



## Aethelstan Statue Group Report for Malmesbury Town Council

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024

### **Members of Statue Group**

Mike Westmacott & Richard Robbins (Warden and Freeman)  
Peter Osgood (Architect), Janet Casselden (Aethelstan Museum), Julia Bowen (Wessex Week & co- chair), Sarah Wilde (co-chair), Paul Deacon (Artist & Sculptor), Oliver Ross (Malmesbury Abbey), Campbell Ritchie (Town Team), Ray Sanderson (Malmesbury Town Council), Maria Marsh (Civic Trust), John Sunderland (Diocesan Advisory Committee)

### **1 Introduction**

The aims of this project are to erect a Statue of King Aethelstan in Bird Cage Walk and to enhance the immediate area. The project scope has widened to include references to the Church that previously stood on the site.

Members will be aware that this project was paused following the withdrawal of the previous Planning Application. This was due to a campaign objecting to the removal of the three Birch trees currently situated in Bird Cage Walk. However, the project has now been revived and is progressing towards a full Planning Application (submission early 2025).

As Bird Cage Walk is currently leased to Malmesbury Town Council, it is important that members are kept informed as to the progress of this project and are supportive of its aims and delivery.

### **2 Update**

A pre-application was submitted earlier in the year and responses from all parties have been favourable:-

Wiltshire Council were positive and suggested that the Church Tower could possibly be made accessible and open to the Public. They also suggested that any archaeological finds could be 'revealed and integrated' into the project. Wiltshire Arboricultural Officer advised that she had no objections to the removal of the 3 Birch trees as they are 'over mature trees' and their 'longevity is questionable'.

Historic England commented on the improvement of the application since the original submission. However, they were concerned about the position of the statue blocking the view of the Church tower from the Market Cross. A site visit was carried out and the Statue has been re-positioned (in its original position- the widest part of the site).

County Archaeologist recommended that a trial trench be dug to ratify a previous ground radar survey and to ensure that any disturbance of the ground (for the statue plinth and lighting cables) will cause not cause an issue.

### **3 Current actions**

As a result of the above responses, the Statement of Need will be changed to accommodate the Planning Officers comments, the exact placing of the statue within the area has been adjusted and the group are currently looking at quotes from Archaeologists to carry out a desk top assessment of Bird Cage Walk with a view to digging an exploratory trench.

In order to address the important issue of the removal of the Birch Trees, a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan will be commissioned to ensure that the replacement of the Birch trees with a planting scheme, will provide Biodiversity Net Gain. An application to the Carnival Grants Committee was made to cover the cost of this assessment and was successful.

A lighting plan has been submitted by Rixon architects who have been employed by the group to assist with the project. Comments have been fed back and an amended plan received. Lighting will be inset into the paving to illuminate the statue, to mark the position of the central columns from the original church and to up light the Church Tower.

Finally, the decision has been made by the group to set the statue on stone rather than a tiered plinth. This enhances the concept of Aethelstan rising from stone and will serve to make the statue less dominant in the site. Investigations are currently being made with local quarries/ stone contractors.

## **4 Funding**

Costs thus far (architects, heritage consultants, design costs etc) have been met from donations from local groups e.g. Wessex Week, Warden and Freeman and Malmesbury Civic Trust. However, concerted fund raising will start when Planning has been granted. It is not anticipated that individuals will be approached – unless they expressly wish to contribute. The group is currently looking for someone to assist with the application for grants/ funding for a project of this kind .

## **5 Summary**

The project is making solid progress and a positive pre-application has been welcomed. The group is now focussed on dealing with archaeology and environmental aspects of the scheme. It is anticipated that a full Planning Application will be submitted in the New Year alongside a further public consultation event.

Sarah Wilde

Co- Chair- Aethelstan Statue Group