

## **The Gorge Parish Council**

### **Annual Report of the Chair**

#### **2014 – 2015**

As an introduction to this report I must acknowledge the sacrificial commitment of Borough Councillor Dave Davies who passed away during the year after a long illness. He served the Borough Council and Madeley Town Council for many years and he loved the Gorge and the people who lived in his ward and even though he was very ill continued to serve them. I was privileged to make tribute to him at the Borough Council meeting after his untimely death and he is greatly missed.

It will not have escaped anyone's attention that this has been a very significant year for the Gorge Parish Council with the commencement of the very major and critically important stabilisation works in Jackfield. This multi-million pound project has had a huge impact on the topography of the area and a similar impact on the lives of those who live there. Although the work still has a long way to go all the major piling work is complete and the Borough Council and MacPhillips are to be congratulated on the success of the project thus far. The whole undertaking has been a testament to the cooperation of the contractors and to the understanding and good will of the long-suffering residents of Jackfield.

As we approach the AGM I am pleased to say that our two 2014 Councillor co-optees Carolyn Healey and Paul Rhoden have been confirmed in their roles at the elections on 7<sup>th</sup> May to serve the Parish Council in the Gorge and Lightmoor wards. Councillors Heather Oldershaw, Maureen Bragg, Steve Hodge, Tony Hobson, Jake Bennett and myself also return for another four years. It's worth remembering that your Parish Councillors are all experienced and enthusiastic volunteers and each one represent the people of their wards without partisan interests.

Councillor Jake Bennett represents Lightmoor together with Councillors Paul Rhoden and myself. Councillor Steve Hodges serves the Jackfield Ward and Councillor Tony Hobson, (who has fully recovered from illness) continues to serve Coalport with enthusiasm and represents the Parish Council on Woodside allotments. Councillor Maureen Bragg serves the Gorge community around Coalbrookdale together with Councillors Carolyn Healey and Heather Oldershaw sharing the work in the whole of the ward. Please do support all of us and in particular Councillor Oldershaw as she takes the Chair of the Parish Council for the next year. Our new Borough Councillor for the Gorge is Councillor Nic Lowery and we are pleased to welcome her and look forward to working with her and with Councillor Clive Mollett in the future.

The Christmas Lights 'switch-on' was again a very successful and sparkling event with more lights than ever before and a fabulous fireworks display. So many people come to Ironbridge for this event from all over Telford and beyond and once again our grateful thanks go to our Parish Clerk Jayne Madeley and her team for a wonderful evening.

The Walking Festival, with unstinting support from Councillor Oldershaw, is now firmly established as part of the 'Walkers are Welcome UK Network', a nationwide initiative launched a few years ago to encourage towns and villages to be 'welcoming to walkers'. The organisers of the Walking Festival have provided walks of all lengths around the Gorge for people of all abilities and at the presentation of 'Challenge' medals on 10<sup>th</sup> May I was delighted to meet people from all over the West Midlands and beyond (One of whom walked over 150 miles around the Gorge) for whom this festival has become an annual 'must do'.

During 2014/2015 The Gorge Parish Council has made grants from its precept to local groups, causes, activities and events. During the last year we have made all our regular grants on your behalf to all of the parish halls and sponsored a race at the Rowing Club. We have provided the Brass Band Festival with a very large grant to include the provision of music workshops for young people during the summer months.

This last year has been one of great change in the personal and business of our Parish Clerk Jayne Madeley. However in spite of all the real changes in her circumstances I must pay tribute to her boundless energy and commitment to what she often describes as 'her patch'.

There has been no change in our meeting arrangements during the last year. The Gorge Parish Council meets twice monthly during the year on the first and third Tuesday evenings of every month with the exception of August. The first Tuesday is our planning meeting. Because much of the Gorge is in a conservation area the rules and regulations around planning matters are rigorously pursued and this council takes its responsibilities very seriously as the first filter for all planning applications. Councillors have developed considerable expertise in these matters and we like to think that our voice is heard in the planning corridors of the Borough Council. On the third Tuesday of each month our full planning meeting covers all other areas of concern for the Parish Councillor.

Much of the Gorge is part of the World Heritage Site and the chair of the Parish Council is a member of the World Heritage Steering Group of what in reality is a major national and international centre for tourism. Councillor Oldershaw will represent the Parish Council on this group in coming months.

It has been a rare privilege to serve as chair of the Parish Council for a number of years (probably too many) but it is not my intention to take a back seat as the new chair begins her work and I intend to do all I can to serve the Parish Council during the next four years.

We are all looking forward to the next 12 months as we seek to continue to represent the Gorge communities to the best of our abilities and thank the residents of the Gorge Parish for the trust you have placed in us.

Keith Osmund-Smith

Chair - The Gorge Parish Council

28<sup>th</sup> May 2015