

Brighton & Hove City Council

Culture, Heritage, Sport, Tourism & Economic Development Committee

Agenda Item 73

Subject: Undivided India Commonwealth Soldiers
Commemorations

Date of meeting: 18th April 2024

Report of: Corporate Director, City Services

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 On 9th November 2023 a Notice of Motion (Appendix 1) was submitted by Cllr Miller to this committee to examine opportunities to commemorate the significant role played by soldiers from undivided India before partition of 1947 – including modern-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar (Burma) in ensuring victory in both world wars.
- 1.2 In conversations with Councillors in the intervening time, an additional objective was identified about utilising this legacy to forge stronger inward investment opportunities across the Commonwealth.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee agrees to delivery of an annual multifaith event from October 2024. A committee made up of community leaders and chaired by Cllr Asaduzzaman should be set up to oversee the proper and professional delivery of the event and ensure that funding can be secured from the community and other community funds for future years.
- 2.2 That the Committee agrees that the Culture, Tourism and Sport service collaborates with the Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust (RPMT) to partner on, secure seed funding, plan and deliver the first annual commemoration multifaith event at the India Gate on/around 26 October 2024, as a testament to the welcoming and inclusive reputation of the city and reflecting the diverse religious communities of the sub-continent.
- 2.3 That the Committee agrees that as an integral part of the annual multifaith event a campaign will be developed to generate awareness of the wider contribution of soldiers from undivided India, to include educational

materials.

- 2.4 That Committee agrees that additional scoping and feasibility work should be pursued with the Economic Development team, and business partners across the city, to scope and secure an additional commonwealth business-related event to leverage our enduring links to citizens from undivided India and the wider Commonwealth.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 In World War I (1914-1918), more than 1.5 million soldiers from undivided India served in the British Indian Army, participating in major battles. Notably, the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, Battle of Gallipoli, and the Battle of the Somme.
- 3.2 In World War II (1939-1945), over 2.5 million soldiers from undivided India volunteered to serve in the British Indian Army, the largest volunteer army in history and a testament to the generosity of the Indian soldiers. It is undeniable that the contributions of Commonwealth soldiers from undivided India were pivotal in the Allied victory, and their courage was recognized with numerous medals and awards.
- 3.3 During both World War I and World War II, undivided India played a significant role in supporting the British Empire's war efforts. Indian soldiers from various regions, religions, and backgrounds served in the British Indian Army.
- 3.4 Indian troops were sent to the Western Front in Europe, where they participated in battles such as the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, Battle of Ypres, and the Battle of Gallipoli. They fought alongside British and Allied forces.
- 3.5 The war effort relied on recruitment from various regions of India, and many young men volunteered to join the British Indian Army. The Indian population also provided essential support in terms of supplies, finances, and resources.
- 3.6 In addition to combat, Muslim and Buddhist soldiers served in support roles. They provided logistical support, helped with transportation, and served in various auxiliary units that contributed to the overall war effort. Muslim and Buddhist soldiers from undivided India served alongside soldiers from various religious and ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the Indian subcontinent. Their contributions, along with those of soldiers from other communities, played a crucial role in the overall success of the British war effort in both World War I and World War II.

- 3.7 It is with the respect that Brighton showed for these soldiers that it is proposed that the city should commemorate and reflect on the efforts of the forgotten Muslim and Buddhist undivided India soldiers and honour their sacrifices.
- 3.8 The Royal Pavilion was one of 3 buildings in Brighton, used to house undivided India soldiers and served as a base hospital in which to treat undivided India soldiers wounded on the western front. Between 1914 and 1916 12,000 soldiers were treated in Brighton with 4,306 placed in the Pavilion. Only 32 men died in the Royal Pavilion hospital. These soldiers were a mix of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs and great care was taken to respect the religion and customs of each.
- 3.9 The Indian hospital is marked by two monuments in Brighton.
- (i) The Chattri memorial stands on the spot on the Downs where Hindus and Sikhs were cremated. It is accompanied by a memorial maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission bearing the names of the 53 men who were cremated here. An annual remembrance ceremony takes place here every June, organised by the Chattri Memorial Group.
- (ii) The India Gate at the southern entrance to the Pavilion was presented to the people of Brighton by the 'princes and people of India' as a gesture of thanks for the care provided by the town's Indian hospitals and is 'dedicated to the use of the inhabitants of Brighton'. It was unveiled by the Maharajah of Patiala on 26 October 1921 and was paid for by individuals from India, including the Maharajah.
- 3.10 During his speech at the opening ceremony, while the Maharajah talked of the sacrifices made by soldiers of undivided India, there was also emphasis around 'Dr Brighton', a popular reference to the town's reputation as a place of healing. He described 'Brighton's abounding hospitality' and claimed that the town's fame as a healer 'was talked of in many hundreds of remote Indian villages'.
- 3.11 By holding a day of remembrance, the city can preserve the memories of the undivided India soldiers who fought for Britain in the war and ensure that this vital history is more widely understood and recognised by and for contemporary generations; highlight the stories of individual undivided India soldiers to provide the community with diverse role models, previously hidden from public dialogue; promote more of an understanding of the array of different cultures present in Brighton.
- 3.12 By focusing on shared heritage and acknowledging the sacrifices made by these soldiers, Brighton or any other community can foster a stronger sense of unity and inclusivity and serve as a bridge to connect people from various backgrounds, promote understanding, and break down social barriers.
- 3.13 A consideration for establishing an annual event at the India Gate is the impending works to the Pavilion estate in light of the recent National Lottery Heritage Fund (NHLF) Grant for improvement to the overall garden. However, the RPMT have reassured that works will not affect the India Gate in October 2024.

- 3.14 In consultation with the RPMT they have committed, as part of their community focussed programme, to explore how Brighton & Hove City Council and the RPMT can work together to identify seed funding for 2024, scope and deliver an annual commemoration event, a campaign including new educational materials.
- 3.15 In consultation with Cllr Asaduzzaman, he is supportive of convening a committee to oversee the events and campaign in 2024 and to support the longer-term planning and funding of the event.
- 3.16 In addition to the commemorative event at the gateway there has been discussion around how the legacy of the strong connection between Brighton and undivided India nations can be leveraged in a Commonwealth business event in coming years.
- 3.17 In consultation with colleagues from the Economic Development team it was identified that it is important to ensure that any subsequent business-related events are placed in the context of – and align with – the council’s emerging Economic Strategy. A major business-focused event would help to promote Brighton & Hove as a destination for foreign direct investment, but could also have significant budgetary implications. An event of this nature can generate a significant positive economic impact for the city but will require extensive planning to ensure its success. It will be essential to work with business partners in the city and to scope existing events of this nature that could be attracted to the city.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 Due consideration should be given to the current Chattri memorial service in June and its accessibility for some attendees.
- 4.2 A memorial event at the India Gate in October would be a suitable addition to the current remembrance services and would additionally recognise the commitment of Muslim and Buddhist soldiers of undivided India.
- 4.3 There is an inclusive service at the Brighton War memorial in November. However, this is part of a national commemoration primarily for British soldiers.
- 4.4 There would be budgetary implications to initiating this new commemoration event, but a committee, working in partnership with Brighton and Hove City Council and the RPMT, should be able to secure seed funding and in-kind support.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 When planning any public events there would need to be public engagement. It is proposed that this is led by the new committee, in association with RPMT.

- 5.2 In working with the RPMT and other community partners we hope to increase the general awareness around the history of the India Gate and relate it to the city's modern identity and reputation for inclusion and diversity.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Given the important historical context of the India Gate and increased interest in the recent history of the Pavilion estate it is important that, as a testament to the international reputation of the city, this multifaith event celebrates the undivided India story as well as embracing the India Gate and its story.
- 6.2 In 2024, Brighton and Hove City Council will celebrate its first south Asian Mayor. This is a key moment to also launch this inaugural multifaith event.
- 6.3 By collaborating with the RPMT an annual celebration in the City, focussing on the enduring reputation for inclusion, hospitality and acceptance, is likely to be of great social value and offers an opportunity to link the challenges faced today to the actions of the past at relatively little cost.
- 6.4 A collaboration between Brighton and Hove City Council, RPMT and the wider south Asian community will help to identify possible seed funding to help facilitate a suitable event to ensure maximum benefit without significant budgetary pressure.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Costs associated with organising the unveiling of the India Gate are anticipated to be contained within existing service budgets. Where capacity allows, scoping and feasibility work by Economic Development will be contained within existing budgets. Outcomes from this work along with financial implications for an annual event will need to be reported to a future cabinet meeting for approval.

Name of finance officer consulted: John Lack Date consulted: 26/03/2024

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 There are no legal implications arising from the report.

Name of lawyer consulted: Elizabeth Culbert Date consulted 12/03/2024:

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 The consultation needs to be fully inclusive, and accessible to people with a range of disabilities. The planning process and event itself should be aligned with our Accessible City Strategy and Anti Racism Strategy, bringing an intersectional perspective. As a council we have a strong commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant, which is being refreshed and re-applied for under

the current administration. We make provisions to recognise and honour those who have fought for our country. The proposed event would support our Armed Forces commitment.

- 9.2 The consultation should involve local Armed Forces personnel, the teacher who has been leading on the annual remembrance event and the undivided India Ex-Services Association. It should also involve veteran forces and the wider South Asian community via the Mayor's office.
- 9.3 The multi-faith approach should recognise and seek to involve the diverse religious communities of the sub-continent which include Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Muslims, Jains, Christians, Jewish people and Zoroastrians and other religions.
- 9.4 It should be noted that the India Gate is a memorial space and solemn recognition should be given to this context as well as to the emphasis on 'Dr Brighton.' The India Gate will be read as a memorial space by those of South Asian heritage, especially commemorating soldiers from Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan community members. It is important to maintain recognition of the sacrifices made by south Asian soldiers.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 There are no significant sustainability implications within the proposed recommendations. Any agreed event should be carried out in line with current sustainability policies and, where possible, aim for a carbon neutral approach.

Supporting Documentation

1. Appendices

1. Agenda Item 28, Culture, Heritage, Tourism, Sport and Economic Development Committee