

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT

2010 – 2011

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Chairman's Report

The Annual Report of which this is a summary is the second produced in the new format by Renhold Parish Council.

The Parish Council seeks to work efficiently and to give residents of the Parish every opportunity to contribute to its meetings. It therefore utilises committees and working groups to deal effectively with the Council's business and to decongest the agenda for full meetings. During 2010/11 the Parish Council met 9 times, the Finance Committee 6 times, the Highways Committee twice, and there were occasional informal meetings when the deadline on a planning application required a response before the next formal meeting. In addition, an Employment Working Group met as necessary to review the Parish Council's responsibilities as an employer. During the year the Parish Council reviewed and published its Standing Orders.

In addition to dealing with over 20 planning applications, where we are not always in agreement with the Borough Council's decisions, matters relating to highways and traffic have continued to occupy much of the Parish Council's time. Speeding traffic was confirmed as a real problem through use of the SID machine and as a result the Police now bring the mobile speed camera to Renhold from time to time. The TRO continues to be ignored by motorists and the Hookhams Lane weight restriction is ignored by HGV drivers, and there is no enforcement of either by the authorities. Parking outside Renhold Lower School is getting worse, and although the Borough Council has introduced an extended zig-zag outside the school and H-bars across residents' driveways there appears to be no early solution in prospect. The Parish Council will keep trying to resolve all of these issues, which appear to be the primary concerns of residents.

Through careful monitoring and control of the Parish Council's finances, including challenging requests for grant assistance and offering advice, the precept was again reduced in 2010/11, to £18,000. Councillors recognise that a further reduction is possible, once the uncertainties of election costs and possible devolved responsibilities from the Borough Council are known.

Thanks are due to the Parish Councillors who served during 2010/11, and also to our Clerk, Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat. 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 the needs of the Parish and started the process of modernising the Parish Council and the way it works. Mr Stewardson resigned in July, to be replaced as Chairman by Ian Slater in the same month, and as a Councillor by Ian McDougall in November. The names and contact details for Parish Councillors appear at the end of the Annual Report.

Our Clerk has continued the 'modernisation' of the Parish Council, pointing us in the right direction and ensuring that we put in place documents that provide information for residents on both the Parish Council and the Parish. The website has been developed to facilitate access to Parish Council documents as part of this work, and Councillors have had the opportunity of training so that they may help in this work.

The list of thanks continues with Carol Ellis, our Ward Councillor. 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. Most recently she purchased a Police-approved speed gun, which we hope will soon be in use in Renhold. Mention must also be made of our Police contingent, PC Kerry Jones and PCSO Paul Jones; 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 made an increased contribution to meetings, 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
May 2011

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Parish Welfare

Renhold is a long established parish, but the village is under increased pressure from Bedford, in the form of the new estates off Norse Road and 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 in Church End. We also work with the Borough Council and Police in respect of speeding traffic and ensuring our roads and footpaths are maintained to a level reflecting the traffic volumes they suffer. Recent use of the Borough Council's pothole hotline has seen an improvement in the speed with which potholes are repaired. 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: the village now has Street Champions in most roads, who organise litter picks regularly. 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 2010-11 was set at £18,000, a reduction of £2,000 on the previous year, and a reduction of £7,000 in total since 2008-09. The Parish Council began the year with a balance of £23,518, and ended with a balance of £28,213. The figures on the table on the next page represent the financial position of Renhold Parish Council at 31st March 2011. They show that the Council continues to operate within its budget, and give confidence to the view that a future further reduction in the precept may be possible. Looking ahead, as the budget was set, the coming year has uncertainties regarding the level of grant available from Bedford Borough Council, the possibility of services devolved from the Borough Council to the Parish Council, and the cost of the Parish Council election due on 5th May 2011.

The Parish Council gave the following grants:

	BUDGET	ACTUAL
Good Neighbours	314	152
PCC Churchyard	418	418
Sports Club	500	500
PCC Magazine	1380	1380
Parish Plan	500	0

OUTTURN 2010/11

	10-11 BUDGET	EXPENDITURE	INCOME
Precept			18000
Bank Interest			14
VAT Reclaim			446
Councillor Ward Funding			0
Clerk to the Council	6129	6032	
Administration Expenses	2273	1933	
Grants	3612	2450	
War Memorial and Garden	622	550	
Repairs to Property	1000	0	
Bus Shelter Cleaning	210	200	
Grass Cutting	2477	1822	1164
Long Terms Funding	1000	0	
Contingencies	2500	380	
PARISH COUNCIL TOTALS	19823	13367	19624

Planning

There has been a steady flow of householder and residential planning applications for extensions and redevelopments, totalling over 20 for the year. The Parish Council submitted comments to the Planning Infrastructure Commission in respect of the Covanta incinerator at Stewartby, concerned that effluent from the chimney might affect Renhold, which is on the first high ground downwind of the chimney. We have a good working relationship with the Borough Council's Planning Officers, but do not always see eye-to-eye on decisions; they have promised to explain where their decision is different to the Parish Council's view. 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 Bedford Conservation Area Management Plan and Design Framework for Public Realm Works for Bedford High Street, although expressing concern at possible issues in the latter document in respect of access to car parks in Bedford from the Renhold direction.

Community Plans are to be prepared for all parishes in Bedford, but the timetable for these appears to be slipping following experience in pilots in Brickhill and Wyboston parishes

Highways

Highways matters continue to 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. The Highways Committee, chaired by Jim Leydon, met twice in the year, and also met with representatives of Wilden to consider a joint approach to traffic issues in the two parishes.

Measures introduced in previous years to restrict access to the village and reduce vehicle speeds do not appear to be policed, although the mobile speed camera is now in use in Renhold following the success of the SID in 2010 when over 300 speeding motorists were reported to the Police. A proposal to ban HGVs through a wide area, including Renhold, was put on hold by the

Borough Council, and despite assurances from the portfolio holder, Borough Councillor Royden, the early production of a replacement scheme, in the context of a Borough-wide freight strategy, has failed to materialise. Parish Councillors have attended meetings on production of the Borough-wide Freight Strategy, but this has not got beyond the stage of first principles and offers no immediate relief to Renhold, and the one restriction we have, the weight restriction on Hookhams Lane, is also ignored by some drivers. The Parish Council has been successful in having the TRO signage made clearer, although through traffic at peak periods is still an issue. In the context of these matters, mention should be made of Keith Herkes, who has been at the forefront of trying to quantify the problems and identify solutions.

Meetings arranged by the Parish Council with the school and the Borough Council to identify a solution to the parking problem have also not produced any realistic possibilities. On occasions the Police have had to attend to sort out traffic congestion at school opening and closing times. The Parish Council understands that this problem is a priority for the Borough Council, but even their officers cannot identify a way to resolve the matter. The Parish Council will continue to press for meetings with the hope that things can be moved forward before there is a serious accident on Church End.

In terms of the roads themselves, the flooding on Wilden Road by the Polhill Arms, reported last year, has been resolved by identifying and clearing existing drains. Elsewhere, the carriageway at Church End has had kerbs and new drainage introduced, and this will be extended to the bus shelter in 2011. This has been done to combat damage to the verge resulting from traffic trying to get passed parked cars on the opposite side of Church End. In other parts of the village many road repairs have been implemented and some kerbs have been introduced to prevent the road from collapsing into the ditch; use of the Borough Council's pothole hotline has speeded-up some of these repairs.

Councillor Gurney has undertaken a survey of all footpaths in the village, and Brickfield Road has been identified as the priority. Should funds become available from the Borough Council this may be resurfaced in 2011/12. For horse riders and pedestrians Bridleway 26 has been resurfaced and had a light-controlled crossing introduced by the Go Outdoors store, and further improvement is proposed as a part of the legal agreements with the Norse Road 3 developer.

Government

Following the establishment of Bedford Borough Council as a unitary authority, the Government has reviewed 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, but in the end the Electoral Commission has included the majority of the Parish in a 2 Councillor ward, Great Barford, together with Ravensden, Great Barford, Willington and Cople. The Asgard Drive estate has been included within this ward, but The Spires estate has been placed into the adjoining Goldington Ward in Bedford. The Parish continues to have 3 wards returning 9 Councillors, 5 from the village and 2 each from the Asgard Drive and The Spires estates.

The Borough Council has not proceeded with changes to create a 2-tier education system across the Borough. The opportunity this might have brought to address the parking and traffic problems at Renhold Lower School therefore was lost, but the Parish Council will use every opportunity to identify and implement a resolution to this major issue for the parish.

The Parish Council is a regular attender at the Borough Council's Town and Parish Network meetings and the Police's Joint Action Group meetings, and the Clerk is on the Borough Council's Clerk Champions group, which provides input to the Network meetings.

COUNCILLORS & OFFICERS 2010-2011

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