

Memorandum for Executive Council

SUBJECT **Report from the Liberated African Advisory Committee**

Memorandum by Chief Secretary

ADVICE SOUGHT 1. **Executive Council is asked to advise whether:**

a) **the Report from the Liberated African Advisory Committee (LAAC) attached at (Annex A) should be endorsed**

b) **the recommendations from the Report, as follows, should be adopted:**

i. **The LAAC recommends that the Pipe Store continues as temporary storage for the Liberated African Remains whilst plans are developed for a peaceful and final resting place: the Pipe Store should in no way be considered an option for a final resting place.**

ii. **The LAAC recommends that repatriation is not a viable option; focus should therefore be placed on reinterment on St Helena.**

iii. **The LAAC recommends that reinterment of the Liberated African Remains takes place within Rupert's Valley.**

iv. **The LAAC recommends that the Liberated African Remains are:**

- **Reburied at the site identified in Rupert's**
- **A memorial is created at that site**
- **An interpretation centre is developed, ideally at the Depot Building in Rupert's**

v. **The LAAC recommends that in the interim period prior to reburial, the materials returned from the International Slavery Museum are displayed at the St Helena Museum and that every effort is made to provide the local population with the opportunity to engage on this issue.**

The LAAC further recommends that the grave goods are

fully documented and recorded before then being returned to the set of human remains that the grave goods were unearthed with and reburied as part of this project.

- vi. **The LAAC recommends against the retention of a subset of the remains for further study/exhibition.**
The LAAC further recommends that this principle should be applied to any future remains that might be uncovered e.g. if in the worst case scenario further remains are discovered during future developments in Rupert's, these remains should be documented and then reburied at the site identified under this project at the earliest opportunity.
- vii. **The LAAC recommends that under Phase 3 of this project, further work is carried out to establish and, where appropriate, memorialise other aspects relating not just to the Liberated African history on St Helena but also to the island's slave history. It is recommended that the scope of the LAAC is expanded to encompass this subsequent phase.**

BACKGROUND & CONSIDERATIONS

- 2. St Helena's role in the abolition of African slaves is largely unrecognised. Following the Abolition of Slave Trades Act in 1807, the Royal Navy's West African Squadron was established on a permanent footing in 1814, its remit being to patrol the South Atlantic in search of illegal slaving operations. Slavers found to be acting unlawfully were commandeered and brought to judgment.
- 3. A Vice Admiralty Court operated on St Helena for this purpose during the period 1840-1855. Records are unclear but it is calculated that during the period 1840-1850 alone, over 15,000 slaves were landed at St Helena. The Environmental Statement (ES) for the Airport Project notes "*a station was established in Rupert's Valley to accommodate the freed slaves (the 'Liberated Africans Depot'). However, significant numbers died on ship or after landing on St Helena and large cemeteries grew up in Rupert's Valley.*"
- 4. In examining the archaeological significance of Rupert's Valley, the ES notes "*The international historical importance of these graveyards cannot be over-stated. Between 1519 and 1867 in excess of 11 million Africans were captured and shipped to the Americas, but the Rupert's Valley cemeteries may preserve the only large group of burials relating to slaves who did not survive the Atlantic crossing. Their cultural significance is huge, whilst the archaeological information that they preserve is extremely valuable.*"
- 5. SHG has responsibility for the reinterment of 325 sets of complete skeletal human remains of Liberated Africans. These were excavated from their original location in Rupert's in 2008 as part of

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works under the Airport Project. Additional disarticulated human bones and bone fragments, commonly referred to as scatter material, were also collected during the course of the 2008 excavations and also during the course of the construction of the Airport haul road.

6. The Remains are securely stored in the former Pipe Store in Jamestown. A commitment was made as part of the environmental mitigation under the Airport Project that the Remains would be appropriately reinterred.
7. The Liberated African Advisory Committee (LAAC) was formed in late 2017 with the purpose of advising SHG on options to ***“provide a peaceful and respectful final resting place for the disturbed Liberated African Remains currently housed in the former Pipe Store in Jamestown”***. The LAAC’s Report (hereafter ‘the Report’) is attached at Annex A.
8. The LAAC considered a do-nothing option and this was discounted as it would not deliver the objective stated at para 6 above. There was discussion around whether an alternative location could be found until such time that it is possible to reinter the remains. The LAAC recommends against this; the Pipe Store provides adequate storage and any interim relocation of the remains would create unnecessary disturbance. The LAAC therefore recommended:
Recommendation i: that the Pipe Store continues as temporary storage for the Liberated African Remains whilst plans are developed for a peaceful and final resting place: the Pipe Store should in no way be considered an option for a final resting place.
9. The LAAC considered the option of repatriation of the Liberated African Remains to a location (to be determined) in West Africa. The general principle behind this option would be to return the Liberated African Remains ‘home’. However, there are a number of inherent difficulties with this option that the Liberated Africans would have originated in multiple locations.
10. Dr Andy Pearson led the 2008 excavations in Rupert’s and went on to publish *Infernal Traffic. The Excavation of a Liberated African Graveyard in Rupert’s Valley, St Helena*. In an earlier paper, Dr Pearson recommended against this option. Based on these factors, the LAAC recommended:
Recommendation ii: that repatriation is not a viable option. Focus should therefore be placed on reinterment on St Helena.
11. Given the importance of the historical context in Rupert’s, the LAAC recommended that reinterment should take place in Rupert’s Valley. This was important as it narrowed options for the location and method of the reinterment.

Recommendation iii: reinterment of the Liberated African

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Remains should take place within Rupert's Valley.

12. The LAAC then considered options for the method of reinterment. By weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of an ossuary versus reburial, the LAAC concluded:

- the option of reburial meets the criteria for a final peaceful resting place and offers the greater advantages in terms of reinterment (e.g. lower capital outlay and lower ongoing maintenance costs).
- the option of an ossuary offers the greater advantages in terms of:
 - retaining remains for future study. However, this may not be necessary due to information available from earlier studies plus the data that will become available for future use from the current study being undertaken by Howard University.
 - memorialisation and enabling knowledge transfer about the Liberated African remains and their history.

13. The LAAC therefore placed greater importance on the ossuary option in terms of 'telling the story' of the Liberated Africans, more so than on its merits as a reinterment option. It was further posited that the same objectives could be achieved through an interpretation centre.

14. The LAAC hence proposed that an optimum solution would be reburial of the Liberated African Remains plus an interpretation centre. The LAAC recommended:

Recommendation iv: the Liberated African Remains are:

- **Reburied at the site identified in Rupert's (near St Michael's Church and the current temporary fuel facility)**
- **A memorial is created at that site**
- **An interpretation centre is developed, ideally at the Depot Building in Rupert's**

15. If agreed, the LAAC proposes that the draft specification in the report (based on the principles at para 6 above) is finalised and a competitive tendering exercise be undertaken to produce concept (and once these are agreed) detailed designs. As much public engagement as possible would be undertaken so that the local community as well as any international stakeholders could engage on this issue. The designs would require planning permission which would also provide another avenue for public engagement in the process.

16. In addition to the human remains, the 2008 excavations uncovered a number of items from the graves (grave goods). These were personal effects including dog-tags, beads from necklaces, and

remnants of clothing. Approval was granted in 2008 for the export of samples of the grave goods for further study and analysis. Approval was then granted for the loan of a selection of the grave goods to the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool to form part of an exhibition there. These items, including the exhibition panels, were returned to St Helena in 2017 and have now been loaned to the St Helena Museum. The LAAC recommends:

Recommendation v: in the interim period prior to reburial, the materials returned from the International Slavery Museum are displayed at the St Helena Museum and that every effort is made to provide the local population with the opportunity to engage on this issue. The grave goods are fully documented and recorded before then being returned to the set of human remains that the grave goods were unearthed with and reburied as part of this project.

17. Given the unique significance of the Liberated African history in Rupert's, it was queried whether a subset of the remains should be retained for further analysis. The LAAC considered this matter and recommended:

Recommendation vi: The LAAC recommends against the retention of a subset of the remains for further study/exhibition. The LAAC further recommends that this principle should be applied to any future remains that might be uncovered e.g. if in the worst case scenario further remains are discovered during future developments in Rupert's, these remains should be documented and then reburied at the site identified under this project at the earliest opportunity. The site identified allows space for expansion and this will form part of the specification to be incorporated into the design.

18. The LAAC considered a number of examples of memorials to slave history around the world. Whilst the examples are useful in terms of general guidance and lessons learnt, the LAAC recommends that a memorial unique to St Helena is developed. To this end it is proposed that the next phase is to run a competition to design the memorial. Outline TORs and specification are included in the Report. The LAAC recommends:

Recommendation vii: under Phase 2 of this project, a competition is run to design the memorial at the Liberated African Reburial Site.

St Helena's role in the liberation of African slaves is but one small part of the island's history connected to slavery. It is an aspect of the island's history that is largely unrecognised where St Helena's role is of international significance.

19. The focus on the liberation of African slaves and the work that took place in Rupert's during the period 1840-1860 tells only one part of the story: it is important to establish and recognise the wider context of the island's own role in slavery and the events that led up to the

setting-up of the Vice-Admiralty Court at St Helena.

Recommendation viii: The LAAC recommends that under Phase 3 of this project, further work is carried out to establish and, where appropriate, memorialise other aspects relating not just to the Liberated African history on St Helena but also to the island's slave history. It is recommended that the scope of the LAAC is expanded to encompass this subsequent phase.

20. Executive Council is asked to endorse the LAAC Report and the above recommendations so that Phases 2 and 3 of the project are progressed.

21. Physical implementation on site cannot begin until the temporary fuel storage facility is removed (currently estimated for end 2019) but the design work and bids to funding sources (see below) can commence immediately so that everything is in readiness when the site becomes available.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

22. A business case has been prepared for Phase 2 of this project which would involve competitive tendering to finalise designs and to carry out the reburial and memorial work. A key aspect would be the availability of specialist archaeological input to undertake the reburial aspect of the work. This input would also need to be sourced through a procurement exercise.

23. The one-off capital costs involved are not presented here in order not to prejudice the planned competitive tendering exercises. The LAAC has started to investigate alternative sources of funding and will continue this work under Phase 2 of the project.

24. There are no operational costs associated with the project. Ongoing maintenance costs are minimal (and this will be one of the design criteria).

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

25. There are economic benefits from the tourism potential associated with this aspect of the island's heritage that can be enhanced by developing a tasteful memorial place and maximising the amount of information displayed publically about the story of the remains being uncovered, and the people themselves. Representatives from the Tourist Office and Enterprise St Helena are members of the LAAC in order to progress this concept.

26. There could be further economic benefits from studying the remains, as this provides research possibilities and expands knowledge. Whilst re-burying the remains does not help to enhance this particular benefit, the LAAC is confident that extensive research has taken place to understand the significance of the finds in Rupert's. The data collected (including DNA analysis) during these earlier studies is available for future research requests. Reburial was the preferred option in both the Airport Environmental Statement and in an island survey conducted in 2015 and has

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therefore been considered by the group to be of overriding importance.

**CONSISTENCY
WITH
INVESTMENT
POLICY
PRINCIPLES
PUBLIC / SOCIAL
IMPACT**

27. N/A
28. There are social and cultural benefits through recognition of the role that St Helena played in the liberation of slaves.
29. Rupert's Valley in St Helena preserves the only large group of burials relating to slaves who did not survive the Atlantic crossing. The significance is huge and hitherto largely unrecognised.
30. Benefits would accrue to the local community as this is a part of the island's history but also to the international community, particularly those with a specialist interest in this period of history.

**ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT**

31. A number of references exist, including the Environmental Statement for the Airport Project and *Infernal Traffic* (Dr Andy Pearson). All of these are consistent in emphasising the significance of Rupert's in the history of the Liberated Africans. There are also earlier recommendations for reburial of the Liberated African Remains excavated in 2008. This project is recommended environmental mitigation for the earlier Airport Project works in Rupert's. Further detail is available in the LAAC Report at Annex A.
32. Outline planning permission has been granted for the identified site in Rupert's and there was initial consideration of environmental aspects during this process. As discussed above, the final design will be subject to planning approval, including an environmental assessment of that design.

**PREVIOUS
CONSULTATION /
COMMITTEE
INPUT**

33. This matter was discussed by Executive Council in October 2017 when Council mandated the establishment of the Liberated African Advisory Committee to take forward this work.
34. Work was carried out in 2015/16 to examine possible reburial sites in Rupert's. This identified a site near St Michael's Church and the current temporary fuel storage facility. Outline planning permission was obtained for this site and approval was also granted for the site to be designated as a burial ground. There was public consultation and engagement with Elected Members at this much earlier stage of the project.

**PUBLIC
REACTION**

35. There has been a great deal of international interest in the project and as noted in the Report, there have been differing views over reburial versus an ossuary. The most contentious aspect, however,

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is likely to be timing as stakeholders are keen to see the reinterment of the Liberated African Remains as early as possible.

36. This then links with the steps on publicity below, where every effort will be made to engage with stakeholders during the next stage of the project.

PUBLICITY

37. The Executive Council's decision should be published via the normal channels.

38. Once approval is received to move on to Phase 2 of the project, a programme of public engagement is planned to raise awareness and to seek involvement in the development of concept designs.

SUPPORT TO STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

39. The project contributes to the following Strategic Objectives:

- *Altogether Greener* through contributing to the management of a key aspect of the island's heritage;
- *Altogether Wealthier* through the tourism opportunities that could potentially be derived as a result.

LINK TO SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN GOALS

40. The project contributes to the following SEDP goals:

- *Sustain and improve our Natural Capital - maintaining and enhancing St Helena's exceptional environment, landscape, heritage and cultural qualities for this generation and the next.*
- *Attract Visitors and Increase Tourism*

SO'B

OPEN /CLOSED AGENDA ITEM

41. This paper is for the open session.

Corporate Support
Corporate Services
28th November 2018