

Observations on the public survey by the Peterloo Memorial Campaign Group

Carried out between 2 and 12 November 2018

Basic Statistics

Total responses received = 227 (totals for component parts differ as some elements were not completed by individual respondents)

Residents of Greater Manchester comprised nearly 88% of 220 respondents

The proposed location of the memorial was approved by 89% of 220 respondents

The Peterloo Memorial Campaign Group's RIP document was read by over 97% of 223 respondents

Jeremy Deller's design proposals were read by over 97% of 224 respondents

A selection of respondents' comments follows. They are included under each of the five major questions posed in the survey. Most of the comments, but not all, are taken from respondents who are neutral or disagree as it is in the nature of things that the thorniest questions are usually raised by this group of people rather than those who approve of the proposition in question. It should be remembered that between 65% and 79% of responses fall into the 'agree' or 'strongly agree' categories.

Q: Do you agree that the proposed memorial design satisfies the 'Respectful' criteria?

Total respondents: 225 Agree: 162 (72%) Neutral: 20 (8.9%) Disagree: 43 (19.1%)

This question undoubtedly, and against expectations, prompted the liveliest reactions of the survey. It might be argued that the designer of the proposed memorial unwittingly built into the design a bone of contention which need not have existed at all. The use of the word 'respectful' here was surely intended to apply to the innocent victims of the Peterloo massacre and not to those who will come to look at their memorial. In the event, the word was taken up by over 20 disabled and other respondents to launch an attack on the accessibility of the memorial, the chief complaint being the lack of provision for, especially, wheelchair users to mount the steps leading to the 'speaking platform':

"It does not respect people with mobility impairments, for whom it will be inaccessible."

"expresses the spirit of democracy, economic justice and human rights" - so long as you're able to haul yourself up the steps?..."

Several comments made mention of a possible design solution:

"It respects people in the past but not disabled people in the present and future. This could be rectified through using a spiral design as the interactive element is worth keeping."

There must have been a lively external debate about the spiral ramp as several people refer to it. The question of disabled access ripples through all the survey responses, taking perhaps an overgenerous share of the attention.

Q: Do you agree that the proposed memorial design satisfies the 'Informative' criteria?

Total respondents: 223 Agree: 151 (67.7%) Neutral: 31 (13.9%) Disagree: 41 (18.4%)

The difficulty here is that we do not have very much information yet about the descriptive plaque forming part of the memorial. Various people are relying for their comments on the limited details we have seen so far. Several respondents are, in any case, in favour of an accompanying information board to supplement the plaque:

"Provided the plaque accompanies it with suitable information. In addition to a small(ish) plaque, why not a larger information board at some nearby distance."

"Nice placement of names of dead/places people marched from and similar events. Larger info board nearby would be good."

Some have questioned the inclusion of references to events not specifically linked with Peterloo, such as Tiananmen Square. The fear is that these are either irrelevant or that they will take attention away from the main focus of the memorial:

"Linking other social uprisings could actually dilute the much forgotten narrative of Peterloo which the piece is supposed to promote."

"it's fine - not sure about links to other similar massacres - as I'm not convinced there's a direct relationship."

"The contemporary world events referred to are a distraction and very partisan. They have no place on a monument to a struggle in the 1810s in Manchester."

Some would like more specific information rather than symbols:

"I think that it could be more informative. Proposed design seems to rely heavily on symbols which might be too obscure for some people."

"I don't think it gives enough information about the Peterloo Massacre"

Access again:

"How does it communicate to blind people? Where is the tactile information?"

Q: Do you agree that the proposed memorial design satisfies the 'Permanent' criteria?

Total respondents: 218 Agree: 172 (79%) Neutral: 23 (10.5%) Disagree: 23 (10.5%)

The familiar question of access crops up in another guise in respondents' comments about permanence. Their anxiety relates to the location and the possibility of its being restricted during major events at Manchester Central:

"My concern relates to public access whenever a party conference or other 'secure' event takes place. There needs to be a clear and comprehensive commitment to ensure the monument is never fenced off."

"The memorial itself is but would need assurances that it can never be made inaccessible by Manchester Central."

Other concerns relate to the potential vulnerability of the monument:

"Further work needs to be done around the materials and surfaces to satisfy me that these will remain in place for a significant period of time and are resistant to wear and tear / vandalism."

"I've nothing against skaters, but this couldn't be a better practice spot for them, I think damage will be inevitable due to that . . . "

"the inserts in the stone seems rather overwhelming and will be prone to wear or attempted removal"

"Its permanence will depend on the way it is treated and maintained. If neglected by the council, it will go the way of so many permanent' predecessors."

This statement neatly sums up the feeling of several respondents:

"It's as permanent as any of the other monuments and statues that the council have moved."

Q: On the basis of the RIP criteria, do you approve of this design for the Peterloo Memorial?

Total respondents: 224 Agree: 146 (65%) Neutral: 18 (8%) Disagree: 60 (27%)

The impact, visibility and recognisable features of the proposed memorial figure strongly in comments about the overall design:

"It is bland and visually does nothing to represent the fact that a massacre took place there."

"Pretty good although I'd definitely like a significant reference to the name of Peterloo on the memorial rather than on an information plaque."

"Too modern, not effective as a memorial, it won't stand out as a memorial, people will just see it as a part of a public plaza."

"It does not say Peterloo to me."

"Although I don't mind how it looks, I don't think it is striking enough to capture the interest of passers by. I suspect that it will only be noticed by people who are looking for it."

"I don't think the design shows what the Peterloo Massacre was all about. It is too bland. It just looks like a pedestal in the middle of a square. It doesn't give the emotional effect that the Massacre caused."

"It looks like an extension of the G.Mex steps and the people involved deserve better."

And, inevitably (many comments):

"Visually stunning and beautiful. However, some controversy over accessibility for wheelchair users."

Q: Do you have any suggestions as to how the design, if necessary, could be altered to make it better fulfil the RIP criteria?

In terms of impact, several people suggest more of a figurative element in the design to grab the attention of the passer-by:

"Possibly a more figurative and immediately engaging central tier, or figurative/narrative elements worked into the handrail."

"real people, suffering the real events in the right place...something children can look at and think .. ahh that is what happened here."

"Leave the door open for a tasteful sculpture on the top, this would also negate the need for disabled access provided it was of sufficient stature to be easily viewed from ground level."

To answer the points made about vulnerability and upkeep:

"I'm concerned about the materials and the durability of the designs. It could be improved by introducing an endowment for a maintenance contract; and selecting the most robust materials / methods of production in the first place."

"This needs to come with commitment from the council to maintain the monument and surrounding space properly."

To add to the prominence of the memorial:

"Lines from Masque of Anarchy (now becoming more widely recognised) speak of what the memorial is about more powerfully than anything else. Rename G Mex apron Peterloo Field."

"More prominently name the area between Manchester Central and Midland as St Peter's Fields or Peterloo Place to more firmly establish the connection."

"Get the names of the murdered to light up in neon."

To eliminate the disabled access challenge:

"In my opinion, the current design would be massively improved by the provision of a spiral ramp allowing all citizens to reach the top. It is vital that it meets the best standards possible in terms of accessibility. Otherwise, a completely different design is needed."

For some people, the proposed design is simply not up to scratch:

"Just start again and create something that makes people stop and stare and want to know what it's all about. It is just totally unacceptable as a memorial to anybody other than the Tele Tubbies."

"Completely re-think it and come up with something that doesn't look like a pile of concrete for a change."

"it needs a different design - the inaccessible steps are a structural feature and cannot be modified."

Some comments from respondents who approve of the proposed memorial:

65% or more of those who took part in the survey approve of the design for the proposed Peterloo Memorial. To provide balance against the critical comments listed above, here is a selection of their feedback:

"I think it meets all aspects of the Respectful criteria as well as I could imagine any memorial doing."

"It's an invitation to make speeches. It reminds us that democracy is about us, and I feel that is completely in the spirit of the Peterloo protestors."

"It will be a clear reminder of the price our forebears paid for free speech and democracy."

"Simple yet detailed. Different yet befitting."

"It is easy to understand for all. Very beautiful & channels traditional monumental culture. I like the geographical aspect - will help connect Greater Manchester. This is all of our history."

"It looks beautiful and people will pause and spend time looking and remembering."

"Informs about the event and loss of life at the same time as placing it in a wider context.:"

"Take the time to look at it properly and one will be informed."

"Hard to tell where we'll be a century on, but I'd hope future generations will treasure this."

"Despite my concerns that people may not 'get it', I am swayed by the fact that it will be used by people, not just a piece of street furniture to be walked on/ around."

"Really pleased it's by such a significant artist and is thoughtful and reflective on historical events, and encourages a contemporary use for it."

"it is striking in design, quite large and imaginative in its conception - not at all what i was expecting and that makes it even more exciting and endears it to me."

"Aesthetically and functionally a brilliant response to the brief."