

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2011-12

PICTURE?

This is the 2nd report that Renhold Parish Council has prepared for delivery to every property in the Parish. It presents information on the Parish Council's activities during 2011 – 12 and shows how your money, in the form of the Parish Precept, has been spent. We hope you find it interesting, and welcome feedback on the content and format.

Ian Slater
Chairman
Renhold Parish Council

THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Council comprises 9 Parish Councillors and the Clerk to the Parish Council. In theory the Councillors are elected every 4 years, 5 for the village ward and 2 each for the Cranbourne Gardens and Spires wards. The Clerk is a paid officer appointed by the Parish Council to keep the Parish Council's business in order.

2011-12 started with the election in May. 8 of the retiring Councillors stood for re-election, and as they were unopposed they were re-appointed without an election. The remaining vacancy was filled when the 9th of the retiring Councillors was co-opted at the Parish Council's Annual Meeting. So, there was not an election, but for the administration of nomination forms and appointment of the Councillors the Parish Council was charged £216 by the Borough Council. If an election had been required, this cost could have been as much as £1,750. 2011-12 therefore started with the same Councillors as the previous year, and their details appear at the end of this report. The Clerk is an on-going appointment, and Renhold is lucky to have Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat as its Clerk; she continues to bring a modernising approach to the Council and has been instrumental in its significant progress during the year.

How We Work

The Parish Council met 10 times during 2011-12. Meetings are held in the Village Hall and are open to all residents. Residents are invited to contribute to items on the agenda, and there's a specific Open Forum item on each agenda when residents can raise their concerns for the Council to consider. Our Borough Council Ward Councillors, Carol Ellis and Stephen Moon, usually attend and bring us up-to-date on what the Borough Council is doing that impacts on the Parish.

To help to keep Parish Council meetings to reasonable length, committees are appointed, and their meetings are also open to residents. The Finance Committee met 4 times during 2011-12, and made recommendations to the Council in respect of matters such as the Parish Precept. The Quality Council Committee met twice, and the Employment and Highways Committees did not need to meet, Councillors met on 3 occasions as a Planning Committee to respond to planning applications between Council meetings, their decisions then being endorsed by the Council at its next meeting.

Parish Councillors attend many other meetings as representatives of the Parish Council. These are principally with the Borough Council's Town and Parish Network, the Borough Assembly, the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils, the Joint Advisory Group with the Police, and with our MP. There are also workshops and training sessions, and visits to locations in the Parish, for example to the Lafarge Willington Quarry to understand how it is operating and how effects on Renhold are being addressed, and meetings with Officers from the Borough Council and the Police – for example on traffic issues.

In Renhold Parish Councillors are not paid for their work and Councillors have not claimed expenses either. The Clerk's salary is determined in relation to national pay scales.

A Quality Council

Encouraged by the Clerk, a Committee put together a bid for the Parish Council to be recognised as a Quality Council. This is a nationally recognised standard, examined and awarded by the National Association of Local Councils. It takes into account how the Parish Council works, the documents it has in place, how it communicates with residents, whether Councillors are elected, and many other matters. The Parish Council submitted its application to be a Quality Council in August 2011, and it was announced at the Bedfordshire

Association of Town and Parish Councils AGM in October 2011 that Quality Status had been awarded. This is national recognition and owes much to the Clerk's work to put in place necessary processes and procedures, and the effort of the Parish Council over the last 3 years or so. Renhold is only the 17th Parish Council in Bedfordshire to achieve this award.

THE PARISH

The Parish of Renhold encompasses the original village, essentially a collection of 'ends', and the 3 new estates off Norse Road. Renhold Brook forms the Parish boundary with Bedford. For the Parish Council the village and the new estates present different issues, as reflected in this report.

HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC

Traffic issues, again, have dominated the Parish Council's agenda in 2011-12.

In the new estates the issues centre on on-going maintenance, including weed control, which in turn revolves around when roads, footways, open spaces and drains will be adopted and become the responsibility of the Borough Council. The Parish Council has supported local residents in endeavours to progress adoption and to provide maintenance by the house-builders in the meantime

In the village the issues relate essentially to the failure by the authorities to enforce measures already in place to address speeding, rat-running and overweight traffic, and the traffic issues associated with Renhold VC Lower School. A 7.5 tonne weight limit is supposed to protect Hookhams Lane from excessively heavy goods vehicles [HGVs]. The Traffic Regulation Order [TRO] is supposed to protect Church End to Water End from traffic using this route as a short-cut to

the A421 bypass, and speed limits are supposed to protect the whole village from speeding traffic.

This report could dwell on the failure of the Borough Council and the Police to enforce these matters, and on the frustration at the slow progress to launch Community Speed Watch [CSW]. However, the Clerk, Councillors and local residents have worked tirelessly to achieve progress and there is light at the end of the tunnel, so let's concentrate on the positives. In 2010 residents used the Police Speed Indicating Device [SID] to 'catch' over 300 speeding drivers in sessions totalling 20 hours. The Police accepted that Renhold village had a problem, and [a] sent warning letters to these drivers and [b] started to use the camera van in the village. This continued through 2011. During 2011-12 Borough Council officers identified the issues with HGVs in the area generally, and when advised by residents contacted the operators of HGVs using Hookhams Lane with warnings. These appear to have had some effect. In April 2012 number plate recognition cameras were used in the village for the first time; as a result drivers of HGVs using Hookhams Lane and drivers ignoring the TRO will all receive warning letters, and if caught again will receive fixed penalty tickets and points on their licences. The Borough Council and Police will follow this up with days of intensive action in Renhold village in May and July 2012, which is good news.

Progress on CSW has been deplorably slow, but now appears to be gaining pace, with the hope that soon residents will again be able to reinforce the speeding message by using the SID in the months ahead. Can you volunteer to help?

The issue with traffic at Renhold Lower School centres on the volume of parking at the start and finish of the school day. This affects the whole of Church End, causing traffic congestion and greatly increased risk of accidents, and causing annoyance to residents whose drives may be obstructed. Meetings have been held with the school, Parish and Borough Councillors and Borough Officers, and the reality is that

there is no solution, not even partial. Walking buses, park-and-walk, even a car park have been considered, but all throw up issues we have been unable to resolve. The school is to have a 20mph speed limit, at an unspecified date, but this will merely slow traffic down and not restrict car parking.

The Parish Council has also requested reductions in the speed limit between the bypass and Green End and 'gates' at each entrance to the village, but there is no response from the Borough Council on these yet.

There are then the day-to-day issues of road and footpath repairs, and the Parish Council identifies the priorities each year for inclusion in the Borough Council's annual programme.

The Parish Council will continue to give all of these issues its full attention in 2012-13, but residents must understand that the Parish Council has no formal powers on highway matters and so cannot, itself, resolve them.

PLANNING

The Parish Council is consulted by Bedford Borough Council on all planning applications in the parish and on all planning policy documents as they pass through their various stages. In 2011-12 the Parish Council commented on 26 planning applications, ranging in scale from the Lafarge quarries and the Aspire estate to small domestic extensions, garages and garden fences.

Our views are not always accepted by the Borough, but most are. A number of good developments have resulted, but special mention should be made of the replacement house at 33 Top End, which is especially successful.

ENVIRONMENT

Much of the work in relation to traffic and planning is principally directed to improving the Parish's environment. The Parish Council is responsible for cutting the grass verges, and in 2011 supported the planting of bulbs at the Ravensden Road / Wilden Road junction. Hopefully more can be planted in other locations in 2012-13. The Parish Council has supported occasional litter picks, but during 2011-12 volunteers have been signed up by the Borough Council as Street Champions for most roads in the village, and they undertake regular litter picks that have greatly improved the village's environment. On a larger scale, the Parish Council has taken action to secure a clean-up of rubbish associated with the Aspire development.

FINANCE

The Parish Council is funded by the Parish Precept – you may have seen it referred to on your Council Tax bill. In 2011-12 this was set at £18,000, and this is split between the residential properties in the parish. As more houses are built off Norse Road, the amount required from each property is reduced. As a responsible council the Parish Council has regard to future events when setting the precept, and is also accumulating savings to address future requirements. We provide grants to a number of local organisations, such as the Village Magazine, the Sports Field and Good Neighbours. In 2011-12 the Parish Council's expenditure was within budget for all items, with a total underspend of £7,333, although an element of this was collected to be put into the reserves. For 2012-13 the Parish Precept has been reduced to £17,000.

OTHER MATTERS

During 2011-12 the Parish Council approved a number of strategies and procedures that reflect the way it works, and has been particularly concerned at the restructuring of the Police, which has seen us lose

'our' dedicated Police Officer. In part this restructuring has released the resources that will make possible the action days in respect of traffic in 2012-13. The Parish Council has also supported action to deal with anti-social behaviour, especially on The Spires.

There are reports each month in the Village Magazine on the Parish Council's activities, and you can always attend a meeting if something in particular interests you.

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL

CLERK

Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat, 30King William Close, Kempston, MK42 7BA,
Tel 01234 841835, E-Mail lizzie_barnicoat@hotmail.com

COUNCILLORS

Stuart Andrews [Vice Chairman]	01234 341246
Carl Bernard	01234 363925
Susan Brunsdon	01234 266281
Margaret Dean	01234 771520
Albert Gurney	01234 870044
Jim Leydon	01234 870705
Ian McDougal	01234 772776
Ian Slater [Chairman]	01234 772471
James Stapleton	01234 771457

Full contact details are in the Village Magazine each month.