

Jawbone Arch – too fragile to return to The Meadows

Edinburgh councillors have agreed to replicate a pair of whale bones which stood in The Meadows for more than 120 years after the originals were deemed “too fragile” to return.

The Jawbones brought to Edinburgh as part of an 1887 science and art exhibition, were built using the upper and lower jawbones of a whale.

The council removed the historic structure for restoration work in 2014, however further damage was reported following an attempt to return it to its original site last year.

The fate of the Jawbone Arch was discussed at the Culture and Communities Committee on Tuesday when council officers said reinstating the landmark to an outdoor location is “unviable” due to their fragility and the risks and costs associated with erecting the Arch.

Noting there is “significant public interest” in the giant fossils, the conservation of which is part-funded by personal donations and external grants, they suggested spending around £130,000 on creating and installing a bronze replica of the bones in the same spot in The Meadows.

Officers said this would “ensure a memorial to a much-loved local feature, while providing a solution to the current outstanding concerns,” according to officers.

The cost of moving, installing and storing the original jawbones is estimated at £30,000.

David Patterson, Collections Manager for Edinburgh Museums and Galleries, said: "The restoration of the Meadows Jawbone has been a very turbulent journey thus far but we have reached a stage now where as officers we feel we need guidance on how we move forward."

Conservative councillor Max Mitchell questioned what the council's plans are for the iconic arch, asking if it will be displayed publicly.

Mr Patterson responded: "It certainly is our intention to retain the original jawbones and to find some suitable location inside to re-erect them. That would preserve them in an environment that would remain stable throughout the year, you could control visitor access to them."

Cllr Mark Brown suggested National Museum of Scotland as a suitable location, adding: "It's such a magnificent structure and that would give it a place for a safe and controlled environment."

Mr Patterson said displaying the bones at the Chambers Street museum is "an option we're looking to explore".

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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Jawbone Walk, The Meadows

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