

OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT – JULY 2020

1. Civic Matters: Lucy Clarke, Civic Officer

The Civic Officer arranged for the civic silver to be re-valued for insurance purposes following a recommendation within the 2019/20 Internal Audit report; Richard Winterton Auctioneers conducted the valuations on 8 July in the Guild Room. The silver has not been valued for nearly 20 years, the most recent valuation being undertaken by Salloways Jewellers back in 2001. The Museums and Heritage Officer assisted the Civic Officer with unpacking, photographing, cataloguing and repacking each item.

The re-gilding of the historic names on the Mayoral Board has now been completed, with over 4600 letters being carefully re-gilded off-site during lockdown. Many of the names on the board had faded badly due to the use of poor quality gold leaf substitute on various occasions in both the 1800's and 1900's; the re-gilding process restores all names to their former glory and the process will not need to be repeated. The re-installation of the Mayoral Board took place on 10 July 2020, with a team of four specialist technicians on site to install a bespoke backing frame to the wall to enable this historic item to be suitably reattached; the previous baton arrangement being removed for safety reasons following inspection.

The current Mayoral Board has also been updated, with the names of the 2020/21 Mayor, Cllr Deborah Baker and Sheriff, Dr Daryl Brown added.

The Civic Officer is currently preparing for the Samuel Johnson Birthday Celebrations and Remembrance Sunday. Both events are likely to be very different this year due to the uncertainty with COVID-19, social distancing requirements and government guidance regarding large scale public events.

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

Following the inclusion of Museums in the late June announcements from Government, the Birthplace Museum scheduled reopening is Tuesday 14 July, shortly after the deadline for compiling this report.

Measures introduced to protect the public and the Museum team include: entry by free advance booking only to control visitor numbers and to assist the UK Track and Trace scheme, social distancing markers, route markings and signage, use of one-way entrance and exit doors, contactless payment as standard and a protective screen at the cash register, limiting access to the Bookshop for Museum visitors only, hand sanitiser throughout the building and regular cleaning.



Interactive activities and handling items have been removed to avoid contact between visitors, but family activities and international guides have been added to the Museum's website for visitors to download. Large print versions of wall panels are available to pick up and take away from the Museum. All of these measures are also supported by numerous procedural changes, and the Birthplace is certified under the Visit England 'Good to Go' Scheme.

In addition to preparing for reopening, the Birthplace maintained its online profile with a digital audience of 4,807 in May and early June, representing anyone directly engaging with a social media post, reading the e-newsletter or visiting the Museum's blog or website. The total 'reach' on Facebook and Twitter (anybody who saw a Birthplace post on their newsfeed) was 62,835.



Museum Administration Assistant Penny Taylor has led on reaching virtual audiences, and has also supported re-opening by creating the Museum's booking system, writing material for the website, downloadable content for visitors and making changes to internal administration procedures to be as paperless as possible. Penny has also attended Museums Association Webinars and has also been completing a full shop stocktake before re-opening.

The Museum Attendant team continued to support collection documentation projects and future events from home before re-opening, and casual Attendant Sue Bray has been invited to deliver a talk using 'zoom' to residents of the Three Spires Care home.

Alongside reopening the Museum, other recent MHO work has included: continuing the Development Project with liaison with architects and conservation officers; preparing documentation to assist with the revaluation of the Civic silver and progressing the restoration of the City Centre plaques. The pilot plaque, Stowe Gate from Lombard Street, has now been removed and is with conservators in Derbyshire.

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

Following the development of the Inspection Program App in December, the data from the open space inspections have been entered into the new system. Each City Council open space, footpath and bus stop now has at least one photograph attached to the site. This is important to (for example) compare the rate of deterioration of a footpath surface or for monitoring ash die-back over time. Having this information in one place is efficient and allows others to know what is current at a site in the absence of the officer. Phase two in this project was started in June with additional functionality added to the app. It will again be a few months before this final stage is complete, but it is already a useful tool in scheduling and keeping up to date with inspections.

The Open Spaces and footpaths have been well used during the COVID crisis but cocktails being served on Poolside walk on Saturday 4 July, to well behaved and socially distanced users of the area, was a clear visual indication that restrictions are being lifted. Further evidence of a release from the lockdown was the removal of the closure notices from play areas, replacing the signs with a list of guidelines to reduce the risk of contracting the virus.



Eight hanging baskets were commissioned for the Guildhall, Donegal House and Dr. Johnsons which now add an element of cheer to the City Centre.

There were some unexpected visitors at Netherstowe on 3 July when 15 caravans arrived on City Council land alongside Curborough Brook. Officers were informed that arrival at such a time can be common practice as it is thought most landowners will not take action until after the weekend. However, in this instance by 7.00pm on the same evening the Open Spaces Officer and Cllr. Robertson were in attendance to witness the Police read the Code of Conduct notice to the leader of the group. By Saturday, notices of land ownership and warning of action to be taken had been distributed and displayed on the lamp posts, and black plastic bags given to caravan owners so household rubbish could be collected.



Tension between the local residents and the travellers intensified over the weekend, and on Sunday the Police, equipped with the relevant paperwork from LDC, were able to move the caravans on. The Street Scene department at LDC were then quick to clean the site on Monday. There was evidence of anti-social behaviour such as bark being mindlessly stripped from trees, the example in the photograph to the right being certain to die as a result.



The City Council is now urgently reviewing the access to this Open Space to reduce the risk of a reoccurrence.

4. Markets: Jordan Appleyard, Markets Officer



The Officers at Lichfield City Council have worked tirelessly to ensure Lichfield outdoor General Market was able to fully re-open COVID safely on Tuesday 2 June. The market layout was changed to allow the 2m social distancing requirements along with a one-way barrier system that has been created in the middle of the square.

Most permanent licenced traders are now back operating on all three market days. The Saturday market traders have been most affected due to the amount of permanent licenced traders exceeding actual space available on the Market Square; the only solution available to keep things as fair as possible was to introduce a rota system, this is currently in place to all 'non-essential' traders. All traders are adhering to the new market rules and reduced space available to them. There has been a noticeable increase in footfall over the past few weeks, especially since the re-opening of shops on Monday 15 June. With the reduction in social distancing guidelines to 1 metre plus, a revised market layout has allowed space for two extra stalls.



Hand sanitisers are provided on market days and conveniently located at each end of the Market Square alongside the one-way barrier system currently in place to control pedestrian traffic and maintain social distancing requirements. Traders are currently using their own market stalls, and this is reflected in the reduced stall fees being charged, based on the Tuesday rent model.

Traders are currently charged 50% of the prevailing pitch fees as agreed by Council resolution on 15 June and this will remain in place until 11 August. The Minutes of the meeting of the Markets Working Group, who are due to discuss the next steps in regard to this incentive from 11 August, will form a separate agenda item to the July meeting of the Council. The service charge has increased from £3 per stall to £5 per pitch and is not subject to the 50% stall fee reduction.

All traders now pay their stall fees by debit/credit card as cash payments are no longer accepted. Most traders use the contactless feature on their debit/credit cards avoiding any unnecessary contact with the handheld debit/credit card machine. There has been a noticeable increase in market traders also now offering debit/credit card payment facilities to their customers.



Lichfield General Markets along with the Sunday Producers Market (held Monthly) were both promoted this month in The Lichfield Advertiser, The Village Advertiser and The Darwin Advertiser. Areas covered include; Boley Park, Streethay, Borrowcop, Stowe, Whittington, Handsacre, The Longdons, The Ridwares, Kings Bromley, Yoxall, Fradley, Alrewas, Darwin Park, Leomansley, Friary, City, Chadsmead, Curborough and Shenstone.

Both markets have also been promoted on social media via City Councils Facebook and Twitter feeds.

The second Producers Market was held on Sunday 5 July. C J Events were pleased to be back on the Market Square for only their second time as COVID-19 has prevented them from returning until now. 21 traders attended selling a variety of local produce, arts and crafts. Social distancing measures were in place and CJ Events confirmed that the public response had been very positive. They are very much looking forward to growing this market each month.



As part of the annual maintenance of the kitchen block and toilet area on the Market Square, arrangements were made to have the building professionally deep cleaned at the end of June. The doors and frames along with the outside flooring area has also been cleaned and refreshed.

The Spiritualist Public house recently hired Minster Pool Walk on Saturday 4 July 2020 to install a 'pop up' bar. The trader was given guidance to set up on the grass area away from the footpath to allow enough space for social distancing requirements. Customers were able to sit on the grass area and enjoy a drink in the late evening sunshine.

Minster Pool Walk has also been offered as a possible trading area alternative for those traders affected by the Saturday rota

system, unfortunately this was not positively received but still stands as an alternative should the traders wish to utilise it.

5. Twinning: Gabriele Lasch-Burden, Twinning Officer



The Twinning Officer is in regular contact with the councils of Limburg and Ste. Foy, receiving regular updates on the impact of the current pandemic.

Lichfield residents have been contacted regarding the cancelled trip to Limburg in September and the Twinning Officer has been assisting in the cancellation of flights and possible refunds.

The Mayor of Lichfield, Cllr Mrs Deborah Baker has sent a letter of congratulation to the Mayor of Ste. Foy for her comprehensive re-election win and the Mayor of Limburg has sent personalised face masks to Lichfield as a sign of friendship and solidarity at this difficult time.

Discussions have begun with Limburg City Council regarding the 'Pity of War' monument project by Lichfield artist Peter Walker. The statue portrays a young child, eyes bound, and mouth silenced, and stands in recognition of unspoken stories and unseen memories of innocent civilian victims of war, who are not individually remembered on military based memorials. Following a touring exhibition of the statue, including the National Memorial Arboretum in Alrewas, there are now permanent copies at the British Embassy in Dubai, Paris and various national Cathedrals. It is hoped that a copy of the statue could be placed in a display stand outside the council's offices in Limburg's city centre, a decision by the Limburg council is expected after their summer recess.

6. Guildhall: Helen Winter, Guildhall Bookings Officer

The easing of lockdown restrictions has enabled Phase II of the Guildhall renovation works to begin ahead of schedule. The radiators have been removed for refurbishment and the French Polisher close to completing work on the wooden panels which were not previously treated. The new oak flooring is due to be delivered shortly after the deadline for this report. General maintenance work around the building is being carried out by the Premises Assistants including refurbishing the banqueting chairs used in the main hall.

All the regular hirers have been contacted regarding the reopening of the building and asked to provide revised room layouts which will be checked by the Guildhall Bookings Officer before the bookings resume. The terms & conditions on the Guildhall booking form have also been revised and reissued to reflect the new safety measures put in place to make the building COVID safe. Health and Safety posters have been displayed and hand sanitiser stations purchased for use around the building.

The building will open briefly on 2 August to facilitate a small Wedding ceremony in the Guildroom. Government guidelines and guidance from Staffordshire Registrars will be strictly adhered to.

Boley Hall still remains closed. During this time, a number of repairs have been carried out including repairing the back door and replacing a broken window. Following completion of the architect's quinquennial inspection of the Hall a few weeks ago, an asbestos survey has been carried out and a schedule of minor repairs has been prepared; discussions are underway with local tradesmen to address these relatively minor issues before they deteriorate into larger scale problems. In preparation for reopening, a deep clean has been carried out and social distancing tape will be placed outside the front and rear exits. Additional hand sanitiser units have been installed and COVID-19 compliant posters displayed around the hall.

7. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

The Deputy Town Clerk has been working with officers to facilitate the reopening of the general markets. As detailed in the Markets Officer's report, retractable barriers were put in place on the square, promoting a one-way system around the market. Meticulous attention was paid to social distancing in the planning of all three markets and the Deputy was on duty for all markets along with other officers to resolve any issues that traders or members of the public might have. As a result, the markets are running effectively and attracting a good footfall.

Following further updates to the Government's guidelines the Deputy has revised the City Council's risk assessments to reflect the measures put in place to make each building COVID safe, protecting both staff and the public. Donegal House reception is now open daily from 10.00am – 2.00pm and all contractors are required to make an appointment in advance to carry out maintenance work.

In addition, the City Council has obtained the 'We're Good to Go' accreditation for both Donegal House and the Guildhall. The 'We're Good To Go' industry standard has been developed by Visit England to support businesses towards reopening and welcoming customers back to their venues. The industry standard and consumer mark is designed to provide a 'ring of confidence' for businesses as well as reassurance to local residents and visitors that clear processes are in place and that as a business, we are *good to go*. The Deputy continues to monitor the ever-changing guidelines issued by the Government to ensure the Council remains compliant.



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