

OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT

1. Civic Matters: Lucy Clarke, Civic Officer



On Saturday 8 August, as the Lichfield Cathedral Bells struck Middy, The Mayor, Cllr Mrs Deborah Baker greeted the High Sheriff of Staffordshire, Charles Bagot Jewitt DL at Lichfield Cathedral alongside the Dean of Lichfield, The Very Revd Adrian Dorber. The High Sheriff led a cycle ride to promote "Staycations" within the County of Staffordshire. The Sheriff, Dr Daryl Brown joined the cycle ride on the final day from Tamworth to Lichfield. The cycle ride took one week to complete starting on 1 August and finishing on 8

August at Blithfield Hall in Rugeley.

Recent and upcoming events have been scaled down this year due to the uncertainty with COVID-19, social distancing requirements and government guidance regarding large scale public events.

The 467th Sheriff's Ride took place on Saturday 5th September with a very different format to previous years. To honour the tradition, the Sheriff, Dr Daryl Brown and The Clerk of the Course, Mr Nick Sedgwick set off from the Guildhall in the Sheriff's own Riley vehicle to inspect the boundary of the City and visit the majority of landowners along



the route. A very small socially distanced gathering met in the Courtyard to the rear of Donegal House/Guildhall during the morning. Those attending included, The Mayor, Cllr Deborah Baker and Consort, Dr Steve Baker along with Council Group Leaders, Cllr Mark Warfield, Cllr Miles Trent and Cllr Dave Robertson. The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk were also in attendance and Deputy Mayor Councillor Robert Yardley took photographs of the occasion to add to his large archive of Sheriff's Ride photographs and

information. Everyone wished the Sheriff well before commencing the ride. No horses took part in the ride this year and the usual luncheon at Freeford Manor was cancelled.

The Civic Officer is currently preparing for the Samuel Johnson Birthday Celebrations and Remembrance Sunday. The Dr Johnson Birthday celebrations will also follow a very different format. The event will be marked by a small ceremony on the Friday evening on the Market Square with the traditional placing of a Laurel chaplet on the statue. To comply with government guidelines and to prevent large public gatherings the event will be invitation only.

Furthermore, the Mini Town Criers' Competition usually held on the Saturday during Heritage Weekend will not take place this year and The Johnson Society has confirmed that the Johnson Supper, usually held on the Saturday evening at the Guildhall, has sadly been cancelled.

The Civic Officer is currently working with Lichfield Cathedral and the Royal British Legion on the safest way to mark Remembrance Sunday.

The Civic Officer has also been assisting the Markets Officer both in terms of day to day market activities and the beginnings of a strategic review of the function.

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

The Birthplace Museum re-opened on July 14th with COVID-secure measures in place and the 'good to go' certification. Detailed information about safety measures can be found in the July Officer's Report and on the Birthplace Museum website. An advance booking system is in place to limit the number of people in the building. This is working smoothly and the Museum Attendants have adapted well, finding ways to safely accommodate drop-in visitors where possible and also bookshop customers, where they are willing to provide contact details to comply with the government's Test and Trace requirement for Museums. Guidance is regularly changing and on August 8 face coverings became mandatory in Museums. Visitor arrival information was updated, staff updated, and posters displayed from the 'Sunflower Project' to highlight hidden disabilities that are not required to wear masks.

Visitor numbers for the first four weeks of opening totalled 350. This represents only 19% of visitor numbers in the same period in 2019, however data from the national museums shows a proportion of only 10% of visitors prior to closure, so the Birthplace is performing well in the current climate. The 350 visitors who came in July-August represent a 55% occupancy rate in terms of timed visits that can be booked, so it is hoped we will see some increase in this number in the coming months. All visitors who book in advance have been sent a link to our visitor satisfaction survey after their visit and the results are very encouraging, with the majority of respondents rating their overall visit as 10 out of 10.

Online engagement has lessened since the easing of restrictions but the digital audience figures for July and early August totalled 2,479 people directly engaging with the Museum, and an additional social media 'reach' of 9,226.

Family visits have been very low compared to normal summers, and in August the MHO attended a webinar by *Kids in Museums* on safely welcoming family audiences – a particular concern considering that all interactives and shared touch points had been removed at re-opening. As a result, trail bags have been introduced which families can pick up and carry with them and are quarantined and cleaned between uses.

The Birthplace Book Club is not yet able to meet in the Museum, but one member kindly invited some of the group to their garden for a socially distanced gathering. Following the success of her first 'Zoom' talk, Sue Bray was invited to deliver another virtual talk to the residents of the Three Spires Care Home. Another interesting project in July was supporting a local school to develop classroom resources about Johnson's heir Francis Barber.

3. Open Spaces and Tree Management: Nick Burton, Open Spaces Officer

Following the recent unauthorised Traveller encampment on City Council owned open space at Netherstowe, the City Council, in partnership with Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust has utilised soil excavated from the site of the former canal along Tamworth Road to create an earth 'bund' or mound along a portion of the grassed area adjacent to Handel Walk.

Approximately 150 tonnes of soil were transported to site on the 11 and 12 August and moulded into the shape of the bund.



The bund has been seeded with a wildflower mix on the southside and cosmetically landscaped with shrubs on the north side to create an attractive gateway to the open space. The City Council will also plant a feature Oak tree to further enhance the site in due course. The scheme was designed by Landscape Architects from local planning and environmental consultancy, Pegasus Group.

A number of bollards have also been installed, and together with the bund, it is hoped that they will provide



considerable protection against any future unauthorised vehicular access to the land. Rocks from the Open Space have also been repositioned to further dissuade unwanted visitors.

The project has attracted many positive comments from residents, though it has been disappointing to note that within two weeks of being planted, a considerable number of the most colourful specimens were removed by persons unknown. Wild flower seeds will be scattered to replace the colour for next year, but the loss of the plants is a shame for local residents and frustrating for all involved in the project.



Trees in the Festival Garden have been monitored over the past few months and 5 small dead/dying specimens will be removed. The most likely explanation is the extremes in weather. Unfortunately, some of the more established trees are also showing signs of stress such as a large branch tearing away from the cherry tree trunk. In consultation with the LDC Tree Officer it has been decided to

have this felled. The established willow which is a landmark by the footpath from the Heather Gardens to the City has also lost a sizeable branch from the canopy and the tree canopy will need to be severely reduced. This will seem drastic but regrowth from the willow is normally quick as it was for the mature willows around Stowe Pool.

LDC have completed the Summer hedge work which started on the most popular paths such as cycle route 54 which goes across LCC land. Further work on the hedges is done in February after they have been used as winter shelter for wildlife.

4. Markets Report: Jordan Appleyard, Markets Officer

The Officers at Lichfield City Council continue to ensure Lichfield Outdoor General Market remains COVID safe to all market traders and the public. The one-way barrier system continues to be used on each market day with hand sanitisers provided for the public at either end of the Market Square. Most permanent licenced traders have now returned to work on all three market days.

Revised Government guidelines issued in July reduced Social distancing to 1m so the Markets Officer was able to instruct traders to reduce the gap between each stall accordingly, this has generated space for two additional stalls to trade on each market day. The Saturday market continues to be mostly affected due to the amount of permanent licenced traders exceeding actual space available on the Market Square.

The rota system was revised in August to include all Traders with the exception of the fruit and vegetable stall; this change followed representations from Traders and discussions with members of the Markets Working Group.

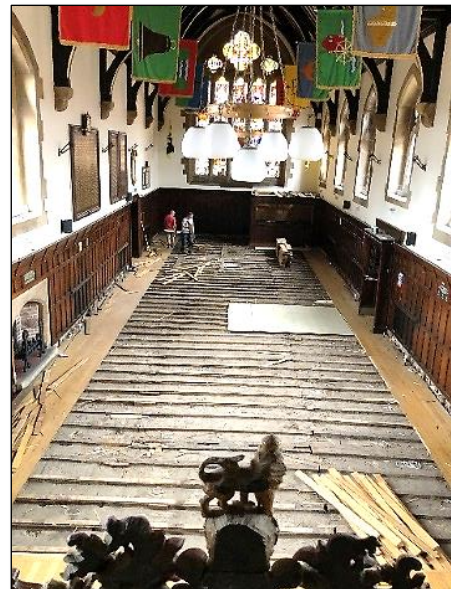
Traders continue to use their own market stalls, and this is reflected in the incentivised stall fees being charged, based on the Tuesday rent model. Following Council resolution on 28 July and to reflect the increased footfall, Saturday traders now only receive a 25% reduction in rent while the 50% reduction for Tuesday and Friday traders remains in place until October. The incentives will be discussed by the Markets Working Group at their next meeting, which is scheduled for 2 October.

Lichfield General Market and The Producers Market continue to be promoted via social media channels each week. The third Producers Market was held on Sunday 2 August and the fourth on 6 September. C J Events were pleased to announce there had been an increase in Traders; this new Sunday event continues to grow, and with footfall increasing steadily each month, public response has been very positive.

5. Guildhall: Helen Winter, Guildhall Bookings Secretary

Phase 2 of the Guildhall renovation work is largely complete. The new floor has been laid, sanded and polished and further repairs undertaken to the oak panelling. The radiators are due to be returned shortly following refurbishment. Premises Attendants are continuing with general maintenance work.

Many regular hirers with vulnerable members have chosen not to resume their bookings until January 2021. Those who do wish to return have been contacted and made aware of the safety measures which have been put in place throughout the building to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Hirers have been advised on how best to facilitate their event, reminded to wear facemasks, and encouraged to have an event specific Risk Assessment.



On 2 August, the first Wedding Ceremony since lockdown restrictions were eased was held in the Guildroom. The latest Government guidelines were strictly adhered to and prior to the Ceremony a specific COVID-19 Risk Assessment was agreed with Staffordshire County Council's Registrars to ensure the safety of all those in attendance. Hand sanitiser units were available on all floors of the building and at the entrance to each room in use. A maximum of 30 guests could attend who were all be seated at least 1m apart and within family groups. Other new protocols included the sanitising of hands immediately after the rings had been exchanged and no group photographs were permitted while the Registrars were on site, even the pen for signing the register had to be



sterilised. Although masks were not required on this date, current regulations require them at Wedding Ceremonies with only the wedding couple and Registrars being exempt.

Boley Park Community Hall has now re-opened with most regular hirers planning to return during September. All hirers have been asked to submit an event specific Risk Assessment to the City Council prior to resuming their bookings and new booking forms have been issued to all reflecting the requirements they must comply with to run a COVID safe event. The hall has been equipped with hand sanitiser units at the front and rear doors and a one-way system is in operation to enter and exit. Clear signage along with social distancing markers have also been installed to make sure all visitors to the building can comply with Government guidelines.

Renovation work has started at the Boley Park Co-op supermarket. During this time, there will be some disruption to the usual parking outside the community hall but hirers will be able to utilise the remainder of the Co-op car park.

6. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

The Deputy Town Clerk has been working closely with Officers to ensure Ward members are kept informed of current planning applications and that member recommendations are reported to Lichfield District Council. Although the PAC has not held any meetings since March an Agenda has still been circulated in line with the usual schedule of meetings, with submitted comments published on the City Council's website in line with the usual procedure of publishing the Minutes of the meeting.

On 1 September all City Council Officers returned to Donegal House full time rather than splitting time between office work and home working based on the rota system that had been in place previously. Protective screens have been installed between desks where limited space does not allow for a 1m gap and hand sanitiser provided. Following guidance from the Government on 8 August all Guildhall staff have been advised regarding the mandatory wearing of face masks in community halls. All the City Council's Risk Assessments have been updated to reflect these latest changes.

While the return to some sense of normality is welcomed, the situation will be kept under constant review, with the possibility of a return to reduced hours, rota systems and even lockdown not beyond the realms of possibility.

The Deputy will be providing secretariat support at September Council and the Markets Working Group.