

QUALITY
PARISH
COUNCIL

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13



This is the 3rd 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 2012 – 13 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

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, sometimes now referred to by estate residents as “Lower Renhold”. 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.

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 the Parish Council's business in order.

The Parish Councillors were elected or co-opted in May 2011 and have remained unchanged during 2012 – 13. Their details appear at the end of this report.

The Clerk is an on-going appointment. Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat has now been our Clerk for 4 years, during which time we have modernised and improved the way the Parish Council works.

In October 2011 Renhold Parish Council was awarded Quality Council status, in recognition of how it works, the processes it has in place, how it involves local residents, and many other matters. This is national recognition, and only 16 other Parish Councils in Bedfordshire have achieved this award.

How We Work

The Parish Council met 8 times during 2012-13. Meetings are held in the Village Hall and residents are invited to contribute to items on the agenda. 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, Carole Ellis and Stephen Moon, usually attend and bring us up-to-date on what the Borough Council is doing that impacts on the Parish. Meetings start at 7.30pm, and we aim to finish by 9.00pm.

To assist the Parish Council, committees are appointed, and their meetings are also open to residents. The Finance Committee met twice during 2012-13, and made recommendations to the Council in respect of matters such as the Parish Precept. The Highways Committee and Employment Working Group did not need to meet during the year. Councillors informally exchanged views on a few planning applications between Council meetings, the 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, and with our MP. There are also workshops and training sessions on being a Councillor and on the rapidly changing planning system, 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 cost of the Clerk is determined in relation to national scales.

HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC

Traffic issues have again dominated the Parish Council's agenda in 2012-13.

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 residents throughout the 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 received warning letters, and if caught again may receive fixed penalty tickets and points on their licences. The Police followed this up with a day in Hookhams Lane in May 2012, and 3 days in the area of the TRO in December 2012. The Police are discussing with the Borough Council further ways by which the traffic issues can be addressed. This is good news, indicating that the effort of the Parish Council and local residents is beginning to bring results. It's a shame that some residents display signs warning drivers when the Police are in the village, so undermining everyone's efforts.

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? We also distributed 'KILL YOUR SPEED' wheelie bin stickers through the village.

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. We will keep trying to find a solution.

The Parish Council has also requested reductions in the speed limit between the bypass and Green End but the Borough Council advised this did not qualify. A request has been made for white 'gates' at each entrance to the village, and the first may be installed at Green End before you receive this report.

There are then the day-to-day issues of road and footpath repairs, which we report to the Borough Council, and the Parish Council identifies the priorities each year for inclusion in the Borough Council's annual programme. Footways in Becher Close and Brickfield Road have been relaid in 2012-13.

The Parish Council will continue to give all of these issues its full attention in 2013-14, 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 2012-13 the Parish Council commented on 15 planning applications, ranging in scale from the Lafarge quarries and the Aspire estate to small domestic extensions, garages and garden fences, and a wind turbine in Ravensden.

Our views are not always accepted by the Borough, but most are. In addition to the Parish Council, the Borough Council consults with neighbours adjoining the proposed development, with its own technical officers and with officers in local, regional and national bodies involved with the environment and conservation. The technical consultations carry more weight than locally expressed views and can mean that the Parish Council's comments are not reflected in the decision.

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. We were unsuccessful in our bid for more in 2012-13. The Parish Council has supported occasional litter picks, but during 2011-13 volunteers have been signed up by the Borough Council as Street Champions for most roads in the village and some in the new estates, and they undertake regular litter picks that have greatly improved the Parish'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 2012-13 this was set at £17,000, 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. The budget is summarised at the end of this report. In 2012-13 the Parish Council's expenditure was within budget for all items, with an underspend overall, although an element of this was collected to be put into the reserves. For 2013-14 the Parish Precept has remained at £17,000.

OTHER MATTERS

In 2012 the Parish Council started development of an e-mail circulation list to facilitate the speedy and economic circulation of information to residents. It has continued to express concern at the loss of our 'local bobby', and supported action by relevant authorities to deal with anti-social behaviour, especially on The Spires. On the 'social' front, the Parish Council was represented on and chaired the Diamond Jubilee Barn Dance organising committee. To celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee the Parish Council purchased a commemorative bench that is now located in front of the church.

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

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COUNCILLORS

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WARD COUNCILLORS

Carole Ellis

Stephen Moon

Full contact details are in the Village Magazine each month.

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL – BUDGET 2012/13

ITEM	BUDGET	EXPENDITURE
Grants	152	0
Good Neighbours	500	2000
PCC Churchyard	500	600
Sports Club	1380	1750
Village Magazine	2000	0
Contingency		
War Memorial	622	575
Jubilee Seat	1200	884
Property Repair	1000	0
Bus Shelter	220	220
Grass Cutting	2477	1915
Administration	2916	1823
Clerk of the Council	6168	4836
Long Term Fund	1000	1000
Contingencies	2500	0
ITEM	BUDGET	INCOME
Precept	17000	17000
VAT Refund	0	0
Bank Interest	0	17
Grass Cutting	1164	1164

