

Replica “jawbone arch” plans for the Meadows questioned

Council plans to replace the whale bones which stood in The Meadows for over 120 years with a bronze replica have raised concerns in the community.

The historic jawbones – which were removed for restoration works in 2014 – were deemed too fragile to return by experts last year.

But now the council says it would be “unviable” for them to go back on public display either indoors or outdoors – and options are being explored for artists and sculptors to incorporate the bones into a new installation.

Officials previously unveiled plans for a £130k bronze replica of the original ‘Jawbone Arch’ for The Meadows, however some locals are uncertain and have raised concerns about a lack of input from the community.

The issue was raised at a council meeting by Jim Orr from Friends of the Meadows and Bruntsfield Links.

“I don’t feel a lot of love for this proposal in the community,” he told the Culture and Communities Committee on Thursday (August 10).

“We’ve discussed it at various meetings, we’ve reached out to various people – I know a lot of people who grew up in the 60s and 70s in the Meadows and they know that location and it’s a much-loved artefact – and it’s not clear that we can maintain that level of love and support by having a bronze replica.”

Mr Orr said a many locals felt the arch was now “something from the past that perhaps should remain in the past”.

He added: "People are concerned about the idea of bronze, maybe bronze looks expensive and wouldn't fit into the organic setting of the previous one."

A report before councillors said insufficient funds remain for creating a bronze replica. Funding sources are being looked into from organisations including Historic Environment Scotland and the report added if "public interest is strong" then a crowdfunder could also be launched.

"If successful in erecting a bronze replica, the Council would bear the cost of ongoing maintenance," the report said.

The committee agreed to widen scope of project to consider other materials other than bronze following Mr Orr's deputation.

Future options could see cross-sections of the jawbones preserved and put on display in one of the city's museums or galleries, the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop using them as part of a new piece or Jupiter Artland sculpture park installing the bones "as part of the creative landscape".

The report continued: "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.

"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."

The council will continue exploring "ideas for alternative and creative conservation" before any final decision is made.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

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3D digital image of how the bones would be replicated by a bronze sculpture. Image: Edinburgh City Council.



Whale Bones currently. Image; Edinburgh City Council.