

For Council: 24 January 2022 APPENDIX 7

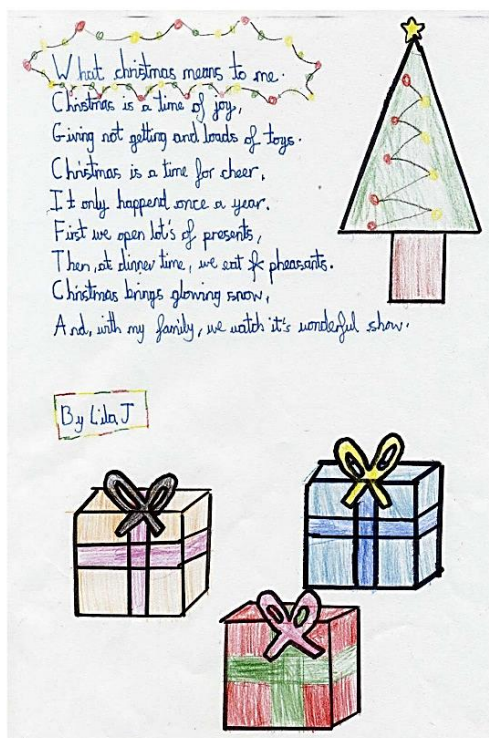
OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT

1. Civic Matters: Deputy Town Clerk, Sarah Thomas

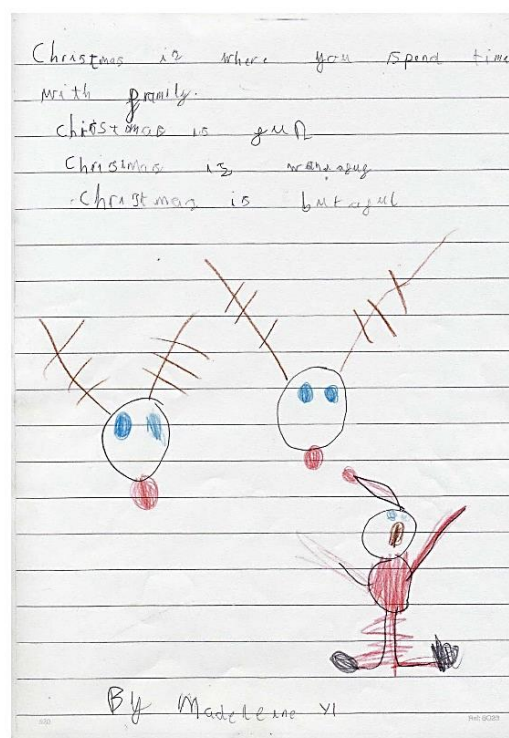
On Saturday 20 November the Mayor and Sheriff welcomed a total of 69 guests to the Guildhall for their annual charity Ball. After being officially received the invitees enjoyed a welcome drink before dining on a three-course meal and then dancing to music provided by 'Sparky and Sprite'. During the evening Chris Cooper from Lichfield Cricket club presented the Mayor and Sheriff with framed photographs of their visit to the club on Vice Captains Day in September. The evening was enjoyed by all and made a profit of £1,090 for the Mayor and Sheriff's chosen charities; We Love Lichfield and Freinds2Friends.



For the City Council's official Christmas card this year the Mayor and Sheriff ran a competition inviting local primary school children to compose a poem with the theme '*What Christmas Means to Me*'.



Lila James, from Christchurch School Lichfield, year 5.



Madeleine Groutage, from Christchurch School Lichfield, year 1.



After much deliberation two winners were chosen, both from Christchurch primary school. Lila James and Madeline Groutage were then invited to the Mayor's parlour where they were presented with their prize, a framed copy of their poem, an audio book, and a chocolate selection box. The Christmas card was sent to over 300 dignitaries, civics, councillors, and friends of Lichfield City Council.

The Mayor's Carols for Christmas was held in the Guildhall on Tuesday 7 December, led by the Mayor's Chaplain, Rev Ian Hayter. In keeping with tradition, the seven lessons were read by the current Civics and their consorts, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the City Council and the Mayors' cadet.

Unfortunately, this year Scotch Orchard Primary school did not take part due to concerns around COVID. However, thanks to Dudley Ray and Ted Green a combined choir from Christchurch and St Michaels Church was formed at very short notice, their performance of *Ding Dong Merrily on High* enchanting the audience and creating a truly festive atmosphere.

The evening concluded with former Councillor Tony Thompson serving his special recipe mulled wine (orange juice for the drivers) to all the guests accompanied by a warm mince pie. Donations received on the night for the Mayor and Sheriff's charities totalled £59.00

Members may wish to note that the City Council is still maintaining a cautious approach to events. To this end all Civic events have been held in accordance with the latest Government guidelines at the time and operated with restricted numbers in well ventilated rooms.



At the time of writing this report preparations continue for the Mayor & Sheriff's Charity Sunday lunch which will be held in the Guildhall on Sunday 23 January 2022.

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

The Johnson Birthplace Museum was well-supported in the period before Christmas with 1400 visitors to the Museum or shop from November to mid-December, and a virtual audience of 2700 people directly engaging with the Museum online. Visitor safety requirements were updated in line with 'Plan B' measures, and normal Christmas opening hours were anticipated at the time of writing.

It was a busy period of events and activities. A hand-crafted Angel Trail for families started on November 19 and on Sunday November 21 the Museum had a stall to engage local audiences at the well-attended Chamber of Trade and Commerce Christmas Fair.

The Museum's seasonal event programme began with late-night opening for the Christmas Light switch on, with activities and mulled wine for sale. Visitor numbers were lower than previous years due to the weather, but the following weekend's Johnson Family Christmas event on Sunday 5 December was a great success.

Over 150 visitors attended the event which included festive sea shanties from the Lichfield Lighthouse Company on Market Street, Storytelling from Christine Genders, readings from the Lichfield Poets, Family Craft activities, and refreshments. Kevin Lynch provided a display of his colourful handmade automata in the Workroom for visitors to enjoy throughout the holidays. Christmas events were organised and promoted by the Museum Support Officer.



The MHO attended a meeting with 'Visit Lichfield' about plans for future Heritage Weekend events. The Birthplace also supported city-wide events planned by Visit Lichfield over Christmas, taking part in a Christmas Minster Duck trail, and as a location for Stocking Filler guided tours.

Birmingham University student Macey Palmer completed her work placement, leading a focus group with staff and volunteers, conducting a marketing review and producing a briefing document for developing a logo for the Museum.

In December the podcast 'IABLEd' about disability, chronic illness, and health aired an episode on Samuel Johnson, having worked in collaboration with the Birthplace for their research.

Research visitors returned to the Wood Library in December, when experts on watercolourist John Louis Petit consulted an album in the collection.

Routine building care and maintenance included the annual boiler service, obtaining quotes for upgraded fire sensors and an issue with the Museum's internet connection was resolved. There was a small loss to the render on the façade of the Birthplace and arrangements for repair were underway.

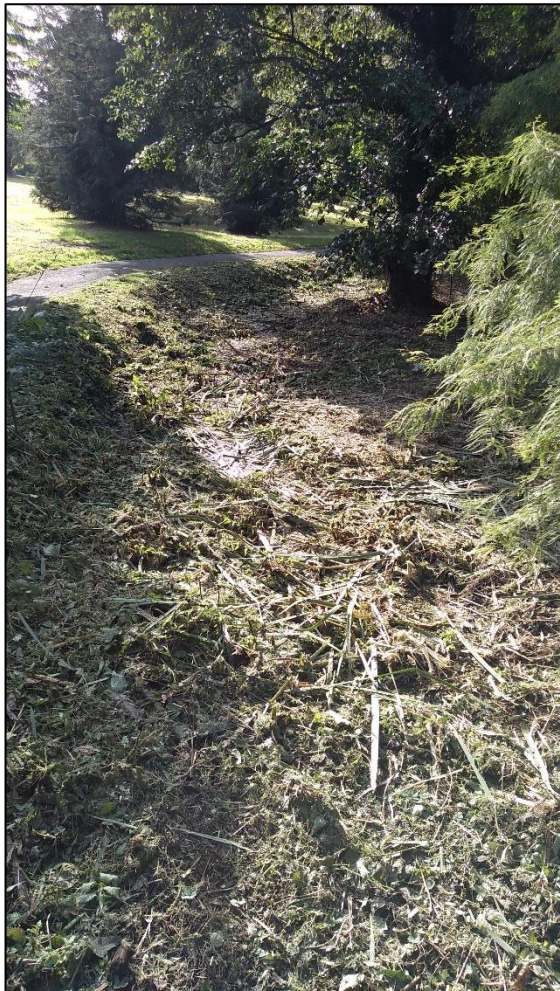
Work on the Birthplace Development project was ongoing and comments on the planning application for disabled access on Market Street returned. Staffordshire County Council

Highways did not support the proposal. BHB Architects will continue to liaise with SCC to seek a mutually agreeable solution for Market Street. The planning application was split in order to continue with the work to build a toilet in the Birthplace yard, and drawings finalised to obtain quotes with a view to groundworks starting before Spring 2022.

In addition to managing the Johnson Birthplace, the MHO continued to work on the maintenance of the city's historic plaques with the plaques to Bishop Langton's Bridge on Bird Street and the School of Art on pool walk undergoing repair and cleaning.

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

The tree work on Festival Gardens has been completed and the brook desilted. The next stage is the preparation for the extended 'wilding' area. We are fortunate to have had some expert advice on this recently and we are hopeful that it will make an excellent display in 2022 and beyond. LDC's Ops Services team will be working on this shortly. The 'before and after' photographs below, taken from the red bridge over Trunkfield Brook seven weeks apart, demonstrate the impact of the work undertaken thus far.



A report was received from a member of public stating that rats were crossing a local resident's garden heading towards Stowe Pool along the cycle path. An information leaflet drop to local residents, inspections & test baiting had not highlighted an issue. LDC's Environmental Health team visited the area and it was noted that ivy was growing from the Lichfield City land, up the partition fence which could be aiding any rats getting up and over the fence; LDC's advice was that the ivy should be removed, which was duly carried out.



Councillor Bob Harrison contacted the Council reporting a tree had fallen across the pathway in Christian Fields woods during the high winds recently experienced. Members of the public were still using the pathway having to duck underneath the fallen tree which was dangerous.

A swift response was made to make the site safe with removal of the obscuring tree across the path.

Other matters progressed since the last report include:

- Shrubs scheduled to be cleared along the boundary of Friary Remains at the time of preparing this report, following the discovery of potential rough sleeping and/or drug dealing activity
- New waste bins ordered for Curborough Community Centre open space – due to be installed shortly
- New waste bin installed adjacent to Cruck House
- Progression of proposals for Netherstowe Brook, including cutting the face of the hedge on the boundary with Netherstowe School, desilting and the possible installation of drainage measures to mitigate the longstanding issue of water pooling along the cycleway adjacent to the allotments
- Progression of proposed remedial work to the entrance to Christian Fields which is in LCC ownership.

4. Markets

The General markets continue to be well attended by both traders and the general public. Traders report anecdotally that people feel safe shopping outside in the fresh air. The market continues to operate with a large central aisle walkway giving shoppers more space to circulate.

Occupancy across all three markets continues to improve with a waiting list for available pitches. Unfortunately, due to a yellow weather warning of high winds the Friday market on 26 November was cancelled. All traders were informed in good time and the public notified via social media; notices were also displayed around the Market Square.

The new Markets Officer, Hayley Howen came into post on 3 December 2021. Hayley will be a welcome addition to the City Council team and will be responsible for all aspects of the market operation. Up until this point the post had been overseen by a member of the CJ Events team, Steve Harris. Steve's professionalism and contribution to the streamlining of the market function is greatly appreciated.

The attendance incentive, which operated in January and February 2021 and offered a 25% reduction on pitch rental to permanent traders attending the weekly markets, will be repeated in January and February 2022.

The waiving of Street Trading charges by Lichfield District Council incentivised the Fruit and Vegetable stall to operate on non-market days during Christmas week. In spite of the inclement weather, they reported a swift trade, almost selling out by Christmas Eve.



The Producers' Market due to take place on 5 December was sadly cancelled as CJ's Events were experiencing staffing issues as a result of COVID and subsequently had no available crews to erect the stalls. However, the Producers' Market has been well attended throughout the year with an average of 30 stalls each month. A review is due to take place in early 2022 to see if any additional stalls can be added but this will largely depend on COVID restrictions at the time and shoppers' safety. The Producers Market is now well established as a regular event in Lichfield which attracts a healthy footfall. The next Producers' Market will be on Sunday 6 February 2022, there is no market in January.

5. Twinning: Gabriele Lasch- Burden, Twinning Officer

Preparations for next year's international twinning celebrations are still advancing. The Limburg mayor, in his official invitation to the Lichfield citizens and councillors, expressed his sincere hope, that the weekend in Limburg from 29th April to 2nd May 2022, will be able to go ahead, with covid travel restrictions being lifted by then. Around 25 people from Lichfield have expressed their intention to take part, so far. Please register with the Twinning Officer if you would like to take part when possible.

The language department of Lichfield's King Edward VI school, have started using the daily digital newspapers from Limburg for their German lessons. These are being forwarded to the school each day by the Twinning Officer.

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

Since the last report, we have had the following regular hirers in the Guildhall: City of Lichfield Concert Band - weekly band practice, Mencap, Slimming World, Chess, Dementia Café, Bridge, U3A and Heyday Friendship. U3A and Heyday Friendship have both held Christmas Parties.

Market Research have been in once, and three other groups have held meetings in the building (including one company).

In the run up to Christmas, we have had three craft fairs, the Chamber of Trade and Commerce Christmas Fair, and the Stan Bowley Trust Christmas Fair. All these were well attended, especially the Chamber of Trade booking which had long queues inside and outside the building.

Private bookings include a 40th Birthday Party, Funeral Wake, and Ballroom Dance.

Lichfield Arts have held five concerts, some of them selling out. The City of Lichfield Concert Band also held two successful Christmas Concerts, and the Tourist Information Centre Tours have visited the Old Prison Cells seven times.

Civic events have included the Mayor & Sheriffs Charity Ball and the Mayor's Christmas Carols.

Some restrictions remain in place in the Guildhall - operating at 75% capacity for room numbers and one-way systems for the main hall and Guildroom. Following government updates, face masks must now be worn whilst in the building unless exempt, we await developments in the coming weeks with interest, and enquiries are coming in for 2022 and 2023 now.

Please support the following scheduled craft fairs in the Guildhall (10.00am - 3.00pm): Saturday 12 February, Saturday 19 March, Saturday 9 April.

Boley Park Community Hall

Regular hirers are still using the hall (except one) and there have been several Children's parties. Other bookings have included a Stamp Fair, Christmas Fair, AGM and a First Aid Course.

7. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

In the absence of the Civic officer much of the Deputy's time in November and December has been occupied with facilitating Civic events as documented earlier in this report.

In addition, the Christmas lights Switch On event took place on Sunday 28 November. This was the first time the event had been held since 2019. The usual road closures were in place and all businesses and residents were contacted well in advance of the day to ensure their inconvenience was kept to a minimum.

For the first time, tabletop football was held on the square enticing shoppers to take part in a light-hearted competition for a much-coveted selection box. CJ's Events provided a total of 21 festive stalls around the City and being mindful of crowd circulation these were spread throughout Market Street and the Three Spires shopping precinct.

Live entertainment began on the Switch on Stage with Liberty Jamboree Shine and Sign Choir who are part of the Liberty Arts theatre group. The charities aim is the inclusion into society of young adults who are vulnerable because of their disabilities, encouraging them to communicate and perform.

A brief break from the music allowed Adrian Holmes, Master of Ceremonies for the day, to interview Sebbie Hall. Sebbie raised over £40,000 last year for charity by carrying out random acts of kindness for strangers. At the end of his interview Sebbie continued with his acts of kindness by handing out Reindeer food to all the children in the crowd.

The entertainment then continued on stage with Jordan Adams. This performance was particularly important to Jordan as he was born and raised in Lichfield and had always wanted to take part in this event. As the weather turned more inclement 50 members of the Lichfield Rock Choir took to the stage to perform a selection of contemporary Christmas songs including '*Let it Snow*' in the snow! The afternoon concluded with traditional carols sung by Christchurch school choir.

The Mayor, Cllr Robert Yardley, helped by Lewis Upton (aged 6) & Dylan Stansbie (aged 5) then officially switched the lights on at 5.00pm. The new light curtain over the Market square looked particularly impressive in the snow. A final visit from Father Christmas to wish everyone a Happy Christmas sent everyone home feeling festive.

A selection of photographs is presented below giving a flavour of the day.

The Deputy Town Clerk will continue to support the Civic function throughout January as well as providing secretariat support at full Council, the Sheriff's Ride Working Party, Markets Working Group, and the Neighbourhood Plan Implementation working party.





