



The Parish of Eccleston and Pulford

Meeting of the Parochial Church Council
Wednesday 29th January, 7pm, at Pulford Village Hall

Minutes of the meeting

Rector: Rev Dr Stephen Torr
Secretary: Jeanette Howe
Treasurer: Bridget Marsden
Safeguarding: Hilary Garrard
Pulford Church Warden: Sue Payne
Eccleston Church Warden: Stephen Hutchinson

Other Members of PCC (in alphabetical order):
Bob Hughes
Nayland Southorn
Margaret Walker
Rachel Williams
Paul Williams

Apologies for Absence:
Terry Brightmore
Ben John
Garth Jones

1. **Opening Prayers** led by Revd Steve Torr: centred on Ephesians reading on unity.
2. **Apologies for Absence** as above
3. **Draft Minutes of the last PCC**: Proposed by Bridget, seconded by Nayland; all in favour.
4. **Matters Arising:**
 - a. Gift for John - Hilary is still looking into this and liaising with Mo.
 - b. 80th anniversary of VE Day in May - our new headteacher, Kathryn, is happy for us to work together to celebrate this together. A commemorative service was proposed followed by a picnic or refreshments in church/grounds. The event could be themed, possibly 1940's. People could dress up in colours red, white and blue. It was suggested that the PTA might look after refreshments.
Action: Rev Steve to look into the feasibility of a VE day commemorative service.
 - c. For later in the year, there is also the 150th birthday of the school to be celebrated in September or October to be tied with the sensory garden opening. The Duke and his wife have been invited - could the Duke's mother come too?
 - d. Church cleaning
Action: Rev Steve to request volunteers from Messy Church parents
5. **Financial Report**

Financial concerns were highlighted with 2024 once again showing a deficit for the year (£3812) and the 2025 budget projecting a loss of over £12,000, due partly to increased maintenance costs of running two Listed Churches. We start the year with only £7k in the current account and £8k in reserves.

- a. The Diocese is requesting a fuller picture of the church as well as a financial understanding. The diocese emphasised the need for proper trustee's report and accounts, including aims, objectives, and future plans.

Action: Bridget will prepare a draft ready for Revd Steve to add the church aspects.

- b. We will need the auditors for one more year after which we can offer reciprocal checking of accounts with other treasurers in the Diocese.
- c. Insurance quote from Trinitas £7559 (without metal theft protection), ecclesiastical £9750.

Action: Everyone was happy for Bridget to purchase the cheaper option of the Trinitas policy.

- d. Eaton Estate Trust Fund

Action: Bridget to ask Naim to get their security person to speak to Revd Steve about security for the church.

- e. It was agreed to renew the contract for another year with Eon for the Pulford electricity.
- f. Revd Steve asked about fees for energy used in weddings and funerals and it was suggested a fee increase to £50 per service to cover increased heating costs.
- g. It was suggested that it might be cheaper to replace the storage heaters in the Eccleston church vestries for electrical heaters with timers - fixed heaters are more efficient.

Action: Bridget and Steve H will look into this. St Mary's maintenance trust may fund part of this expense.

6. Mission and Future of the Buildings

The Church's financial situation was discussed, and the need to face reality, together with the importance of focussing on mission and growing people's relationship with Jesus. Members of the group mentioned that at times it felt that all we are doing is maintaining buildings. Although a positive recent outcome was the success of Messy Church with 50 to 60 regular attendees raising the profile of the Church to non-Church going families and their children. Other community-based activities such as the Summer Fete were also mentioned as a great success.

The group considered the financial impact of maintaining two Listed Buildings with such a small parish population, and the potential need to reduce the Parish Share.

- a. The central question should be: is what we are doing helping us to grow in faith and helping others to meet Jesus? Messy Church is a good missionary outreach, which allows people to understand about Jesus, but they are unlikely to join our traditional church services. How can we continue to do mission with the resources we have? We are running two listed buildings with a parish population of under 900. In comparison, Huntingdon and Handbridge only maintain one building each, with parish populations of 14,000 and 8,000 respectively. If we were not looking after Pulford church, we would have saved around £9000 in 2024. Revd Steve felt the buildings are a distraction to our mission; with buildings which are not fit for purpose, not eco-friendly, and very cold; we need to be responsible with our limited resources.
- b. We needed to explore reducing the parish share in the short term without risk, whilst we explore the options for the future. It was suggested that there may be a two year limit to continue as we are with both churches. The Archdeacon,

Mike Gilbertson, has stated that we could reduce the parish share in the short term, but this may impact on whether we receive another incumbent after Steve, although the Church could always revert to paying the full Parish Share again, once the finances are back in order. One solution to the problem of having to maintain two Listed Church Buildings was seen as having to make the very difficult decision to close one of the Churches. Since Eccleston has very close ties with Eccleston Church of England Primary School (and the Duke of Westminster), the church most likely to be closed would have to be Pulford.

- c. We can use other premises for church services in Pulford, such as the village hall.
- d. Asking for further funds needs to support God's mission; we cannot justify such requests simply for church maintenance, which is the position at the moment.
- e. Should we decide to close one of the churches, we would have to apply to the Diocese/Church Commissioners and then there needs to be a consultation process. If there is opposition then we have to consider further. If not, the church is handed back to the Diocese, who will want to be involved in the consultation. The graveyard would be handed over to the council who would then be responsible for the maintenance. Revd Steve explained further that the church commissioners are not interested in the financial aspect, just whether we can justify closing the church based on whether two buildings are necessary to cater to the spiritual needs of the parish.
- f. There was discussion around how we can continue to be a church in this place without maintaining a grade 2 listed building.
- g. Revd Steve explained that the diocese will expect the PCC to lead the consultation process, involving both churchgoers and the wider parish community. The timeline for the process could take 12 months (or potentially much longer given how busy the DAC are).

Action: Revd Steve will get in contact with the Archdeacon to see how we move forward as we explore the process of closing a church.

Action: Rev Steve suggested setting up an extraordinary PCC meeting to discuss the next steps and involve the Archdeacon for guidance.

Action: Bridget will speak to Sharon in Finance at the Diocese about reducing our parish share.

- h. When decisions and plans have been made, we can let other people in the community know through the parish council.

7. Warden Reports:

Pulford

- a. Pulford report was received digitally. With regards to the legacy of £5000 and a donation of £2000 per annum from the Lady Edna Wilson Trust, Revd Steve felt there was no need for an Aumbry; the current PCC policy is not to put up a plaque to those who support the church financially. One idea proposed was a general acknowledgment of the donor's generosity through a special service that mentioned her by name (Like the service at All Souls in November).

Action: Revd Steve will to speak to Mr Ellis to greater understand how we can honour the memory of his mother.

- b. We have a new water meter in the undercroft.
- c. Pointing needs to be done.
- d. The fallen headstone is now safe and no longer a concern for the church.

Eccleston

- e. Eccleston documents were sent by Steve digitally; apologies given by Jeanette as all Steve's PCC documents ended up in her junk box. Steve brought to our attention the highlighted elements of the report.
- f. The Eccleston Church Warden mentioned the upcoming work needed to the church including work already done since the last PCC meeting. The leaves

have now been cleared from the roof and gutters; however, a section of guttering fell off the church during this process. This will need repairing/ replacing and refitting to the church. The List B application has now been finally approved with regard to tree pruning so, pending Estate approval to help with the cost, we can go ahead and allow the tree surgeon to cut back the tree at the front of the church and the trees at the back of the church.

- g. Although most of the old moth-eaten carpet has been removed, there is still a section under the altar that needs removing.
- h. Upcoming work includes servicing of fire extinguishers, the church clock, and the cleaning of the Stained Glass Windows.
- i. The urgent need for a new Tower Captain was raised due to Andrew Pridding stepping down from this role. The PCC thanked Andrew for his many years as Tower Captain.
- j. The removal and capping of the chimney on the roof of Eccleston Church was discussed at length. This was seen as non-essential at the present moment, given that it had been given temporary pointing by the builders while they were clearing the roof of leaves.
- k. A log book has been started to log all work done to Eccleston Church including the names and contact details of the handymen as well as the cost of the work.
- l. Covering service 23/2/25: Revd Steve suggested Steve H email Stefan at Christleton who is the secretary of the Deanery Chapter as he can put out a request for holiday cover. The first priority is to have a service of Holy Communion and the Diocese would not be happy to have someone lead a Holy Communion by extension.

Action: Revd Steve will revisit whether we can conduct communion by extension for future services when we find it difficult to arrange cover.

8. Safeguarding Report:

Hilary presented her safeguarding report, emphasising the need to address safeguarding procedures and ensure compliance with the Church of England's guidelines. The group discussed the importance of following the already laid-out procedures for dealing with safeguarding concerns and allegations. We had a parish safeguarding plan which we can transfer to the dashboard, but we need to action items already mentioned before we can move along the dashboard. Everyone agreed the importance of following the appropriate procedures in the handbook:

- a. Everyone needs to do Basic and Foundation training.
- b. PCC must complete their training at the level stipulated, if not this could affect membership. They must also ensure they have done their DBS.
- c. Rachel and Hilary are keeping a log of where people are up to and will send reminders.
- d. Leadership safeguarding training needs to be achieved by wardens, tower captains, choir leaders, and anyone in senior leadership positions.
- e. What happens if someone is unable or unwilling to do the training - Revd Steve to speak to Hilary about how we deal with this. It was suggested that an inability to complete mandated training might indicate that the person is not suited for that position. It was noted that safeguarding training is a crucial part of roles, and Revd Steve would discuss individual situations with Hilary outside of the meeting.
- f. Applying safer recruitment process and people management: we do not have to deal with this retrospectively, just going forward, based on conversations with the head of safeguarding. New members of the PCC must go through the safer recruitment process. The differences between safer recruitment for voluntary and employed posts was explained, and the

need to consult the safeguarding team was discussed. It was suggested to document model role descriptions to make the process easier for potential volunteers.

- g. We need to organise a meeting around creating a healthy culture with a wider group, including people from the congregation.

Action: Hilary will work with Jeanette to move this forward and to organise a special meeting.

- h. Revd Steve is giving members a deadline of the APCM.

Action: Everyone to get up to date with their training and DBS.

9. **Deanery Synod Report:** No meeting since last time; the next meeting will be 13/2/25.

10. **Any Other Business:**

- a. Hilary introduced her idea for a 'Christian Curiosity' group, due to start with a meeting on March 26th at Eccleston Village Hall. The plan was outlined, which would include a column entitled 'Questions and Answers with 'Doc Torr' in the parish newsletter, featuring responses from Reverend Dr Stephen Torr. Hilary hopes the initiative will attract both religious and secular individuals to Christianity and foster interest in the Christian Curiosity Group. The importance was emphasised of sharing Revd Steve's theological knowledge with a wider audience.

11. **Date of next Meeting:** 19/3/25, 7:00pm at Eccleston village hall

Action: Hilary to book the hall.

12. **APCM:** Wednesday 21st May 7:00pm at Eccleston village hall.

13. **Closing Prayer:** Rev Steve concluded the meeting with a moment of stillness, then prayer, while the PCC members offered the discussion to God and asked for guidance and peace.