

## **REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE PARISH COUNCIL 22/23: -**

The Parish Council have continued to meet regularly over the last twelve months which saw a welcome return to a full calendar of face-to-face meetings during this period, with no meetings traditionally held in August and December. At the 2022 AGM, Nicola Gribble was elected as Chair, and Fiona Cardinale as Vice Chair. Thanks given to Amanda Quince and Ian McIver who dedicated many hours to the benefit of Renhold and stood down during 2022 and more recently Julian Polhill who also committed many hours to support the Council.

The current serving Parish Councillors for 2023 going forwards following the Council elections are: Warwicker, Dean, Brunsdon, Roberts, Cardinale, Gribble, and Luguero, with there being two vacancies at present.

2022/23 continued to be another busy and productive time for the village, with a range of important village matters being dealt with. This has been more challenging as, without a full complement of Councillors, the Parish Council has been at reduced capacity. Ten parish electors called for an election to fill a vacancy for Renhold North in 2022, however, sadly, after repeated notices no one came forward for a long period of time.

Renhold Parish Council continues to work hard on behalf of residents, with attention to detail given to planning matters looking at a range of different domestic applications at every meeting. The Parish Council have remained determined to stay engaged in the important public consultations surrounding key items, which have continued again to be an enormous focus at meetings given the significance of the proposals on the Renhold community.

Most notably these are the Local Plan 2040 planning strategy framework document, and the planned East West rail route, having understandably taken up a lot of meeting time. The Council has, as always, stayed committed to voicing comments to the proposals given the detrimental impact that would result for the parish. Unfortunately, the Local Plan does see a significant area allocated, with an employment site put forward within the village known as EMP6 – Business Park, Land at Water End and St Neots Road.

It takes considerable time on reviewing such associated technical documents for such a proposed development which will have significant impact on Renhold as a rural village, but it is of paramount importance to the Parish Council. Ensuring thorough and robust presentation at all stages of the Local Plan consultation process whilst working hard alongside this to make sure residents are kept informed have been key areas of focus. Engaging with appropriate professional support when needed has also been actioned and presently the Parish Council is making in person representation at the Local Plan public hearing sessions which have commenced today and will run through to September.

The Parish Council is also aware that in other local planning and development matters, it needs to continue to engage in all aspects – an example being the East West Rail proposals. Prior to the final route alignment being confirmed, it is important to recognise the huge amount of work behind the scenes that has been continuing to ensure Renhold remains informed and engaged in such an important item. Renhold Parish Council and the committed community have continued to be exceptionally pro-active on this matter, Council representatives at the local Stakeholders Group, BFARE engagement, along with regular dialogue with Richard Fuller MP, have all been pursued and the Parish Council are most grateful to those Renhold residents who have supported with this.

On every meeting agenda the Parish Council make sure they engage in the range of residential planning applications received - this last twelve months has seen around 55 applications reviewed,

with the Parish Council carefully considering each application individually with, where appropriate, objections being made, usually with concerns such as over development or impact on street scene. Again, Renhold Parish Council have a pro-active approach, so not just applications where the Parish Council is a statutory consultee are considered, but also the Parish Council engage in permitted development and prior notification certificate applications to reiterate the importance of key local features relating to street scene are taken into account by the determining Officer.

Planning enforcement is also an area that is important to Renhold Parish Council, with items being reported where necessary to the local authority, to ensure there is consistency with the local and national planning policies being applied. Residents who contact the Council worried about a local issue, are signposted on how to engage in this area if they have a concern with an item.

Renhold Neighbourhood Plan Working Group is also a valuable asset where a number of dedicated residents are kindly giving up their time to collate a Plan document which sets out the clear objectives for the local community. The Parish Council wish to thank all those who continue to support and engage in this important planning strategy document for Renhold.

As well as the Plan Working Group, Parish Councillors also kindly volunteer their time, to support improvements, and make sure Renhold's voice is heard. This is done in a range of ways, such as representation at Bedford Borough Council led events. In addition to planning and development, Councillors have engaged with: Town and Parish Council Network meetings, meetings with Richard Fuller MP, CPRE training events, Bedfordshire Association Town and Parish Council training events, Local Plan consultation briefing session, meetings with Borough Council Officers on local projects in the parish, bus service operator, Anglian Water, Aspire walk round plus liaison with Orbit homes, website development, village asset inspections, and when opportunities arise, engaging with Bedfordshire Police on a range of local matters. Plus arranging drop-in sessions for residents to find out more on key consultations such as the Local Plan 2040 document.

Renhold is fortunate to have so many dedicated individuals who share their ideas on parish improvements, act as critical friends when needed, and enable democratic decisions to be made. With there continuing to be a good level of residents attending Parish Council meetings and engaging in the Open Forum, which is always encouraged and most welcomed.

The Parish Council have continued with raising the profile of Renhold, whether it is securing safer highways for road users through to having more effective communications with residents. Renhold Parish Council does not stand still.

The Council have remained prudent with the precept calculations over the last few years, looking to maintain a low per household contribution, yet also being mindful of moving forwards with village improvements.

The following are just some of the recent achievements:

- Donations made to the British Legion for Remembrance Day, along with support for the village to mark this important occasion
- Coffee with a Cop meeting supported
- Wild flower planting at two roundabouts in Water End
- Dropped kerb arranged at War Memorial to make it more accessible following Neighborhood Plan survey feedback
- Maintaining regular and ongoing communications with Anglian Water during the water pipe replacement works including engineers attending a Parish Council meeting
- Village grass cutting

- Jubilee village event financially supported
- Engaged in the village Christmas tree festival
- Various village asset maintenance and repairs as required
- Support provided to All Saints Church Rural Grant application for new floor
- Financial contributions to support Renhold Magazine, Renhold Churchyard maintenance, Renhold Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, commemorative items for Renhold Primary children to mark the coronation and a grant to enable a defibrillator to be back in service
- Funding of the Parish Council website development to improve accessibility of information
- Installation of further Speed Indicator Devices in the parish to promote highways safety alongside signage to highlight the active Community Speedwatch

Do remember the Parish Council have a formal application process for organisations requesting financial assistance which is available to anyone wishing to apply for help.

The Parish Council are continually striving to ensure Renhold remains a village with a rural feel, reporting highway issues and maintenance needs within the village as and when they arise, and supporting suitable planting schemes as well. The logging of these issues often take time to be followed up: Borough Councillors, Parish Councillors and the Clerk, remain persistent. There have also been regular communications and on-site meetings with various Borough Council Officers to highlight the local issues. Whilst Bedford Borough Council are the local highways authority, the Parish Council remain focused on improving highways safety so dialogue is frequent with Officers as well as the local Police.

The Council receives updates from the Police and works with them in efforts to reduce crime and traffic speeds in Renhold. This is an endless task but there have been several successes and positive outcomes over the year through collaborative working. This passion in Renhold to improve highways safety and to slow vehicle speeds down extends past the Parish Council to the many volunteers who kindly give their time with Community Speedwatch. Thanks to all those involved with the various activities that support many different initiatives to raise awareness of the speeding issues experienced, from downloading the Speed Indicator Device data to standing on the roadside.

As another busy year passes it has also seen the new Borough Council ward boundary change come into effective which meant that Renhold moved from being served by four Borough Councillors to one. The Parish Council worked alongside Borough Councillors Tim Caswell and Christine McHugh, as well as Stephen Moon and Phillipa Moran-Bryant Martin. The Parish Council were saddened by the passing of Stephen who was an exceptionally dedicated and passionate Councillor and is greatly missed. The Council will now be working alongside Nicola Gribble the recently elected Borough Councillor for the newly formed Ravensden and Renhold ward.

As the Parish Council stay busy with the current Local Plan public hearings, the ongoing East West Rail alignment consultation, plus the Anglian Water improvements taking place, on top of supporting residents throughout the parish, there remains a lot for the Parish Council to get stuck into, so if you are interested in joining the Parish Council it is great time to come forwards.