

## Lichfield City Council

### Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee Meeting held in the Moulton Room, Guildhall at 10.30 am on Thursday 19 July 2018

#### PRESENT:

**Committee Members:** Councillor R Awty (Chairman) and Councillors Mrs G Boyle, Mrs S James, C Spruce and A Thompson.

**In Attendance:** D Arthur (Johnson Society), T Briggs (Town Clerk), Cllr B Cocksey, M Dunley (Birthplace Volunteer), Cllr Mrs J Eagland, A Griffiths (Birthplace Volunteer), Cllr P Hitchman, S Horsfall (Lichfield Civic Society), A Ivens (Erasmus Darwin House), M Mackay (Birthplace Volunteer), P Taylor (Birthplace Museum Administration Assistant), Alan Thompson (Lichfield Civic Society), J Wilson (Museums and Heritage Officer).

**Apologies:** Councillors J Brooks, C Ball, D Dundas, D Leytham, R Yardley and Mr M Mullarkey.

*The brief summary of the report by Susan Dalloe Consultancy prepared by the Museums and Heritage Officer to accompany the agenda, and referred to in these Minutes, is attached for ease of reference.*

#### 58 REVIEW OF THE SAMUEL JOHNSON BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM BY SUSAN DALLOE CONSULTANCY

The Chairman welcomed all attendees and invited them to take an active part in the meeting to ensure all viewpoints were heard. The purpose of the meeting was outlined with attendees being asked to consider the report as the first stage of a process of redevelopment of the Museum, with the meeting being charged with assessing the report and identifying priorities, with those recommendations to be put before Council.

There followed a detailed discussion of the recommendations contained within five broad headings, each heading being supported by a brief presentation by the Museums and Heritage Officer that gave an overview of the report recommendations in each specific area:

##### **'Feel of House'**

There was agreement that this was a priority and that much could be done to improve the 'feel of house' experience. The recommendations contained within the report were endorsed as appropriate and proportionate, with further investigation into these options recommended.

##### **'Universal Access'**

A detailed discussion around the various options for universal access to the ground floor were discussed, with each of the proposed solutions including positive aspects as well as areas requiring further investigation. There was also concern that a solution implemented in the short term may not be appropriate in the medium to long term if the opportunity arose to acquire a part or whole of any neighbouring premises that may lend itself to the provision of additional access. The general view was that a 'ramp' arrangement may be the least favoured, but the complexity of alternative measures such as a platform was also highlighted. It was agreed that all proposed solutions would require consent from Staffordshire County Council Highways Department. The possibility of a lift to remaining floors to be sited in the rear courtyard was seen as aspirational but presented many practical difficulties, not least of which being the expectation of complete access to those floors served by the lift, which would be seemingly impossible to deliver within the confines of the Grade I listed status of the building. It was agreed that at this stage at least, the focus be on ensuring a good visitor experience for those only able to access the ground floor, with I.T. to be utilised to assist in this aim. It was agreed that it was a priority to gather more information on the options available in order to decide upon the most appropriate course of action.

##### **'Develop Museum Displays and Interpretation'**

The report recommendations were welcomed, with the caveats that Johnson's legacy including the present day be covered in greater detail, and that the building be seen as vernacular architecture. There was particularly strong support for the recommendation to open the kitchen

area by removing panels and exposing windows, the need for new and more appropriate display cases and the use of interactive technology. Further investigation was recommended.

#### **'Improve Facilities'**

The recommendations were welcomed with the need for appropriate toilet facilities being acknowledged as a priority. There was some discussion regarding the role of the Birth Room and whether it would be possible, through the use of IT, to present the room as it may have appeared at the time of Johnson's birth while enhancing the flexibility of the space for events and meetings. It was noted that it may not be possible to install a fully DDA compliant toilet in the courtyard due to space restrictions; the matter to be investigated further.

#### **'Exterior'**

The report recommendations were welcomed and it was agreed that signage both to the Birthplace and on the Birthplace is not adequate. It was agreed that some form of 'frontage' needs to be established to encourage visitors, and that information regarding the Museum could be usefully displayed outside, be this either in a digital or printed format. The various options to be investigated further.

Following the conclusion of this discussion the Chairman invited each attendee in turn to make any further comments they felt appropriate. These comments identified several priorities from within the report based on personal experience of the Museum, including more appropriate toilet facilities; improved signage; the need for the museum to 'feel like a home'; the need to make more of the fact that Johnson was born in the building and how fortunate the City of Lichfield is to have and retain such an asset; and the need for a strong strategic vision for the Museum while retaining a focus on short term improvements. It was suggested that the additional expertise gathered for this meeting would be well suited to assisting with the formation of such a strategic vision.

There were also notes of caution, notably around the use of technology, with knowledge that such technology can quickly date and may be costly to repair, maintain and upgrade, and the potential for identity conflict within the building as it tries to both be a 'birthplace' and a 'Museum' at the same time.

## **59 RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL**

Members of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee considered the discussions held and compiled the following recommendations:

- a) That the Review of the Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum as prepared by Susan Dalloe Consultancy be received, and that the best thanks of the Council be passed to its authors for their detailed, informative and insightful report.***
- b) That the City Council endorse the principle of redevelopment of the Birthplace Museum at this time with the above report forming the basis for the overall proposals, and the discussions at this meeting providing guidance as to priorities.***
- c) That further work be carried out by the Town Clerk and Museums and Heritage Officer both in regard to broad costs for the elements identified within the report (with particular focus on possibilities for universal access to the building) and opportunities for funding such work, including submission of 'expressions of interest' to funding bodies as appropriate; and that a progress report on this matter be provided to the next meeting of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee scheduled for 6 November 2018.***

The Chairman thanked all present for their contributions and expressed a desire for all attendees to continue to have input into the proposals for the Museum as they develop, including attendance as guests at future meetings of the Committee.

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS  
THE CHAIRMAN DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 11.45 AM**

## THE SAMUEL JOHNSON BIRTHPLACE MUSEUM: SUMMARY OF RECOMENDATIONS

The following document is a brief summary of the report by Susan Dalloe Consultancy, June 2018, to accompany the full report and including key recommendations for development, grouped for discussion (drawn from parts 4 and 5 of the report)

### Present the Museum with a feel of a house throughout

Recommendation	Report item
Modern lighting and strip lighting removed and replaced with dimmable reproduction period lighting	4.2.4
All service pipes and modern heating services need to be considered. In many places around the property there are modern features which could be changed, removed, covered or upgraded.	4.2.4
Holistic review of safety/fire equipment - ensuring compliance but more appropriate to historic house setting	4.2.3
Hand-painted signage in an 18 <sup>th</sup> century style, quotes and words from the Dictionary throughout the building	4.1.1
All multimedia to be mounted in 18 <sup>th</sup> century style furniture	4.1.2
Rugs and suitable replica curtains could be created	4.2.4

### Universal Access

Recommendation	Report item
Establish universal access to the Bookshop (with digital 'fly-around' available, see page 37), and ground floor where possible Ramp drawing and three options for lift platforms to the front door explored in detail – see page 54 for full review of the options, and see <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qo0ZGkYik28">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qo0ZGkYik28</a> for example of best practice platform option in operation	4.2.1, 5.2.1
Option for introducing a lift into the courtyard, with access to upper floors through back windows discussed and costed (see page 44 for feedback on this option from workshop groups)	5.3.2

### Develop Museum displays and interpretation

Recommendation	Report item
Improving Museum text panels and case labels	4.1.1, 5.1.1
Replace Museum display cases throughout	4.1.2, 5.1.2
Re-allocation of display rooms, See 4.2.3 (page 41) for a full list: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parlour to become introductory room (Blum library relocated)</li> <li>'Johnson's Lichfield' and 'Johnson's People' in Intro room</li> <li>Current AV room to become display on Johnson's Family</li> <li>'Johnson's Travels' themed room in attic developed</li> <li>Addition of area on legacy, donors and Francis Barber in attic</li> <li>Area for temporary exhibitions in the existing AV Room and option for Birth Room</li> </ul>	4.2.3 4.1.1 4.1.1 4.2.3 4.1.1 4.1.7
Addition of low and high-tech interactives, See 4.1.5 (page 37) for a full list <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interactive timeline table in Intro room</li> <li>Upgrade Dictionary Room interactives</li> <li>Video about how books are made in workroom</li> <li>Option for digital exhibitions on bookshop terminal</li> </ul>	4.1.1 4.1.4 4.1.6 4.1.7
Kitchen display development to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interactive kitchen display – handling collections, smells and voices</li> <li>Removing sliding panels and opening up windows</li> <li>Removing door to existing cupboard and opening up second area of kitchen for display</li> <li>Basement areas to be treated for damp ingress</li> </ul>	4.1.6 4.1.6 4.1.6 4.1.6 4.2.4

Architectural Tour of house to exist alongside Johnson Tour using models, mirrors, discovery doors and to include:	4.2.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some access to barrel vaulted boiler room to be established</li> </ul>	4.2.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full model of the Birthplace</li> </ul>	5.2.4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cupboard under stairs opened up as display area</li> </ul>	4.2.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cupboard beside office opened up for architectural display</li> </ul>	4.2.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views across city (market square, cathedral) accessed in some rooms</li> </ul>	4.2.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replace free-standing attic display screens (currently block view of eaves)</li> </ul>	4.1.1
Introductory Film:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New short audio-visual as main introduction to house in Parlour</li> </ul>	4.2.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing introductory film edited into chronological chunks to access on smaller screens at relevant points around the house.</li> </ul>	4.1.1
Improved access to Johnson's works to include:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bookcase with various editions of the Dictionary</li> </ul>	4.1.4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copies of relevant works throughout displays</li> </ul>	4.1.4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library display areas</li> </ul>	4.1.5

### Improve Facilities

Recommendation	Report item
Accessible public toilet built in courtyard, including baby changing facilities. For discussion of possible layout see 5.3.3	4.2.3, 4.3.2
Possibility of glass-roofing the courtyard could be explored (or other weather proofing), allowing for coffee machine and breakout area for bookings. On Courtyard Developments, see also: Stairs into cellar from yard could potentially be opened up for use Possibility of creating an additional room underneath the courtyard space (basement extension)	4.2.3  5.3.1 5.3.2
The possibility of acquiring the adjoining building is discussed as a solution to events, office, storage and research space, with historic precedent	5.3.4
Birth Room to become an events/meeting/performance space, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removal of display cases and rehanging with paintings</li> <li>• Cupboards to hold private hire equipment (projectors etc)</li> <li>• Flexible event furniture, in keeping with house (non-plastic)</li> </ul>	4.1.6 4.3.4 4.3.4
Storage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All new furniture and display cases to have ample storage solutions built in</li> <li>• School bags and coats store could be in barrel vaulted area</li> <li>• Some nooks and crannies suggested to become additional exhibition space, so some off-site storage will need to be sought - little potential on site</li> </ul>	4.3.6 4.3.6 5.3.1
Libraries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-organise material (move some off site) allowing space for interpretation and working areas</li> <li>• public terminal for accessing collections</li> </ul>	4.3.3 4.3.3
provision of folding stools for visitors to carry around in hidden units	4.2.5

### Exterior

Recommendation	Report item
Liaison to ensure stalls and hoardings are not placed in front of the Birthplace obscuring its presence	4.2.1
External signage with information about the Museum 24 hrs available - option for something digital	5.2.1
Signage around the city at car parks and at salient junctions could be enhanced to mark the building, as well as the development of city trails.	4.2.1

Joanne Wilson, Museums & Heritage Officer  
June 2018