



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*

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING OF THE ASTWELL BENEFICE HELD ON MONDAY 18TH MAY 2026 **DRAFT**

Welcome and Opening Prayers by Revd HW.

Apologies for absence: Alice Palmer, Diane & Caroline Hunt, Sue Timmis, Sheena Warren, Wiggy Smith & Mike Streten.

Present: Kathleen Brunning, David Billingham, Nicola Billingham, Claire Bonner, Penny Bonner, Cliff Netten, Frank Hunter, Clive Johnson, Philip Thompson, Steve & Nicola Crofts Caroline Raven, Iris Gregory, David Wright, Revd Hugh White, Paul Stothard and Sarah Rudkin.

Items 2-4 were considered as 'consent items', ie. taken as read and accepted.

1. **Minutes of 2025 APCM:** Clive Johnson mentioned that he had not given the congregation figures mentioned in item 5; these may have been given by PS. Otherwise there were no other issues arising and the minutes were approved.
2. **Benefice and Committee Reports for the year ending December 2025**
 - 2.1 Pastoral Care
 - 2.2 Social & Fundraising report/Let's Shine Festival
 - 2.3 Safeguarding
 - 2.4 Deanery Synod
 - 2.5 **Hope Centre** - SR read out A North's short report which included that he was going to step down from his role as run coordinator at the end of this year. HW thanked AN for his work and suggested that he be asked to find a volunteer to replace himself from amongst the other volunteer drivers. **Action: SR**
 - 2.6 Benefice Choir
 - 2.7 Finance
3. **Church Council Reports for the year ending December 2025**
 - 3.1 St. Mary Magdalene, Helmdon and St. Lawrence, Radstone
 - 3.2 St. Mary & St. Peter, Lois Weeden with Weston and Plumpton
 - 3.3 St. James the Great, Syresham
 - 3.4 St. Mary the Virgin, Wappenham
 - 3.5 St. John the Evangelist, Whitfield
4. **Benefice Financial Report and Audited Parish Accounts - Financial Statements for the year ending December 2025**
 - 4.1 Astwell Benefice
 - 4.2 Helmdon & Radstone
 - 4.3 Lois Weedon
 - 4.4 Syresham
 - 4.5 Wappenham
 - 4.6 Whitfield
5. **The Rector's Report** – matters arising and further discussions are covered under item 6.
6. **Looking to the Future: an open discussion lead by HW**

- **Lay Reader** - PS announced that he was stepping down from his role from the beginning of September 2026. HW said this would mean a change in service pattern.
- **Service Pattern/Types** - HW said he would like to explore the idea of services being held on Sunday afternoons, together with evensongs, to use his available time better. He invited people to suggest and discuss any ideas for new types/times of services. FH mentioned the Matins service currently led by MS at LW, & HW said that MS's sermons were considered 'irregular' but thanked MS and FH for their work at LW. DB asked if there was a list of approved service types available. HW said this did not exist, and PS said we have to be careful about the sermon and 'teaching' element of any service offered. KB & DB thought it might be possible to provide a Matins service at Syresham, and that Messy Church already takes place on Sunday afternoons. HW said that BCP services may be welcomed in some parishes, eg. LW, and that perhaps different parishes could 'specialise' in different types of worship, eg BCP, children's services etc. CB said Whitfield was having trouble paying its parish share and thanked the Benefice for helping out with this. They usually have a maximum of 6 attending normal services. HW said they have been having discussions with the parish about becoming a 'Festival' church, with max 6 services per year inc. Christmas, Harvest and Easter.
- **Parish Nurse** – PS explained that this was not a typical health care role, but more a community role, helping people in a broader sense. A nurse would be part-time role, a worshipping member of the Christian community, and would attend local events, such as markets, coffee mornings etc, make home visits, help people navigate NHS systems etc. Would probably be paid at a 'Band 5' level, and a contribution to the central Parish Nurse organisation would also be required. CJ asked what the cost is likely to be and how tax & NI is organised. PS said start-up cost would be 'in the £ hundreds', with ongoing employment costing about £1k/month. A single church can be responsible for employing the nurse and administering payroll. KB asked if the Parish Nurse role worked successfully elsewhere and PS said that it mainly existed in urban areas, but that our Benefice could be the pioneers.
- **Full-time Youth Worker** – HW said that Helmdon had had plenty of interest and success in encouraging children and their families into church but did not want to take on the responsibility and lead the project further. A paid youth worker could devise a programme to go into the Benefice schools (Syr & Helm) and could also lead Messy Church. He felt it would be better to take the risk of the project failing than for youth participation in our churches to dwindle to nothing. KB said that we need to reach the children who have been to church at a younger age/been confirmed and then are lost in their teenage years. CB asked if there was funding available for this project from the Diocese. DB asked if the National Lottery could provide funds? HW said we are in an affluent area and should be able to find the funds ourselves! KB wondered if a Diocesan youth worker could help with more information on employing a local youth worker. **Action: HW & PS**
- **Benefice Treasurer** – HW said that AP will stand down as Benefice Treasurer at the next election in 2027. **Action: HW/AP**
- **Safeguarding Training** – HW said this is required of everyone on PCCs, and that FM is going to be in touch about updating their certification and training. **Action: FM**
- **Single Parish** – HW said we needed to get 'ahead of the game' on this, because there were fewer people in the churches, and therefore fewer people to help run them. CJ said a proper paper was needed giving the pros and cons of a Single Parish system, or else there would be no traction to the project. HW said that if a paper was produced, people need to be open to adopting it. PS said the Benefice should be congratulated on at least having the conversation about how to manage this crisis, as a lot of parishes were not doing so, and would not survive. **Action: HW & PS**

HW said we must be brave, and invited each parish to say how they are feeling about their particular situation at the moment:

Whitfield - CB said that the situation at Whitfield cannot continue and welcomed the idea of a Festival church as a possible solution.

LW – FH wanted to know exactly what a Single Parish would look like and felt that their parish was generally doing OK at the moment.

Syresham – DB & NB said that maybe their attendance numbers were up and should perhaps not be afraid of trying new innovations.

Wappenham – Philip ? said churches were facing the same challenges as other organisations, and should perhaps be used for other purposes as well.

Helmdon & Radstone – CN said that their church was good at the 'set pieces' at Christmas, Easter, Harvest etc, when attendance was high, but that otherwise numbers were low (eg. Ascension Day, and Christmas midnight service). What would we have to offer in 4 years' time when HW retires and a new priest is sought? PB said that they had very few services and she was basically running the church on her own.

HW said that the PCCs should each be asked to come up with 2/3 ideas for new events/service types at their meetings and report back at a future BPC meeting. **Action: All PCC members**

- **Benefice Music** – DW said that choir numbers were low, but there was still enough interest and a desire to be involved, with a focus on Benefice Services.

7. **The Election of Officers (ex-officio) to the Astwell Benefice Parochial Church Council for 2026/7 – the following were confirmed:**

- Chair – Revd Hugh White
- Lay Chair – Paul Stothard
- Benefice Treasurer – Alice Palmer
- Benefice Secretary – Sarah Rudkin
- Benefice Safeguarding Officer – Fiona Mason
- Deanery Synod Representatives – Bill Elkington & Wiggy Smith

8. **Notification of BPC Membership for 2026/7**

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

- 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 BPC reps - Kathleen Brunning,
David Billingham & Alice Palmer (ex off)
- Whitfield BPC Reps - Claire Bonner & Sue Timmis
- Wappenham Churchwarden – Sheena Warren
BPC member – Guy Rodger

9. **Election of Committee Chairpersons for 2026/7**

- Finance – Clive Johnson
- Pastoral Care – Wiggy Smith
- Parish Church Council Chairs – Alice Palmer, Cliff Netten, Claire Bonner, Frank Hunter & Sheena Warren

10. **The Appointment of Independent Auditor for the 2026 Benefice Accounts**

Gill Swinford to be asked to continue as auditor. ***She has since agreed to continue in this role (AP)***

11. Notification of Parish Electoral Roll Officers for 2026/7:

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

12. Appointment/Confirmation of Eucharistic Assistants for the Benefice for 2026/7

Helmdon – Bob Israel, Bill Elkington, Cliff Netten, Paul Stothard (Wiggy Smith??)

Radstone – Penny Bonner

Syresham – Kathleen Brunning

Whitfield – Claire Bonner

Wappenham – Rick Cullen

Los Weedon – Frank Hunter, Diane Hunt & Vicki Streten

13. Any Other Business: Nothing was raised.

The Meeting ended with the Grace.

SR DRAFT v1. 29/06/26