



# CLUSTER ONE

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River Idle Benefice  
Blyth, Scrooby & Ranskill  
Oswaldbeck  
Idle & Sands



RURAL CLUSTERS

# CONTENTS

Background	3
Location & People	4
Opportunities	5
Centres of Strength	6
Idle & Sands Parish Profile	7





# BACKGROUND

**Led by the desire to share the living hope that is found in following Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3) we are on a mission to grow new disciples with compassion confidence and courage.** We believe that this vision is as relevant in the rural villages of our diocese as it is in our other contexts. We are also aware that there are some particular challenges in our rural parishes and we have spent time developing a plan that we hope will enable the church to grow and flourish into the future. While we understand the challenges in rural ministry, we are excited and motivated by the many opportunities that we see. However, the church needs to reach out to people outside of its usual congregations, grow younger and be future focused. As a diocese we are committed to supporting and developing ministry in our rural communities. We have spent time reviewing our learning and have identified several things that work well, including a focus on schools, strategic planning of resources, and the development of contemporary styles of worship, alongside the more traditional forms and styles.

We are drawing on examples of good practice in the rural where we have seen growth – Connect Church in school (Farnsfield, Aslockton); The Potting Shed Church (work with schools, children, families and youth); River Idle benefice (multi-parish benefice, with a focus on children's and families work)

We are proposing a new model that draws together several (likely 3 or 4) benefices into a new cluster. Each cluster will have a priest who will act as lead mission enabler (LME) who will lead the strategy and vision for the cluster, and priests who will be mission associates (MA) focusing on leading one of the benefices. In addition, we have proposed a combination of other roles that can support the cluster (this may include an operations manager, children and family's leader, contemporary worship pastor). These roles will be funded by our successful bid from the national church through the diocesan investment programme.

We have one remaining vacancy for a mission associate to come and help us deliver this innovative vision. This post will be time limited (initially for 3 years with a 3-year extension) with the hope that it can become a permanent post beyond this point.

**We are piloting three clusters. This pack provides the information for Cluster 1.**



## PEOPLE

The Lead Mission Enabler is **Revd Becky Hancock** (pictured right) who is currently the vicar of the River Idle Benefice.

**2 out of the 3 mission associates (Priest-in-Charge roles) have been recruited to the Blyth, Scrooby and Ranskill Benefice and the Oswaldbeck Benefice. The remaining vacancy within the cluster is in the Idle & Sands Benefice.**



There are **23 churches** in this cluster serving a population of **22,259**.

There are **6 C of E primary schools** and 9 non-church primary schools.

The villages are home to families who have lived there for generations, as well as those who have moved to enjoy this rural context more recently.

The benefices enjoy **good links to the A1 and the East Coast mainline railway** and because of new housing developments, attract those commuting to neighbouring towns and cities (Lincoln, Doncaster, Sheffield) as well as those further afield (York, Leeds and London).

## OPPORTUNITIES

We have some good links with the schools, but these need to be developed with more effective pathways to faith. Many of our churches have few or no children attending on a Sunday and few young adults, but we have good relationships that can be built on to enable greater connections.

We consider that in this cluster, initial opportunities can be found with the schools at Gringley-on-the-Hill, Blyth and Gamston.

## CENTRES OF STRENGTH

These will be places where a new worshipping community is planted, focusing on reaching younger and to new people - those who are not currently part of a worshipping community (the de-churched or un-churched), with the gospel of good news that faith in Jesus Christ brings. As recent research suggests new things tend to reach new people.

These centres will share the following characteristics:

- Create a space where people can encounter God
- Focus on those who may be unfamiliar with the church (outreach)
- Desire to build a place of inspirational worship (likely to be contemporary worship style)
- A clear plan around discipleship pathways, beginning with a generous welcome, outreach events, explorer courses and pathways that enable a clear route from initial contact to full participation.
- A culture that understands what it is to be a disciple of Christ in the rural context in the 21st Century.

A place that can act as a hub for teaching, training and social gatherings for the whole benefice.

We envisage that in this cluster, potential centres of strength could be developed at Gringley-on-the-Hill Church, Blyth or Ranskill churches and Gamston Primary School.

### **Location (residence) of the 3 mission associate posts in the vicarages at:**

- Misterton (Oswaldbeck Benefice)
- Blyth (Bylth, Scrooby and Ranskill Benefice)
- Elkesley (Idle and Sands Benefice)

## WELCOME FROM THE CHURCHWARDENS & PCC

We're delighted to share this parish profile with you and hope it gives you a genuine sense of who we are and the communities we serve. We feel incredibly blessed to live and worship in this beautiful part of North Nottinghamshire, among villages full of character and people with a heart for fellowship, service, and faith. We are especially excited to be forming a new Rural Cluster with neighbouring benefices—a fresh opportunity for collaboration that will increase capacity and provide mutual support for both lay leaders and ordained clergy. Together, as an expanded leadership team, we are committed to growing disciples marked by compassion, confidence, and courage.

Our Statistics for Mission affirm what we see around us: that God is already at work in our churches and villages. We believe this is a season full of promise and potential. As you read through this profile, we hope you'll begin to sense the opportunities here and be encouraged to consider prayerfully whether God may be calling you to join us on this journey of faith and growth.

We're praying for you as you discern your next steps—and we're hopeful for all that lies ahead.

## OUR PARISH

The Parish of Idle & Sands was formed in 2019 and contains the former parishes of Bothamsall, Eaton & Gamston, Elkesley and West Drayton which have been linked together since 1992 and Sutton-cum-Lound, Babworth & Ranby, and Scofton which have also historically been linked.

There are eight open churches within the parish, seven of which are currently offering regular services. These range from a small modern Chapel of Ease through to Victorian churches and buildings with medieval features. Two of the churches recently undertook re-ordering projects to add toilet and kitchen facilities which have enabled them to accommodate a wider variety of worshipping styles for all ages as well as making the buildings more welcoming to the wider community. All Saints' Babworth is notable as a Pilgrim Church which attracts many visitors each year, particularly from North America. There is also an additional church, Gamston St Peter's, which is now under the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. The building is closed for public worship but, following a £1.3 million restoration project, it has re-opened for visitors, special events, and school services and activities.



To complement Sunday worship in church, more informal/contemporary services and activities have also taken place in village halls around the parish. This includes Alpha and Lent courses as well as Messy Church. The churches are also very proactively involved in supporting their local and wider communities through our outreach activities. Lay leaders regularly run and support events in our parish's schools and several collect donations for the local Foodbank and other charities that meet the needs of struggling families. We also organise a monthly lunch in a village pub.

The demographics of many of our villages are changing. Whereas most traditionally served farming communities, new housing developments and the conversion of farm buildings into residential dwellings have meant an influx of younger families, particularly thanks to our area having excellent transport links which enable people to commute to work. We expect this trend to continue as flexible/remote working patterns and the desire to move out of urban areas encourage people to seek a more rural lifestyle. This brings significant opportunities to grow new worshipping communities, particularly through our schools.





## SCHOOLS IN THE PARISH

There are **4 primary schools** in the Benefice:

### **GAMSTON ST PETER'S C OF E PRIMARY**

A Voluntary Aided academy with 114 pupils on roll that is part of Southwell & Nottingham Multi Academy Trust. Ofsted Good, SIAMS Good. A significant proportion of pupils are the children of the staff at the Jamia Al-Karam Islamic Studies College at Eaton Hall which adds a multi-cultural dimension to the school. Festival services take place at the village church, St Peter's, which is able to offer 6 services per year under the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. Pupils and their families also attend worship at nearby All Saints Eaton.

### **ELKESLEY PRIMARY**

A community school with 104 pupils on roll. Ofsted Good. The school engages well with its village church through festival services and class visits to St Giles. Families in the village started to become connected with the church through activities such as Mini Church (aimed at pre-schoolers), Messy Church and Forest Church which ran pre-pandemic.

### **RANBY C OF E PRIMARY**

A Voluntary Controlled school with 110 pupils on roll. Ofsted Good, SIAMS Outstanding. The school has a strong worshipping community both at its term-time Messy Church and services at the village church, St Martin's.

### **SUTTON-CUM-LOUND C OF E PRIMARY**

A Voluntary Aided school with 100 pupils on roll. Ofsted Good, SIAMS Outstanding. The school has a strong relationship with its village church, St Bartholemew's, with classes making regular visits for activities and worship.

The Jamia Al-Karam Islamic Study College is also located in the former Eaton Hall. It offers opportunities for better understanding and dialogue with Muslims, and the churchwardens and congregation at All Saints Eaton enjoy a strong relationship with the staff and students.

## OUR MINISTRY & MISSION

Lay leaders in the parish take a very active role in the liturgical life of our churches, offering a variety of lay-led services ranging from family services, morning and evening prayer, evensong and special services such as Christingle and Hymns & Pimms. We work together closely as a team, sharing resources and expertise, and working to put together a monthly service rota which encourages congregants to travel for services between the villages whilst also meeting the needs of our community. We are supported by local serving and retired clergy for Holy Communion services and occasional offices. One lay leader is also starting Licensed Lay Ministry training in September 2025 and several have Bishop's permission to administer Holy Communion in our churches.

This combination provides the parish with a wealth of knowledge and support, assisted by very active church teams comprising volunteers from our communities. In addition to services in church, there are other areas where ministry has flowed out into our communities including house groups, messy church, school collective worship, school choirs and forest church. Pastoral care is also well supported throughout the parish with close knit rural village communities.

Alongside the church teams, there is a single PCC which meets quarterly. Members of the PCC are motivated and highly supportive of each other and keep in close contact with each other between meetings through means such as WhatsApp.



This collaboration and commitment to ensuring our parish continues to flourish during vacancy and beyond is reflected in our Statistics for Mission data:

## ATTENDANCE FIGURES

	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Christmas</b>	178	313	297	448
<b>Easter</b>	112	89	86	78
<b>Average Week, October</b>	49	52	48	82
<b>Usual Sunday</b>		94	96	118

## WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>0-17</b>	12	4	3	9
<b>18-69</b>	46	28	29	35
<b>70+</b>	67	74	59	77
<b>TOTAL</b>	125	106	91	121
<b>Joiners</b>	5	4	2	18
<b>Leavers</b>	13	9	3	3

## USUAL SUNDAY ATTENDANCE

	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Adults</b>		90	93	110
<b>Children</b>		4	3	8

## NUMBER OF OCCASIONAL OFFICES

	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Baptisms</b>	9	9	9	11
<b>Marriages</b>	9	3	4	6
<b>Funerals</b>	20	9	7	9

Seven candidates have also been put forward for confirmation since the parish formed. Our area of focus is now on encouraging families and young people to worship more regularly throughout the year through closer links with our schools.



## GOOD NEWS STORIES

St Bartholemew Sutton-cum-Lound completed its re-ordering project to add kitchen and toilet facilities in 2024. This is enabling the church to accommodate a wider variety of worshipping styles for all ages as well as making the building more welcoming and accessible. Already, the new facilities are supporting the re-vitalisation of the church, with so many new people joining the congregation that leaders are increasing the number of lay-led services each month to meet this increased demand. The facilities are also making the building more accommodating to the pre-school children who visit the church on a monthly basis, and are also helping to strengthen links with the village primary school with its Messy Church and choir. Popular special events run by the church on an annual basis including arts festivals and a Christmas tree festival, alongside a monthly church lunch in the village pub, also serve to ensure that St Bartholemew's remains at the heart of its community.

In Eaton, when the Parish Council withdrew its grant for churchyard maintenance, the churchwardens at All Saints decided to turn this financial challenge into an opportunity. They established a monthly working party where volunteers from the local community were invited to help out with mowing and weeding on a Saturday morning in return for refreshments and fellowship. This has developed into a valued opportunity for the community to come together to socialise and attracts people of all ages including many who have not worshipped in church apart from occasional festival services. It has resulted in new connections being made between people as well as with their church. Following a conversation, one regular volunteer decided to come along to an informal lay-led Hymns & Pimms service and is now worshipping regularly. These connections and opportunities to try different worshipping styles have continued to develop with the addition of toilet and kitchen facilities in 2023 and has resulted in a re-vitalisation of the church community. Congregations are growing, and in 2023 and 2024, All Saints put forward three candidates for confirmation. The church now offers all age services which attract families from the local primary school, and it also acts as a community hub in the absence of a village hall, hosting a popular monthly coffee morning, children's holiday clubs, Spring and Christmas Fayres and other events and social activities.



Elkesley is the largest village in our parish with a population of 852. It had a predominantly agricultural economy until the opening of the nearby Bevercotes colliery in the 1960s. This brought an influx of families to a new purpose-built housing estate in the village, many coming from mining communities in Wales and the North East. A primary school opened in 1961 to serve this rapidly growing population, and the school and wider community have long enjoyed close links with the church. However the closure of the colliery in the 1990s has resulted in increased levels of deprivation amongst families in Elkesley, with a third of pupils at the primary school currently eligible for Free School Meals. In recent years, work has been undertaken by church leaders to engage with and support these families. A children's book exchange was established at St Giles and toys donated at Christmas were collected by a charity that supports deprived families. A 'mini church' at St Giles for pre-schoolers and their families was established, and this grew into a popular Messy Church in the village hall run by volunteers, with food provided for children and adults. Forest Church also took place in the ancient woodland, once part of Sherwood Forest, that borders the village. Lay leaders also organised a popular Easter trail around the village which incorporated a service, food and children's activities at St Giles. These initiatives served to strengthen the links between the community and its church, and there continue to be opportunities to further develop these relationships.

Originally built as a private memorial chapel for Osberton Hall, St John's is now the parish church for the hamlet of Scofton on the Osberton estate. Despite the small population that it serves, St John's has a large congregation for its regular services which continues to grow. People from the towns of Retford and Worksop and surrounding villages are attracted not only by the church's beautiful setting, surrounded by parkland which radiates peace and tranquillity, but also the outreach work undertaken by the church to engage with the wider community. In recent years, this has included an annual Rogation Walk followed by tea and a service, summer concerts with Pimms and cream teas, a pet service and annual dog show, and an annual Road Peace service to remember those killed or injured in traffic accidents. The Allegra Voice Choir which was formed at the church in 2019 also continues to regularly perform at its services, and the year culminates with a carol service featuring a donkey who likes to join in the singing and who is a great favourite with the children! People of all ages who come to these special events and services often return for regular worship throughout the year.



## OUR VICARAGE

Our modern four-bedroomed vicarage is situated in a quiet residential cul-de-sac in the centre of Elkesley. A new kitchen has recently been installed and there are gardens to the front and rear.

Elkesley has a shop, primary school and a playing field which has recently been re-developed to add a playground, basketball court and BMX track. There is also a village hall which acts as the village pub and which hosts regular social events such as quizzes and lunches.

The village borders ancient woodland that once formed part of Sherwood Forest, and through which the Robin Hood Way passes. Elkesley lies alongside the A1 which enables easy access to the churches and schools in the parish, and there are also regular bus services which serve surrounding areas including the secondary school at Tuxford to which Elkesley primary is a feeder school.







## OUR LOCALITY

Our parish lies within a short distance of the wonderful landscapes and historic houses of the Dukeries, with several beautiful parks open to the public to enjoy. The most local is Clumber Park, one of the National Trust's top ten most visited properties, which is just 7 minutes by car from the vicarage. Thoresby Park, Rufford Abbey Country Park, Sherwood Pines, Sherwood Forest and Cresswell Crags are all less than 30 minutes away ready for you to explore. With such a rich history and acres of natural beauty surrounding, our area is one of the UK's best kept secrets.

Our parish is also situated close to the historic market town of Retford which lies 26 miles east of Sheffield, 31 miles north east of Nottingham and 23 miles west of Lincoln. As well as a market on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, it has a good range of supermarkets and shops, restaurants, pubs, two theatres, a museum, a library, excellent primary and secondary schools, several dental practices and three medical practices. Bassetlaw General Hospital is just 20 minutes away in Worksop.

The River Idle and the Chesterfield Canal both pass through the town centre. There are walks through the surrounding countryside, including the Idle Valley Nature Reserve. Opportunities for walking, cycling and running, including weekly ParkRuns, are also on offer at nearby Clumber Park and Sherwood Forest. Local activities for younger children in Retford include a splash park and playground in beautiful King's Park. Sundown Adventureland is also a short drive from the town. For older children, mountain biking and Go Ape are available at Sherwood Pines. There is also a multi-screen cinema 7 miles away in Worksop. Further afield, the Derbyshire Peak District is within an hour's drive and easy access to road networks enable travel to scenic parts of Yorkshire, the Lincolnshire Wolds and the East Coast.





Sports and fitness are well catered for by several gyms and a leisure centre with swimming pool as well as a number of football, rugby, cricket, tennis, running and bowls clubs.

The town has a very diverse social and economic mix, with levels of unemployment that are below the national average. It has a surprisingly young age profile with 7,500 under 30 and 12,000 under 44 in a total population of over 22,000.

Strong transport links enable people to commute to Sheffield, Doncaster, Mansfield, Newark and Lincoln. There is also a growing number of people who commute to London. Retford is very close to the A1 trunk road, has a mainline station taking people into London Kings Cross (90min), York (40min), Leeds (25min), a cross country service to Lincoln and Sheffield, and easy access to the airports at East Midlands and Manchester.

The opportunities that exist in this vibrant town have been recognised by the Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham who provided Strategic Development funding to re-vitalise St Swithun's church, located in the centre of Retford, and establish it as a thriving resource church with the remit to plant and graft new worshipping communities and to be a hub for training and resourcing in the local area.

Retford is surrounded by charming villages, and our parish covers several of these. Set in beautiful surroundings featuring farmland, woods and rivers, these also offer many local opportunities for walking, cycling, running, fishing and even wild swimming!





## TO FIND OUT MORE

Thank you for considering this profile. We hope it has given you a flavour of our beautiful part of the diocese and the opportunities that exist within it, and we would love to invite you to consider if God is calling you to join us here.

If you would like more information, please contact:

Ven. Tors Ramsey Archdeacon of Newark

[archd-newark@southwell.anglican.org](mailto:archd-newark@southwell.anglican.org) or 01636 817226.

**You can also find out more by following the links to some of our Facebook pages:**

[www.facebook.com/Parish-of-Idle-and-Sands-Retford-103196687863553](https://www.facebook.com/Parish-of-Idle-and-Sands-Retford-103196687863553)

[www.facebook.com/allsaintseatonandgamston](https://www.facebook.com/allsaintseatonandgamston)

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