

Lichfield City Council

Minutes of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee Meeting held in the Moulton Room, Guildhall at 10:30 am on Tuesday 25th April 2024

PRESENT:

Representing Lichfield City Council: Councillor A Hughes (Chair) and Councillors J Anketell, J Christie, P Knight, and R Yardley.

In Attendance:

Tony Briggs (Town Clerk)
Kimberley Biddle (Museums & Heritage Officer (MHO))
Francesca Benson (Museum Support Officer)
P Jones (Johnson Society representative)
J Winterton (Johnson Society representative)

Apologies:

Councillors J Eagland, S Hollingsworth, B Watkins and Honorary Members R Awty and A Thompson

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

None

13. MINUTES

RESOLVED: *That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 October 2023 confirmed as a correct record.* [Minutes adopted by Council on 11 December 2023].

14. MATTERS ARISING FROM JBAC MINUTES

Cllr R Yardley confirmed receipt of the comparative visitor information (local, national, international) that he requested at the previous meeting (Minute 5). The Chair confirmed that Council had adopted the recommendations made at the previous meeting.

15. PERSONNEL UPDATE

The Committee formally welcomed Francesca Benson to the role of Museum Support Officer.

RESOLVED: *That the report be noted.*

16. SAMUEL JOHNSON BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM – ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered the agenda report, with members commending the report and the positive detail therein. The phrase 'Visual Merchandising' was clarified; the presentation/display of items for sale. The MHO highlighted proposals to update the Birthplace logo and introduce new items for sale, both new 'lines' and updates to existing provision, together with a greater focus on more generic 'Lichfield' souvenirs.

RESOLVED: *That the report be noted.*

17. FORWARD PLAN UPDATE ON CURRENT PRIORITIES/FUTURE STRATEGIC AIMS

The Committee considered the MHO's agenda report. Confirmation was sought regarding accreditation, Cllr Christie advised of his knowledge of the matter, confirming the MHO's view that due to the pandemic and its impacts, the accreditation originally set to expire in 2021 would expire in 2024. P Jones highlighted the work of the Johnson Society to refurbish the Johnson Statue at King Edward VI School, and that this might be an ideal opportunity to build a relationship between the school and the Museum. J Winterton supported the proposed refresh of the interpretation and displays, identifying this as a priority for both the Johnson Society and the Museum. Cllr J Anketell enquired as to the display of the letter of Johnson to Lord

Chesterfield. The MHO stated that while a valued item, the current restricted number of suitable display cabinets meant that the item could not be appropriately displayed currently, but that this was an aim for the future.

Cllr J Christie asked whether the collection was reliably catalogued. The MHO confirmed the use of the MODES database and current online access, but that the provision was flawed currently; the aim being to have a collection database fully searchable by item detail, with online accessibility being very important to the Museum, especially given its limitations for physical accessibility.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan key strategic aims and objectives (2024-2027) be adopted.

18. DEVELOPMENT PROJECT - UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

Cllr R Yardley asked whether the Museum's reopening on Monday would be accompanied by publicity. The MHO stated that there were various elements that were not as yet complete, and while the Museum can provide a good visitor experience currently, it was felt more appropriate to tie in publicity once the outstanding items in the current phase of the development project had been resolved.

The Committee considered the MHO's agenda report which provided an update on various previously identified priorities, plus a request to JBAC to approve a revised charge to schools for Birthplace visits as a result of the MHO's work with 'Up An At 'Em' History'. The new 'school visits' provision would be closely tied to the National Curriculum and would evolve both with changes to the Curriculum and to the Museum itself as the redevelopment project progresses. It was confirmed that the suggested cost of school visits was the approximate break-even point for the Museum.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the report be noted.**
- 2. JBAC approves a charge to schools of £140+VAT per session, per class**

19. 'JOHNSON'S HEAD' INSTALLATION – BIRD STREET

The Committee considered the MHO's agenda report which confirmed the Bust to be in the final stages of renovation. The MHO restated that as much of the work has been carried out on a voluntary basis, the timescales had been longer than desired, but that plans were now well underway for installation, but with dates to be arranged. J Winterton enquired as to the 'crowdfunding' raised by Jonathan Oates; the MHO confirmed that as the necessary work to the bust was much greater than anticipated, a donation had been made from those funds to the Stonemason by Jonathon Oates. The Town Clerk confirmed that the monies raised in the Crowdfunder were not accessible to the Council and nor did the Council assume any responsibility for them or how they are allocated.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

20. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

In the Calendar of Meetings of 10:30am on Tuesday 5 November 2024. Following the adoption of the Minutes of the JBAC meeting of 6 November 2018, additional meetings may be called in the meantime if appropriate. The Chair confirmed she would be unable to attend the meeting.

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS
THE CHAIRMAN DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 11:20am**