

Area Dean's Statement

We think Islington is a vibrant, challenging, exciting place to live and worship. Its diversity, changing landscape, history, culture, and attitude are full of life. Those of us who live and minister here think there is no better place to be! However, the polarisation of growing poverty gaps, increasing housing demands, and the difficulty of experiencing community within a transient lifestyle are hugely challenging. Anyone interested in ministering here will need creativity and resilience. But it won't take you long to fall in love with Islington.

Islington deanery follows the same boundaries as the borough (except for a small area in the south). The borough is roughly rectangular in shape, and lies either side of the A1. It is primarily residential, stretching up towards Archway, sharing a border with Hackney, and within easy walking distance of the city including St Paul's Cathedral. It features the Angel shopping centre, Almeida and Sadlers Wells Theatres, and HMP Pentonville. Islington is the most densely populated English district (15,670 people per km²), the population currently being approximately 215,000. The trends and challenges of housing in Islington are a source of much thought and debate.

The borough, particularly Upper Street, is famous for its number of restaurants, cafes and bars. Time Out described that 'you know you live in Islington when...there's always somewhere new to eat' (Oct 2015) because it is one of the most restaurant-dense areas of the UK. There is affluence and growth in Islington. However, this can easily hide the significant areas of deprivation found here too. Almost half (46%) of children are living in poverty; this is the second highest child poverty rate in England. 11% of children aged between 11 and 16yrs has a mental health problem. Three quarters of residents live in flats, and overcrowding is a common problem. Islington has the smallest amount of green space per person in London. There are significant social challenges to grapple with.

Crime rates are almost double the National Average. A lot of young people say they don't feel safe in our community, and there have been two high profile deaths in the last two years. Many have experienced being robbed or attacked in the street. These crimes often go unreported for fear of the consequences or mistrust of the police. However, in spite of this, Islington is seen by most residents as a 'nice' place to live. There is a huge amount of pride in the local community, and recently much effort has gone into building community cohesion.

We are well served by transport links - the Underground, the Overground, Network rail and numerous bus routes. Kings Cross/St Pancras is a major transport interchange, and the location of the Eurostar. One of the major recent influences shaping the borough is the development at Kings Cross - the largest in London since 1820. Although the development itself is in Camden, there is a ripple effect slowly increasing the amount of gentrification, as well as the number of students living in Islington.

Most churches in the deanery are within the Evangelical tradition, but there is strong Catholic representation mainly in the south of the borough. Chapter morale is good and there is a genuine sense of wanting to collaborate. There are exemplary models of planting partnerships and corporate strategic development. There is an active Faiths Forum in Islington. We have strong links with the Finsbury Park Mosque and the Muslim Welfare House and have helped to support the mosque after the recent attacks. The Chapter takes fellowship and mutual prayer seriously, and makes meeting together a priority.

The next vicar would be assured of a very warm welcome by the Chapter, and continued support in the future.

Jess Swift
Area Dean of Islington
October 2017