



The Astwell Benefice

*St Mary Magdalene Helmdon with Stuchbury & St Lawrence Radstone
St James the Great Syresham,
St John the Evangelist Whitfield,
St Mary and St Peter Lois Weedon & Weston with Plumpton
St Mary the Virgin Wappenham*
www.astwellparishes.org.uk

Minutes of the Benefice PCC Meeting Monday 14th July 2025

The meeting opened with a prayer

1. **Apologies:** AP and ST
Present: MS, D Billingham, K Brunning, PB, CB, SR, HW, PS, WS, FH, SW, F Mason, CN.
2. **Approval of minutes of previous BPCC meeting** held 24th March 2025 – these were approved unanimously.
3. **Committee Reports by Committee Chairs and Astwell Benefice Church Reports:**
As discussed at the recent Finance meeting, CB raised the subject of division of the Parish Share. Whitfield will pay what it can, but an unattainable target is demoralising, and funds are finite. The question of who sets the Parish Share percentages was raised – is it the BPCC or the Churchwardens? This led to FH asking if our status and structure as a United Benefice is officially recognised by the Diocese. PS said he had a positive email from the Archdeacon, Richard Ormston, which defines the Diocese's understanding of the Benefice status, and which he would circulate to all. HW suggested that a paper should be written giving the advantages and disadvantages of moving to a Single Parish/PCC (with just 2 churchwardens covering the Benefice), which is a recognised structure (as eg. Witney). DB asked for a simple diagram/explanation of how the Benefice is currently organised and governed, with pros and cons, so that someone who is not familiar with it could understand it. FH asked what the legal responsibilities were under the current structure, and FM wondered who would want to act as a churchwarden under the Single Parish model? **Action: HW/PS**
4. **Proposal for services from September to January:**
LWW - MS said he wanted to discuss the services with parishioners, particularly the Christmas Eve/Day issue. HW said the time of a Christmas Day service could be moved if necessary.
Whitfield – CB asked if one service a month included any other occasional services eg, Harvest? Whitfield's Patronal service and Carol Service were both missing from the schedule. She wondered if the 'Plough Service' should be held at Whitfield in January, but could probably get a plough to the church if required.
Wappenham – SW said she would speak to her church council about the proposed services. **Action: PS**
5. **Review of Let's Shine Festival (inc. item 6. Community Fund management):**
SW said that a committee was being formed to review the success of the Festival and to manage the money raised. 'Thank you's' had been sent out and draw prizes given out. Over £15,000 is now in the Benefice bank account. The committee would like suggestions on what to spend the money on, with the proviso that some (£7k) is kept back for a festival next year. Before the Festival took place, the group applied to the Charity Commission to form a charity to manage/distribute the funds, but the CC were confused by the relationship between the Festival and a potential charity, so declined the application. DB mentioned the example of Age Concern v Age.co.uk, which exist completely separately. CB asked if local people really know that the money is not for use by the church but for charitable purposes? HW said that more discussion was needed on how to use the money and what the structure doing this should

look like. DB said that some definition of who can apply for funds would be useful. FH said that removal of the Festival funds from the Benefice account was necessary in order to prevent people getting the (false) impression that the Benefice was benefiting from those funds. HW said the money should not lose its connection with the Benefice, as this might tend to diminish the importance of Let's Shine in the Benefice's self-understanding. A degree of consensus emerged that it might be appropriate for the following to happen, but no vote was taken:

1. Creation of a separate entity to manage the fund
2. Decide how who can apply for grants and how
3. Appoint trustees to administrate the fund.

FH asked that it be formally recorded that the BPCC thanks the Let's Shine/Fundraising committee for all their work in organising the Festival, as well as the individual churches and their members for all their work, eg. for the flower festivals.

SW & PS asked that the chosen trustees should report back to the BPCC regularly on how the money is used. WS asked if we are advertising that the fund is there to apply to? SW said this was a 'work in progress' and would be discussed at a meeting scheduled for August. There was discussion of the charities the money could go to, eg. national – WaterAid, and FH mentioned the charitable organisations which give money to local people, eg Tesco's Community Fund, via a similar scheme with Waitrose, the Northamptonshire Community Fund, food banks and local community volunteer organisations. **Action: S/F Comm**

6. **Benefice governance:** this subject had been largely covered in item 3, but HW added that he felt the suspension of the Worship Committee had now been justified but this now means that there is no dedicated forum to discuss service provision and that there were not enough BPCC meetings (currently 4 per year) to cover this and other topics. WS asked if BPCC should be bi-monthly or monthly. PS suggested that meetings could be called to discuss individual topics as require. DB wondered if some meetings could be less formal, ie. held over food/at the pub?

Action PS/HW

7. **Any Other Business:**

- SW introduced her paper concerning 'The Future of the Benefice Fundraising Committee'. She is no longer able to chair the committee if she is to lead the work on the next Festival, and Andrew North has resigned. The fundraising committee needs to be strengthened if it is to continue in its current form, or else the activity could be devolved back to the parishes, with each parish managing one event per year. She mentioned that she already had the possibility of a 'silent' disco event 'ready to go', but needed someone to run it. FH said that so much of the work involved in fundraising fell on a few individuals in the churches. CN wondered if it was possible to get local professional help to run events and would do some research into anyone who might be able to help from the wide Brackley area

Action: CN

- DB asked if an information service could be created, similar to Citizen's Advice, giving practical help and advice on health, legal, financial (and spiritual) issues. SW said that Jane Mordue had been involved with Citizen's Advice in the past, so she might be able to help with this idea.

Action: SW

8. The Grace was said and the meeting ended.