

OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT – JANUARY 2021

1. Civic Matters: Lucy Clarke, Civic Officer



The Mayor & Sheriff's Annual Charity Dinner Dance and Mayor's Carol Service usually held over the Christmas period were both sadly cancelled this year due to the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions.

The Mayor, Cllr Deborah Baker recorded a Christmas message from the Mayor's Parlour which was made available via a YouTube link on the

Lichfield City Council website and also on Twitter. This was the most appropriate way for the Mayor to reach a wider audience during the current COVID restrictions. This year the Mayor and Sheriff's Civic Christmas card was designed by the Mayor's Consort, Dr. Steve Baker. The card focused on civic events that have taken place over their last eighteen months and wished everyone peace, hope and kindness for Christmas and 2021. Over 400 cards were sent out to Councillors, Civic heads, and members of the Civic list

The Mayor and Sheriff visited the Market Square in early December to support the market traders and spread some festive cheer by giving out free Lichfield Market shopping bags to customers visiting the market.



Unfortunately, due to Lockdown 3.0 restrictions. The Pancake Races and Shrovetide fair due to take place on 16 February has been cancelled.

The Civic Officer has also been assisting the Markets Officer in the of day-to-day market activities

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

Due to ongoing restrictions the Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum has remained closed since 5 November, and the team have been working primarily from home. As in the Spring lockdown, the focus for the Museum's public-facing work has shifted to online engagement, led by the Museum Support Officer. In November and December, a total of 6,201 people directly engaged with the Birthplace online. This led to a 'reach' of 16,512 on Twitter and Facebook. Analytics show that although there are many national and international users, most people engaging online are from Lichfield and the Midlands, so the Birthplace continues to serve the local area while closed.

Monday December 21 saw the Birthplace Museum's first ticketed online event, held in collaboration with Lichfield Storytellers. 'A Country Christmas' was an evening of traditional folk tales on 'Zoom', in lieu of an event originally planned to take place in the house. The evening combined live performance from the tellers' homes with a pre-recorded introductory film from the Birthplace, decorated for Christmas. The short tour was delivered by Attendant Sarah Dale

and filmed by the MHO. Publicity was undertaken by the MSO and the event was a success with 41 tickets sold and very warm feedback from participants.

Following on from the news of the funded membership to the Association of Cultural Enterprise, the MSO has completed the West Midlands Museum Development 'Organisational Health-check', a self-assessment toolkit which resulted in bespoke recommendations and resources for forward planning. Time working from home has also been used to review and update Museum policy and procedure ahead of the anticipated invitation to re-apply to the Arts Council England Museum Accreditation scheme, currently scheduled for early 2021. Updates of the two largest documents, the Birthplace Emergency Recovery Plan, and the main Procedural Manual for collection documentation processes, are currently underway.



Other work in late November and December has included: continuing supervision of the Keele PhD project; convening the Birthplace Book Club online; attending LDТА Executive Committee meetings virtually; research enquiries from the public; updates to the Museum's collection database; blog content and preparing material on Francis Barber ahead of his death anniversary in January.

In addition to Birthplace work, the MHO has progressed the city plaque cleaning project, liaised with a company regarding an offer to clean the statue of Johnson on the Market Square, and pursued a project to display reproductions of the city charters. The Museum Attendants have assisted with the smooth running of the Markets, stewarding the one-way system in the run up to Christmas.

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

Repairs to the wall between Greyfriars and the Friar's Alley were completed ensuring that the bricks matched the existing and any loose bricks were repointed. On the Children's play area at Curborough Community Centre, hazardous pieces of sharp metal have been ground away from under the children's slide to make it safe.



The open Spaces Officer has been in contact with Eon following reports that a lamppost on the footpath from Cathedral Rise is leaning. A temporary repair was carried out by Eon last year which has proved insufficient, so a more permanent solution has been requested. In addition, an ivy-covered branch which came down over the path to the A51 at Christchurch was removed quickly.

Extensive hedge reduction work has been completed at Manor rise which is a busy path used by the local secondary schools. Following the work, it is now wider allowing for social distancing and the removal of the undergrowth has made the path much lighter.

The decision by Staffordshire County Council to close a section of the Windings footpath (which is a Public Right of Way) for up to 6 months whilst an extension was being built on one of the properties overlooking the path work has generated a number of complaints from local residents. However, the owner of the property concerned has reassured LCC that the work will be completed some two months before the six months allowance and any damage to the footpath will be rectified.

With the climate crisis in mind, a small solar powered system for light and recharging the lawn mower was investigated for the Dovehouse Community Garden, also support was given to Transition Lichfield who wish to do some significant tree planting in the City.

4. Twinning: Gabriele Lasch- Burden, Twinning Officer

This third coronavirus wave has hit both of Lichfield's twin towns harder than the spring outbreak. In Limburg the recorded deaths as of 6 January were over 100, compared to 7 until August 2020. The Twinning officers of all three twin towns are staying in touch regularly to support and encourage all Twinning members. Messages are communicated to the Lichfield Twinning Association and circulated via newsletter to its members, in the absence of face-to-face Open Committee meetings.

Warm, optimistic Christmas messages from the Mayors of Lichfield and Limburg have been exchanged and were featured in the December issue of City Life and the newly established Lichfield Chronicle. The messages expressed the wish on all sides of finding ways to continue the friendly cooperation during these difficult times.

Brexit will undoubtedly mean some changes to Twinning in the future with new and innovative ideas. Recognising the challenges faced by children at the moment, one such idea has come from a primary school in Ste. Foy. They would like to partner with a primary school in Lichfield so that children can write to each other, expressing their feelings during lockdown. The Twinning Officer is contacting Lichfield primary schools to establish interest in this project.



Looking ahead to March there will be local and Mayoral elections in Limburg and the present Mayor, Dr. Marius Hahn is standing for re-election. Another candidate is Stefan Laux, who visited Lichfield twice in 2019 helping to set up the first student exchange with the Lichfield College.

At the end of 2020 the Twinning Officer, with the cooperation of the Twinning Association, has organised the safe recycling of the City Councils old computers. Together with donations from members of the Twinning Association, these computers were donated to the charity "IT Schools Africa", who have helped 5 million school children in Africa by equipping them with computers, laptops and IT skills, as well as supporting UK community projects with refurbished IT equipment and access to increased digital skills for 14,000 users in the UK since 2004. The charity was very grateful for all donations and sent a certificate of appreciation. Prior to collection all the hard drives on each computer were removed and securely destroyed at the City Council Offices. This has been a great way to recycle old, unwanted computers and monitors, giving them a helpful second life.

5. Markets Report: Jordan Appleyard, Markets Officer

Lichfield General Market has continued to operate throughout the Tier 4 restrictions and subsequent Lockdown 3.0. In line with Government legislation, the City Council has identified only six traders who sell essential goods that are currently permitted to stand;



this is a significant reduction from the twenty-one stalls that were able to stand on the market square prior to Lockdown 3.0. These significant changes to working practices were once again implemented at very short notice, and while the loss of non-essential traders is regrettable, this has resulted in additional spacing between each stall, giving customers additional room to safely queue for their essential goods.

No new stall rent incentives have been put in place for the current lockdown, however the usual 25% discount given to those traders in attendance during the months of January and February is being applied. Officers continue to ensure the General Markets remain a COVID secure environment; the one-way barriers and hand sanitisers are part of the standard set-up for each market day. The Samuel Johnson Birthplace Attendants have been re-deployed to become Market Marshals while the Birthplace Museum is currently closed to the public. Market Marshals are located at either end of the market square to monitor the pedestrian flow throughout the market day. This has proven to be very beneficial in keeping the market square as COVID secure as possible for both customers and traders. At the time of compiling this report, lockdown footfall is being monitored to establish whether the extent of the current provision of Market Marshals is appropriate.

The Markets Officer continues to check that all traders have the correct PPE equipment (masks, hand sanitiser and gloves). In addition, most traders now have the technology to offer contactless payments to customers rather than dealing solely with cash. This has been very well received by customers visiting the market and is the most COVID secure way to pay for goods. Lichfield City Council will continue to promote and encourage customers to pay using contactless technology and support traders in adapting to this preferred payment system.

At a meeting of the Market Working Group on 16 December, it was agreed that pre-erected stalls provided by Lichfield City Council would not be returning to the market square during the ongoing COVID restrictions, this will be reviewed again at the next Market Working Group meeting in March 2021. An update to the Lichfield City Council Severe Weather Policy for the general market has been approved by the Market Working Group and issued to all Traders. Amendments to this policy include a review of the maximum wind speeds before cancelling a market as traders are now providing their own stalls on all three market days.

On Tuesday 29 December, severe weather caused the market to be cancelled at 11:30am. Heavy snowfall and icy conditions meant the market square was unsafe for traders and the general public. The Markets Officer cordoned off the whole square for safety reasons and traders were asked to pack away and leave. The 'cancelled market' provision was implemented which meant traders will not be charged rent for this trading day, those that had already paid are credited accordingly.

Lichfield General Market and The Producers Market continue to be promoted on social media via the City Councils Facebook and Twitter accounts. The Markets Officer recently trialled boosting these posts which proved successful and the Market Working Group have agreed that this should continue in 2021 to help promote Lichfield Market and support the traders.

The Producers Market continued to be held on the 1st Sunday of each month during 2020. CJ Events reported that both public and trader feedback has been very positive to date and they very much look forward to continual growth of this newly established market. The Market Working Group agree that CJ Events have done an outstanding job managing this market in what has been a disruptive year for many businesses. CJ Events have been successful in growing the Producers' market whilst maintaining COVID safe practices at all times.



The revised Market signage which is predominantly on Lichfield city centre car parks has now been designed, manufactured, and installed, a project undertaken from design to completion by the Civic Officer in her enhanced market-related role.



6. Guildhall: Helen Winter, Guildhall Bookings Officer

Phase 2 of the Guildhall renovation work has now been completed with only a few items on the snagging list to be resolved when lockdown restrictions are lifted.

The only hirer using the Guildhall throughout Lockdown 3 is the Dementia Support Group on Thursday mornings. This is a pre-booked event with no more than 15 members.

Some regular hirers with vulnerable members are not returning to the Guildhall until the current restrictions are lifted. The Guildhall Bookings Officer continues to liaise with all regular hirers regarding their return to the Guildhall. Enquiries for Weddings and other bookings during the second half of 2021 and 2022 are still being received. Unfortunately, the current lockdown is likely to have implications for some of the spring wedding receptions which were booked last year.

Although most hirers returned to Boley Park Community Hall in September, bookings have been suspended again during lockdown 3. The only booking remaining is Pre-school. Maintenance work to the outside of the building is a result of a comment in the architect's quinquennial report of the hall, recommending that the timber gablets be replaced with a low maintenance material. On closer inspection it was found that much of the timber, and the frame on which it was fixed, had rotted quite extensively. Repairs are underway at the time of preparing this report. Fortunately, the issue had not resulted in any internal leaks, but it was clearly only a matter of time before it would have done so, and demonstrates the advantages of a proactive rather than reactive approach to the repair of buildings in the Council's portfolio. Renovation work is almost complete on the car park, there will

inevitably be some disruption to the usual parking outside the community hall during this time, but hirers will be able to use the remainder of the Co-op car park.

The Bookings Officer also continues to assist with Planning applications, distributing them as they are submitted and collating the comments received by ward members.

7. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

Following the sudden announcement of a third national lockdown the Deputy Town Clerk has been working closely with all Officers to ensure the Council is fulfilling its legal requirements and adhering to the latest legislation. To reduce the risk of transmission, from Monday 11 January all Officers are predominantly working remotely from home. Premises Attendants will carry out routine building checks and office staff will take it in turns to monitor the post and answerphone each week day. Cleaning staff will also be on site to disinfect all surfaces.

The Christmas lights have now been dismantled and the Deputy is liaising with contractors regarding any replacements which may be needed for next year.

The Deputy will be providing secretariat support at the January Council meeting and continues to support the Bookings Officer on Planning matters including producing the Agenda and minutes. In the absence of the Administration Officer, the Deputy is collating the grant applications in preparation for the meeting of the Grants Committee on 1 February.