

OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT – June 2020

1. Civic Matters: Lucy Clarke, Civic Officer

On Monday 11 May the Council meeting was held via a Zoom online conference call. The meeting replaced the usual Annual Council and was very different to how this meeting is usually held in the grandeur of the Guildhall. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, the Council resolved that the current Mayor, Cllr Deborah Baker, Sheriff, Dr Daryl Brown and Deputy Mayor, Cllr Robert Yardley will remain in office for an additional year to May 2021.

The Mayor's Chaplain, Revd. Nest Bateman and Mayor's Cadet, Benjamin Dodds have both agreed to continue with their official roles for an additional year.

The Mayor and Sheriff's chosen charities will also remain unaffected: St. Giles Hospice, Lichfield Voluntary Transport for the Disabled and Lichfield Voluntary Transport for the Disabled. It is not known at this point if further fundraising events will be taking place during 2020/21.

In view of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic and social distancing requirements, the City Council and/or its partners have had to cancel/postpone a number of further events as detailed below.

- Mayoral Service (17 May)
- Bower Sunday Service (24 May)
- Court of Arraye (25 May)
- Bower Procession (25 May)
- Swinfen Broun Bowls Match (24 June)
- Town Criers' Competition (4 July)
- Mayoress at Home (25 July)
- Sheriff's Ride (5 September)

The Sheriff's Ride is the largest event organised by the City Council and takes many months of planning and preparation. It is with great sadness that we have made the difficult decision to cancel the 'Ride' element this year, but we will still honour the tradition. The Sheriff, Dr Daryl Brown, accompanied by the Clerk of the Course, will perambulate the boundary of Lichfield City in some way (restrictions permitting) through other, safer means. Health and safety is always our top priority and we feel this is the correct course of action at this time.

The Dr Johnson Birthday Ceremony due to be held on Saturday 19th September is scheduled to go ahead but on a much smaller scale without any entertainment and only the Civic party in attendance. Further details will be published closer to the time reflecting the Government guidelines that are in force at the time.

The Civic Officer is investigating the possibility of holding remote engagements, and Government guidelines regarding events/gatherings will be closely adhered to as we emerge from lockdown.

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

The Birthplace remains closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but the Museum's online presence has enabled engagement with the public while the doors are shut. Numbers of interactions with the Museum's social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) have increased by an average of 168% in April. In total there were 3,595 virtual visits in April and early May by people 'liking', commenting on and sharing posts, reading blog articles or the e-newsletter or visiting the Museum's website. The total 'reach' on Facebook and Twitter (the number of people who saw a Birthplace post appear on their newsfeed or timeline) was 60,808.

The creation of online content has been undertaken by Museum Administration Assistant Penny Taylor, with blog posts compiled by the MHO. Actively seeking opportunities for promotion online, on Staffordshire Day (1 May) the Birthplace joined a programme of virtual events organised by Enjoy Staffordshire with a story performed and filmed at home by Museum Attendant and Storyteller Christine Genders. Other events have included the BBC's 'Museum From Home' day on 30 April, and linking to hashtags including #InternationalMuseumDay and #MuseumWeek2020. Organisations such as City Life Magazine and Visit Lichfield have shared posts to their larger audiences.



Collaborations with partners through social media to produce content have also included the 'Fantastic for Families' website, for which the Birthplace created a downloadable activity for children to complete at home and working with London-based actor and writer David Benson. David is performing Johnson's Rambler online and has recorded a special number for the Birthplace.

Other content has included 'behind the scenes' posts about what the Museum Attendant team are doing during closure. Attendant work at home has included making and repairing interactive displays, repairing and making new costumes for visitors to handle, researching for new tours and events, and carrying out archival research with transcriptions of early museum committee minutes.



The Birthplace Book Club and Writing Groups have continued to 'meet' through email, the MHO and MAA have regular video meetings to allocate work, and the MHO sends a weekly round-up to the Attendant team to keep everyone updated, and has been in regular contact with volunteers.

The MHO is progressing the Birthplace development project and has had conversations with officers at LDC and Historic England regarding the creation of disabled access on Market Street as opposed to the Breadmarket Street recommendation. Further advice has been sought from SCC Highways and the council's architects. Museum design company Vertigo are currently preparing initial visuals for the ground floor options. The report from an access audit undertaken in 2019 focusing on neurodiverse visitors has been received and the recommendations will be included in future project briefs where applicable. Susan Dalloe Consultancy have provided costs for ongoing support with funding applications, however, all National Lottery Heritage Fund award schemes are currently closed in order to divert to emergency recovery for the sector.

Other work completed at home by the MHO has included: compiling content for the new displays including a history of the Birthplace building; writing an article for the Johnson Society's 'Transactions' including new research on Johnson and items in the Museum collection; renewing loan agreements and progressing the city centre plaque restoration project.

The MHO and MAA attended a webinar on 'Restarting the Visitor Economy' organised by the Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce and the MAA attended a Zoom session on 'Engaging Online Audiences' organised by West Midlands Museum Development.

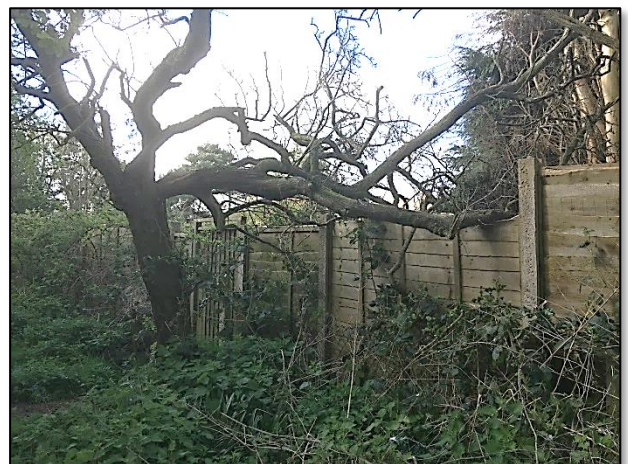
While closed, the Museum is secure with remote monitoring of the alarm system and access to the CCTV, and a regular visual check of the exterior by Attendants. Plans for social distancing and reopening when it is safe to do so are underway, and the MHO is keeping up to date with sector news and guidance.

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

Inspections of the LCC open spaces and footpaths continued during the Corona virus restrictions.

Apart from the footpath from Beech Gardens to Manor Rise which had to be closed while a hawthorn tree was removed (pictured), and also a footpath in St Michaels for hanging branches to be removed, all LCC parks and footpaths remained open and were well used by residents.

Play equipment at Netherstowe and Curborough remains taped off with notices of closure to explain the government guidelines.



Some tree clearance was also required in the plantations to the north of Eastern Avenue which were also well used.

E.on have now completed the replacement of all the LCC lamps with INDO Air LED lanterns. These will save energy and will cost less to run. This project has been completed nearly two years ahead of the original schedule, thanks largely to a CIL contribution.

E.on have also relocated the lamp near the Johnson Willow at Stowe prior to a replacement tree being planted. The lamp was previously sited adjacent to the tree itself; the new arrangement is far more appropriate and still provides ample light to pedestrians and cyclists (*photo: Cllr C Greatorex*).



4. Markets Report: Jordan Appleyard, Markets Officer

The City Council's market function has been at the centre of discussions over the past few weeks, despite the market hosting only essential stalls and operating well below its capacity due to lockdown restrictions. The request by the Lichfield Place Board to utilise the Market Square for socially distanced seating to aid restaurants, cafés and pubs as we emerge from lockdown was coupled with a request that the markets are relocated to Bird Street car park. This has caused a considerable amount of concern among traders but the City Council has

ensured that their views have been heard, both through written consultation responses and a meeting between traders and representatives of the Markets Working Group that was held via Zoom on 27 May. The proposals form a separate agenda report to council and all responses have been circulated separately to all Lichfield City councillors.

During the initial phase of the lockdown only food stalls stood at the market, but officers were pleased to welcome back the plant stall to the Square during May following discussions with LDC's Licensing Officers and the government's amendment to its list of essential and non-essential shops. These traders abided by new rules and regulations in regard to social distancing between stalls, traders and customers, PPE, the availability of sanitising hand gel and payment of pitch fees by electronic means rather than cash.

These new rules and regulations have served as a template to be implemented across the market following the Government's announcement that markets could resume from 1 June. Together with the incorporation of NABMA'S guide to social distancing into these guidelines, the market is as safe as possible.



This 'new normal' is unknown territory for officers, traders and market advisory bodies such as NABMA alike and it is not without its difficulties. The markets officer has devised stall plans for each of the City Council's markets that are compliant with new guidelines, but the need for social distancing considerably reduces the number of stalls the Square can host, notably requiring the removal of the central row. This has necessitated the introduction of a rota system to allow all permanent traders the opportunity to stand on a Saturday Market. For example, of the 23 traders who wished

to return to the Saturday market, a socially distanced Market Square layout can only support a maximum of 15. With Street Trading applicable to traders who are not physically located on the Square and no other suitable land within eye line of the Square, the City Council's options are limited. This has caused some frustration



among traders and officers alike, but the safety of the traders and the public is of paramount importance and we must all adapt to the unprecedented times we live in.

The first of these new style markets was held on Tuesday 2 June. Extra LCC staff were on hand from 7am to ensure stalls were set up in the appropriate places and social distancing requirements observed.

Traders are currently not subject to any arrears if they do not stand at the market (unless they have advised of their intention to stand and then subsequently do not attend) and the 50% pitch fee reduction agreed as an emergency ensure by the Leader and Town Clerk at the outset of the pandemic remains in force. A separate agenda report to Council addresses possible future arrangements for any incentives.

5. Twinning: Gabriele Lasch-Burden, Twinning Officer

Limburg

The corona virus pandemic has hit the Limburg district relatively mildly. As of 21 May there were 14 infected cases in total, of which 5 were in the city of Limburg. In total, there have been 288 cases in the district, 267 of whom have already recovered and sadly 7 people have died in the district. Apart from essential food shops, everything was shut down for numerous weeks, including Limburg City Council, whose personnel worked from home. There were social distancing measures in force but with greater freedom of movement. Corona tests were carried out on a voluntary basis at a drive through multi-storey car park outside Limburg. Now, Limburg is starting to get back to a new normal, with most shops, restaurants, hotels, schools, playgrounds and the City Council open again. The social distancing rules and hygiene regulations are staying in place and it is compulsory to wear face masks in all enclosed spaces, like shops and public transport.

Due to the social distancing rules, mass gatherings are still not allowed and will not be for the foreseeable future. As a result, the Mayor of Limburg, Dr. Marius Hahn, sent out a letter to the twin towns, explaining why he had to take the difficult decision to postpone this year's planned Twinning Weekend, due to have taken place from 25th to 28th September. It will now take place next September, with the EU guaranteeing to postpone funding for a year, which means that each guest from Lichfield will still receive a small contribution towards their travel costs. All registered guests from Lichfield (approximately 80) have been informed and sent the translated explanation letter from Dr. Hahn. The Limburg online photo competition, with prizes up to 200 Euros, is still going ahead with a deadline towards the end of June. Please contact the Twinning Officer for details.

Whether the planned yearly work placement of a public office apprentice from the Limburg City Council to Lichfield can take place is still to be decided. It is scheduled for a week from 10th October 2020.

The sports fun week in Limburg in August, where youngsters from Lichfield were invited to take part in, has been cancelled.

The Lichfield ArtFest, where artwork from Limburg artists was to be included, has been postponed to 2021.

At the time of writing this report, Lichfield Cars in the Park are due to make a decision on event proceedings imminently. However, a participation of planned classic cars from Limburg is not possible, should it go ahead in some form or other.

Sainte Foy Les Lyon

There have not been any official statistics on corona virus cases in Ste. Foy, however, the outbreak has not been severe and there were no reported deaths in the local care home. The lockdown in France has been significant, with all open areas and parks in Ste Foy closed and movement highly restricted without a printed "attestation" . Open air market stalls remained open. Council personnel all worked from home. Since 11th May, things have been slowly opening up again: primary schools are open for class sizes of 15 (10 for nurseries); masks in enclosed areas and public transport are a must and Ste Foy council distributed masks to every citizen over the age of 10; Ste. Foy citizens are now allowed to travel up to 100 km from home. Restaurants and cafes remained closed until the 2nd June.

The present Mayor, Veronique Sarselli, has received 53.8% of votes in the first round of local elections in Ste. Foy, which took place on 15th March. As she has received more than 50% of the votes, it is not necessary for her to take part in the second round of voting (22nd March), which has been delayed due to the corona virus pandemic. The final round of elections was scheduled to take place on June 28, however the council have confirmed Mrs. Sarselli as Mayor of Ste. Foy for another 6 years at their last council meeting on May 26.

Lichfield

The Twinning Walking Weekend, with participants from all 3 countries, from 19th to 22nd June this year, to be held at Church Stretton, Shropshire, has been postponed to 11th to 14th June 2021.

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

Phase 1 of the renovation work has been completed. This phase has included:

- The ceiling panels and timber have been cleaned, repaired and decorated where necessary.
- The walls have been repaired and repainted.
- The damaged glass above one of the doors has been repaired.
- The flags have been cleaned and put back in position.
- The numerous broken and damaged wooden panels were repaired and French polished.
- Electrical work has included new uplighters and additional switches at the back of the room to allow greater lighting flexibility, notably during concerts, plus updated connections for stage lighting
- Single electrical sockets have been replaced with doubles and an extra socket has been added at the back of the Recorders Bench.

Once the work was completed, one of our casual Premises Attendants, Nigel Boden, decorated the first-floor corridor outside the Main Hall and the fireplace inside the hall.

Some work has been delayed by the lockdown. The stage lights have been purchased but still need to be installed. Contractors will also be on site to carry out a survey of the radiators prior to their removal which is scheduled shortly after the distribution of this report.

Phase 2 of the work will include French polishing the remainder of the wall panels and a new floor. Before this work begins, the new wood for the floor will be delivered and stored at the back of the hall to acclimatise. The Mayor's Chair will also be repaired during phase 2. All the furniture is still stored in the Ashmole Room.

Contracted PA's are currently cleaning the building and carrying out routine maintenance tasks. All furniture is being disinfected and repaired where necessary. Looking ahead when the Guildhall reopens, future bookings will need their layouts reviewing with regard to social distancing regulations.

We are still hoping that the Wedding Ceremony can go ahead in August. Although it was originally a whole building booking, the bride and groom are in the military and hoping for a small ceremony to take place. I have been in contact with the Registrars and I am monitoring the current situation.

As Boley Park Community Hall has also remained closed, the opportunity was taken to arrange an architect's inspection of the building. This was originally scheduled for 2021/22 as part an extended cycle of quinquennial inspections that will now apply to all City Council owned buildings, rather than selected buildings (predominantly Guildhall, Donegal House and SJBm) in the past. A number of relatively minor issues have been identified, some being the responsibility of the management committee of the Hall and others falling to the City Council under the terms of the lease. Fortunately, there are no serious matters to report, and swift action to repair minor defects will hopefully ensure that such problems do not deteriorate and require more expensive remedial work in the future. The Town Clerk will be looking to progress these matters in due course.

7. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

During the current Covid-19 Pandemic, the Deputy Town Clerk has been working to ensure the City Council is complying with the most recent Government guidelines and liaising with the Council's Health & Safety consultants, Terrain, to update risk assessments so that they now reflect the change in working practices.

Officers have been working efficiently from home during the current crisis, however the need to access documents and files in the office has become more apparent. A rota system has therefore been introduced for staff to return to Donegal House which will minimise the risk of cross contamination and ensure social distancing is adhered to. The Guildhall remains closed to the public, but Premises Attendants have also returned to work, again on a rota system, to carry out a deep clean of the building concentrating on disinfecting tables and chairs in preparation for opening to hirers.

The Deputy Town Clerk has made all staff aware of best practices. A 'clean as you' go policy has been introduced to keep desks and communal areas as sterile as possible and together with hand washing/sanitising, the working environment has been made as safe as possible.

A protective screen and social distancing markers have been installed in Donegal House Reception in preparation for opening to the public when guidelines permit.

The Deputy Town Clerk has also been heavily involved in the preparations to reopen the General Markets on 2 June. There have been several challenges to overcome to maintain social distancing on the Market Square and keep both traders and the public safe. A number of Officers and staff will be on duty on market days to resolve any issues that arise and ensure guidelines are adhered to. A full report will be presented to Members in July.

In addition, Members will be aware of the request from Lichfield Place Board (LPB) to use the market square for socially distanced seating and relocate the markets to Bird Street car park. Both market traders and members of the public were contacted and asked to submit their views on this proposal. A total of 118 responses have been received. The Deputy Town Clerk has been collating these responses and keeping members of the Markets Working Group informed. An informal meeting with representatives of the Market Traders Liaison Committee and MWG members was held via Zoom on 27 May so that traders could make their representations and discuss their concerns. The Deputy Town Clerk hosted this meeting and has provided secretariat support for remote meetings of the Council.