

OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT

1. Civic Matters: Lucy Clarke, Civic Officer



On the evening of Friday 18 September, the 311th birthday of Dr Samuel Johnson was marked by the Mayor, Cllr Deborah Baker placing the traditional laurel chaplet on the Dr Johnson Statue at the corner of the Market Square. The Revd Nest Bateman gave a brief blessing, observed by the Mayor, Deborah Baker, Town Clerk, Chairman of The Johnson Society, Mr Phil Jones and Chairman

of the Birthplace Advisory Committee, Cllr Gwyneth Boyle. The usual singing and entertainment which takes place during Lichfield's annual Heritage Weekend were unfortunately abandoned this year due to COVID-19 restrictions. It is hoped a more substantial ceremony will be able to take place next year on Saturday 18 September 2021.



The Civic Officer worked closely with The Royal British Legion and Lichfield Cathedral to make alternative arrangements for Remembrance Sunday this year. Unfortunately, lockdown 2.0 restrictions forced organised plans to change significantly at very short notice.

On Wednesday 4 November the Deputy Lieutenant of Staffordshire, Colonel Christopher Comport OBE

TD DL, accompanied by the Mayor of Lichfield, Cllr Deborah Baker and Chairman of Lichfield District Council, Cllr Joseph Powell were able to attend a small socially distanced wreath laying ceremony to pay their respects at the Remembrance Gardens which was filmed prior to lockdown. This is available for viewing via YouTube, please follow the link https://youtu.be/QzfGVqycQ_M

Unfortunately, Lichfield Cathedral's Remembrance Sunday Service was not open to the public, however the service was live streamed on Sunday 8 November at 10:30am allowing everyone to take part in the safety of their own home. Lichfield City Council actively encouraged citizens to stay safe and "**Remember at Home**". The Mayor was kindly invited

to take part in the live streamed Remembrance Sunday Service by reading one of the lessons on the day. This service is also available for viewing via YouTube, please follow the link <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCG19BuYIzGFS7ITZ9gbmNsw/>

Sadly, due to the restrictions in place there was no parade, civic procession, or formal wreath-laying ceremony in the Gardens of Remembrance. A one-way system was operated in the Remembrance Gardens to ensure the gardens remained as COVID safe as possible, avoiding any potential for large gatherings on the day. Oakwood Security were on site to monitor pedestrian flow at peak times, advising visitors to remain socially distanced and follow the one-way system in place for their safety. As per tradition, the bugler played the Last Post, and the two minutes silence was observed followed by Reveille.

The Royal British Legion has unfortunately had to cancel most of their street collections this year due to COVID restrictions. Lichfield City Council have raised £164 for the Lichfield Branch of the Royal British Legion through the sale of metal Poppy 2020 and VE75 pin badges to Councillors and Staff.



Unfortunately, the following civic events are now cancelled due to current lockdown 2.0 restrictions.

21 November - Mayor & Sheriff's Charity Dinner Dance

29 November - Switch-On Christmas Illuminations

01 December - Mayor's Carols for Christmas

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

The Birthplace Museum team had been adapting well to life under the 'new normal' and finding creative ways to safely engage with audiences before the latest restrictions closed the doors again on Thursday 5 November. Prior to closure, the majority of volunteers had returned to their collection and activities roles. In addition to the socially-distanced wreath laying organised for Samuel Johnson's Birthday in September, a programme on social media included sharing memories from previous years, a video tutorial to make fabric bunting and an article on the history of the Birthday celebrations on the Birthplace Blog. As an alternative to the usual cake at the event, a special discount in the Hindley's café was offered to visitors over the week of Johnson's Birthday.

Following the successful trial of Covid-secure activity bags in the summer holidays, the offer



for families was extended over the October half-term with an autumn trail and the usual hands-on activities turned into a takeaway craft pack to make at home inspired by spooky *Dictionary* definitions. The activity packs were also available for sale at the café at the Hub at St Mary's, as an alternative to a partnership event that had been discussed prior to changes in social distancing measures. A further video tutorial was offered online, making autumnal pumpkin decorations.

The Museum welcomed 1511 visitors throughout August up to closure in November. This represents 19% of normal visitor numbers for the period (compared to 2019) and 57% of the available timed entry sessions, though occupancy rose to 100% during the October Half Term Holiday. Online engagement in the period from August totalled 10,136 (people who liked or shared a Facebook, Twitter or Instagram post, read the e-newsletter, visited the website or read the blog). This represents a 138% increase in the Museum's online audience compared to the same period in 2019. On Facebook and Twitter this led to a 'reach' of 62,423.

The Birthplace Museum was awarded a TripAdvisor 'Traveller's Choice' Award 2020 based on consistently high reviews from visitors, and was included in a Visit England article on 50 ways to 'escape the everyday from home', highlighting the Virtual Tour in their national list. The results of the annual Visit England 2019 visitor survey were received, with the Birthplace ranking 12th place in the top 20 free attractions in the Midlands based on total visitor numbers.

The MHO and Museum Support Officer (MSO) attended the Museums Association and the Literary Houses conferences online, and are working in partnership with Lichfield Storytellers to deliver an online event on December 21st, as an alternative to a live Storytelling event originally scheduled for the house.

The collaborative research project with Keele and Liverpool University began officially in September and the MHO has attended virtual supervision meetings with student Emma Stanbridge and provided online support and training on the Museum database. Other work completed by the MHO has included preparing Agenda items for the Birthplace Advisory Committee and related work on the Birthplace development, online meetings with a group of artists who have expressed interest in a future exhibition at the house, and liaison with St Mary's regarding the display of the civic silver.

A planned upgrade was carried out on the Museum heating system, with an additional pump installed to restore the basement radiators to working use and improve heat throughout. Another behind the scenes project saw the return of a de-accessioned Tavern Chair, restored by the Aldridge Shed Age UK project over the past year, and now ready for use in the Museum's redevelopment.

The MSO has made a successful application to the West Midlands Museum Development programme for an annual membership to the Association of Cultural Enterprises. Aimed specifically at Museum retail, tours and events, the programme of free support and training will support the Birthplace to find ways to make best use of resources and maximise possible income streams in the current climate.

The Museum Attendant team continue to work on projects from home during closure including repairs and upgrades to costume items, creating a new automated donation box, providing content for social media, researching future tours and talks, and cataloguing historic visitor books.



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

The winter grounds maintenance work has now been scheduled. All feed-back from Councillors and the Public is gratefully received to keep the footpaths and open spaces safe for users.



In Boley Park, tree branches hanging low over footpaths have been raised; a drain cover has been replaced on Poolside Walk and an overgrown laurel hedge on a footpath from King Edwards has been reduced allowing more light and a safer passage for students. The bins at Curborough and the steps at Beech Gardens have also been repaired. However, there is still a lot of tree and hedge work to do. During the clean-up for the Day of Remembrance dead wood was removed from the Paulinus tree and a slab on the low wall re-concreted.

have been ordered for the
Thanks to the generosity
now a new bench in the
and a new bench near
people to rest after the



At Curborough the
junior slide has been
repaired and some
replacement parts
climbing frame.
of residents there is
Heather Gardens
Hillside to allow
climb from the city.

Some new hedging has been provided to shield residents of the Gledhill flats from work on LCC land off London road that is being undertaken by the Canal Trust. The Bund at Netherstowe, which has witnessed over 50% reduction in the planted colourful flowers, is now greening up after a second sowing of wildflower seed, which will make a good display in the Spring.

The Open Spaces Officer would like to highlight the work currently being done by the Volunteers of Lichfield Litter Legends. The levels of human litter seen during inspections has significantly reduced as a result of their efforts.

4. Twinning: Gabriele Lasch- Burden, Twinning Officer

The annual placement of public office apprentices from Limburg City Council to Lichfield was scheduled to take place on 10 October 2020 but unfortunately due to Covid-19 and the associated restrictions was cancelled.

In October, a German film crew from Cologne, near Limburg filmed around Minster Pool for a documentary on German national TV which deals with surprise family reunions of long-lost family members. The connection to Lichfield has not yet been revealed.

Messages of condolence for Lichfield's town crier Ken Knowles have been received from the Councils of Limburg and St. Foy, as well as a publicised obituary in Limburg's local newspaper. He is fondly remembered in both twin towns for ceremoniously opening the international meeting celebrations.



Lichfield's peace woodland project was officially implemented in our twin city of Limburg this November. Three "peace trees" were planted near Limburg's Cathedral. A bronze plaque was placed in front of the trees by Limburg's Mayor Dr. Marius Hahn, symbolising the friendship



links between Lichfield and Limburg, expressing the hope for lasting peace. A larger scale ceremony is planned for next year

5. Markets Report: Jordan Appleyard, Markets Officer

The Officers at Lichfield City Council continue to ensure Lichfield Outdoor General Market remains a COVID secure environment. The one-way barrier system controls the pedestrian flow and reinforces the 2m social distancing message to all visitors. Hand sanitiser stations are also provided at either end of the market square. The one-way floor arrows have recently been re-sprayed slightly larger using a pre-cut template.



At a meeting of the Market Working Group in September it was agreed that due to the risk of cross contamination the pre-erected stalls would not be returning to the market square for the remainder of 2020, this is to be reviewed at the December Market Working Group meeting in preparation for 2021. Members of the Working Group also agreed that stall rent discounts, which have been operational since March 2020 were to cease in October and replaced with full market stall fees.

Stall rents continue to be based on the Tuesday model with an additional service charge fee of £3.00 added on both Fridays and Saturdays.

Lichfield General Market and the monthly Producers Market continue to be promoted via social media channels i.e. Facebook



and Twitter each week. The Markets Officer is currently looking at different ways to increase the social media audience reach for Lichfield Markets using “boosts” on both platforms. Initial trials seemingly provide very positive results in comparison to the small fee required to action the boost. The Producers Market continues to be held on the 1st Sunday of each month. CJ Events have reported that both public and trader feedback has been very positive to date.

All traders are monitored on each market day to ensure they have the correct PPE equipment (i.e. 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 seems to mirror the national trend for an increase in contactless payments as the payment method of choice during this Coronavirus pandemic.

Unfortunately, the implementation of a second national lockdown on 5 November 2020 meant significant changes had to be made to the market operation at very short notice. The legislation clearly stated that outdoor markets must close with the exception of those selling essential goods. Officers liaised with Senior Licensing Officers at the District Council who confirmed essential traders are deemed to be Food (e.g. Fruit & Veg, Fish, Home Baked Goods etc), Pet Food, Hardware (e.g. Tools etc), Plants (as with Garden Centres). The General Markets have therefore continued to operate using this criteria and there are currently six traders in attendance on each market day. This is a significant drop from the twenty-one stalls that were able to stand on the market square prior to Lockdown 2.0 restrictions. Market stall rent continues to be charged at the same rate prior to lockdown but has reduced dramatically compared to pre-lockdown measures.

The one-way barriers and hand sanitisers remain part of the standard set-up for each market day and as there are only six traders standing there is significant spacing between each stall, enabling customers additional room to safely queue for their essential goods.

6. Guildhall: Helen Winter, Guildhall Bookings Officer

Phase 2 of the Guildhall renovation work has now been completed to restore the main hall to its former glory. Some regular hirers with vulnerable members have decided not to return to the Guildhall until January and the Bookings Officer is liaising with all hirers to facilitate their return to the Guildhall when restrictions allow. Enquiries for 2021 are still being received, especially regarding Weddings.

The Guildhall remains a Covid safe venue and the Risk Assessment is constantly reviewed to reflect the latest Government guidelines.

During the second lockdown the Guildhall has been used by two vulnerable groups; Mencap, an Ofsted registered educational group attend twice a week and a Dementia support group use the Guildroom once a week. All surfaces are sanitised between bookings and chairs are rotated, quarantined and sprayed with disinfectant. One of the most frequent hirers,



Slimming World, made a successful return to the Guildhall during September. Unfortunately the booking was suspended again due to the second lockdown, it is hoped they will return in December.

Although most hirers returned to Boley Park Community Hall in September, bookings have once again been suspended during the second lockdown. The only booking remaining is Pre-school. All regular hirers have provided COVID19 Risk Assessments. Some routine maintenance is due shortly outside the building. The NHS Breast Screening vehicle is back outside the building.

Renovation work has started at the Boley Park Co-op. During this time, there will be some disruption to the usual parking outside the community hall, but hirers can park elsewhere in the Co-op car park.

7. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

Following the announcement of a second lockdown the Deputy Town Clerk worked closely with Officers to ensure the general markets could continue, liaising with Lichfield District Council to establish which essential traders were permitted to stand. The Act of Remembrance also fell within lockdown and the Deputy supported Officers to ensure that the Remembrance Gardens remained accessible to the public on the day and that social distancing was maintained. Risk Assessments for all of the Council's activities are constantly being reviewed and updated to reflect the Government's latest guidelines.

Donegal House reception is once again closed to the public and Officers have reverted to working from a rota system to limit the amount of staff in the building at any one time.

Although there will be no Christmas Lights Switch on event this year the lights will still be erected to bring some much-needed Festive cheer to the City Centre and the Deputy is liaising with contractors to ensure this is achieved on schedule.

The Deputy will be providing secretariat support at the Markets Working Group, Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Working Party, December Council and continues to support the Bookings Officer on Planning matters.

Ken Knowles 1949 - 2020



On Sunday 27th September Ken Knowles, the City's Town Crier and Sword Bearer sadly passed away after a short illness at the age of 71.

Ken had been part of the City Council family since 2009 No Civic event was complete without him - cutting a dashing figure in his bright red tunic, frilled shirt, and tricorn hat. He took great pride in the traditions of the City and his 'shouts' were an integral part of any event. He was well known for his charismatic, upbeat, and witty personality, particularly when presiding as Master of Ceremonies at Mayoral Banquets or the Christmas Lights Switch-On. He 'loved to work a crowd' and his endless repertoire of jokes often kept guests entertained when things were not going to plan behind the scenes. In contrast, he could bring considerable gravitas to more sombre occasions such as Remembrance Sunday.

Civic duties aside, he was an excellent ambassador for the City and could often be found regaling local groups and charities with tales of his travels around the country and the world - in 2019 alone he gave over 100 talks. He loved taking part in Town Criers' competitions far and wide and in 2015 won the coveted title of Invitational World Champion in New Zealand followed by British Champion in 2017.

The pride Ken felt for Lichfield shone through in 2018 when the biennial Town Criers' Competition was held in his home City, attracting over a dozen criers from across the country. Ken also enjoyed performing in amateur dramatics, supporting the intimate theatre during heritage weekend by adopting his favourite alter ego - that of Lichfield's first son, Dr Samuel Johnson.

The warmth and generosity he gave to all those who knew him will be greatly missed and our thoughts are with his family and friends as they come to terms with his passing. Ken's dedication to the City that he loved so dearly will leave a lasting impression on us all and Lichfield will mourn his loss for many years to come.

