



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 Benefice PCC Meeting Monday 20th January 2025

The meeting opens with Prayer

1. **Present:** PS, FH, WS, JE, BE, ST, HW, SW, AP & SR
Apologies: BG & PB
2. **Approval of minutes** of previous BPCC meeting held 7th October 2024. These were approved unanimously, with no matters arising.
AP – raised the issue of the possibility of VAT being charged on places of worship. She urged everyone to write to their MP, and PS suggested a standard letter be produced so that this was made easier for people to do.
JE – announced that she would not be standing for re-election as Benefice Safeguarding Officer in May at the APCM. HW thanked her for all her hard work.
3. **Committee and Parish Reports:**
There was no discussion arising from these reports, except the Worship Report from HW. He raised the possibility of the Benefice Worship Committee being resurrected, to discuss types of service/worship, and PS suggested this should be a 'Task & Complete' group, and not used for detailed discussion of services, as previously. AP asked if the 'Planning' spreadsheet would be circulated regularly by SR for approval by email instead. This was confirmed. **Action: SR**
4. **Looking to the Future:**
HW began the discussion by saying that the churches in the Benefice should try new things.
BE - Helmdon would welcome some new hymns and services
AP - most of their congregation (Syr) wanted to keep what they are used to, but she realised they would have to try some new things as well.
SW - Wappenham had 2 new congregation members, but they liked traditional services and worship.
PS - had completed his survey of worship/services in the Benefice, and that an average of 3.5 services were regularly held each week in the Benefice, and that there was a lot of time given by lay people to make this happen.
AP - tradition and 'a sense of time and place' is important in rural communities.
FH - he was now having to take over the Matins service at LW and did not have the capacity or energy to think about new services at the moment.
HW – maybe 1 or 2 HC services (at Helmdon & Syresham) should be stopped to give capacity for other types of services.
PS – the attendance rates of 18–24-year-olds has changed very little over the years, and over the whole Benefice; almost no attendance from under 16s, except pet services and Messy Church, and Helmdon does have some younger attendees at Children's Church.
The average attendance at Benefice Services is 36 – 40 – maybe there should be more of these, but the usual problems with 'not travelling' and missed services at the other churches were pointed out.
HW then moved to discuss **Outreach in the Benefice**. What do we do for the others in our communities? Syresham and Wappenham had answered this question in their reports to this meeting.
PS- had found some possible ideas for how the Benefice could help the local community, one

of which was a 'Parish Nurse', who could attend people medically, but also provide help in other practical ways, similar to a Support/Outreach Worker.

FH/HW – maybe the money raised by 'Let's Shine Festival' could pay for this. SW remarked that issues such as Employment law, NI costs etc could mean this was problematic. FH said he had spoken to other local fundraising organisations such as Rotarians, Round Table etc, who were having a hard time at the moment, and in some instances were reducing their operations/closing down.

HW – said that this conversation showed that this group was trying to think of others and that this was positive and should continue.

It was suggested that more Prayer/Bible/Discussion groups in the parishes might be of benefit, eg. at Wappenham, and this was greeted positively.

HW then raised the subject of '**Giving**' , and charitable donations by the churches – he said this could and should increase. There were some special services where funds for a particular cause were raised; at other times a percentage of the parish total raised was donated. There were mixed feelings, with AP saying, for example, that she gave to charities on a personal basis, and that the money she gave to church was to be spent on Parish Share and church activities. HW said we must be radical and that the 'Let's Shine Festival' was a good start.

HW said he had been approached by the leader of Deddington 'Boys Brigade' about coming to speak to the Benefice. Who should he talk to? SW suggested that maybe they could take part in the 'Let's Shine Festival' somehow. **Action: SW/HW**

FH – asked what the outcome of the discussions/meeting at Weston Chapel on 14th December had been. HW gave a list of items noted (**HW to add them to these minutes please!**) **Action: HW**

HW – asked that the Prayer Meetings be re-advertised in the PN **Action: SR**

SW – said the new date for the Benefice Quiz was 11th April at Syresham. AP asked for help with the food to be served. **Action: All**

5. **Dates of 2025 BPCC meetings:** Mon 17th March, Mon 7th July, Mon 6th October and Mon 19th January 2026. All at 7pm, Wappenham V Hall. SW to book Hall. **Action: SW**

Date of 2025 APCM: Monday 19th May 2025. Vestry Meetings should be held by 12th May. SR to circulate a timetable of actions leading up to APCM, including election of officers and renewal of Electoral Roll etc. **Action: SR**

6. Any Other Business – there was none.
7. The Grace was said and the meeting ended.