

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18



THE FIGHT CONTINUES

This is the 8th 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 2017 – 18 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.

An 'issue' that has arisen during the year is some residents querying why the Parish Council, and indeed the Village Magazine, continue to print documents and deliver them, when it would be easier, and cheaper, to circulate documents using the internet. Documents are put on the Parish Council and Renhold websites if you wish to read them there. We know, however, that many residents either do not use the internet or like to have a hard copy document they can pick up and look at during the year. By continuing to deliver copies to every address in the parish we can ensure that everyone at least has the opportunity to read about Renhold and the Parish Council.

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, 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.

The full list of Parish Councillors in the council year 2017 – 18 appears at the end of this report.

Stuart Harrison resigned from the Parish Council on his move to Norfolk. His detailed knowledge on planning and highway matters was of considerable value to the Parish Council, and will be missed. We wish him well in his new job. On Stuart's resignation 10 electors from the Spires Ward requested that the vacancy be filled by way of an election. Under new regulations, once an election is requested a vacancy can only be filled by election, and not by co-option. 2 times the vacancy advertised with no nominations resulting. On the 3rd time a single nomination was received, and Darren Rayner was appointed through the uncontested election. Each time the election process was advertised cost the Parish Council approx. £100, and it took some 5 months to appoint Stuart's replacement.

Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat has now been our Clerk for 9 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. Early in 2018 Parish Councillors nominated Lizzie for the Lord Lieutenant's annual award; we're delighted to report that she was highly

commended and attended a presentation evening in Luton to celebrate her success

How We Work

In 2017 – 18 the Parish Council 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 – especially on traffic issues.

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. At the end of the 2017-18 year it was decided to increase Lizzie's hours by 3 per week, in part reflecting the additional time spent on the Local Plan 2035 consultations and responses.

HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC

In 2017 – 18 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. 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.

An emerging concern, especially for Cranbourne Gardens, is the gatherings of vehicles on the Elms Farm and Viking industrial estate opposite, leading to use of Norse Road as a race track. The Parish Council is supporting residents in efforts to get the use of industrial premises car parks denied to these gatherings.

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 2017 – 18.

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 been live for over a year now, and although there are occasional offenders 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 is now lifting its embargo on new schemes, although with a limited budget, and the Parish Council has been advised that a scheme for Ravensden Road is on the long list of potential schemes.

The Parish Council previously gave notice that average speed cameras would have been requested for Hookhams Lane, but at this moment there is not a scheme in the long list of potential schemes. 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 2017 – 18 year came to an end the Borough officers are looking at potential narrowings near Home Close, but there is no funding for such a scheme unless the Parish Council can identify sufficient funds.

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

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 again been asked to undertake a 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 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 and 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. Over recent years, H bars and double yellow lines at the blind bend by the barns and either side of Church Close have helped to protect domestic entrances and providing passing places. In March 2018 a camera was installed by the Borough Council to catch offenders parking on the yellow zig-zag area, but this has caused further problems for residents because of the lighting associated with the camera, an issue that is still being tackled. 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.

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. The parish has not seen any road improvements as a result, but as a part of the Borough Council's programmes the footways in Hookhams Lane were refurbished in February / March 2018.

The Parish Council will continue to give all of these issues its full attention in 2018 – 19, 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 2017 – 18 the Parish Council commented on 25 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. Some applications are now to demolish existing dwellings to replace them with larger properties, and some applications have been to extend existing dwellings, often significantly. During 2017 – 18 it has been pleasing to see the planting of new hedges as properties change hands. Sadly, in other instances there are now fences giving a more urban feel to the street scene.

An ongoing concern is the eyesore that is the site of the former Three Horseshoes public house in Top End. In March 2017 legal agreements were signed and planning permission issued for a replacement of the public house with a restaurant / public house and an additional detached house. Unfortunately, a year has gone by and there has been no movement on the site, save for the erection of a sign indicating who the developer is.

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 almost 200 objections were submitted by Renhold residents. This proposal was deleted when the latest consultation document was published in February 2018, but there were other proposals that impacted on Renhold. Once again local residents sprang into action and we understand that some 600 submissions have been made from Renhold supporting the removal of the major housing proposal. The Parish Council has submitted an 11-page representation, in particular reminding the Borough Council why the Salph End proposal should not be reinstated. Leaflets have been delivered to every property in the parish advising residents how to get involved, and the Parish Council's full response 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.

The Parish Council is especially grateful for the support given by local residents led by Pally Sohal in the local plan campaign, producing leaflets and posters and going door-to-door encouraging residents to get involved.

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.

Last year the Annual Report commented on problems with the maintenance of hedgerows, especially where they were obstructing footpaths. Some hedgerows have been cut back with noticeable

improvement for pedestrians, and the Parish Council welcomes this and hopes it will continue.

FINANCE

The Parish Council is funded by the Parish Precept, as shown on your Council Tax bill. In 2017 – 18, for the sixth 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 2017 – 18 the Parish Council's expenditure was within budget with an underspend overall. For 2018 – 19 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 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

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL BUDGET 2017 – 18

ITEM	BUDGET	EXPENDITURE
GRANTS		
Good Neighbours	150	0
PCC Churchyard	750	600
Sports Club	500	500
Village Magazine	1760	1380
Contingency	1090	1000
War Memorial	830	600
Property Repair	2000	1847
Bus Shelters	220	110
Grass Cutting	5000	2780
Administration	3930	2588
Clerk of the Council	6500	6383
Churchyard Fund	1000	0
Contingencies	2500	0
ITEM	BUDGET	INCOME
Precept	17000	20771
Grass Cutting	1164	1897
VAT Refund	0	3823
Bank Interest	0	32
Other Income	0	0

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Clerk to the Council

Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat, PO Box 1548, Bedford, MK44 5AX
Tel : 01234 771702 E-mail : lizzie_barnicoat@hotmail.com
Parish Council Website: <http://renhold.bedsparishes.gov.uk>

COUNCILLORS	TELEPHONE	E-MAIL
Susan Brunsdon	01234 266281	susan.brunsdon@ntlworld.com
Margaret Dean	01234 771520	h.dean520@btinternet.com
Andy Gregory	01234 771271	andy.d.gregory@btinternet.com
Nicky Gribble	01234 771994	nicky.gribble@icloud.com
Albert Gurney	01234 870044	albig39@gmail.com
Stuart Harrison [Vice Chairman] Resigned May 2017		
Julian Polhill	07808 773577	julian.polhill@pageestate.com
Amanda Quince	01234 870704	pace.quince@gmail.com
Darren Rayner Elected Nov 2017	07825 950673	thespiresrenhold@gmail.com
Ian Slater [Chairman]	01234 772471	ianslater47@btinternet.com

BOROUGH WARD COUNCILLORS 2017 – 18

Great Barford

Sheryl Corp
Stephen Moon

Goldington

Anthony Forth
Jade Uko
