



The Astwell Benefice

Helmdon with Stuchbury and Radstone, and Syresham with
Whitfield, Lois Weedon with Weston and Plumpton and Wappenham

Finance Committee – Minutes 30/6/25

PRESENT: Alice Palmer, Clive Johnson, Philip Thompson, Ann Netten, Sue Timmis, & Hugh White

APOLOGIES : Paul Stothard, Clare Bonner

MINUTES

We agreed the minutes from 20/1/25

MATTERS ARISING

- Adjustments to accounts had been made by AN P & CJ
- MP letter regarding VAT has been written but was in the event not needed at the present time.

PARISH & BENEFICE ACCOUNTS

Benefice

Benefice expenses have been almost covered by incoming fees so far this year. The secretary's rate of pay was increased in April to slightly more than the living wage.

We have paid 47% of our *Parish Share*, this is excellent so far but we are aware that Whitfield are likely to have a shortfall of over £2500 and we are unlikely to receive more from the Benefice Social and Fundraising committee leaving another shortfall of just over £3000. AP advised that there were some discussions at BPCC level taking place to address this. It was agreed that any adjustments to Parish Share allocations and other changes should be left to the BPCC or Wardens meetings as in the past.

Let's Shine was very successful with a current profit of £17,762 with a bit more to come which should take the community fund to just over £19000. It was noted that donations from the committee almost matched this. HW suggested that this significant amount should alleviate giving donations for individual parishes.

Syresham

Syresham's finances are in good order at the moment have paid 51% of their Parish Share to date. Collections are down but this is partly due to one member of the congregation transferring to standing order payments.

They decided not to have a full fete this year due to the Let's Shine events happening in June, but did run the teas for the Gardening Club Open Gardens event, this raised £367. They also held a concert in June which raised £250.

They need to pay £1500 each quarter on top of their standing order to meet the Parish Share. They have £1000 in hand for the third quarter.

They have completed paying for the Steeple works, apart from a loan of £13000, and are now looking at getting some other quinquennial works done. These largely include works to windows. CJ PT & ST recommended Rachel Aldridge to look at this work.

The charitable donations to date are actually from the 2024 Christingle. Community donations include a regular gift to the Syresham Times and a contribution to the Gardening Club from the teas.

Whitfield

AP had updated Whitfield accounts with some allocated funds from their Friends who are contributing towards insurance and some corrections to the 2024 carry forward. This leaves them with a balance of £1489. They have paid 25% of their Parish Share. It was decided not to top this up this quarter as they are receiving £190 regular giving, paying £230 by standing order to the Parish Share, will need to find £555 for the insurance over and above the Friends contribution and around £110 to cover utilities plus £240 to cover the standing order. This leaves £584 plus anything that comes from collections or further fundraising. There should be some gift aid to come in so we will review next time.

Action AP to circulate updated accounts.

ST said they were disappointed with the response from the village to the churchyard breakfast that took place last week. HW mentioned the possibility of becoming a festival church in which the church would focus on festival services and might get buy in from the community. Whitfield do get good support for Harvest, Christmas and some different folk to Remembrance. ST commented that with only one service per month they were heading towards a festival church anyway.

CB had sent in the following report:

*I'm sorry I am unable to attend the meeting this morning, so am sending this report.
Thank you for all your comments, I feel it was worth airing!*

As you say money from collections will never cover the parish share. We can only pay what we have, as Alice says we haven't paid our full share for years, but this doesn't help our morale, either way the burden falls on the other Parishes!

Just to put others in the picture; Sue and I met Paul & Hugh in November to discuss our options i.e. becoming a Festival Church, dropping or changing services etc. no decision was made at the time. When the new rota was circulated in March Whitfield was only allocated one service a month.

Here are some stats re services and collections over the last couple of years.

2023

Morning Prayer - 6 services – Collection £28.00 – attendance average 4.7

Holy Communion – 12 Services – Collection £195.15 – attendance average 6.2

2024

Morning Prayer – 8 services – collection £161 – attendance average 6.1

Holy Communion – 15 services – collection £275.60 – attendance average 6.9

So think just we carry on as we are, pay what we can, and look at the stats again at the end of the year!

The committee agreed that it was for the BPCC or Wardens to make decisions regarding the allocation of the Parish Share and Whitfield status.

Wappenham

Regular giving is still strong in Wappenham, collections are down on last year - but are usually better in the second half of the year anyway. The Tove Valley contributions are helpful - with the caveat that utility bills are up due to the costs of hosting them.

Previously allocated funds have been spent on fabric project such as replacing lightening conductors, checking the alarms and fire inspections.

Churchyard maintenance is paid for by the Parish Council. There have been some comments about overgrown areas but this is a Wappenham Parish Council decision to keep these in place - not the church council. Ian Chapple is going to provide some seeds to help introduce some wild flowers to these areas.

There are some other works that need addressing such as a broken gate. There was also some discussion about items added to graves and softwood seats being placed by parishioners that eventually collapse. Some other detritus is being removed. Whitfield and Syresham are affected by problems of dead flowers/ wreaths - it was agreed that these could be removed, PT suggested any ornaments might be kept in the church in case they were asked for at a later date.

PT noted that there is no Friends group in Wappenham now but money that would have gone to Friends is held in the restricted funds of the church.

Helmdon

AN reported the Regular Giving is still in transition in Helmdon from standing orders to PGS. Collections are down in Helmdon, however gift aid was very positive largely due to some donations that the church believed wouldn't be eligible being found to be eligible, meaning 3 years worth of gift aid could be reclaimed and paid towards the Parish Share.

Fundraising is just getting started, there has been a bingo evening and in July there will be Open Gardens.

The Friends of the church have agreed to contribute to getting the churchyard wall repaired, they hope for a grant from the parish council towards this. The Friends held a highly successful and popular Safari Supper this month.

Lois

CJ reported that the Lois finances are in a healthy position. Regular giving has increased and eight people have transferred to PGS. They are hoping more folk currently paying by standing order will agree to transfer. Collections are, as with everyone else, down, but again usually improved in the second half of the year.

There have been a few small donations and fundraising via coffee mornings. There is lots more fundraising planned: A rectory cheese and wine party, Harvest supper, July tea party and a race night in September.

Lois have agreed to pay a regular £850 per month which should mean they meet the Parish Share.

There are various fabric issues to be sorted out particularly the damp issue in the north and the parapet wall on the north aisle that has collapsed. These should be addressed before any inside work is done. CJ had received two quotes, one for £19000 just to address the parapet wall, the other £20000 to address wall plus other issues such as replacing down pipes to resolve damp issues. It was noted that repairs may not need a faculty but any changes would. CJ has a list of trusts to apply for grants to fund some of this work.

£540 was spent on a tree survey. The trees are sound. Some of the trees will be pared back the cost of which will be contributed to by by the Friends.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

We reviewed our Terms of Reference and decided to make no changes.

AOB

PT capital from the bar at the Queen concert was used for the Beer festival however the net profit will eventually be given to charity. Wappenham should get some funds from the Beer Festival

CJ Lois Weedon village held a successful and popular May Day event. It was not economically successful so the church will probably not benefit financially, but the event was so well received it is hoped that it will continue in future years.

AP commented that the Syresham Gardening Club open gardens is advertised widely and the church have started planning their fete to coincide with this to boost footfall at both events.

CJ asked if the results of the Let's Shine Community fund would be communicated widely. It was suggested that results be sent to the Towcester and Brackley free magazines for maximum reach. HW thought this was a good idea and would share it with the committee.

Action HW

NEXT MEETING : December 1st 11am at Vine Cottage.