

LEDBURY TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING OF JOHN MASEFIELD WORKING PARTY HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2022

PRESENT: Councillors Morris, Sims.

NON-COUNCIL MEMBERS: Christine Tustin (Ledbury Civic & District Society)
Chloe Garner (Ledbury Poetry Festival)

ALSO PRESENT: Angela Price – Town Clerk
Emma Jackson – Community Development Officer (CDO)

JM13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Beddoes-Davis, Robert Vaughan (Honorary Chair of The John Masefield Society), Caroline Magnus (Committee Member of The John Masefield Society and Great Niece of John Masefield) and Charles Masefield.

JM14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

JM15 DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Clerk advised members of the amendments to the Terms of Reference to reflect the discussions at the working party held on 28 August 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the revised Terms of Reference be approved, subject to point 6 being amended to read as follows –

- ***The timeframe to establish a John Masefield memorial is not expected to exceed a three-year period.***
- ***The memorial is to be dedicated to John Masefield and no other poets at this stage.***

JM17 ELECTION OF NON-COUNCIL MEMBERS TO THE JOHN MASEFIELD WORKING PARTY

Chloe Garner declined to be an elected member of the Working Party at this time, advising that the Board of The Poetry Festival are due to meet on 7 October, at which it is anticipated that The Poetry Festival will discuss this project. Chloe advised that she would report back on how The Poetry Festival would wish to be involved in the project following that meeting. Councillor Sims

welcomed engagement from The Poetry Festival and noted it was an important element to the progress of the project.

Councillor Morris hoped that Tim Keyes would be involved for similar reasons.

The Clerk advised members that she had received email correspondence from The John Masefield Society who had advised they would *'very much like to be associated with the current plans.'*

Additionally, Caroline Magnus emailed on 22 September as follows:

"I would like to confirm my interest in joining the Working Party for this John Masefield memorial project ... I am John Masefield's great niece and also a Committee member of the John Masefield Society. My grandfather was next in age to John Masefield and my mother (nee Masefield) spent part of her early childhood in Ledbury with her great Aunt and Uncle at the Priory. I gave the John Masefield's annual lecture in 2018 on the subject of the relationship between the two brothers. Much of it focused on their childhood and the years spent growing up in Ledbury before John was sent away to sea. As a member of the family, I am delighted to know that a commemoration of this sort is being considered. I am concerned that both the Family and the John Masefield Society should be involved in decisions relating to the form, shape or design of any commemoration that is proposed, and would be grateful for the opportunity to speak to the Working Party about this in November ... I would also ask that no firm decisions are taken on this before that meeting."

Members welcomed this update and noted that they looked forward to meeting members of the John Masefield Society at the next meeting of the working party.

Councillor Morris hoped that future meetings will see more and regular representation from the local community, and that invitations continued to be sent to those individuals referred to in minute no. JM07. Members agreed that this was key to the progress of the project, and especially formal representation from the local schools.

JM18 TO APPROVE AND SIGN NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WORKING PARTY HELD ON 28 AUGUST 2022

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Working Party, held on 28 August 2022, be approved and signed as a correct record.

JM19 UPDATE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON REGARDING ANY POTENTIAL CONTROVERSIES RELATING TO JOHN MASEFIELD

The Clerk advised members that Dr Philip Errington had replied to her letter. In his response, he stated:

“I write as Masefield’s bibliographer ... I have also edited of Masefield’s work ... for a number of ... publishers. I am also the librarian and archivist of The John Masefield Society. I have received fellowships from the University of Texas and the Bodleian Library to research Masefield, have lectured widely on the writer, and am also a visiting research associate with the Department of English Language and Literature at University College London state categorically that there are no concerns known to me regarding John Masefield. He does, of course, represent many of the beliefs of the early twentieth century, but there is nothing unique to him that should over concern. Indeed, one might find in Masefield an early supporter of rights for women (a subject on which he lectured and wrote before the First World War). If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.”

All members gratefully welcomed this update. Councillor Sims recommended that there should be on-going communication with Dr Errington to keep abreast of ongoing research. The Clerk advised that she would continue communications with Dr Errington, as well as The John Masefield Society, and all other correspondence of significance. Councillor Morris requested that The Clerk also contact Peter Carter, who had previously chaired The John Masefield Society to update him regarding this correspondence from Dr Errington and assuage any concerns regarding the matter of Masefield’s will. The CDO advised that a copy of a notable person’s will would usually be held on archive, and therefore it may be worth asking The John Masefield Society for access to it.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1. That the Clerk contacts Dr Errington specifically on the subject of being informed on emerging research about John Masefield**
- 2. That the Clerk writes to Peter Carter to inform him as matter of courtesy of the correspondence received from Dr Errington.**
- 3. That the Clerk contacts The John Masefield Society regarding access to a copy of the will to share with members of this Working Party and those involved henceforth for the purposes of this project.**

JM20 TIMESCALES AND PROVISIONAL PROJECT BUDGET

Members reviewed the timescales and provisional paper budget that had previously been submitted to the Environment and Leisure Committee at the request of the John Masefield Task and Finish Group. Members noted that a working party had been established, as per point one. Members then worked through a more detailed project brief for Phase 1.

Members agreed that building community engagement and raising awareness of John Masefield's breadth of poetry, his life and specific connection to Ledbury was a primary purpose of Phase 1. Members also wished to engage and involve the community in a practical creative response to his work, including amongst those who were not yet familiar with his work.

It was agreed that engagement did not have to happen just in the form of creative workshops, methods of engagement could be adapted dependent on the audience e.g. a classroom specific project for young people would be different to a broader local community engagement idea. The creative responses of Phase 1 would then be amassed and used to inspire and inform what a lasting memorial would eventually be.

Chloe Garner asked for clarification on what a lasting memorial would be and the process to deciding on it. Councillor Sims advised that Phase 1 was a preparatory phase; establishing early active community engagement was a key part of the Council's role before the project became too defined e.g., while a final lifelike sculpture might be the view of some as a suitable memorial, wider members of the community may consider something different.

Consultation and community inspiration was important, and would allow new ideas to emerge, and for wider voices to be heard. Chloe Garner advised that a set of simple workshops on a response to a specific poem, for example, could result in a set of lovely personal poems but would not necessarily help define a final memorial to John Masefield. She agreed with members that enabling a creative response would build enthusiasm, and establish a baseline for the project, and that many people are currently unaware of the breadth of his work.

It was suggested that workshops in school settings should be memorable so that children would want to talk about it with friends and family, as well as working with the schools to facilitate communication of the project with its stakeholders.

Members concluded that creative workshops could take place in schools and at The Poetry House, subject to their agreement. Chloe Garner advised that The Poetry House would readily welcome being a venue, as providing the space and enabling its use for, by and with the local community was a key part of The Poetry's Festival existing strategy. Members considered using other local spaces like The Burgage Hall or the Community Centre.

Members then discussed the target number of participants in Phase 1, and from what sections of the local community these would be drawn. Following comprehensive discussions, members concluded that in Phase 1 the total target number of participants would be 1500, through a variety of means explored below.

It was agreed that creative community workshops would not suffice as the only means of engagement. Chloe Garner wondered if the Working Party had considered other forms of engagement to support mass engagement, for example the Clerk suggested doing something on World Book Day. Chloe suggested using a method that would capture imaginations and enable heightened publicity, especially in local media because it had not been done in Ledbury before. Councillor Beddoes-Davis (in absentia) wished to advise the Working Party of a group called Two Faced Dance that had undertaken a street performance of Masefield's Christmas novel – Box of Delights. Councillor Morris especially welcomed this suggestion because it reflected his own ambition for theatrical performances to be an element of this phase. Members considered if this could be included in the already planned Christmas lights' switch on, planned for 27 November, and asked The Clerk to investigate if this was possible. It was suggested that if the two Faced Dance were interested in performing at the Christmas Lights Switch-on a soft launch of the Masefield project could run alongside the event.

It was agreed that publicity would need to be developed in time and approved and the Clerk advised that funding for this could be available from the "Events Budget". Volunteers could also help distribute leaflets to inform why this element was included in the Christmas Lights' Switch On event.

The CDO advised that there were other opportunities like the 30-Day Creative Challenge which takes place in January every year which offers opportunities for mass engagement. Chloe Garner advised that specific expertise on mass engagement participation might also be necessary. The Clerk suggested that Ledbury Town Council's social media could also be used to promote John Masefield's poetry with a regularly scheduled post sharing his work, and this would help enable feedback which in turn could be collated.

Members asked The Clerk to consider what existing staff resources were available and if additional ones needed to be factored in specifically for this project.

Members discussed the timetable for Phase 1 and recommended that Phase 1 be completed by the end of the Easter holidays 2023 but were mindful that if this timetable was not met then by the end of Summer 2023 should be the next goal. It was felt that completing workshops in schools by the end of late Autumn 2022 was probably too ambitious and unrealistic.

Members agreed that a recommendation be taken forward to the Economy and Planning Committee to seek quotes from specialist organisations and/or individuals who could help facilitate and advise on these workshops. Councillor

Sims asked Chloe Garner if The Poetry Festival could help provide a list of people to contact. It was suggested that the John Masefield Society also be contacted in respect of this. Councillor Sims advised that different facilitators may be employed dependent on the audience to be engaged.

The Economy and Planning Committee would also need to consider budget allocation for this project. The Clerk advised that there is some existing funding that may be used in the 2022/23 financial year and she agreed to discuss this separately with the Chair of Economy and Planning, as well as a possible application to Awards for All for funding towards the public engagement.

Councillor Sims advised that if the timescales set out above were to be met then external resources would be required, and the budget should reflect this. Councillor Sims also asked that consideration be given to appointing an overall project manager given Ledbury Town Council's existing staff arrangements. The Clerk agreed to explore this and provide a clear brief to the Economy and Planning Committee.

Members agreed that evaluation should also be built into the project from the outset, as it would help with drawing down funding at subsequent phases. The CDO advised that having external independent evaluation is key in enabling projects to develop and be more self-sustaining. This is an area that the John Masefield Society, and especially Dr Errington might also be able to advise on. Evaluation would therefore need to be considered as part of the budget provision.

Members agreed that evaluation would demonstrate impact; recording the project in the form of photographs etc. would help provide evidence of the project as it progressed. Members suggested that a specialist film company be approached to make a film of Phase 1. The Clerk agreed that officers would follow up on this.

Members agreed that a ballpark overall budget figure of £10-£15k for Phase 1 was accurate. Councillor Sims suggested that involving volunteers may help reduce costs e.g., leaflet design, distributing local publicity. The Clerk advised that the budget needed to be as detailed as possible with 3 quotes received, or alternatively she could ask the Economy and Planning Committee to agree a ceiling figure of £15k on Phase 1, with the caveat that if this figure was being neared, the Working Party would return to the Committee for further consideration.

Members noted that timescales were a concern. The Clerk agreed to review these and report back to the Working Party on what a realistic timescale would be.

Members also discussed how information boards would be included in Phase 1. They concluded that these would better sit in Phase 2 and agreed to explore these at a later stage. Alternative forms of sharing information could also be explored. Christine Tustin advised that Ledbury Civic and District Society might support here with a special event on the Life and Work of John Masefield.

Ledbury Library is also an existing source of information. Councillor Morris advised that the information boards should be an ongoing discussion for the Working Party.

Members also noted the current cost of living crisis and the impact this might have on the viability of this project. They were sensitive to the wider demands being placed on residents and by extension, council budgets. Members noted that the project would be mainly funded externally. Councillor Sims advised therefore community engagement is vital – this project is something the Council is facilitating for everyone in the Town and is a means to bring everyone together and boost tourism, and by extension the local economy to the benefit of all.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1. That the project be split into three phases, and that the first phase begins now and runs until end of Easter holidays 2023 preferably, and no later than the end of summer 2023.**
- 2. That phases have the following distinct objectives:**
 - Phase One: Raises awareness and develops engagement in the local community; acts as a preparatory phase for phase 2**
 - Phase Two: Defines a lasting memorial and secures funding for it**
 - Phase Three: Delivers lasting memorial and considers legacy project**
- 3. That Phase One aims to engage 1500 participants**
- 4. That Phase One includes:**
 - Mass engagement initiatives**
 - Creative Community Workshops**
 - Social media campaign**
 - Evidence gathering for Phase 2**
- 5. That the project is soft-launched at the Christmas Lights Switch-On event (27 November 2022) subject to the availability of 2Faced Dance company and that the Clerk reports back to the Working Party on the feasibility of this timescale**
- 6. That volunteers be engaged to help with the operational elements of the project e.g., distribution of leaflets, publicity**
- 7. That independent evaluation is included in the project**
- 8. That a digital film company is appointed to record the project**
- 9. That The Clerk provides the Economy and Planning Committee with a plan for marketing this project**

10. That the Economy and Planning Committee instructs The Clerk to seek quotes from specialist organisations and/or individuals who could help facilitate and advise on the community workshops
11. That the Clerk prepares a separate paper for the Economy and Planning Committee to consider the appointment of a project manager to oversee and/or undertake many of the elements listed above, while providing additional expertise and experience to support timely progress
12. That the Economy and Planning Committee allocates a budget with a ceiling figure of £15k to Phase One of this project

JM21 REVISED DRAFT NOTICE OF INTENT

Members reviewed the draft notice of intent. Councillor Morris requested that the reference to specific monies be removed. Councillor Sims and The Clerk advised that for fundraising and engagement purposes, some general reference should remain. Councillor Sims requested that a more proactive approach to seeking donations be included, as the Council's budget would not be the sole source of funding. Councillor Sims suggested that the Notice of Intent should clarify Phase 1's primary purpose is to inform the structure of Phase 2 and Phase 3.

RESOLVED:

That officers review the Notice of Intent and distribute it via email in the interim for review.

JM22 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that the next meeting of the John Masefield Working Party is scheduled for 25 November at 10.00 am in Ledbury Town Council Offices.

Signed Dated
(Chair)