

For Council: 13 March 2023 APPENDIX 6

OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT

1. Civic Matters: Harriet Chatwin, Civic Officer

The Mayor and Sheriff's first charity event of 2023, a Valentines Luncheon, took place on Sunday 12 February. Following a service at Wade Street Church, led by Minister Alan Weaver, a total of 64 guests joined the Civic party for a traditional Sunday lunch in the Guildhall.

The event proved very successful & guests were entertained by Jazz duo Nick Dewhurst & Tom Moore. A raffle & small auction was also held. The whole afternoon raised just under £900 for the Mayor & Sheriff's Charities, Pathway Project & Sebbie Hall Kindness Foundation – a popular event and a resounding success.



The annual Pancake Races and opening of the Shrovetide Fair took place on Tuesday 21 February, much to the delight of the large crowds that gathered.

Watched from the dais by the Civic party, competitors raced along Bore Street pausing to flip their pancakes before crossing the finishing line in front of the Guildhall. A total of 54 competitors took part on the day with the winner of the coveted ladies' trophy being Hollie Nelson, who works for Connells Estate Agents. She will now have her name etched upon the special Golden Pancake Day trophy.

The winner of the Gents race was Issa Husain from EPO Solicitors, who won a cash prize of £30.

Winning the Under 10's Races was Rosie Colley, aged 6. Rosie was presented with a certificate, medal and a £25 Entertainer voucher. A big well done to Rosie & all the children who took part, who each received a special 'Mayor Bear' pin to remember the occasion.



Victorious in the Mascots Race was Austin Brauser, who ran dressed as a pizza! He scooped a £30 prize.

The Civic party then processed to the Market Square where the Town Crier read the traditional proclamation giving notice of the Court of Piepowder before the Mayor officially opened the Shrovetide fair, inviting some of the local children present to claim their free ride, including a ride for the Mayor & Sheriff themselves, in the spinning cars fairground ride.

Refreshments were then served in the Guildhall including the traditional Simnel Cake and Cllr John Smith who gave a toast to "The Old Fair and Pancake Races".



Richard Hunt, one of the City Council's Mace Bearers, recently attended the Guild of Mace Bearers Annual Conference in Kent.

The Guild is a membership organisation for those experts in civic protocol who assist Civic Heads to carry out their ceremonial duties and is an excellent source of professional knowledge. Although there are 140 members not all were able to attend, however the Deputy Lieutenant of Kent, Major (Retd) Dennis Bradley BEM, DL was there to support the Guild. Also, in attendance were both the Mayor of Ramsgate, Cllr Raushan Arawas and Mayor of Margate, Cllr Heather Keen, all of whom were present for the photo call and Gala Dinner.



The packed programme included the installation of a new Prime Warden, Clifford East, for the forthcoming year as well as other officers of the Committee, a training session on social media and a lively Question and Answer discussion. The event proved to be very informative on matters of Civic protocol and was an excellent opportunity to network with fellow Mace Bearers from other local authorities and share information.

The highlight of the event was the guest speaker; Ugbana Oyet who is the Serjeant at Arms in the House of Commons (pictured left, with Richard Hunt). In office since 2019, he shared the vast amount of experience he has gained during this time which has seen the death of the Monarch and three changes of Prime Minister in one year.

At the time of writing this report, preparations are ongoing for the Michael Fabricant & Arthur Price of England School Speaking Competition to be held on Friday 3 March. We are fortunate in that five schools wish to take part this year.

Planning also continues for the Entertainment & Tea for the over 70's on Monday 13 March at Curborough Community Centre & the Mayor and Sheriff's final Charity event on the Friday 24 March, a charity Barn Dance evening. Reports on these events will be included in the next officers' report.

2. Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum: Jo Wilson, Museums and Heritage Officer

The Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum welcomed 1490 visitors in January. This represents the busiest January on record for the Museum, with a 61% percentage increase on visitor numbers in January 2022 and a 74% increase on average visitor numbers in the five years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. A further 3,900 people engaged directly with the Museum online.

In addition to the general visitors to the Museum, the Birthplace team also led school sessions for 102 pupils. Year 1 pupils came from St Michaels Primary School and Charnwood Primary Academy. A year 4 group from Willows Primary (pictured) visited as part of a trial of a new 'Lichfield Heritage Safari', a collaboration between the Birthplace, Lichfield Cathedral and Erasmus Darwin House to offer a whole day visit for schools to the city. The trial was successful, and a further booking has been made for March. Museum Support Officer (MSO) Lisa Hand has led on the partnership.



January was a period for building care tasks, which included the installation of a new fire alarm system, using wireless smoke detectors which meet current fire regulations with minimal impact on the historic fabric.

A replacement rug was purchased for the Birth Room, and the skip hired for the Guildhall and Donegal House also enabled accumulated rubbish to be cleared from the Museum.

Research visits to the Museum library included an academic from the University of Birmingham using the letter collection, and an independent researcher writing on Tolkien's Lichfield visit for a Chinese audience. A partnership with the Staffordshire County Council Archives & Heritage Service will see facsimiles of Birthplace collection material in a handling collection at the History Access Point in St Mary's.



Staff training included the MHO attending a session organised by the National Archives on managing archives within museum collections, the MSO undertaking Social Media training, and Attendant Sarah Dale completing PAT testing training. All members of the Birthplace staff team have also undertaken Safeguarding training.

Preparations and publicity for events in Spring were underway, with half-term activities in February and a women's history programme for March, including the premiere of 'Tea with Mrs Thrale?' by Museum Attendant and resident performer Christine Genders (pictured). The event will be offered both at the Museum and as an online performance to ensure it is accessible, and online tickets have already been purchased by an international audience.



The MHO also supported the project to re-install the bust of Johnson on Bird Street and the continuing City Plaques work. Planning permission for the Francis Barber plaque was granted in late January and is now in production, with plans for the installation and an associated event underway.

3. Open Spaces and Tree Management: Nigel Boden, Open Spaces Officer

The new bollards have now been installed around the boundary of Festival Gardens to discourage unauthorised vehicular access. An additional sowing of wildflower seeds will be carried out in the next few weeks, doubling the width of the wildflower bed planted in 2022.

Four extra benches have been installed around the site to provide additional seating.



Following discussions at the LDC mowing panel, it has been agreed that Festival Gardens will also be one of the sites where part of the area is given over to wilding. The proposal includes pathways mown through the wilding area to allow residents and visitors to experience the wild areas, rather

than simply look upon them as was the case with the previous wilding area in the Gardens. Signage will be provided to advise visitors of the importance of such areas.

The other open space selected for this pilot scheme is open space 10 at Nether Stowe.

As previously reported concerns were raised by one of LCC tree surgeons regarding a copper beech at the Friary Clock Tower Open Space. A subsequent report confirmed root disease and a recommendation that the tree be removed. Upon this action was taken to have the tree removed. A replacement sapling has been planted.



Other matters progressed/completed since the last report and in addition to routine inspections includes:

- Quotations obtained for repairs to the tarmac pathways in Heather Gardens
- Investigations and quotation regarding the feasibility of using bollards to prevent unauthorised parking on the small area of LCC land opposite St Chad's Church and turning that area into a small wildflower meadow.
- Further discussions with Leomansley Area Residents Association and Staffordshire County Council regarding the re-siting of bus shelters that do not currently serve an active route
- Temporary repair and subsequent longer-term repair following reports of slabs being stolen from open space 10 at Nether Stowe, causing a potential significant hazard
- Discussions with Cllr Harrison and LDC regarding a small area of Friary Remains to be given over to Ukrainian families for planting
- Tree work at Christchurch (phase 3 of 3) and St Michaels (completion of scheduled works following previous report and further investigations).

4. Guildhall/Boley Park Community Hall: Helen Winter, Guildhall Bookings Officer

Regular hirers have returned after the Christmas break. Since my last report, 36 meetings have been held in various rooms in the Guildhall. A local marketing company also held a business conference in the main hall.

The Guildhall was also part of the recent Lichfield Arts free music event in the city centre which saw over 50 music acts performing at free concerts held at 15 locations throughout the city centre over a weekend in January. Unfortunately, their Beer Festival was cancelled in February.



Lichfield District Council held a public information event on the new City Centre Pedestrianisation on Tuesday 17 January. A further event is booked for the Guildroom on 1 March 12:00 – 4.30pm, and another in Boley Park on 9 March from 6.00pm – 7.15pm (registration with LDC is required before attending the Boley Park event due to limited numbers).

Staffordshire County Council also have a public information event at the end of February in the main hall and Ashmole Room.

A 70th Birthday Party has been held and we have a 40th Birthday party booked. A Funeral Wake was also held at the end of January, and another the beginning of March. The Worshipful Company of Smiths Court and Feast was held on 28 February.

We have also had 2 market research bookings and another is scheduled.



An annual stock take of items in the Guildhall has been completed, as well as the annual PAT testing, and a tidy of the storage areas including disposal of rubbish.

Recent Civic events included the Mayor & Sheriffs Valentine Sunday Lunch and reception following the Shrovetide Pancake Races.

Boley Park Community Hall

Enquiries have been consistent for children's birthday parties. A phone line and broadband has been installed in readiness for a new monitored fire alarm system and CCTV to be installed in the Easter holidays. Following a Management Committee meeting, prices have been increased from 1 April to cover increased bills.

5. Markets: Clive Read, Markets Officer

The Markets Officer has continued to work with the Market Traders and is making headway with the cooperation and communication between LCC and Traders, in particular monitoring absences, holiday and filling available pitches.

The Traders have all been informed of the increase in pitch fees, effective from 1 April 2023 (resolved by Council on 23 January 2023) and to date only one Trader has made representations expressing their disappointment at the increase.

In early January a homeless person took refuge in the Market Square Toilet Block. They were removed from the area but due to the abuse that the Markets Officer received, the Police were informed in case of any further disturbances. In order to prevent further issues, the door closures on the toilet doors have been replaced to ensure the area is secure and all traders have been reminded to keep the doors closed. New signage has been added in this area to reinforce security and the correct use of these facilities. In addition, the City Council has joined the City Centre *Pub Watch* and *Shop Watch* scheme. The Markets Officer has been equipped with a two-way radio which provides direct access to the Police on duty and the City centre CCTV control room. It also allows all those participating in the scheme to share information and flag up potential issues or troublesome individuals.

The design of the General Market poster was agreed by the Markets Working Group in January 2023. We have now received the posters and these are being displayed in the frames that are on the Market Square. A third frame has been installed enabling all three markets to be advertised simultaneously: General Markets; Vegan Market and the Producers Market.

In addition, vinyl wraps of the new posters are due to be installed on all City Council bus stops by early March. It is hoped the bright, eye-catching design will attract members of the public's attention. The poster has been designed with consideration for people who have sight impairment and people with dyslexia.

Social Media

The Markets Officer continues to promote and update social media with events held on the Market Square, Minster Pool Walk and showcase the current General Market Traders. The aim is to give all traders exposure on Facebook and Twitter, as well as an overview of other events taking place. Members may also wish to note that the Markets Officer has recently completed an online course in Social Media.

Producers' Market

On 5 February 2023 the Producers Market returned after the festive break with a total of 29 stalls selling the usual variety of produce, gifts and craft items. The Market was very busy and traders report a successful day with a good footfall, photographs follow overleaf.



Tuesday Market Update

A small number of pitches remain available for the Tuesday market. Enquiries have been received from a few new casual traders that have been contacted. One of the new traders joined us on Tuesday 21 February, Rustic Ideas, a stall that showcases bespoke wooden items.



Friday Market Update

A new casual trader joined the Friday market on the 27 January. JoJo's Cakes offer a wide range of cakes and brownies which so far has proved to be a popular addition. This leaves only two remaining pitches available, which it is hoped will be occupied soon. On Friday 17 February, due to high winds, we did have trading from vehicles and without top and side sheets. This proved to be a positive decision that went down well with traders, especially those with perishable items.

Saturday Market Update

The Saturday market is currently full. Officers are working with traders for all 3 days to ensure that they give adequate notice for non-attendance which will provide an opportunity to plan ahead and invite casual traders who have agreed to attend at short notice.



Market Square Bookings - Non-Market Days

New licences have now been signed by the Fish and Chip van and the Ice Cream Van for 2023. The Ice Cream trader has already paid in full for his trading year which reduces the administrative burden of producing monthly invoices. Bookings for Market Square included Leons Holidays on 15 & 22 February. Photographs from their first visit are below:



St Giles Hospice have also confirmed that they will be using the market Square for their Evening Solstice Walk in June. This is a well-known event in the City that will hopefully boost the charity's presence and raise much needed funds. Enquiries continue to be received from both Casual Traders and Market Square bookings.

6. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

The Deputy Town Clerk was pleased to represent the City Council recently at a Diversity and Inclusion Focus Group held at Lichfield Cathedral. The Cathedral invited various stakeholders and members of the community to share their experiences as they compile a roadmap for Inclusion and Diversity which will be shared with attendees later in the year.

In addition, the Deputy has been working with the Town Clerk on various staffing matters which has included amongst other things, identifying training needs of individual members of staff. The Deputy Town Clerk has provided secretariat support at the Markets Working Group, the Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Working Party and full Council.