



THE PREHISTORIC SOCIETY

o The Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY

The Society is registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee (no. 2532446) and is a registered charity (no. 1000567)

Council Leader Mrs Abi Brown
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
(by email) Abi.Brown@stoke.gov.uk

January 31st 2022

Dear Councillor Brown

Re Stoke Museum Services

The Prehistoric Society is dedicated to furthering the understanding of our global prehistoric past and conserving prehistoric remains for the future. Our members are passionately interested in many prehistoric sites, museum collections and excavations both in Britain and abroad. I am writing with regard to the proposals to restructure Stoke Museum Services and to create cuts to a number of key staff members, including curators of ceramics, other heritage posts and staff who undertake visitor services, engagement and audience development. I understand proposals also exist to close the Gladstone Pottery Museum to the public for part of the year to use the venue for other non-educational purposes including corporate hire and filming.

Museums are invaluable resources for the public, particularly schoolchildren, and with pandemic restrictions lifting, it will be more important than ever to provide access to museums and their collections. Much can be learnt on line of course, but a lifetime's fascination can come from coming face to face with objects, whether the earliest hand-made prehistoric pottery, or the most elaborate modern art ceramics. Many professional archaeologists and modern artists were first inspired by school visits to museums. Your collections, which hold Designated Status, are truly exceptional and should be unrestricted and fully accessible to visitors and researchers alike.

Skilled curators bring objects alive, and the Stoke Museums hold a superb collection, and also curate the archaeological archive for the region. Our interest is particularly associated with the Prehistoric period, and I would draw your attention to the stories that may be told through these parts of your collection. The first ceramics date from the Neolithic period, 6000 years ago, and tell of a time when people were dramatically changing their lifestyle from a hunter-gatherer to a farming and sedentary existence.

Ceramics were central to this new way of life, and not only represent technological innovation, but a fusing of cultures, as migrants travelled from the European mainland to find a new home and community in this land, bringing ceramic styles with them. These are important stories which resonate today with the movement of peoples across Europe. Your curators will already be telling these stories, and telling them to modern migrant and refugee children – is now the time to reduce your ability to link the present to the past and show our shared humanity?

I am mindful of the very difficult circumstances of the past year, however, by reducing your expert curators and visitor engagement team, and partially closing the galleries, you will drastically reduce the possibilities for visitors, particularly schoolchildren. I urge you to reconsider retaining these staff and continue to provide your local community and visitors with the full story of our past.

Yours faithfully

Professor Clive Gamble, President

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Cc The Right Honorable Member of Parliament Mr Jack Brereton (jack.brereton.mp@parliament.uk)