

## OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT

### 1. Civic Matters

The Johnson Birthday Celebrations were held on Market Square on Saturday 18 September to mark 312 years since the birth of Lichfield's most famous son. In keeping with tradition, just after midday, the Mayor placed a laurel chaplet on the statue of Dr Samuel Johnson after which St. Michael's choir sang Johnson's last prayer.

Following the low-key event held during COVID restrictions in 2020, it was good to return this well attended and historic event to normality.

On 11 September the Sheriff, Mr. Peter Hitchman, and Sheriff's Lady, Mrs. Pat Peters undertook the perambulation of the boundaries of the City to fulfil the command of Queen Mary's charter of 1553. The Sheriff and Sheriff's Lady left the City in a magnificent horse-drawn carriage.

Alighting from the carriage at The Pinfold, the Sheriff and Sheriff's lady were then chauffeured around the City by the Clerk of the Course, Mr Nick Sedgwick, visiting landowners along the route.



Returning to the carriage for the entrance to the City, The Sheriff and Sheriff's Lady were escorted by the Sword and Mace Bearers, and greeted by Revd. Canon Andrew Stead on the traditional return via The Close.



Following discussions earlier in the year it had been agreed that the event would not be the normal 'Sheriff's Ride' due to uncertainties regarding COVID-19 and potential organisational difficulties. As the largest and most resource intensive event organised by the City Council, an early decision on its format for 2021 needed to be taken, but it was agreed that – should restrictions allow at the time – a Sheriff's Banquet would be held in the Guildhall following the Sheriff's return to the City.

The Banquet was a resounding success, with approximately 90 guests, including the Mayor and Mayoress, Deputy Mayor and Mayoress, Chairman and Vice Chairman of Lichfield District Council, and the Chairman of Staffordshire County Council. Guests gathered in the Guildhall to celebrate the fulfilment of the Charter command and to celebrate the role of Sheriff, with many positive comments received both during and after the event.

The evening was however tinged with sadness as news emerged during the event of the death of Mr Peter Barrett, Chairman of Lichfield Twinning Association, and former City Councillor, Mayor and Sheriff, who had been scheduled to attend and who was greatly missed.

On Tuesday 19 October the Mayor and Sheriff welcomed 64 guests to the Guildhall for their charity quiz night. The questions were kindly set by the Mayoress (who did not take part) and teams of 4 entered into the competitive spirit whilst enjoying a light buffet. Cllr David Salter kept an eye on proceedings and the scores, acting as compere. The event raised an excellent £1,101 for the Mayor and Sheriff's chosen charities.



On 21 October 2021, the Mayor formally reopened the newly renovated Cruck House on Stowe Street, with the Sheriff also in attendance, plus the Chair of Curborough Community Association (who manage the Hall on behalf of the Council) and the Town Clerk. The reopening took place during a meeting of 'Friends2Friends', one of this year's chosen charities, and was greatly enjoyed by all who attended. Photographs of the renovations are included at the end of this officers' report.



The annual Remembrance service was held in the Cathedral on Sunday 14 November. Following the Cathedral service, Deputy Lieutenant of Staffordshire Colonel Adrian Walton MBE TD, accompanied by the Mayor, led the civic party into the Remembrance Gardens to observe the national two minutes silence and then perform the wreath laying ceremony, after which the Dean of Lichfield, the Very Reverend Adrian Dorber gave the blessing.



A professional public address system was used once again to ensure the large crowds could hear the ceremony. Oakwood security were employed to enforce the road closure and ensure public safety. After the wreath laying ceremony in the Remembrance Gardens, around 80 guests returned to the Guildhall for light refreshments. The Mayor gave thanks on behalf of Lichfield City Council to all those involved on the day and Mrs Christine Ayling gave a toast on behalf of the Royal British Legion.

The Charity Ball was due to be held shortly after the deadline for this report, and the Christmas Lights switch on is scheduled for 28 November. The next Officers report will cover these events in detail.

On 10 November the Mayor & Sheriff held an additional charity event at the George Hotel. Lesley Smith, Curator of Tutbury Castle provided an evening with Elizabeth I. The event was a sell out and raised £856.00. This was organised independently by the Mayor and Sheriff and

is in addition to the agreed 5 charity events which the City Council facilitates during their year in office.

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

From September 20 to November 1 Johnson's Birthplace was successfully rewired by Darwin Electrical. Work was carried out in close liaison with architects and saw very minimal disturbance of any historic fabric. The Museum bookshop remained open to visitors for the majority of the work, and special events were able to take place. Closure was extended when asbestos board was identified in the basement ceiling, causing work to halt. The area was inspected, confirmed safe and batons added by a specialist company to enable rewiring to be completed. Although rewiring was largely a 'behind the scenes' piece of maintenance, many rooms have benefited from new lighting.

Work is underway on building the elements of the new workroom displays, to be installed in early 2022. The outcome of the current planning application for the visitor toilet and ground floor disabled access was expected on October 14, but the date has been extended.

Visitors to the Museum totalled 2264 in September and October, despite the partial closure for rewiring. This shows an increase of 194% on visitors in the same months during 2020, and 50% of pre-pandemic visitor numbers. 3830 people engaged with the Museum digitally over the two months, with a social media 'reach' of 31,510 people.

Johnson's Birthday Celebrations took place on Saturday 19 September. In addition to the Civic events on the Market Square, a programme of activities in the Museum followed the national Heritage Open Day festival's 'Edible England' theme. This included a free slice of Birthday cake for visitors, floral displays, Storytelling with Christine Genders, performances by the

Lichfield Poets, a family trail, and craft activities were held in a gazebo outside the Museum on Market Street. The Guildhall Cells were also open for visits. 172 visitors attended the Birthplace Museum. On the

same day, the Birthplace contributed Dictionary definitions to a climate-themed trail as part of 'Ecofest' held at Wade Street Church. From 23 – 26 October the Birthplace hosted the L2F Festival of Folk Art Competition exhibition of finalists, with entrants from across the country.

The Museum was also a venue for small performances and workshops on Saturday 23 October, with over 100 visitors. The Birthplace team also took





part in the annual L2F procession, celebrating arts and heritage organisations from the area.

Museum volunteers led family activities for the half term holidays on Thursday 28 October and the Birthplace participated in Visit Lichfield's 'Trick or treat' tour.

The Birthplace was invited to take part in Black History Month at the Hub at St Mary's, as part of 'Face: an exhibition in honour of Francis Barber'. Sue Bray delivered a talk about Barber on Wednesday 13 October alongside a poetry workshop organised by the Kwanzaa Collective.

At the invitation of Staffordshire Library Service, material about the Birthplace was provided to appear in an online 'escape room' event as part of Staffordshire History Festival.



A group visit was held for the John Buchan Society, in collaboration with the Johnson Society, and a bespoke Johnson city tour delivered for students from Derby University. School visit enquiries have also increased. Birmingham University student Macey Palmer started her work placement at the Museum, with a project to review current marketing and create a briefing document for future use. Keele University PhD student Emma Stanbridge was able to visit the Museum collections in person for the first time since starting her work with the Birthplace in 2020.

The Birthplace Book Group was invited to submit questions for a recording of Radio 4's 'Bookclub', and member and Museum volunteer Mandy Griffiths took part in the programme which was broadcast on Sunday 7 November. The Museum's writing group re-convened in September for their first meeting since the start of the pandemic, and the Latin groups held provisional meetings to plan a new term to start in January 2022.

Other projects which the Museums and Heritage Officer and the Museum Support Officer have undertaken in the reporting period included: preparing documents for the November JBAC meeting; progressing the City Plaque restorations project, with the five plaques on the Market Square restored; information panels about the City's Charters for display at the Guildhall; updating souvenir products for the Museum shop including fridge magnets and tote bags. Museum team members also attended Health and Safety and Fire Safety sessions organised by the Deputy Town Clerk.

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

Phase 1 of the scheduled improvements to Festival Gardens began in late October with the trees around Trunkfield Brook being dead wooded, crown lifted and thinned in line with tree surgeon and Arboricultural Officer recommendations, and to allow access for machinery to desilt the Brook. Following further advice from the Arboricultural Officer, a number of small cherry trees that had been planted too close to each other, to the path and to adjacent specimen trees, were removed. Photos below left show the open space prior to the work being carried out, while photos on the right were taken afterwards.





The next phase is the much-needed de-silting of the Brook, and to that end a meeting was held with the contractors and LDC's Arboricultural Officer to agree a method statement for this work to ensure the root system of the adjacent trees is protected. The de-silting and second phase of treework – which will see remaining trees on the site crown lifted, thinned and dead-wooded as appropriate – is due to be completed shortly after the deadline for this report.

The 'wilding' area at Festival Gardens has received its annual cut, and the proposals for 2022 will enhance this area significantly. Grassed pathways are to be maintained through the area to allow greater access for residents and visitors, notably those who use a wheelchair. The area will be turned and sown with wildflower seeds by Lichfield District Council's Operational Services Team shortly. It is hoped these seeds will improve the wildflower display in 2022 and beyond.

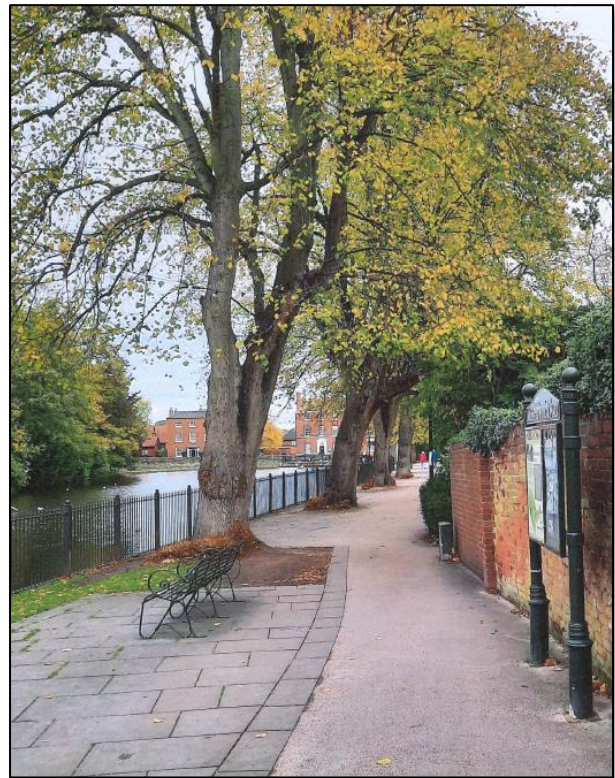
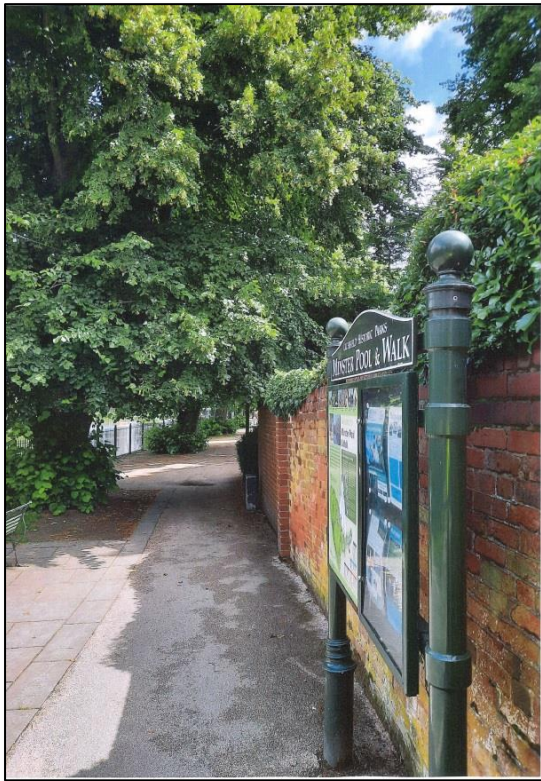
A meeting with representatives from Transition Lichfield took place in late October. While volunteer contributions and involvement are welcomed, such projects must be formalised. The aim of the meeting was to designate a certain area for their activity in order to avoid a repeat of previous issues, and disappointment to the volunteers if their planting is lost through the usual mowing process. Arrangements are being finalised at the time of preparing this report.

Clearance work has been completed at Dovehouse Fields to assist the Community Association who manage this former allotment site. The area had become somewhat overgrown during COVID, and following a complaint from a nearby resident and discussions with representatives from the Community Association, it was agreed that LDC's Operational Services would be asked to assist. The clearance around the edge of the site enables the plot holders to gain a head start and allows for easier future maintenance. As ever, LDC's Operational Services staff did an excellent job.

The play area adjacent to Curborough Community Centre and the hopscotch matting in front of the Centre have recently been repaired, generating positive comments from users.

Low tree branches were noted on the entrance to the Remembrance Garden. With the permission of the LDC Arboricultural Officer, lower branches were subsequently trimmed back in preparation for Remembrance Sunday. The Garden of Remembrance was cleared of leaves on several occasions in the lead up to Remembrance Sunday, with plants also being trimmed back, steps pressure washed and swept and the railings at the memorial cleaned.

The trees along Pool Walk have received significant pruning and dead wooding, plus crown lifts and removal of epicormic growth where necessary. This main route across the City is very well used and the completed work has attracted a number of positive comments. The photograph on the left overleaf shows Pool Walk prior to the tree work, and the photo on the right illustrates the resulting improvement. The loss of leaves in the period between the photographs does make it more difficult to make a direct comparison, but the change is significant.



LCC's preferred tree surgeons are very busy currently, with work instructed in October/November being scheduled for February 2022. However, a number of other projects have been progressed or completed since the last Officers' Report:

- A failing cherry tree that was covered in ivy and presented a danger to passers by and the adjacent car park was removed from the Friary Remains site
- Extensive tree work has been carried out to open space 15b (Beaconfields) to thin and reduce trees in accordance with professional recommendation
- Further tree work completed at several sites on Boley Park, including Cappers Lane, Cornfield Drive and Haymoor
- Meeting with LDC Operational Services and Cllr Robertson regarding opportunities for 'wilding' in Curborough ward
- Scheduled extensive tree work on the former canal land on Tamworth Rd (from London Rd bridge to Cricket Lane). This work, in the main, is to return the trees to a statutory clearance for pathways and roads on this important route into the City. Dead wood removal will also be carried out at the same time.
- Scheduled extensive tree work to Open Space 15d (Lillington Close/Swinfen Broun Rd), to include assessment of the impressive scotch pine and thinning of the dense trees along Swinfen Broun Rd. The contractor and Open Spaces officer have been in discussions with residents to ensure a balanced approach to this work is undertaken.
- Scheduled tree work to open space 58 (Manor Rise)
- The hedge running along the eastern boundary of open space 10 (Netherstowe) has been cut back and reshaped. At the same time, the vegetation adjacent to the brook was also cleared. Further tree work has been undertaken adjacent to the cycle path



to clear branches from pathway lights and remove dead wood. This work led to further positive and appreciative comments from residents.

- Discussions are underway with LDC's Arboricultural Officer and a tree surgeon in regard to the Clock Tower open space, notably the trees/shrubs to the west elevation that have grown considerably over the past few years. It is hoped that a more sympathetic and attractive design can be implemented in line with wider proposals for the Clock Tower that have emerged from the architect's recent quinquennial inspection. Proposals include the upgrading of the floodlighting and reinstatement of the fourth floodlight that has not been functional for more than 20 years, the original fitting being stolen shortly after installation; this is being progressed by the Town Clerk.

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

Following discussions between Lichfield and Limburg City Councils, it was decided to postpone the annual week-long internship of Limburg's council apprentices to Lichfield, which was due to take place in October, until the Easter holidays in 2022. Covid Testing entry regulations and office closures, as well as the lack of host families, made it difficult to organise placements for a meaningful work experience.

A new online project started between Lichfield's Saxon Hill Academy and Limburg's Astrid-Lindgren-Schule during the last school lockdown. Saxon Hill Academy pupils have started learning a little German and practised some greetings in German, introducing themselves and their city and sharing some of their favourite music during their video calls with the Limburg partner school, which takes place every 3 to 4 weeks. They have also swapped boxes from their respective countries. During next month's video call they will be sharing different Christmas songs. In the photograph, Astrid-Lindgren pupils are shown preparing for the online connection to Lichfield's Saxon Hill Academy.



On 12th November, a 2-hour ring twinning online meet-up was held by the 3 twin towns of Limburg, Ste. Foy and Lichfield. The Chairs of all 3 Twinning Associations covered various subjects around all aspects of Twinning in these extraordinary times, as well as the forthcoming international meeting in Limburg at the end of April next year.

The funeral of Lichfield's Twinning Association Chairman, Mr. Peter Barrett, took place on 15th October 2021 at Wade Street Church and St. Michael's Churchyard, amongst a small congregation of close friends and family.

## **5. Guildhall/Boley Park Community Hall: Helen Winter, Guildhall Bookings Officer**

All but two regular hirers have now returned to the hall, one has moved to an alternative venue more suitable for Arts groups and another will be returning in January 2022. Some restrictions are still in place in order to guard against COVID transmission, such as operating at 75% capacity for room numbers and one-way systems for the main hall and Guildroom. There are now antibacterial units on all floors in the building.

The 2023 diary will be released shortly and new booking forms/paperwork will be sent to all regular hirers in the next few weeks. The 2022 diary has no Saturdays free now between 5 February and 2 July, there are also regular enquiries for other dates.

Since the last report, the Guildhall has been used for four wedding receptions, two Celebration of Life/Wake bookings, two birthday parties (50<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup>), three Lichfield Arts concerts and their L2F weekend. A school was also able to hold their awards presentation evening, which had previously been postponed no less than four times.

Lichfield Live also held their second Community Awards event in October which honoured community heroes in Lichfield and Burntwood. Awards included a Partnership prize which went to Curborough Community Centre and Lichfield Foodbank.



The Tourist Information Centre have visited the Old Prison Cells several times in recent weeks, particularly over Halloween, and have further cell tours booked.

Further work was carried out on the new Guildhall floor during October half term; this scheduled work follows the 'settling' of the floor over the past few months and improves the look and finish of the floor considerably.

## **Boley Park Community Hall**

A roof leak at the hall has recently been repaired. All but one regular hirer has returned to the hall, and there has been a marked increase in the number of enquiries for children's parties in the last few weeks. The 2022 diary is now available for bookings and the financial information required for the external audit of end of year accounts is currently being compiled.

## **6. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas**

In the absence of the Civic Officer the Deputy Town Clerk is currently facilitating all Civic events and engagements including Remembrance Sunday, the Charity Ball and Mayor's Carols, in addition to overseeing the Markets Operation.



The Deputy Town Clerk will be assisting the Town Clerk in the recruitment of a new Markets Officer as the present incumbent seconded from CJ Events will be leaving at the end of December.

At the time of writing this report preparations still continue for the Christmas lights Switch on Event; a full report will be presented to members in January.

The Deputy Town Clerk will also be providing secretariat support at the December Council meeting and January NPIWP.

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### **Cruck House**

Following the 'in progress' report to September Council, work at Cruck House to update the aged annexe accommodation and certain aspects of the host building is now complete. The renovated Cruck House was formally opened by the Mayor of Lichfield, Councillor Robert Yardley on 21 October. A selection of 'before and after' photos follow:

Before	After
	
	



