

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19



ELECTION TIME

FORWARD

This is the 9th 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 2018 – 19 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 discussed in my forward last year an ongoing issue continues to concern why both the Parish Council and the Village Magazine continue to print and deliver hard copies of documents that can so much more easily be distributed, at virtually no cost, by electronic mediums. Not everyone uses the internet and the social media, and by continuing to deliver copies of important documents to every address in the parish we can ensure that everyone at least has the opportunity to read about life in Renhold.

This year unusually the Annual Report is being produced and circulated before the end of the parochial year. This is because on 2nd May 2019 there are the local elections, for the Mayor, the Borough Council and the Parish Council. These occur every 4 years and the Parish Council decided that the Annual Report provided the opportunity to explain the procedure as it affects election to the Parish Council. As a result, it is not possible to provide complete information for some topics, for example the total number of planning applications considered, as there will be at least one Parish Council meeting after this Annual Report is produced.

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. At the turn of the century Renhold had some 550 properties and the last 17 years have seen some 830 further properties added in the 'new' estates. For the Parish Council the village and the estates present different issues, and opportunities, 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.

Darren Rayner was appointed to the Parish Council through an uncontested election in November 2017. Unfortunately, pressure of his day job led to Darren resigning from the Council in July 2018. Following advertisement of the vacancy Richard Cook was co-opted at the November meeting. Whilst welcoming Richard the Parish Council expressed their disappointment that given the number of elections that have been called for the Spires Ward no resident of the ward had come forward to represent it.

At the January 2019 meeting it was announced that Andy Gregory had resigned from the Council for personal reasons. Because of the proximity to the elections in May it was not necessary to formally advertise the vacancy and the Parish Council could co-opt. Anyone interested was advised to contact the Parish Clerk for further information. At the time of writing no one has approached the Clerk.

We take this opportunity to thank those who have served on the Parish Council between 2016 and 2019.

Parish Councillors' details appear each month in the Village Magazine.

Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat has now been our Clerk for 10 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 2018 – 19 the Parish Council will have met 10 times.

Meetings were held in the Village Hall and in the Chapel and were 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 the Borough Council's Town and Parish Network, the Borough Assembly, the Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils, Bedfordshire Police 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.

In Renhold, Parish Councillors are not paid for their work and Councillors have not claimed expenses either. The salary of the Clerk is determined in relation to national scales and her hours are reviewed each year when the budget is set having regard to the pressure on her time. Additional work by the Clerk, especially in respect of responses to the Local Plan, has meant additional hours in 2018 – 19.

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 2018 – 19 the Parish Council commented on an increased number of planning applications, ranging in scale from vehicle crossovers, through domestic extensions to redevelopments. 2018 – 19 has seen an increased number of applications for new dwellings on private green

spaces and rear gardens. In the January 2019 Parish Council meeting alone, there were applications for a total of 17 dwellings on previously unbuilt on land. Having fought the proposal in the Local Plan for 500 new dwellings in Salph End, the Parish Council is resisting proposals for smaller developments that would increase the urban feel of the village. Our views on planning applications are not always accepted by the Borough Council, but most are.

An ongoing concern is the eyesore that is the site of the former Three Horseshoes public house in Top End. As we write this Annual Report there is a planning application to replace the existing approval for a restaurant and one house with a scheme of 3 detached houses. We need to do something to remove this eyesore from the village scene.

The Bedford Borough Local Plan 2035 continues to progress. The proposal in 2017 that 500 dwellings and a school should be built in Salph End was the subject of a strong objection from the Parish Council and by Renhold residents. This proposal was deleted when the subsequent consultation document was published in February 2018. At the next stage of the preparation of the Local Plan, in October 2018 the Parish Council again submitted a robust response reminding the Borough Council, and the Planning Inspectors who will now consider the Local Plan, why it will be inappropriate to propose any further built development in the parish. During the Local Plan's consultations leaflets have been delivered by Parish Councillors to every property in the parish advising residents how to get involved. The Parish Council's full responses can be seen on its website [<http://renhold.bedsparishes.gov.uk>]. The next stage in the process will be a public inquiry into the local plan's proposals, and the Parish Council has indicated it wishes to be involved as necessary.

HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC

In 2018 – 19 traffic issues continued to be a major concern for the Parish Council.

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. 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, assisted by residents as part of the Community Speedwatch initiative, has again tried to progress action on these matters during 2018 – 19.

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

After 4 years of pressure from the Parish Council average speed cameras were installed in 2016 at Church End and between Top End and Green End. They have had a positive effect on traffic through this part of the village. The Parish Council has requested cameras on Ravensden Road; the Borough Council has lifted its embargo on new schemes, although with a limited budget only 4 or 5 new schemes can be delivered each year. The Parish Council is discussing with Borough Council officers a way by which cameras might be introduced in the foreseeable future.

Hookhams Lane continues to present problems. A survey by the Police in 2018 identified average speeds in parts of Hookhams Lane of around 38mph, reinforcing the message that something needs to be done. At this moment average speed cameras seem to be unlikely. 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, but to date the Borough's Officers have advised that the bends and 'hills' on Hookhams Lane so restrict forward visibility as to make speed restrictions such as chicanes difficult to accommodate. The absence of street lights is also a factor making speed humps or traffic islands unlikely. As the 2018 – 19 year comes to an end the Borough officers are looking at a potential chicane near Home Close. The Parish Council is funding this work, and if a scheme is approved it will be the Parish Council that has to fund it.

Residents continue to report offenders who are not observing the 7.5 tonne weight limit on Hookhams Lane but with limited effect.

Assisted by residents, the Parish Council continues to press for enforcement of the Traffic Regulation Order [TRO] that bans through traffic between Wilden Road and the bypass during the morning and afternoon peaks. Unfortunately, the alternative route for rat-running traffic is likely to include Hookhams Lane.

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. With the increased size of the school since September 2017 there are more parked cars even during school hours. The school is now also serviced by a double-decker school bus, which parks on the yellow zig-zags in front of the school seriously restricting visibility of children and parents wishing to cross the road to use the footpath opposite to the Norse Road estates. Measures over the years to protect residential amenity have included H bars at residential gateways and double yellow lines at the blind bend by the barns and either side of Church Close. A camera was installed by the Borough Council in 2018 to catch offenders parking on the yellow zig-zag area, and after representations by residents and the Parish Council the new street light installed as part of the scheme was deemed unnecessary and switched off. As necessary further double yellow lines will be requested to improve safety along Church End, but it is recognised that these will not solve the parking problem.

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 footways in Hookhams Lane were refurbished in February / March 2018, but are already being reduced in width by overgrown hedgerows and brambles, especially by the brook where it seems to be impossible to establish responsibility for work to cut them back.

The Parish Council will continue to give all these issues its full attention in 2019 – 20, but again reminds residents that it has no formal powers on highways matters and so cannot, itself, resolve them.

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.

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. Residents have also taken responsibility for ensuring that noticeboards in the village and the estates are kept clean, tidy and up-to date.

FINANCE

The Parish Council is funded by the Parish Precept, as shown on your Council Tax bill. In 2018 – 19, for the seventh year, this was again set at £17,000, and this is split between the residential properties in the parish. 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 2018 – 19 although final figures are not available as we are not yet at the end of the financial year but wish to get the Annual Report circulated. The Parish Council's expenditure is generally within budget with an underspend overall. A financial analysis is on the back page of this Annual Report.

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

OTHER MATTERS

The Parish Council continues to press for improvements to high speed broadband for all parts of the parish.

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.

Parish Council - <http://renhold.bedsparishes.gov.uk>

Renhold Website - renholdvillage.net

THE 2019 PARISH COUNCIL ELECTION PROCESS

On 2nd May Renhold has to elect 9 Parish Councillors, 5 for the North Parish Ward [essentially the village], and 2 each for the South West Parish Ward [Cranbourne Gardens estate] and The Spires Parish Ward [The Spires and Aspire estates]. Information on the process of the election has already been circulated with the Village Magazine. The opportunity of the Annual Report is therefore being used to explain what being a Parish Councillor in Renhold involves.

Parish Councillors are elected for a period of 4 years.

During that time, they and can expect to have 10 full Parish Council meetings each year. Parish Council meetings are held on weekday evenings starting at 19:30 and usually last no longer than 2.5 hours. Meetings are held principally in the Village Hall, but occasionally in The Chapel. Standing items on each agenda are **Open Forum** - when residents can raise matters that concern them, **Borough Councillors Reports**, **Highways**, **Planning**, **Village Matters**, and **Finance**. Under Planning, Councillors see every planning application affecting the parish and can send a response to the Borough Council.

Sub-Committees comprising a few Councillors are usually appointed, to allow more in-depth consideration of finance and highways matters, together with occasional Working Parties for specific pieces of work. During 2018 -19 only the Finance Sub-Committee needed to meet, and then only once.

All Parish Council and Sub-Committee meetings are open to the public.

Parish Councillors then have ad hoc meetings on specific issues with Borough Council Members, with Borough Council Officers, and with residents. They may also attend training sessions that are funded by the Parish Council. Training is available, for example, on being a Parish Councillor. Each Parish Council meeting includes the opportunity for Councillors to report back on meetings or training they have attended.

A Parish Council Chairman and a Vice-Chairman are elected at the start of the first meeting after the election, and then at the first Parish Council meeting each Council year – usually in May.

At Parish Council and Sub-Committee meetings all Councillors are entitled to speak on all topics. In Renhold it is the custom to invite residents who are in attendance to contribute to discussions such that all decisions are as well informed as is possible.

The Clerk to the Parish Council keeps Councillors in line with proper procedures and ensures that an accurate record is made of all meetings.

Between meetings there is a free exchange of information between Parish Councillors, usually by e-mail. A folder is also circulated with paper copies of correspondence and papers received by the Parish Clerk. Documents are also posted on the Parish Council's website.

For anyone who is genuinely interested in ensuring that the Parish of Renhold achieves the best it can for its residents, a seat on the Parish Council is the ideal place to be.

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL BUDGET 2018 – 19

ITEM	BUDGET	EXPENDITURE
		To February 2019
GRANTS		
Good Neighbours	0	0
PCC Churchyard	750	800
Sports Club	500	550
Village Magazine	1760	1500
Contingency	1000	92
War Memorial	700	773
Property Repair	2000	518
Bus Shelters	220	110
Grass Cutting	5000	3188
Administration	4175	2707
Clerk of the Council	7000	6556
Churchyard Fund	1000	0
Contingencies	600	1276*
ITEM	BUDGET	INCOME
Precept	20771	20771
Grass Cutting	1164	1164
VAT Refund	0	0
Bank Interest	0	30
Other Income	0	6386

* including 2 new benches, one for Green End and one for Cranbourne Gardens, purchased by the Parish Council following a successful application to the Borough Councillor Ward Fund