

Blue Plaques for Suffrage Pioneers

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

As requested by Lead Members, this report explores the possibilities of campaigning for blue plaques to represent the 100 Suffrage Pioneers celebrated in the LGA and WLGS's From Suffrage to Citizenship Campaign in 2018.

Recommendation

That the Board note the report and consider whether to progress with further research into the proposal.

Action

Officers to progress scoping of the 'Blue Plaques for Suffrage Pioneers' project if directed

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Blue Plaques for Suffrage Pioneers

Background

1. The Suffrage Pioneers project was developed by the Women's Local Government Society, alongside the LGA, and aimed *'to identify and celebrate the lives of 100 previously hidden women and supportive men who were active in the campaign for votes, leading to the Representation of the People Act 1918, and who used the extended rights to citizenship in a positive way locally'*
2. The full list of the 100 pioneers can be found at this link <https://www.suffrage-pioneers.net/the-list/> . Further details on the project itself available at this site <https://www.suffrage-pioneers.net> and from the LGA website <https://www.local.gov.uk/suffrage-citizenship>.
3. Following discussion at our Lead Members meeting, this report investigates whether championing a blue plaque' scheme for the 100 identified pioneers could be a potential project for the Board to undertake and oversee, to enable a continued legacy for the Suffrage Pioneers project. It provides some initial justifications as to the benefits of the idea and several practical difficulties which would arise.
4. Currently, the Blue Plaque Scheme in London is owned by English Heritage. This has been the case since 1986, yet the scheme existed for around 120 years prior to this. Outside London, many local councils, civic societies and other organisations run similar plaque schemes, and there are at least 300 plaque schemes existing in the United Kingdom at the present time. There is no national body governing such commemoration.

Arguments for the scheme

5. The scheme would provide a continued legacy and build upon the work of the Suffrage Pioneers project, allowing the recognition of these pioneers to continue on beyond the 100 year anniversary of female suffrage.
6. There already has been an acknowledgement of lack of women featured in existing heritage plaques, this was acknowledged by English Heritage in 2016 and has been seen most recently in the London Assemblies #BackthePlaque campaign, which called on residents to nominate more women. Any proposed Suffrage Pioneer scheme may be able to capitalise on this positive direction in gathering support.
7. The lack of pre-existing national schemes, while it causes several issues as documented later in the paper, may offer some advantages if the campaign were to be run outside of existing local schemes, as a separate project.

8. Broadland District Council provide an example of the potential enthusiasm local authorities may display for such a scheme. They in fact launched their blue plaque scheme by unveiling their first three plaques, which were all dedicated to suffragettes from the local area. Broadland may also provide a welcome point of contact for further research into the costs and practicalities of the scheme. Further insight into the Broadland scheme can be found here
https://www.broadland.gov.uk/news/article/267/new_blue_plaque_scheme_celebrates_remarkable_people_in_broadlands_history

Practicalities

9. However, in the process of examining the viability of such a campaign, several key practical issues present themselves.
10. The problems behind co-ordinating plaques in a national scheme have already been shown in English Heritage's failed national scheme, which was attempted from 2005-2007. The scheme was abandoned as untenable with in particular, the scale and number of existing plaque schemes a factor. While provision of advice and guidance regarding plaques remains an English Heritage responsibility, the scale of support we could receive from them is unclear.
11. One issue presented is tying down a specific location or building to attach the plaque. Locations attached to specific pioneers are vague as can be seen in the list of pioneers linked to point 2.. Due to the lack of a co-ordinated national scheme, the criteria used to determine who and where gets a plaque vary widely from place to place.
12. It is left to local councils, charities and history organisations to police the plaques issued in their areas. Many have their own qualifications as to what a site's connection to an individual must be for it to be assigned a plaque. This research stage is given an estimated cost of between £10-£1,500 (per plaque) by English Heritage.
13. Another concern would be the lack of resources, both financial and in terms of manpower, within the LGA team to conduct the necessary research and communications work to drive the campaign and contact/persuade all of the local schemes. To be successful, the scheme would need an outside sponsorship and a sustained level of support from English Heritage and local authorities.
14. The costs presented by such a scheme may be significant, especially when multiplied by attempting to install 100 plaques within a reasonable close time-frame. English Heritage provides a breakdown of the 12 stages required in establishing a plaque scheme, with each of their estimated costs. The list of the 12 stages and their estimated costs and time requirements can be found in **Appendix B** of this report.

15. These concerns are highlighted by the lack of resources, both financial and in terms of man power, within the LGA team to conduct the necessary research and communications work to drive the campaign and contact/persuade all of the local schemes. To be successful, the scheme would need an outside sponsorship and a sustained level of support from English Heritage and local authorities.
16. Further background information and advice regarding the establishing and running of plaque schemes can be found in this English Heritage publication: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/siteassets/home/visit/blue-plaques/propose-plaque/commemorative-plaques-guidance-pt1.pdf>.

Implications for Wales

17. The existing suffrage pioneers list includes those based in Wales and Scotland so steps to reach out to any existing local schemes in the promotion of the Suffrage Pioneer would need to take into account Welsh authorities also.

Financial Implications

18. The costs behind each individual stage of such a plaque scheme are outlined in **Appendix A** of this report. However, it is fair to presume that taking on such a project would represent a significant cost to the LGA and outside funding of some sort should be pursued if going forward.
19. Based upon costs estimated in Appendix A, with parts 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 most likely to pertain to the LGA's role in such a project, our estimated cost per plaque through taking a median position between the scales of points, which would be $15 + 140 + 850 + 1325 + 275 = \text{£}2605$ total estimated cost per plaque.
20. The LGA would need to bid for this figure X100, which equals **£265,000**.

Next steps

21. Weighing up the issues identified in this report, Members of the Board to advise officers as to whether this project should be pursued.
22. If members wish to move forward on the topic, further planning and research as to how best to engage and plan such a campaign, with a more in-depth review of its viability, will be needed. The level of LGA involvement will need to be considered and put forward to the Board for approval.

Appendix A

1. SCOPING AND CONSULTATION

Average time-frame: 2-6 months

Average cost: £10-£150

2. FUNDRAISING

Average time-frame: 1-12 months, or more

Average cost: £10-£50

3. PROJECT INITIATION AND ENCOURAGING NOMINATIONS

Average time-frame: 1-8 months

Average cost: £50-£2,000

4. ADMINISTRATION OF NOMINATIONS AND SELECTION PROCESS

Average time allocated: 5 hours-2 days (per plaque)

Average cost: £1-£5 (per plaque)

5. HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Average time allocated: 2-10 days (per plaque)

Average cost: £10-£1,500 (per plaque)

6. CONSENTS

Average time-frame: 1-12 months, or more (per plaque)

Average cost: £5-£25 (per plaque)

7. DESIGN AND POSITIONING

Average time-frame: 2 days-2 weeks (per plaque)

Average cost: £30-£250 (per plaque)

8. MANUFACTURE

Average time-frame: 1-2 months (per plaque)

Average cost: £200-£1,500 (per plaque)

9. INSTALLATION AND UNVEILING

Average time-frame: 6 weeks-6 months (per plaque)

Average cost: £150-£2,500 (per plaque)

10. PLAQUE MAINTENANCE AND MONITORING

Average time allocated: 3 hours-3 days (per plaque, per annum)

Average cost: £1-£150 (per plaque, per annum)

11. PUBLICITY, PROMOTION AND OUTREACH

Average time-frame: 1-6 months (for a limited initiative) or ongoing

Average cost: £50-£500 (per annum)

12. ENQUIRIES

Average time allocated: 1-10 days (per annum)

Average cost: £1-£10 (per annum)