Pitsford Annual Parish Meeting 2026

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Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of Pitsford Parish on Tuesday 12th May commencing at 7.30 pm held at the Pitsford Village Hall. Members of the public are welcome to attend.

Attending: 12 attending (Cllrs SP, MP, MH, JS, KI & CF); WNC Cllr Sue Gaskell, MOP x 5

Item 1.: Welcome address and introductions by the Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr Mary Podesta

Apologies for absence: Cllr Alastair Kimbell; WNC Cllr John Slope; Martin Flanagan (Pitsford Village Hall),

Item 2.: Approval of the minutes of the 2025 Annual Parish Council Meeting (available from www.pitsfordvillage.co.uk)

Minutes were approved and signed by Cllr Mary Podesta

Item 3.: Annual report from the West Northants Councillors John Slope, Sue Gaskell, Peter York

Report on West Northamptonshire Council by Cllr John Slope

A New Administration for West Northamptonshire

In May 2025, residents of West Northamptonshire elected a Reform UK majority administration, ending around 20 years of Conservative control. The new Cabinet, led by Council Leader Cllr Mark Arnull, was formally appointed at the Annual Meeting on 15 May 2025. The administration set out its priorities: financial transparency, value for money, visible community leadership, and long-term sustainability of services.

The incoming administration conducted an early review of the council's inherited financial position, which included approximately £679 million of legacy debt, two Section 114 notices issued in 2018 (the statutory equivalent of bankruptcy), and around £10 million per year in debt interest payments. This context has shaped every major financial decision taken since.

Finances: A Balanced Budget Despite Significant Pressures

Setting a legally balanced budget for 2026/27 was the administration's most pressing challenge. The year began with an anticipated £50 million shortfall, driven by rising demand for adult social care, children's services, SEND transport, and temporary housing. This was the most difficult budget-setting process since the council was created in 2021.

The outcome was a balanced revenue budget of £1.02 billion (or £464.3 million excluding the ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant), with £29 million of new efficiencies identified. This brings total savings found since the council's formation to £144 million. Key points:

- Council Tax increased by 4.95% – reduced from the originally proposed 4.99% following public consultation feedback.
- Over 3,000 residents responded to the budget consultation – the highest engagement ever recorded for this process.
- A first-ever online Budget Question Time was held in January 2026, giving residents direct access to the Leader, Cabinet Members, and senior officers.
- Resident feedback directly shaped final decisions on garden waste charges and car parking, where the original proposals were modified.

Capital investment of £163 million is planned across 2026/27 to 2030/31, covering highways, education, housing, and regeneration. A further £82.5 million will be invested through the Housing Revenue Account in 2026/27 alone.

Housing: Investment and Taking Services Back In-House

The council manages over 11,000 council homes across West Northamptonshire. In November 2025, Cabinet approved a phased transition to bring housing services back under direct council control from the arms-length management organisation Northamptonshire Partnership Homes (NPH). Back-office functions moved in-house in April 2026, with the full transition due by April 2027. This change follows the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and a tenant and leaseholder consultation which received responses from 22% of all tenants – a strong result for this type of consultation.

Investment in existing and new homes continues at pace:

- By 2031, the council will have invested £364.4 million in housing, including new builds, estate improvements, heating upgrades, and disabled adaptations.
- Three major housing development sites – including Belgrave House – were refreshed and progressed by Cabinet in June 2025, with a focus on affordable homes and best value for taxpayers.

Town Centre Regeneration: Greyfriars Takes Shape

The Greyfriars regeneration project in Northampton town centre entered a significant new phase during the year. In summer 2025, the council signed a formal Development Agreement with ECF (a joint venture between Homes England, Legal & General, and Muse) to deliver this 25-acre brownfield site. Plans include:

- Up to 1,200 new homes – a mix of affordable, build-to-rent, and student accommodation.
- New shops, cafés, restaurants, workspaces, and leisure facilities.
- A new public park with an outdoor amphitheatre, improving green space in the town centre.
- An estimated £1 billion in economic value and up to 7,000 construction-phase jobs.
- An additional £21 million per year in local spending once complete.

A planning application is expected in autumn 2026 following further community consultation. Residents across West Northamptonshire are currently being invited to comment on the refined masterplan.

Community Safety

The council secured its first-ever Partial Closure Order on an entire block of flats in Northamptonshire in May 2026, covering St Stephen's House in Spring Boroughs, Northampton. Granted by Northampton Magistrates' Court following an application by the council's Community Safety Team in partnership with Northamptonshire Police and NPH, the order restricts access to tackle persistent anti-social behaviour including drug use and threatening conduct in communal areas. It remains in force for three months.

Highways, Transport and Active Travel

Work continued on active travel improvements across the area, with consultations on the Abington Active Travel scheme (Phase 3) and the council's emerging Local Transport Plan, which ran from December 2025 to January 2026. Residents were asked for their views on improving walking, cycling, and bus connectivity across West Northamptonshire. Capital investment of £8 million is allocated to highways and waste in 2026/27, contributing to over £15 million over five years for road maintenance and infrastructure.

Families, Communities and Local Plan

Investment in Best Start Family Hubs continues, with new and improved facilities being developed across West Northamptonshire to support families with children in their early years. The council also maintained its support for a wide range of community events and activities, from Armed Forces Week to Black History Month, with discretionary grant funding available to voluntary and community organisations.

Work on the updated Local Plan for West Northamptonshire, which will run to 2043 and set out how homes, jobs, and infrastructure are planned across the area, is progressing with public consultation on developer contributions completed and a Regulation 19 consultation planned. The plan includes policies to protect valued green spaces nominated by local communities and to bring forward regeneration sites.

Devolution

In March 2026, the council discussed options for becoming part of a Foundation Strategic Authority, following the Government's invitation to areas outside the Devolution Priority Programme. An Extraordinary Meeting of Full Council on 13 March 2026 considered the available options. The preferred approach remains a South Midlands partnership with North Northamptonshire Council and neighbouring authorities, which would support investment and decision-making around transport, housing, skills, and the Oxford–Cambridge Growth Corridor. A formal expression of interest was submitted.

Item 4.: Annual report from the Chairman of Pitsford Parish Council

At the end of last year, we said goodbye to Steve Arnold, who had served as a parish councillor for many years. Steve's passion for environmental issues and his extensive knowledge of trees and conservation helped guide the council towards a stronger commitment to protecting and enhancing our local environment. Although he is greatly missed, West Northamptonshire Council's

invitation for parish councils to appoint a Climate and Nature Champion has enabled us to continue this important work. We are pleased that Alastair has taken on this role, helping to build on Steven's legacy.

A significant part of the council's work is dedicated to keeping the village looking its best. Last year, we appointed Paul Thomas as our "Lengthsman" — a traditional term for a parish handyman. Paul has done an excellent job maintaining flower beds, carrying out additional mowing, and helping care for the new cemetery. For larger projects, we have continued to employ specialist contractors to manage tree work and maintain village walls.

Cllr Furniss has also been instrumental in improving the appearance of the Tumulus area, ensuring it was tidied and organised in preparation for the purchase and installation of a new bench. Chelsey further highlighted the condition of Pitsford's bus shelters, which were beginning to look tired, and as a result we now employ a window cleaner to keep them looking smart and welcoming.

At the beginning of this year, the council was concerned to see that the emerging Local Plan for West Northamptonshire included provision for 30 new homes in Pitsford and 1,500 in Boughton, developments which would inevitably have an impact on our village. In response, the Parish Council submitted a carefully considered and well-reasoned objection to the consultation proposals, requesting that West Northamptonshire Council reconsider both the scale and geographical distribution of new housing in the area. We do not expect to learn the outcome until the autumn.

With the support of a dedicated team of councillors who care deeply about village life, Pitsford Parish Council continues to work effectively and collaboratively on behalf of the community.

Item 5.: Financial report from the Clerk & Financial Officer to Pitsford Parish Council

Council started the year with a bank balance of £39.2K (councils are advised to hold one year's precept). The council raised a precept of £38,000, and received WNC grants for grass mowing (£254). We closed the year with £34.5K remaining. Broadly, the council spent on the following:

£1,086 Cemetery plaque
£2,196 tree maintenance work
£3,247 legal services related to purchasing the cemetery
£1,538 replacement bench for the tumulus
£26,105 Scheduled running costs
Council is about to submit the annual audit for YE March 2026.

Item 6.: Report from Northants Police (received by email)

PS Greg HARRISON continues to manage the team responsible for Daventry Town and its largest surrounding villages including Long Buckby, West Haddon and Crick. We are based at Daventry Police station and supported by the 24/7 response policing team also based at Daventry providing emergency response to the district.

The full report received by email is available on request.

Item 7.: Reports and accounts of village charities to be received (those under the Charities Act 1960)

a. Pitsford Village Hall Committee

Pitsford Village Institute Annual Report 2025/2026 (from Martin Flannagan, Village Hall, Chairman of Trustees)

We have, without a doubt, enjoyed a hugely successful 12 months, with significant improvements made to our facilities, several successful fundraising initiatives, and further recruitment to the committee.

Over the past year, several important improvements have been completed at the Village Hall. These included a complete refurbishment of the kitchen, redecoration of both the entrance hall and main hall, and the professional relaying of the rear patio area. In addition, the roof and guttering were professionally cleaned, and internet/Wi-Fi was installed to improve connectivity and support hall users.

Fundraising events throughout the year have continued to be both enjoyable and highly successful. We held two jumble sales, with our latest event in March raising a record-breaking total of more than £700. Our Curry and Quiz Night raised an impressive £800, while the annual Pitsford Calendar was once again produced by Wendy Biggs and remained a valued community project.

A new event, Vintage in the Village, was introduced in November as a clothes swap initiative and proved to be an outstanding success, raising a remarkable £1,460. Proceeds from the event were shared between Cancer Research, Pitsford School, Cynthia Spencer Hospice, and the Village Hall.

Our monthly Community Breakfast continues to be an extremely popular event, regularly welcoming more than 50 people over a two-hour period, many of whom travel from outside the village. We continually review ways to improve both the quality of the food and the overall service provided. This year, we also introduced takeaway bakes, which have been very well received and have proved hugely successful.

We were also delighted to welcome two new regular weekly bookings to the Village Hall: Yoga and Sound Bath sessions, and Slimming World. Both have quickly become successful additions to our regular programme of activities.

None of the improvements to the Village Hall facilities or the success of our events would have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the committee members and our regular helpers. The committee now stands at eight members, supported by three regular helpers at the Community Breakfast. Our youngest helper, Eli Macmillan, also contributes by baking wonderful cakes for us to sell at the breakfasts.

Looking ahead, we already have several exciting fundraising events in the planning stages for 2026/27, and we look forward to another successful year for the Village Hall and the wider community.

A summary of the accounts has been received and is available on request.

b. Pitsford Sports field & Trustees of Pitsford Sports field (Tony Miles, Chair – Pitsford Sportsfield Management Committee)

The Pavilion has now been open almost 13 years and the Pavilion and/or Sportsfield continue to be in use almost every day of the week. The present regular users are: Pitsford Pumas Junior FC - who now play on Saturday mornings and Sunday mornings and afternoons with teams covering an age-range of U7 to U18
Pitsford Scout Group, U3A Choir, Pilates Class, Keep-Fit Class. We also host Pitsford Primary School Annual Sports Day, and the school use the facilities on other occasions. We have regular private bookings for parties, both children and adults, and for meetings. With the open space of the Sportsfield we are particularly suited to children's parties, and we get several repeat bookings.

We continue to have challenges with the large number of dog walkers using the Sportsfield some of whom do not clear up after their dogs despite notices and a bin. May I once again please remind all dog-walkers who do take their dogs onto the Sportsfield that it is a village recreation and sports area, particularly for the young people of the village, rather than a dog exercising field. There is no excuse for not clearing up after your dog.

The buzzard who seems to have adopted the quarry as his home appears to be helping to keep the rabbit population under control as there has been less damage to the pitches, although it remains an ongoing problem. More troublesome are the moles who seem to take delight in popping up within the white lines of the football pitch. We will no doubt shortly be undertaking end of season pitch maintenance which may include some re-seeding and if any areas are taken out of play for a period this will be the reason.

We had to replace our heating system during the last 12 months and are grateful to the Parish Council for a Grant to help with the cost.

The Management Committee, who are all volunteers, will continue to work hard to keep this village facility clean and tidy and available for the community to use.

Accounts received by email and are available on request.

Item 8.: Reports from Pitsfords' clubs and societies (if provided) – to receive and display.

a. All Saints Parish Church (Keith Issacs, Pitsford PCC)

We are blessed to have such a beautiful church in our village, a great community asset, and all who visit are very taken with its historic architecture and welcoming vibe.
Although our congregation is small, we are pleased that we have seen an increase in attendance and we welcome those of all faiths or none to join us at our Sunday morning service at 11am and for refreshments afterwards.
We do not receive any financial support from the Peterborough Diocese and are expected to pay a contribution towards the employment of our incumbent Rector known as the "Parish Share". We pay what we can, but it is beyond the capacity of our small congregation to pay the full expected amount. All day-to-day expenses, including those for repair and maintenance, are covered by regular financial contributions, fundraising and grant funding facilitated by our congregation and PCC members.
Having completed our installation of an accessible toilet and servery area we have been able to hold several events including hosting the Wellingborough Gospel Choir in July 2023, the Northants Sings out Choir in February 2024, and the Queen Eleanor Choir in 2025. We regularly host cream tea events, the Ride and Stride programme, and Flower Festivals and the Parochial Church Council and our congregation welcome any ideas you may have for future events particularly with a cultural and musical emphasis. The church can comfortably accommodate over 250 people and has its own sound system and hearing loop.
We host several services for both the Pitsford Primary school and the Pitsford Independent school throughout the year.
We are conscious that for so long we have been continually fundraising, asking for village support, and we thank all those who have helped us meet our objectives in recent years. We would like to give something back, acknowledging that support, and we planned to provide a Dementia/Carers support group but unfortunately recent health issues among our congregation have meant that this had to be put on hold. We plan to start this shortly and we would welcome additional volunteers from our village community to help make this happen.
<u>WHAT ELSE HAVE WE BEEN DOING</u>
Having had extensive work completed on servicing our historic ring of six bells we were determined that our bells would be regularly rung and we started a new team of Pitsford bellringers in February 2023. We are delighted to report that our bellringers have gone from strength to strength with often 20 ringers joining us for practice at Pitsford on a Monday between 4 and 6 pm. We have trained ten new ringers and work in partnership with Scaldwell and Boughton Towers and with the help of several experienced Northampton based colleagues. We also have Wednesday evening practices at Boughton and Scaldwell, and access to a computer simulation programme to assist learners with a tied (quiet)bell at Scaldwell Tower. We have enjoyed several ringing day outings, ringing at six different Towers each day. We took part in the Ring for the King coronation celebrations and hosted bellringers from across the country to ring in the Peterborough Guild of Bellringers centenary celebrations on Saturday the 11th May 2024 with around 60 ringers joining us. There have also been four quarter peals rung by visiting ringers. It is an enjoyable social activity, and it is a great hobby and social occasion with making new friends, providing physical exercise, and mental stimulation. It is a fun hobby for all ages from 10 yrs upwards.
We have had our set of handbells refurbished by John Taylor Bell Foundry and hope that we can encourage more people to join the handbell choir.
We have hosted the local Beavers, Cubs and Scouts on several occasions to join us to learn about our church, to play our sets of children's handbells, the main church handbells, and boomwackers. The Scouts and their leaders were also able, if they wanted to, to have a go at ringing the big bells with the assistance of our ringing teachers and volunteer bellringers. It was a very enjoyable experience for us all.
The new cemetery has been very much welcomed, given that the old churchyard has been closed to future burials, and we have agreed for the Parish Council to install a shed in the old churchyard to support works in the cemetery.
<u>OUR NEW CHURCH PATH</u>
We are delighted to have installed our new church path which was funded by several personal donations and general fundraising. The work was completed by a local contractor. Many positive comments by villagers and visitors alike

comment on how much more welcoming it makes entry to the church, as well as greatly improving access for the elderly and those with a disability.

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

We have had two roof leaks on both flat roofs repaired with grants and donations and fundraising.
We have had to this year replaced a rotten beam in our ringing chamber and replaced the old unsafe ladder accessing the Tower with a new wooden bespoke one.
We would like to install solar panels on our flat church roof, but we would need a big funding appeal and access to grant funding for this to be achievable. Our current heating system is very expensive.
Our five yearly quinquennial inspection took place on the 5th May this year, which inspects all aspects of the fabric of the church both internally and externally. The specialist Architect was very impressed with how well the church is maintained with identifying just a few issues requiring work on the roof flashings, a constant issue due to weathering.
The installation of bollards outside the church to protect the stone walls and repairs to church walls and various tree works have been funded by the Parish Council as part of their responsibility in maintaining the old churchyard. We very much appreciate their support. We have also employed professional cleaners to complete a deep clean of the church in the summer of 2025.
Keeping our beautiful and historic church in good repair is a constant process and mainly the work of a small congregation who work tirelessly to highlight what a valuable resource we have for our village.

b. Pitsford Women's Institute (Helen Morris, Pitsford Wi Secretary)

This year has been very successful for our Women's Institute group, particularly in terms of recruitment. We were delighted to welcome several new members and now officially have a membership of 23.

Throughout the year we enjoyed a varied programme of activities and speakers. Members heard from Anthony Pile and his colleagues on the uplifting history of his Pitsford based company Blue Skies, took part in spring crafting sessions, and enjoyed an interactive "Judge and Jury" evening with retired judge Chris Tickle. We also sampled Indian cuisine, learned about the work of Rainbows Children's Hospice from Jane Burns, and welcomed Moulton based artisan soap maker Ruth, who spoke about her company, 'Fred & Betty Soaps'.

Our summer garden party and Harvest Festival were both very successful and well attended, as was our New Year Lunch at The Griffin Inn, all providing enjoyable opportunities for members to socialise. Members also took part in walks and lunch outings during the year.

In addition, the WI continued to support the local community through fundraising activities, holding a cake stall at the Pitsford Primary School Summer Fair, donating cakes to the Cynthia Spencer Hospice and organising the village Christmas lights and carol service.

We have a packed agenda for 2026, and are presently looking forward to our Laughter Yoga Session in the village hall in May.

c. Pitsford Football Club

d. Scouts

e. Pitsford School (Dr Craig Walker, Head Teacher)

f. Pitsford Primary School (Nina Robert, Head Teacher)

Attendees were invited to talk about turning streetlights off between midnight and 5am. John Oldham spoke in favour of tuning lights off. Micheal Holiday raised some concern over dark night providing cover for more nefarious activity. Some advantage to promoting dark gardens.

Item 9.: To agree date for the 2027 Annual Parish Meeting. Tuesday 11th May 2027

Meeting closed 8pm