



Lichfield City Council

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

28 October 2025

To: Members of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee

Councillor A Hughes (Chair) and Councillors J Anketell, J Christie, J Eagland, M Field, J Madden, P McDermott, 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 4 November 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 25 February 2025 (**copy attached**) and to consider any matters arising from those minutes. [*Minutes adopted by the City Council on 10 March 2025*].

As agreed by the Committee, a suite of documents was circulated in lieu of the usual April meeting of JBAC

4 DEVELOPMENT PROJECT– 2025/26 PRIORITIES UPDATE

To consider the MHO's report at **APPENDIX 1** (attached). This report provides an update on each of the identified priorities for 2025/26. Members' particular attention is drawn to section 1 of the report (improvement of kitchen and toilet facilities), the additional costs and possible next steps detailed therein.

RECOMMENDED:

1. *That the report be noted.*
2. *The Committee to consider whether it wishes to support the additional costs of the kitchen/toilet renovation as detailed in section 1, from where any such funding should be requested, and make a corresponding recommendation to council.*

5 DEVELOPMENT PROJECT – PROPOSALS FOR 2026/27

To consider the MHO's report at **APPENDIX 2** (attached). The proposed projects total £39,400 (£24,700 in revenue funding and £14,700 capital funding from LCC's capital reserve). Members are asked to note the following:

1. Assuming a suitable scheduling window can be found, extensive repairs to the Guildhall roof are to be put forward as the main item of capital spend for 2026/27 following the recommendation of LCC's specialist advisors. The anticipated budget figure for this work is £150,000, which places significant demands on LCC's capital finances. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting.
2. The proposals funded through general revenue amount to approx. 2.5% of LCC's precept. Proposals for the current financial year were approximately 1.5% of precept. This results in a further commitment of 1% of precept against 2025/26 figures, which would be added to 2026/27 budgetary pressures.

RECOMMENDED:

1. *That the 2026/27 priorities as set out in the report [summarised in the table below, together with funding source] be considered by the Committee.*
2. *The Committee to make a recommendation to council that the agreed 2026/27 priorities be favourably considered when the draft 2026/27 budget is presented to Council at its January meeting.*

Proposed 2026/27 project		Budget (£ excluding VAT)	Funding Source
A	Free use of the Guildroom for the audience consultation project on Tuesday, 18 November 2025.	£0	N/A
B	Marketing Strategy consultant	£4,500	Revenue
C	Staff and volunteer inclusion training	£3,700	Revenue
D	Replacement of broken interactive in Dictionary Room	£4,400	Capital
E	125th anniversary celebration event and mini pop-up exhibition	£2,500	Revenue
F	Secure storage solutions	£5,300	Capital
G	Quinquennial inspection	£2,500	Capital
H	Structural surveys including load bearing	£2,500	Capital
I	Strategic planning support – interpretation strategy and historic building assessment	£11,500	Revenue
J	Measured survey	£2,500	Revenue
Total		£39,400	

6 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

In the Calendar of Meetings as 10.30am on Wednesday 6 May 2026.

Following adoption of the Minutes of the JBAC meeting of 6 November 2018, additional meetings may be called in the meantime if felt appropriate by the Committee.

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 10:30am on Tuesday 25 February 2025

PRESENT:

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

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)
A Thompson (Honorary Member)

Apologies: Councillor M Field

Copies of all the documents referred to in these minutes are available to members on request to the Town Clerk or Museums and Heritage Officer.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

None

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED: *That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 5th November 2024 confirmed as a correct record.* [Minutes adopted by Council on 16th December 2024].

3. MUSEUM ACCREDITATION – FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Museums and Heritage Officer's (MHO) SJBM Forward Plan 2025-28.

(4.4) Cllr R Yardley asked whether the age group data presented in the visiting audience overview included school visit numbers. The MHO explained that these numbers exclude school groups and instead reflect general visitor data. The age group data is a good indication of who SJBM's audience are and what they need.

(3.2 aim 4) P Jones and J Winterton asked about the relocation of the Blum Library. The MHO stated that this concept dates back a few years, asserting that this was one of the priorities laid out by the former MHO. She explained that the Blum Library was a donated collection of books with a pot of money assigned to it. The MHO believes that the Parlour is a poor location for it, so the aim would be to reorganise and combine the libraries, and therefore to reinterpret rooms.

(3.2) Cllr J Eagland asked how the Birthplace was advertising activities and events. The MHO explained that the Birthplace advertises its upcoming events via the website, social media, and through leaflets. Cllr J Eagland then asked about advertising for private events and building hires. The MHO stated that the Birthplace would not be able to accommodate that sort of hiring because of limited space and access to facilities (i.e. no public toilet or catering facilities on site). The Birthplace is, however, available for smaller bookings, such as the Johnson Society Chair Ceremony. It was reiterated that the Guildhall would be the most suitable site for venue hires. The MHO, referencing her previous experience, explained that overall costs and loss in revenue to put on a larger hire would outweigh the benefits. P Jones added that there should be limitations on certain activities due to the building's listed status.

(3.2 aim 3) P Jones asked if the Wood Library, being an incredible resource, is likely to be more visible to visitors in plans to develop the Birthplace. The MHO stated that the Wood Library is already open to researchers, but that she would like to expand this to visitors at some point. However, with collections items being stored there and the room being the only dedicated space for volunteers to use, this would have to be considered as part of the larger reinterpretation plan.

(4.4) P Jones also highlighted visitor figures. The figures indicate an increasing number of visitors from outside of Lichfield; P Jones asked if there would be anything done to increase the number of visitors from within Lichfield. The MHO explained that these figures are very positive, and that ultimately the goal at the Birthplace is to appeal to a variety of audiences. The Birthplace aims to expand its local audience by holding events and collaborating with external community groups.

(5. aim 1) Cllr J Christie praised the document for generally being strong and comprehensive. Cllr Christie wondered if some parts could be made more specific - for example, how the document states that SJBK will maximise volunteer input but does not mention how it will do that. The MHO explained that volunteer input will be increased through new roles which will be advertised on the new website. The MHO explained that while volunteers are a valuable and incredible resource, there are limitations as to how many new volunteers the Birthplace can recruit due to staffing capacity and the level of support volunteers require. The MHO suggested that the aim could be made more measurable and specific through a focus on volunteer skills development.

(4.9) J Winterton asked about the wording around opening hours, and whether it would be better to state that the museum can sometimes be closed outside of Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and New Year's Day, due to events such as the Lichfield Food Festival. A Thompson agreed with J Winterton, also suggesting that the Birthplace should state that it has additional closures. The MHO stated that closures can be unpredictable (like the closure of the Birthplace in March and April of 2024). Cllr A Hughes agreed with the MHO, reaffirming that the Birthplace aims to be open as much as possible and that the current wording allows leeway.

(4.3) A Thompson questioned whether the 11 volunteers should be included within the 2.7 FTE staff. The MHO stated that volunteers are different from paid staff and that should be clearly defined in those numbers. The MHO said that Lichfield City Council employ 2.7FTE staff to run and operate the Birthplace, and that volunteers are recruited in a voluntary capacity, meaning that they are unpaid. A Thompson asked about the wording around volunteers, and suggested the document should be amended to say 'unpaid volunteers', but this was challenged by Cllr A Hughes who believed that the Accreditation assessors would understand the distinction between paid staff and volunteers.

(4.13) In reference to the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis section of the Forward Plan, Cllr A Hughes stated that the Birthplace had been modest, and that some of the points had been partially achieved. The MHO explained that the Johnson Society and Johnson's worldwide fame would be added as points to the strengths section of the SWOT analysis.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan, as amended following discussions above, be adopted by JBAC.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That the amended SJBK Forward Plan 2025-28 be adopted.

4. MUSEUM ACCREDITATION – ACCESS POLICY

The Committee considered the SJBM Access Policy.

(3.) J Winterton asked about how the Birthplace was going to make the collections and information stored on the upper floors of the building accessible. The MHO explained that this has partly been done with virtual tours (available on SJBM's website and on the tablet in the Bookshop), however these could be improved upon and that she would like to expand the Birthplace's accessibility in the future.

(5) J Winterton revisited the wording around the opening hours, again suggesting that it may need to be amended to reflect closures outside of the expected ones in December and January.

Cllr A Hughes stated that the document was good, honest, and imaginative in terms of mitigation.

RESOLVED: That the Access Policy be adopted by JBAC.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That the SJBM Access Policy be adopted.

5. MUSEUM ACCREDITATION – COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY

The Committee considered the SJBM Collections Development Policy.

(10) Cllr J Christie questioned whether the Birthplace should mention something about obtaining items of good provenance to strengthen the section on acquisitions. The MHO said that this could be added.

(4.1) J Winterton pointed out that the section that describes Johnson's circle of friends erroneously includes Josiah Wedgwood. The MHO said she will remove Wedgwood from this section.

(12) J Winterton asked the MHO to define what biological and geological material was in the context of museum practice, and whether this impacted the museum's collection. The MHO explained that biological materials relate to things like specimens and geological materials include things like minerals and rocks. The MHO confirmed that this section is not applicable to the Birthplace, and that the inclusion of the biological and geological section is standard and required for the Accreditation Return.

RESOLVED: That the Collections Development Policy, as amended following discussions above, be adopted by JBAC.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That the Collections Development Policy be adopted.

6. MUSEUM ACCREDITATION – CARE AND CONSERVATION POLICY

The Committee considered the SJBM Care and Conservation Policy.

(8) J Winterton asked what a working collection item was. The MHO explained that these are usually objects that are used for demonstrative purposes, such as waterwheels and drop stamps. The MHO advised that the museum does not have any working items.

RESOLVED: That the Care and Conservation Policy be adopted by JBAC.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL: That the Care and Conservation Policy be adopted.

*The MHO to circulate the finalised versions of this suite of documents
to JBAC members as soon as is practicable.*

7. 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, with a meeting taking place if needed. The Town Clerk had provisionally set the next JBAC meeting as 4th November 2025, but this was subject to confirmation by Council at its March meeting as part of wider consideration of the 2025/26 meetings calendar.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS

THE CHAIRMAN DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 11:15am

2025/26 PRIORITIES UPDATE

1. Improve kitchen and toilet facilities – Additional Costs Identified

This project aims to provide adequate and hygienic welfare facilities for all staff, volunteers, contractors, student placements, and researchers working on site. The work includes:

- Reconfiguration and upgrading of the kitchen, including new appliances (under-counter fridge and dishwasher), stainless-steel sink and taps, improved storage, new hygienic worksurfaces, replacing tiles, replacing shelving, and painting walls/ceiling/woodwork.
- Refurbishment of the WC, including the installation of a compact two-in-one toilet and sink unit for improved hygiene and painting walls/ceiling/woodwork.
- Improved heating and ventilation, including the installation of two radiators and two extractor fans.
- Installation of a new water heater to replace a rusted and undersized unit, using the existing location and service routes.
- Plumbing and waste drainage upgrades, with new waste pipes serving the kitchen and cleaner's sinks, all connected to the existing ground drain and using existing holes.
- Installation of new electrical sockets.
- Installation of a new cleaner's sink repositioned slightly from its current location to improve usability.

To support delivery of the project, the Town Clerk circulated an email to members of the City Council's Grants Committee on 18 October 2024 seeking informal guidance on the potential use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding. All responses received were supportive, and the proposal was formally discussed, approved and the recommendation adopted by council thereafter.

Planning the project has taken time to ensure the work is sympathetic to the Grade I listed building. Lichfield District Council's Policy and Strategy Officer (Conservation and Design) provided detailed recommendations, which were factored into the Listed Building Consent application. As part of this process, it was also suggested that the project address the issues of damp affecting these rooms to ensure the longevity of the works. Consequently, heating and ventilation improvements, previously outside the original project scope, were added to the specification.

LAM Associates prepared the necessary plumbing and electrical plans, but progress was delayed due to the absence of measured surveys for the space. This required the creation of both proposed and retrospective plans from scratch, a time-consuming process. (A proposal for full measured surveys of the building has been submitted as part of the 2026/27 planning cycle.)

The Museum and Heritage Officer (MHO) completed and submitted the Listed Building Consent application, which was approved on 15 September 2025. Following approval, the MHO has been liaising with contractors to finalise specifications and updated quotations in line with the consented plans. However, the project is currently on hold pending confirmation of additional funding. If the revised budget is approved, the MHO will coordinate the scheduling of works with contractors. While every effort will be made to minimise disruption, short periods of closure to the Museum and Bookshop may be unavoidable while the refurbishment is carried out.

Revised Budget Request

When the initial project proposal was submitted, an allocation of £15,000 + VAT was approved through CIL funding. However, following the completion of detailed plans and the receipt of contractor quotations, it has become clear that the total cost of delivering the project will be £22,042 + VAT.

This increase reflects a number of legitimate and unavoidable factors:

- Additional work identified by LAM Associates: The detailed mechanical and electrical plans highlighted the need to replace the existing water heater, which was found to be rusted and

undersized. The plans also identified necessary plumbing and waste drainage upgrades, including new waste pipes serving the kitchen and cleaner's sinks. These upgrades were not included in the original cost estimate but are essential to ensure the system functions safely and reliably.

- Rising material and labour costs: There have been significant price increases in construction materials and labour since the original estimate was prepared, in line with national trends.
- Recommendations from Lichfield District Council: The Conservation and Design Officer's advice required adjustments to certain elements of the design to ensure the work remained sensitive to the building's historic fabric. These changes, while more costly, represent the most appropriate and sustainable approach for the long-term preservation of the building. In addition, the recommendation to address damp issues led to the inclusion of heating and ventilation works that were not part of the original quote.

This additional funding will ensure the works are completed to the required conservation standards, safeguard the historic integrity of the building, and provide appropriate, long-lasting welfare facilities for all who work on site.

Given these factors, the Committee is asked to:

- Consider whether it still wishes to support this project given its increased scope and cost
- If it does wish to support the project, to recommend that the project budget be increased from £15,000 to £22,042 + VAT.
- Recommend that a request to fund this additional cost via an increased CIL allocation be favourably considered firstly by the Grants Committee at its November meeting and then by Council in December.
- Consider whether the Committee would wish to recommend that LCC's capital funding be utilised if attempts to increase the CIL allocation are unsuccessful.

2. Francis Barber interpretation

This work has now been completed, with four new interpretation panels successfully installed in the London Life room. These panels address a previously acknowledged gap in the Museum's interpretation by introducing visitors to the life and significance of Francis Barber, Samuel Johnson's Black servant, friend, and heir.

Previously, Barber's story was only briefly mentioned on site, despite his central role in Johnson's later life and legacy. The new interpretation responds directly to past visitor feedback calling for greater recognition of his life and helps ensure a more inclusive and representative telling of Johnson's story.

The panels have been well received and contribute meaningfully to a richer, more engaging visitor experience.

3. Installation of Sun-X conservation blinds to protect objects from damage caused by light exposure

The installation of new blinds throughout the Museum has now been successfully completed. The updated blinds have made a significant improvement to both light control and the overall atmosphere within the building.

This project addressed long-standing issues with the previous blinds, which were ineffective at reducing lux levels and often prompted visitors to raise them in order to see outside. This not only led to frequent damage to the mechanisms but also exposed sensitive objects to harmful light. As light exposure, including lux and UV, causes irreversible and cumulative damage to collections, resolving this issue was a key preventive conservation priority.

The newly installed perforated vision blinds are specifically designed for heritage environments and are already in use at sites managed by the National Trust and Historic Royal Palaces. They are flame-retardant, wipeable, and successfully balance effective light reduction with outward visibility, enhancing both object protection and the visitor experience.

The contractors completed the work using existing fittings and pre-existing holes from the previous blinds, ensuring no additional impact to the building fabric. This approach aligns with best practices in heritage conservation and minimised physical intervention in the historic structure.

4. Conservation report and training led by a specialist preventative conservator

The conservation health check has now been completed, with Birmingham Museums Trust's (BMT) Conservation Manager commissioned to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the Birthplace Museum, the Storeroom at Donegal House, and the Silver Safe. A detailed conservation report has been produced, which will inform the development of a targeted and proactive collections care strategy.

This report provides a strategic overview of the current condition of the collection, identifies key conservation priorities, and offers clear, practical recommendations for preventative care. It also forms a critical component of the museum's Collections Care and Conservation Plan, supporting both Accreditation requirements and future funding applications.

To complement the report's findings, a programme of conservation training for staff and volunteers has been scheduled. These sessions, delivered by BMT's professional conservators, will build internal capacity and improve day-to-day collection care. Training topics include:

- **Thursday 18 December – Object Handling and Packing:** Covering safe handling, conservation housekeeping, swab cleaning, and appropriate techniques for metal polishing and waxing.
- **Thursday 22 January – Stop the Rot:** Focused on the nine agents of deterioration, damage identification, environmental monitoring, and basic mitigation strategies.
- **Thursday 12 February – Integrated Pest Management:** Addressing the risks posed by insects, how to identify them, and effective response strategies.

The Museum and Bookshop will be closed on these training dates to ensure all staff and volunteers can fully participate.

5. Workroom - additional interpretation

Significant progress has been made on enhancing interpretation in the Workroom, with a combination of physical and digital elements introduced to enrich the visitor experience.

Three new interpretation panels have now been installed, addressing previously under-interpreted aspects of the room's history and helping to contextualise the space more effectively. The panels explore:

- What the house was like when Samuel Johnson and his brother were young children
- Kitty Chambers, the family servant who later became a bookseller
- The later uses of the Bookshop, detailing the building's history after the Johnson family's ownership

These additions have transformed a previously bare wall, adding depth and character to the room.

In parallel, work is progressing well on a new touchscreen interactive titled *Tools of the Trade*. This digital feature focuses on the tools currently on display.

The interactive will launch with an automatic animation that transforms a photographic image of the room into an illustrated version, highlighting each tool as tappable. Visitors can then explore images and descriptions of each item, learning more about their function and significance.

All photography for the interactive was taken by Robert Yardley, whose work brings visual impact to the digital content.

Together, these physical and digital updates will significantly enhance the interpretation of this space, supporting learning, engagement, and a richer understanding of the site's layered history.

6. Professional valuations for insurance

Expert valuations of the collection are required to ensure appropriate insurance coverage and to support the Museum's documentation records.

While valuations were last undertaken in 2010 and 2020, many of the Museum's most significant items, including manuscripts and high-value objects, have not been reviewed since the 1990s. On the recommendation of our auditor, a review and update of valuations for key objects is now being undertaken.

We are currently working with Winterton's to provide the necessary information to enable them to progress this work over the coming months, within the 2025/26 financial year.

7. Student development project - Keele University partnership

Following the successful PhD placement with Keele University, the Birthplace is continuing to strengthen its academic partnership through a new student development project.

While future PhD placements are not guaranteed due to the need for alignment between student research interests and the Museum's collection, Professor Nicholas Seager and the Birthplace team have identified an alternative model to maintain and grow this collaboration. This involves creating a shorter-term, project-based placement open to Keele students.

Keele University highlighted that two key barriers to student placements are a lack of travel funding and the availability of clearly defined meaningful projects. In response, a well-scoped role has been developed and advertised, supported by a dedicated budget. The role has been advertised, and, at the time of writing, applications are expected shortly.

The advertised project, titled *Signed, Sealed, Delivered: Exploring Letters in the 1700s*, invites a student to develop a public-facing display and online exhibition focused on the historical significance of personal correspondence. Drawing on the Birthplace's collection of letters, the project will explore key themes such as:

- Social, cultural, and political insights revealed through letters
- The workings of the 1700s postal system
- Sealing methods and their relation to privacy and social status
- Language, tone, and conventions of letter writing
- Tools and materials used to write letters

The project will result in both an engaging onsite interpretation aimed at visitors aged 11 and up, and an accompanying online exhibition to increase access and visibility of the Museum's archival holdings. This hands-on placement offers the student valuable experience in historical research and audience-focused interpretation.

The project is scheduled to be completed by mid-March 2026.

JBAC: 3 November 2025 APPENDIX 2

PROPOSALS FOR 2026/27

A. Free use of Guildroom for stakeholder consultation as part of audience consultation project on Tuesday 18 November 2025 (budget £0)

The MHO has secured funding to deliver a new audience consultation initiative, *Opening Chapters*, which runs from September 2025 to March 2026. The project aims to better understand the needs, expectations, and barriers experienced by both existing and under-represented audiences.

A range of consultation activities will take place, including workshops, in-gallery feedback points, and focus groups. These are designed specifically for visitors, potential visitors, and local community groups.

Alongside these, two dedicated stakeholder sessions are planned. These sessions will allow key individuals and partner organisations to feed into the project from their own perspectives. The findings from all elements of the consultation will inform future exhibitions, displays, and programming at the Museum.

A consultant with significant sector experience has been appointed to lead the project.

Opening Chapters is supported using public funding from Museum Development Midlands (MDM) and Arts Council England.

The MHO requests the free use of the Guildroom at the Guildhall on Tuesday 18 November 2025 to host the two stakeholder consultation sessions, scheduled for:

- 10:00am to 12:30pm
- 6:00pm to 8:30pm

The JBAC and four representative members of the Johnson Society will be formally invited to attend. Stakeholders who are unable to join either session will have the opportunity to contribute via a follow-up survey.

B. Marketing Strategy Consultant (budget £4,500)

We are requesting a budget allocation in 2026/27 to engage a specialist consultant to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy for the Museum.

This work will be led by a consultant who previously supported the Museum through the creation of its Audience Development and Diversification Plan, giving them a strong understanding of our current audiences, challenges, and opportunities. Building on this existing knowledge ensures continuity, avoids duplication, and provides excellent value for money.

The marketing strategy will give the Museum a clear and achievable plan for reaching more people and communicating our offer more effectively. It will cover both onsite and digital audiences and will support our goals to:

- Increase general visitor numbers
- Grow digital engagement
- Boost group and school bookings
- Encourage donations
- Drive bookshop sales

The consultant will also provide tailored training and practical tools to help our small staff and volunteer team implement the strategy with confidence and efficiency, making better use of limited time and budget.

This proposal directly supports a priority identified in the Museum’s Forward Plan (approved by the committee in 2025):

- ‘Commission a marketing and audience development consultant to create a marketing strategy’ by December 2026.

Why This Is Needed

- The Museum does not currently have in-house marketing expertise. Our small team lacks the capacity to develop a detailed, evidence-based strategy without external support
- A targeted and realistic strategy will help us focus our efforts where they will have the most impact, making better use of limited resources
- The strategy will support audience growth, income generation, and long-term sustainability.
- Tailored tools and training will build skills and confidence within the existing team
- Working with a consultant who already understands our organisation and audiences enables a more efficient and joined-up approach

As further endorsement, Jane Austen’s House recommended developing a marketing strategy and specifically highlighted this consultant at the 2024 LitHouses conference. They reported measurable successes including increased visitor numbers and significantly higher online engagement after working with the same consultant.

What Will Be Delivered

The consultant will:

- Review current marketing activity and data
- Facilitate a workshop with staff and volunteers to gather insight and ideas
- Develop a three-year marketing and communications strategy (2026–2029)
- Produce an action plan with prioritised activities, timelines, and key performance indicators
- Provide practical templates and tools (e.g. content calendars, press release templates, evaluation spreadsheets)
- Deliver in-person training tailored to our team’s needs

Proposed Budget Allocation (2026/27): The total cost for this work is **£4,500 + VAT**, inclusive of all planning, delivery, training, and supporting materials.

C. Staff and Volunteer Inclusion Training (budget £3,700 + VAT)

We are requesting a budget allocation in 2026/27 to commission specialist inclusion and awareness training for the Museum’s front of house and volunteer teams. This two-day programme will provide essential tools to support an inclusive, respectful, and welcoming environment for all visitors and staff, with a particular focus on working with underrepresented communities and visitors with diverse needs.

Our front of house and volunteer teams are often the first point of contact for visitors. The way we welcome, communicate with, and support the public directly shapes how people experience the Museum. This training is not simply a workplace development exercise. It is a key step in strengthening our reputation as a space that is open, inclusive, and accessible to all.

This proposal supports the following objectives from the Forward Plan, which was approved by the Committee earlier this year:

- *‘Review individual training needs of staff members’*
- *‘Offer development opportunities for volunteers to expand their skills, increase knowledge, and enhance their capabilities’*

The training also directly responds to feedback from our front of house team who raised a need for inclusion and cultural awareness training during a recent team meeting. None of the team have previously received training of this kind, and there is a clear appetite to build confidence and skills in this area.

Why This Training Is Needed

- Visitor-facing staff and volunteers need practical, confidence-building training to handle complex interactions with empathy and awareness
- The programme covers important areas not previously addressed through formal training, including neurodiversity, allyship, and inclusive communication
- It supports our wider goals to broaden and diversify audiences, helping ensure the whole team is equipped to contribute to this ambition
- The sessions will also help to foster a more respectful and psychologically safe workplace culture

Training Overview

The training will be delivered across two full days, through four practical and interactive sessions tailored to the Museum context:

Day One

- **Morning: Equality, Diversity and a Culture of Inclusion**
Focuses on respect in the workplace, language, and behaviour. Explores the impact of stereotypes and assumptions, how to recognise when lines are crossed, and how to respond constructively.
- **Afternoon: Global Inclusion and Cultural Awareness**
Builds cultural understanding and inclusive communication skills. Participants explore unconscious bias, cultural difference, and how to create respectful and inclusive interactions with a wide range of visitors.

Day Two

- **Morning: Allyship and Psychological Safety**
Encourages reflection on individual roles in supporting others, building empathy, and developing active allyship. Covers privilege, the bystander effect, and how to create safe spaces.
- **Afternoon: Neurodiversity Awareness**
Introduces the range of neurodivergent experiences, including autism, ADHD and dyslexia. Offers practical tools to support inclusive communication and better understanding of sensory and cognitive differences.

Each session includes activities, real-world scenarios, and discussion. Participants will also create personal action plans to help embed learning into daily practice.

Impact and Benefits

This training will:

- Improve the experience of visitors, particularly those from underrepresented or marginalised groups
- Increase confidence and awareness among staff and volunteers when dealing with complex or unfamiliar situations
- Strengthen the Museum's internal culture of respect and inclusion
- Support compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and Worker Protection Act 2023
- Demonstrate the Museum's commitment to national standards of accessibility and inclusive practice

We believe this is a timely and valuable investment in the people who represent the Museum every day, and it will directly support our aim of being a welcoming, inclusive space for all.

Proposed Budget Allocation (2026/27): The total cost for this work is **£3,700 + VAT**, inclusive of all planning, delivery, training, and supporting materials.

D. Replacement of Broken Interactive in Dictionary Room (budget £4,400 + VAT)

We are requesting budget allocation in the 2026/27 financial year to replace the broken interactive display in the Dictionary Room.

This is currently the only interactive in the room, and one of the few in the building overall. Originally installed in the early 2000s, the unit is now broken beyond simple repair. While it has been maintained regularly over the past two decades, parts are now extremely difficult to source, and even a successful short-term fix would likely fail again in the near future.

The current interactive allows visitors to press one of six buttons to hear spoken definitions from Johnson's Dictionary. While innovative at the time of installation, it now feels outdated and does not engage today's audiences as effectively as we would like.

This presents a timely opportunity to replace the broken unit with a more modern and engaging experience that better reflects current visitor expectations and learning styles.

We are proposing a new word-based challenge: a simple game inviting visitors to match Johnson-era words with their definitions. This would offer a more active, hands-on experience, encouraging curiosity, interaction and deeper engagement with the content of the room.

We have already worked with a designer to create mock-ups for both a digital and an analogue (non-digital) version of the new interactive. These are prototypes only and will be refined based on feedback from our current audience consultation work. The final format will be chosen in response to what visitors tell us they want and need.



Image: A mock-up by Vertigo Design illustrating what a digital or analogue version might look like.

As the only interactive in the Dictionary Room, replacing this feature is an important step in maintaining a balanced and engaging Museum experience, particularly for younger visitors.

Proposed Budget Inclusion for 2026/27: £4,400 + VAT. This includes design, production and installation.

E. 125th Anniversary Celebration Event and Mini Pop-Up Exhibition (budget £2,500 +VAT and free use of the Market Square for the event)

In 2026, the museum will celebrate its 125th anniversary. To mark this milestone, we are proposing a public event and a temporary pop-up exhibition that reflects on the history and legacy of the Museum.

Event:

We are planning a one-day celebration event in July, which will include a multi-period living history experience in collaboration with *Up An At Em History*, a professional historical interpretation group. The event will feature costumed characters representing different eras from the Museum's history, from Johnson's lifetime in the 18th century through to the 20th century, offering visitors an engaging way to explore both the Museum's story and broader historical periods.

We expect the multi-period approach to appeal to a broad audience and encourage longer dwell time and greater engagement with the Birthplace.

Weather permitting, the event will take place both inside the Museum and outside on the Market Square. The outdoor activities will also serve as a valuable promotional opportunity, drawing attention to the Museum and encouraging passers-by to visit. In the case of poor weather, all activities will be moved indoors to the Birthplace.

Mini Pop-Up Exhibition

Alongside the event, we will install a temporary pop-up exhibition running from July to December. It will consist of five interpretation panels displayed on easels/stands, telling the story of the Birthplace as a Museum over the past 125 years, including photographs and insights into how the building and displays have changed.

The easels/stands will be a reusable resource for future temporary exhibitions, helping us deliver flexible, low-cost interpretation in the years to come.

This anniversary is a unique opportunity to both celebrate the Museum's legacy and raise awareness of its ongoing role in the local community and beyond. The proposed budget will cover:

- Fees for the living history performers
- Design and production of interpretation panels
- Purchase of reusable display easels/stands

This proposal supports the SJBm to:

- Mark a significant milestone in the Museum's history
- Increase local engagement and visibility
- Provide value for money with reusable exhibition infrastructure
- Deliver meaningful, public-facing activities within an accessible budget

Proposed Budget Inclusion for 2026/27: £2,500 + VAT. We would also like approval to utilise the Market Square free of charge for the one-day event.

F. Secure storage Solutions (budget £5,300 + VAT)

We are requesting budget allocation in the 2026/27 financial year for improved storage solutions at the SJBm.

Storage may not be the most visible part of operations, but it is absolutely essential for protecting the historic collection and supporting the day-to-day running of the Museum. Our current storage is not meeting professional standards, and investment is now necessary.

Specialist Storage for Collection Items

Following a recent Collections Health Check carried out by the Conservation Manager at Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT), a key recommendation was to upgrade the storage of significant paper-based items in our collection. This includes autograph letters by Samuel Johnson and Anna Seward, which are currently kept in a standard office-grade metal cabinet.

This cabinet does not meet museum conservation standards and offer inadequate protection for these important items. To address this, we want to purchase a conservation-grade fireproof storage cabinet, specifically designed for archival materials. This upgrade would ensure the long-term preservation of high-value documents and align our storage with accepted best practice in the museum sector.

Secure Storage for Operational Needs

Following recent security audits by local Crime Prevention Officers and internal expert Richard Hunt, we have identified the need for improved secure storage within the Museum. This relates not to collection items but to operational materials that require a higher level of security.

Due to the sensitive nature of these materials, we cannot include further details in this report. However, this request would allow us to act on professional recommendations and ensure we are managing safety, security and data protection to an appropriate standard.

Basic Staff and Retail Storage

In addition to the above, we are seeking budget allocation for two additional practical storage improvements that will directly support daily operations:

- Staff lockers: At present, there is no dedicated or secure area for staff to store personal belongings while on duty. The installation of lockers will improve working conditions, support professionalism, and help maintain the appearance of public and staff-only areas
- Retail storage: The current metal shelving used to store shop stock is heavily rusted, with chipped paintwork. This presents an ongoing risk of damaging retail items and requires

constant care when handling stock. Replacing these with durable, clean shelving will support the continued growth of the museum's retail offer and ensure stock can be managed safely and efficiently

A First Step in a Longer-Term Plan

This budget request represents the first step in addressing broader storage challenges at the Birthplace. In future years, and informed by planned audience consultation and interpretation work, we hope to explore creative ways of incorporating storage into displays, allowing more of the collection to be safely shared with visitors.

It is also important to note that specialist collections storage is extremely expensive due to the conservation and environmental standards required. A phased approach is therefore both sensible and cost-effective. Tackling the high-priority manuscript storage cabinet now represents a practical and meaningful starting point.

Proposed Budget Inclusion for 2026/27: £5,300 + VAT

G. Quinquennial Inspection (budget £2,500 + VAT)

We propose that funding be allocated within the 2026/27 budget to bring forward the next quinquennial inspection of the building.

A quinquennial inspection is a detailed professional survey undertaken every five years, typically by a conservation-accredited architect or surveyor. It provides a comprehensive assessment of a historic building's condition, identifies any urgent repairs, and helps inform long-term maintenance planning. This is considered best practice for the care of listed and heritage buildings.

The most recent inspection was completed in 2023. However, the resulting report did not fully meet expectations in terms of depth or scope. Since that time, a number of issues have come to light that, in our view, should reasonably have been identified during a comprehensive quinquennial review. This has highlighted the need for a more thorough and forward-looking assessment to ensure the long-term care of the building. Commissioning a fresh report in 2026/27 would allow us to address this, and to plan future maintenance and conservation work more effectively.

We intend to work with a specialist practice that has significant experience in the museum and heritage sector. This firm recently undertook a quinquennial inspection for Lichfield City Council at another property, which was noted for its thoroughness, practical value and clear, actionable recommendations.

Bringing forward the inspection would have the following benefits:

- Provide accurate and current information to support repair and maintenance planning;
- Strengthen future applications for external grants, particularly larger funding opportunities, which typically require a recent and detailed condition report, such as a quinquennial inspection;
- Support the council's wider goals around sustainability, asset management, and heritage preservation.

This is not a routine expense, but a strategic investment in the responsible care of a significant public asset. Including it within the 2026/27 budget will ensure that decisions are based on robust, up-to-date information and that we remain eligible for relevant funding opportunities in the coming years.

Proposed Budget Allocation (2026/27): £2,500 + VAT

H. Structural surveys including load bearing (budget £2,500 + VAT)

We are proposing that a structural survey by a CARE-accredited structural engineer be commissioned and included within the 2026/27 budget.

This survey, which is separate and distinct from a quinquennial inspection, will provide a specialist assessment of the building's structural condition, with a particular focus on its capacity to accommodate future use and change. While a quinquennial inspection offers a broad overview of the building's fabric and maintenance needs, this structural survey will deliver in-depth technical insight into the building's load-bearing capacity, areas of structural vulnerability, and potential constraints on use and adaptation.

These surveys will encompass consideration of any planned or potential alterations to the internal layout, including:

- The positioning of heavy display cases and interpretive infrastructure;
- The storage and exhibition of large or weighty library and museum collections;
- The use of upper floors and other sensitive areas for public access, events, or programming;
- Any future reconfiguration of spaces for improved visitor flow, accessibility, or operational efficiency

Engaging a CARE-accredited engineer ensures that the advice provided is appropriate to the building's historic significance and aligned with best practice in conservation. This is essential to safeguard both the physical integrity and the heritage value of the site.

In addition, the survey will:

- Strengthen future capital funding applications, especially where changes to layout or use are proposed;
- Inform budget planning by identifying areas where reinforcement, repair, or preventative intervention may be necessary;
- Provide a technical foundation for display and interpretation planning that is sensitive to the building's capabilities and limitations.

Given the age, complexity, and historic value of the building, commissioning a structural survey of this type is not only prudent, but vital to ensuring that future development is safe, appropriate, and sustainable over the long term.

Proposed Budget Allocation (2026/27): £2,500 + VAT

I. Strategic Planning Support – Interpretation Strategy and Historic Building Assessment (budget £11,500 + VAT)

We are requesting a combined budget allocation in 2026/27 to support two complementary pieces of strategic planning work that will provide the Birthplace with clear actionable plans necessary for future external funding and long-term development.

This request covers:

- The development of an interpretation strategy, led by the MHO with support from a specialist consultant.
- The development of a historic building assessment, designed to improve understanding of the site's heritage significance and guide any future development or capital works.

Both pieces of work will be carried out through close collaboration between the MHO and external experts. This approach ensures continuity, oversight, and internal leadership while drawing on specialist knowledge where needed.

Crucially, these studies will form the foundation of a more detailed and costed project plan for the future of the Museum. Such a plan is an essential requirement for any major external funding bid and is key to ensuring that future changes to the building and displays are strategic, integrated, and fully informed.

Together, these projects represent a professional and cost-effective investment in the Museum's long-term sustainability and public value. They build on the extensive engagement and planning activities taking place in 2025/26, which significantly reduce the costs of the strategic planning work proposed for 2026/27.

The work is aligned with the requirements and expectations of national funding bodies, but no specific funders are named at this stage. This ensures the Museum can act with flexibility and protect its competitive position when future opportunities arise.

1. Interpretation Strategy

The MHO will lead the project from within the organisation, drawing on their knowledge of the collection, site history, and audiences. The consultant will provide targeted support in areas requiring specialist expertise, particularly in interpretation planning within the context of heritage funding applications.

This collaborative approach is designed to ensure the resulting strategy is both professionally robust and rooted in the Museum's values, character, and practical needs. It is not a handover of responsibility, but a strategic partnership that will allow the MHO to retain oversight while benefitting from external capacity and insight.

Given the MHO's broad remit, including museum operations, collections and property management, audience development, staff leadership, and commercial activity, bringing in a consultant also ensures that this strategic work is delivered to a high standard without compromising the Museum's day-to-day delivery.

Purpose and Impact

A well-developed interpretation strategy is critical to shaping how stories are told across the Museum. It will guide exhibition planning, redisplay, tours, signage, and digital engagement, ensuring that all interpretation is inclusive, accessible, and aligned with audience needs and organisational goals.

This work will build directly on two key recent initiatives:

- The Audience Development and Diversification Plan (completed)
- The Opening Chapters audience consultation project (currently underway)

Aligning interpretation planning with these will ensure that any future programming or capital development is underpinned by meaningful audience insight and a commitment to inclusive practice.

The interpretation strategy will also directly support:

- Funding applications, where a clearly defined interpretive approach is a core requirement
- Audience engagement, by identifying key themes and messages that resonate with a wider range of visitors
- Capital and infrastructure planning, by embedding interpretive thinking from the outset of redisplay projects

Scope of Work

The consultant is expected to work closely with the MHO and draw on existing audience consultation data. The project is likely to follow three key stages, subject to final scoping and agreement. Reasonable travel and subsistence costs are included in the proposed budget.

Stage 1: Review and Planning

- Inception meeting at SJBH to review the building, explore potential interpretation locations, and understand the local context
- Handover and review of existing project data to provide background and establish a baseline
- Audit of existing heritage research and materials to inform planning
- Development of early interpretation principles, themes, and potential storylines

Stage 2: Concept Development

- Evaluation of proposed interpretation and potential audiences, considering differing needs and engagement styles
- Creation of an interpretation matrix, mapping proposed themes to tools, audiences, and learning outcomes
- Identification of barriers to engagement, measures for success, and evaluation tools
- Development of an early concept design scheme, considering potential use of media such as graphics, audiovisual, materials, colour palette, and interpretive branding
- Presentation of a design sketchbook to refine direction before drafting the full strategy

Stage 3: Final Strategy and Costing

- Production of a costed interpretation strategy, including visual materials and outline plans
- The strategy will provide a framework to guide future design and development work, with the intention of supporting a future development phase that may be enabled by external funding

Strategic Fit

This proposal aligns directly with key objectives outlined in the current Forward Plan (approved by JBAC in 2025):

- *Produce a development plan for the Museum and displays, including diverse stories and elements of local history*, by November 2026
- *Full redisplay – seek funding opportunities and implement development plan*
- *Re-display the Parlour, introducing Johnson and setting the narrative for the Museum, conveying key messages and impact of Johnson*, by December 2027
- *Re-display the historic Kitchen, providing an audio-visual introduction to Johnson*, by October 2028
- *AV Room redisplayed/repurposed*, by October 2028
- *Combine libraries and improve the research facilities and study area*, by September 2028

Commissioning this work now lays the essential groundwork for these projects and positions the Museum to apply for external investment with confidence. It represents a professional, responsible, and audience-focused approach to our future growth.

2. Historic Building Assessment

Carried out by a qualified heritage consultant in collaboration with the MHO. This assessment will provide a detailed understanding of the building's historic and architectural significance and support future decision-making around development, conservation, and access.

The Museum occupies a complex and sensitive Grade I listed site, and any future change, however minor, must be carefully considered in light of its historic importance. This includes potential improvements to access, redisplay of rooms, or changes to interpretation infrastructure. While the Museum has clear ambitions in these areas, we currently lack a professional assessment that clearly sets out which parts of the building are most sensitive, why, and what the likely impact of any changes might be.

This work is proposed as an early step towards a full Conservation Management Plan. Conservation Management Plans are often required by national funders for major capital projects, but they are extensive and can be prohibitively expensive to commission without support. A Historic Building Assessment is a more focused and cost-effective approach that delivers real value now, while laying the groundwork for a full plan in the future.

An outcome of this project will be a Statement of Significance, a document that identifies and explains what is important about the building, its setting, and its individual architectural features. This will include:

- A summary of the building's historical evolution and context

- A detailed record of its existing architectural and historic features, cross-referenced to existing drawings and photographs
- An assessment of the building's heritage value, considering architectural, historical, archaeological and communal factors
- A description of the wider site and setting, including any associated assets
- Identification of areas where more detailed investigation might be needed in future (e.g. archaeological or further structural analysis)
- An initial review of the impact of potential physical changes, including improvements to access or layout
- Advice on how to avoid or minimise impact on the most significant features

This will be delivered in a format that can be adapted or expanded into a full Conservation Management Plan in the event that development funding becomes available.

Why Now?

This is a timely and responsible piece of preparatory work. It aligns directly with several strategic aims in the Forward Plan, including:

- A programme of redisplay and room re-use across key areas of the Museum
- A desire to improve interpretation and visitor experience
- A focus on long-term sustainability and planning

It will also ensure that any external funding bids are underpinned by professional evidence about the historic value of the site, a requirement or strong recommendation for most major heritage funders.

How This Differs from a Quinquennial Inspection

This work is distinct from the five-year Quinquennial Inspection, which focuses on condition and repair needs. A historic building assessment is not a compliance document, but a planning and development tool. It does not assess risks or repairs but instead focuses on significance: what matters most about the site, and how that should influence decisions about its future use and presentation.

Working Approach

This project will be led internally by the MHO, working closely with a specialist consultant to ensure that findings align with the site's current use, future vision, and day-to-day realities. This collaborative model ensures professional standards are met without placing additional pressure on the Museum's limited internal capacity.

Strategic Benefits of Combined Approach

By delivering these two projects together, the Birthplace will:

- Strengthen the quality and credibility of future external funding bids;
- Ensure interpretation and physical development are planned together, not in isolation;
- Meet sector best practice for audience engagement and heritage conservation;
- Use internal staff time efficiently while supporting high-quality outputs;
- Begin to deliver on key Forward Plan priorities, including redisplay of core spaces;
- Lay the groundwork for a comprehensive project plan, essential for securing significant capital funding and guiding the Museum's next phase of development

Proposed Budget Inclusion for 2026/27: £11,500

J. Measured Survey (budget £2,500 + VAT)

We are requesting budget provision for a measured survey of the building. This involves taking precise measurements of the entire property in order to produce an accurate and up-to-date set of scaled drawings, including floor plans, elevations, and sections.

At present, we do not have a complete or current set of measured drawings for the building, which makes planning, design, and maintenance work significantly more complex and time-consuming. A measured survey would provide a detailed record of the building as it currently exists, forming the essential foundation for any future architectural, conservation, or renovation project.

These drawings will support:

- Accurate design and planning for any repair, conservation, or refurbishment work;
- Informed decision-making when developing layouts for displays, visitor circulation, or improved accessibility;
- More efficient liaison with consultants, contractors, and statutory bodies (including planning and conservation officers), who will require this baseline information

In practical terms, almost any future project, from installing a display case to applying for Listed Building Consent, will depend on having reliable and detailed survey drawings. Commissioning a measured survey now would enable us to move forward with confidence and avoid delays or additional costs down the line.

Proposed Budget Allocation (2026/27): £2,500 + VAT