

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2009-2010

Presented 6 September 2010

Chairman's Overview

This Annual Report is the first produced by Renhold Parish Council. Councillor Ernie Stewardson [then Chairman] presented a report at the Annual Parish Meeting in May 2010, but Councillors decided subsequently that a written report on the Parish Council's activities should be prepared. I became Chairman of the Parish Council in July 2010, and it therefore falls to me to produce this retrospective Annual Report.

Firstly, thanks are due to the Parish Councillors who served during 2009/10, and also to our Clerk, Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat, who achieved her CiLCA qualification in November 2009. The Councillors are all volunteers and receive no payment for their work for the benefit of the residents of Renhold. They are committed to their responsibilities, and have a concern for the environment they live in. Particular thanks are due to Ernie Stewardson, who as our Chairman devoted countless hours to an extent that probably will never truly be appreciated. Thanks are also due to Mrs Pauline Stewart, who retired in June 2009 after 2 years as a Councillor, and to Ivan Morgan who joined the Council in April 2009 but resigned in January 2010 due to ill health: I am sorry to have to report that Ivan died shortly thereafter. The names and contact details for Parish Councillors appear at the end of this report.

Our Clerk, with the Chairman, has continued the 'modernisation' of the Parish Council, pointing us in the right direction and ensuring that we put in place many documents that, if we are honest, we should have produced many years ago. We have also developed the use of Committees, especially the Finance Committee, to improve the Council's performance and to 'decongest' the agendas for full Council meetings, and have started to develop a website to facilitate access to Parish Council documents. This is especially important to address the requests from residents for copies of documents that increased considerably in 2009-10.

Renhold Parish Council is forward looking, and aims to be open and accessible to all residents. It is less than two years since we introduced an Open Forum session at Council meetings, and we now aim to develop this by having residents' involvement on all appropriate items on Council and Committee meeting agendas. I hope sincerely that this encourages a greater involvement from residents, to the benefit of decisions in respect of Renhold.

The list of thanks continues with Carol Ellis, our 'new' Ward Councillor – Bedfordshire County Council and Bedford Borough Council ceased to exist in April 2009, being replaced

by the unitary Bedford Borough Council. Carol has worked ceaselessly at the Borough Council on our behalf, and has provided us with advice and guidance especially with regards to funding opportunities. Mention must also be made of our Police contingent, PC Kerry Jones, PCSO Paul Jones and SC Jonathon Rogers. We recognise that they have a large area to cover, but feel that they do give their attention to issues we bring to them and provide us with sound advice on the ways forward.

And finally, thanks are due to the residents of Renhold. You have kept us on our toes, encouraged us to make those difficult decisions, and, when it has been necessary, have supported the Parish Council in its endeavours to make Renhold an even better and safer place in which to live.

Ian Slater
Chairman
Renhold Parish Council
September 2010

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL 2009-2010

A SUMMARY

Parish Welfare

Renhold is a long established parish, but the village is under pressure from Bedford, whether in the form of the new estates off Norse Road or from traffic using the village roads to avoid congestion in the town. Where these influences combine, for example at the school, the problems are ongoing and increasing. The Parish Council is continuing to work with the school and the Borough Council to improve the traffic situation. We also work with the Borough Council in respect of the environment generally, and organise two or three litter picks each year when we try to remove the litter and fly-tipped rubbish from every road in the village: support from residents, however, has not been good. In respect of the Norse Road estates, we work with the Borough Council and the developers to provide notice boards and litter bins, and to address those issues that inevitably follow a major development, in particular the lack of ongoing maintenance of roads, footpaths, open spaces and landscaping. Following adoption, these matters become the responsibility of the Borough Council.

The remainder of this report will follow the topics that appear on the Parish Council's agenda on a month-to-month basis, which therefore occupy the majority of the Council's time.

Finance

Day-to-day finance matters are now dealt with by the Finance Committee, chaired by Councillor Stuart Andrews. Meetings of the Committee are open to residents, and the matters dealt with there have relieved the pressure on the full Council agenda. The Parish Council's principal source of funding is the precept, which is the local charge on the Council Tax. The precept for 2009-10 was set at £20,000, a reduction of £5,000 on the previous year. The main saving was in the cost of the Clerk, as it had been agreed with our new Clerk, Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat, that a significant reduction in hours worked was possible given increased use of e-mail in particular. The Parish Council began the year with a balance of £14,596, and ended with a balance of £23,518. The figures on the table that follows represent the financial position of Renhold Parish Council at 31st March 2010. They show that the Council continues to operate within its budget, despite pressures arising during the year through greatly increased levels of correspondence.

	09-10 BUDGET	EXPENDITURE	INCOME
Precept			20000
Bank Interest			72
VAT Reclaim			516
Councillor Ward Funding			1118
Clerk to the Council	4200	5114	
Administration Expenses	2160	1828	4
Grants	3495	2690	
War Memorial and Garden	648	550	
Repairs to Property	1000	712	
Bus Shelter Cleaning	200	200	
Grass Cutting	1000	1721	1152
Long Terms Funding	2000	0	
Contingencies	2500	774	
PARISH COUNCIL TOTALS	17203	13589	22862

The Parish Council gave the following grants:

	BUDGET	ACTUAL
Good Neighbours	230	314
PCC Churchyard	418	498
Sports Club	990	500
PCC Magazine	1357	1380
Parish Plan	500	0

Planning

There has been a steady flow of planning applications, totalling over 20 for the year. The most significant was the details submitted in respect of the 323 dwellings at Norse Road [Phase 3], and the Parish Council registered a number of objections and concerns in respect of this application, which was later approved by the Borough Council. Most applications are considered at the regular meetings of the Parish Council, but as necessary Councillors meet informally between meetings in order to respond by the Borough Council's deadline. On the policy side, supportive comments were submitted to Bedford Borough Council in respect of A Strategy for Bedford High Street, and views were also submitted on the SPA Boundary Review and Important Open Spaces consultation.

Discussion started on preparation of a Parish Plan for Renhold, but this has been overtaken by changes at the Borough Council that will see preparation of Community Plan at a later date.

Highways

Highways matters occupy a major part of Councillors' time. Congestion and inconvenience caused by parents parking outside Renhold Lower School, through traffic volumes and vehicle speeds generally, and the unacceptable use of Renhold's rural roads by HGVs appear on every Council agenda.

Traffic lights installed at the church appear to have made little difference to the volume of traffic, but the bend is now safer. The Vehicle Activated Sign at Church End was relocated to Hookhams Lane following discussions between the Parish Council and the Borough Council. During 2009-10 a TRO was implemented restricting through traffic between Wilden Road and the A421 junction during the morning and evening rush hours, but this is not policed and appears to have had little effect. A proposal to ban HGVs through a wide area, including Renhold, was approved by Bedfordshire County Council before its demise, but was subsequently put on hold by the Borough Council. Borough Councillor Royden, portfolio holder on highway matters, attended a Parish Council meeting to explain the Borough Council's decision, but failed to convince residents about the justification for the change. Parish Councillors subsequently have attended meetings on production of a Borough-wide Freight Strategy, but this will not be forthcoming for some time, and meanwhile HGVs continue to be a problem, even on Hookhams Lane where the 7.5 tonne restriction is regularly ignored.

Meetings arranged by the Parish Council with the school to attempt to find a solution to the parking problem have also not produced any realistic possibilities, although continued discussion with Highways at the Borough Council resulted in an extension of the zig-zags outside the school and the introduction of 'H' bars across residential driveways, which has helped.

In terms of the roads themselves, flooding on Wilden Road by the Polhill Arms caused severe icing in freezing weather, and the Parish Council is pressing for improvements to drainage to resolve this problem. Elsewhere, the carriageway at Ravensden Road has had kerbs introduced, and this solution is also being proposed for the majority of Church End where parked cars cause vehicles to drive onto the verge on the opposite side.

The footpaths in Home Close were resurfaced during 2009-10, and Councillor Gurney is undertaking a survey of all footpaths in the village to establish priorities for further resurfacing should funds become available from the Borough Council.

Government

Bedford Borough Council became a unitary authority in April 2009. As a result, the Government is reviewing the wards of the new authority, to establish wards such that Councillors each represent approximately the same number of electors. The Parish Council has responded to consultations from the Borough Council to support a ward comprising Renhold and Ravensden Parishes.

The Borough Council is proposing to change the Borough's education system from 3 to 2 tiers. This would mean that Renhold Lower School would increase in size. The Parish Council is concerned that any increase in size will exacerbate the already poor situation in respect of parking by parents, and so has opposed any change until this problem is addressed.

COUNCILLORS & OFFICERS 2009-2010

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Ivan Morgan [Co-opted April 2009, Resigned January 2010]

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Mrs Pauline Stewart [Resigned June 2009]

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