

Poulton and Pulford Parish Council

Clerk to the Council: Peter Gosmore, 5 Castle Hill, Pulford, Chester CH4 9EY - Telephone 07711808082

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held on 4th August 2026 in Pulford Village Hall at 7pm

Present : Cllr David Ewins (Chair), Cllr Ashley Murray, Cllr Glenys Evans, Cllr Margaret Fay, Cllr Nick Franklin, Cllr Richard Fair, Cllr Keith Board, Church representatives (Sue Payne and Steve Hutchinson), our new CWAC councilor Stephen Mosley and approximately 40 members of the public

1. Possible Closure of St Mary's Church, Pulford:

- 1.1. The Chairman, Cllr David Ewins, opened the meeting and gave a short overview of the situation. He explained that the meeting had been called to hear the views of those present on the possible closure of St Mary's Church, Pulford, and to look into ways of trying to keep the church open. The meeting was then opened to general discussion.
- 1.2. The Chairman outlined the church's importance to the parish and the long history of worship on the site. He noted the potential challenges of maintaining the building and the need to establish the financial and practical position clearly before decisions were made.
- 1.3. The Parish Council had written to the Bishop of Chester with several questions. The Bishop had sent his blessings, advised that the matter would be passed to the Archdeacon and indicated that a fuller response was awaited. It was felt that action, as well as encouragement, was now needed.

2. Matters raised in discussion:

- 2.1. It was suggested that a five-year business plan should be prepared to explore ways of keeping the church open and, if this could not be achieved, to identify an appropriate future role for the building.
- 2.2. Cllr Ashley Murray's work on the issue from the outset was acknowledged. He reported that the only complete accounts currently available for inspection were for 2023/24, together with some aspects of 2024/25; the PCC had promised the full 2025/26 accounts shortly. He felt that the Church authorities might prefer closure, despite this ending more than 800 years of continuous worship on the site. He stressed that all possible options should remain open.
- 2.3. Were the church to close, the possibility of a Church Conservation Trust route was mentioned, although it was recognised that there is substantial competition for this treatment. It was also suggested that the building could be difficult to sell and that the community might need to consider how it could be used.
- 2.4. The meeting noted the potential heritage and visitor interest of the church, alongside the adjacent motte-and-bailey castle and the archaeological dig at Poulton. It was suggested that *Marketing Cheshire* should be encouraged to promote Pulford, given the number of visitors to Chester each year. Better publicity, an effective tag line and a stronger social-media presence were also proposed.
- 2.5. Possible future uses of the church (if it were to close and be deconsecrated) were discussed including civil weddings, noting that the Grosvenor Pulford Hotel hosts a significant number of such weddings each year.

- 2.6. A further approach to the Duke of Westminster was suggested, given the historic involvement of the Grosvenor family with the church. It was noted that the Duke's agent had previously indicated that Grosvenor Estates had "no appetite to purchase the building", but it was agreed to explore other options including extending the maintenance trust fund the Grosvenor Estate has with Eccleston church to Pulford St Mary's.
- 2.7. The Churchwarden, Sue Payne, reported that the Church required considerable repair and maintenance work and that the spiritual side of the church was under pressure as worship attendance continued to fall. She agreed to share details of the recent quinquennial inspection carried out together with the latest quotations thought to be about £6,500 for boiler work and £15,000 +VAT for roof repairs. The Chairman noted that grant funding may be available for improved boiler provision. The need for toilet facilities was also discussed and considered important if the building were to be used more widely.
- 2.8. It was noted that the churchyard is separate from the church building and following any closure responsibility would for its upkeep would pass to the parish council.
- 2.9. It was emphasised that the Church Bank carpark is owned by the parish council and not by the church or the Eaton Estate.

3. Agreed next steps:

- 3.1. The Chairman invited volunteers to form a *Friends of St Mary's Pulford* group, to help develop ideas, explore funding and grants, support communication and consider the future use and upkeep of the church.
 - 3.2. The following people volunteered: Stephen Shakeshaft, Simon Nock, Ann Davies, Neil Turner, Cllr Ashley Murray, Peter Gosmore, Andrew Nelson, Cllr David Ewins and Steve Hutchinson.
 - 3.3. Email addresses were collected from those willing to remain involved. The meeting recognised the need to harness the energy and skills of local people in taking this work forward. A local builder is to be asked for his personal input.
4. **Close of meeting:** The Chairman thanked those present for their contributions. The meeting then closed.

Extraordinary meeting of PPC re potential church closure

7pm 4/8/26

Pulford Village Hall

Welcome

Intro

- PCC public consultation mtg Mon July 22 (n>50)
- Officially announced planned closure St Mary's Pulford
- Stated reasons
 - Annual shortfall in maintenance budget ?10k
 - Defunct boiler - CofE carbon zero replacement costs - 80k
 - Dwindling congregation
- PCC covers Eccleston and Pulford – cf Eccleston
 - No maintenance trust fund / no toilets / no choir /ltd. burial space / no linked school

Background

- Christian worship on site >800yrs
- 1st stone church built 16th C
- rebuilt by Grosvenor family early 19th C with current John Douglas bdg 1884 – gift from 1st DoW
- financial contribution from DoW after 1991 fire

Process

- PCC submit application for closure
- DAC and ultimately Bishop of Chester draw up *Pastoral Church Building Scheme*
- Statutory 28 day consultation
- Decision made – closure / amend / withdraw

Action to date

- Detailed letter delivered to Bishop of Chester John Tanner. cc Archdeacon & Rector addressing / requesting
- Alternatives to closure
 - Details of PCC accounts
 - Costings of repairs and permission for alternative quotes
 - Explore use of church for potential funding activities
 - Details of church title in liaison with Grosvenor Estate
- Potential uses following closure
 - Limited as grade 2* listed in Conservation Area

Reply from Bishop

- Very appreciative of community involvement
- Passed on to Archdeacon for a full response

Reply from rector Stephen Torr proposing separate timetable

- Argued case for choosing to close Pulford rather than Eccleston church
- PC to present a strategy to PCC in 3 months on 31/10/26 before PCC decides
 - No mention of requested partnership between community and church
- PCC offer us to;
 - Review 2025 accounts and projections
 - Discuss repair and likely maintenance costs, allow alternative quotes
 - Approach the Grosvenor Estate

Suggested Plan tonight

- Establish a local “Friends of the Church”, ? as a subcommittee of the PC
 - Meet monthly initially
- Look at funding issues
 - Activities whilst church open
 - Available grants
 - Crowdfunding
 - Other fundraising measures
- Look at Church finances and cost of repairs
 - Understand likely ongoing maintenance costs going forward
 - Discuss ongoing viability
- Liaise with Eaton Estate
 - Clarify legal aspects of title and any reverter clause
 - Could they extend Maintenance Trust Fund to Pulford
- Burial Grounds
 - Maintenance costs
 - Any previous structural and safety reports
 - PCC to take over or hand on to CWAC?
- Responsibility for the church
 - After closure – Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF)
 - Longterm – sold, repurposed or transferred to Churches Conservation Trust (CCT)
- Future use of church building after any closure
- Ongoing communication with community
 - Email list, WhatsApp group
 - Set up a dedicated website or use Parish Council site