

The Gorge Parish Council

Annual report of the Chair

2015-2016

Since the 2015 elections, your councillors remain the same with the exception of Lightmoor ward which saw the resignation from the Parish Council of Keith Osmund-Smith due to ever more church work and other voluntary commitments. Andrew White from Lightmoor has been co-opted to represent that ward in Keith's place. All of your councillors continue to represent the residents in their wards with enthusiasm, compassion and without political bias. All are volunteers, claiming no expenses for their work. Several have young families and full time jobs yet still put in hours a week for the Parish Council.

We always say this but it has been another busy year, for we are a small council with a low precept which for another year we have kept unchanged. Continuing cuts at borough council level put further pressure on our budget but we continue to lobby for the WHS to be respected and to ensure that the environment of The Gorge is maintained not only for visitors but also for residents. Our focus as the Parish Council must be on the residents and local businesses.

We continue to support the local village halls and community centres and now find ourselves struggling to find a slot for this meeting as they are so well used. We provided a significant grant for the scout group to replace their boiler and central heating system in their room at the Ironbridge and Coalbrookdale community centre. It was unsafe and they would otherwise have had to close or move. Given the growing number of families with children we now have resident in The Gorge we regard this as an investment in the future.

Via our grants system we support many local groups across a wide spectrum from our local green spaces and nature reserves to safety training for the school children. We operate 2 different styles of grants, one that is usually a one off, others that are annual donations, though these are kept under review.

Many of the activities we are involved in are ongoing year in year out, but a few things stand out as specific to the past year. One is the work, led by Cllr Carolyn Healy, to secure funding from the TWC Pride in Your High Street initiative. As a result of the efforts of Carolyn and her team we have secured funding of around £37,000 to improve the High Street and environs and thus we hope, increase footfall in this under utilized part of the town. As this project progresses there will be further information available. Another is the co-ordination, along with other groups in The Gorge of a robust response to the TWC Local Plan, in particular objecting most strongly to the proposals for the old Beeches Hospital and surrounding land. The area of land involved has been reduced and the plan is going through the process of external review. I doubt that we have seen the end of negotiations on this area, and your Parish Council will be fully involved, as it is in all aspects of planning in The Gorge. We also provided the secretariat for the Stakeholders meetings for the Jackfield Stabilisation Project. This project has gone extremely well, with not a little help from the weather, which meant we had no major flood events during its course. Neal Rushton has been a regular at our annual residents meetings and we have given him a year off this year, but I am sure everyone would join me in congratulating him on his management of the project.

Among plans for the future are for your Parish Council to assist residents with submissions to add public rights of way to the definitive map. Andrew has explained some of this process to you.

I will finish by thanking all of our councillors and Jayne Madeley, our clerk, all of whom work very hard on residents behalf. I would also like to thank you, the residents, for your support and involvement. Without you, the Parish Council would have no function.

Heather Oldershaw
Chair – The Gorge Parish Council
11th May 2016