



CLUSTER TWO

Rivers Benefice
Beck & Trent Benefice
Tuxford Benefice
Northwestern Group
The Potting Shed



RURAL RENEWAL

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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 are looking for several mission associates to come and help us deliver this innovative vision. These posts will be time limited (initially for 3 years with a 3-year extension) with the hope that they can become permanent posts beyond this point.

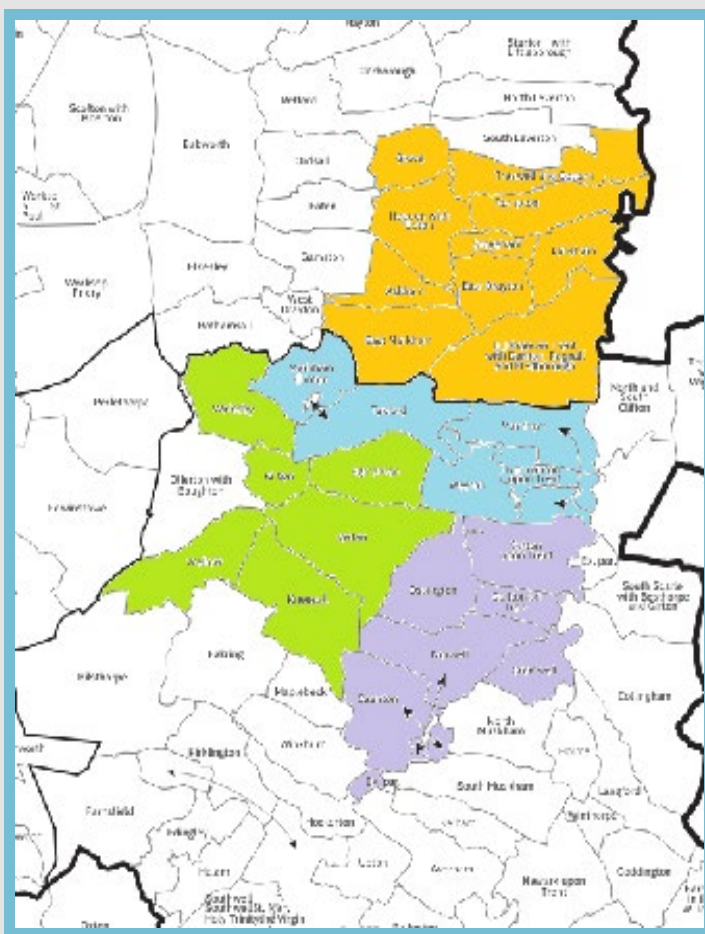
We are piloting three clusters. This pack provides the information for Cluster 2.

LOCATION

Situated in the middle of the diocese, between the market towns of Retford, Southwell and Newark cluster 2 is comprised of 4 benefices:

- 1. Rivers Benefice** (East Markham, Askham, Treswell and Cottam, Dunham with Darlton, Ragnall and Fledborough, Headen with Upton, Grove, East Drayton and Stokeham)
- 2. Beck & Trent Benefice** (Norwell, Cromwell, Caunton, Ossington, Sutton on Trent, Carlton on Trent)
- 3. Tuxford Benefice** (Tuxford, Weston, Normanton-upon-Trent, Marnham, West Markham)
- 4. 6 parishes of the Northwestern group** (Kneesall, Laxton, Egmonton Kirton, Walesby, Wellow)

In addition, the cluster includes **The Potting Shed Church** (a Bishops Mission Order).



PEOPLE

The Lead Mission Enabler will be **Revd Alison Jones** (pictured right) who is currently the Pioneer Minister of The Potting Shed Church.

We have opportunities for 2 mission associates (Priest-in-Charge roles) for The Rivers and Northwestern Group.



There are **29 churches** in this cluster serving a population of **18,562**.

There are **5 C of E primary schools** and **1 secondary academy** at Tuxford.

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, 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 Tuxford, Dunham, Norwell and Kneesall.

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 mission associate posts:

- Tuxford (Tuxford Benefice)
- Norwell (Beck and Trent Benefice)
- Dunham (The Rivers Benefice)

OUR BENEFICE

The Rivers Retford comprises nine former rural parishes to the south-east of Retford, stretching from Rampton to East Markham. This is predominantly an attractive agricultural area on the edge of the Trent valley but very few of the inhabitants remain engaged with agriculture. Communications are relatively good with the A1 and the East Coast mainline allowing easy travel north and south. Lincoln, Sheffield, Doncaster, Peterborough, Nottingham and Leeds are all within commuting distance.



OUR CHURCHES

Nine churches in the benefice are open, to serve 21 villages and centres of population. Eight are scheduled with regular services although some have very small local congregations and depend on travellers from elsewhere in the benefice for most of their congregation. There are also open churchyards in four other locations within the civil parish of Dunham on Trent, Fledborough (Churches Conservation Trust), Dunham on Trent and Ragnall (churches in private ownership), and Darlton (church for sale). After a difficult start, exacerbated by Covid, the benefice now works well, although it requires some full-time ministerial engagement in order to progress.

OUR SCHOOLS

There is a Church of England primary school at Dunham on Trent, and County Primaries at Rampton and East Markham. The majority of children progress to Tuxford Academy or to secondary schools in Retford. The Benefice has contact with Dunham School through our Lay Minister who is also a Foundation Governor. There is regular contact with Rampton School, but it has not been possible to maintain the former regular contact at East Markham, particularly since the building of a school hall which has removed the need for using the church for major events. Recent contact suggests that there may be an opportunity for monthly communal worship, and the possibility of Time Travelling in the church.

OUR LOCALITY

New residential building can be found in most of the villages and East Markham has roughly doubled in size over the past ten years with further development scheduled. There is a popular visitor attraction for families and small children at Rampton, Sundown Adventureland. East Markham church was described by John Betjeman as the 'cathedral of the Trent Valley' but this does not attract hordes of visitors. Most of the churches have some architectural or historical interest.

Each of our villages enjoys its own characteristics. Most have a village hall with facilities for a variety of activities. Examples are indoor bowls in Rampton, regular coffee mornings in East Drayton, village cinema at Headon, Laneham, and East Markham. The only church at present which has toilet facilities and a basic kitchen is East Markham, which allows a regular well attended weekly Coffee Shop; similar facilities are currently being worked on at Treswell. Within the group there are many clubs and groups targeting particular sections of the community – mothers and toddlers, uniformed organisations, Mothers' Union and so on. Each church has its own arrangements for providing flowers, cleaning, bell-ringing. There is at present no activity or provision specifically for teenagers, which has led East Markham to begin to think about the possibility of creating some sort of youth club, if money and leadership were to become available.

Inhabitants of the villages embrace a wide cross-section of society. Recent housing development in East Markham has attracted both young couples and retired people. There is evidently a considerable amount of home working as well as more distant commuting. A traveller site is located at Treswell.

All our communities are very friendly towards new arrivals who are always warmly welcomed. The benefice provides the opportunity for rural living combined with excellent communications. It has the reputation for being one of the lowest cost areas to live. Nearby West Burton power station development is expected to bring additional opportunities and employment.



WORKING TOGETHER

Since becoming a single benefice the former members of the individual PCCs have come together well to recognise the benefits of working together. None of the churches has a churchwarden although there is at least one person in each church, bar two, who is fully engaged in worship and the PCC. The Chairman, assisted by the Secretary, administers the PCC and Standing Committee and provides advice and support to the individual churches as and when required. The Treasurer has consolidated all the bank accounts and maintains the books saving the need for nine individual treasurers which had become very onerous for many – he provides a service of inestimable value. The Lay Minister arranges the service rota in consultation with the PCC and individual churches and agrees clergy support for sacramental services; she also administers baptisms and funerals throughout the benefice. A lay volunteer deals with all the weddings in the benefice, liaising with the couples involved and the clergy, organising the reading of banns and the provision of the necessary paperwork.

GOOD NEWS STORIES

East Markham which, with about half the population of the whole benefice, has the largest congregation, many of whom travel regularly to attend services in the other churches. Services are invariably attended by people from different villages.

The best news comes from Dunham and Rampton schools where a heightened level of engagement has been possible, and from East Markham where the weekly Coffee Shop in the church has become a welcome gathering point for many residents, very old and very young.

Treswell church is about to undergo a major re-ordering made possible through a generous legacy. The sad thing is that there is no regular congregation from the village of Treswell, but once the project has been completed there will be an opportunity to engage more fully with the population.

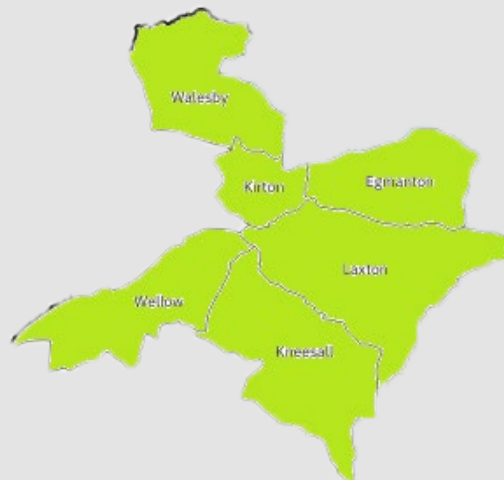
Grove church which had been more or less neglected for several years has recently come to life and now provides regular worship and a focal point for the village which has no other public space. There is a possibility of restoring the ruined almshouses in the churchyard to provide more public space.

THE LOCATION

The group is slightly north of the geographical centre of the diocese, between the A614 and the A1, adjacent to the town of Ollerton.

Mansfield, Newark, Retford and Southwell all 10-12 miles; Lincoln 20 miles, Nottingham 22 miles, Sheffield 28 miles.

M1 (j29) 18 miles.



OUR CHURCHES

KIRTON

Kirton is a community supportive of the church. We produce a monthly village newsletter and have a good relationship with the local pub, The Fox. We are nearby Boughton Industrial Estate and the Clay quarry and brickworks.

The church is very visible throughout the village. We have an organ, and use the Lady Chapel for refreshments. There is limited disabled access and we don't have a hall or toilet (although we can use The Fox Pub nearby).

Special services are very well attended, especially at Christmas. Every eucharistic service is well supported.

WALESBY AND HAUGHTON

The Walesby & Haughton parish has a mix of elderly people and young families, as well as some professionals. There is lots of new housing. The church has an organ, and the Church Institute opposite has a hall, toilet and kitchen.

The church has lots of occasional offices, and the church and its worship have been well maintained throughout the vacancy.

There are two local pubs, a small grocers, Post Office, village hall and Walesby Forest Activity Centre all nearby.

EGMANTON

Egmanton is a small agricultural village with a pub (currently vacant) and village hall. Many of its residents are agricultural or self-employed, families with older children, or of retirement age.

The church is a medieval (and current) place of pilgrimage with a shrine. There is spectacular gothic revival decoration throughout. It also has an organ.

Our relationship with the Society of Our Lady brings many visitors. Congregations at pilgrimage services are growing.

OUR SCHOOLS

There are three schools across the group:

- **Walesby CofE Primary** (organises its own festivals in the church building)
- **Kneesall CofE Primary** (Good links with church visitors to school and use of church building)
- **Wellow House** (Private, age 3-16) uses Wellow Church for events. In the past Ollerton vicar was chaplain.

Children from the parishes often attend schools outside the benefice, including primaries: Tuxford, Norwell, Lowes Wong (Southwell), Ranby House (private school); secondaries: Tuxford academy, The Dukeries Academy, Southwell Minster, Worksop College (private).

WORKING TOGETHER

Some of the churches have grown closer during the vacancy and many people attend more than one church in the group. There is a co-ordinated service rota. Each parish has a separate PCC.

While the wider group is of broad churchmanship, Kirton, Walesby & Haughton and Egmanton have a strong history of Anglo-Catholic Eucharistic worship. None have passed resolutions excluding women priests.

