

For Council: 8 December 2025 APPENDIX 1

Lichfield City Council

Minutes of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee Meeting held in the Moulton Room, Guildhall at 10:30am on Tuesday 4 November 2025

PRESENT:

Representing Lichfield City Council: Councillor A Hughes (Chair), and Councillors J Anketell, J Eagland, P McDermott and R Yardley

In Attendance:

T Briggs (Town Clerk)
K Biddle (Museums & Heritage Officer)
F Benson (Museum Support Officer)
J Winterton (Johnson Society Representative)
A Thompson (Honorary Member)

Apologies:

P Jones (Johnson Society Representative)
Councillors J Christie, M Field, E Strain, and J Madden

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

None

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Cllr J Eagland asked for an update on advertising, referencing section 3.2 of the Forward Plan in the minutes of the previous Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee meeting in February 2025. The Museums and Heritage Officer (MHO) reported that visitor numbers are up, with the team hoping to reach a record-breaking 25,000 visitors for 2025/2026. She noted that improvements to the website and the introduction of new leaflets have helped increase visitor figures. The MHO added that the team needs to work more closely with the website designer, Vision ICT, to gain further insights into website visitor statistics.

Cllr A Hughes asked whether the museum had received Accreditation status. The MHO explained that the Accreditation Return takes around six months to process and, having been submitted in October 2025, a response is not expected in the near future.

RESOLVED: *That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 February 2025 confirmed as a correct record.* [Minutes adopted by Council on 10 March 2025].

3. DEVELOPMENT PROJECT – 2025/26 PRIORITIES UPDATE

The Committee considered the MHO's report on the 2025/2026 priorities update.

(7.) Cllr J Eagland enquired whether the student completing the Keele University placement was the same person who had undertaken the studentship. The MHO clarified that the former student had completed her PhD and that project had ended. A new student placement, titled *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered*, has commenced, thereby continuing the relationship with Keele University. J Winterton noted that the new project aligns well with the letter acquired in 2023 and would provide greater insight into postal systems and letters in the Georgian era.

A Thompson welcomed the higher education student placement but suggested that opportunities should not be limited to Keele University. The MHO agreed, noting that other universities in the Midlands could be approached with similar projects. However, she emphasised that student placements are not guaranteed and that staffing levels and capacity

constraints at the Birthplace mean that placements are limited. Cllr A Hughes concurred, echoing concerns regarding capacity.

(5.) Cllr A Hughes asked if the Workroom panels had been recently installed. The MHO confirmed this, stating that they had been fitted in September 2025 before the Johnson Birthday Celebrations. Cllr A Hughes thanked Cllr R Yardley for taking images for the new Workroom interpretation. Cllr R Yardley asked when the touchscreen in the Workroom will be operational. The MHO explained that due to delays with the sub-contractors used by Vertigo, she did not have a clear answer. The MHO said that she is currently chasing them on the matter and is hoping to receive a response soon.

Cllr J Anketell asked if visitor numbers had increased and if admission to the museum was still free. The MHO clarified that numbers were up and that the museum was still free to enter.

RESOLVED: The report be noted.

4. DEVELOPMENT PROJECT – PROPOSALS FOR 2026/27

The Committee considered the MHO's report on proposals for 2026/2027 as set out in the table below:

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	

Cllr A Hughes congratulated the MHO for securing funding for the audience consultation project, *Opening Chapters*.

(C.) Cllr R Yardley questioned whether the staff and volunteer inclusion training was necessary as the Birthplace team seem to already provide an adequate welcome and reception for visitors. The MHO explained that staff had asked for this training at Birthplace staff meetings, wanting to be equipped with knowledge on the best ways to address certain scenarios with visitors and how to talk about difficult histories. The MHO explained that this form of training is standard within businesses and museums, adding that the Birthplace needs to reflect cotemporary practices as its audience grows, ensuring that the team are able to offer the best possible welcome and experience for visitors. Furthermore, as there are members of the team who identify as neurodivergent (for example), this type of training would enable the team to better support one another.

(D.) J Winterton asked whether an analogue version of the dictionary interactive would be more limited than a digital version, given that it would only allow a set number of possible words and combinations. The MHO explained that the designer, Vertigo, believes an analogue interactive may be preferable, as it would be less likely to break and would not rely on electricity. However,

the MHO acknowledged that younger audiences may prefer a format more familiar to them, such as a tablet or other digital interactive. She added that the decision on whether to create an analogue or digital interactive would be informed by the ongoing audience consultation at the Birthplace.

Before discussing proposals F to J, the MHO explained their significance, stating the need to establish a solid foundation in order to give the Birthplace the best chances of securing major funding for future redevelopment. While the proposed budget represents a significant investment, this work would ensure the team can make more informed decisions, leading to better project planning, and the long-term preservation of the building, with or without external funding. The MHO reiterated that these plans would still be led internally, but work with consultants would ensure credibility, alignment with sector standards, and compliance with funder expectations, while allowing the Birthplace team to continue day-to-day operations of the museum.

(G.) Cllr J Eagland asked if a different architectural consultant was being used for the quinquennial report. The MHO explained that the previous quinquennial report was not comprehensive enough, so an alternative architectural firm that Lichfield City Council have recently worked with would be used. The MHO stated that this firm have vast experience working on historic buildings, and have already discovered significant work needed to the rear elevation of the building that was not identified in the previous report, confirming the need to change architects.

(H.) J Winterton pointed out that an increase in visitor numbers could become an issue when examined in the context of the building's load bearing capacities. The MHO agreed, stating the need to ensure the building is structurally safe for years to come.

Cllr J Anketell complimented the MHO on the increased visitor figure, asking if groups had access to toilets at the Birthplace. The MHO explained that there are established arrangements for certain groups or events, such as the use of the Guildhall toilets for schoolchildren and the use of the Birthplace's staff toilet during evening events at the Birthplace.

Cllr R Yardley asked if the MHO had considered the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) or other sources of funding. The MHO confirmed that she explores a range of funding opportunities, including the NHLF. She noted that the museum has recently received a small grant for the audience consultation project and support for the access audit, both of which are essential for establishing the scope and laying the groundwork for larger projects. The MHO added that securing major funding requires significant preparatory work—beyond what is currently proposed—such as a feasibility study to determine the museum's needs and priorities. She emphasised the importance of exploring multiple funding sources rather than relying on a single funder, as some may support development phases.

A Thompson said that the MHO's information on funding was helpful but questioned whether the Committee wished to pursue major redevelopment, and whether that level of ambition should be the current aim. Cllr A Hughes stated that the museum is a glory of Lichfield, and whilst the Council do not have much in the way of extra funding, the museum building requires continued care, ensuring that the museum is making the best of itself. Cllr A Hughes explained that the MHO's proposals were lucid, but that £40,000 is more than the Council usually supplies; however, she hoped that the Committee would be ambitious and support bigger opportunities.

The MHO reiterated that the proposed projects would allow the Council to take a long-term approach rather than applying a temporary fix, helping to prevent future issues, ensure the museum's longevity, and make sure that any investment is not wasted. A Thompson said there should be a change in approach and suggested reprioritising and asking for a smaller amount before progressing to larger requests. Cllr J Eagland proposed that the MHO create a priority list, with the most important proposals addressed first; this was supported by Cllr P McDermott and Cllr R Yardley. Cllr Eagland also recommended approaching local charities in Lichfield for funding, noting that they are often very supportive. Cllr J Anketell added that Committee members with connections to local charities should share those details with the MHO.

The Town Clerk noted that proposals B to E may be more likely to attract alternative funding, and the Committee may wish to request funds from Council for those items where alternative funding is less likely.

The MHO explained that many of the items, particularly F to J, are not eligible for external funding, such as those relating to storage and building reports. She added that while alternative funding could be explored for proposals B to E, staff capacity is a significant limitation, as the MHO is the only full-time member of staff and the MSO works part-time, alongside the demands of day-to-day museum operations. The MHO noted that many museums have dedicated fundraising roles because sourcing external funding is time-consuming and often requires specialist skills. She emphasised that she will always pursue available funding opportunities but acknowledged the limitations created by current staffing levels. The MHO agreed to look for alternative funding for items B to E; however, if funding cannot be secured and no budget is allocated, these items will not proceed or would need to be returned to JBAC for further consideration. It was agreed that alternative opportunities for funding would be explored and that JBAC would be updated in due course, with the possibility of JBAC making recommendations to Council that some or all the unfunded items be funded internally.

On being put to the vote, it was agreed that proposals F-J (as set out in the table above) be put forward to council for consideration of 2026/27 funding.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL:

- 1. That free use of the Guildroom be provided for the audience consultation event on 18 November***
- 2. That the following projects be favourably considered for 2026/27 funding by council at its January 2026 budget setting meeting:***

Proposed 2026/27 project		Budget (£ excluding VAT)	Funding Source
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		£24,300	

5. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

In the calendar of meetings as Wednesday 6 May 2026 at 10.30am in the Moulton Room, Guildhall.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS

THE CHAIRMAN DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 11:45am