



## **The Astwell Benefice**

*St Mary Magdalene Helmdon with Stuchbury and St Lawrence, Radstone*

*St James the Great Syresham*

*St John the Evangelist, Whitfield, St Mary & St Peter Lois Weedon with Weston and Plumpton  
and St Mary the Virgin Wappenham*

# **DRAFT**

## **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING OF THE ASTWELL BENEFICE, MONDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2025**

### **Welcome and Opening Prayers**

**Present:** Alice Palmer, Nicola Billingham, Kathleen Brunning, Wiggy Smith, Paul Stothard, Claire Bonner, Sue Timmis, Jane Rymell, Frank Hunter, Mike Streten, Clive Johnson, Caroline Raven, Iris Gregory, Bill Elkington, Judith Elkington, Fiona Mason, David Wright, Jenny Overson, Jenny Saunders, Penny Bonner, Sheena Warren, Revd Hugh White and Sarah Rudkin.

**Apologies for absence:** Cliff Netten, Diane & Caroline Hunt, Niki Phillips

***Items 1-4 were considered as 'consent items', ie. they were taken as read and accepted.  
There were no issues arising from these items at the meeting.***

- 1. Benefice and Committee Reports for the year ending December 2024**
  - 1.1 Pastoral Care
  - 1.2 Social & Fundraising
  - 1.3 Safeguarding
  - 1.4 Deanery Synod
  - 1.5 Hope Centre
  - 1.6 Benefice Choir
  - 1.7 Finance
- 2. Church Council Reports for the year ending December 2024**
  - 2.1 St. Mary Magdalene, Helmdon and St. Lawrence, Radstone
  - 2.2 St. Mary & St. Peter, Lois Weeden with Weston and Plumpton
  - 2.3 St. James the Great, Syresham
  - 2.4 St. Mary the Virgin, Wappenham
  - 2.5 St. John the Evangelist, Whitfield
- 3. Benefice Financial Report and Audited Parish Accounts - Financial Statements for the year ending December 2024**
  - 3.1 Astwell Benefice
  - 3.2 Helmdon & Radstone
  - 3.3 Lois Weedon
  - 3.4 Syresham
  - 3.5 Wappenham
  - 3.6 Whitfield
- 4. The Rector's Report**

### **Minutes of the 2024 APCM and actions arising:**

Unfortunately, the minutes from last year's meeting had not been circulated, but HW and those present discussed the main action points:

- **Liaison with schools:** BE had contacted Rachel ? at Helmdon but nothing more had come of this yet.
- **Eucharistic Assistants:** HW said he had done nothing about renewing the EA licences, updating training etc. He asked that all parishes should notify him of the names of their current EAs, and check their licences/training status, and he would update where necessary. **Action: HW**
- **Official Recognition of Benefice Status:** BE said he had spoken to Bishop Debbie when she visited the Benefice last year. She was keen to give the United Benefice the status it deserved, but nothing had happened since. AP said that she now paid the Parish Share as one lump sum, not as individual parishes, and that maybe this was progress as far as Peterborough was concerned. However, there is still confusion amongst CC members about their personal liability status. This may be putting off potential churchwardens and CC members. CJ asked that this be clarified as soon as possible. **Action: HW**

### **5. Looking to the Future: Open Discussion**

HW asked everyone at the meeting to turn to their neighbour and talk about their hopes and plans for the future of the Benefice. After a few minutes, he asked parishes to report back on their discussions. These broadly covered 3 different themes: Reaching Young People, Money and Music.

CJ said that the average age of Helmdon's current congregation was high and the number of children (ie. potential future churchgoers) was low, that their parents were not interested in coming to church, so that the future of the church was threatened.

HW said that if there were sufficient funds from 'Let's Shine' Festival and from future fundraising, a Youth Worker could be employed on a part-time basis, possibly in the schools. He also mentioned the possibility of a link-up with the Boys Brigade. He gave the examples of Deddington and Barford, which had a similar/smaller populations than the Astwell Benefice.

AP said that Syresham used to have a youth group run by volunteers from the Church, but that she and others now felt too old to continue.

MS said that there wasn't a critical mass of children in the Benefice.

FH mentioned the greatly reduced roll at LW school, due to the falling birth rate, with the resulting reduction in income, teachers etc. If the school closes there will be no children in the village.

BE said he had talked to Rachel Wheeler (Helmdon Guides & Brownies), which has attracted girls from as far away as Middleton Cheney. He also mentioned that Helmdon school now relies on 'overspill' children from Brackley.

PS said that these Guides were now involved in the Let's Shine Festival in several ways, that we shouldn't be afraid to try new ways of attracting people, particularly children, to our churches and that we should not look for immediate returns.

WS said she thought the Festival was wonderful and that it was already answering some of the needs of the Benefice in terms of creating a 'community'. She asked

how much a part-time Youth Worker might cost – HW said about £15k/yr. He continued that we could make the money to fund this if we have the will. CB said that the smaller parishes don't have enough money to keep going at the moment – how will they find even more? HW said they would raise more if they needed to, and that this had been the case with the Parish Share in 2024. JR wondered if the Benefice could provide a weekly online service, with Holy Communion, for people with small children, the ill and elderly. She suggested the use of a QR code so that people could still give their collection. HW welcomed this suggestion and BE said that Helmdon had the facility for either recorded or live services (camera & audio), if the technology could be mastered.

**Action: HW/BE/PS**

PS mentioned the possible role of a part-time Parish Nurse, again paid for by Benefice fundraising. This person should be of faith and able to bring spiritual help to people whilst providing a practical medical service. This is not to replace the NHS community service; perhaps they could attend the parish coffee mornings? He suggested that someone from the group based in Northampton could attend a future BPCC meeting to tell us about their work.

**Action: PS**

HW noted that our worship was a bit 'fusty' and suggested a 'worship band' to go around the parishes to liven up the services with some new music and more modern hymns.

IG said that this might put off the more traditional worshippers, resulting in falling attendance.

HW said that there was no harm in trying something new and seeing where it took us.

JR mentioned that she had attend Brackley church recently where there was a mixture of modern and traditional music, and children took part in some of the services, and the giving of Holy Communion was more relaxed.

HW asked DW if he could look at putting together a 'worship band'. DW said he might consider it, and FH offered his services on the guitar.

**Action DW/HW??**

BE mentioned the 'Spring Harvest' Festival, which AP and WS also praised. HW suggested that the Benefice should consider visiting this.

KB asked if it was possible to consider all monies given by individuals to charities as though it was money donated to the Benefice. HW said it was.

CJ asked how the above discussion would be taken forward into actions, and HW said he would set up a 'Mission Committee' to do this.

**Action: HW**

## 6. **The Election of Officers (ex-officio) to the Astwell Benefice Parochial Church Council for 2025/6**

The following were appointed unanimously:

- |  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| ▪ Chair  | Revd Hugh White              |
| ▪ Lay Chair  | Paul Stothard                |
| ▪ Benefice Treasurer   | Alice Palmer                 |
| ▪ Benefice Secretary   | Sarah Rudkin                 |
| ▪ Safeguarding Officer   | Fiona Mason                  |
| <i>(HW presented Judith Elkington, who was standing down as Safeguarding Officer, with a gift and thanked her for her service to the Benefice)</i> |                              |
| ▪ Deanery Synod Representatives  | Bill Elkington & Wiggy Smith |

**7. Notification of BPCC Membership for 2025/6**

The nominated Churchwardens and Representatives elected from each Parish are welcomed onto the BPCC.

- Helmdon Churchwardens - **Cliff Netten & Paul Stothard**  
Pastoral Comm Chair – **Wiggy Smith**  
Safeguarding Officer – **Fiona Mason**  
Radstone Rep – **Penny Bonner**
- Lois Weedon Churchwarden – **Frank Hunter**  
Rep – **Mike Streten**
- Syresham BPCC reps - **Kathleen Brunning,**  
**David Billingham & Alice Palmer (ex off)**
- Whitfield BPCC Reps - **Claire Bonner & Sue Timmis**
- Wappenham Churchwarden – **Sheena Warren**

**8. Election of Committee Chairpersons for 2025/6**

The following were appointed unanimously:

- Finance **Clive Johnson**
- Social & Fundraising **Sheena Warren**
- Pastoral Care **Wiggy Smith**
- Parish Church Council Chairs **To be agreed/announced**

**Action: Churchwardens/Reps**

**9. The Appointment of Independent Auditor for the 2025 Benefice Accounts**

AP will ask Gill Swinford if she will continue in this role

**Action: AP**

**10. Notification of Parish Electoral Roll Officers for 2025/6**

- Helmdon **Judith Elkington**
- Lois Weedon **Clive Johnson**
- Syresham **David Billingham**
- Whitfield **Claire Bonner**
- Wappenham **Cassie Harris**

**11. Appointment of Eucharistic Assistants for the Benefice for 2025/6**

Existing EAs are: **Paul Stothard, Wiggy Smith (?), Claire Bonner, Bill Elkington, Frank Hunter, Vicki Streten, Bob Israel, Rick Cullen (NB. this list is not complete – churchwardens/reps to let SR know who is missing!!)**

**Action: Churchwardens/Reps**

As stated earlier in the minutes, we need to clarify who can serve as an EA, how long the term is and the training and licensing required.

**Action: HW**

**12. Any Other Business:**

None was raised but BE thanked HW for a successful first full year in his post as Rector, and all agreed.

**The Meeting ended with the Grace**