

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17



This is the 7th 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 2016 – 17 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.

As I write the future of Renhold, and especially of Salph End, as a village is under serious threat from the Borough Council's draft local plan proposal for 500 dwellings and a Lower School to be built in Salph End with access from Hookhams Lane and Ravensden Road. The Parish Council and many residents have submitted objections to the Borough Council and we wait to see if the proposal is taken any further

Ian Slater

Chairman

THE PARISH

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

THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Council comprises 9 Parish Councillors and the Clerk to the Parish Council. 5 Councillors are elected to represent 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 its business in order.

In May 2015 we welcomed Amanda Quince, Andy Gregory and Julian Polhill as new Parish Councillors. Sadly, in March 2016 Jim Leydon resigned as a Parish Councillor and we thanked him for his contribution over 5 years. The vacancy on the Parish Council was advertised locally and in the middle of the council year we welcomed Nicky Gribble onto the Council. The full list of Parish Councillors in the council year 2016 – 17 appears at the end of this report.

Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat has now been our Clerk for 8 years, and she continues to seek to improve how the Parish Council works and to keep our processes up-to-date and reflecting the latest guidance.

How We Work

In 2016 – 17 the Parish Council met 10 times, and also facilitated 2 sessions to provide information to residents about the Local Plan 2032 public consultation. The Finance Sub-Committee met once.

Meetings were held in the Village Hall and in the Chapel and are all open to the public. Residents are invited to contribute to all items on the agenda, and there's a specific Open Forum item when residents can raise matters that concern them for the Council to consider. Meetings start at 7.30pm and we aim – not always successfully – to finish by 9.00pm. Our 4 Borough Ward Councillors are invited to attend

and to up-date us on what the Borough Council is doing that impacts on the parish.

Parish Councillors attend other meetings to represent the parish and to be trained. The meetings are principally at the Borough Council's Town and Parish Network, the Borough Assembly, the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils, and with our MP. There are also workshops and training especially on aspects of being a Councillor and on the continually changing planning system, and meetings with Borough Council Officers – especially on traffic issues and at the end of the year on the Local Plan 2032.

In Renhold Parish Councillors are not paid for their work and Councillors have not claimed expenses either. The cost of the Clerk is determined in relation to national scales.

HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC

Traffic issues continue to be a major concern for the Parish Council in 2016 – 17.

On the new estates the roads and open spaces on Cranbourne Gardens and The Spires are adopted and therefore are the responsibility of the Borough Council. Concern has been expressed by residents at the state of roads and open spaces on Cranbourne Gardens, and the Parish Council has pursued these concerns with the Borough Council. A new green space maintenance regime was agreed in 2017. The Aspire estate is different in that the developer, Orbit Homes, has retained ownership of roads and open spaces in perpetuity and is therefore responsible for their ongoing maintenance.

In the village, as in previous years, the issues continue to relate to an apparent lack of enforcement of measures already in place to address speeding, rat-running, overweight traffic, and on-street parking at Renhold VC Lower School. The Parish Council, greatly assisted by residents as part of the Community Speedwatch initiative, has tried to progress action on these matters throughout 2016 – 17.

A speed limit of 30mph applies throughout the village, and Speedwatch volunteers have been re-enforcing the message and reporting offenders to the Police; they in turn write to identified drivers to warn

them about speeding. In 2016 – 17 the average speed cameras installed at Church End and between Top End and Green End at last became live. This was the conclusion of over 4 years of effort by the Parish Council and has, at last, seen drivers who are not observing the 30mph speed limit being prosecuted. Initial results identified some offenders averaging above 50 mph between cameras, but more recent results, which are advised monthly to the Parish Council, show a reduction in both the number of offenders and the speeds they are travelling at. A definite result.

The Parish Council has requested cameras on Ravensden Road, but the Borough Council has stopped installing cameras as a cost-cutting measure. We'll keep looking for opportunities to reduce traffic speeds there.

A further measure to reduce vehicle numbers in the village is the Traffic Regulation Order [TRO] that bans through traffic between Wilden Road and the bypass during the morning and afternoon peaks. Unfortunately, it appears to be impossible to enforce this restriction, but the Borough Council has been asked to undertake a further survey to at least identify how many vehicles contravene the TRO so that consideration can be given to what else can be done.

Unfortunately, the alternative route is likely to include Hookhams Lane.

The Parish Council had given notice that average speed cameras would have been requested for Hookhams Lane, but this is also affected by the Borough Council's position as reported above. Residents continue to report offenders who are not observing the 7.5 tonne weight limit but with limited effect. The Parish Council has continued to press Borough Council officers to identify what can be done to 'protect' residents of Hookhams Lane from speeding vehicles, and as the 2016 – 17 year came to an end the officers agreed to the provision of 2 chicanes to restrict the road width at either end of the lane. The details are still being finalised, but we hope this will be implemented during 2017. Because of the Borough Council's budgetary situation, it is probable that the Parish Council will have to fund these works in 2017 – 18.

The Parish Council recognises that all of the restrictions that have been or are being introduced restrict the movement of residents in their own village. However, that's the price of a better environment for all residents in Renhold, surely a price worth paying?

The last, but by no means least, issue with traffic centres on the numbers of vehicles parking on Church End at the start and finish of the school day. Up to 70 parked vehicles have been counted at any one time, effectively making Church End between the traffic lights and Wilden Road a single track road, increasing the risk of accidents and congestion. H bars and double yellow lines at the blind bend by the barns have helped by protecting domestic entrances and providing passing places. In the final days of 2016 – 17 the double yellow lines requested in 2015 – 16 to protect the entrance to Church Close were implemented, and residents of the Close can now see in both directions when they wish to leave the close. As necessary further double yellow lines will be requested to improve safety along Church End, but it is recognised that this will not solve the parking problem.

The School is now in the process of becoming a lower school by the addition of additional classes and classrooms. The School's own travel plan, published in 2016, estimates that a further 40 children may travel to the school by car, and although the plans for the school site include a rearrangement of on-site car parking there's still likely to be an adverse impact in terms of increased parking on Church End. The Parish Council will continue to seek to ameliorate this situation, but there are no obvious solutions.

There are then the day-to-day issues of road and footpath repairs – both beside the roads and along the designated footpaths and bridleways in Renhold. The Parish Council identifies its priorities for highway works each year, and these are considered by the Borough Council in the context of requests from every parish in the Borough. At the end of 2016 – 17 a particular concern is to provide a surfaced footpath from The Spires to the bridleway to better facilitate walking to the school; finance is again likely to be an issue.

The Parish Council will continue to give all of these issues its full attention in 2017 – 18, but again reminds residents that it has no formal powers on highways 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 2016 – 17 the Parish Council commented on 35 planning applications, ranging in scale from vehicle crossovers, through domestic extensions to redevelopments. Our views are not always accepted by the Borough, but most are. Many applications have been to extend existing dwellings, often significantly. A consequence of many of these applications, often when properties change ownership, has been the replacement of roadside hedgerows with walls or fences, with implications for the village's rural character.

An ongoing concern continues to be the future of the Three Horseshoes site in Top End. During the year the Parish Council has commented on proposals for the site, which now includes replacement of the public house with a restaurant / public house and an additional detached house. At the end of 2015 – 16 the Parish Council, by a majority vote which is unusual, supported a proposal that Borough officers then recommended be refused. The Parish Council supported presentations at the Borough Council's Planning Committee, and eventually the proposal was granted planning permission subject to the completion of a legal agreement to ensure the restaurant / public house was completed before the separate dwelling. This legal agreement was only signed in March 2017, and the Parish Council hopes that the development will be completed during 2017 – 18 to remove the eyesore of the demolished former public house.

The Bedford Borough Local Plan 2035 continues to progress. In December 2015 Parish Councillors responded to the proposal that all settlements with a designated Settlement Policy Area [SPA] should each provide for an additional 10 – 20 dwellings between now and 2035. Renhold has 2 SPAs, at Salph End and Green End, and the Parish Council was concerned that neither of these areas has the capacity to 'absorb' so many additional dwellings, and that rather than a blanket policy for SPAs each should be considered individually when local constraints can properly be identified.

In April 2017 the Borough Council published a consultation document that departed from the previous proposal and instead proposed that 500 dwellings and a new one-form entry lower school be built on land in Salph End on both sides of Hookhams Lane. The 500 dwellings can be compared to the 231 existing dwellings in Salph End, meaning that the character of Salph End will be totally changed, and there has been no analysis by the Borough Council of the impact of the traffic generated by these properties on Ravensden Road and Hookhams Lane. Inevitably the new traffic will spread through the whole of the village, with implications for all residents. The consultation document acknowledges that the change is so significant the whole of Salph End – at least – would be taken within the urban area boundary. The Parish Council, greatly assisted by a few local residents, has publicised the proposal throughout the parish, and although it is in 2017 – 18 the strongest possible objection has been submitted. Copies of the Parish Council objection can be obtained from the Clerk. It may be a further 2 years, with further consultations and a public inquiry, before the Local Plan is finally completed and we know the outcome in respect of this proposal. The battle is on to save Salph End.

ENVIRONMENT

Much of the work in respect of traffic, footpaths and planning is principally directed to protecting and improving the parish's environment. The Parish Council's only direct responsibilities relate to cutting the grass verges through the village, maintaining the Village War Memorial, and cleaning the bus shelters.

In 2016 – 17 a particular effort was made by a few residents and the Parish Council to improve and then maintain in an improved condition the bus shelters at Church End and Green End, and the improvements have been noted and welcomed by residents. There are Street Champions for most roads in the village and for some in the new estates, and they undertake regular litter picks that have greatly improved the parish's environment. The maintenance of hedgerows has been a particular concern, especially where they are obstructing footpaths. Often responsibility falls between owners, the Borough Council and even the Environment Agency in respect of water courses, and budgetary concerns also come into the equation. If you have a

hedge it will help if it is kept trimmed so that footpaths are usable without having to step into the road.

FINANCE

The Parish Council is funded by the Parish Precept, as shown on your Council Tax bill. In 2016 – 17, for the fifth year, this was again set at £17,000, and this is split between the residential properties in the parish, with the cost per property reducing as more new houses are completed. We also receive a grant from the Borough Council towards the cost of cutting the grass verges in the village. As a responsible council the Parish Council has regard to future events when setting the precept, for example the contribution towards the average speed cameras and the need in due course for an extension to the church graveyard. The Parish Council provides grants to local organisations, each of which has to be applied for and justified at the start of the financial year.

The budget is summarised at the end of this report. In 2016 – 17 the Parish Council's expenditure was within budget with an underspend overall. For 2017 – 18 the Parish Precept has again been set at £17,000.

Finance is a standing item on the Parish Council's agenda, when progress against the budget can be monitored.

OTHER MATTERS

The Parish Council has been pressing for the earlier introduction of high speed broadband to all parts of the parish, with the hope that a significant improvement will be noticed later in 2017.

There are reports on the Parish Council's meetings in the Village Magazine, and if you are interested you will always be welcome at the Parish Council meetings.

The Clerk has continued to develop an e-mail circulation list to facilitate the speedy and more economic circulation of information to residents. There is also the Renhold website, that has links to the Parish Council's, and that promotes the parish and its organisations.

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL – BUDGET 2016 – 17

ITEM	BUDGET	EXPENDITURE
GRANTS		
Good Neighbours	152	0
PCC Churchyard	500	750
Sports Club	500	500
Village Magazine	2076	1452
Contingency	772	25
War Memorial	975	600
Property Repair	1000	1298
Bus Shelters	220	110
Grass Cutting	2500	1732
Administration	4277	2284
Clerk of the Council	6300	5573
Churchyard Fund	1000	0
Contingencies	2500	0
ITEM	BUDGET	INCOME
Precept	19869	19869
Grass Cutting	1164	1164
VAT Refund	0	0
Bank Interest	0	29
Other Income	0	0

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