

For Council: 26 January 2026 ENCLOSURE 1

RESPONSES FROM HIRERS TO PROPOSED 2026/27 GUILDHALL CHARGES

CHARITY BOOK FAIR

Charity Tier, Whole building, Saturdays

I would be grateful if you could confirm as I have already booked and paid a deposit for the event booking in October 2026 that you be honouring the rate offered to me at the time of booking. If the rate increases, we would have to cancel the event and lose out on good will from customers and traders, as well as the financial implications on time spent on the event and advertising. I hope you can give me some assurances on this matter.

MARKET RESEARCH

Commercial Tier, Guildhall , Thursdays

Having reviewed the proposed new Mon-Thurs rates for the Guildroom I have to say I am disappointed and frankly amazed that anyone believes the increase can be reasonable. I can see no justification for the proposed increase of 46%, all we require are the tables chairs and in certain times of year lighting and heating.

We are a small company that uses your facility as it is in a good location and we will live with it being at the expensive end of the rooms that we hire for market research, we are already completely priced out of Fri – Sun.

The new rates will mean we can no longer afford to use your facility; this leaves us worse off and our local team of interviewers with less work.

I cannot speak for other research agencies but I would be very surprised if any will agree to pay this exorbitant rate.

Please add this to your feedback, I fear as only a small stakeholder I will not be listened to but it is important to speak up.

CRAFT FAIRS

Commercial Tier, Guildhall , Saturdays

The only rise I like is a pay rise, if the councillors want more money then there's little I or any other hirer can do, but as I have been looking at other venues due to the repair work on the roof, right now The Guildhall is competitively priced if the councillors get too greedy they will force people to look elsewhere.

I'm saddened more that the councillors have agreed to abolish the Charitable Tier surely they never really expected to make money from charities.

LICHFIELD ARTS

Charity Tier – Main Guildhall, Weekends

Thanks for sharing with us the increased hire charge proposal for the Guildhall. I have summarised our concerns regarding the proposal below:

- *Lichfield Arts runs a programme of regular live music and arts events at the Guildhall, with approximately 30 bookings per year. These events already operate on very tight margins. In addition to venue hire, each event incurs substantial fixed costs, including sound engineering, PRS/PPL licensing, marketing and promotion, technical support and other operational expenses, before any payment is made to artists. The significant increase in hire costs proposed would render many of our regular Guildhall events financially unviable.*
- *Income generated from this regular events programme is essential to covering core organisational costs. Without this income stream, Lichfield Arts — already facing pressures on financial sustainability — would experience serious difficulty continuing to operate as an organisation.*
- *A reduction in, or cessation of, Guildhall events due to significantly increased costs would have consequences far beyond individual concerts. It would remove a long-established and highly valued cultural offer from the city centre, reducing access to high-quality live music and arts experiences and impacting community wellbeing, social cohesion and city-centre economic activity.*
- *In 2025 Lichfield Arts Guildhall events attracted 3080 visitors, provided a platform for 113 artists, and 265 volunteer opportunities shared between 75 volunteers.*
- *The Guildhall programme presents both regional and national performers, attracting audiences from across the Midlands and wider UK and supporting tourism and the local economy. These events also provide crucial performance opportunities for local emerging artists as part of Lichfield Arts' wider Emerging Talent programme, which includes mentoring, skills development and progression pathways for young and early-career artists from the city.*
- *Without the Guildhall events, or if they are delivered at significantly increased financial risk, Lichfield Arts would struggle to sustain its wider programme of community-focused events. This includes Fuse Festival, which leads the way in delivering accessible arts and culture in Lichfield through a poverty-proof, inclusive-by-design approach shaped by ongoing dialogue with audiences, volunteers and access advisors, as well as Lichfield Blues & Jazz Festival and Lichfield Festival of Folk. Together these events deliver substantial cultural, social and economic value and attract a combined audience of approximately 24,000 visitors to Lichfield city centre.*
- *Lichfield Arts also supports its core costs through operating a permanent licensed bar within the Guildhall, holding a five-star food hygiene rating, for non-Lichfield Arts events such as weddings and charity hires. This mutually beneficial arrangement provides a high-quality service for hirers and generates income for the organisation; however, increased hire costs risk reducing overall venue bookings and consequently this vital income stream for the charity.*
- *The Guildhall events delivered by Lichfield Arts are the core year-round activity that keeps volunteers engaged, motivated and supported. The proposed increase in hire costs would place these events at risk and, in turn, reduce opportunities for volunteers to remain actively involved, leading to a potential loss of volunteer capacity and continuity.*

CHESS

Charity Tier – Thursdays

We currently pay £12.22 per hour +VAT for Thursday nights from September to April. and if I follow the Appendix to The Committee minutes correctly and apply the original proposal of a 4% increase that would be £12.71 per hour. I'm not sure if that is supposed to equate to the £13.69 per hour mentioned in the Appendix.

The Guild Room rent is quite high compared to comparable venues in Lichfield but we do recognise the value of the caretaker facility provided and so if rent increases of 4% were proposed, taking into account inflation etc. we would consider them acceptable. However, if I understand the alternative proposal correctly, ie. £20 per hour + VAT that would represent an increase of over 60% that our members would have to pay. We have our AGM in May and I think it likely that the members would consider an increase in their subscriptions of that scale unacceptable and request the Committee to look for an alternative venue for the 2026/27 season.

I understand that the Commercial Services Committee have a duty to ensure that they get the best return on the properties that they supervise but what is being proposed would run the risk of the Guild Hall facilities being largely unproductive because most of the users will be able to find cheaper alternative venues. Unfortunately, once users move on they don't come back even if there is then a change of heart. I would suggest the Committee focuses on ways of increasing the usage of the facilities rather than simply increasing the rents which I suspect will be counterproductive.

RSPB

Charity Tier

The feedback from our members at RSPB Lichfield Group is one of disappointment that the Guildhall is doing away with the voluntary rate. Moving us onto the private rate and taking account of the proposed increase next year is a 44% increase on our current rate. I think this is also made more pressing as numbers to the meeting have been in decline since the pandemic and whereas we could look forward to taking around the £200 per meeting back then it has gradually shrunk with this month's meeting recording a take of £82 before deductions. So, things are tough at the moment. I'm hoping there may be a revival in the next twelve months to our fortunes and then we would be in a better position to accommodate this proposed increase.

Obviously, when the above figures are being considered we, RSPB Lichfield Local Group, have to make some decisions in the coming year that will shape our development in the future and a little "play room" may make all the difference between surviving or dissolution.

We have been using the Guildhall since 2017 and we would ask if the council can either treat us as a special case for now or at least phase in this large increase over a couple of years. It may give us the breathing space we need.

JOHNSON SOCIETY – ANNUAL SUPPER

Whole Building Charitable Tier

The Johnson Society feel that they should be given special consideration when we hire the Guildhall for the Annual Supper. The Supper has always involved the civics and was started in conjunction with the City Council to honour Lichfield's greatest son. Indeed the event is, by tradition, hosted by the Mayor. In other words, this is not solely a Society event (unlike the AGM which is). In years past, free tickets for the Supper were given to the Mayor and Sheriff as the council made no charge to the Society for the hire of the Guildhall. We would much prefer to operate on this basis! The Council might also like to reflect on the fact that, over the years, the Society has given a lot of money to the Birthplace. Indeed, very recently, we enabled the Birthplace to acquire Johnson's letter to Sophie Thrale. If the Annual Supper is to continue we need your help. Otherwise, the Annual Celebrations will be much impoverished.

SLIMMING WORLD

Commercial Tier (x 52 weeks per year)

Having been informed of the proposed rent increase from April, I feel like I have no choice to send the email, as a business that has been running over 50 years from the building, I need to confirm that if the intended rate is introduced it will mean my business will no longer be viable. The current rates are already higher than any other available venue, and I believe the building would generate more income by the rents actually being lower not extortionately inflated, I personally have been using the building for over 25 years and over the years have noticed most times I am the only hirer which isn't how it use to be !

My rents at my other venues are £15 per hour and £24 per hour just to highlight the difference between other places and comparing the current prices is scary at best, but the proposed rise is petrifying and I would be unable to continue at that rate, which is unfortunate as the building has been of good service to me and also for all the Lichfield and surrounding areas people that have used my services,

I hope you will consider my opinion, otherwise I feel that the building will become an unused old historic building like so many across the country.

Twinning Association

Charitable Tier

In general, the idea of charging the Lichfield Twinning Association (which normally organises twice-yearly events in the Guildroom) seems counter-intuitive, as the Association's purpose is to promote, support and fund-raise for one of the City Council's goal, i.e. the furthering of the aims of the City Twinning between Lichfield, Limburg and Sainte Foy. The LTA therefore suggests that it is in the City Council's interests rather to facilitate the activities of the Twinning Association by making rooms available free of charge, as charging for the use of City Council premises will only reduce the funds available to the Association to support the City Council in its promotion of Lichfield City Twinning activities;

It would be appreciated if clarity could be provided about the alcohol serving charge, and specifically the proposed exclusion in the case of 'just for a toast'. Would the exclusion apply when the LTA wishes to serve a welcome drink

BRIDGE

Charity Tier – Guildroom, Wednesdays

Further to notification of planned increases to the costs for hiring the Guildhall rooms please pass this email along with the attachment through the official process to challenge that increase and provide a user perspective.

I want the decision to reflect not just the financial impact but the community and societal impact of the decision. From documents I have been able to access there appears to be no data supporting the amount, discussion or decision. Am I within my rights to ask for sight of that information?

Finally, I would like to represent my club and other users at the City Council meeting on 26th January.

[Also see letter below, received from Lichfield Bridge Club]

To whom it may concern.

I have received the information regarding the proposed increase to the hire rates for the Guild Hall rooms and would present the following in a request for consideration of both the impact in relation to cost and community.

It is interesting to note that the aim of the increase is to make the facility more commercially focussed. Having read the City Council website this aim feels at odds with the stated aims of providing services and support to the community of Lichfield.

We fully appreciate that costs increase and so expect that to be passed on to users but abolishing the charity and voluntary rate seems to target that section of the community and a significantly above inflationary rise for all users is doubly impactful for the section of the community we at Lichfield Bridge Club support.

Background

We have used the guildhall for over 15 years, every Wednesday for a gathering of senior citizens, to play bridge. There are around 30 – 40 people aged between 65 and 90 that attend this function every week.

For some, this is their opportunity to socialise, be mentally stimulated and enjoy an evening out for a small, currently affordable, cost.

Current Situation

We are able to hold the cost of the event to a minimum for pensioners.

Our costs are covered by a small weekly charge to cover the room hire.

The club is run as a voluntary sector group providing support to the community.

Impact

The suggested room hire rates means that the weekly charge to participate will increase by 50%.

This may cause numbers in attendance to drop and so increase the burden on those remaining.

We may have to seek alternative (cheaper) accommodation.

Request

We, the committee have discussed the situation, looked at the minutes for the meeting at which the standard increase was recommended and declined in favour of these new suggested rates. We would ask that you consider the following:

- 1. Are these new rates actually in line with other rooms available in the area? My own research shows they are not, see **Appendix 1**.*
- 2. Is the need for income outweighed by the community impacted?*
- 3. Could a smaller, yet significant increase be more in order?*

While we appreciate that your costs need to be covered it feels more like a profit is being made at the expense of the community and we would urge you to think again please.

At the time of writing this message I also researched other community available facilities and have attached their costs. I did this as the numbers in the revised charging seem excessive and there was no mention of any research or data in the correspondence.

Thank you

Treasurer, Lichfield Bridge Club.

Appendix 1

Here are community-run, charity, church, and council-managed venues near Lichfield town centre that can accommodate your Bridge club setup (8 tables, 32 players, with circulation space).

Darwin Hall

- **Type:** Community hall, registered charity.
- **Capacity:** Large modern hall, suitable for 50–100 people.
- **Space:** Ample room for 8 bridge tables with space to move around.
- **Cost:** Affordable hire rates (community-focused, typically £15–£25 per hour).
- **Notes:** Accessible, modern facilities, good lighting — ideal for older members.

Boley Park Community Hall

- **Type:** Council-owned, managed by local committee.
- **Capacity:** Medium-sized hall, suitable for 40–60 people.
- **Space:** Can comfortably fit 8 tables with walkways.
- **Cost:** Approx. £12–£20 per hour.
- **Notes:** Local, straightforward community venue.

Curborough Community Centre

- **Type:** Council-built, leased to community association.
- **Capacity:** Multiple rooms, main hall fits 100+.
- **Space:** Easily accommodates 8 tables with circulation.
- **Cost:** Around £15–£25 per hour depending on room size.
- **Notes:** Vibrant centre with flexible layouts.

St Chad's Church Hall

- **Type:** Church-managed hall.
- **Capacity:** Suitable for 40–50 people.
- **Space:** Enough for 8 tables, though tighter than Darwin or Curborough.
- **Cost:** Typically £10–£15 per hour.
- **Notes:** Community feel, accessible location.

 Whittington Village Hall

- **Type:** Village charity hall.
- **Capacity:** Large hall, up to 100 people.
- **Space:** Easily fits 8 tables with generous circulation.
- **Cost:** £12–£20 per hour.
- **Notes:** Slightly outside town centre but excellent facilities.

 The Thomas Spencer Hall (Whittington)

- **Type:** Church community hall.
- **Capacity:** Medium-sized, suitable for 40–60 people.
- **Space:** Can fit 8 tables with careful layout.
- **Cost:** Affordable, around £10–£15 per hour.
- **Notes:** Traditional church hall setting.

 Wall Village Hall

- **Type:** Community-run.
- **Capacity:** Smaller venue, but can fit 8 tables.
- **Cost:** Approx. £10–£15 per hour.
- **Notes:** Best for smaller, quieter gatherings.

 Cruck House

- **Type:** Historic council-owned building.
- **Capacity:** Meeting room style, smaller than others.
- **Space:** May be tight for 8 tables; better for smaller groups.
- **Cost:** Low-cost hire, around £10 per hour.
- **Notes:** Unique historic atmosphere.

Letter received from Lichfield Society of Artists in response to proposed 2026 Guildhall hire charges.

Dear Lichfield Councillors,

Re: Proposed Guildhall hire increases

I am the exhibitions organiser for the Lichfield Society of Artists and I am responding on their behalf. Over the last few years, we have hired the Guild Room for our twice yearly exhibitions. We have just been informed of the proposed rise in hire rates for the Lichfield Guildhall. We are a voluntary society with limited income and it will come as no surprise that we are dismayed at the scale of the price rises.

The Lichfield Society of Artists was created some 80 years ago and has been part of the fabric of Lichfield since then. It has no selection policy and is open to anyone to join. One of the core activities of the Society has always been to exhibit the work of its members. For many years we exhibited in the old Library and Museum. Exhibitions ran for a month or two. When it became the Registry Office in 1991, the Society was deprived of the exhibition space and moved to the 'new' library. When the decision was taken by the Council to move the library again and sell off the building, the society were again left without an exhibition space so we moved to using the Guild Room.

This was not a painless transition. The higher cost of the Guild Room means we can no longer exhibit for a month, so the exhibition is shortened to five days maximum and often only three days. We have two short exhibitions per year rather than one longer one because then we can collect twice the hanging fees from our membership to help pay for the space. We cannot hang directly on the walls, so we were obliged to invest a not inconsiderable sum in display boards and lighting and also have to deal with the problem of storing them. But the Guildhall is ideally placed and our exhibitions are popular with the public and visitors to the city; we had some 900 visitors to the most recent one, many of whom were from outside Lichfield. This was despite the attentions of Storm Amy which completely washed out Friday and Saturday. The feedback we receive makes it clear that people really enjoy coming to look at our art.

Unfortunately, each exhibition runs at a loss which, so far, we have been able to absorb. With the proposed price changes, the hire cost for us will rise by 50%. That translates to an extra £900 plus VAT per year that we have to find in order to continue exhibiting at the Guildhall. We don't have the income to support this. This year our membership income was approximately £2500. The club is run entirely by volunteers but we have to cover the cost of hiring venues for our monthly meetings and visiting speakers. We run various art sessions and the attendees pay a fee to help cover the cost of those. We also incur costs exhibiting at and running free public sessions at the FUSE festival which is a hugely popular event with the public.

At our last AGM we agreed and implemented a 20% increase in membership fees for this coming year to help cover our own increasing costs. Unfortunately this increase will not be nearly enough to absorb the proposed Guildhall hire increases. We cannot revisit this until the next AGM, for fees for 2027. We don't know what it will do to our membership numbers if we are to ask for so much more, so quickly. The society currently receives no financial assistance from the Council arts funding.

We planned for and made our 2026 bookings on the basis of the current fee scale with an inflationary increase. While the Terms and Conditions suggest increases higher than inflation can be made, we feel it is unreasonable to expect us to have anticipated a 50% price increase. Such an increase is especially hard to bear given that the planned maintenance work on the Guildhall is

likely to impact negatively on our next exhibition. Will we have the option to pay for the hire up front at the current rates as specified in the current T&Cs of hire?

If we cancel the booking, we have no chance of finding another venue at such short notice; we normally have to book a year in advance. At the Hub, we currently cannot even get on the waiting list, let alone make a booking. There is no other suitable venue in the centre of Lichfield. We think it would be a great loss if the Lichfield Society of Artists could not exhibit in their home town.

We understand that the Council is stretched for money and is examining every avenue for more revenue and we concede that price rises are inevitable. However, while commercial and private concerns are looking at a 27% increase, those who are least able to pay will have to find an extra 50%. This seems grossly unfair. The market research companies, backed by huge corporations with deep pockets, will have no problem with the Standard Rate price rises. The small clubs and charitable communities that actually serve Lichfield will not find it so easy. We respectfully ask the Council whose interests they were elected to represent? Surely the commercial rate should be helping to support the voluntary and charitable communities of Lichfield? Or is the Guildhall yet another service we will lose to the faceless corporate and commercial? Nobody comes into Lichfield because they want to visit market researchers!

The Guildhall is already funded by us, the people of Lichfield and we believe it should be made available to be used by us, the people of Lichfield at a rate preferential to big commerce. We therefore respectfully request that you reconsider your decision to abolish the voluntary/charitable rate and scale any increases at a rate that small societies and charities have a chance to cope with.

Many thanks for your attention,

Lichfield Society of Artists,

Exhibition Organiser