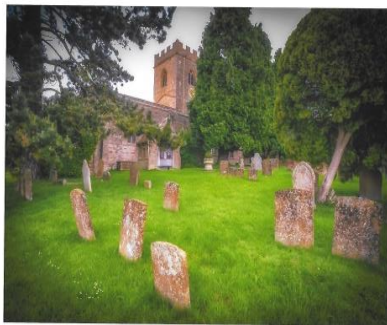


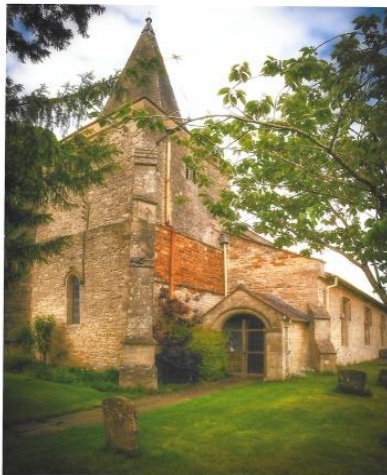
# **The 2018 Annual Report Of the Astwell Benefice Parochial Church Council**



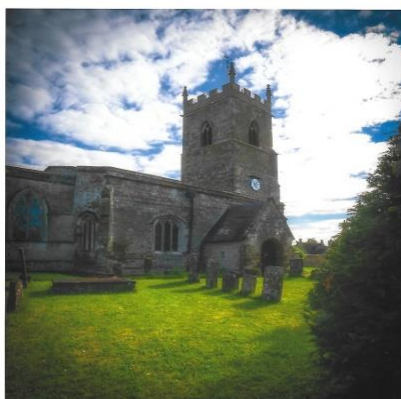
**St Mary Magdalene, Helmdon, and  
St. Lawrence, Chapel at Ease, Radstone**



**St. Mary & St. Peter, Lois Weedon with  
Weston and Plumpton**



**St James the Great, Syresham with  
St John the Evangelist, Whitfield,**



**St. Mary the Virgin, Wappenham**

**The 2018 Annual Report  
Of the Astwell Benefice Parochial Church Council**

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**Appendix: 1 Astwell Benefice United Governance 3-year Trial**

**These reports will not be read out at the APCM however questions  
pertaining to them may be asked.**

## **1. Rector Report**

2017 was a momentous year for our churches and I would personally, and behalf of the whole Benefice, like to thank our former PCC members and our Churchwardens for their foresight and their commitment to the future of their Churches and their worshipping communities.

Without them we would not have a new vision for our future, a future that sees us working together to further God's Kingdom, here in the Astwell Benefice. A future that sees this Benefice leading the way in providing a model for rural Benefices throughout the country.

I have again broken down my Report into a framework that highlights not only the work we have achieved so far but allows inspiration for the way ahead.

### **Sustaining the Sacred Centre with Collaborative Leadership**

We began 2017 as we had begun the year before, unable, as a Benefice, to meet the whole amount levied on us by the Diocese for Ministry, struggling to find officers and members for our Parish parochial councils.

Our struggle was not dissimilar to that facing rural Churches everywhere, but what was different here, was that in January the members of our 4 PCCs (Helmdon with Radstone, Lois Weedon with Weston, Syresham with Whitfield and Wappenham) met together to try and find a way forward.

The meeting saw us celebrating what we had in common - a love of our Church buildings with a concern for their maintenance and preservation as places of worship, to sustain our sacred space, but also a desire to grow the kingdom, increase our congregations and reach out further into our communities. There was also an acknowledgement that we needed to look to biblical teaching for answers, particularly St Paul's insistence that work together as the body of Christ, complementing and helping each other through our individual gifts.

The result was a joint Benefice Working Party of PCC Representatives tasks with looking at the various options open to us. On behalf of the whole Benefice, I would like to thank Bill Elkington, David Wright, Frank Hunter, Jane Rymell and Sheena Warren for their diligence, openness and honesty during the six months they sought to find a way forward for our Worshipping Communities across the Benefice.

In June the four PCCs met again, to consider the proposal of the Working Party, recommended by Archdeacon Richard, that we embark on a three year trial that would see us pioneering new style of Parish governance in 2018. This was agreed almost unanimously, with just one single abstention out of all the 46 PCC members in the room.

The 3-year Trial sees the caretakership of our buildings separated from the Mission and Ministry. Maintenance of the buildings will be overseen within each Parish via local fundraising, gift aid and donations, while the mission and ministry will now be shared via a Benefice PCC (BPCC) representing every Church and Community.

A new Benefice PCC made up by a representative and Churchwarden from each Parish, elected by those on their Parish electoral role, these members along with the Benefice PCC officers will work alongside the incumbent organise and oversee all Ministry and Mission in the Astwell Benefice.

They will also be responsible through allocated parish income and fundraising for the payment of Benefice Share to the Diocese as well as oversight and payment of all expenditure incurred in the provision of the day-to-day Ministry and Mission in the Parishes. In practice this means that through its Committees (Worship with Mission Outreach; Finance; Social and Fundraising; Pastoral Care), it will organise and oversee all worship and mission, pastoral care and outreach both at a Parish and Benefice level, it will organise Benefice fundraising and social activities and the setting and management of the Benefice Budget.

Each Parish will now have its own Buildings Repairs Insurance and Contents Committee (BRICC), which has delegated powers from the Benefice PCC to oversee and encourage the Parish income streams such as regular giving, collections, fundraising and donations. Chaired by an elected Churchwarden, each Parish will invite a group of members of the parish electoral role to make up this BRICC.

The BRICC will be given a 12-month budget for the maintenance and repair of their Parish Church and the payment of all utilities and insurance cost for this building. This will be made up of a percentage of their income. They will also manage and oversee a commitment to a set payment of the remaining allocated income stream as an agreed "Parish Contribution" to the cost of the provision of Ministry and Mission.

As with every Trial, there is a process in place that allows any Parish to leave the trial at any time, but it is hoped this will not be needed.

This pioneering, ground breaking Trial would not have been possible without the variety of lay leadership and commitment to serve that encompasses this Benefice. I offer my heartfelt thanks to everyone who is working so hard to make this Trial the success it deserves to be.

When it comes to collaborative ministry we have truly demonstrated it here in the Astwell Benefice and so my thanks go to all our former PCC membership, but especially to my Churchwardens and Representatives – Bill, Malcolm, David, Penny, Edwin, Howard, Sue, Clare and Frank for all they do and for their constant support in my own Ministry.

And special thanks to Howard and David, who are both stepping down as Churchwardens this year. Your service to our Churches and the wider Benefice has been wonderful, thank you.

To our Benefice Treasurer, Alice Palmer, who has one the hardest jobs of any and to our Parishes Admin, Sarah Rudkin, who has now taken on the job of BPCC secretary, Bill Elkington who has become our new BPCC lay Chair and to Judith Elkington who is our new BPCC Communications Officer.

Ladies (and Bill) I am internally grateful to you for all you do, for your patience, understanding, help and support.

Finally very special thanks go out from the whole Benefice to our Benefice Reader Wiggy Smith, who has been such a wonderful a support to this whole Benefice as well as to her Rector, who is also very grateful for all she does.

Our Trial has now started (on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2018) and as with everything new we are tweaking it as we go along, but I am very proud that this small Benefice is pioneering a new way working together that would allow us to sustain our sacred spaces while freeing up our worshipping communities to seek growth and new mission opportunities.

My prayers, (and I hope yours too), are with us all for success in the future.

### **Creating a Vibrant Christian Community & Making a Difference in Society.**

As always our wide range of Christmas Services, from Carols and Christingles to Nativities and Communion proved as popular as ever with our communities, quadrupling our normal attendance at most churches. As such we are following the pattern emerging across the country.

And that same pattern shows our traditional congregations remaining frustratingly static, dipping further during holiday time. But, I am delighted to say that we have bucked the trend by seeing a steady increase in those in our congregations who travel to worship together at our Benefice wide services and events.

The feedback is that these are hugely enjoyable, especially for the smaller churches, who love worshipping with larger congregations, but that the 11am time is too late at start for many. There has been a great deal of concern raised, that by hosting Benefice Patronal festivals, our Parishes lose regular services for much of the summer months and that the irregular nature month by month of our service pattern is confusing our congregations. Also we have found that the Bring and Share Feasts at these services have proved less and less popular, despite a real attempt to get our congregations to enact these real Biblical traditions and so we do need to look at other ways to continue this concept of a shared meal as part of our Worship fellowship.

Outside of our Benefice Worship, we continue to offer a wide range of services, that is unseen in many rural parishes, with everything from Prayerbook Communion, through Parish and Holy Communion to our lay led services and fresh expression such as Breakfast and Family Church.

Our service pattern could not be as extensive or universally appealing without the help of all those who lead and organise our lay led Village Praise and Prayers, Matins and Breakfasts. Thank you to all of you for your discipleship and service.

And to all those who help prepare and clean our churches, sing in our choir, play the organ and help out with hospitality, reading, intercession and all the other many jobs that need doing. THANK YOU!!

I also want to thank those with "Permission to Officiate", who lead services when I am away, but especially to the tireless help, advice and support that was offered to me by the Reverend John Roberts, who finally decided to really "retire" from the Benefice after so many years of wonderful service. He will be missed.

2017 has been another busy one for Occasional Offices, we had 4 Weddings, 7 Baptisms and 4 confirmations, but also sadly we had 10 funerals. We have also held a number of burials of ashes.

Sadly this year we lost too many former and serving PCC members, Alan Clube, Barbara Rawlins, Wendy Wilmott, along with a former Lois Weedon, Weston and Wappenham Rector The Reverend Canon Frank Pickard, our beloved organist and choir member Ann Harman, our former Churchwarden and current PCC member and Helmdon Sacristan Celia Terry and Shirley Holt the wife of our former Churchwarden Gerald.

While Heaven is better off for their presence we miss them all and thank God for their service to these Parishes.

Outside of Regular services, services at times like All Souls and Remembrance are as popular as ever and our Rogation Service still proves to be as popular as ever and I thank our Rogation Committee for their work to make it such a success.

We are growing our discipleship through our Lent and Beyond Lent Bible Study courses along with our Holy Week Offerings all of which have seen increases in attendance.

The Churches are very much part of the communities they serve.

We have a good relationship with our Village schools. My thanks go out to the Head Teachers and staff and of course pupils for their constant invitations to get involved in school activities, for having me lead assemblies and for their wonderful Christmas and Easter services in the Churches.

Outside of our schools our work with families and children continues and I must thank those who organise and lead our Parents and Tots groups and our Messy Churches in Syresham and Helmdon. Particularly Judith, Bill and Alice.

I am still very proud of our weekly Benefice Hope Centre Food run. Volunteers from both parishes form part of the rota of drivers collect donated food from the Wolverton Mission in Milton Keynes and transport to the Hope Centre in Northampton to allow the homeless of that city to have a free meal once a week and I thank Barry for his organisational work to keep this going and to all those who offer their cars and time to deliver the much needed food.

I know the whole community is grateful for the wonderful coffee mornings and lunches run by our churches, that provide a much-needed community gathering so thank you to all who host them.

And to those in every Parish who helped to create our Benefice wide Wedding Fair and Celebration of Marriage at the end of June, thank you. It was lovely to see the churches looking so beautiful and share memories looking at the dresses and albums so many donated to the weekend.

Then there's the outreach we provide in time and care –thank you to all who visit and care for those in need and for letting me know when someone is in need. Thank you to all those who visit those in need, as well as to our Village "Trustees" in Lois, Syresham, Wappenham and Whitfield, who organise the distribution of Christmas plants, gifts and financial help.

As Church communities we constantly reach out to all those who live in our Parishes through the hospitality through our many and varied social events and thank you to all those who help to organise these and for all those who turn up to support us.

Please know that however you do contribute to God's work here in the Benefice you are valued and playing your part in the whole mission of God to this village and beyond!

### **The Future**

As with all democratic decisions, this new approach may not appeal to everyone, but it is something that has been backed by those you elected to represent you and as such we truly ask that you give it your prayerful support.

Whilst we don't want this to be just about raising money, it is of course central to our success. And this depends on your support and commitment to regular giving, as without this we cannot hope to continue to support all our churches and our Ministry and Mission and be capable of supporting full time ministry here.

And we need your physical presence, at services and at fund raising events, as well as inviting neighbours and friends to swell numbers.

Already our Social Committee has organised the first of what we hope will continue to be successful Benefice Fundraisers, while our BRICCs have been freed to concentrate on raising funds in-Parish and are on the case.

But we also need Parishes to commit to supporting those who serve on the BRICCs as well as their Representatives to the BPC. Our Trial will only succeed if those in our congregations support those who have stepped forward to offer their governance and commitment to a new better future.

And speaking of this future, our Benefice Worship Committee has been addressing the feedback we have received from our parishes on service provision and have created a new service pattern for our future growth, which will begin in May.

A table of service is attached to the end of this letter for information.

Our work has only just begun and if we are to succeed then we need the support of everyone who worships with us. But success brings with it rewards. It hoped that the Astwell Benefice will prove the template for other rural Benefices not just in this Diocese but throughout the country to copy.

As I have said before, we may be small, but we are mighty and God has clearly blessed us as pioneers and this year we have worked together with his help to find a vision and an action plan for the future of ministry and mission in these parishes that can be available to all.

I pray that with your support and prayers and with God's continued help, led by the Spirit, with Christ alongside us, we will lead the way in working towards a future that furthers God's Kingdom here in the Astwell Benefice.

**Amen**

**Reverend Carole Peters**  
**The Rector of The Astwell Benefice.**

## **2. Financial Reports and Audited Parish Accounts – Financial Statements**

### Addendum 1.

- a) Helmdon
- b) Lois Weeden
- c) Syresham
- d) Wappenham
- e) Whitfield
- f) Benefice

### **3. Safeguarding**

The updated Policies and Practise Guidance for Adoption was circulated to all members of the Benefice PCC in January. A preliminary audit of the Safeguarding Practice across the Benefice was drawn up and circulated for comment. There are several areas which the Benefice needs to improve its Safeguarding practice which will start with the adoption of the new policy at the APCM. Once adopted this policy and practice will need to be displayed and implemented.

A key area which is already under review is the Safer Recruitment section, volunteers within our benefice will be reviewing role descriptions and making self-declarations. A wider range of roles will need a DBS check and all activities where we engage with children or vulnerable adults will need a risk assessment.

**Rachel Wheeler**  
**Safeguarding Officer**

### **The Adoption of Safeguarding Policies in compliance with Legislation**

#### Addendum 2

- 3.1 Benefice Statement on Domestic Abuse
- 3.2 Diocesan, Parish and Cathedral Church Safeguarding Policy
- 3.3 Church of England and Methodist Joint Policy on Safer Recruitment
- 3.4 Promoting a Safer Church (Children, young people and Adults)
- 3.5 Code of Safer Working Practice

### **3. Deanery Synod Report**

**March 16<sup>th</sup> 2017 - Aynho Village Hall** The Rural Dean Simon Dommett led the Opening Prayer and welcomed Bishop Donald- Bishop of Peterborough to Synod. Bishop Donald outlined his Ministry prior to arriving at Peterborough highlighting that innovative forms of worship enabled young people in particular to hear of Christ's Ministry. He recognised that rural parishes benefit perhaps from the older congregations more, whose diehard members prefer the 'old' ways and change is not welcomed. He is not against the old ways if you can fill a church with them. BUT we must think of the future and encourage the younger persons. Too often the parents of today's children know nothing of the Bible stories and the Lords Prayer. The hall was packed with standing at the back an interesting talk but should have a larger venue when the Bishop comes.

**18<sup>th</sup> May - St. Leonards Aston le Wells** The Deanery standing committee was elected. Synod received a report updating them on the Diocesan Synod of 12<sup>th</sup> March. Synod was make aware of local training course and encouraged to share these so people would attend and benefit from them.



There was the introduction and Launch of 'Thy Kingdom Come' initiative backed by the Archbishop of Canterbury <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

**4<sup>th</sup> July - St Mary's Moreton Pinkney** Synod met to celebrate what God has been doing in our deanery during the past year and to pray for his blessing on our endeavours for the coming year. Each benefice or parish was invited to share their good news and to ask for prayer for their future plans. Some of these are codified into Growth Action Plans and some into general mission and outreach. Deanery Prayer cards were given out for parishes.

**11th October 2017 - St Peters Brackley** Our Annual Deanery service was lead by Lay members of Synod, recognising that we all have a shared ministry. The service started with a reflection on a form of Celtic worship. Connie Coleman, Lesley Palmer, Jane Bullock and Bill Elkington then led the worship with prayers and readings. Hymns were accompanied by Rev Geoff Moore, Alan Perkins, Sue Yates and Lesley Palmer. A number of members were greatly affected by the sincerity of the worship and calmness of the surroundings.

A voluntary collection for Christian Aid raised over £200 for the Rohingya refugee crisis. A bring and share supper was enjoyed in the Church extension afterwards.

**Bill Elkington, Sheena Warren,  
Karin Smith (Wiggy), Claire Bonner**

#### **4. The Hope Centre**

The Astwell Benefice has continued to take responsibility for the delivery of food items to the Hope Centre in Northampton. The number of volunteers is now 25 but there is still room for more! We all feel it is one of the most worthwhile things we do to help others. In our yearly giving the Hope Centre delivery amounts to over 150 hours of contribution.

The delivery takes place weekly on a Tuesday and involves picking up a variety of products, fresh fruit, cakes of all sorts, vegetables, bread, croissants, fruit juices etc. from Faith Dimensions in Wolverton. The volume of food can be quite staggering often including huge personalized birthday cakes which somehow have not been collected – very odd!

The Hope Centre literally could not cope without this delivery. It enables them to provide free meals for their clients on at least two days in the week.

**We are almost at the point where an individual is only called upon to do two runs a year. So you could be just that person who joins us to make that happen. If you are interesting in joining us please call Barry Peters-King on 01327 860 089**

**Barry Peters-King**