

CHAIRMEN'S REPORT 2012

As is customary, after our first general meeting in January we held our Annual Post Christmas party at the Speech House and were treated to a tour of the improvements being made. We also had a very interesting talk by Poet Pilot with film of his flights over our area. Other General meetings at Harts Barn and Perrygrove also gave us very interesting tours of their facilities.

The most significant change to the association came in March 2012 when we became a fully fledged company limited by guarantee and that had many implications on the way we run. It took a while to get to grips with the new Board of Directors structure and how each member business has to sign up to the company. This all took a lot of work and effort and we have now increased our paid assistance to enable more paid clerical and accounting help. We decided on a new invoicing policy of adding £30 to each membership fee that could be deducted for prompt payment. This was quite successful and reduced the time and labour in collecting overdue membership fees. We did investigate changing to a Direct Debit system of collecting monies but unfortunately, because of new regulations, our small association does not qualify.

A huge part of the year was also taken up with getting our new website up and running; this replaces our old site and the FODDC site. Financed by FODDC and in partnership with them, we think we are well on the way to an extremely attractive, user friendly and informative site both for the visitor and locals. In order to standardise our offer to visitors, we commissioned a new version of our area map so that the one on our website is identical to the one used in the FODDC Visitor Guide and widely distributed in the area.

There have been initial talks also with Monmouthshire County Council but nothing concrete has been agreed so far. However MCC have channelled Welsh Government money our way from Welcome Monmouthshire (Digital Tourism Support) funding and we are in the very early stages of discussions that will result in an IOS and an Android APP for the area, using our data.

In terms of Marketing, we have really focused on the internet. We have continued with Google Adwords. The new website is producing 1st or 2nd place on Google and we continue to work hard to maintain that placing. We took an ad in the Caravan & Camping Handbook, partly financed by the old Magic Leaflet group of attractions. Sadly we have not attended many shows. This is solely because our requests to the membership for help on our stand has not been forthcoming. The Board is reluctant to keep attending shows without some support from the members. Our appointment of ACM Digital to run our social media was not successful and we did not renew their contract. We are hopeful that in 2013 we will be able to further develop a new marketing strategy in partnership with our respective District Councils & County Councils.

We were able to run some training courses – Photography, Excel, Facebook, Geocaching. We did lay one cache and hoped to take this further but there was lack of support from the membership. With the new 'availability system' on our

website we have held several teaching sessions and we now have in place an ongoing support system for members who may have problems.

As usual, we produced and widely distributed our very successful Attractions, Activities & Specialist Shopping Guide and also our Eating Out Guide. We enrolled some new local business services members and produced a bespoke Business Services Handbook for the commercial needs of all members. This has not proved as successful as we had hoped, and consequently many of the Business members did not renew for a further year.

We were asked to purchase a PA system so people could hear properly at our general meetings and this we have done.

We are very upbeat at the moment and looking forward to more advances on the website, the production of our APP and a new and positive working relationship with MCC in 2013.