



Lichfield City Council

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Town Clerk: Anthony Briggs B.A (Hons), CiLCA

18 February 2025

To: Members of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee

Councillor A Hughes (Chair) and Councillors J Anketell, J Christie, J Eagland, M Field, E Strain and R Yardley.

Representative of Johnson Society

P Jones and J Winterton

Honorary Member

A Thompson

Also to:

Museums and Heritage Officer (Kimberley Biddle)

Museum Support Officer (Francesca Benson)

Dear Committee Member

Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee (JBAC)

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee to be held in the **Moulton Room, Guildhall at 10.30am on Tuesday 25 February 2025** at which the following business will be transacted. Any member unable to attend should forward their apologies to the Town Clerk.

Yours sincerely

Town Clerk

AGENDA

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

3 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2024 (**copy attached**) and to consider any matters arising from those minutes. [*Minutes adopted by the City Council on 16 December 2024*].

MUSEUM ACCREDITATION DOCUMENTS

4. FORWARD PLAN

To consider the SJBM Forward Plan 2025-28 (**ENCLOSURE 1**) and agree any amendments as appropriate. The Forward Plan provides the overarching framework for the Museum's priorities during the Plan period 2025-28 and is a central document in the pursuit of reaccreditation.

RECOMMENDED: The Committee to adopt the Forward Plan 2025-28 (as may be amended during discussion) and make a corresponding recommendation to council.

5. ACCESS POLICY

To consider the SJBm Access Policy (**ENCLOSURE 2**) and agree any amendments as appropriate. The Access Policy outlines how the SJBm aims to make its collections, building, programmes, exhibitions, and services accessible to as wide an audience as possible. The policy is a mandatory requirement of the Accreditation Return.

RECOMMENDED: The Committee to adopt the Access Policy (as may be amended during discussion) and make a corresponding recommendation to council.

6. COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY

To consider the SJBm Collections Development Policy (**ENCLOSURE 3**) and agree any amendments as appropriate. The Collections Development Policy provides information to museum staff and wider stakeholders of the criteria and principles that will be used in the management and ethical acquisition (and disposal) of collections. The policy is a mandatory requirement of the Accreditation Return.

RECOMMENDED: The Committee to adopt the Collections Development Policy (as may be amended during discussion) and make a corresponding recommendation to council.

7. COLLECTIONS DOCUMENTATION POLICY

To consider the SJBm Collections Documentation Policy (**ENCLOSURE 4**) and agree any amendments as appropriate. The Collections Documentation Policy outlines how the SJBm fulfils its responsibilities in relation to security, management and access of the collections. The policy is a mandatory requirement of the Accreditation Return.

RECOMMENDED: The Committee to adopt the Collections Documentation Policy (as may be amended during discussion) and make a corresponding recommendation to council.

8. CARE AND CONSERVATION POLICY

To consider the SJBm Care and Conservation Policy (**ENCLOSURE 5**) and agree any amendments as appropriate. The Care and Conservation Policy sets a framework for the preservation of the collections and building and outlines how preventative and remedial conservation is managed. The policy is a mandatory requirement of the Accreditation Return.

RECOMMENDED: The Committee to adopt the Care and Conservation Policy (as may be amended during discussion) and make a corresponding recommendation to council.

9 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

In the calendar of meetings as Thursday 1 May 2025 at 10.30am in the Moulton Room, Guildhall. However, the Committee has previously stated that the documentation to be considered at this meeting be circulated via email in due course (see Minute 3, recommendation 2,below).

ANY OTHER URGENT OR NECESSARY BUSINESS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIR

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Lichfield City Council

Minutes of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee Meeting held in the Moulton Room, Guildhall at 10:30 am on Tuesday 5 November 2024

PRESENT:

Representing Lichfield City Council: Councillor J Anketell (Vice Chair, in the Chair) and Councillors J Christie, J Eagland, M Field and R Yardley.

In Attendance:

T Briggs (Town Clerk)
K Biddle (Museums & Heritage Officer)
F Benson (Museum Support Officer)
J Winterton (Johnson Society Representative)
P Jones (Johnson Society Representative)

Apologies:

Councillors S Hollingsworth (apologies accepted due to illness and ongoing recovery period), A Hughes and E Strain.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

None

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 25th April 2024 confirmed as a correct record. [Minutes adopted by Council on 10 June 2024].

3. DEVELOPMENT PROJECT – 2024/25 PRIORITIES UPDATE

The Committee considered the Museums and Heritage Officer's (MHO) report (agenda appendix 1), that provided an update on each of the identified priorities for 2024/25.

(Appendix 1.2) Cllr R Yardley asked about the size and location of the proposed touchscreen for the Workroom. The MHO stated that the screen will be installed in the corner of the room at an accessible height. J Winterton enquired as to whether there was any information in the room that explained the business model and context behind the Workroom. The MHO explained that this was something that the Birthplace would like to add as a recommended priority for 2025/26. Cllr Anketell enquired whether there was a display case for the dictionary. The MHO confirmed the dictionary is on display in a case in the attic.

(Appendix 1.3) P Jones and Cllr J Anketell praised the recent update of the Bookshop, commenting on its appearance, the range of giftware, and the professionalism of the Museum Attendants.

(Appendix 1.5) In response to the MHO's explanation about the delays with photography due to building work taking place either side of the Birthplace, Cllr R Yardley offered to make a start with the photography, which was accepted by the MHO. P Jones asked how the Birthplace can compete and boost its results on search engines. To increase its ranking, the MHO explained that the Birthplace needs to employ Search Engine Optimisation techniques, such as ensuring the blog is located on the Birthplace's website instead of WordPress, and that the website contains as many key words related to Johnson as possible.

(Appendix 1.6) P Jones asked what feedback the Museum has received from its trial primary school sessions with Up An' At 'Em History. The MHO explained that feedback has been positive, and that a particular highlight for the children has been the hands-on activities at the Guildhall. The MHO also stated that the team would continue to take on feedback and evaluate the school offering. It was clarified that Up An' At 'Em History, who have worked across the country at events hosted by other heritage organisations, lead the school sessions at the

Birthplace. The MHO highlighted the importance of these interactive sessions, explaining that it encourages children who enjoyed the visit to bring their relatives back to the museum. Cllr J Christie enquired about the Birthplace's secondary school offering. The MHO explained that the main priority was establishing primary school visits and ensuring that they are successful, before moving on to the secondary offering. However, the MHO does intend to revisit this in the future. P Jones suggested a language session with the dictionary, which the MHO agreed was something to look in to. The subject of Lichfield City Council providing free use of the Guildhall for school visits was mentioned by Cllr J Anketell. The MHO reiterated the importance of having the space available to the Birthplace for school visits, particularly for use of the toilets and having a space for lunch. The Committee agreed that free use of the Guildroom was an important part of this offer.

(Appendix 1.8) The Committee were asked their preference for the following JBAC meeting. The MHO explained that the plans, policies, and procedures for Accreditation are lengthy, and it would not be practical to read through them or present them all at a meeting, and that they will instead require prior consideration. Cllr J Christie asked who needs to sign the Accreditation Return. The MHO stated that Lichfield City Council, as sole trustee of the Birthplace, needs to sign it off. P Jones further enquired about who oversees Accreditation and if there are consequences to not returning correctly or on time. The MHO explained that Art Council England run the Accreditation Scheme and use SPECTRUM Standards to assess museums. The Birthplace needs to meet these standards otherwise it risks losing its Accreditation status. If unaccredited, it shows that the museum is not meeting museum standards, which, in turn, means that it will miss out on funding and training opportunities. Cllr J Anketell asked if an emergency procedure was required for the Return. The MHO confirmed this and explained that the emergency plan at the Birthplace is reviewed yearly.

Cllr R Yardley asked if the MHO had considered other funding opportunities. The MHO said that she would like to submit an expression of interest for Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) next year but is aware that many ongoing issues need addressing before this can take place. The MHO believes that the Birthplace would be a good candidate for a HLF bid; a previous expression of interest was submitted but ultimately not followed through on. Cllr R Yardley asked if this type of funding could be spent retrospectively, contributing towards previous costs related to, for example, roof repairs or asbestos removal. The MHO clarified that HLF only supports museum practice-related developments, such as interpretation panels or interactives for displays.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the report be noted.***
- 2. The scheduled 1 May JBAC meeting be brought forward to allow JBAC discussion of the documents for Accreditation prior to the March Council meeting. The Birthplace annual report and updates, which would generally be reviewed in the May committee meeting, to be circulated for discussion via email in due course.***

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That in order to support the provision of educational visits at reasonable cost, hire of the Guildroom (Ground Floor) of the Guildhall as an area for teachers/pupils to have lunch/refreshments during educational visits be free of charge to the Birthplace Museum.

4. DEVELOPMENT PROJECT – PROPOSALS FOR 2025/26

The Committee considered the MHO's report at Appendix 2, and the table of proposals for 2025/26 provided.

(Appendix 2. C.) J Winterton expressed concern about the placement of signage on the railings on Breadmarket Street, highlighting the pre-existing signage on the Birthplace. Additionally, Cllr J Eagland worried it could pose a risk to pedestrians who stop on the narrow pavement to look at it. The MHO stated that the current signage is not working as effectively as it could, and adding this sign would help the Birthplace to stand out, encouraging more people to visit.

Suggestions were made about putting this signage on Market Street instead. With the introduction of the new A-frames that have been purchased, the MHO explained that there would not be enough space on the Market Street side of the building. The MHO, referencing her previous experiences at other historical sites, believes that there needs to be more signage so that the Birthplace can be accessible. The Town Clerk suggested a mock up design of the sign on the railings, so that members can visualise the proposal. Cllr R Yardley stated that the additional signage would be a good idea, highlighting the success the Old Guildhall Prison Cells has had in attracting more visitors with its new signage. Cllr J Christie agreed, explaining, from his experience at Dr Johnson's House in London, people did stop to read the signage.

(Appendix 2. D.) Cllr R Yardley asked about external funding for the proposed Francis Barber interpretation. The MHO said that she would like to apply for external funding for a full exhibit, but there is a current need to tell Barber's story and to be more representative of hidden stories at the Birthplace. The MHO explained that the panel would be designed by Vertigo and placed in the Birthplace. P Jones offered the help of the Johnson Society to collaborate on such projects.

(Appendix 2. G.) P Jones asked if valuation would include all books and dictionaries within the collection. The MHO explained that not every object would be valued by the expert in this instance, but that the Birthplace team would be able to update valuations based on the value of similar items. The MHO emphasised that valuating the entire collection object by object would incur large costs.

(Appendix 2. H.) Clarification was required for what the proposed sum of money for the Keele University partnership would contribute towards, who would judge and monitor costs, and what the student placement would entail. The MHO explained that she would monitor project costs, and that it would operate in a similar way to a work experience placement, with funding going towards permanent features in the museum, such as interpretation panels or tactile/handling objects. Cllr J Eagland expressed reservations over this item, citing uncertainty that it would be passed by Lichfield City Council. The Town Clerk suggested lowering the budget to £3,000 and consulting JBAC after assessing the project and supplying the Committee with more details.

Following discussions, it was agreed that the following projects would be supported by JBAC (listed together with preferred funding source and budgeted spend). The Committee strongly supported the possibility of funding the kitchen/toilet facilities via CIL, and the Town Clerk confirmed that he would update the Grants Committee accordingly at its next meeting.

Proposed 2025/26 project	Budget (£ excluding VAT)	Funding Source
Improve kitchen and toilet facilities	£15,000	CIL
Workroom - additional interpretation	£2,800	General
Outdoor welcome panel fitted to railings*	£1,200	General
Francis Barber interpretation panel	£1,100	General
Installation of conservation blinds	£6,000	Capital Reserve
Conservation report and training	£4,000	General
Professional valuations for insurance	£3,800	General
Student development project	£3,000	General
Total	£36,900	

*[*Town Clerk's note – following informal discussion with JBAC members, it was agreed this item would be removed, the total costs reducing to £35,700 as a result]*

RESOLVED:

- 1. The MHO to circulate a mock up design to show the impact of the proposed signage.**
- 2. The MHO to advise JBAC by email as to proposed spend associated with the student development project prior to committing to that spend.**

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: *That the 2025/26 priorities as set out above be included in the draft budget to be considered by Council at its January 2025 meeting, and that favourable consideration be given to these items when discussed.*

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

The Committee noted the MHO's report that followed the successful conclusion of this project.

RESOLVED: *That the report be noted.*

6. ROOF REPAIRS

The Committee considered the MHO's report (agenda appendix 4) which provided an update on the roof repair work that has been undertaken. A further verbal report was provided by the MHO to confirm that the roof works have been completed. These included the replacement of the back gutter, installation of additional lead flashings, replacement of the cowl on the chimney, and repointing of areas surrounding the chimney.

RESOLVED: *That the report be noted.*

7. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Following earlier discussions (see minute 3, resolution 2), the MHO to circulate suggested dates for a meeting to tie in with the planned consideration of accreditation documentation prior to formal LCC consideration at the March 2025 council meeting.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS

THE CHAIR DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 11:45am