

Lichfield City Council

Donegal House, Bore Street, Lichfield, Staffordshire, WS13 6LU

Tel: (01543) 250011 e-mail: townclerk@lichfield.gov.uk

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

24 October 2023

To: Members of the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee

Councillor A Hughes (Chair) and Councillors J Anketell, J Christie, J Eagland, S Hollingsworth, P Knight, B Watkins and R Yardley

Representative of Johnson Society

P Jones and J Winterton

Honorary Members

Robert Awty and Antony Thompson

Also to:

Museums and Heritage Officer (Kimberley Biddle)

Museum Support Officer (Lisa Hand)

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 31 October 2023** 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

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 April 2023 (**copy attached**). [*Minutes adopted by the City Council on 12 June 2023*].

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM JBAC MINUTES

5 UPDATE ON PERSONNEL CHANGES

Following the departure of Joanne Wilson in August, Kimberley Biddle was recruited to the post of Museums and Heritage officer, joining LCC in September. Kim has over 20 years' experience in the museums and heritage sector, having worked for Birmingham

Museums Trust (BMT) since 2002. She has previously been the general manager of all BMT's historic properties including Aston Hall, Blakesley Hall, Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, Sarehole Mill, Soho House, and Weoley Castle. Kim was the curator manager at Aston Hall since 2015, and was the project manager for Aston Retold, a major reinterpretation project.

RECOMMENDED: *That the update be noted.*

6 VISITOR NUMBERS 2022-2023 (ANNUAL REPORT)

To consider the Museums and Heritage Officer's report at **APPENDIX 1** (attached).

RECOMMENDED: *That the report be noted.*

7 'JOHNSON'S HEAD' INSTALLATION - BIRD STREET

To consider the MHO's report at **APPENDIX 2** (attached).

RECOMMENDED: *£750 to be factored into budgets each year for the yearly inspection of the bust by a structural engineer to ensure that it remains safely in position and does not pose a health & safety concern.*

8 JOHNSON LETTER TO SOPHIA THRALE

To consider the MHO's report at **APPENDIX 3** (attached).

RECOMMENDED: *That the report be noted.*

9 DEVELOPMENT PROJECT UPDATE – 2023/24 PRIORITIES UPDATE

To consider the MHO's report at **APPENDIX 4** (attached). This detailed report provides an update on each of the identified priorities for 23/24, and the issues encountered with these priorities. The implications arising from this update, and newly identified priorities, are considered at agenda item 10.

RECOMMENDED: *That the report be noted.*

10 EMERGING PRIORITIES – 2023/24 REPROFILING AND 2024/25 PROPOSALS

To consider the MHO and Town Clerk's joint report at **APPENDIX 5** (attached). The report details spend priorities identified by the new MHO and puts these into context against 23/24 priorities, together with proposals for 2024/25.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1. JBAC to consider *whether or not* it wishes to reprofile the 2023/24 budget as set out at section 1 of this report and make a corresponding recommendation to council.**
- 2. JBAC to consider the draft 2024/25 proposals as set out at section 2 of this report and approve/amend as it feels appropriate and make a corresponding recommendation to council.**

11 OUT OF HOURS GROUP VISIT RATES

Guided tours during opening hours (10.30am - 4.30pm) can be booked for a minimum of 10 people at £4 per person, and out-of-hours tours cost £5 per person. To ensure personal safety and security of the site a minimum of two staff are required for out-of-hours activities.

Benchmarking out-of-hours group visits:

Erasmus Darwin do not provide out-of-hours tours, and their standard tour price during opening hours is £5 per person.

Lichfield Cathedral provide private tours during opening hours, and they charge £10 per person.

In the wider sector Birmingham Museums Trust's Historic Properties do not offer out-of-hours guided tours as part of their group packages, however they would take group bookings and include their evening/private hire rates, which range from £400 - £2,000 to cover costs. During opening hours their tour prices are as follows:

Aston Hall	£13 per person
Blakesley Hall	£13 per person
Museum of the Jewellery Quarter	£10 per person
Sarehole Mill	£10 per person
Soho House	£8 per person
Weoley Castle	£10 per person

RECOMMENDED: Consideration to be given to increasing the price of out-of-hours tours to £10 per person for a minimum booking of 10 people to cover staffing costs and associated utility costs for keeping the site open.

12 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

In the Calendar of Meetings as 10.30am on Thursday 25 April 2024. 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 10:30 am on Tuesday 25th April 2023

PRESENT:

Representing Lichfield City Council:

Councillors Cllr G Boyle (Chair) and Cllrs J Anketell D Dundas, J Eagland, C Rapley, C Spruce, and R Yardley.

In Attendance:

A Briggs (Town Clerk)
Joanne Wilson (Museums & Heritage Officer)
Lisa Hand (Museum Support Officer)
J Winterton (Johnson Society representative)
R Awty and T Thompson (Honorary Members)

Apologies:

P Jones, Cllr T Matthews.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

None.

10. MINUTES

RESOLVED: *That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 1st November 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.* [Minutes adopted by Council on 12 December 2022].

11. MATTERS ARISING FROM JBAC MINUTES

Update on the Lomax Bust: funds have been raised by J. Oates via an appeal to residents, and local specialists have offered their services at reduced or zero cost to enable the installation to take place. The bust is soon to arrive at Donegal House for safekeeping while it is inspected and assessed prior to its installation. The bust should be installed over summer 2023.

12. FORWARD PLAN: AIMS AND OBJECTIVES 2023-2026

The Committee considered the Aims and Objectives report. The committee discussed the goal of the Museum to have an average donation of 50p per person; the average donation per head for the last 2 financial years has been 39p pp.

Aim 1 on the report was addressed: The offer of staff and volunteer training & development is open to JBAC members.

Aim 3 on the report was addressed 'Work with the Johnson Society to support their exploration of fundraising for expansion into an adjacent building': J Winterton requested that the item be reworded to reflect the current position, i.e. that support for such expansion remained but there was no proactive work taking place by the Johnson Society currently as LCC has not committed to any such project. It was determined that the Town Clerk will investigate costs of a feasibility study regarding expansion to provide a working document that will enable more complete consideration of the costs and benefits of such a project should such an opportunity arise in the future.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the revised Forward Plan be adopted.**
- 2. The costs of a feasibility study into the potential expansion of the Museum be investigated and provided to the Committee.**

13. DEVELOPMENT PROJECT UPDATE

The MHO provided a brief update, confirming the budget for the remaining phase one work had been approved by Council at its January meeting. Plans are being finalised for composition and installation of the toilet block; a demountable toilet block is no longer an option due to cost, however there is the alternative option of having a pre-constructed toilet block that can be lifted into position by crane. A contractor who specialises in such installations will review the site on Tuesday 2nd May 2023, and the architect is looking at costs. The new workroom will be installed before or after the toilets depending on the timeframe. It was mentioned that some committee members had not seen the reports for the work carried out in 2022. The MHO to send out the 2022 reports to the committee members.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

14. QUINQUENNIAL ARCHITECT INSPECTION

The Quinquennial inspection of the Birthplace building was undertaken by Andrew Hayward of Brownhill Hayward Brown in March 2023. No significant identifiable issues were reported.

Three 'Priority A' items are recommended:

- 1) that access to inspect the hidden valley gutter between the Birthplace and Number 36 Market Street is investigated.
- 2) that small areas of some ceilings and walls are made good post re-wiring.
- 3) that the boiler is inspected and monitored regarding an area of apparent corrosion.

Item 2) is already budgeted in the development plans for 2023/2024 and item 3) addressed during annual boiler checks by CBS systems. Item 1) will be pursued with BHB, with a view to reporting on any resulting associated costs at the next JBAC meeting for inclusion, if required, in R&R budgets for 2024/2025. The full inspection report is available to members on request.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

15. COSTS AND CHARGES

The Committee discussed concerns over the Cost of Living Crisis and the school charges increase; The MHO explained the tiered system which gives schools different options and that the Museum always offer a free option during holidays and half term for families who do not wish to participate in a paid trail or craft.

RESOLVED: That the 2023/24 costs and charges be approved.

16. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

In the Calendar of Meetings of 10:30am on Tuesday 31st October 2023. Following the adoption of the Minutes of the JBAC meeting of 6 November 2018, additional meetings may be called in the meantime if appropriate.

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS
THE CHAIR DECLARED THE MEETING CLOSED AT 11:15am**

Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum 2022/23 Annual Report

Visitor Numbers

2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
14,807	10,607	1,653	20,994	21,427

The 2022/23 financial year has been the first since the coronavirus pandemic that the Birthplace has been consistently open throughout the year. Prior to the pandemic, visitor numbers had increased annually from 2015, hitting a peak of 21,427 in 2018/19. Despite the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, visitor numbers grew in 2022/23 in comparison with 2021/22, which is demonstrative of the growth experienced across the museums and heritage sector. However, the Birthplace is also demonstrative that overall, the sector has some way to go before visits recover to pre-pandemic levels.

The quarterly breakdown of visitors in the last reporting period was as follows:

Apr-Jun 2021	1,224	Jul-Sep 2021	3,591
Apr-Jun 2022	3,662	Jul-Sep 2022	3,103
Quarterly Difference: +199%		Quarterly Difference: -14%	
Oct-Dec 2021	2,781	Jan-Mar 2022	3,011
Oct-Dec 2022	4,182	Jan-Mar 2023	4,403
Quarterly Difference: +50%		Quarterly Difference: +46%	

Average donations from visitors increased from 33p per head in 2021/22 to 43p per head in 2022/23, representing growth of 30%. However, sales per head have decreased from 98p per head in 2021/22 to 71p per head in 2022/23.

Indications from the present financial year 2023/24

This financial year has had a strong start seeing an increase in visitor figures from the previous year in each of the first two quarters:

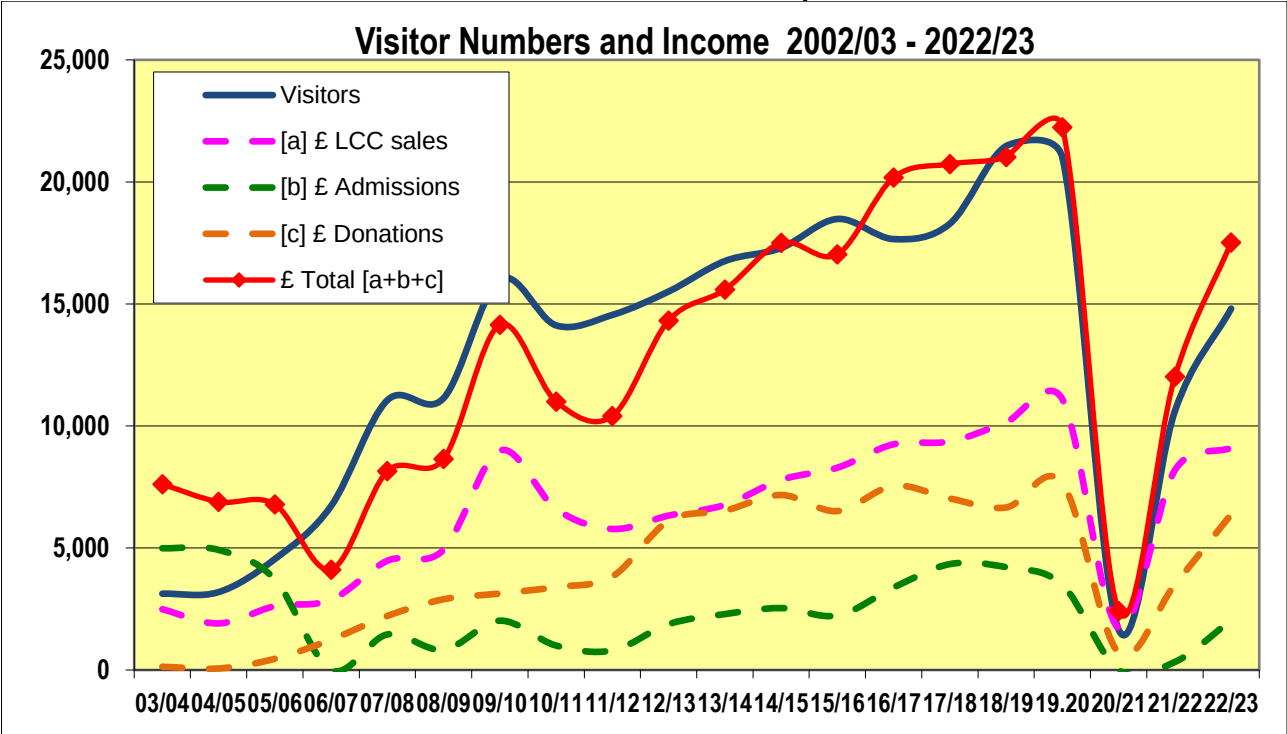
Apr-Jun 2022	3,662	Jul-Sep 2022	3,103
Apr-Jun 2023	4,428	Jul-Sep 2023	5,304
Quarterly Difference: +30%		Quarterly Difference: +71%	

Heightened numbers for the July to September period are envisaged to be attributable to increased footfall within the city following several localised events inclusive of Samuel Johnson's birthday celebrations and the Sheriff's Ride.

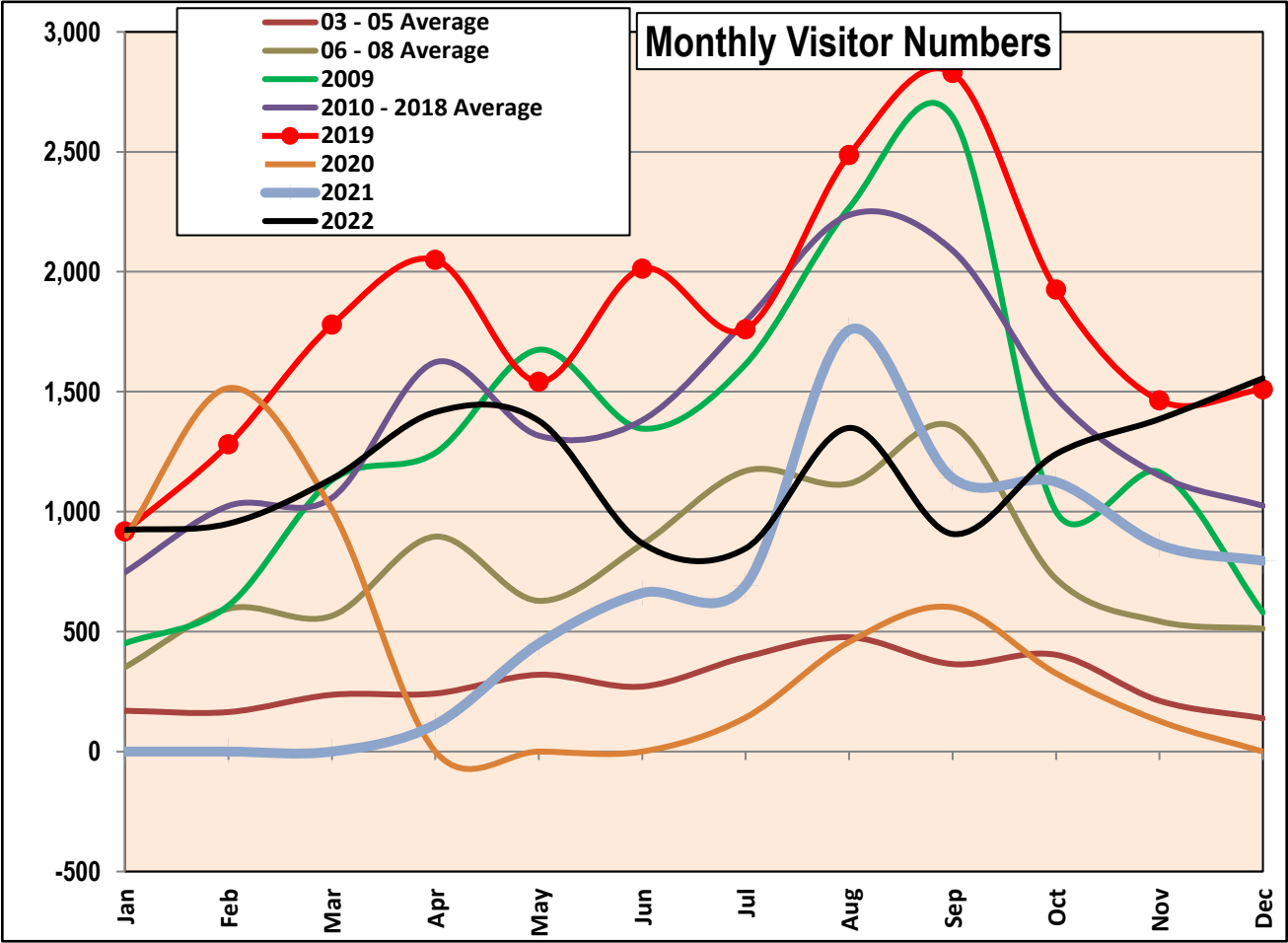
It is anticipated that the schedule of proposed public activities and recent publicity around the procurement of the 'Sophia Thrale' letter (see below) will aid to secure further visitor numbers across the final two quarters for 2023/24.

To promote growth for 2024/25 we will review our events programme and current involvement with localised events with a view to increase both the breadth and depth of our engagement.

Overview of annual visitor numbers and income over the past decade:



*Admissions refers to guided tour, school and special events admissions from October 2005 onwards, when standard visits to the Museum became free of charge



JBAC: 31 October 2023 APPENDIX 2

‘JOHNSON’S HEAD’ INSTALLATION – BIRD STREET

In late November 2022 Jonathon Oates stated that he wished to crowdfund the costs of the installation of the bust on Bird Street. This was supported by the Council in December, and the Museums and Heritage Officer (MHO) was designated as the point of contact for Jonathon. The campaign was subsequently launched and quickly gained traction.

Costs of the installation were significantly reduced when Messenger BCR, the building contractor offered their services free of charge as part of their community engagement agenda, as did specialist carver Paul Jones of Jones Carving who is undertaking the restoration. Further, Lichfield City Council (LCC) met the application cost for Listed Building Consent. Consequently, the crowdfunding campaign ended with a total of £3,735 raised.

In June, under a loan agreement with the owner, the MHO arranged delivery of the bust to Jones Carving for condition checking, to ascertain what work was required. By September the carver’s investigation had revealed more damage than had originally been identified, this damage would have been caused by the removal from its original location, and previous poor attempts at restoration that had been carried out many years ago using incorrect materials. These previous repairs have resulted in weak points and have caused the bust to lean forwards which when installed would prevent it from sitting square to the wall, this would be dangerous if not rectified. Paul’s investigations also revealed that the bust was originally lime washed, so the intention is to sympathetically restore it to its original appearance.

The restoration work could not begin until the transfer of title from the owner to LCC was received, this was received on 19 September 2023 and work is presently underway.



The bust on 8 September 2023

Next steps and recommendations

A completion date for the restoration has not yet been provided due to Jones Carving balancing paid work with this voluntary project. They are in regular contact with the MHO and Messenger BCR to provide updates. The costs to Jones Carving will be much higher than originally anticipated due to the costs of materials and the poor condition of the bust. The MHO has had a discussion with Jonathon Oates with a recommendation that he may wish to factor in a contribution to help cover cost of the materials, he is supportive of this.

Although Messenger BCR have kindly volunteered their time, there may be costs incurred from scaffolding or tower hire, which the MHO has made Jonathon aware of.

When a completion date is in sight the MHO will liaise with all parties to ensure there is a celebration event and press release to mark the return of the Johnson Head bust.

RECOMMENDED: £750 to be factored into budgets each year for the yearly inspection of the bust by a structural engineer to ensure that it remains safely in position and does not pose a health & safety concern.

JBAC: 31 October 2023 APPENDIX 3

JOHNSON LETTER TO SOPHIA THRALE

A letter of historical importance written by Dr Samuel Johnson was acquired at auction on 20 September 2023. The acquisition was made possible by funding and support from the Friends of the National Libraries, The Johnson Society (Lichfield), Lichfield City Council, and the generosity of Phil Jones, a private donor.

The letter, penned by Johnson in 1783, had been documented but its location was unknown, and scholars thought it was lost. After 240 years it was discovered in a cupboard amongst other historical letters in a Gloucestershire country home and was sold at auction. It is addressed to a twelve-year-old Sophia Thrale, daughter of Hester Lynch Thrale, a British author and patron of the arts. Samuel Johnson regularly corresponded with Hester Lynch Thrale and her children, and these letters became of historical significance, providing great insight into Johnson's mind and a resource for the study of 18th century society.

In the letter we read Johnson encouraging Sophia to continue her studies, especially her mathematical pursuits. It demonstrates his enlightened views on the importance of women's education in the eighteenth century, and the openness he had towards young people in general. This charming correspondence is a rare and documented example of a different side to Johnson, its affectionate and paternal tone shows a softness not often associated with him. It also provides further evidence of Johnson's interest in mathematics during his later life, not a field he is not known for.

The letter has been securely delivered to Lichfield by Crown Fine Art, specialists in insuring and shipping museum collections.

Next steps

The letter will be professionally photographed, and when put on display the photos will sit next to it so that visitors can view the full letter from all sides. Having photos also enables us to periodically change which side of the letter is on display, this reduces the damaging effects of light exposure. The letter would be placed inside a protective transparent melinex pocket, and a transcription will go alongside it for ease of reading. There will also be an object label explaining what the letter is.

In the longer term, the letter would form part of the development/reinterpretation project and can be used to explore themes such as the relationships between Johnson and the women in his life, Johnson's interest in mathematics, his enlightened views on the education of women, his curiosity in fields beyond literature, and to look at the wider context of women's lives in the eighteenth century more broadly.

Members are advised that the timeline for displaying the letter is dependent on purchasing a secure case. The purchase of such a case (and others) is discussed elsewhere on this agenda. In addition to the purchase of a case, a budget of £400 is required for photography, a printed transcription, and an object label.

RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.

JBAC: 31 October 2023 APPENDIX 4

DEVELOPMENT PROJECT – UPDATE

At its meeting of 1 November 2022, this Committee considered proposals for work to be carried out at the Birthplace Museum during 2023/24. A corresponding recommendation was made to Council which informed draft budgets and the eventual approval by Council at its meeting of 28 January 2023. All elements of the programme to be funded via LCC's capital reserve.

At the time of those considerations the unexpected necessary structural work to the Breadmarket Street elevation had recently taken place. The extent of the work and its nature became apparent across the period 24 June – 12 July, and included the replacement of significant areas of structural oak beams that support the timbers above, plus the introduction of steel on the corner of the Breadmarket St/Market St elevation to prevent further structural movement. The project went from an 8-week duration to approximately 20 weeks, and the original contract cost of £34,000 more than doubled to a final figure of approximately £74,000 (plus fees). There was no option but to carry out this work however, and it is fortunate that the more minor work revealed this issue before any further deterioration occurred.

This significant overspend put pressure on LCC's capital reserve. This pressure, together with what were then outstanding issues with sourcing a contractor for the proposed toilet pod, plus a list of smaller projects, led to a recommendation that 2023/24 be a year of consolidation to bring some of these outstanding matters to completion.

The recommendation of JBAC, together with costings provided at the time, are provided below.

- Architects and Officers to continue discussions with SCC with the aim of reaching a solution regarding **disabled access** to the ground floor.
- **Removal of the Asbestos** Insulation Board ceiling, floor tiles and old boiler flue lining in basement of Museum and replacement with appropriate alternatives (estimated budget £17,500)
- **Reviewing the original internal ground floor display plan** following the conclusion of discussions with SCC regarding disabled access, with a view to presenting JBAC with a revised schedule, costing and funding plan for further redevelopment works for consideration before 2024/2025.
- Completion and installation of new **Workroom Displays** (£9,625 remaining from the allocated CIL budget)
- Installation of the **toilet block** (approx £20,000)
- Minor making-good **repairs to ceilings and floorboards** (budget £5,000)

The departure of former MHO Jo Wilson in August 2023, together with issues and delays encountered prior to and since her departure, has left the 2023/24 programme significantly behind schedule.

The two clear priorities for 2023/24 were the removal of the asbestos and the installation of the toilet pod, the former due to safety and the latter due to appropriate provision and the desire to progress other projects that would be easier to complete following the installation rather than prior. The current position of each element listed above is detailed overleaf.

1. Disabled access to ground-floor

A removable step designed by Brownhill Hayward Brown (BHB) was installed at the bottom of the main staircase to allow for movement of wheelchairs throughout the ground floor. The alteration is sympathetic and only visible when the step is removed, otherwise the stairs appear to be exactly how they originally were.

The proposal to install an invisible lift to the Market Street entrance has remained unsupported by Staffordshire County Council (SCC). BHB received correspondence in June 2022, in which SCC said they had consulted their legal team and stated it is a county-wide policy that they cannot support a scheme that involves permanent structures in the highway, and that any deviation to highway authorities' policies and statutory obligations would have a detrimental effect to highway users. The MHO received a further response from SCC on 11 October 2023 which reiterated their views:

"The stance of the County Council briefly, is that we would not accept any structures within the adopted highway as they cause obstructions for all users of the adopted highway, particularly the visually impaired. It is the responsibility of the developer/landowner to provide disabled access within their own land and not within the adopted highway."

The MHO and BHB have an in-person on-site meeting scheduled with SCC on 25 October to discuss the matter once again. The MHO will provide a verbal update at the meeting, but if – as expected – the SCC stance remains unchanged, the situation appears to be at an impasse.

2. Asbestos Removal

Unfortunately, the contractor who provided initial advice and some enabling works to allow rewiring to progress in 2021 no longer offers the necessary asbestos removal service. The MHO has obtained further quotes and sourced a new contractor, meeting with them on 3 October 2023. The removal of all asbestos at one time is more expensive in the short term but preferable to partial removal and management of the remainder, with the likely need for remedial work to take place which would be impacted by that asbestos in the near future.

The removal of the asbestos will require significant making good, notably to ceilings in the kitchen and storeroom, plus other areas. It is currently envisaged that the work can be completed within the allocated 2023/24 budget.

3. Reviewing ground-floor display plan

Vertigo provided the following design proposals for the Bookshop and Parlour in 2020:

The Bookshop (budget £29,050): design and fit the interior of the shop in the original style of a 1730s bookshop including covering or minimising modern features, installing period style shelves, lighting, floor, wall finishes and additional seating. The quality and style would be vernacular, commonplace and a little shabby so there would be no need to purchase antique furniture. Includes animated building flyround interactive and screen/projector.

The Parlour (budget £13,975): decluttering, removal of most current furniture. Re-finishing walls and populate with reproduction furniture and fittings to resemble an early Georgian reception room. Lower light levels. Fit projector and media store activated with PIR. Existing video presentation will be projected onto one of the walls. Includes multimedia screen and programming.

An alternate plan has not been developed since the initial quotes and designs were provided. The quotes supplied are now outdated and would need to be revisited due to increased supplier costs. The MHO met with Vertigo on 3 October and it was agreed that the initial designs would need changing due to not being workable for a Bookshop that isn't solely dedicated to the sale of antiquarian books, and that noise from the surrounding area made the digital aspects of the current Parlour and Bookshop design challenging. The MHO believes that a solution for the Bookshop could be delivered in-house and at greatly reduced cost.

4. Workroom Display

The original design for the Workroom display was submitted by museum designers Vertigo in August 2020. Progress has been slow, with the bulk of the work only able to commence upon completion of the toilet pod due to space for storage and required access throughout the groundworks and installation.

Arthur Green, an expert bookbinder, was commissioned by the former MHO to act as an advisor to Vertigo, and to produce a step-by-step video on how a book is bound. Arthur Green provided Vertigo with research including a list of key pieces of equipment and tools that should feature in the room display. Vertigo have purchased these display items, and they are storing them off-site.

The 2020 plan for the room included digital interpretation on an interactive screen. Vertigo are in the process of producing designs for this following a meeting with the current MHO on 3 October 2023.

The MHO will work with Vertigo to review the design as there are some historical inaccuracies and some practical elements that have been overlooked. Vertigo have received a portion of their fee and are due to receive the remaining amount on completion of the work. The majority of this project is funded via CIL.

Arthur Green has been commissioned to deliver a training session for SJB staff which will take place upon completion of the Workroom. The timescales of this project are dependent upon whether or not a toilet block is to be installed (discussed elsewhere on the agenda).

5. Toilet Pod

Despite repeated requests, there appeared to be some difficulty in obtaining updated costs for the toilet pod during 2023/24. The £20,000 budget figure was provided to the Town Clerk by LCC's professional advisors in September of 2022, with the clear request that a budget figure be provided based on likely costs for 2023/24.

It was not until 3 October 2023 that further costs were provided. At the request of the MHO, costs were provided for both an on-site build of the pod, and for a pre-built pod to be lifted into the rear courtyard of the Museum by crane. The costs include some assumptions and are subject to further variation if these assumed sums – largely relating to the groundworks provision, are varied as the project develops. The costings received, together with a brief analysis of each option are provided below. The costs provided are far in excess of the £20,000 +VAT stated in September 2022.

Option 1: Craned in Steel Pod Option – £36,066 + VAT and professional fees

Advantages vs Option 2	Disadvantages vs Option 2
Cheaper	Risk of damage to building/s (including the Birthplace) during craning into place
Speedier installation	Potentially chargeable delay if wind speed is too high on installation day est. £5,500 per failed lift
	Requires road closure to be in place

Option 2: Bespoke Timber Option - £59,295 + VAT and professional fees

Advantages vs Option 1	Disadvantages vs Option 1
No risks to SJBm or surrounding buildings	More expensive
No obvious delay risks	Longer build time – groundworks required etc
More control over internal finishes due to bespoke nature	

Upon receipt of these estimates the Town Clerk advised that the project could not proceed without further consideration by JBAC in the first instance and ultimately by Council.

The significant increase in costs pushes this project past the current £24,955 ceiling at which point LCC's Financial Regulations dictate a formal tendering process should be entered into. The time taken for the process to be completed would likely rule out the work commencing during the remainder of 2023/24 and would therefore most appropriately form part of the 2024/25 proposals for the development project. However, other priorities have been identified and the significant increase in costs perhaps makes the whole project less attractive. Moreover, the significant pressure on LCC's capital reserve, and budgets generally, may bring in to question the value to the public purse of such a project.

6. Minor making good repairs

A budget of £5,000 was agreed for the purpose of making-good repairs to ceilings and floorboards. This work has not yet been carried out and is not seen as a significant priority by the new MHO.

RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.

JBAC: 31 October 2023 APPENDIX 5

POSSIBLE REPROFILING OF 2023/24 BUDGETS AND PROPOSALS FOR 2024/25

1. 2023/24 BUDGETS - REPROFILING

The report at Appendix 4 identified some 2023/24 priorities that are progressing, but others that have considerable budgetary and/or timescale issues. Moreover, the new MHO has identified significant priorities that may lead to the Committee favourably considering a reallocation of existing 2023/24 budgets and that will influence discussions for 2024/25.

Replacement Display Cases

The MHO strongly believes that consideration should be given to prioritising the security and conditions of the current collections on display. The current 1980s display cases contain items of great historical importance but are not compliant by modern museum standards and will likely cause issues for insurance cover in the future. They have broken or insufficient locks, and they do not have attack resistant security glass. Upon reviewing the displays, the MHO recommends that in the first instance the most valuable collections, which include Samuel Johnson's personal artefacts, are prioritized and that five new cases are purchased at a cost of approximately £25,000, based on quotations obtained by the MHO in October 2023.

The original budget for the toilet pod (£20,000) and the minor making good to floors and ceilings (£5,000) would cover the cost of these new display cases if reallocated. Further new display cases would need to be factored into the future development/reinterpretation project, but this proposal would address the immediate requirements, including the display case for the Johnson letter to Sophia Thrale discussed elsewhere in this agenda. JBAC is asked to consider the merits of such reprofiling and make a corresponding recommendation to council.

2. PROPOSALS FOR 2024/25

The MHO is keen to prepare a robust project and funding plan for the next stage of the redevelopment of the Museum. The preparation of such a plan, identifying funding etc will necessarily take time, with the current aim to present the plan for consideration in readiness for 2025/26. There are however several matters that are recommended for consideration for 2024/25. Each item is discussed below and summarised in the table that follows.

A. Toilet Pod

As detailed at Appendix 4, the costs of the toilet pod have increased significantly, with even the lowest estimation suggesting costs will almost double from the £20,000 originally budgeted (+professional fees). The question arises as to whether this represents good value to the public purse, and JBAC is asked to formally consider this point.

Public toilets are available near the Birthplace, and the length of an average visit makes it possible to continue to open without an on-site visitor toilet. If Staffordshire County Council (SCC) change their stance on the installation of a wheelchair lift, then an accessible toilet would undoubtedly benefit visitors with access needs. The toilet would still be beneficial for income generating activities such as functions and out-of-hours hires, even if no progress is achievable with the lift installation. However, it is highly unlikely that income from these activities would ever recoup the costs of the pod.

Longer-term impact on budgets must also be considered, such as the additional costs of cleaning, sanitary waste collection, disabled alarm installation/maintenance, and purchasing of washroom supplies.

As an **alternative to the toilet pod**, improvements to the existing Birthplace staff toilet could be explored (budget £5,000, though may be achievable for significantly less) for usage for out-of-hours activities when public toilets are closed.

B. Website Redesign (budget £4,000 based on quotation October 2023)

A complete redesign, improving Disability Discrimination Act (1995) compliance, and website optimisation to boost the Museum's position within search engines and increase interest in Johnson and the Birthplace. Additional considerations could also be given to strengthening the use of the website as a digital archive and source of promotion for the museum's collections.

C. Improvements to the Bookshop (budget £15,000)

Instead of progressing with Vertigo's 2020 design with the proposed budget of £29,050, the MHO would work with a reduced budget of £15,000 to improve lighting, furnishings, reception desk, and install 'instagramable' shop displays with a view to increasing retail sales and elevating the Bookshop's status to a prime retail destination and tourist attraction.

D. Improving the education offer (budget £6,500)

Working with museum education specialists (e.g., Mrs History - <http://www.mrshistory.org.uk/>) to develop an education programme offering inspiring and memorable experiences for schools. This would create curriculum focused education sessions which directly relate to key stages, and the development of a loan box that can be hired by local schools. This would greatly improve the current situation which has limited capacity to take bookings due to a dependency on other sites for the school's safari sessions, the reliance on the goodwill of a limited number of staff who are able to deliver sessions, and the lack of standardised sessions and consistency of delivery. Further to this, the MHO will explore education sessions being delivered by freelancers who are fully trained and experienced in working with schools to increase bookings, with a proposal for consideration at the April 2024 JBAC meeting to review school charges.

E. Recommendations Arising from Roof Survey

The Architects Quinquennial Report recommended inspection of the hidden valley gutter adjacent to 36 Breadmarket St (see minute 14 of the JBAC meeting held on 25 April 2023). Following discussions with the Town Clerk it was agreed that, while on site, a whole roof survey would be beneficial. A drone survey is due to take place on 24 October. The MHO recommends that, in addition to any required work to the valley gutter, options for gutter guards and brushes are explored. Discussions will take place with the council's professional advisors on these matters in due course, with the urgency of any remedial work dictating whether it is brought forward for consideration in 2024/25 or presented for consideration at a later date.

F. Developing Proposals and Funding Opportunities for 2025/26

An alternate plan should not be rushed and over the next year priority will be given to the careful planning of the development/reinterpretation project, with a robust project and funding plan produced for consideration in 2024/25 to action in 2025/26.

Proposed 2024/25 Project	Budget (£)	Funding Source
Enhancements to existing toilet facility <i>(in lieu of planned toilet pod)</i>	5,000	Capital Reserve
Website Redesign	4,000	Revenue (precept)
Improvements to Bookshop	15,000	Capital Reserve
Improving Education Offer	6,500	Revenue (precept)
Recommendations/discussions arising from roof survey	-	-
Devising proposals for 25/26	-	-
Total	£30,500	

RECOMMENDED:

1. JBAC to consider **whether or not** it wishes to reprofile the 2023/24 budget as set out at section 1 of this report and make a corresponding recommendation to council
2. JBAC to consider the draft 2024/25 proposals as set out at section 2 of this report, and approve/amend as it feels appropriate and make a corresponding recommendation to council