

## Reepham – dying but now revitalised

You will perhaps recall the article entitled “30 years ago” which appeared in the May Newsletter, it detailed comments made at the Reepham Chamber of Trade and Commerce at their meeting held on Friday 19th November 1954. Three students from Liverpool University had made a survey of Reepham during the previous summer and they had been “appalled” at the lack of sewerage and piped water, and they considered the town “half dead”.

These were comments that were not met with disagreement by the Chamber as they considered it was their duty to help bring Reepham back to life and they felt that without water and sewerage no industry or private housing was likely. A study of newspaper reports of this particular era shows that there was indeed a great deal of local feeling and vocal expression as to whether Reepham was dying, thriving or generally just held back due to its lack of basic amenities.

The *Norfolk Chronicle* dated 21st May 1954 reported that at their meeting held on Monday 16th May, members of the Reepham Chamber of Trade and Commerce had the gratifying news that their recent efforts towards improving Reepham’s amenities had met with some success. The white lines on the road at Towns End Corner which had almost faded to obscurity were to be renewed by the County Council. This would minimise the traffic danger at this crossroads. (The white lines were only down the centre of the road and on the Cawston and School roads only, the Dereham/Market Place road was unmarked – today we would be happy for any reasonable traffic improvement in Reepham and Towns End Corner is perhaps ripe for improvement, it shows how much time and traffic has changed this corner of Reepham, looking at a photo of the early 1950s it shows Grief’s shop with petrol pumps outside, not more than a few yards from the crossroads.) The meeting was also told that the local RDC had intimated that a water scheme for Reepham was at last substantially in hand. Members were still unhappy that no mention was made of a sewerage scheme as they felt this was a major need as present conditions were verging on the primitive.

Reepham caught the local press headlines less than two months later in July 1954 when the first of a series of articles on Reepham appeared, it gives an account of Reepham changing with the times from a commercial point of view. It is interesting to note the paragraph about the fitting of the stone framework façade to Barclays Bank, not a word of discontent was expressed at the time about this work, work which gratefully has been undone by Barclays restoring a year or so ago the building to its former beauty.

In January 1955 the Reepham Parish Council expressed strong views in support of a letter from the Reepham Chamber of Trade and Commerce about the lack of piped water and sewerage. This, they felt, was diminishing the prospects of attracting new

enterprises into the town. One of Reepham's district councillors said that it was not the fault of the RDC but that the holdup was with experiments with the composition of the type of pipe to be used in relation to the soil.

This explanation was, however, given short shrift and the Clerk was instructed to write to the local MP and to the county councillor urging them to speed up the installation of these essential services.

In November 1955 the Reepham water and sewerage scheme had progressed, tenders had been accepted for headworks and water mains from Cawston and Salle up to the Reepham railway line and tenders for the water mains and sewers in Reepham were due to be received during that month. It was hoped that the starting date "should not be many weeks ahead".

We have to move on a couple of years or so to January 1958 to find the next headline "Reepham is generally happy, but...", the reporter felt that as one wandered about Reepham the impression gathered was that the residents felt it was "a very pleasant, happy and generally satisfactory little town". However, it was felt that there was room for development and improvement. There was room for light industry in the town, it was equipped with electricity and good roads, it had an active railway station for both passenger and goods traffic and water and sewerage would be fully available by the end of March. The basic needs for an enterprising and expanding town were all there. The new school (now the High School) was projected for the following year and this should bring a welcome influx of new life and interest to the benefit of the trade and town. It was true that a number of shops could do with a facelift, a spot of modernisation but in 1958 it seemed that Reepham was attractively poised commercially to bring an era of prosperity to the town. It was felt that "The town and trade of Reepham" – a must on every toast list two decades earlier – could now be heard again.

The toast was obviously not expressed or heard by all as no more than five months later the headlines read "Is Reepham a dying town?", the article which is reproduced here lets you decide for yourself.

Subsequent letters to the Press from a number of "Reephamites" asserted most strongly that Reepham was not dying but merely changing, the new rector, the Rev. G.H. Hurst felt that although many things were lacking it was encouraging to find many people who knew and loved the town. There were obviously many signs of life in the town and perhaps one of the problems was that Reepham was a town, if only in size. It was perhaps a very small town which had difficulty in its isolation, there was likely to be a conflict between a small outlook and a big outlook – between those who were concerned to do things in small ways suitable for a village community and those who wanted to do things in ways more fitting the dignity and responsibility of

a town.

### **Reepham today**

Whatever description of Reepham I could now make would probably meet with disagreement from someone, so it is probably for the best if I leave you to draw your own judgement and conclusions. I feel though that Reepham could hardly be regarded as dying, it is changing and has probably changed more in the last twenty years than in any other twenty-year period of its history. Yet during this period of change it has also been through its most restrictively planned period of its history. In 1972 the Norfolk County Council produced a Village Plan for Reepham, which included a Central Area Policy Plan. At the same time most of the town centre was designated within a Conservation Area for the town. In 1979 part of the Reepham Village Plan was superseded by the Reepham Town Centre Local Plan.

In 1985 it was decided that both plans were out of date and that a review of local planning policies for Reepham should be carried out. Reepham is also included in the Norfolk Rural Development Programme which allows for the development of industrial floorspace.

Reepham has been selected (within the Draft Roll Forward Policies of the Norfolk Structure) as one of the 12 villages selected for housing estate development and as a village service centre which will provide a range of facilities for the village and the surrounding area. It is ironic to note that 25 years ago Reepham was a small town which was finding difficulty in its isolation and now it is to expand and to provide facilities for the surrounding area it is called a village.

Yet during this “planned period” the number of houses and the population is at its highest ever level as the following figures clearly show.

### **Census population**

1961	1276
1971	1381
1981	1896
Dec. 1984 (estimate)	2127

### **House completions**

1971	13
1972	8
1973	32
1974	32

1975	39
1976	11
1977	20
1978	24
1979	4
1980	24
1981	14
1982	23
1983	17
1984	42

Reepham is well liked by most if not all of its inhabitant, it is a town that is alive and expanding, let us hope that all the planning and policies that now allow and contain this will let it retain its character and its rural but valued isolation.

*From an article published in the Reepham Society Newsletter, Christmas 1985*