

## For Council: 27 January 2025 APPENDIX 6

### OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT

#### 1. Civic Matters: Harriet Chatwin, Civic Officer

The Mayor's Carols for Christmas Service was held in the Guildhall on Tuesday 3 December. The service was once again led by the Mayor's Chaplain, Reverend Ian Hayter and this year, as a joint service with the Chair of Lichfield district Council, Cllr Ann Hughes.

The story of the birth of Jesus Christ was told by the Chair & Sheriff, Cathy Wood with thoughtfully selected poems read by the Mayor & Deputy Leader of the City Council, Cllr Jacob Marshall including Carol Ann Duffy's 'The Christmas Truce'.

Prayers were led at the end of the Service by Warren Bardsley, representing Lichfield City of Sanctuary. The service included a mixture of traditional carols, including 'O Holy Night' and 'Joy to the World'. Once again, we were joined by Lichfield Tuneless Choir who came prepared with their Santa Hats & words to acapella 'Gaudete'. They were a pleasure to watch and greatly enjoyed by the assembled audience. Also present once again was Dudley Ray, along with the combined choir of St Michael's & St John's, Wall, choirs who truly enhanced the event and created a wonderful festive atmosphere to the start of the season.



The evening concluded with former Lichfield City Councillor, Tony Thompson, serving his top-secret recipe of mulled wine (orange juice for the drivers) to all the guests, accompanied by a warm mince pie. Generous donations were received on the night for the Mayor, Chair & Sheriff's charities, totalling just over £200. This will be split between Staffordshire Blood Bikes, Methodist Homes & Lichfield Foodbank

At the time of preparing this report, we are pleased to share that the Mayor has attended and supported 45 engagements in the City, the Deputy Mayor has attended 15 events representing the Mayor and the Sheriff has attended 23 events. Both the Mayor & Sheriff are continuing to raise money in the New Year for their chosen charities.

As mentioned in December's Officer's Report, the Mayor and Sheriff met with the winners of the Civic Christmas Card Competition in the Mayor's Parlour on Thursday 12 December. Accompanied by their parents, Emma Ballantyne (Christ Church C of E Primary School) & Cameron Woodley (The Friary High School) were presented with their framed Christmas Cards & Waterstones gift voucher.



Preparations continue for forthcoming events including a church service at St Peter & St Paul's on Sunday 19 January & the Annual Pancake races taking place on Bore Street on Tuesday 4 March.

## **2. Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum: Kimberley Biddle, Museums and Heritage Officer**

The Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum has welcomed 14,815 visitors thus far in the current financial year (April 2024 – end December 2025). The Birthplace remained open throughout the festive season, closing only on Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and New Year's Day. Following the holiday break, regular groups have resumed, including the Birthplace Book Club and the Writing Group.

Museum Attendants have had a busy start to the year, conducting guided tours in January and completing emergency first aid training. Birthplace volunteers have been researching and creating mini history presentations, set to be launched later in the year, as well as designing family craft activities for the upcoming school holidays.

The Birthplace team is in the final stages of preparing content for the new website, set to launch by 31 March. This content will feature new imagery designed to highlight the museum's collections, services, and activities. Robert Yardley photographed a recent school visit to showcase the museum's education offer, capturing vibrant images of pupils engaged in learning, exploration, and play (photos overleaf).



The Bookshop development project is advancing with the addition of new signage and a donations box. The updated exterior signage includes three eye-catching A-frames promoting both the museum and the bookshop. Two are positioned outside the entrance on Market Street, while the third is placed on Breadmarket Street. These vibrant blue A-frames have been designed to assist with wayfinding and encourage passersby to explore the shop.

The donations box (pictured below) has been acquired with the goal of encouraging more contributions and increasing average donation values. It is equipped with a self-service contactless card terminal, making it easy for visitors to contribute via both cash and digital payments. Positioned in the Bookshop near the entrance and exit,

the brightly coloured box is accompanied by a sign to attract attention and thank visitors for their support.

On 15 January, the Birthplace hosted historian and historical interpreter, Rik Sowden, for a sold-out lecture titled The War of the Three Kingdoms. Tickets were in high demand, with sales facilitated through our new online ticketing system. The new system offers customers the option to Gift Aid and donate during the booking process. It does not incur the Birthplace ticketing fees and is free to use.

Recent routine building maintenance included the annual servicing of the boiler, as well as inspection and testing of intruder and fire alarm systems and associated equipment. Remedial works on the boiler included repairs/replacement of the auto air-vents, flue, and fan, which has significantly improved the temperature and conditions in the building.



Quotes are being obtained to address dampness and damage to the Birthplace's exterior plinths, likely caused by capillary action in the underlying soft stonework which has been exacerbated by adverse weather conditions.

Repairs to address the water damage/staining in the Audio-Visual Room, caused by heavy rainfall in September, will be carried out in the warmer months once the room has fully dried and conditions have improved.

Upcoming events in February include a talk on 18th-century fashion, storytelling, and family craft activities during the half-term break.

### **3. Open Spaces: Nigel Boden, Open Spaces Officer and Jane Varley, Clerical Officer**

#### **Netherstowe (Site 11A)**

Various works are being undertaken to roadside trees. Crown lift over road, footpath and neighbouring property, remove major deadwood, ivy and epicormic growth, pruning etc

#### **Northern Plantation – (Site 1)**

Following storms earlier in December, some damage was reported within the Plantation (pictured). Paths have now been cleared of obstruction with fallen limbs left for biodiversity



#### **Bracken Close (Site 47B)**

Reduce and deadwood Robinia tree, plus removal of low Sycamore branches growing over driveway.

#### **Friary Wall Repairs**

Discussions continue with architects, contractors and Heritage England regarding the scheduled repairs to the Friary Wall. Historic England have now approved the stone sample provided, and this stone will be used for the repairs. It is hoped that work will begin on site on 31 March, allowing the worst of the cold winter weather to have passed.

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

- **Beaconfields (Site 15)** - Cobra brace fitted to pine tree
- **Wissage Road (Site 14C)** – Sycamore cut back to garden boundary
- **Netherbridge Avenue (Site 44A)** – Reduction of trees overhanging garden.

#### **4. Markets: Jeremy Williams, Markets Officer/Michelle Read, Office Administrator**

A full market is still being maintained on Tuesday, Fridays, and Saturdays. Any traders that have left, have been swiftly replaced from those on the waiting list.

All food stalls are still being monitored for standards of food hygiene and temperature of stock sold and stored on the market. As part of due diligence these are recorded and held for future reference. The Market Officer has updated his Food Hygiene and Safety Accreditation to Level 2 certification. The Environmental Health Officers at Lichfield District Council are being kept informed of any issues and any new food traders that join the market.

In addition to the usual market days, the Fruit and Veg stall is now standing every Wednesday. During the Christmas period a new trader, "*Poppies*" also stood on Mondays and Wednesdays selling Christmas wreaths and decorations.

On Friday 13 of December, BBC Radio WM breakfast reporter PJ Ellis visited the Market. The radio station was on a "*Twelve Days Of Christmas*" tour of local markets that runs across the West Midlands. After a walk through the market meeting the traders, P J was challenged by the Station Manager to find items from the Twelve Days of Christmas on the Market. This proved highly entertaining as he attempted to achieve his goal and provided an opportunity to speak to Traders who portrayed the Market in a positive, upbeat, and welcoming manner.

#### **Tuesday Market Update**

All available pitches on the Tuesday market have now been filled by casual traders. The turnover of traders on this market still remains quite high however, the waiting list maintained by Officers has proved effective in rapidly filling any spaces.

A new trader selling nightwear, socks and gloves had been standing as a casual in December but is hoping to become permanent in the New Year. Due to predicted high winds on 21 December the Tuesday market was restricted to trading from vehicles only.



#### **Friday Market Update**

Unfortunately, due to personal circumstances, two long standing traders on the Friday, market have decided to give up their pitches.

The pitches have been offered to some of the permanent Tuesday traders and will be filled in the New Year. The Markets Officer maintains a list of casual traders from all three markets that are invited to stand when permanent traders are absent or take holidays, this maintains a full market.

#### **Saturday Market Update**

The Saturday market also remains full. Again, the Markets Officer maintains a list of casual traders from all three markets that are invited to stand when permanent traders are absent or take holidays this maintains a full market.

Due to the predicted high winds the market on Saturday 7 December was cancelled and there was a restricted market on 21 December, again due to the inclement weather. Traders were offered the use of the Guildroom but opted to trade from vehicles on the Market Square.



### Christmas Lights Switch-On



Due to high winds on 24 November the Christmas Light Switch On event was postponed until 1 December. As a result the scheduled Festive Market had to be cancelled. Fortunately, the revised date meant that the Producers' Market, due to be on the Market Square, could be relocated to Minster Pool Walk.

The Market was officially opened by the Town Crier and comments from the public were positive with everyone enjoying the variety of stalls and entertainment. All fo the Traders who attended had an exceptional trading day, with some stall holders completely selling out of stock!



## Extra Market Days - Sunday 22 December & Monday 23 December

Due to the predicted high winds, the extra market due to take place on Sunday 22 of December had to be cancelled. On Monday December 23 a total of 12 traders stood, much to the delight of the Christmas Shoppers. All traders reported that they had a good day's trading.

## Vegan Market

The Vegan market runs on the third Sunday of the month. This is becoming increasingly popular with an average of 26 traders helping to bring something different on to the market square with a range of diverse stalls.

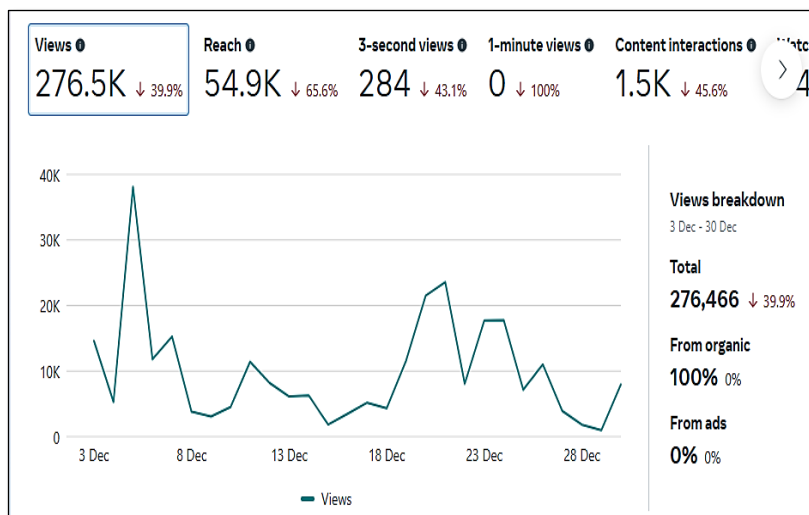
## Producers' Market

The Producers market, operated by CJ Events is held on the first Sunday of the month. This market is well supported by 30 traders standing and is immensely popular with customers, many revisiting every month.



## Social Media

All social media platforms maintain a good following with reach climbing. This is due to cross posting to LCC Facebook groups and help from other Facebook pages. The statistics show the number of followers on Facebook and Instagram. Officers are continuing to track numbers and posts that are most popular, focusing on specific traders. This has proven to be the most effective way to encourage new traders to join the market.



## Lichfield Food Festival 7 & 8 December

With the prediction of extremely high winds the organiser took the decision to cancel the festival on the 7 December, the event still went ahead on Sunday but some of the traders decided not to trade reducing the numbers that stood on the day.

## 5. Guildhall & Boley Park Community Hall: Helen Winter, Bookings Officer



Since my last report, during December the Guildhall has been busy. Regular hirers have met for their Christmas celebrations and we had bookings throughout the Christmas week. Three Christmas Concerts have taken place – Sinfonia held one at the beginning of December and then Lichfield Musical Youth theatre returned for two more Christmas Concerts.

Extra income is being generated by an educational group who are meeting in the building short term.

Twelve meetings have been held in various rooms.

A school visit organised by the Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum took place in the Guildroom. Although the Cells were not available to view, children were able to look around other areas of the Guildhall.

Commercial hirers have included four market research bookings, two craft fayres, and Lichfield Leather were booked in the during the weekend of the Food & Drink Festival for their usual handbag sales before Christmas.

Lichfield Arts held four concerts in December, including their last one of the year in the Guildhall on 20 December – Britpop United, which was well attended.

A Celebration Dinner was held just before Christmas and the Party Bingo returned on 22 December for their last booking of the year.



### Boley Park Community Hall

The Playscheme returned for two sessions a week during the Christmas holidays and generated additional income for the hall. Other bookings during December included four children's birthday parties, a family get-together, a stamp fayre and a craft fayre. The end of year accounts are now complete and have been submitted to the external auditor. Regular enquiries are being received for events to be held in 2025.

## 6. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

On 10 December, Support Staffordshire hosted the Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) Forum at the Guildhall. The Deputy Town Clerk was invited to give a presentation to the attendees to explain the role and responsibilities of the City Council which included a description of the Civic role.



The Sword and Mace were on display, which created a talking point as many people had not seen this precious regalia up close before. Councillor Colin Ball also informed the audience of the City Council's Grant award scheme and encouraged applications. There were several other presentations at the event from various organisations who spoke on such topics as Autism , Mental Health, and the Staffordshire Green Network. At the end of the presentations there was a chance to network over a cup of tea.

Following the Christmas Lights Switch On Event, a review meeting has taken place with the Council's Crowd Safety expert and Head of the security team. Comments were also invited from other agencies involved on the day, such as the Police. As with any large scale public event, there were areas that were identified for improvement and it was noted that an attendance of approximately 5,000 is close to the capacity of the market square. Overall it was felt that the event was well planned, operated safely and those attending enjoyed the spectacle.

The Deputy Town Clerk has also been working closely with the Guildhall Bookings Officer to review the pricing structure and hourly hire rates of the Guildhall, details of which are contained in the Town Clerk's Agenda report.

In addition the Deputy is planning for the Council's Annual Health and Safety Review in February and preparing an Agenda and associated reports for the next meeting of the Climate Change and Biodiversity Committee on 12 February.