

## Undertaking reviews of monuments and street names: Processes to guide public bodies

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### About the research

The toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol in June 2020 has set in motion a national debate about our heritage and who we continue to commemorate. At least 150 reviews and audits of contested heritage are taking place in the UK's towns, cities and institutions in 2020/21. Many of these have been carried out with little guidance, with actions of both removal and retention without consultation arguably contributing to social division in some places.

This research uses primary and secondary research data, including in-depth analysis of past reviews of contested heritage to present guidance for public bodies engaged in reviews of their heritage assets and place names.



The guidance focuses on the best practice in process design rather than what action should be taken with individual monuments. It has informed the processes undertaken by a number of public bodies, including the We Are Bristol History Commission and the Greater London Authority. The guidance covers:

- Different models of review.
- The factors and contexts relevant to reviews.
- Key principles to underpin and guide reviews.
- Process design and implementation.
- Guidance on inclusive community engagement.
- Some possible courses of action.

### Policy implications

- In conducting sensitive reviews of contested heritage, public bodies must follow processes that are fair and transparent, inclusive, participatory, evidence-based and committed to justice.
- Engaging communities in constructive and participatory conversations about contested heritage is a necessary part of deciding what to do.
- There can be no single recommended approach to reviewing contested heritage – the local landscape should guide the shape of the review.
- Where the prevailing recommendation is to 'retain and explain' controversial monuments, this presents both an opportunity to think creatively about how we represent heritage holistically and the potential for further division due to the lack of definition of this process of 'explaining'.
- Existing models for guiding community conversations exist which promote mutual understanding around sensitive subjects. These can be tailored for reviews.

## Key findings

Most reviews employ one of three models, the descriptive audit, which focuses only on identifying the heritage assets that may be considered controversial, the evaluative review, which explicitly includes the intention to decide on potential alterations to the memorial landscape, and the holistic approach, which uses conversations about heritage as a platform to address wider inequalities.

Factors relevant to reviews are wide ranging and include public opinion, a figure's life and the historical context of their commemoration, the changing moral landscape, the immediate context prompting the review, the contemporary mission and values of the body responsible for the object, duties of non-erasure, artistic value of the object, historical relevance of the commemorated person, the location of the object, the timing of the review, the practicality and cost of any decision, and a wide range of legal issues including planning considerations, ownership, covenants, the legal authority to act and offences under the Public Order Act.

Courses of action – i.e. what might be concluded can be done with contested monuments, are described as the 'five Rs': Retention, Recontextualisation, Removal, Replacement and Relocation. Although the presumption in government and Historic England guidance is to retain statues in situ where possible, the guidance demonstrates that the 'retain and explain' policy is potentially controversial, with past examples showing how the 'explanation' of a figure's life can be contested.

## Further information

The full guidance document is published [here](#).

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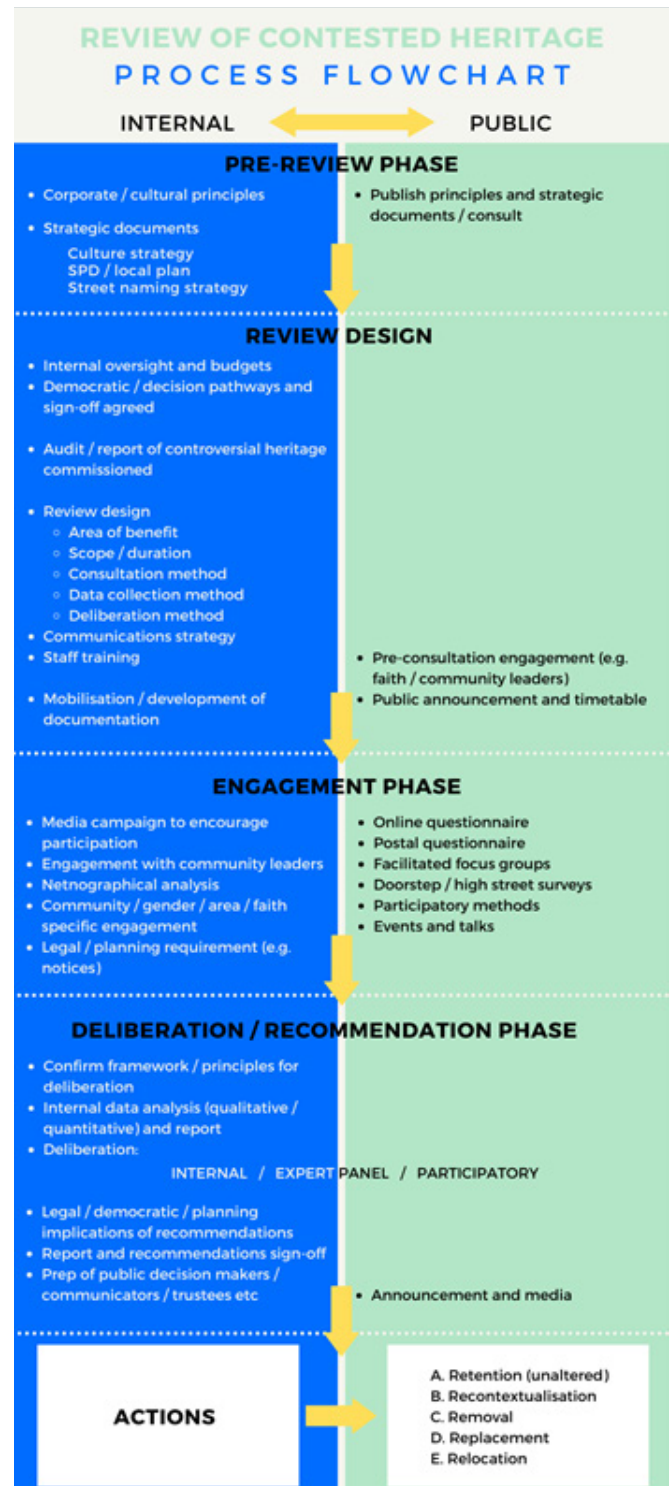
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