

OFFICERS' INFORMATION REPORT

1. Civic Matters: Harriet Chatwin, Civic Officer

Lichfield City Council's 'Back to School' event returned on Friday 21 August and was once again well attended, with families braving the rain to take part. The event was created to help ease the financial burden of preparing for the new school year by providing free school uniforms, refreshments, and free face painting for all children, helping to create a fun atmosphere for both children and adults.

The event was made possible thanks to the support of Lichfield City Council officers, councillors, volunteers, and local businesses, including Tesco Extra. Generous donations from residents included stationery and brand-new uniforms purchased especially for the cause.

Cllr Ann Hughes, Deputy Leader of the Council, expressed her gratitude to everyone involved, from those who helped advertise the event in local shops, to residents who donated their pre-loved uniforms, and the officers who organised and distributed the donations on the day.

On Saturday 5 September, the Sheriff of Lichfield, Cllr Andrew Fox, took part in the annual tradition of the Sheriff's Ride.



Led by the Clerk of the Course, Doug Smith, the Sheriff received a round of applause as he left the Guildhall to begin the Sheriff's Ride, taking part on foot for the first time. The Mayor also took part, as a member of the Three Spires Morris Dancers, who came along to perform the 'Sheriff's Ride' dance.



The remainder of the event, organised by the Lichfield Shrievalty Association, continued with the full route from Stowe Fields back into the city, accompanied by several horse riders and cyclists.

They were later led by the Sword and Mace Bearers back into the city via The Close, where they were welcomed at the Cathedral to toast the ride with a glass of sherry. The ride then continued via Dam Street and Market Street to the Guildhall.



The Sheriff's Ride is a tradition dating from 1553 when Queen Mary's Charter separated Lichfield from Staffordshire, making Lichfield 'A City and a County' with the right to appoint its own Sheriff. The Charter commanded the Sheriff to make a perambulation to inspect and enforce the city boundary each year. This year marks the 473rd Sheriff's Ride.

The Sheriff said: "I am very honoured to have been able to complete much of the Historic Sheriff's Ride as a runner; the first for many years. It was wonderful to have three generations running at the start. I am very grateful to the Clerk of the Course, the Ride Committee, and the Lichfield Shrievalty Association, together with the landowners, officers of Lichfield City Council and many others, for creating this opportunity. The Sheriff's Ride is one of the most historic events in Lichfield and I am sure that we all want future generations to treasure it, as we do. Long may it continue!"



The next Officers report will include detail of the Mayor and Sheriff's first charity event of the civic year, a Charity Sea Shanties Evening, as well as Samuel Johnson's Birthday Celebrations. Preparations are continuing for the upcoming Twinning Weekend, with a full account to also follow in the next Officer's Report.

2. Open Spaces: Nigel Boden, Open Spaces Officer and Jane Varley, Clerical Officer

Replacement Bins

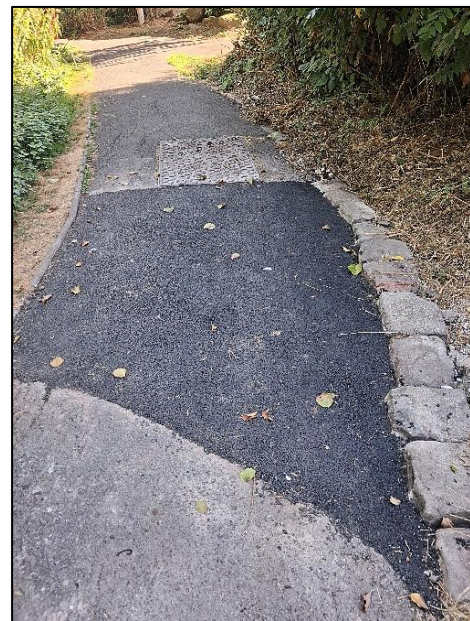
Several corroded metal bins have been replaced with new polymer recyclable bins at Friary Remains, Speakers Corner and Festival Gardens.



Festival Gardens (Site 19C)

Wilding areas have been cut back earlier than planned this year to negate heightened fire risk. Horse Chestnut near Trunkfield Brook has been felled following safety advice after large limb fall.

Repair made to subsidence on pathway, underlying sewer was investigated by Severn Trent, however no damage was found.



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

- **St Michael's Churchyard (60)** – Foliage cut back from two lime trees overhanging parking spaces at Lorne House development.
- **Fecknam Way (11C)** – Tree overgrowth cut back from cable lines on green
- **Beaconfields (15A)** – Cut back of overgrown hedge adjacent Erasmus Way property
- **Friary Remains (19a)** – Rear flower beds cut back and tidied
- **Library Corner (33)**
Realignment of dedicated signpost (pictured) ahead of Twinning Weekend scheduled for early October.



3. Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum: Kimberley Biddle, Museums & Heritage Officer

It has been a busy summer at the Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum, with family craft activities, refreshed displays, and engaging events giving visitors new things to discover. In August, staff welcomed 2,510 visitors, a 22% increase compared with the same period last year.

Interpretation and Displays

Over the summer, work has been underway to refresh interpretation and displays within the Birthplace, including relocating the introductory film about Samuel Johnson to the cellar kitchen. This creates a more atmospheric visitor experience and has also enabled the former AV room to be redeveloped as a new display.

The two interpretation panels in the cellar kitchen have also been refreshed to explore whether the Johnson family's kitchen was actually located in the cellar when Samuel was a child. Drawing on changes to the building, historic auction catalogues, and an account by Johnson's friend Hester Piozzi, the interpretation explores the evidence and uncertainty surrounding the kitchen's original location and explains why the museum has chosen to recreate it in the cellar.

The former AV room is being transformed into a new display marking the 125th anniversary of the Birthplace opening as a museum ('work in progress' photo opposite). New interpretation panels tell the story of the campaign to save the Birthplace, from concerns about its future in the late nineteenth century through to its opening as a museum in 1901. The display also highlights Lieutenant John Gilbert's generosity in providing the funds that enabled the council to purchase the property in 1900, as well as the recognition he received for his contribution to the city.

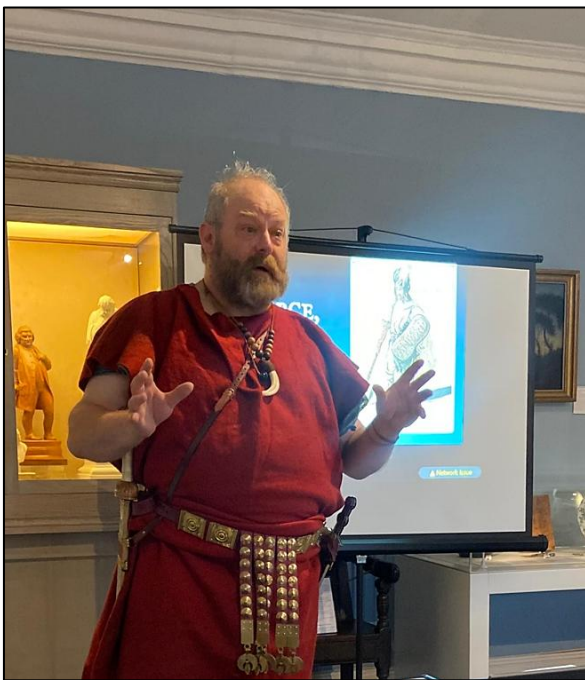


Objects connected with Gilbert have been relocated to the room, giving greater prominence to his role in securing the future of the Birthplace. Historic posters have also been displayed, including the advertisement for the 1887 auction of the building. Together, the new interpretation, posters, and objects give visitors a greater understanding of the museum's own story and of the individuals whose efforts helped ensure that Johnson's Birthplace was preserved for future generations.

The completed display will be ready to welcome visitors as part of the programme for Johnson's birthday event on 19 September, providing a timely opportunity to celebrate both Johnson's life and the Birthplace's 125-year history as a museum.

Events at the Birthplace

At the end of July, the museum hosted a relaxed evening collage workshop, offering participants the opportunity to develop their creativity and consider art as a form of wellbeing. The session was suitable for all levels of experience, with materials provided and participants encouraged to bring images from books and magazines that resonated with them. The workshop was led by Hazel Pitt, an analogue collage artist based in Staffordshire.



On 5 August, the museum hosted a talk by Rik Sowden on the relationship between Rome and Britain during the first centuries BCE and CE.

The evening event attracted a good audience, with Rik delivering the talk in costume and bringing the subject to life through an engaging and accessible presentation.

Volunteer-led family craft sessions ran throughout the school summer holidays every Thursday, providing fun and creative activities for families and encouraging them to discover more about the museum and its collections.

At the time of writing, the Birthplace team is preparing for the annual Samuel Johnson Birthday celebrations. The event will include a range of free activities for visitors of all ages, including living-history demonstrations and opportunities to meet costumed characters from the past. A skilled calligrapher will write visitors' names on bookmarks for them to take home as a memento of the day. Continuing the tradition of celebrating Johnson's birthday with cake, visitors will also be able to enjoy a slice as part of the day's celebrations.

Heavy Rainfall and Flooding

On 27 August, heavy rainfall across Lichfield caused flooding that affected a number of local businesses and residents, as well as the Birthplace Museum. The yard flooded quickly, resulting in water entering the Workroom and seeping into the cellar.

Thanks to the swift response of staff, the water was cleared promptly, and there was no significant damage to the building or collections. The museum was temporarily closed during the morning to allow staff to deal with the situation safely, with the Bookshop reopening in the afternoon. The Birthplace reopened fully as normal the following day.



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

On Sunday 9 August, the Market Square was dedicated to the Pride Weekend celebrations, with a variety of activities taking place throughout the day. The event provided an enjoyable and inclusive experience for those attending and contributed to a vibrant atmosphere in the city centre.

During the recent period of hot weather, the Markets Offices monitored all food traders to ensure compliance with food hygiene standards and the safe storage and sale of food products, including checks on stock temperatures. These inspections were recorded as part of the market's due diligence procedures, with records being retained for future reference.



Tuesday Market Update

Three traders have now successfully completed their 12-week trial period and have become permanent Tuesday market traders. These are **The Shoe Man**, **Rewind Vintage Toys**, and **Bloom & Bliss**.

This leaves one casual trading space available for Tuesday which is currently being occupied by **Greek Gyros Wraps**, who have received excellent feedback from customers.

Friday Market Update

The Friday market remains full.

Saturday Market Update

The Saturday market also remains full. Unfortunately one of the Saturday Traders had their licence revoked following breaches of Market Regulations. The vacant pitch will now be occupied by **C&T Records**, a trader who has consistently supported the market and currently trades on the Tuesday Market.

The Markets Team are still getting regular enquires for stall mainly for Friday & Saturday so a strong list is maintained of casual traders that can be invited to stand when permanent traders are absent or take holidays.



Antique & Vintage Market

The Antique and Vintage Market, organised by Dark Antiques, continues to go from strength to strength, with an increasing number of traders applying for pitches each month.

The market is receiving strong support from the people of Lichfield and continues to attract a steady number of visitors. Positive feedback has also been received on social media, with many attendees commenting positively on the quality and variety of stalls on offer.

In addition, the organisers have extended their October booking to include the Guildhall, where they will be hosting a Halloween-themed event.



Producers' Market

The Producers' Market, operated by CJ Events, is held on the first Sunday of each month. The market continues to be well supported, with around 30 traders attending on a regular basis.

The event is immensely popular with customers, many of whom return month after month. A wide variety of traders participate in the market, with the mix of stalls changing regularly, ensuring a diverse and interesting range of products for visitors. This variety helps to maintain the market's appeal and contributes to its ongoing success.

Vegan Market

The last Vegan Market was held on 17 May. The next event is scheduled to take place on 20 September and will incorporate a Biodiversity and Regenerative Food Festival.

The event is expected to attract a diverse range of traders and visitors, promoting sustainable food production, environmental awareness, and ethical consumer choices.



Other Events

On Sunday 23 August a local business hired The Square for a Spirit and Nature Festival. The event run from 10am until 4pm and footfall throughout the day was steady.

We have not had a Spirit and Nature Festival on the Market Square before, so did get several visitors interested in Yoga and Sound bath experiences.

We are hoping that the organiser will book again in the new year when the weather allows for outdoor activities.

Andrew Elson, the organiser is pictured below, along with a Yoga instructor offering taster sessions.

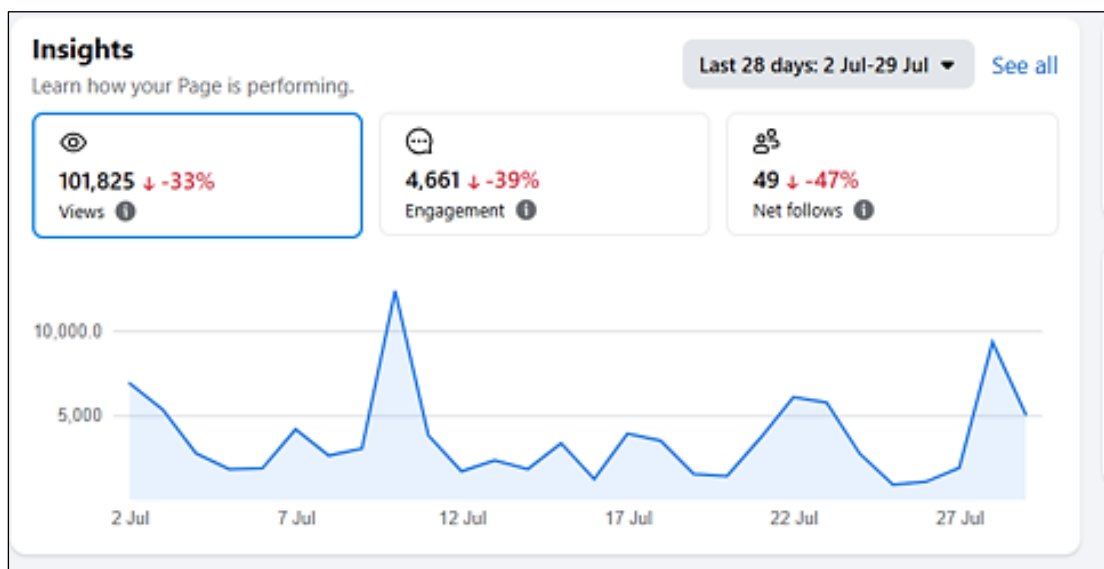


Social Media

All social media platforms continue to maintain a strong following.

Greater emphasis is now being placed on promoting the market through X and Instagram, as engagement and audience growth on these platforms have fallen behind other channels. Officers are therefore focusing on increasing content and interaction to strengthen the market's presence and reach a wider audience.

The statistics below show follower numbers and engagement levels on Facebook over a 28-day period. To support existing traders, officers regularly feature individual businesses through trader spotlights and promotional posts. New traders joining the market are also given a comprehensive social media showcase to promote their arrival, raise awareness of their products, and help increase both footfall and sales.



5. Guildhall & Boley Park Community Hall

Guildhall bookings and enquiries are currently being managed by the Office Administrator with assistance from the Deputy Town Clerk.

Roof Repairs

The roof works continue to the Guildhall, affecting availability for bookings. The repairs to the main roof are complete and have been signed off by LCC's advisors, with the lower-level repairs ongoing at the time of preparing this report. While there have been savings because of the high level leadwork being in far better condition than assumed, extra costs have been incurred due to the addition of the following:

- Replacement of the flat roof covering over the ladies toilets due to the current provision failing in the recent storms, and previous patchwork repairs and upstand additions approaching end of life. With the scaffold in place to allow relatively easy access to this otherwise difficult area – both for inspection and for remedial work - there are significant long-term savings and advantages to carrying out this work now.
- Originally the budget included for replacement/repair to 7 of the 23 lead bays that form the roof above the first-floor corridor of the Guildhall. The recent storms and a detailed inspection revealed that 12 bays require attention.

Despite the above, and with the project now being significantly over the original planned duration due to additional work and extreme weather, it is currently forecast to be slightly under budget.

Heavy Rainfall and Flooding

On 27 August there was significant water ingress as rainwater goods between the Guildhall and the George IV became overwhelmed. The main issue was traced to a plastic bottle which had found its way into a downpipe, significantly restricting flow. Despite there being a similar rainfall on the evening of 26 August, the issue did not occur at that time, suggesting the bottle may have been washed along the guttering by the previous rainfall. The resulting water ingress predominantly affected Lichfield Arts' storage area/beer cellar and the ground floor ladies toilet. The area affected is not part of the roof that is being repaired/replaced as part of the current roofing contract; the new roof over the main hall remained watertight.

The incoming rainwater quickly began to spread from the storage area and ladies toilet across the Guildhall's ground floor corridor. LCC Premises Attendant Clive Read and the Town Clerk managed to lift the inspection chamber cover in the main corridor, directing the rainwater to the drain and protecting otherwise vulnerable areas such as the Guildroom and ground floor kitchen. Contractors from Messenger BCR, together with contractors called upon by the George IV, arrived shortly afterwards and were able to rectify the immediate issue, with Messenger contractors also clearing the remaining guttering and downpipes.

Events and Bookings

The 'Back to School Event' uniform event was held on Friday 21 August, this proved to be a busy and successful event run by City Councillors and the Civic Officer. August bookings also included regulars such as Chess, U3A and Bridge, together with Market Research holding two sessions, a business launch party, a Craft Fair, two wedding ceremonies and reception, 1 wedding reception following a ceremony elsewhere, and the Royal Naval Association held their 70th Anniversary Celebration in the Guildhall, together with fly past (pictured overleaf).



Boley Park Community Hall

The Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) inspection has been completed. Some minor remedial work was identified and has since been undertaken. Minor repairs have also been carried out to the toilet facilities.

The five-yearly Architect's inspection has been completed and the report submitted to the Town Clerk. While a number of routine maintenance matters have been identified for further investigation in due course, no significant concerns have been raised. The Architect did question whether asbestos could be present within the Artex finish of the Hall, but LCC's asbestos report from 2021 confirms this is not the case.

During August, the Hall hosted a children's birthday party, a Stamp Fair, a holiday playscheme and an engagement party, in addition to its regular hirers, many of whom continue their activities throughout the summer period.

Following discussion and resolution at the Boley Park Community Hall Management Committee earlier this year, the Town Clerk has stepped down as Treasurer after ten years in the role. LCC's Responsible Financial Officer, Lisa Davies, has succeeded him, having been appointed as a Trustee and added as an authorised signatory to the Committee's bank account in accordance with the Committee's resolution.

The year-end accounts are currently being prepared and will be submitted for audit shortly.

6. Twinning: Gabriele Lasch-Burden, Twinning Officer

Just before the summer holidays, 2 teachers from a Limburg vocational High School, visited the Lichfield Cathedral School on the Erasmus mobility scheme for educators. The purpose of this visit was to establish and tighten links with the Cathedral School with a view to sending trainee Teaching Assistants over to Lichfield on a month placement at a time once the European Erasmus scheme will be reintroduced in 2027. This has not been possible anymore without lengthy and costly visa applications.

The photograph below shows the two teachers from the Limburg ARS High School on either side, Mr. M. Amison, and Assistant Headteacher and Head of Geography from the Cathedral School to the left of Ben and Kathy Lamb with their son, who hosted the 2 German teachers during their stay.



7. Deputy Town Clerk: Sarah Thomas

The Deputy Town Clerk continues to work closely with the RFO to review and streamline the Council's internal procedures, some of which are referenced in the Commercial Services Committee meeting minutes. In addition, the Deputy Town Clerk will support Officers during the forthcoming Twinning Weekend and provide secretariat support at the next Commercial Services Committee meeting and Full Council meeting.

Preparations continue for the Christmas Lights Switch On event, which this year will be held on Sunday 22 November.

The Council's health and safety consultants recently completed annual reviews and fire risk assessments for the Guildhall, Donegal House, and Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum, with no issues reported.

Community Engagement



The final Community Day of the summer was held on 20 August and, despite the occasional rain shower, attracted a good footfall. A variety of organisations attended, including the RNLI, Lichfield First Responders, Pathway Project, and the Greyhound Trust.

Younger visitors enjoyed a range of activities, including the ever-popular colouring station, a penalty shoot-out football challenge, and the opportunity to get up close to some spectacular birds of prey.

A special thankyou to Jake Lane Fruit and Vegetable Stall, who kindly donated a large quantity of delicious fruit to give away, and to Bluestone Plants for supplying free daffodil bulbs to everyone who tried their hand at being a Town Crier.



8. Responsible Financial Officer – Lisa Davies

The RFO continues to work closely with the Accounts Administrative Officer and Internal Auditor in reviewing the current accounting systems. The Accounts Administrative Officer is now making regular weekly Bankline payments and this has streamlined the process making payments timelier. The accounts process now includes saving electronic copies of invoices and attaching them directly into SAGE with a view to improving our audit trail and reducing paper usage.

The RFO has renewed the real living wage accreditation. New real living wage rates are due to be published on 15 October 26 and any necessary adjustments to payroll will be processed in November. The new pay award agreed by The National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) was applied in September wages.

The RFO has continued to work with the Museum Support Officer and the Markets Officer on the new point of sale systems to make improvements to both these areas.

The RFO is currently working with the Deputy Town Clerk and the Commercial Services Committee on a simplified pricing structure for Guildhall bookings and looking at utilising social media for marketing purposes.