

# RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL

## ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16



This is the 6<sup>th</sup> 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 2015 – 16 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.

When I joined the Parish Council in 2007 the main topic under discussion was how to resolve the traffic problems in the village caused by through traffic. Our front cover this year shows the result of more than 9 years of effort by the Parish Council, and although not activated as this report is written we hope that, at last, there will be a significant reduction in through traffic and vehicle speeds. At last!

Ian Slater

Chairman

Cover Picture

Average Speed Check warning, Water End.

## **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.

Before the Parish Council election in May 2015 Stuart Andrews, Ian McDougal and Jim Stapleton retired. We thank them for their conscientious service to Renhold over their years as Councillors, in Jim's case for more than 30 years. In the event an election wasn't necessary – although the Borough Council charged us £150 for the work they did to determine an election was not needed - and we welcomed Amanda Quince, Andy Gregory and Julian Polhill as new Parish Councillors. The full list of Parish Councillors in 2015 – 16 appears at the end of this report. We're sorry to report that in March 2016 Jim Leydon resigned as a Parish Councillor, we thank him for his contribution over the last 5 years.

Mrs Lizzie Barnicoat has now been our Clerk for 7 years, and continues to seek to improve how the Parish Council works and to keep our processes up-to-date and reflecting the latest guidance. This includes making a submission early in 2016 in order to maintain our Quality Council status under the new system, and we await the outcome of this.

## **How We Work**

In 2015 – 16 the Parish Council met 8 times, including a special meeting to consider a response to Bedford Borough Council's Local Plan 2032 consultation. The Finance Committee met once, the Quality Status Working Group met once, and on 2 occasions Parish

Councillors met informally to consider planning applications that required a response between normal meetings. The Parish Council has also supported a working group that is developing a website for the Parish that has been chaired by the Parish Council Vice-Chairman, Stuart Harrison.

Meetings were held in the Village Hall 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. These are principally 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.

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 2015 – 16.

On the new estates the roads and open spaces on Cranbourne Gardens and The Spires have, at last, been adopted and are now the responsibility of the Borough Council. On-street parking is a continuing problem, especially on The Spires where the Parish Council supported introduction of double yellow lines on Maskell Drive, the main access into the estate. The Aspire estate will be different in that the developer, Orbit Homes, is retaining ownership of roads and open spaces in perpetuity and will be responsible for their ongoing maintenance when the development is finished.

In the village 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 Keith Herkes, and by residents as part of the Community Speedwatch initiative, has tried to progress action on these matters throughout 2015 – 16.

A speed limit of 30mph applies throughout the village, and Speedwatch has been re-enforcing the message and reporting offenders to the Police. In 2014 the Borough Council planned to install white 'gates' and / or 'dragon's teeth' road markings at the village limits, and in 2015 these were implemented on Ravensden Road and Green End. For 4 years we have been trying to get average speed cameras installed, with a financial contribution from the Parish Council. Initially a limited scheme between Top End and Green End was proposed, but when technical work was completed the scheme was extended to provide cameras on Church End – between Wilden Road and the traffic lights, and between Top End at the traffic lights and the 30mph sign at Green End. In January 2015 Parish Councillors had a demonstration of the street light required at each of the camera locations, but it was not until early in 2016 that the street lights and cameras were erected. They are not live as we write, but already there is a noticeable reduction in vehicle numbers and speeds between the bypass and Wilden Road. The effort required to get these cameras has been considerable, and in reality they represent our last chance to affect traffic through the village. The Parish Council has requested cameras on Ravensden Road, but we understand that the Borough Council has stopped installing cameras as a cost-cutting measure. We'll keep asking!

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. It is hoped that the average speed cameras will make the journey between Wilden Road and the

bypass significantly longer in terms of time such that some drivers will look for a quicker alternative.

Unfortunately, the alternative route is likely to include Hookhams Lane. There is already a 7.5 tonne weight limit on Hookhams Lane, but this is as difficult to enforce as the TRO. Offenders details are passed to the Borough Council when we have them, and Borough Officers do contact the firms concerned, we believe with positive results. But the number of offenders identified is but the tip of the iceberg. With the average speed cameras 'protecting' Church End to Green End, the Speedwatch volunteers will be targeting Hookhams Lane, Wilden Road and Ravensden Road, and may be able to identify more of the HGVs contravening the weight restriction. If Speedwatch identifies a significant level of speeding, we will request more frequent attendance by the Police camera unit to reinforce the message.

The last, but by no means least, issue with traffic centres on the volume of 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. The 'H bars' implemented at house accesses have made it easier for residents to get in and out of their houses, and they also provide small places where vehicles can pass. At the Parish Council's request, double yellow lines have been implemented at the blind bend near the barns to improve safety there, and agreement has been received to extend these to protect the entrance to Church Close, where parked cars were obstructing the view in both directions for residents wishing to leave Church 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, merely move it further along the road. With local residents the Parish Council will continue to try to find a solution to the parking problem. The Borough Council's decision to move to a 2-tier education system will increase the numbers of parents bringing children to the school, but will also mean that alterations are required to the school. The Parish Council will seek to have adequate car parking provision addressed as an element of these changes.

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 will continue to give all of these issues its full attention in 2016 – 17, 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 2015 – 16 the Parish Council commented on 30 planning applications, ranging in scale from vehicle crossovers, through domestic extensions to new dwellings. Our views are not always accepted by the Borough, but most are. On a couple of occasions, the Parish Council Chairman has attended the Borough Council's Planning Committee to explain the Parish Council's position on applications, and on both occasions the Parish Council's view prevailed.

One of these occasions concerned the future of the Three Horseshoes site. During the year the Parish Council has commented on 3 proposals for the site, all of which included replacement of the public house with a restaurant / public house and an additional detached house. Parish Council concerns related to outdoor play space for children and the level of off-road car parking. We don't want to have significant on-road parking causing problems in Top End, but the developer has a problem on-site with provision for service vehicles. Ultimately the Parish Council, by a majority vote which is unusual, supported a proposal that now awaits the Borough Council's decision.

The Bedford Borough Local Plan 2032 continues to progress, and in December 2015 Parish Councillors met to consider their response to the latest consultation. The proposal of greatest concern is that, Borough-wide, all settlements with a designated Settlement Policy Area [SPA] should each provide for an additional 10 – 20 dwellings between now and 2032. Renhold has 2 SPAs, at Salph End and Green End, and the Parish Council is 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. Still more potential sites in Renhold have been identified by landowners and the Parish Council has raised concerns in respect of these. The Local Plan process continues, and it may be a further 2 years, with various consultations and a public inquiry in the meantime, before it is finally completed.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Much of the work in respect of traffic, footpaths and planning is principally directed to improving the parish's environment. It'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. More volunteers will always be welcome! In 2015, after 2 years of effort, we did manage to have a hedge cut back that was almost totally blocking a pavement in Home Close, and we are aware of other locations, especially on Hookhams Lane, where similar work is urgently required. The difficulty is in identifying who is responsible for a hedge: for example, the one in Hookhams Lane is between the road [Borough Council] and the brook [Environment Agency], with neither accepting responsibility.

## **FINANCE**

The Parish Council is funded by the Parish Precept, as shown on your Council Tax bill. In 2015 – 16, for the fourth 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 on the Aspire estate. 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. A new financial requirement in 2015 –

16 was the support provided by hiring the Village Hall for the Website Working Group's meetings.

The budget is summarised at the end of this report. In 2015 – 16 the Parish Council's expenditure was within budget with an underspend overall. For 2016 – 17 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**

There are reports on the Parish Council's meetings each month 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 a Parish Council website, but we will now be working with residents to develop a Renhold website that can include the Parish Council's or links to it, and that can promote the parish and its organisations.

## RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL – BUDGET 2015 – 16

ITEM	BUDGET	EXPENDITURE
GRANTS		
Good Neighbours	152	0
PCC Churchyard	500	750*
Sports Club	500	500
Village Magazine	2076	1737
Contingency	772	50
War Memorial	700	627
Property Repair	1500	0
Bus Shelters	220	220
Grass Cutting	2500	2592
Administration	4450	2301
Clerk of the Council	6300	5328
Churchyard Fund	1000	0
Contingencies	2500	0
ITEM	BUDGET	INCOME
Precept	17000	18479
Grass Cutting	1164	1164
VAT Refund	0	1377
Bank Interest	0	27
Other Income	0	0

\* Includes one-off payment for tree work

# RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL 2015 – 16

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## BOROUGH WARD COUNCILLORS 2105 – 16

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