

OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT – SEPTEMBER 2021

1. Civic Matters: Lucy Clarke, Civic Officer

The Mayor of Lichfield, Cllr Robert Yardley, and The Sheriff of Lichfield, Mr Peter Hitchman held their first charity event on Tuesday 17 August 2021, a Beer & Skittles event held at the Guildhall.

A cask of Gatehouse Ale was kindly donated by Brewhouse and Kitchen, Bore Street. This proved to be quite a hit on the evening with the cask soon running dry! Lichfield Conservative Association once again kindly provided us with their wooden skittle alley.

The event was thoroughly enjoyed by all those who attended, raising over £1,500 for the Mayor and Sheriff's chosen charities which are 'We Love Lichfield' and 'Friends 2 Friends'. The Mayor and Sheriff would like to express their sincere thanks to all those who attended their the event, they have been truly overwhelmed with the support they have received.



Mayor with Mike Price, Head Brewer, with Sheriff and Sheriff's Lady at Brewhouse & Kitchen

The Mayor recently celebrated the return of the Lichfield Arts Fuse Festival held in Beacon Park on Sunday 15 August 2021.

The Mayor is pictured with members of the Lichfield Rock Choir, who are all very happy to be back together and performing once again.



Invitations for the Mayor and Sheriff are now beginning to increase quite significantly since the easing of Covid restrictions in July. Anyone wishing to invite the Mayor and Sheriff to a special event within the City of Lichfield can do so by emailing the request/invitation to civic@lichfield.gov.uk

Preparations remain ongoing for the Sheriff's Ride Banquet, which is imminent at the time of preparing this report, the Samuel Johnson Birthday Celebrations on 18 September, Remembrance Sunday on 14 November and the Mayor & Sheriff's Charity Ball on 20 November.

Anyone who wishes to join the civic list to be sent updates of all civic and charity events can do so by emailing their request to enquiries@lichfield.gov.uk

The Civic Officer continues to assist the Markets Officer with day-to-day market activities, social media posts and training.

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

The Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum team have enjoyed a busy summer. Following the easing of restrictions nationwide on Monday 19 July, the Birthplace retained many safety measures including staggering entry times to the house and encouraging the continued wearing of face coverings. Visitor numbers increased steadily throughout the holidays, with 694 in July and 1351 in the first three weeks of August. This represents 37% of pre-pandemic visitor figures, but a 185% increase on the 2020 summer figures so indicates growing visitor confidence. Online visits remained strong with over 3000 direct digital engagements in July and a further reach of over 13,000 on social media.

The Guildhall Prison Cells were opened to the public for the first time since the 2019 season. Arrangements were made by the Museum Support Officer and 460 visitors were welcomed by volunteers over six open days in August. New volunteers joined the team and shared very positive feedback on their experiences, and mid-week opening on Wednesdays was trialled alongside the usual Saturdays and proved successful. A visitor to the cells shared reminiscences about his mother, Sybil Dodd, an artist who worked on the painted figures in the Guildhall Main Hall. Research is underway about this newly discovered story to update available information.

On Tuesday 27 July the Birthplace Museum had a presence on the Market Square, with a stall to promote the Museum and summer family activities. Many local people, including some who had not visited before, stopped to speak to costumed Attendants.



Family activities returned on Thursdays in August. Carefully planned to be Covid-secure, the theme for the summer was 'Lichfield Legends'. Activities were devised and delivered by Birthplace volunteers with assistance and publicity by the Museum Support Officer.

The Birthplace Bookclub resumed in-person meetings in August, having kept in contact throughout the pandemic and sending in reviews by email. 2021 marks the 20th anniversary of the group. Arrangements are underway for the Museum's writing group to restart in September, and Latin classes in the New Year.



Behind the scenes, much work has been carried out to prepare for Johnson's Birthday events in September, with events at the Museum to include poetry readings, storytelling, family activities and cake. All events have been planned to be safe and distanced. Planning for events beyond the Birthday weekend has included meeting with Lichfield Storytellers regarding a possible online event including pre-recorded performance from the Guildhall Prison Cells. Shortlisting for the Lichfield Arts L2F art competition, to be displayed at the Birthplace in October, has taken place.

Work on other Heritage projects included arrangements for maintenance of the plaques on the exterior of St Mary's, facing into the Market Square. Quotes for a scheme to display reproductions of the City's Charters in the Guildhall have been gathered, and text prepared for design with a view to the new interpretation being in place in place shortly.

Planning applications for the Birthplace Museum Development Project were validated, and an outcome is anticipated in October. Final arrangements were made for the rewiring of the Birthplace which is scheduled to begin on Monday 20 September for 2-3 weeks. Other work related to the project has included liaison regarding paint samples taken in the workroom, research into Michael Johnson for new displays, and working with a Bookbinder expert consultant on the content for the room.

Collection work has included correspondence with a Canadian academic about a discovery relating to Johnson's housekeeper and poet Anna Williams, improvements in the collection storeroom, and arrangements about a donation which includes some signed Michael Johnson documents.

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



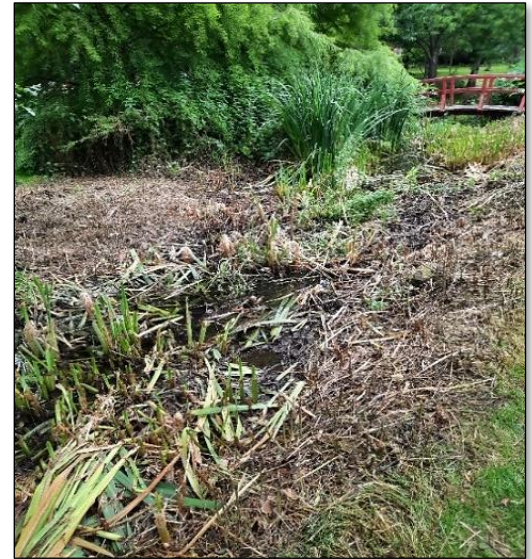
At the request of Lichfield District Tourism Association, one of the benches at Speakers Corner has been dedicated to the memory of Lichfield's Town Crier, the late Ken Knowles. The Open Spaces Officer refurbished the bench and installed a plaque donated by the LDТА. There will be a 'Celebration of Life' for Ken at Speakers Corner on 25 September 2021 at 2 pm.



A cherry tree on the canal towpath at Tamworth Road, to the rear of Fish Face fish and chip shop was reported by LHCRT who lease the land from the Council. On inspection, a tree surgeon confirmed the tree was unable to be saved and was subsequently removed due to health and safety concerns.

Following extensive investigations, work is scheduled to commence at Festival Gardens in the autumn. New pathways have already been cut through the 'wilding' areas to allow greater accessibility and these will be retained in future years. The ground will shortly be turned ready for wild mixed flowers to be sown which will provide a much-needed burst of colour next year.

Discussions regarding the desilting of Trunkfield Brook (pictured) that runs through Festival Gardens have been ongoing for some weeks. Concerns were raised by the District Council's conservation team after being advised of the desilting proposals, and as a result an independent specialist ecological report has been carried out. The report concluded *'that there was no evidence of crayfish and no other ecological concerns in relation to the proposed works. Desilting the watercourse is much needed and will be an ecological benefit'*.



As a result, work to desilt the Brook is being scheduled and it is hoped this will lead to the Brook running freely once again. The site will further be improved as all trees within the open space have been inspected by a tree surgeon and are due to be crown lifted and dead wooded in accordance with professional recommendation and approval of the District Council's Arboricultural Officer. This work is currently scheduled across two separate site visits, the first being in the latter part of October and focusing on trees around and along the Brook.

Significant tree pruning has taken place at Curborough Community Centre, notably along the boundary with the Primary School, where significant overgrowth was impacting on the Community Centre's roof and guttering.

At site 46 (Maple Grove, Boley Park), all trees have been crown lifted and dead wooded. The improvements are clear in the before and after photographs below.



Further work is planned on Boley Park in the area of Ryknild Street to Austin Cote Lane to Cappers Island, plus the embankment area. All trees have been inspected and are due to be cut back and crown lifted as appropriate before the Autumn.

4. Twinning: Gabriele Lasch- Burden, Twinning Officer

Remembering the devastating floods in Germany in July, we were thankful to hear that our friends in Limburg and surrounding area had been safe and unaffected by this disaster, whilst Cologne, which is not too far away, was indeed flooded. Numerous enquiries from concerned Lichfeldians were received by the City Council and on social media and the thoughtful well-wishes were very much appreciated by Limburg City Council, as well as Limburg's Twinning Association.

Work is still ongoing to see whether the annual week-long internship of Limburg's council apprentices in Lichfield, scheduled for this October, will be able to go ahead. New immigration laws for European citizens, working or studying in the UK and possible covid restrictions are still making the work placements and host family accommodation searches more difficult than in previous years.

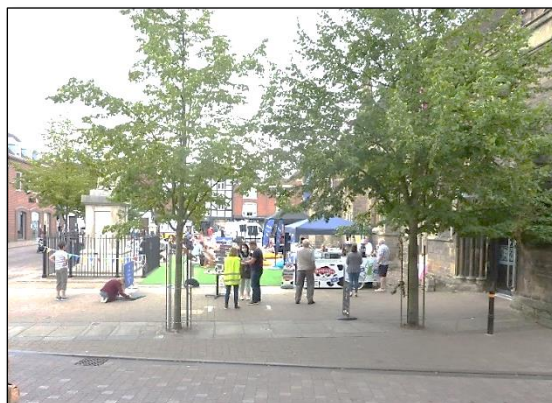
As this report is being finalised, confirmation has been received of the death of Peter Barrett, President of the Lichfield Twinning Association and former Mayor and Sheriff of the City. A great friend of the City council, our thoughts are with his family at this sad time.

5. Markets Report: Lucy Clarke, Civic Officer

The Markets Officer continues to receive a noticeable increase in general market enquiries and trader applications. Saturday markets continue to operate at full capacity with Tuesdays and Fridays having limited availability. The City Council will continue to operate the one-way barrier system currently in use on all three market days along with the one metre gap between each market stall. Hand sanitisers are also placed at either end of the market to encourage visitors to stay safe.

The monthly Producers' Market organised and operated by CJ's Events Warwickshire continues to thrive. CJ's have reported the Producers' Market is now fully booked until the end of the year. CJ's will also be organising this year's Christmas Lights Switch-On Street Market on Sunday 28 November 2021. For further information please visit their website www.cjseventswarwickshire.co.uk

Bookings on non-market days have continued to prove popular during the summer. The COVID testing tent has become a regular feature on both Mondays and Thursdays due to popular demand within the local community. Other bookings have included Lichfield Library, Kia Electric Cars, PDSA & Royal British Legion Charity Fundraisers. St. Mary's Hub Summer Sundaes have also proved successful featuring live entertainment, family activities, outside bar and seating area on Market Square.



Simon Davies, one of the Friday and Saturday market traders has recently celebrated his family trading on Lichfield Market for 70 years. Simon continues to hold a stall on Market Square, following in the footsteps of his grandparents Cyril and Charlotte Davies who began selling brassware in 1951 before switching to clothing in 1956.

His parents Alan and Joan Davies were recruited into the family business following the death of his grandfather, before Simon began trading in 1981.

Three generations of the family continued to work alongside each other until the death of his grandmother in 1990 aged 86. Simon is now a sole trader and continues to trade in ladies clothing on Fridays and Saturdays, having taken a step upmarket by specialising in Italian and French designs.



The Mayor made a presentation to Simon on 20 August 2021 to mark the 70 years of trading.

Lichfield General Market continues to be promoted on Facebook and Twitter. Posts are shared on various local Facebook groups to increase awareness and ultimately boost footfall on market days. The Civic Officer has arranged to take part in a Social Media Training Course to help improve skills in-house.

6. Guildhall: Helen Winter, Guildhall Bookings Officer

Most regular hirers have started to return to the Guildhall, however some have decided not to return until the New Year. All regular hirers are receiving new booking forms and are asked to submit risk assessments specific to their booking. New room layouts have also been devised with hirers to reflect a reduced capacity, allowing as much space as possible to circulate in line with the City Council's cautious approach to re-opening.

Due to one of the regular hirers not returning until January 2022, the main hall is unusually free on some Friday evenings between September and Christmas. For booking enquires please contact the bookings officer directly at helen.winter@lichfield.gov.uk.

The Dementia Café who have been using the Guildroom during the pandemic has decided to make the Guildhall their permanent home for their meetings each Thursday morning.

The BBC recently hired the Guildhall to film segments for the popular TV show Bargain Hunt. Private bookings for Wedding Receptions are increasing, with three wedding receptions and three other private bookings in the next 2 months. Some of these bookings were scheduled last year, and this is now their third attempt to hold their celebrations.

The remedial work identified at the recent 5 yearly electrical inspection has now been completed. Further work which is required on the main hall's new floor is scheduled for October half term.

At Boley Park Community Hall, most regular hirers have returned following recent government updates. Some who do not meet in school holidays will be back in September. There has been a large increase in enquiries for children's parties in the last couple of weeks. Whilst these would have previously been booked on a steady basis, the relaxation of COVID regulations has led to an influx of enquiries. The NHS Breast Screening unit is scheduled to leave the site imminently at the time of preparing this report.

7. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

The Council's Health & Safety consultants, Terrain were on site for two days in July to conduct a review of the general risk assessments for the Guildhall, Donegal House, and the Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum. This was the first physical meeting in nearly 2 years. The Deputy Town Clerk is pleased to report that only a few minor issues were identified, many of which were as a result of the extended lockdown period, corrective action has already begun to address these.

The Consultants praised the COVID safeguards which had been put in place and commended Officers for keeping abreast of the ever-changing Government guidance to ensure all buildings were a safe environment for both employees and members of the public. In view of recent events, a specific Pandemic Disease Policy has been issued to all staff as well as an update of the General Health & Safety Manual.

Terrain will be on site again in October to conduct refresher training courses for all relevant staff on Manual Handling, Working at Height and Fire Safety awareness. In addition, since returning from remote working all office-based staff have now completed a Display Screen Equipment assessment and any issues identified have been addressed.

Following a meeting of the Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Working Party on 1 September the Deputy Town Clerk is liaising with both District and County Council officers to progress various projects identified as a priority by the working party.

Training has begun for three new casual Premises attendants with an aim to provide holiday cover for the contracted Premises Attendants. At the time of preparing this report, the Deputy is scheduled to be on the interview panel for recruitment to the post of Administrative Officer - Planning and Finance, and will be assisting the Civic Officer at the Sheriff's Banquet.

Preparations continue at pace for the Christmas Lights Switch On event in November.

Cruck House Renovations

Work continues on the renovation of the annexe at Cruck House, with completion due during September. Further updates and photographs will be provided to the next meeting of Council, though a small selection of 'in progress' photographs are included below.



Curborough Community Centre Pathways

Following a recommendation from the Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Working Party at its meeting of 14 June 2021, the City Council resolved that £6,000 (exc. VAT) of CIL be allocated towards the cost of new pathways at Curborough Community Centre and the adjacent LCC owned open space.

Work commenced on 16 August and completion followed on 23 August, with the remaining cost funded by Curborough Community Association. In addition, the aged sign at the entrance to the Centre has been replaced.

