# Herefordshire councillor brands museum event woke virtue-signalling amid growing debate



A Herefordshire councillor has ignited a fierce debate by denouncing an upcoming event at the town’s new museum as a “woke virtue-signalling” initiative. Councillor Ewen Sinclair openly criticized the event, titled “Contentious Narratives,” which seeks to engage the local community in discussions about how museums tackle issues like misinformation and contested histories. Sinclair took to social media to express his skepticism, suggesting that the event is not about fostering genuine dialogue but rather about pushing a narrow ideological agenda. “Anyone who says disinformation and misinformation is probably lying,” he asserted, highlighting concerns about the integrity of the initiative’s true motives.

The museum's director, Damian Etheraads, touted the event as an opportunity to encourage complex discussions while resisting harmful ideologies. He claimed that community input is crucial, suggesting these discussions would dictate how the exhibits in the new £18-million museum and art gallery, slated for construction in Broad Street, are shaped. Etheraads framed the initiative as part of a broader effort funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, supposedly designed to enlighten the public about the principles underpinning the museum's redevelopment.

In response to Sinclair’s critiques, a spokesperson for the council endeavoured to reassure the public that the assembly was meant to facilitate open dialogue rather than impose a prescribed viewpoint. “In the upcoming session we won’t be telling people what to think,” they asserted, trying to mitigate the rising tensions surrounding the event. The open meeting is set to occur at the History Store in Hereford on Saturday, June 7, and promises to be free for the public to attend without prior reservations.

The backlash against Sinclair’s remarks mirrors a broader national discourse surrounding the role of museums and public institutions in an age defined by "woke" culture. Critics argue that such institutions risk becoming battlegrounds for political correctness, where curators feel coerced into rewriting history under pressure from prevailing ideologies. These concerns reflect previous discussions that have spotlighted attempts to reframe museum practices, with many fearing such shifts could lead to an outright politicisation of cultural repositories.

This contentious debate is not unique to Herefordshire. Similar dialogues are resonating throughout the UK, particularly highlighted by the Welsh government’s recent introduction of the 'Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.' This initiative has ignited controversy over the construction of historical narratives, raising alarms about how the legacy of empire and race is tackled within public collections.

As community discussions like the one planned in Hereford unfold, they have the potential to illuminate how public institutions negotiate complex narratives within an increasingly fragmented society. Councillor Sinclair's passionate dissent may resonate with those who believe local councils are straying from conventional historical accounts. Ultimately, the ramifications of these dialogues will not only dictate the future direction of the Hereford museum but could also sway public sentiment on how history is curated and presented in similar institutions across the nation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://hellorayo.co.uk/hits-radio/birmingham/news/hereford-museum-councillor-woke> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4nn96646xeo> - On 8 June 2024, Hereford Town Hall faced criticism for flying the Pride flag instead of the Union Jack on the 80th anniversary of D-Day. A council spokesperson explained that the Union Jack was raised at lunchtime due to a delayed changeover. Following complaints, the flag was changed, and the Union Jack remained raised at both the Shire Hall and Hereford Town Hall until after the King’s official birthday. City mayor Councillor Kevin Tillett clarified that the Union flag was raised on the Town Hall after lunchtime.
3. <https://yourherefordshire.co.uk/all/news/news-hereford-pride-cancelled-and-organisation-in-process-of-being-wound-down/> - On 8 April 2025, Hereford Pride announced the cancellation of its 2025 event and the winding down of the organisation. The decision was attributed to the current economic climate and the unsustainable dedication required for such a project. The organisation, formed by the late John Walker, aimed to make Hereford a beacon of hope for the LGBTQ+ community. The announcement expressed deep sadness over the inability to continue Walker's legacy and thanked all involved for their contributions.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/04/03/museums-will-pushed-rewrite-history-woke-orwellian-new-definition/> - On 3 April 2021, concerns were raised over a proposed change in the international definition of a museum by the International Council of Museums. The new definition could pressure curators to rewrite history under political influence. Critics argued that the change could lead to museums becoming battlegrounds in culture wars, with curators potentially imposing politically correct interpretations. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport declined to comment, stating that the definition was independent and wouldn't affect government policy.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/08/20/welsh-labours-war-on-whiteness-is-a-warning/> - On 20 August 2024, an article discussed the Welsh Labour government's 'Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan,' which aimed to set the 'right historical narrative.' The plan included a project named 'Anti-Racist Library Collections,' funded by the government, instructing librarians in 'critical whiteness studies' and how to manage the 'dominant paradigm of whiteness.' A total of 93 buildings in Wales, including schools and libraries, were identified as associated with empire and the slave trade, raising concerns about the impact of such initiatives on Welsh communities.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/05/19/weve-reached-peak-woke/> - On 19 May 2023, an article highlighted the University of Oxford's intervention in support of freedom of speech against student union attempts to stop a speaker due to her gender-critical views. The article criticised the no-platforming of lawful speech and discussed the broader issue of 'woke' culture in academia, emphasising the importance of confronting difficult views and the role of universities in promoting free speech and critical thinking.
7. <https://arthistoryunchained.com/2024/03/16/a-week-in-the-world-of-woke/> - On 16 March 2024, a blog post discussed the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge's rehang of its collection, which included interpretations of artworks through the lens of 'woke' culture. The article criticised the museum's approach, highlighting instances where artworks were interpreted as reinforcing nationalism or other political ideologies. The author expressed concern over the politicisation of art history and the imposition of contemporary political views on historical artworks.