

For Council: 22 January 2024 APPENDIX 7

OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT

1. Civic Matters: Harriet Chatwin, Civic Officer

The Carols for Christmas Service was held in the Guildhall on Tuesday 5 December and at the request of the Mayor, Cllr Ann Hughes, the theme was Peace Around the World, particularly at Christmas time. The service was once again led by the Mayor's Chaplain, Reverend Ian Hayter.

The story of the birth of Jesus Christ was told by the Mayor & Cllr Ed Strain with thoughtfully selected poems read by the Deputy Mayor, Cllr Sam Schafer & Leader of Lichfield City Council, Cllr Dave Robertson, including Carol Ann Duffy's 'The Christmas Truce'. Prayers were led at the end of the Service by Nigel Gann, representing the Mayor's charity 'Lichfield City of Sanctuary'.



The service included a mixture of carols including 'Born in the Night' and traditional carols like 'Hark! The herald Angels sing!' This time, guests were joined by Lichfield Tuneless Choir who came prepared with their Santa Hats & words to a rendition of 'It's beginning to sound a lot like Tuneless', they were a pleasure to watch and greatly enjoyed by the assembled audience.

Also present once again was Dudley Ray, along with the combined choir of St Michael's Church who truly enhanced the event and created a wonderful festive atmosphere to start of the season.

The evening concluded with former Lichfield City Councillor Tony Thompson serving his top-secret recipe of mulled wine (orange juice for the drivers) to all the guests, accompanied by a warm mince pie.

Generous donations were received on the night for the Mayor & Sheriff's charities, totalling £116.00.



At the time of preparing this report, we are pleased to share that the Mayor has attended and supported 43 engagements in the City so far, the Deputy Mayor has attended 23 events representing the Mayor and the Sheriff has attended 29 events. Both the Mayor & Sheriff are continuing to raise money in the New Year for their two chosen charities; Lichfield City of Sanctuary & St Giles Hospice. *The Mayor is pictured at the opening of 'Grace Cares' new unit at Elmhurst Business Park.*

As mentioned in December's Officers Report, the Mayor and Sheriff met with the winner of the Civic Christmas Card Competition in the Mayor's Parlour on Friday 15 December. Accompanied by his parents and sister, Felix Osbourne from Charnwood Primary Academy was presented with his framed Christmas Card & gift voucher, which has been kindly provided by the Lichfield 'Entertainer Toy Shop'.

Felix was delighted to have won the competition and was even more excited to get his gift card spent on anything 'Minecraft' themed.

Preparations continue for forthcoming events including a service at Wade St Church on Sunday 14 January & the Annual Pancake races taking place on Bore Street on Tuesday 13 February, which coincidentally falls in half-term as it did in 2023.

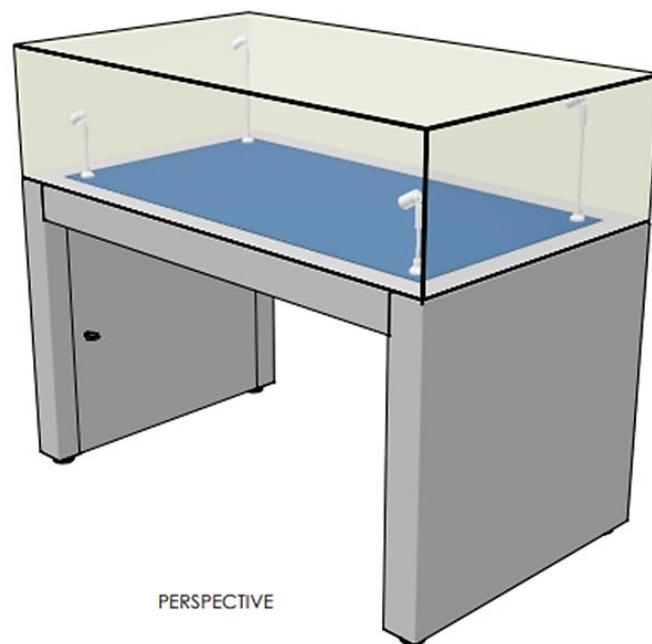


2. Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum: Kimberley Biddle, Museums and Heritage Officer

The Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum has welcomed 14,368 people this financial year (April-end December), a 43% increase on 2022/23 visitor numbers.

An article written by the Museums and Heritage Officer (MHO) about the recent Johnson letter acquisition has been accepted for publication in the Friends of the National Libraries (FNL) annual report. The article reflects on the content of the letter and will be freely accessible online via the FNL's website.

Following an internal review of the Birthplace's most significant collections on public display, subsequent recommendation from JBAC and adoption by council, an order for five new display cases has been placed. These showcases will replace a large portion of the existing 1980's cases. The new cases were chosen to provide a high level of security and environmental control, whilst the attack resistant all-glass vitrine enables full visibility of the exhibits. The showcase design is minimal and streamlined, and an off-white colour has been selected for the frame and dress panel. The design, though contemporary, will sit beautifully in the rooms and will elevate the standard of displays, appropriate to the importance and high quality of the collections. The newly acquired Johnson letter will be one of the highlight objects to feature in a new showcase. The MHO is researching funding opportunities to replace the remaining old and problematic cases.



Further progress has been made on the Johnson bust reinstatement project with the bust undergoing the final phase of restoration; the careful application of handmade limewash. The colour of the limewash has been selected to match traces of the original finish. This has been sourced from a company whose limewashes have been used on the Queen's Chapel, and Kew Palace. Later this month a structural engineer alongside Messenger, the building contractor, will undertake an internal and external inspection of the building on Bird Street to establish the method of fixing the bust in place. Once this inspection has been completed a date for its reinstatement will be confirmed.

The MHO met with Professor Nicholas Seager from Keele University to reestablish Keele's relationship with the Birthplace and to replace Joanne Wilson, the former MHO's position on the supervisory team for PhD researcher Emma Stanbridge. The relationship with Keele has been mutually beneficial, providing developmental opportunities for



students, and expanding the public programme and research opportunities at the Birthplace.

An application for Listed Building Consent to remove asbestos and undertake associated remedial work in the Basement of the Birthplace has been submitted and notification of the decision is due by 5 February. Work will be completed by the end of the financial year, subject to the local planning authority's approval of the proposed alterations.

The MHO has been in discussion with Brownhill Hayward Brown architects regarding necessary repair work to the Birthplace's valley gutter following issues identified in a drone survey of the roof. A meeting with contractors is scheduled later in January to establish the full extent of repairs required, with plans to schedule the work in the forthcoming financial year. The photograph below from the drone survey shows the hidden valley gutter which is the subject of greatest concern currently.



The Birthplace remained open throughout the festive period, only closing on Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and New Year's Day. Regular groups have resumed after the Christmas break including Bookworms, Latin Learners, and the Writing Group. The Birthplace Book Club continues to be extremely popular; new members joined in January and the group now has a waiting list.

As part of the continuing work on the City Plaques Project, the Tamworth Gate plaque has been replaced following the theft of the original in the Autumn. The new bronze plaque and backboard are smaller in size, providing a much-improved fit.



3. Open Spaces: Nigel Boden, Open Spaces Officer and Jane Varley, Clerical Officer Curborough Community Centre Field (Site 9)

The fencing around the car park and play areas at CCC has now been replaced.

The previous wooden fencing had come to the end of its useful life, despite several repairs undertaken due to rot or vandalism. The condition of the fence had also been highlighted in the latest RoSPA annual report on the play area.

The new concrete/metal fencing will provide a permanent solution the financing for which has been approved for CIL funding by the Grants Advisory Committee.



Friary Remains (Site 19A)

Prevalent growth during the summer had resulted in the border along the back wall of Friary Remains becoming overgrown. A general tidy up has taken place, shrubs and bushes cut back and the wall and steps have been cleared.



Footpath - Christchurch Lane to A51 Allotments (FP 16)



The strong winds during the Christmas holiday period brought down a Hawthorn tree which completely blocked access along the LCC footpath bordering Christchurch Allotments.

The fallen tree has now been cleared by appointed tree surgeon.

The opportunity has also been taken to cut back heavy Ivy loaded limbs overhanging the path and trim hedges/branches encroaching on the path.



Other matters progressed/completed since the last report and in addition to routine inspections includes:

- Remembrance Gardens (28) - Crown lift of oak trees scheduled for mid-January 2024. Plaques for an additional two trees have been requested.
- St Michael's Churchyard (60) – Additional tree safety work, removal of Lime (T708) is scheduled for March 2024.
- Heather Gardens (19b) – Fell dead cherry tree, crown lift over footpaths, reduce three lime trees and remove epicormic growth completed 16 December.
- Birch Grove (17A) – Lime tree reduction and reshape completed 18 November.
- Kean Close to Terry Close (5) – Crown reduce two maple trees and cut back from property at Ferndale Road completed 9 December.
- Christchurch Churchyard Extension (61) - reduction of red oak encroaching over residents' gardens at Townfields completed 19 December 2023.
- Stowe Pool - Mill Croft to St Chad's Road Cycleway (FP22) – Plans for improvement of cycleway signage and ground markings are being progressed.

4. Markets: Jeremy Williams, Markets Officer/Michelle Read – Office Administrator

The New Year has unfortunately seen the loss of two long term traders that stand all three market days. However, the Friday and Saturday pitches have been taken up by *Ryan James Butchers* who has proved a popular addition on the Tuesday Markets. The Markets continue to attract new traders such as '*Deluxe Snacks*' selling hot take away Indian food. *The Potting Shed* selling antiques and collectables has become a permanent trader.



The inclement winter weather resulted in a restricted market on 9 December and a cancellation of one of the additional Christmas markets on Thursday 21 December due to the predicted high winds. However, the additional market on Wednesday 20 was able to go ahead with the nine Traders in attendance reporting a good footfall.

The Festive Market on Minster Pool Walk, which ran alongside the Christmas Lights Switch On event on 26 November, had a total of 24 traders standing and proved a great success.



Officers worked closely with Lichfield District Council to ensure all licences and consent to trade were verified and up to date before the day.

On 16 December Aston Villa football legend Dennis Mortimer took up residence on Martyn Shaws Picture Frame stall with the European cup. The football veteran spent the day signing autographs and having pictures taken with the cup

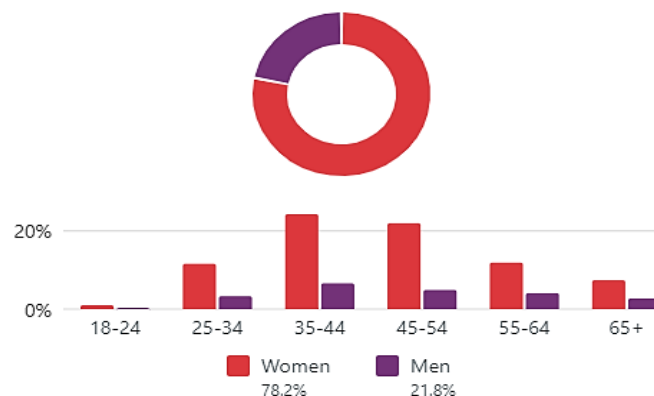
The markets social media platforms maintain a good following and is also used to advertise for traders to join the market on Tuesday, Fridays, and Saturdays.

The statistics below show the number of followers on Facebook and Instagram. Officers are tracking numbers to determine the most effective posts.

Facebook followers ⓘ

3,478

Age & gender ⓘ



Instagram followers ⓘ

67

Age & gender ⓘ

You need 100 follow
To protect the privacy of
needs to be at least 100 |

The City Council has now joined the Rural Services Network to promote Lichfield and share good practice with other rural markets, towns & cities. The membership is free for twelve months, during which time officers will be able to assess the benefits.

The last Vegan market of 2023 was well attended with a total 22 stalls, dates for 2024 have been confirmed.



The Producers' Market operated by CJ Events on the first Sunday of the month is also well supported by traders and is very popular with the shoppers. The market is set to return on the first Sunday of February.

The Christmas Food Festival took place on the 9 & 10 December despite the blustery weather conditions. Cockerhoop Creative hired Minster Pool Walk with a total of 16 traders on the Saturday but only 10 traders on the Sunday as a result of the high winds.



On 17 & 18 December *The Red Book Bus* hired the Market Square to sell children's books at a reduced cost. They hope to return in February.

5. Guildhall & Boley Park Community Hall: Helen Winter, Bookings Officer

Several regular hirers held Christmas Parties in the Guildhall prior to their Christmas break.

There was also an exceptional number of Market Research bookings – 9 in total, which being a commercial booking, generated significant revenue. Six meetings were also held, mostly in the smaller rooms. There was also a Wedding Reception and a 60th Birthday Party.

Lichfield Arts held 4 concerts, their last one being on 15 December. As well as their concerts, Guildhall also hosted several other Christmas events: 3 orchestral concerts and 3 choir concerts.

Lichfield District Council also held a Leisure Centre Drop in. Another drop-in session will take place in January on the City Centre Pedestrianisation scheme.

The Guildhall closed for Christmas with a successful private Britpop/Christmas concert, which was sold out. The first private booking of 2024 was a wedding reception on Saturday 6 January.

Other bookings included a school awards night and a 'Green Conversations' event.

Facebook and Instagram pages have now been created for the building

Boley Park Community Hall

Bookings for children's parties continued right up to Christmas. This year, we also had a playscheme booked in for the period between Christmas and 5 January (school holidays).

The end of year accounts have been submitted to the external auditor. LCC officers continue to manage the hall and its finances following the resignation of the management committee in 2016, with the Guildhall Bookings Officer acting as Bookings Secretary for the Hall, and the Town Clerk as Treasurer.

The agendas for the AGM and Management Committee meetings are currently being prepared by the Town Clerk, with the hope that changes proposed at that meeting will enable a resolution to longstanding bank mandate issues.

6. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas



The Deputy Town Clerk is working with the Guildhall Bookings Officer, looking at publicity to promote the Guildhall and to find a more permanent solution to the hire of private bars since Lichfield Arts withdrew their services for private bookings as a result of staffing issues.

In addition, the Deputy is assisting both the Twinning and Civic Officer with events later this year and planning ahead for events in 2025 and 2026.

The Deputy Town Clerk is also working on associated projects for the Grants Advisory Committee and Markets Working Group and will be providing secretariat support at the respective meetings in February.

The important work regarding Critical Incidents continues, with the City Council forging relationships with other key stakeholders in the City to form a coherent City-wide plan. At the invitation of the Three Spires Shopping Centre all stakeholders recently met to discuss further and share information.

On Friday 22 December Lichfield City Council lit the Clock Tower green in support of the Samaritans *Light the Night Staffs* campaign. On this, the longest night of the year, many other local authority buildings across the region also showed their support. The green light serving as a poignant reminder to anyone in need, that the Samaritans are there during the darkest hours, including over Christmas and New Year. Samaritan volunteers provide round the clock support to make sure people who are struggling always have someone to turn to.

Lichfield City Council would like to thank Darwin Electrical for providing their services free of charge in support of this campaign.

