, please tell us what you think should happen to it instead? If you agree that the statue should be in a museum permanently, please tell us how you would like to see it displayed.

2. What should be in the plinth space?¹

- Update the plaque on the plinth to reflect the events of 7 June 2020.
- Use the plinth for temporary artworks / sculptures.
- Use the plinth for a permanent artwork / sculpture.
- Keep the plinth but leave it empty.
- If 'other', please specify.

3. How do you feel about the statue being pulled down?² Please tell us why you feel this way.

1 People were asked to say how strongly they agreed with each option: Strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree.

2 People selected from these options: I feel very positive; I feel quite positive; I feel neither positive nor negative; I feel quite negative; I feel very negative.

Amongst Bristol respondents, people of key social groups participated in numbers broadly representative of the general population.

Who created the survey?

The survey was a collaboration between the Bristol History Commission, Bristol City Council Consultation and Engagement, and the M Shed museum.

What were the aims of the survey?

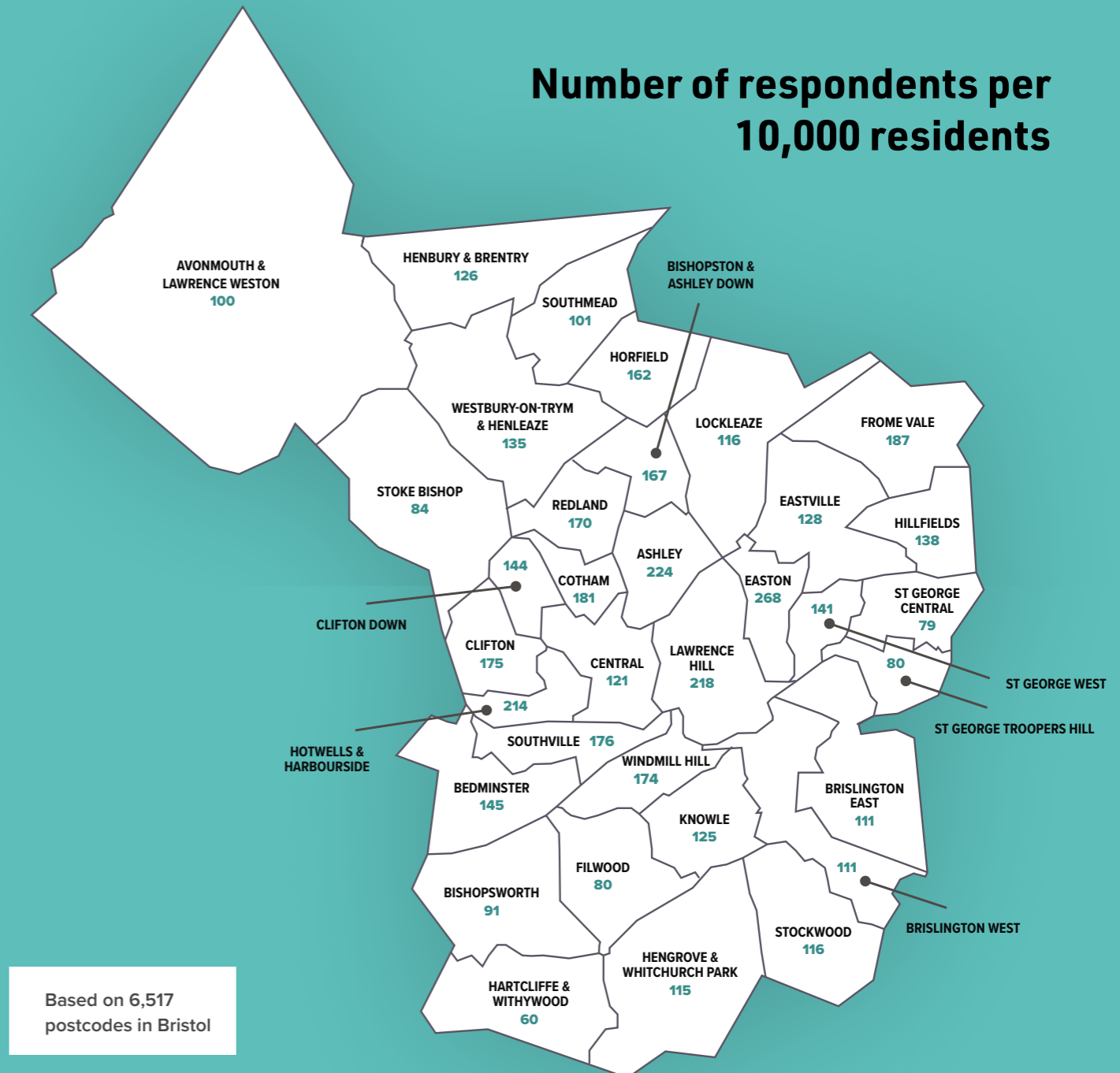
- ▶ To give everybody a voice
- ▶ To help people learn about each other's views
- ▶ To help make it easy for elected officials to decide next steps for the statue and plinth

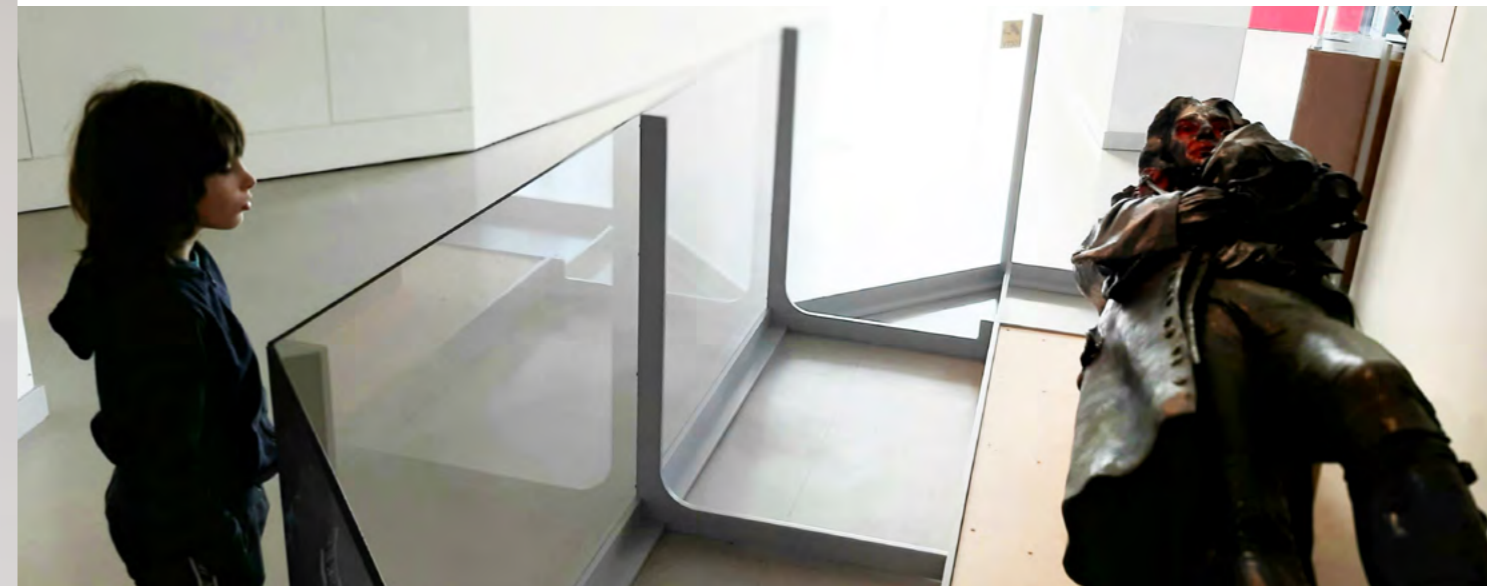
What were the values behind the survey?

- ▶ Fairness
- ▶ Inclusive participation
- ▶ Transparency
- ▶ Evidence-based decision making

Who joined in?

Nearly 14,000 people completed the survey (13,984). Of these, just over half were from Bristol City Council area (55 per cent). The Bristol participants were a largely representative cross-section of the city. Amongst Bristol respondents, people of different neighbourhood deprivation levels, ability, and sex participated in numbers broadly representative of the general population. There was some variation in participation along lines of age and ethnicity, with slight under-representation of people 24 and below, and slight under-representation of people identifying as Black or Asian. Every geographical area of the city was well represented: roughly 100 to 200 people per 10,000 residents filled in the survey from almost all of Bristol's 34 wards. People joined in equally from less well-off and more well-off neighbourhoods.





How did you make sure you heard every Bristol neighbourhood fairly?

A few neighbourhoods had lower response rates, so we distributed paper questionnaires and did extra outreach in neighbourhoods with lower initial response rates. We held 16 events at schools including City of Bristol College, Badminton School, Orchard School, City Academy and Bristol Brunel Academy. We held live events for residents of neighbourhoods with lower initial participation: two tours of M Shed with community leaders, and road shows in Fishponds High Street, St Paul's Learning Centre, Ridingleaze in Lawrence Weston, Oldbury Court and Lawrence Hill Urban Park.

For multiple choice questions, we included every response in our results. We then gave equitable voice to each area of the city when analysing the free-text comments people had written.³ This helped us to be confident that we were hearing from all parts of the city.

What will happen next?

Our findings and recommendations are being shared with the Bristol Mayor and elected officials, to help them decide on next steps.

³ With each multiple choice question, there was space for people to add free-text comments. Because there were 14,000 surveys, we could not analyse every comment in detail. Instead we chose a random sample of responses from 2,798 people, from across all Bristol wards. We took the same proportion of comments from each ward, to ensure that people from every area of the city had their voices heard.

WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT?



4 OUT OF 5
Bristol residents think the statue should be displayed in a Bristol museum

1. Most people wish to see the Colston statue on display in a Bristol museum.

3 out of 4 people said to put the statue in a Bristol museum (74 per cent).

Bristol residents agreed with this option even more strongly, with **4 out of 5 people from Bristol saying the statue should be on display in a Bristol museum (80 per cent)**.

Around 1 in 6 people from Bristol (16 per cent) did not want the statue on display in a Bristol museum. Of this 16 per cent, around three-quarters wanted it returned to the plinth and around one quarter wanted it destroyed or not on display.

4% of Bristol respondents did not have a strong opinion on the matter.

In our sample, for every 1 person from Bristol who said they would like the statue displayed vertically and cleaned up, 5 said to present it in its current state. The most common view was that it should be horizontal and with graffiti intact. Many people said they liked how it appeared in the temporary display.

2. A majority of people support adding a plaque in the vicinity of the plinth to reflect the events of 7 June 2020.

More than 5 out of 8 people (65 per cent) support adding a plaque. Around 3 out of 10 people (29 per cent) disagree with adding a plaque. **Support for a plaque is even stronger in Bristol, where 7 out of 10 Bristol residents (71 per cent) agree with adding a plaque to reflect the events of 7 June 2020.**



7 OUT OF 10
Bristol residents are in favour of adding a plaque to the plinth to reflect events of 7 June 2020

3. Nearly 6 out of 10 Bristol respondents (58 per cent) support using the plinth for temporary artworks or sculptures, and another 15% neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting a total of 7 out of 10 are open to this option (72 per cent).

Opinion was mixed on what to do with the plinth, but a clear majority either support or are open to using the plinth for temporary artworks. Across the survey as a whole, nearly 5 in 8 either agreed with (49 per cent) or neither agreed nor disagreed (15 per cent) with using the plinth in this way. Fewer people were in favour of using the plinth for a permanent artwork (supported by fewer than 4 out of 10) or leaving the plinth empty (supported by 3 out of 10). Smaller numbers wished to see the Colston statue put back up on the plinth (supported by 1 in 10 in the city) or for the plinth to be removed entirely.



6 OUT OF 10
Bristol residents agree with using the plinth for temporary artworks or sculptures

4. More than 5 out of 8 Bristol residents (65 per cent) said they feel either very positive (50 per cent) or positive (15 per cent) about the statue being pulled down.

Across the survey as a whole, over half (56 per cent) said they feel positive about the statue being pulled down. Just over 1 in 3 people (36 per cent) reported feeling negative about this, with the manner of removal the number one explanation for feeling this way.



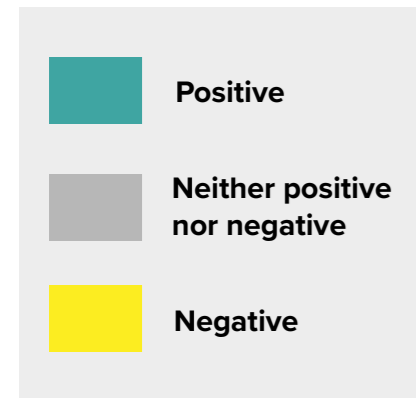
5 OUT OF 8
Bristol residents said they feel positive about the statue being pulled down

HOW DO DIFFERENT GROUPS FEEL ABOUT THE STATUE COMING DOWN?



Attitudes by ethnicity

Broadly speaking, people from different ethnic groups felt similarly about the statue coming down, and gave similar reasons for their feelings.⁴



FOR EVERY 20 MIXED ETHNICITY / MULTIPLE HERITAGE Bristol residents, 15 felt positively, 1/2 felt neither positively nor negatively, and 3 1/2 felt negatively



FOR EVERY 20 WHITE BRITISH Bristol residents, 13 said they felt positively, 2 felt neither positively nor negatively, and 5 felt negatively.



FOR EVERY 20 ASIAN / ASIAN BRITISH Bristol residents, 12 1/2 felt positively, 3 3/4 felt neither positively nor negatively, and 4 1/4 felt negatively.

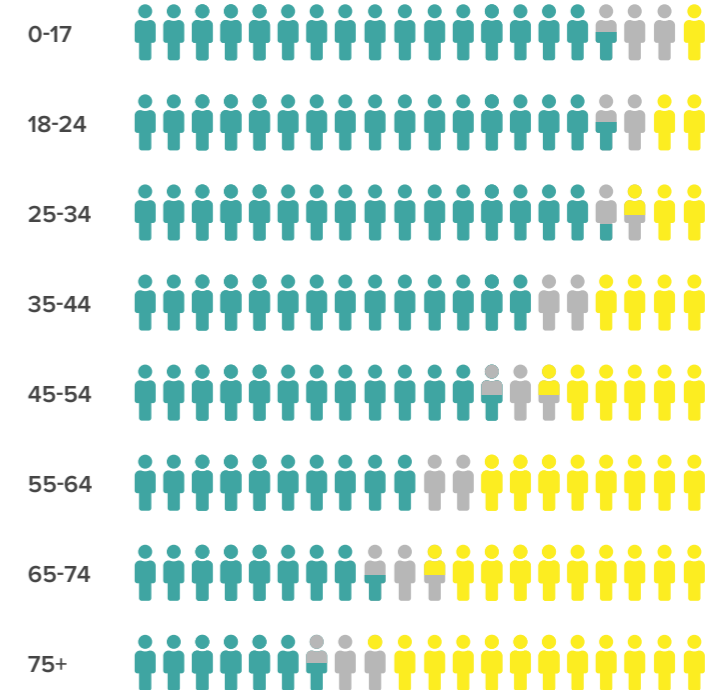


FOR EVERY 20 BLACK / AFRICAN / CARIBBEAN / BLACK BRITISH Bristol residents, 12 felt positively, 2 felt neither positively nor negatively and 6 felt negatively.

⁴ Based on 6152 Bristol residents who reported ethnicity and stated how they feel about the statue being pulled down. Respondents answered on a Likert scale: very positive, positive, neither positive nor negative, negative or very negative. Results simplified here into positive, neither, or negative.

Attitudes by age

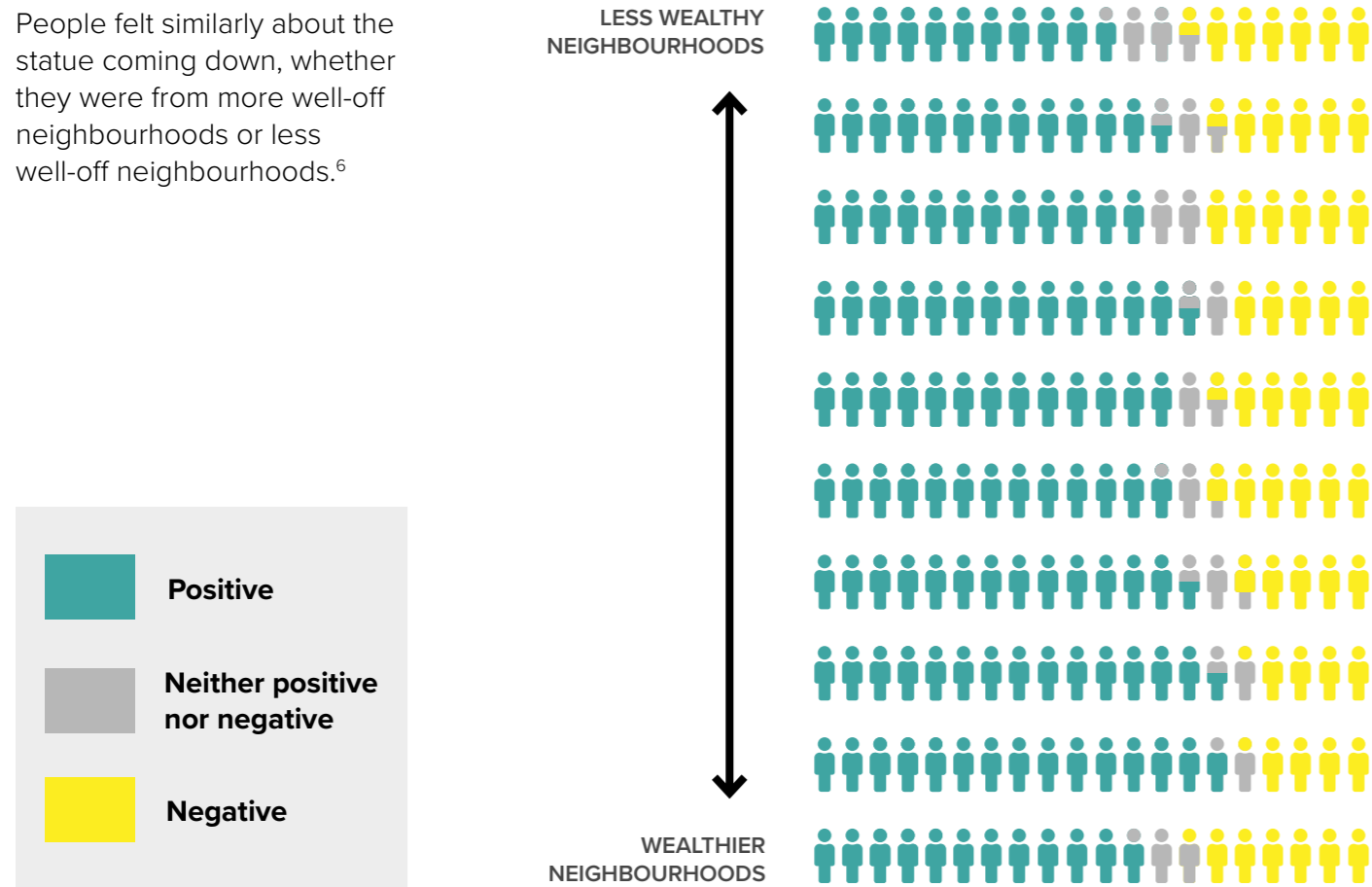
Age appeared to make the biggest difference in how people felt about the statue being pulled down.⁵ Younger people reported more positive feelings about the statue coming down.



⁵ Based on 6489 Bristol residents who reported age and stated how they feel about the statue being pulled down.

Attitudes by neighbourhood

People felt similarly about the statue coming down, whether they were from more well-off neighbourhoods or less well-off neighbourhoods.⁶

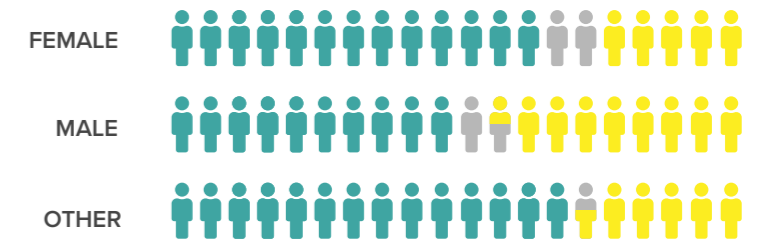


- Positive
- Neither positive nor negative
- Negative

⁶ Based on 6466 residents who provided full postcodes in Bristol and stated how they feel about the statue being pulled down. These figures were arrived at by looking at full postcodes and neighbourhood deprivation levels, using indices of multiple deprivation.

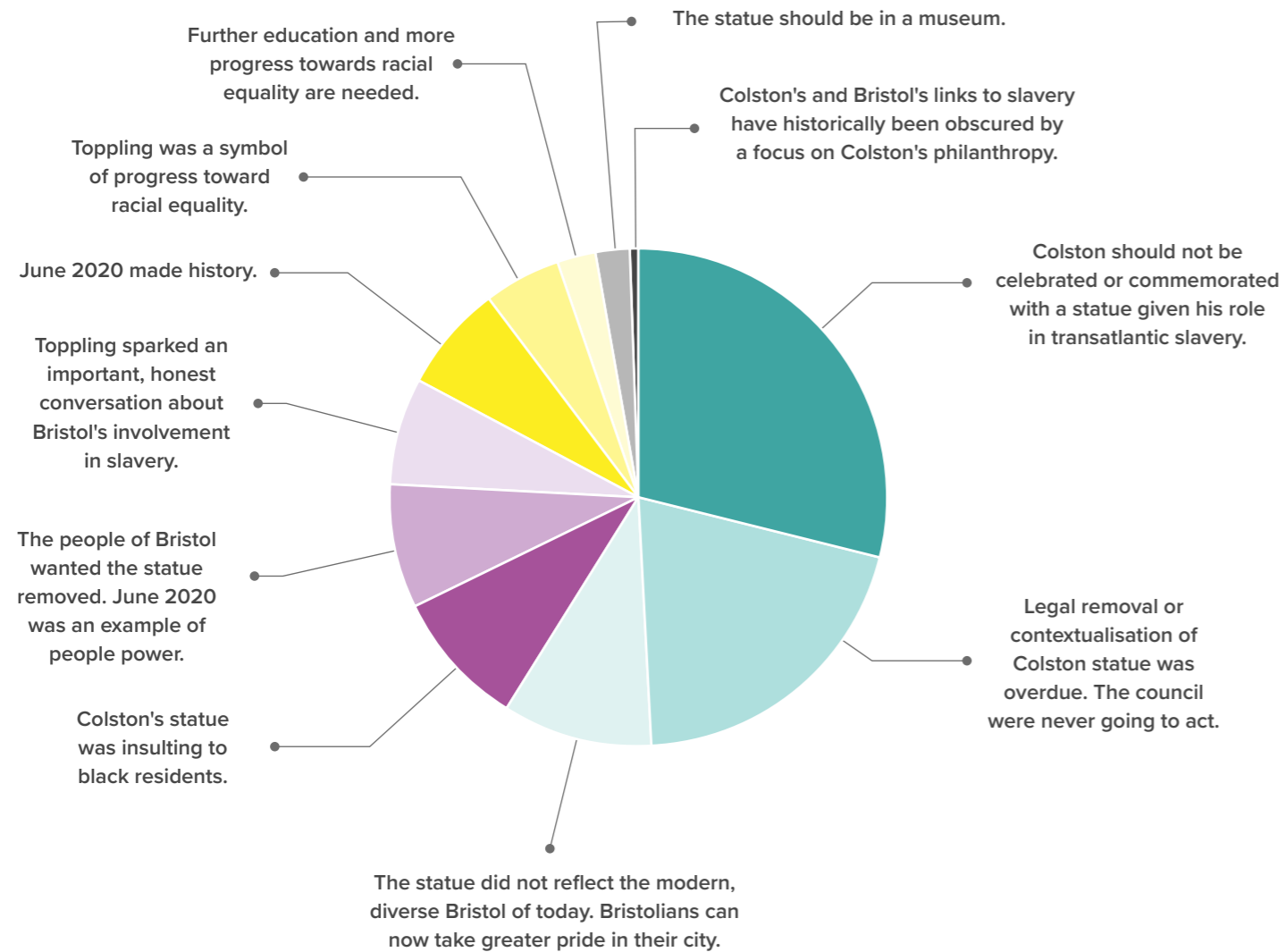
Attitudes by sex

The survey showed some variation in attitudes by sex. 13 out of 20 female respondents felt positively, with similar feelings amongst people identifying as other, whereas 10 in 20 male respondents felt positively.⁷

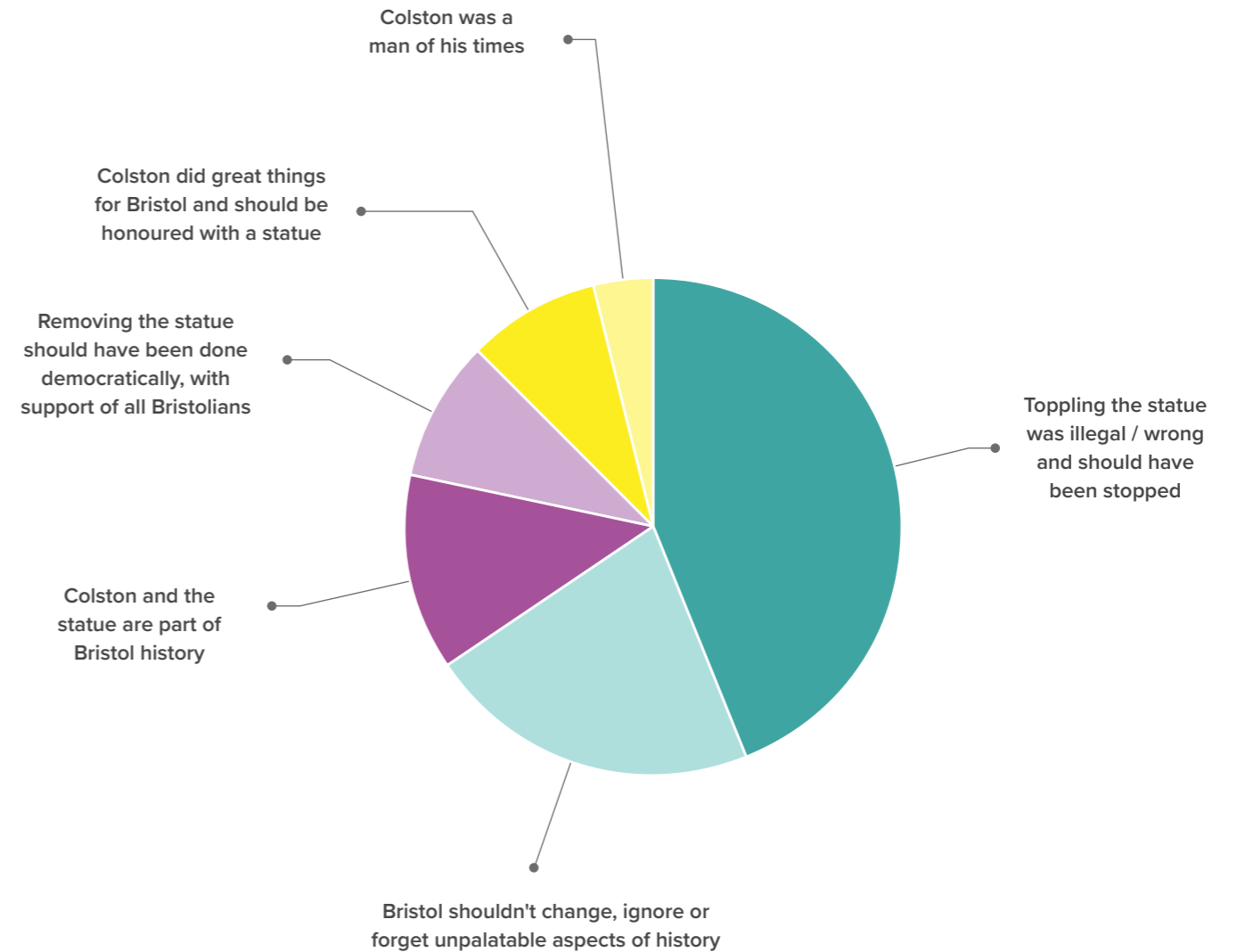


⁷ Based on 12312 respondents from all locations who stated their sex and stated how they feel about the statue being pulled down.

Reasons for positive feelings about the statue coming down



Reasons for negative feelings about the statue coming down



RECOMMENDATIONS

FUTURE OF THE COLSTON STATUE

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Colston statue enters the permanent collection of the Bristol City Council Museums service.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the statue is preserved in its current state and the opportunity to reflect this in the listing description is explored with Historic England.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the statue be exhibited, drawing on the principles and practice of the temporary M Shed display where the statue was lying horizontally. We recommend that attention is paid to presenting the history in a nuanced, contextualised and engaging way, including information on the broader history of the enslavement of people of African descent.



FUTURE OF THE EMPTY PLINTH

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the former Colston statue plinth, along with the original plaques, remain in place and that a new plaque is installed that briefly and factually explains when and why the statue was put up and taken down. We suggest the following wording for the new plaque:

'On 13 November 1895, a statue of Edward Colston (1636 - 1721) was unveiled here celebrating him as a city benefactor. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the celebration of Colston was increasingly challenged given his prominent role in the enslavement of African people. On 7 June 2020, the statue was pulled down during Black Lives Matter protests and rolled into the harbour. Following consultation with the city in 2021, the statue entered the collections of Bristol City Council's museums.'

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Conservation Area Character Appraisal is updated to include a) the events of 7 June 2020, b) this process of public engagement and c) the decision to locate the statue within Bristol City Council Museums service. We recommend that the opportunity to reflect the current state of the plinth in the National List description is explored.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the city think creatively about the empty plinth and its immediate vicinity. We recommend that funding is sought from public and private sources to commission temporary artworks and activities. These might take a digital or physical form, on and around the plinth. We recommend that two principles guide future use of the plinth:

- that there are periods of intentional emptiness and presence;
- that this is a space for dialogue and conversation about things that matter in and for the city, including the legacy of transatlantic slavery.

BROADER ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE CONSULTATION

- ▶ We see the need for a city-wide commitment to creating opportunities for younger and older generations to interact, share experiences and perspectives and develop greater empathy and mutual understanding, including sharing views on the city's past, present and future.
- ▶ We see the need to develop processes and practices, both locally and nationally, that encourage active engagement in creating more representative public space. When making decisions around contested heritage, public bodies should develop and follow processes that are fair and transparent, inclusive, participatory, evidence-based and committed to justice.⁸
- ▶ The history of the city's involvement with the transatlantic enslavement of African people is not an issue that can or should be consigned to the past, but rather remains embedded in present-day concerns. Strong feelings remain on this topic, and the toppling of the Colston statue has opened the opportunity for the history to be addressed urgently, appropriately and sensitively. We recognise the leadership of the Legacy Steering Group on the question of how Bristol might best memorialise and respond to the transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of African people.⁹

⁸ Further guidance on possible processes can be found at Ben Stephenson, Marie-Annick Gournet and Joanna Burch-Brown, 'Reviewing contested statues, memorials and place names: Guidance for public bodies', University of Bristol, 2021 available at www.bridginghistories.com/heritage-resources

⁹ For more information, see the Project TRUTH report, by the Legacy Steering Group and Black South West Network: www.blacksouthwestnetwork.org/acc

BRISTOL VOICES

How do you feel about the statue being pulled down?

“ A beautifully powerful act.

“ The law is the law and must be respected.

“ At first I saw it as destruction... but seeing it in the M Shed today it felt good.

“ As a Bristolian I feel proud of the fact that this happened in my city.

“ A brave thing to do.

“ There is a democratic process and they didn't exhaust it.

“ It shouldn't have been vandalised as it is a work of art.

“ It was hard for any black person to walk past every day.

“ It should have been removed earlier.

“ It was criminal damage by an unlawful mob.

“ Direct political action accomplished what bureaucracy couldn't.



Should the Colston statue be on display in a museum in Bristol?

“ It should be in a museum. Statues are celebratory, museums are educational.

“ I’d like to know more about how much of the city’s architecture came from money, directly or indirectly, due to the triangular trade.

“ Display it in a way that encourages reflection on Bristol’s past and the ripples of that past in the present, not reverence.

“ It’s not ‘rewriting history’ to remove a statue if it’s preserved in a museum in an appropriate context.

“ It should be cleaned up and restored to its rightful place on the plinth.

“ It should be reinstalled onto the plinth, then put to a vote.

“ I would like it to be displayed with the whole history surrounding it.

“ It should be part of a much bigger, dedicated museum / memorial and visitors center to educate the city about the transatlantic slave trade.

“ It shouldn’t be on display. We don’t need statues to be displayed of people who killed and murdered thousands. We do not need statues to remember their crimes.



What should be on the plinth?

“ Pulling down one statue won’t solve racial inequality, so what else can we do using this space to further that cause?

“ The plaque must be updated to reflect history.

“ I really don’t think anything should be put in place that commemorates what happened on 07/06/2020.

“ Remove plinth. People will not agree on what should go on it.

“ Let’s have a meeting place for poets, speakers, musicians, actors.

“ Love the idea of changing what is there! It is quite ‘Bristol’.

“ Empty is the only acceptable thing unless the statue is repaired and returned to its plinth, so that the world knows Bristol does not sanction riots and rioters!

“ An empty plinth leads to conversation.

“ A permanent replacement could be divisive.

“ As a work is replaced it could be displayed next to Colston in the museum, to keep the connection and conversations moving.

“ A real heroic Bristolian like Paul Stephenson.

“ The replacement should be non-political and conciliatory to everyone – after all Bristol is the home to people of all ages, beliefs and politics.



“ HOW ABOUT PUTTING UP...
“ BRUNEL

“ A CLIMATE CHANGE MEMORIAL
“ THOMAS CHATTERTON
“ MARY SEACOLE

“ A SLAVERY MEMORIAL
“ MARY CARPENTER

“ HEROES OF COVID 19
“ BANKSY

“ QUEEN ELIZABETH II
“ PRINCESS CAMPBELL

“ GROMIT
“ CARY GRANT

“ GEORGE MULLER
“ HANNAH MORE

CONCLUSION

Thinking differently is not a problem, but something to be celebrated.

The survey has shown that there is much that we as a city agree on. Most of us think that the best place for the statue is in a museum in the city. Most of us think the plinth should remain, with a new plaque, and should be a space for ongoing conversation. There are also areas where our views differ. We should welcome this. Thinking differently is not a problem, but something to be celebrated. A core principle of democracy is not simply tolerating but valuing differences in opinion. The world – and our city – would be all the poorer without differences in the ways we think about the past, present and future.

Explore more ...

- ▶ The full report gives you a chance to look in more depth at how we did the survey, who responded, and at more of the voices and views of people who joined in.
www.bridginghistories.com/heritage-resources
- ▶ Let us know your thoughts and feedback.
activities@bridginghistories.com
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Please contact history@bristol.gov.uk