

Annual Report of the Chair

2011 – 2012.

The last year has again been another year of significant change and development for the Gorge Parish Council. Following the local elections in May the council welcomed five new parish councillors, Heather Oldershaw and Dave Davies (Ironbridge), Mike Mackenzie and Ben Whitehouse (Lightmoor) and Steve Hodges (Jackfield). Dave Davies was also elected as the Councillor for the Borough of Telford and Wrekin for Ironbridge Ward. All this meant that we said our farewells to the husband and wife team of Mike and Liz Swift, Sarah Williams, Tom Smith and Alan Taylor and we are grateful to them for the time and effort that they spent as parish councillors for several years. Mike and Liz Swift's contribution to the life of the Gorge was recognised later in the year when they were made the first Freeman and Freewoman of the Gorge.

During the year The Gorge Parish Council has made awards of £8000 to local bodies and organisations who have applied for funding and including grants to the various village halls within the parish area. In response to public interest and concerns the Parish Council has arranged for the purchase of village signs which have been erected in each of the disparate communities.

With Jubilee Year upon us we budgeted for and have been able to give some funding support to community groups in Lightmoor and Coalbrookdale for their celebrations and anticipate other grants being made to similar groups in the parish council area. We very much regret that the proposal to erect a bandstand in Jubilee year has had to be abandoned as the costs of the project were prohibitive and would have involved inappropriate expenditure in times of economic hardship.

The Council also funded the firework displays at the World Heritage Site Festival and the Christmas Lights celebration with more new Christmas lights than in previous years extending further along Tontine Hill into the Wharfage. The latter event was remarkable in attracting thousands of people from Telford and beyond – many more than anticipated – and for a short time there was traffic disruption and some disappointment for a few children who were not able to see Father Christmas because of the overwhelming numbers attending. Plans are being made to approach this event differently in 2012 so that traffic issues are minimised and everyone has the opportunity to visit Father Christmas.

The Gorge Parish Council has now set its budget for 2012-13 and has held the precept at the same level as 2011-12 recognising the efforts that need to be made in minimising public expense.

The Parish Council holds the vice chair on The Ironbridge Regeneration Partnership and is also represented on the World Heritage Site Steering Group, the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust and the South Telford Rights of Way Partnership. We also continue to explore the synergies of working with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust and have developed a strong relationship with Vanessa Harbar, the World Heritage Site Officer.

Unfortunately she is moving on shortly and we will be sorry to see her go while wishing her well in her new appointment.

Residents will be very much aware of the on-going problems with traffic in the Gorge area particularly on Madeley Bank and in Dale End and a committee comprising the Police, the Parish and Borough Councils meet regularly to attempt to find some resolutions. The Parish Council was pleased that negotiations with the Borough Council resulted in the withdrawal of proposals to charge residents for parking passes and also for the passes to be extended to cover three years rather than one as at present. The 'Park & Ride' facility at Jiggers Bank is current under construction and will be served by a shuttle bus system when it opens later in the summer. It is hoped that this will alleviate some of the parking problems in the Gorge at the busiest times of the year.

We have supported the local policing team with a contribution of £1000 towards their beat vehicle and congratulate Sergeant Louis Hylton on the award of the MBE for his life and work in community policing. We are grateful to the local beat manager PC Simon Downes who has now left after a number of years to take up a similar role elsewhere in Telford and we have welcomed PC Sam Anderson and PCSO Andy Hudson to the area. We look forward to cooperating with the local police team in future events in the Gorge.

The Parish Council Office in the Maws Craft Centre is resourced by our indefatigable parish clerk, Jayne Madeley and we applaud her tireless commitment and dedication to the daily life of the parish and the support she gives to the parish councillors. The parish council office has become the focus for many visitors to the Gorge and provides a space for meetings of all kinds reflecting the life of the Gorge and there have been more visitors to the office during this year than ever before. The quarterly Gorge Gazette has continued to provide information and news and is delivered to every home and business throughout the Gorge.

The Parish Council meets on the first and third Tuesdays each month and all council meetings, normally held in the Parish Office at the Maws are open to the public. The first meeting of the month deals specifically with planning applications and the Parish Council dealt with more than 100 planning applications during the year.

Finally, as we look towards the major events of the rest 2012 – not least the 30th May- when the Olympic Torch passes through Ironbridge and the on-going plans for the Diamond Jubilee I cannot finish without making mention of the Rotary organised 'Tree of Light'. In 2011 the proprietors of Truffles Cafe in Ironbridge made space for this worthy fund raising cause, making a major contribution to the overall sum of more than of £36000 raised for local charities. We also wish Councillor Dave Davies a speedy recovery from illness.

The Reverend Keith Osmund-Smith

Chair, The Gorge Parish Council

30.3.12