

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Report to	County Hall Museum Sub-Committee
Meeting date	09 September 2026
Report author	Dan Sancisi
Agenda item	6.2

Jurassic Marine Reptiles Project Report

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update committee on developments concerning the Jurassic Marine Reptiles (JMR) in the Attic Galleries or an alternative location.

2 Summary

- 2.1 Updated information about JMR 2028 that will help develop the Museum's profile and appeal to visitors, also exploring the option of a different site.

3 Action required

- 3.1 Members are requested to note the report. (No decision required, report to be noted)

4 Link to strategic plan and objectives

- 4.1 ***KO2 To develop a resilient, sustainable town which will provide a home for residents now and in the future.***

4.1.1 The Museum's presence in Abingdon County Hall sustains the condition of the building, maintaining it for future generations, enhancing its town centre context by articulating the history of Abingdon.

4.1.2 Creating a new exhibition of the rare fossil finds will attract new audiences *and increase footfall into Abingdon benefiting the local economy.*

5 Background

- 5.1 Your Officers continue to research the viability of installing new marine reptile fossils in the Attic floor of Abingdon Museum.

- 5.2 The structural loading survey carried out on 3 November 2025 concluded that there is sufficient loading capacity to install the proposed large Pliosaur case in the last gallery of the Museum Attic.

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- 5.3** Orchard fundraising proposes a ten-day consultancy (one day a week) to prepare the Museum for an application proposal, with further input following the creation of a document and progression to submissions.
- 5.4** The cost of this first step is £4,200 which has been budgeted for in research and development.
- 5.5** Your Officers await the completion of a loan agreement before continuing with further steps but await detailed inventory of elements for the specimens and accredited valuations.

6 Key information and options

- 6.1** The key specimens of Plesiosaur and Pliosaur are currently stored at Portsmouth University.
- 6.2** The Pliosaur skeleton is being actively researched for a PhD at the University of Portsmouth by a student called Eddie Bartlett, under supervision of Prof. David Martill, Dr. Roy Smith and Dr. Judyth Sassoon.
- 6.3** These specimens complement a collection which includes lots of marine reptile remains (ichthyosaur, plesiosaur and pliosaurs), fish, shark, turtle, crocodylomorphs and even dinosaur bones.
- 6.4** The whole collection will be on display in the proposed permanent exhibition.
- 6.5** Next steps include creating a loan agreement for the specimens between the Museum and Dr James Etienne, with a caveat that if project funding is not achieved either party have the option of withdrawing from the agreement.
- 6.6** The basis of the agreement is a standard form currently used by the Museum attached as and appendices; your Officers await an inventory of component parts and insurance valuations to progress completion of the agreement.
- 6.7** In parallel with the above, your Officers are developing a survey to garner public support for JMR.
- 6.8** The aim is to demonstrate a strategic benefit for the local community and general public.
- 6.9** Your Officers are also exploring an alternative location for Jurassic Marine Reptiles experience, that being 'Abbey House' currently operated by Vale of the White Horse.
- 6.10** This option is a possibility because during the Local Government Reorganisation, Abingdon Town Council may consider options for other uses at Abbey House.
- 6.11** Although this is a thought experiment to weigh up benefits of this option, they

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include:

- 6.12 Lift access to the exhibition, (or ground floor access) providing the kind of access and inclusivity that is not currently possible at Abingdon County Hall Museum.
- 6.13 The ability to isolate the exhibition area to apply entry admission fees easily, create a one-way flow through the space exiting via a retail outlet offering a different level of experience and commercial opportunity.
- 6.14 The blank canvas of an empty floor space allows more efficient procurement and application of standard equipment and display items that would otherwise be bespoke due to the listed status of the County Hall building with its difficult access issues, thus reducing costs.
- 6.15 Your Officers will explore this possibility further over the following months to ascertain viability.

7 Climate change/green implications

- 7.1 No additional climate change / green implications to report.

8 Financial/budget implications

- 8.1 There are no additional financial implications regarding the current budget in this report.

9 HR implications

- 9.1 There are no current HR implications.

Dan Sancisi, Museum Manager, 28 August 2026