



**Oriol College**  
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

**Provost**  
Oriol College, Oriol Square  
Oxford OX1 4EW

MPW/RXB

Tel: +44 (0)1865 616758

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Ms Patsy Dell  
Head of Planning and Regulation Services  
St Aldate's Chambers  
109-113 St Aldates  
OXFORD  
OX1 1DS

Dear Ms Dell

**The Cecil Rhodes Plaque on commercial premises at 6 King Edward Street: request for consent to its removal**

I am writing to let you know that, following a decision of its Governing Body, Oriol College wishes to take down from its property at 6 King Edward Street a plaque fixed at first floor level which commemorates Cecil Rhodes. A note of the reasons for this is attached.

The property is in the central conservation area. We are advised that works for the alteration of a building do not constitute development if they do not materially affect the external appearance. While it is not completely clear that our proposal requires consent on this basis, we have deemed it wise to act on the assumption that it does. Given that the College wishes to be open about what it is doing we have concluded that an application should be made unless your advice is that this is not required. I am therefore writing to ask what consent is required and what further information you may need to consider it.

This issue is part of a wider set of decisions relating to Cecil Rhodes and to the experience of black and minority ethnic (BME) students and staff. Given the level of public interest in these matters, the College has today issued a public statement about this which can be found [here](#).

I am copying this letter for information to: Bob Price, Council Leader; Sam Hollick and David Thomas, our Ward Councillors; the Right Hon Andrew Smith MP; as well as to Debbie Dance at the Oxford Preservation Trust, and Peter Thompson at the Oxford Civic Society.

With best wishes

*Maira Wallace*

**Maira Wallace**  
Provost

## The Cecil Rhodes Plaque on commercial premises at 6 King Edward Street: request for consent to its removal

### Background and reasons

#### The Plaque

1. According to the College's conservation plan King Edward Street was created by the College in 1872 and it is believed that No. 6 dates from this time. The plaque was added in 1906 and our archives record that the Governing Body was asked for permission and granted it. Its text is as follows:  
"In this house, the Rt. Hon Cecil John Rhodes kept academical residence in the year 1881. This memorial is erected by Alfred Mosely in recognition of the great services rendered by Cecil Rhodes to his country".  
Alfred Mosely was a private individual, a business acquaintance of Rhodes's, and was not a member of the College.
2. The reasons we seek this change relate to:
  - the changing understanding of Cecil Rhodes's historical impact and views;
  - representations made to us about the impact of the celebration of Cecil Rhodes;
  - Oriel's principles in relation to the issues raised by the Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford movement;
  - the steps the College wishes to take to implement these principles.

#### The changing understanding of Cecil Rhodes's historical impact

3. In the more than 100 years since this plaque was erected, the significance of commemorating Cecil Rhodes has changed dramatically. The transition from Empire to Commonwealth, the increasing historical focus on the experience of the colonised, and the importance we as a country and city now attach to race equality, throw a harsh light on Rhodes's actions and views during his lifetime. Rhodes's writings and speeches include references to African natives as a "subject race", the need for a "system of despotism" and statements like "we are to be lords over them" and "if the whites maintain their position as the supreme race, the day may come when we shall all be thankful that we have the natives with us in their proper position".<sup>1</sup> These are not views the College or University condones, and they are also at odds with the City's vision for equality and diversity which recognises that Oxford has a rich and diverse culture and a community made up of people from different races, backgrounds, beliefs and experiences, that this cultural diversity is one of the things that makes Oxford such a great place to live and work, and that equality and diversity must underpin all strategic priorities and activities.<sup>2</sup>

#### Representations made to us about the impact of celebration of Cecil Rhodes

4. On 6 November 2015, The Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford movement submitted to Oriel College a petition signed by over 2000 people seeking the removal of the statue that stands on College

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<sup>1</sup> Vindex (F. Verschoyle), pp. 150-166 and pp. 371-390.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decC/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion occw.htm>

property overlooking the High Street, on the grounds that its continued presence “violates the University’s purported commitment to fostering an inclusive culture which promotes equality, values diversity and maintains a working, learning and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all its staff and students are respected”.

5. In addition to the demand about the statue, the petition goes on to say that: “The University is strewn with visible symbols of its colonial inheritance, and remains the intellectual heart of unjustly attained global privilege. At Oxford those whose histories have been marred by imperialism are shadowed by statues of their oppressors as they walk through their own university, and find their history held hostage within the archives of their oppressors.”

#### Oriel’s position on commemoration of Cecil Rhodes

6. Oriel College has been giving considerable thought to the difficult issues relating to commemoration of Cecil Rhodes in the built heritage of the College. The College’s approach reflects three key positions:
  - i. We agree that the representation and experience of BME (black and minority ethnic) students and staff in the University of Oxford, including Oriel College, need to improve and we are committed to being at the forefront of the drive to make Oxford more diverse and inclusive of people from all backgrounds.
  - ii. We affirm that the College does not share Cecil Rhodes’s values or condone his racist views or actions.
  - iii. We commit to ensuring that acknowledgement of the historical fact of Rhodes’s bequest to the College does not suggest celebration of his unacceptable views and actions, and to place any recognition of his bequest in a clear historical context.

#### The steps the College wishes to take to implement these principles

7. In light of the above Oriel College has announced today (17 December) a first set of steps to reflect these principles:
  - i. The College will put in place a series of substantive actions to improve the experience and representation of ethnic minorities in Oriel. We will work closely with BME students and staff to understand all the issues that need to be addressed. Our actions will include further outreach initiatives focused on potential BME applicants, more support and training on equality and diversity issues affecting students and staff within the College, and fundraising for graduate scholarships at Oriel targeted at specific countries in Africa.
  - ii. Starting in 2016, we will fund and support a series of lectures and other events examining the continuing history of colonialism and its consequences. The aim of this series is to complement other initiatives in the University and to respond to the desire expressed by many students and staff across the University to see these issues more fully acknowledged and discussed.

- iii. The College is consulting Oxford City Council about the process for consent to remove the Rhodes plaque on No. 6 King Edward Street, an Oriel-owned property, on the grounds that its wording is a political tribute, and the College believes its continuing display on Oriel property is inconsistent with our principles at 6. i – iii above. A formal application will follow as soon as possible. This decision by the College is without prejudice to any decision about the future of the statue of Rhodes, covered in the point below.
- iv. There is a separate issue about the statue of Cecil Rhodes on the College's High Street frontage. This raises complex issues, which cannot be resolved quickly. It is connected with a bequest to the College (which the plaque is not). At the same time, in the absence of any context or explanation, it can be seen as an uncritical celebration of a controversial figure, and the colonialism and the oppression of black communities that Rhodes represents: a serious issue in a College and University with a diverse and international staff and student body, and which aims to be a welcoming academic community.

Any changes to the building would require planning consent, and the statue, and building on which it stands, is Grade II\* listed, and has been identified by Historic England as being of particular historical interest, in part precisely because of the controversy which surrounds Rhodes. The College will therefore launch a structured six-month listening exercise on the statue, running from early February 2016, seeking the ideas of students and staff of the College and the wider University, alumni, the City Council, heritage bodies, residents of Oxford, and other members of the public, as we seek a positive way forward.

8. In respect of the plaque at **6 King Edward Street** our intention, if we obtain consent, is to restore the underlying brickwork to its original condition. The plaque would be preserved in storage as a historical artefact.