

## OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT – June 2021

### 1. Civic Matters: Lucy Clarke, Civic Officer

At the Annual Council meeting on Monday 17 May the new Mayor, Councillor Robert Yardley was invested for the forthcoming year. The new Deputy Mayor is Councillor Jamie Checkland, and the Sheriff is Mr Peter Hitchman. The meeting was conducted with strict adherence to social distancing. Sadly, due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions there was no banquet after the meeting.

In accepting the office of Mayor, Councillor Yardley thanked his fellow councillors for their support and stated that it was a great honour and privilege to be elected. He also paid tribute to the work of the outgoing Mayor, Councillor Mrs Deborah Baker, and Sheriff, Dr Daryl Brown, who had together raised just under £10,000 for their chosen charities; Lichfield and Hatherton Canal Restoration Trust, St. Giles Hospice and Lichfield Voluntary Transport for the Disabled during their year in office.

The Mayor proudly announced his appointment of Army Cadet LCPL James Carter and Mayor's Chaplain, Revd Ian Hayter for his forthcoming year in office.

Following the investiture of the new Civic Team, the retiring Mayor, Mayor's Consort and Sheriff were presented with replica badges of office.



During their year in office, the Mayor and Sheriff will jointly host five events to raise money for their nominated charities; We Love Lichfield and Friends to Friends.

At a meeting of the Sheriff's Ride Working Party on 19 May it was decided that subject to Council approval, the Sheriff's Ride on Saturday 11th September 2021 will continue but on a much smaller scale. It is anticipated this will be similar to the 2020 Ride with the addition of an evening meal at the Guildhall in place of the lunch at Freeford Manor. Discussions for 2022 and beyond will begin in earnest shortly.

The latest government guidance is constantly being monitored with regards to Civic Events and updates will be provided accordingly. The Civic Officer has also been assisting with the day-to-day activities of the Markets, social media posts and training.

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

The Museum bookshop was able to reopen on Monday 12 April. Joining a city-wide initiative on opening day, the Birthplace appeared on social media and gave away 'Visit Lichfield' canvas bags to customers. 250 customers attended in the first month. Full reopening took place on Monday 17 May when Museum visitors returned with timed-entry booking, all the covid-secure measures established last year in place, and with updated guidance on Test and Trace Check-in.



In the run-up to opening, eye-catching window displays attracted attention to the building including a display for the Easter holidays. Work engaging online audiences continued and led to a total of 5,230 digital visitors in April and early May and additional social media reach of over 30,000.

Online content included blog posts about Johnson's Easter resolutions and commemorations for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Hester Thrale Piozzi, and posts marking Staffordshire Day. Throughout May, the Birthplace has taken over the Twitter feed of the Literary Houses Group, with posts written and shared by the Museum Support Officer.

In addition to preparations for reopening and a corresponding increase in enquiries from members of the public and partners, many projects continue behind the scenes. MHO work has included: Forward Plan and agenda reports for the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee, Keele University project supervision including plans for a study day in Spring 2022, and the selection of students applying for placements at the Museum as part of the University of Birmingham's Professional Skills module. Work on the Museum Development Project has included revised proposals following discussions at the JBAC, a site visit with the appointed designers (Vertigo) and meeting with the electrician to establish the timetable for rewiring.

MSO work included the online booking system and publicity for reopening, completing Portable Appliance Tests for the Museum site and preparation and publicity for the Lichfield Storyteller's event 'Ballad Tales: Stories from Samuel Johnson's time' which took place in a live broadcast from the Birthplace on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> May. The MSO is completing the 'Benchmarks in Collections Care' checklist, a review of collection security, storage and procedural measures which is linked to training and funding from West Midlands Museum Development and was last undertaken in 2010.

Work is also underway on planning events for the rest of the year, with provisional plans (restrictions permitting) including covid-secure family activities for the summer holidays, a history event themed on Hester Thrale, events for Johnson's birthday in September, and as a partner venue for the L2F folk festival in the Autumn.



Alongside settling into daily life back at the Museum, the Attendant team have been processing numerous donations of books to the shop, and a special new addition to the Museum was unveiled; a new donation box with interchangeable moving models, created by Attendant Kevin Lynch during lockdown.

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

Following a handover period in March there has been a smooth transition between Officers. The new Open Spaces Officer, Nigel Boden has been familiarising himself with the City Council's sites and meeting key personnel.

Following a request from a resident regarding one of the Council's open spaces joined to Lincoln Close, overgrown and unsightly brambles were removed which were encroaching the property, leaving the open space in a much cleaner and tidier state.



A report was received of a dangerous manhole cover on the cycle path at St Chads Road . The concrete surround had been lifted out of position leaving an exposed storm drain. This was obviously a health & safety risk particularly as it was so close to a childrens play area. Swift action was taken by the Open Sapces Officer to rectify the problem with the surround and cover being replaced and made safe.



At the rear of the Windings off Gaia Lane an attempt was made to remove two ornamental boulders which had been dug out of the border of the footpath and left for collection later.

Thankfully, this was reported to the Open Spaces Officer who reinstated the boulders before they could be removed.



A further Holm Oak has been planted by the Darwin Walk Group in the Festival Gardens, captured in the photograph to the left taken by Councillor Janice Greaves.

Routine inspections continue on all of the City Council's Public Open spaces and footpaths, dealing with such issues as raised slabs and trees which require attention. All LCC owned bus shelters were also inspected during April and May.

#### **4. Twinning: Gabriele Lasch- Burden, Twinning Officer**

A new date for the postponed official International Ring Twinning event in Limburg has been set by the Limburg Council for Friday 29 April – Monday 2 May 2022. It is hoped that by then the each of the three countries taking part will have a successful vaccination programme in place and the Covid restrictions will have eased.

For many years, Limburg City Council has sent a daily national and local newspaper to Lichfield, which were used by some language teachers and displayed in Lichfield library. However due to the covid situation and the reluctance in sharing of newspapers by many different people, it has been decided to receive the Limburg newspapers digitally instead. All secondary schools who teach German as a foreign language have been contacted to see if this would make it easier for them to include articles from the Limburg papers in their curriculum, thus drawing more attention to Lichfield's twin town to a larger group of young people. So far, the Cathedral School has expressed an interest in using this material as well as a possible general collaboration with a Limburg school.

#### **5. Markets Report: Lucy Clarke, Civic Officer**

Non-essential traders were able to return to Lichfield General Market from Tuesday 13th April 2021. Traders from all three market days were keen to return and there has been a noticeable increase in footfall. The one-way barrier system and 1 metre social distancing gap between each stall remains. All traders stall areas were re-measured on their first day of trading to update our records and to ensure appropriate charges were being implemented.

The market has sadly lost a few traders due to poor health and retirement. We have not received any feedback either positive or negative since the announcement that pre-erected market stalls will no longer be provided, traders have embraced providing their own stalls over the last 12 months and seem very happy with the current arrangements. The Markets Officer has seen a noticeable increase in market applications and casual traders wanting to attend.

Lichfield General Market continues to be promoted on Facebook and Twitter. The Markets Officer has joined many local groups on Facebook and is actively sharing posts on these group pages. These local groups have many thousands of followers thus increasing our target audience whilst gaining more followers to the Lichfield Markets page each week. Engagements, likes and shares has also increased, and customer feedback is positive.



The Producers' Market has seen a noticeable increase in traders since non-essential traders were able to attend from 2 May 2021. There were 17 stalls in attendance in April compared to 30 stalls in May.

Trader feedback is excellent with CJ's confirming that June is already fully booked with 30 stalls.

On 29 April, Staffordshire County Council used the Market Square to host a free rapid COVID testing site in the City. Lateral flow tests were offered to the public along with demonstrations on how to complete the tests at home. Free lateral flow test kits were also handed out. Feedback received from Staffordshire County Council proved the booking was successful, with 51 tests completed and 418 kits given out on their first day. A further 8 dates have now been booked during the months of May, June, and July 2021.



On 18 May 2021, Dennis Wasserman who had been the City Council's Markets Officer via arrangement with CJ Events, died unexpectedly at the age of 53.

Although only with the City Council for a short time, Dennis was an integral part of our market operation, respected by Traders and Officers alike. He was an extremely capable and likeable man, and he will be greatly missed.

Our thoughts are with his family at this difficult time.

## 6. Guildhall: Helen Winter, Guildhall Bookings Officer

Following the latest update to Government guidelines, three regular hirers have returned to the Guildhall; Slimming World are back on Thursday, Mencap on Monday and the Dementia Support Group are now using the Guildroom on Thursday mornings until the end of August.

In line with all Covid19 regulations, a socially distanced Wedding Ceremony took place on 17 April (which was re-booked from last year). A first Anniversary Party is booked for next year. The Guildhall Wedding Licence has been renewed until July 2024.



Many regular hirers are in contact with a view to returning when regulations allow, several enquiries have also been received for first wedding anniversary parties during 2022.

Ongoing maintenance continues in the Guildhall including the 5 yearly electrical

inspection, routine servicing of the lift and the tension wires on the blinds in the main hall. Remedial work is still being carried out on the new floor in the main hall.

As an additional safety precaution, anti-viral “*Fogging*” has been carried out twice in recent months to sanitise the building.

Most of the regular hirers have now returned to Boley Park Community Hall. The 5 yearly electrical inspection has been completed and new LED lights installed in some areas. Work was carried out during May half term to put a translucent film on the windows to replace the net curtains. Bookings are now being taken for children’s parties and other social events from 21 June when regulations are due to be lifted.

## 7. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

The Deputy Town Clerk has been working on the Council’s newsletter for the June issue of City Life magazine

As lockdown restrictions begin to ease, work is ongoing to ensure all Risk assessments are up to date in line with the latest Government guidelines. Anti-viral “*fogging*” has been carried out in the Guildhall, Donegal House and Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum and all City council staff have been reminded to remain vigilant and adhere to social distancing and hand sanitising guidance.

The Deputy will be providing secretariat support at the June Council meeting.

The Deputy Town Clerk has now successfully completed the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA).