

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 10 August 2023

Meadows Jawbone Arch Conservation Project

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1. Recommendations

1.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- 1.1.1 Note this update on the Meadows Jawbone Arch Conservation Project, and the information provided in respect of ideas for creative conservation of the Jawbones;
- 1.1.2 Agree to dispose of the existing Jawbones which are deemed unviable for suitable public display;
- 1.1.3 Agree to continue the exploration of creative conservation solutions until October 2023, with the outcome of this reported to Group Spokespeople;
- 1.1.4 Note that, if a creative solution is not found, the original Jawbones will be disposed in line with guidance from City Archaeologist with cross-section pieces kept and accessioned into the museum collections with a view to being installed at a suitable location within the Museums and Galleries service; and
- 1.1.5 Agree to advance discussions with stakeholders and potential funders on the commission of a bronze replacement.

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Meadows Jawbone Arch Conservation Project

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Meadows Jawbone Arch Conservation project requires the approval of Committee to dispose of the original Jawbones as they are considered beyond reasonable repair, unable to be relocated safely and now a cost pressure to the Council.
- 2.2 It would be possible to preserve cross-sections of the Jawbones, accompanied by new interpretation panels which can be moved to the Museums and Galleries Collection Centre until a permanent home can be found in the Museums service. Upon being accessioned into the museum collections, the cross-section(s) would be available for scientific and historical research and sampling, future display and external loan.
- 2.3 At the request of Elected Members, officers are also investigating alternative creative conservation solutions to disposal and will conclude these investigations by October 2023.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Meadows Jawbone Arch was dismantled in May 2014 to allow essential conservation work to be undertaken. The bones have been conserved twice since then and relocated several times (see paragraph 4.1).
- 3.2 This report seeks to address issues previously [reported](#) to the Culture and Communities Committee on 1 February 2022.

4. Main report

Conservation of the Bones

- 4.1 The bones were initially conserved in 2014/15 by an accredited conservator who subsequently went into administration. This conservation work was subsequently changed, without the consent of the City of Edinburgh Council, by the structural engineer attached to the project at that time. From a conservation perspective, the repairs were removed from the bones and the surface coating removed with a

coarse brush. The bones were then stored in several locations for circa three years while the project was reassessed due to financial and legal considerations as well as a change in personnel.

- 4.2 In 2018 another accredited conservator, a whalebone specialist, was appointed to conduct a new condition survey and provide a treatment proposal. This work was undertaken in 2019/20. 3D scans were made at the same time.

Current Location

- 4.3 The bones were returned to Edinburgh in October 2020 and stored in a partially external site to allow acclimatisation to outside conditions, having been under cover for a significant period. A structural engineering company, David Narro, was appointed in 2020 to provide safe mounting and display options.
- 4.4 The bones were relocated to Powderhall Bronze in June 2021. An initial attempt to lift one bone into a vertical orientation, as it would be mounted at the Meadows, resulted in flexing of the bone, cracks and losses. The conservator was consulted and confirmed that this was anticipated and that further repairs once the bones were fully erected in situ would be required, as well as regular ongoing maintenance.
- 4.5 Powderhall Bronze has paused activity on this project to allow a reassessment of options. They are storing the bones but have had to move them to an uncovered area and require remuneration of £200.00 per month for continued storage. Photographs of the Jawbones are attached as Appendix 1 to provide an idea of size and condition.

Armature or Frame for Display

- 4.6 Due to the instability of the bones when manipulated into an upright position, the project team and new structural engineers recommended a full armature or frame be created to support them, as opposed to fixings at the base and the top where the bones meet. Any armature made would need to be sensitive to the appearance of the bones, taking into account their load and height, potential for movement, and the bronze commemorative bands near the base of each bone.
- 4.7 The armature will not guarantee safety of the bones themselves and they may remain a risk. The organic nature of the original material and the volume of repairs, coupled with the risks posed by an outdoor setting and the effects of the weather, mean that further deterioration is likely. This poses a potential risk to the safety of the public.

Current Condition and Maintenance

- 4.8 As it stands, the bones are expected to require annual maintenance including patching of cracks and infills for areas of loss. This cost is estimated at £3,000-£5,000 at time of writing (dependent on extent of weathering and repairs; new casein wash required at minimum each time; including access equipment).
- 4.9 Officers have explored indoor locations such as Central Library, the National Museums of Scotland, and Scottish Historic Buildings Trust at Custom House but

nowhere has been deemed suitable. The instability of the bones as described in paragraph 4.6 as well as their size once set within suitable armature is equally relevant when considering an indoor installation, making it more complex than at an external site.

- 4.10 The remaining lifespan of the jawbones (time-period for which they can remain outdoors in a public setting before irreversible deterioration) is unlikely to exceed 15 years with regular maintenance. If regular maintenance is not undertaken this will be significantly less.
- 4.11 Due to their fragility, it is now deemed that the risks and cost of erecting the Arch make reinstatement in another location unviable.

Future Options

- 4.12 It is felt that the best solution would be to conserve parts of the Jawbones by taking one or more cross-section cuts of each side of the bronze commemorative bands near the base of each bone. These would be intriguing items in themselves, safer and easier to maintain, and could be fixed more easily at an indoor venue with associated interpretation material.
- 4.13 It would be possible to preserve cross-sections of the Jawbones, and new interpretation panels could be created and retained in the Museums and Galleries Collection Centre until a permanent home can be found in the Museums service. Upon being accessioned into the museum collections, the cross-section(s) would be available for scientific and historical research and sampling, future display and external loan.
- 4.14 However, following a site visit to Powderhall Bronze by officers and elected members, other ideas were discussed to enable alternative and creative conservation of the Jawbones and to widen the scope of the term 'disposal'.
- 4.15 Contact has been made with Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop to gauge interest in using the jawbones as part of their practice for a future artwork (for instance, they could form a new creative interpretation on contemporary views on whale hunting). Contact has also been made with Jupiter Artland to see if they could be installed horizontally as part of the creative landscape.
- 4.16 In addition, the eminent Scottish artist and sculptor Will Maclean MBE has expressed an interest in using one or more cross-sections of the Jawbones in his art practice. Maclean had a large and critically acclaimed retrospective at the City Art Centre in the summer of 2022. Now in his eighties, Maclean's work takes inspiration from the history, stories, and working life of the Scottish highlands, from where his family originate. He has used whalebone, scrimshaw (carvings done on bone or ivory most often associated with whalers), and baleen (tissue from the mouths of baleen whales) in his work in the past.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 If Committee approve the recommendations in this report, officers will continue to explore ideas for alternative and creative conservation of the Jawbones until

October 2023 and will provide an update on the outcome of this to a future meeting of Group Spokespeople.

- 5.2 Thereafter, if a creative alternative is not identified, the original Jawbones will be disposed in line with guidance from City Archaeologist, following standard disposal methods for archaeological material. Costs for disposal will be sought.
- 5.3 Prior to disposal, an osteological specialist will be commissioned to safely take jawbone cross-section(s), to include bronze commemorative banding. This will be accessioned into the museum collection.
- 5.4 In the meantime, plans to commission and install a high quality, sustainable replica of the Jawbone Arch in the Meadows (utilising recently made 3D scans) will continue. Officers will progress discussions with stakeholders and potential funders on the design and commission of a bronze replacement and will update Committee within three cycles on the outcome of these discussions.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Public donations have been invested in this project. It is proposed that the City of Edinburgh Council provides an assurance to Edinburgh World Heritage Trust (EWHT) that the value of their contribution will be spent on displaying the cross-section cuts of each Whalebone in an indoor location supported by new interpretation methods.
- 6.2 Insufficient funds remain for creating a bronze replica so external funding would be required. Committee should note that the service has current bids being developed with the most obvious funding sources - such as Historic Environment Scotland and National Lottery Heritage Fund - for Portobello Kilns, and these are competitive processes. If public interest is strong then a crowdfunding exercise should be achievable. If successful in erecting a bronze replica, the Council would bear the cost of ongoing maintenance.
- 6.3 Confirmed expenditure to date totals £89,046.21 plus internal Asset Management fees of £7,314.00. There is no budget allocation for ongoing storage and maintenance of the Jawbones. Transport costs could be around £3,000 - £3,500 per move, depending on distance/location. The ongoing storage cost at Powderhall Bronze is £200 per calendar month, payable since October 2022.
- 6.4 The City of Edinburgh Council will bear the cost of specialist uplift and disposal according to guidance provided by City Archaeologist.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 There is local interest in the fate of the Jawbones. Officers have met with Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links (FoMBL) who have shown an active interest in the project and requested to be involved in further consultation on the Jawbones and alternative proposals from the community. Officers also attended Merchiston Community Council meeting.

- 7.2 The Council and EWHT are required to ensure that the crowdfunding and Shetland Trust grants of approximately £60,000 accepted to fund the project are used appropriately. Engagement with EWHT has been limited due to a long-term staff absence but officers expect broad agreement on the approach detailed in the report.
- 7.3 Health and safety, governance, compliance or regulatory implications. Risk of falling sections of bone or repairs. No external contractors attached to the project can offer a guarantee of safety.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Digital 3-D imaging of whale bones <https://www.thinksee3d.com/edinburgh-whale-bone-arch>.

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 - Images of Jawbones at Powderhall Bronze.

Appendix 1 – Meadows Jawbones Arch Conservation Project

Images taken at Powderhall Bronze



