

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Pentney held on Thursday 23 May 2024 at 6.00pm at Pentney Village Hall

Present: Mrs R Littlehales (Chair) Mrs K Harvey Mrs L Rons
 Mr B Howlett (6:40) Mrs C Dallas (6:35) Mr M Parker
 Mrs P Wells Mr D Johnson Mr Tanios Watfa
 Anne Neary (Executive Headteacher)
 Mr A Smith (Church Warden)

Also present: Clerk

1 Mrs R Littlehales, Chair of the Parish Council, was Chair for the meeting and welcomed everyone.

**2 To receive and consider apologies for absence:
County Councillor J Moriarty has sent his apologies.**

2 Minutes of the Last Annual Parish Meeting held on 16 May 2023
These were approved as a true record by those present.

4. To Receive Reports from the following organisations:

a) The Nar Valley Federation of Church Academies

Mrs Anne Neary, Executive Headteacher, Nar Valley Federation of Church Academies, Castle Acre, Narborough and Sporle C of E Primary schools

Structure;

Number on roll: 90 (across four classes, mixed Nursery/Reception, mixed Year One/Year Two, mixed Year Three/Four and a mixed Year Five/Six). This includes our nursery children who are not full time and 4 new children who have joined during the course of the year.

Context; National and Narborough

National average:	Children with additional needs 13% (same as last data set)
22/23 – most recent 4% (big increase)	Children with additional needs at a more complex level
data available	Children who are entitled to free school meals: 24% (c. same)
20% (c. same)	Children who speak English as an additional language:

Castle Acre NOR 90 (increase of 6 since last report). 1 child worth 1.1%

Children with additional needs: 25% (increased since last report)

Children with additional needs at a more complex level: 5% (increase of 4% since last report). Sharp increase in new Rec children in Sept with additional needs and also in children entitled to free school meals

Girls 55% (about the same since last report)

Boys 45% (about the same since last report)

Children who speak English as an additional language: 4.4% (same since last report) (Norfolk 13%)

Children entitled to free school meals: 22% (increase since last report)

As you can see, the demography of our school has altered slightly, with notable points being as follows:

- having more children who have additional needs (Special Educational Needs) There are children waiting to be assessed and more children expected with September's cohort
- Level of children entitled to free school meals has grown over time – this doesn't always equate to a higher level of need, but often does, and this requires more pastoral support staff, which as three small schools we don't have.

Staff: 1 secretary, 1 teaching Head of School (position currently Acting) Y5/6, with 1 Teaching Assistant, Y3/4 1 teacher and two Teaching Assistants (one for a child with specific needs), 1 teacher in Y1/2 with one Teaching Assistant and 1 teacher in N/R with 3 Teaching Assistants, 2 for children with specific needs. 3 Lunchtime staff. One caretaker. One cleaner.

This year has seen some in year changes, with one young teacher leaving the profession; whilst she was very happy with us, she was just not happy with the demands of the job. Our Head of School retired from leadership due to personal reasons (but is now teaching with us elsewhere in the Federation) and one teacher left and was replaced by another. This is reflected in all schools at the moment.

Notable strengths;

- Family school – our children really do get on with each other and care about each other.
- Exciting and engaging curriculum that does interest children and supports their learning as validated by our Trust reviews.
- Supportive families with a dedicated small group who work hard for our school
- Children making good progress from their individual starting points.
- Children generally making good progress; small cohorts always look like anomalies in terms of statistical releases, but reasonably good attainment in most cases and growing in strength. The Y3/4 class are very vulnerable, but then these are the children who missed their Reception and Year One during the pandemic.
- Residential visits have been re-established with Y4 camping at Westacre Theatre and working with Sadie and her team to put on an abridged version of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in a day and a half! Y5 and Y6 again are going to Whitwell Hall to take part in many exciting outdoor activities, including lighting their own fires and cooking their own tea on it, river dipping, conservation work, shelter building, Bat walks, archery and kayaking.
- Good support from Governors for central areas of school – schools to varying degrees, with small schools hit worst, are increasingly dependent on these not just for added extras, but for day to day functioning.
- Attainment – from comparison with national company PixL that the Trust use, we are mostly in line with the national for each year group, with the exception of some subjects in the current Y3,4 and Y1.

Currently focusing on;

- Pandemic impact continues to affect Y4 and Y3 nationally and we are working to develop their emotional health offer
- Continuing to support our families and develop that reputation for being really supportive for all children and particularly those with additional needs
- Writing is still very much their area for development to reach above national.

- Developing the children's spelling through a new spelling scheme in KS2.
- Work continues on developing a Forest School area in our lovely grounds. This has stalled due to lack of time.
- School budgets nationally continue to be a real barrier and our wonderful PTFA are to be thanked hugely for their contributions to all our curriculum trips, eg to Bure Valley Railway, Walsingham, Norwich Castle, the Cathedral etc as without them these would not take place due to the cost of the coaches.

Future work;

- Continue to develop our grounds

We continue to be keen to be a genuine member of our community and support whatever we can, as well as benefiting from being involved in community events etc. We're really happy to be hosting a visit from a pupil from many years ago who now lives in New Zealand- Michael Martin - if anyone knows him and wants to come along, please do contact me! Please do ask us to be involved; we won't always know what is happening as neither myself nor Miss Maskell live in the area, but will always want to help out and take part.

Thank you for your support for our school and our lovely children; we're very proud of them, their learning and their values.

Cllr Littlehailes thanked Mrs Neary for her report.

b) PCC

Mr Andrew Smith gave the following report:

Background

The parish of Pentney is one of 6 parishes that form the Nar Valley Benefice within the Diocese of Norwich, the Archdeaconry of Lynn & the Deanery of Breckland.

Generally, we hold two Sunday services per month; a service of Holy Communion on the 2nd Sunday & a more informal service of Morning Praise led by our lay members on the 4th Sunday of the month.

To support a full-time priest the Benefice has to raise the so-called Parish Share, payable to the Diocese of Norwich, which covers salary, pensions, accommodation, parish expenses & Diocesan support & administration. In the year ending 31st December 2023 the amount required from the whole Benefice was £67,063 of which Pentney's allocation was £7,382. For year ending 31st December 2024 the total amount required has risen to £70,420 of which Pentney's allocation is £7,704.

Historically the Nar Valley Benefice has always met this obligation in full, the only Group in the Deanery to do, so and which is divided up amongst the parishes roughly according to population. In 2023 the allocation was again met in full, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so & this year will present a real challenge. Failure to do so usually means adding on more parishes to the Benefice – it is not uncommon to have as many as 12 parishes in one Benefice - which then becomes a struggle for the incumbent priest and to the detriment of the communities they serve.

Together with our annual insurance premium of around £1500 these two items make over 80% of our annual expenditure of around £11,000 which sum is increasingly a struggle to meet. Please particularly bear this in mind when it comes to our annual Gift Day in October in October. Our Gift Day is an opportunity for the wider village community to support & appreciate the existence of the parish church even if they are not churchgoers themselves. Sadly, this event is not well supported in the village and the burden then falls ever increasingly on the small & aging regular congregation.

Personnel

Pentney PCC held its annual parish meeting on 10th April 2024 and Andrew Smith & Sue Neep were re-elected as churchwardens for the coming year supported by 5 PCC lay-members of the church community.

Currently the post of Rector is vacant, Stuart Nairn having retired after 30 years of ministry to this group of parishes in November 2021. During the Vacancy officiating at services and basic duties are being undertaken by the Rev. Richard Howells, supported by our retired clergy as necessary. Richard is a non-stipendiary priest living at South Acre but who has a full-time job in publishing. His contact details are to be found at the end of the Nar Valley News.

A New Incumbent

We are delighted to announce that a new priest has been appointed to serve the Nar Valley Benefice. Her name is Angela Hammet & together with her husband Chris they will be coming to join us from their current Benefice which is centred on the town of Towcester in the Peterborough Diocese. Angela takes up her appointment on Wednesday 31st July 2024 at 7.00pm with an induction service is to be held at Castle Acre church & led by the Bishop of Norwich. All are very welcome to attend.

Angela & Chris will live at the new rectory purchased by the Diocese on Main Road, Narborough, a few yards to the west of Narborough cross-roads. To meet the requirements for rectories within the Diocese, one of the twin garages has been converted into a publicly accessible office for use by the new rector.

The Diocese has decided to sell the old rectory, however an area for car parking will be retained as an essential requirement for the future of the church at Narborough.

Pastoral Care

The churches in the Benefice continue to operate normally during the Vacancy and to serve the communities in which they are located. For Pentney the contact details for the churchwardens are printed on the back of the Nar Valley News and they are freely available to deal with any enquiries or to pass them on to the correct person or authority. Alternatively, the Rev Richard Howells can be contacted directly until our new rector takes up her post.

Fabric & churchyard

Pentney Church is in relatively good condition for a building which dates back to before the Norman Conquest. The PCC has a policy of addressing issues to do with the fabric of the church as matters of urgency if we are to retain this historic building for use by future generations. The major issue of the condition of the south roof was addressed in 2018/2019 by installing new slates at a cost of nearly £100K mainly funded by grants from several charities. The Church of England requires all their churches to be thoroughly inspected every 5 years – the so-called Quinquennial Inspection – and the last one was completed in November 2022. This has identified several items that need urgent attention which in basic summary are:-

- rotted timbers under the leaded roof to the top of the tower.
- leaking iron guttering generally which is having a detrimental effect to the stone walls
- the poor condition of the concrete drainage channel running around the external base to the church which is cracked and leaking and again causes dampness & deterioration to the walls
- slate repairs to various areas of the north roof and the porch together with other essential but more minor repairs.

Our Architect has drawn up tender documents to seek quotations from experienced builders & these are now to hand and put the total cost at just under £20,000, including Architect's fees & other associated costs. This figure does not include VAT which is recoverable under the Department of Culture Media & Sport's Listed Places of Worship grant scheme.

We have initiated a fund-raising process in which grants have been sort from funding charities & to date we have secured well over half the funds needed & are confident that the full amount can be raised to allow work to proceed in the Autumn.

We have a willing team of church members and supporters who keep the building clean and arrange flowers and the like. We also tackle specific issues in the churchyard mainly to do with overgrown graves and memorials.

Several fund-raising initiatives occur throughout 2023 including the Great British Breakfast event at Little Abbey Farm and a Christmas Craft Fayre & Grand Draw held in November in the Village Hall. However, the small number of volunteers involved are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain this level of commitment to fund raising.

We have an open-door policy, and the church is normally open during daylight hours and which, judging by the comments in our visitor's book, is much appreciated.

The PCC is very grateful to the Parish Council for the support that it gives in maintaining the churchyard and for help with specific issues such as the upgrading of the church path and restoration work on the war memorial.

Cllr Littlehales thanked Mr Smith for his report.

c) Pentney, Narborough & District WI

Mrs Kate Harvey gave the following report:

The Pentney, Narborough & District WI meet every fourth Wednesday in the Month at Pentney Village Hall at 2.00 pm. We meet formally 11 times a year, often choosing a break in December but a Pantomime visit or trip to the theatre often proves popular. Our WI was formed in 1945 and is a member of the Norfolk and National Federations of WI's. We have over 30 members.

Our AGM was held in February 2024, but due to another WI National edict has reverted back to our traditional November Annual Meeting. (All very complicated!) this is where Member's names are collected to join the Committee, and from those names a vote is made to elect a President. Hello, I am the President for 2024! The names put forward to join the Committee this year was one of the highest recorded, which bodes well for the future of our WI.

To give you a flavour of our 2023 - 24 programme and events. We kicked off the year in January for a New Year's get together for a lovely meal at Abbey Farm, Pentney. The WI campaign for this year includes topics on dental health matters, impacts on poor housing, say "no" to gambling advertising and improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system. Our vote went to dental health matters which addresses the chronic shortage of NHS dentists and people suffering health issues as a result.

We've played bingo, listened to a talk on behind theatrical scenes of theatre and movie sets, and we look forward to talks on Tulipmania family law, will and LPA, dyes on your doorstep, a look at a London fashion house, reflexology, songs from films and musicals by a Mezzo Soprano and a look at festive season myths and legends. We were part of the 750 members attending the WI federation meeting in Norwich and amongst other people heard from Janet Street-Porter. This is only a fraction of what we do, there are many invitations from other WI's which we often support, not to mention the activities organised by Norfolk Federation WI.

Our WI Spring and Autumn lunches continue to impress, with other WI's from all over the County enjoying the occasion.

It is the Village Hall 90th anniversary this year & WI have booked two tables to support them, one selling cakes & biscuits and the other selling handbags and scarves. Some of the money we raise we have donated to Pentney village hall committee, and to a local food bank who were very grateful for our support. We also

supported the Pentney Parish Council by providing refreshments for the Neighbourhood Plan Open Day.

All in all, we are a happy, thriving, enthusiastic, forward thinking and positive WI of which I am proud to belong to and thankful for all the help support of its Members.

Cllr Littlehailes thank Mrs Harvey for her report.

d) Village Hall

Mrs Bell was unable to attend this evening but has sent the following report:

CHAIRPERSONS REPORT

We have had 3 of our trustee/committee members resign this year for various reason and I would like to put on record thanks for all their hard work in the time that they have been members.

I would also like to give thanks to Marion who was secretary for many years and Pat who was treasurer for all their hard work that was much appreciated.

The accounts have been prepared and have been presented to the committee. The accounts show an increase from the previous year.

• INSURANCE

Review of policies and update has been carried out. It is now insured with a specialist village hall insurer at a more favourable premium.

• HEALTH & SAFETY

Annual risk assessment has been undertaken

- Updated policies reviewed and include**
- H & Safety**
- Equality**
- Safeguarding**
- Complaints**
- Conflict of Interest.**

The above are in the process of getting printed and a folder will be placed in the village hall on completion.

ELECTRICITY

Anticipate a significant increase as previously locked in for 3 years prior to energy price increase however commercial market prices were lower than domestic and fixed for 2 years with an 8% saving and additional £200.00 referral

MAINTENANCE

**PAT and Fire Extinguisher testing and service have taken place
Purchased two refrigerators.**

Ongoing maintenance - Works to Emergency lighting , replacement and additional lighting to main entrance , internal and external. Refrigerator sockets.

Urgent roof repairs are needed to be carried out and we are awaiting quotations.

We are continuing our membership with Community Action Norfolk as they have provide us with guidance on updating policies etc

Promotion of the village hall is being carried out through social media and our new website in addition to the Nar Valley News.

Cllr Littlehailes thanked Mrs Bell for her report.

e) Pentney Charity Trust

Mrs Kate Harvey read the following report.

The Trust is made up five Trustees, a Land Agent and a Secretary. Trustees include:
Ex-Officio Trustee who is the incumbent of the Church of Parish of Pentney
Two Trustees nominated by Pentney Parish Council
Two Trustees that are co-opted at a special meeting.

The Land Agent attends the meetings reporting on the management of assets and land owned by the Trust.

In 2024 we will meet five times plus any additional extraordinary meetings held for specific issues.

The Pentney Charity was formed by the amalgamation of some five local charities, the oldest dating back to the early 1800's. The Trusts primary role is to "provide relief to residents in Pentney who are in need by making grants of money or payments for services to reduce need or hardship". The grants can be to individuals and organisations within the Parish of Pentney. This is done by applying the income of the Charity.

Anyone in Pentney may apply providing they are on the voting list and have lived in the village for over two years at the time of application.

Each application is considered by the Trustees and it usually consists of a "one-off " payment either paid to the individual or the service provider.

One of the Trustees is appointed as a Treasurer who looks after The Charities finances, and an appointed internal examiner, who reviews the accounts on a quarterly basis. Accountants provide an independent examination of the accounts and produce an annual report and financial statements.

In light of the continued rises in the cost of living, Trustees agreed to hold the value of the discretionary grant of £150. Articles were placed in the Nar Valley News, asking people who lived in Pentney if they were aware that Pentney has money in Trust specifically to help and support the residents of Pentney.

Main activities for achieving objectives:

- 45 fuel grants were awarded up to year end 2024, totalling £6750.
- £550 was given on other compassionate grounds.

The whole process is confidential, discretionary and considered on individual merits.

We have had significant outgoings on the repair and maintenance of rental properties and land, this is on-going. Also, a ten-year woodland management plan has started with a felling licence and contract in hand.

- Spring 2022 x 1 / Winter 2023 x 46 fuel grants were paid - total of over 7,000.
- £2,775 grants were given on other compassionate grounds.

The whole process is confidential, discretionary, and considered on individual merits.

Cllr Littlehales thanked Mrs Harvey for her report.

f) Police

PC Paula Gilluley had advised that she would send a report, but nothing has been received.

g) Borough Councillor

No report received.

h) County Councillor

Cllr Moriarty had sent his apologies and sent the following report.

Following the election and gaining the most Party votes, we, the Independents, set about forging a “Partnership” with the Greens and Lib. Dems and coming to an “Understanding” with Labour Members.

Our Partnership Members then set about agreeing a Corporate Plan, Objectives and actions to complete for the financial year. All of which can be found on the Borough Web Site.

The first challenge was settling the wage claim from staff in a serious cost of living crisis, compounded by, for professional and managerial staff, a serious issue with recruitment. For example, our Planning and Enforcement team was, and is, seriously under strength and we were not attracting sufficient recruits. This Borough agrees its own pay awards based upon national trends but also our specific services. After much heated debate and opposition from both the Conservative and a Labour Member the award was agreed which included increasing the upper limit of pay scales by 10%. We had the immediate budget for it and with permanent employees we will reduce the cost of Agency staff. But with a pay, insurance and pension bill of just over £20m, the need for efficiencies and productivity is of paramount importance. We also faced a challenging financial position with our revenues not covering our costs such that, although we had the budget agreed for the pay award, we were facing having to use nearly £2.5m, for general operations, from our reserve savings. This situation is not sustainable, and a Council's number 1 statutory priority is to be a going concern and we had to build that fact into our future plans.

Nevertheless, we did not withdraw any of our community help and set aside over £500k to help communities, with examples such as West Norfolk Community Transport (Go to Town), the Kings Lynn Ferry and the many festivals across the

Borough, including one of the largest free festivals in Europe, Festival Too. Smaller capital and revenue grants were available via the Norfolk Community Foundation, Councillor Community Support Grants, the Defibrillator programme, Prosperity Funds and the big contributor CIL.

We suffered extra costs through the bad weather and Storm Babet which has put back our building programme and unfortunately delayed our anticipated rent revenues and capital receipts as well as increasing costs to manage. With further problems anticipated in coastal defence and flood protection. We have, however, maintained expenditure on our climate action plan.

In October Royal Assent was given to enable Councils to increase Council Tax on second homes and bring forward the surcharges on Long Term Empty Homes. The extra tax this could bring is around £18m with some £7m coming from West Norfolk. By law, 80% of this is allocated to the County with around 10% going to the Police Commission. We have started the process of negotiating, with our District Counterparts (apart from South Norfolk who do not wish to take up this opportunity) a common base position to seek return monies as grants from the County. We will be able to use these grants for whatever purpose but at present we are focussed on supporting homes for the affordable and rental markets. 2nd home owners may wish to sell and therefore the council tax for some homes may follow traditional allocations. If some can pass criteria for converting their home into a business, the Borough, but not directly Parish/Towns, will receive revenue through business rates. October also saw the Assent given to new Government Procurement rules following Brexit and we are getting ready to implement the changes from this October '24. In terms of Finance decision making, we recognised that Kings Lynn had no Town Council and could not set precepts or apply for Grants. This was a result, I believe, of the 1974 Local Government changes and to a larger or lesser degree, has made this Council a little Kings Lynn centric. We have, this year, given the Kings Lynn Area Committee Executive powers under the chair of Cllr. Jo Rust.

Late last year we also secured Council agreement to a Council Tax Support Scheme for 24/25 whereby working people who cannot earn or have saved sufficient money to meet certain criteria, will receive 100% support for their council tax demand.

In February we agreed, at a tortuous meeting with last minute motions, a budget for 24/25. The financial settlement from the Government is still not sufficient for our outgoings and we still may have to use some savings but fingers crossed, we won't. We did not wish to reduce our service levels, so all Members have been asked not only to accept a cost reduction programme but to increase fees and charges within their portfolios and which are not regulated, by at least 10% or to market levels if less. The previous Administration, in an election year, had frozen fees but we could not sustain this, our revenues from our services total around £20m, with the big contributors being our buildings lease and rent roll, the car parks and the parking admin service we offer across the County, the crematorium and various Licences. An increase on these revenues was essential with inflation at that time running at 11%.

We are also facing increased costs from the Internal Drainage Boards which, combined, levies over £3m on our cost base or around 43% of our Council Tax take. Last year we received £205K to contribute towards these costs and we await our allocation from the £3m set aside for IDB costs by the Government. At one time they supported the whole cost but have gradually reduced that support to virtually zero. The Secretary, Michael Gove, has said that a long term solution will be found but so far it remains buried. 31 small Districts, including us, have formed a Special Interest Group (SIG) to lobby for this offer to be realised; but no luck so far although we continue to press our 2 MPs.

The external audits of our Annual Statement of Accounts are very much in arrears but we have had an unqualified opinion for the 19/20 Accounts and the auditors were going to fast track 20/21 and 21/22 but that hasn't happened and 22/23 is still on the stocks. We are in the process of completing the figures for the financial year just ending and I trust the results will show that our financial prudence has borne fruit.

5. Parishioner Questions

Mrs Littlehailes asked if there were any questions.

Mr Tanios Watfa asked when the Parish Website would be up and running the Clerk advised that she was having issues as she was not a designer but hoped to get up and running over the weekend.

No further questions.

6. Correspondence and Any Items for Parish Council Agenda

No Correspondence had been received.

7. Date, and Place of next Annual Parish Meeting.

Wednesday 21st May 2024 at 6.00pm.

With no further business the meeting closed at 19.05pm.