



# PARISH PROFILE

## THE PARISH OF BILLINGHAM

16<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2023  
VERSION 1.0



# CONTENTS

<b>Part A: Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Our Diocesan Vision – An Introduction From Bishop Paul</i>	3
<i>An Introduction From The Change Rector – David Brooke</i>	4
<b>Part B: The Billingham Story</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Introducing Billingham</i>	5
<i>The Story Behind Billingham Team Parish</i>	5
<i>Times of Change and Challenge</i>	5
<i>Drawing in New Leadership</i>	6
<i>Beginning the Process of Change</i>	6
Pace – Early Progress in 2023	6
Patience – Partnership for Missional Church	7
<i>The Next Stage for the Team</i>	7
What It Will Look Like to Inhabit Your Role	8
<b>Part C: The Church Buildings and The Congregations</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>St Cuthbert’s</i>	9
<i>St Peter’s</i>	9
<i>St Aidan’s</i>	9
<i>St Luke’s</i>	10
<i>St Mary Magdalene</i>	10
<i>The Emerging Picture – Worship and Outreach</i>	10
Worshipping Congregations	10
Schools	11
Care Homes	11
Attending to the Diocesan Priorities	11
<b>Part D: Appendices</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>Appendix 1: Billingham the Town</i>	12
Industry	12
Shopping	12
Sports and Leisure	13
Housing, transport and health	13
Places to Visit	13
<i>Appendix 2: The Growth of Billingham in Maps</i>	14
OS Revised New Series – 1903-1904	14
OS Popular Edition – 1925	14
OS Second War Revision – 1940	15
OS One Inch Series – Fully Revised 198 – Major Roads Revised 1968	15
OS 1:25K – Present Day	16

## PART A: INTRODUCTION

### OUR DIOCESAN VISION – AN INTRODUCTION FROM BISHOP PAUL

At the end of 2019 we gathered representatives from each of our parishes for *The Waymark Conference*, to pray, talk, share stories and reflect on how we might best respond to God's call to us as his Church. We reflected on our learning from our previous vision and priorities and agreed to maintain our vision:

*'From the Tyne to the Tees and the Dales to the Sea,  
blessing our communities in Jesus' name  
for the transformation of us all'*

Through prayer, conversation and sharing our stories we discerned God's call to maintain and sharpen our three priorities. Through the voice of our children and young people we discerned that we should add a fourth, Caring for God's Creation. This was in response to the question, 'How shall we focus our energies, prayers and resources over the next five years?'

The result of this is our missional strategy which we describe as *Renewing Pilgrimage* – an opportunity and invitation for each of our parishes to step out in faith together, responding practically to the call to *Challenge Poverty, Energise Growth, Care for God's Creation* and *Engage with Children, Youth and Young Adults*. We are praying that Billingham will play an important part in developing this.

Making this a reality will look different in every community. In some places it will come about in collaboration with others. Nobody is expected to do everything immediately or alone, but we are all invited and expected to find ways to respond relevantly.

In Billingham this feels particularly relevant. Billingham is a significant community for which we sense the importance of *Energising Growth* in discipleship, in growing our reach and in the number of local people following Jesus. We also sense the importance of *Challenging Poverty, Engaging with Children and Young People* and *Caring for God's Creation* in an area with lots of families, with some significant pockets of poverty, and with deeply rooted communities that still look to, and are open to, the local church.

In praying for a Team Vicar for the Parish of Billingham we are looking for someone committed to, and able to work collaboratively to equip our churches to be part of this vision. The *Waymark Prayer* sums up this hope:



*Loving God, guiding the people of Durham Diocese faithfully through the years:  
We thank you for saints who have marked our path,  
young and old, known and unknown,  
from all places and in all walks of life;  
help us to find your way in our generation,  
transformed by your truth,  
sharing your life,  
blessing our communities;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

We look forward to meeting together and sharing in this with you.

In Christ,

+Paul

**Bishop of Durham**

#### AN INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHANGE RECTOR – DAVID BROOKE

*I hope you will read this profile and be excited by it. This isn't the job for everyone, but it is an exceptionally exciting challenge. The post calls for some special skills and qualities – for vision, for collaboration, for the ability to shepherd communities through change, for real spiritual breadth and depth, and for huge emotional intelligence. Above all it needs someone who will approach it with deep faith, endless flexibility, and an open heart towards the community and churches in Billingham.*

That's actually one of the opening paragraphs from the parish profile that was produced ten years ago to recruit the first Team Rector for Billingham. I wrote it as the Area Dean of Stockton-on-Tees at the time, and I stand by it today as Change Rector of Billingham.

A great deal of water has flowed under the bridge since then, but the opportunity to be part of what God and his people are doing here in the latest stage of the journey is one we hope you will think about taking up. We have to be honest, the journey of the last ten years hasn't been easy, but there is much to celebrate, and there is a pioneering spirit in the air. The rest of this profile seeks to combine realism with faith and hope, and that reflects the kind of people we are in Billingham.

I ended the introduction to that first parish profile with these words:

*We think this is a wonderful opportunity, in a wonderful deanery, in a wonderful diocese, in a wonderful part of the world. Now we're praying that God will move the right person to come and join us in loving our town, our community and our churches.*

Once again, that really is our prayer. Now let us tell you a bit more of the story...

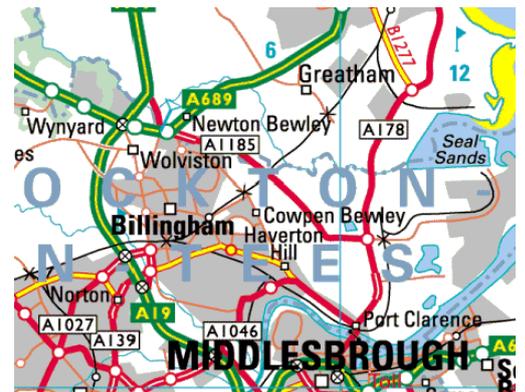
David Brooke  
**Change Rector**

## PART B: THE BILLINGHAM STORY

### INTRODUCING BILLINGHAM

Billingham has a long and varied history, from Saxon beginnings, through rapid expansion to support the chemical industry, to its current position as a town of just under 38,000 people. While Billingham faces many challenges – some of them common to planned new towns across the north east – what should not be overlooked is the sheer strength of the community. Billingham people love their town, and they invest themselves in it.

The area continues to have many families that have strong local roots, some going back to the now non-existent community of Haverton Hill, and many families with different generations spread through the town. The parish also includes the highly deprived, but uniquely vibrant Clarendons community along the Tees (near the famous Transporter Bridge), the hamlets of Cowpen Bewley and Newton Bewley, and a considerable area of industry.



### THE STORY BEHIND BILLINGHAM TEAM PARISH

Fast rewind to 2010. The parish of St Peter Wolviston is part of a group with five other villages. St Mary Magdalene has been vacant for almost a decade. The priest-in-charge of St Aidan, leaves ministry. The long-serving Vicar of St Cuthbert announces his intended retirement. But the deanery of Stockton is thinking hard and long about how deeper collaboration across groups of churches can build a better future. In 2010, Billingham faced a moment of opportunity.

Beginning in February 2011, representatives of the five PCCs, including St Peter Wolviston for the first time, began to meet, pray, and dream about a new future for Billingham. A clear vision quickly emerged around a vision to become a closely integrated, single-parish, team ministry, focused on discipleship and mission, and by November 2011, draft proposals were shared. Over the next year, careful consultation took place, and the parish came into being on Easter Sunday 2013.

During the run-up to Easter 2013, and in the immediate period afterwards, the parish was overseen by the Area Dean (now Change Rector), a gifted curate in training, and a number of other interim clergy committed to the vision. Momentum built, and a new clergy team came together, with a strong emphasis on collaboration and chemistry, as well as character, capability and calling. And equally importantly, we knew that the team meant more than the clergy team – the team was all of us.

Meanwhile, a number of strands of work went on, which continue to bear fruit today:

- New initiatives took root and drew the parishes together. Just one example was a toddler service called *Play and Praise* which began at St Aidan's, warmly supported by several parishes, and led to a second congregation at St Peter's. Even today, though only one continues (St Peter's), it remains a key part of our outreach, and other things have grown from it.
- The link with local primary schools began to change shape, and today that has grown into a small but highly committed **Open the Book** team and other related initiatives.
- A parish office based at St Aidan's was established, staffed and operational daily during the week. Administration processes were brought together, and confidence grew. Now we can't really remember not having a shared central office.

### TIMES OF CHANGE AND CHALLENGE

When the parish was formed, we could always foresee that the future would bring challenges. They came more quickly than anyone expected. The work of uniting into a single church family met with difficulties. With leadership things might have been different, but the challenges included the departure in 2017 of two of the initial ministry team of three, including the Team Rector. The pressure on the remaining Team Vicar was huge, and he was faced with a number of personal health challenges. Unsurprisingly, relationships between different parts of the parish became strained, and both energy and confidence fell.

An Associate Priest was appointed to bring support, but could not balance out the failure to recruit a new Team Rector. Recognising the need to bring fresh eyes, the diocese appointed two Lay Development Workers. Their time in the parish spanned the pandemic – another massive challenge – and ended in 2022. But it is generally agreed that the addition of some new energy through paid lay

workers rather than clergy proved inspired. Their final report is a joy to read. It identifies many of the challenges clearly but kindly, while at the same time telling numerous stories that show God still very much at work among his people.

## DRAWING IN NEW LEADERSHIP

Around the end of that time, the parish went through the diocese's Parish Prioritisation Process to see whether it was the right time to seek a new lead clergy person, and to reflect on what shape that might take. The process identified a number of key priorities that needed to be addressed to prepare the ground. It also led to a green light for recruitment of an interim Team Rector, to be given the title of **Change Rector**.

Meanwhile, the pressure on the Team Vicar had taken a significant toll, and he became ill. What was hoped to be a short absence became an extended period of sick leave, and leadership came under further pressure. The Associate Priest was by this time officially 'retired', and serving with Permission to Officiate, but the team of readers and others stepped up. Even so, the pattern of services was further restricted, and many areas of ministry and mission struggled or faltered.

However, the parish recognised the need for step change, embraced the idea of a three-year post to bring it about, and the recruitment process began. At around the same time, the Revd David Brooke, who had left a post in the Diocesan Resource Team at Cuthbert House in 2018, was exploring the possibility of moving 'home' to Durham. For the previous 4.5 years David had been a key member of the leadership team of **Transforming Wigan** in Liverpool Diocese, a project reflecting many of the same core values behind the formation of the Billingham Team Parish. It seemed a good fit, but it was important to discern carefully.

At interview there was a shared sense that there was a genuine call to return to Billingham in this very different role, and the transition began. David and his wife Kate (the managing chaplain of the local prison) live in their own home in Billingham, and have a long-term commitment to the area, both of them having served in the diocese since 2004.

A licensing date was set for 18<sup>th</sup> January 2023, and the parish and deanery came together to mark the beginning of a new phase. It is expected that David will retire in January 2026, but will continue to live locally and serve in the deanery and diocese in retirement.

## BEGINNING THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

### **Footnote:**

A process of phased return for the Team Vicar began in January 2023. He was immensely supportive, and was determined to give it his best shot. However, he quickly decided to step down, and is currently supporting the Change Rector from the sidelines to smoothe the transition, while preparing to leave post.

From 'Day 1', the Change Rector has made it clear that the PCC and leadership team would need to combine 'pace' with 'patience'. Change can't be rushed, particularly when culture change is part of the picture.

---

## PACE – EARLY PROGRESS IN 2023

The parish is now engaged in the **Partnership for Missional Church** process (see below), and that fits in with 'patience'. But at the same time, we have set about grasping nettles together quickly, starting with some of the ones that were identified by the Lay Workers and the Parish Prioritisation Process: governance, decision making processes, finances, buildings, shared identity, and a missional outlook. So we're doing 'pace' where it is needed, as well, and after almost three months we can point to all sorts of ways in which that has had effect:

- We have done Lent differently and imaginatively, and we are doing Easter differently, and that has been a real positive.
- We've begun a weekly prayer meeting, and though it is small, a growing number of people are connecting.
- We've stepped out in faith and agreed a new, "user-friendly" pattern of Sunday morning worship, to begin at Easter.
- We've also set the ball rolling for new things that aren't just duplicates, or clones of what other places do.
- We've enhanced our AV facilities at St Aidan's with screens to allow us to branch out and do new things.
- We've opened up fresh discussions with some of our schools about the future relationship.
- The staff team are growing together well.
- PCC has started on making difficult decisions and opening up big conversations.
- We have agreed how we will streamline the PCC and Standing Committee and work more effectively and efficiently.

- Alongside that, we're working to ensure that governance and leadership work hand-in-hand.
- Wardens are supporting each other well.
- We're reconnected with various forms of support from the diocesan team.
- We've hosted Deanery Synod and opened up discussions about help from within the deanery.
- We've plugged back into a wider group of Teesside church leaders.
- We've secured some free IT provision that will really help our admin.
- We've started on streamlining some significant admin processes.
- We've started to talk about how **Partnership for Missional Church** moves from the margins into mainstream parish life.
- We're getting ready to re-engage with our baptism families after a period of simply not being able to cope with them all.

Meanwhile, nothing has gone seriously wrong or fallen badly through the cracks, there has been a lot of laughter, and when people complain now it is because they genuinely want to make things better.

The 'pace' element has been very much in the foreground in the first three months. For the next three months it won't stop, but it will move slightly more to the background as we work on communications, relationships and confidence. Developing a wider leadership team to work alongside the PCC on the task of discernment is going to be a high priority, and the Staff Team have identified three things we want people to feel and be saying by July 2023:

1. We can see what God is doing here.
2. We feel confident – we know where we're going, and we know what we have to do!
3. We understand, and we feel listened to – we know we have a voice.

---

## PATIENCE – PARTNERSHIP FOR MISSIONAL CHURCH

**Partnership for Missional Church** (or PMC for short) is hard to describe – it isn't a programme as such, and it certainly isn't a packaged solution for struggling churches. It was devised by Pat Keifert, and has been used in all kinds of church contexts worldwide. In the UK, it is a ministry of CMS, and has been adopted in a number of dioceses. The current Change Rector was on the diocesan delivery team for a number of years, and represented the diocese on the national steering group.

CMS describe PMC as a "journey [that] invites churches to take a look at ourselves, our communities and our calling, and to step out in deep, radical faith to discover what God is up to around us and how we can be part of it". That's as good a description as any – seeing and being able to name God at work is key.

Billingham Team Parish undertook a mini-PMC under the guidance of the Lay Development Workers, one of whom is the diocesan lead for PMC, and that drew in new energy and started some new thinking. A team has now been formed, and the parish has just embarked on the full three-year PMC process.

At this point there is some scepticism, which is to be expected, but it is a priority for the Change Rector to embed the PMC approach into the way the parish thinks and acts.

## THE NEXT STAGE FOR THE TEAM

We see being a team as a source of strength not a weakness, and we don't expect anyone to be good at everything. We want the team to be diverse in personality, spirituality and skills – complementary to each other. That takes work because difference generates both heat and light. Recognising that, we will soon be starting to run the **Difference Course** across the parish so that we can embed the core practices of being present, being curious and reimagining

Already we are growing into a team where we recognise and draw on each other's strengths, and support each other at all times. What we are seeking now is someone who shares that vision and will make it a top priority.

Teams have a mixed reputation in the Church of England. But for us, it is our conviction that where they fail it is because there hasn't been a wholehearted and intentional commitment, backed up by action. The Change Rector has returned from Wigan with wisdom from that setting on how a strong team can make a huge difference, and he brings that experience to bear here. When it comes to hiring a new Team Vicar, we understand that success will take careful discernment at the time of calling, patient team-building in the early days, complete honesty, and a degree of sacrifice on all sides.

## WHAT IT WILL LOOK LIKE TO INHABIT YOUR ROLE

What we hope for from a new Team Vicar is set out in full in the Role Description and Person Specification in the application pack, but here are some things to hold in mind as you read those documents alongside this one.

- The Staff Team (clergy and readers) currently make it a priority to meet weekly to pray together, grow together and ensure that the work of the parish goes forward smoothly, building confidence week by week. We ensure nothing falls through the cracks, and that nobody is stepping on anyone else's toes. We listen to each other and support each other, and we deal with confidential concerns together. We make sure nobody can play divide and conquer with us. In 11 weeks, only one person has had to miss one of our meetings, and only on one occasion. It is foundational.
- Within the Staff Team we all have different 'home' spiritualities, but we are all willing to explore beyond our comfort zones. We want to model to others the treasuring of all the Church of England's traditions of prayer and worship, and you would need to be part of that.
- There is no room for status-consciousness in the way we present as the Staff Team of the parish. We seek to live out and demonstrate open, supportive, but challenging relationships. We are disciples first, and called into leadership second. We "rejoice to see fruit grow on other people's trees". We practice forgiveness and humility.
- As Team Vicar, you will also be a member of the emerging Parish Leadership Team (licensed ministers and a group of laity), which focuses on the task of discernment – taking the balcony view, as PMC expresses it – and the PCC, which focuses on the task of governance and decision making. What we're working hard to do is to separate governance, discernment and operational processes but make them work smoothly together. We have already made strides in that direction, and the Change Rector is leading that transition, but you will play a key part in helping people understand and engage.
- The **Pause to Pray** weekly prayer time is something that we hope will become more and more central to parish life, and it will be important to be part of that – but not always with a leadership hat on. Likewise, we are working hard not to overload ourselves as staff members, so that we can spend time on relationships in the parish, and be seen to be feeding and caring for ourselves through prayer and worship.
- In the same spirit, although there is much to be done, and it is tempting to go too fast, and for too long, you, with the rest of the Staff Team will need to demonstrate what healthy life and ministry look like. If we cannot bring about the changes we've identified while staying healthy, keeping our sense of humour, and remaining sane, then we have discerned incorrectly, and gone beyond the call of God. You would be expected to live by that, and challenge others to do so.
- Conflict is going to be normal and natural over the next few years as we make changes that go both wide and deep. You will need to be comfortable working creatively to bring fruit out of conflict.
- We use Google Workspace as the backbone of our IT provision. Some of us are stuck at the level of using it for email, and perhaps calendars and a bit of file storage. However, more and more we will be using the collaborative capabilities to support what we do, and it will be important to be willing to learn and adapt even if you don't already have experience of the Google Workspace family of products.

## PART C: THE CHURCH BUILDINGS AND THE CONGREGATIONS

The five parishes that were brought together in 2013 were all originally part of the historic parish of Billingham in the first place, with St Cuthbert's as the sole parish church. Wolviston was the first to become a separate parish, reflecting the fact that until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the village heart of Wolviston and the area around Billingham Green were the main centres of community, separated by large areas of farmland.

Successive waves of development moved the centre of the town north, and gradually bridged the gap between Wolviston and Billingham, resulting in the pattern of community we have today. New church buildings were added as the town grew, and the parishes were formally subdivided as new congregations took root, all within a couple of decades.

Just a few years ago, the congregations within the parish were strongly rooted in particular churches – to talk of St Luke's, for example, would have been to talk both about the building and the congregation. Now things are different, with a greater sense of unity, new congregations, and more fluidity. We're starting to try to talk of being church (singular), church buildings and congregations, rather than using the word 'church' to mean all those things. And when we say 'parish', we mean the wider community we serve, not just our regular attenders, the electoral roll, or the PCC.

In the next few sub-sections, there's an overview of the five church buildings and their traditional congregations in the order they came into being, followed by an overview of the emerging picture.

## ST CUTHBERT'S

Founded in 860AD, St Cuthbert's is a Grade 1 listed building, with a partly Saxon Tower and a nave which dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century. The chancel, with three altars, and two-storey vestry/toilet area were added in 1937.

The worship tradition of the established congregation is strongly liturgical, but with considerable creativity at times, and still supported by a very small choir. The building is a very popular choice for occasional offices –many of the multi-generational families in the town still see it as their 'home church'. However, the congregation is very small and maintenance is a constant challenge.

Disability access is mixed, typically for the age and type of building. The toilets are located with the vestries, and although roomy are not specifically adapted for accessibility. The PCC owns a nearby hall which can be rented by the community. It is well maintained, heavily used and a good source of income. The extensive churchyard is closed except for the burial of cremated remains and further burials. It is under the care of Stockton Borough Council.

The PCC is very concerned about the strain that St Cuthbert's as a building puts on parish finances, but mindful of the symbolic significance, and of the income that comes from the separate hall. The future use of the building is under discussion, and the April 2023 PCC meeting will decide whether to explore an alternative future for the building.



## ST PETER'S

Until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, Wolviston village stood at the crossroads of major routes to Durham, Sedgefield, Sunderland, and all points south and north. Now, due to successive bypass measures, it is slightly cut off, separated from the rest of Billingham by busy roads. There is a strong sense of village identity, with a primary school, a number of shops and a Post Office. Nevertheless, it is very much a satellite of the town.

However, there is a high footfall past the church from parents and carers coming to and from school, dog-walkers from the whole of north Billingham, visitors to pub, allotment holders, and users of the Community Centre and WI Hall on the same road.

The well-maintained present building dates from 1876 and replaced a mediaeval chapel dedicated to St Mary Magdalene. It is a typical late Victorian village church – plain and brick, but attractive inside. An extension (from 1972), includes meeting facilities, kitchen and toilets, and accessibility is relatively good. It stands in a large churchyard in two parts, one of which is open for burials.

Until ten years ago, all worship was from the Book of Common Prayer, and a strong attachment to the traditional forms remains. On the other hand, Common Worship is now in regular use, and St Peter's is currently the base for both our **Play and Praise** and **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday@4** congregations working with children and younger families. With a distinct evening congregation as well, St Peter's has embraced diversity. There is always a good buzz, visitors are made extremely welcome, and pastoral support is quietly offered.



## ST AIDAN'S

St Aidan's was built as Billingham expanded rapidly in the 1950s. It is centrally located in the town of Billingham as a whole, conveniently close to the town centre, and with good parking and substantial facilities. There is no churchyard.

Construction was in phases. The present Lady Chapel was dedicated in 1955, and the main church opened in 1960, as the Lady Chapel was outgrown. The combined worship area is very spacious, light, open, and flexible, with chairs rather than pews. There are newly installed AV screens enabling us to worship in a variety of ways.

In addition, there is a large entrance lobby with level access, a lounge, a large hall with a stage, a kitchen, and an accessible toilet. The new parish office is at the end of the hall nearest the street entrance, and has independent access.



Areas of the building complex are in need of refurbishment, but it is generally in very good condition and the PCC regards it as a significant asset which should be further developed. It is increasingly central to the life of the parish as well as the geography of the town. As well as being well used by the parish, it is popular for events and groups, and a source of income.

The original St Aidan's congregation does not conform to any stereotype of Anglican churchmanship, and there is a spirit of openness and expectancy. Becoming a single parish has been fully embraced, and there has been no fearfulness about losing local identity, particularly as a warm welcome has been given to the congregation of St Mary Magdalene while their building has been out of use (see below).

## ST LUKE'S

St Luke's is located in the Low Grange area (the north east) of Billingham, adjacent to a Community Centre and shops. It was built in 1964, as a plant from St Aidan's, in a large and fairly dense area of housing – some of which hides pockets of real deprivation.

The simple, modern building consists of a square nave set on a diagonal axis with a higher three-sided sanctuary at the eastern corner. It is light and airy, seating is flexible, in good condition, and relatively cheap to maintain and run. There is an entrance lobby, a good-sized meeting room, a vestry and toilets. There is no churchyard.

The worship tradition of the congregation is charismatic evangelical with a light touch, and prayer ministry is available. A mixture of modern and traditional worship material is welcomed. Lay involvement (both within church and as disciples living out faith in the world) is a strength. As we move to a new pattern of worship on Sunday mornings, St Luke's congregation has responded generously and creatively, and although there will for a time not be morning worship there, plans are well underway to launch a new evening congregation with a distinctive character.



## ST MARY MAGDALENE

St Mary Magdalene was built in the early 1960s as Billingham expanded westwards. It was a daughter church within the parish of Wolviston, recalling the dedication of the former church there.

The building is adjacent to a small group of shops, a pub, and a community centre. It is also only a short walk from Prior's Mill Primary School – the only Church of England school in Billingham. There is a simple, tall worship space, a good sized pair of vestries, a meeting room, storage, a small kitchen and two toilets. The plot of land is substantial and includes parking. There is no consecrated ground for burials.

However, the building is currently unusable. Roof areas have failed, and the knock-on damage from water ingress is considerable. Full repair was being considered, but the cost would be high. Although no firm decision has yet been made, the PCC is clear that the building is very much 'at risk', and that there are other ways to maintain a Christian presence in this area of the town. We expect to make a decision on the future at the April 2023 PCC meeting.

Those who made up St Mary's congregation would dearly love to see the building restored and well used. On the other hand they have joined faithfully with the congregation at St Aidan's, and their faith remains alive.

The Vicarage, on the same square of land as the church, is the designated parsonage house for the team parish, but currently occupied by tenants as the Change Rector lives in his own home. A different property is to be acquired to house the Team Vicar.



## THE EMERGING PICTURE – WORSHIP AND OUTREACH

### WORSHIPPING CONGREGATIONS

From Easter 2023, the PCC has agreed a new pattern of worship which will be trialled till at least September. It has faced up to the fact that trying to be 'fair' to all the diminishing local congregations, and rotating services around the buildings, was confusing and people were falling away as a result. The Parish Administrator was finding it harder and harder to tell baptism families and other enquirers where they could join us for worship. Even midweek services followed an odd pattern.

So, in the new pattern, things are much clearer – as well as being more varied and richer:

- On Sunday mornings...
  - There will be a traditional service at 9.00am alternating between St Cuthbert's and St Peter's.
  - There will be a multi-generational service at 11.00am at St Aidan's every week.
  - Both will include communion regularly.
  - On fifth Sundays, we will all meet together as one church family at St Aidan's, with every congregation invited.
- On Sunday evenings...
  - **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday@4** will continue...hosted at St Peter's on the second Sunday at 4.00pm!
  - On other weeks, St Peter's will continue to host a traditional evening congregation which has a strong pastoral reach with the elderly and the bereaved.
  - Every week (except fifth Sundays) there will be a service at 6.30pm hosted by St Luke's. The worship will be informal, and we will explore the bible and discipleship in creative ways that connect those exploring faith, with those with many years as a Christian.
- Midweek...
  - There will be a communion service every Wednesday at 10.00am alternating between St Peter's and St Luke's.
  - **We Pause to Pray** every Thursday at 7.00pm, hosted in the lounge at St Aidan's.
  - **Play and Praise** meet on Fridays at 9.30am, currently hosted at St Peter's.

---

## SCHOOLS

There are good links with primary schools across the parish, with lay teams involved in school life in a variety of roles from taking collective worship, talking to classes, hosting school services in church and serving on governing bodies. There is an Open the Book team, which is enthusiastic but small in number. There is an open door to form a closer link with the local secondary school.

Of particular interest is the possibility in the next couple of years of launching a new congregation based at Priors Mill Primary School, especially since the future of St Mary Magdalene is not rosy. Priors Mill has a new head, who is very supportive, and the school is in the final stages of joining the Melrose Multi-Academy Trust.

The Melrose Trust began at nearby Wynyard Primary School, a newly built Church of England school which was always planned to include a church plant. That plant – the [Wynyard Vine Church](#) – is now becoming firmly established, and there have been several conversations already about whether the experience can be reproduced at Priors Mill.

---

## CARE HOMES

There are eight care homes in the parish. Some specialise in problems such as early onset dementia and challenging behaviour. There are also at least seven areas of sheltered accommodation. Lay members of the churches have built good links with some care homes in recent years, visiting and holding services on a regular basis. Some of this work is done ecumenically. Home Communion services are taken by lay members of each congregation who visit the housebound.



---

## ATTENDING TO THE DIOCESAN PRIORITIES

As Bishop Paul highlights in his introduction, the four key diocesan priorities all resonate with the situation in Billingham, and if we are honest they all need greater focus.

- **Energising Growth** will rest on a renewal of discipleship, and a restored confidence in the gospel, and a long-term re-engagement with our communities – **Partnership for Missional Church** will have a big part to play in this.
- **Challenging Poverty** will call us out of our comfort zones, and involve new and re-vitalised partnerships. Some of the poverty is in out-of-sight-out-of-mind communities such as the Clarences, but much is right on our church doorsteps.
- **Engaging with Children and Young People** is likely to look very different in the future from the past, as we build on the good work going on today, re-think our relationship with the many schools, and perhaps look towards a future church plant focused on this work.
- **Caring for God's Creation** is likely to come to the fore as we prune our church building stock, and renew what we retain - there is ample scope for us to aim high in terms of our own carbon footprint, and to go above and beyond.

## PART D: APPENDICES

This profile has already included many web links, which you could see as appendices. There is also [a link to an interactive Google Map](#) which provides an easy way to explore the parish online and see where key facilities are located. Key information on the town is in Appendix 1, and maps showing the growth of the town can be found in Appendix 2.

### APPENDIX 1: BILLINGHAM THE TOWN

Rather than duplicate, comprehensive and up to date information can be found here: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billingham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billingham). Like its history, the social character of the town parish varies considerably. There are relatively affluent areas and, by contrast, very deprived areas across the town parish – some obvious, and some hidden. Statistics can be found [here](#). In terms of local politics, Billingham is served by [Stockton on Tees Borough Council](#), and has its own [Billingham Town Council](#).

The rapid expansion of the community was a direct result of the expansion of the internationally important chemical industry in the area. While employment in the industry has declined somewhat in recent years, output has actually risen. There is still a strong chemical industry presence in Billingham, and we are proud of our industrial heritage.

But the industrial landscape of Billingham isn't completely dominated by the chemical industry: there are a variety of food-related businesses based here too. Billingham has been home to a potato crisp factory, affectionately known as the 'Crispy', for many years, and in 2007 became home to one of the largest tomato producers in the UK. Quorn is also made here! A number of trading estates with well-established small businesses have developed, including a cluster of high-technology companies at Belasis Business Park.

#### INDUSTRY

Alongside the bank of the River Tees are huge industrial works. The chemical works still referred to by many as ICI is now operated by a number of companies. Although the chemical industry began with explosives and fertilizer, it rapidly expanded to manufacture nylon and polyester before creating a highly diversified range of specialist products such as antifreeze and detergents. There is a significant recycling plant in Haverton Hill, as well as marine fabrication. There are vast chemical terminals and storage facilities near the mouth of the Tees at Seal Sands. A plant for the recycling of 'ghost ships' and a nuclear power station both lie just over the parish and deanery boundary.

In the past twenty years there has been a remarkable effort to clean up pollution from heavy industry. No longer is the smell of ammonia ever present, seals have returned to the Seal Sands, and a huge variety of birds now pass through Billingham as they migrate. The RSPB nature reserve at Saltholme opened a few years ago and is well used by birdwatchers from far and wide, as well as school groups.



On the other hand, many experience continuing and increasing concern about industrial safety. For example, hydrogen is now stored underground, and there are worries locally about unforeseen consequences.

#### SHOPPING

In common with many planned new towns, there are a number of groups of local shops dotted around the housing estates. While these supplied all needs in the early years of the town, today they are often centred around a Sainsbury's Local or the equivalent, with takeaways, hairdressers and other local shops alongside. The main supermarkets are Tesco, Aldi and Asda – Tesco near to the town centre, and Asda and Aldi within it. A greater variety of retail outlets can be found along Station Road and Mill Lane in Old Billingham, in Wolviston village, and along Wolviston Road.

Despite prize-winning floral displays, and the injection of life from the annual Billingham International Folklore Festival, the fully-pedestrian town centre currently has a number of unused retail outlets, and low-quality parking areas that give it a dated feel. Even so, the town centre boasts chemists, bakers, cafés and charity shops, plus many of the usual high street names. There are ambitious plans in place for a long-overdue regeneration of the town centre and the recent opening of new stores has helped to lift the atmosphere. However, bids for money from levelling-up funds have been unsuccessful, and the long term results remain to be seen.

---

## SPORTS AND LEISURE

Billingham Forum – recently refurbished at a cost of £18m – is the centre-piece of the sports facilities in Billingham. The Forum provides a swimming pool, an ice rink, squash courts, a top-class gym, and a couple of sports halls as well as a sauna and café area. There are also various fitness classes, a few more gyms, dance classes, and badminton at venues around the town. If you prefer to be outside when playing your sport then there are football pitches (including an all-weather pitch), a golf course ([www.billinghamgolfclub.com](http://www.billinghamgolfclub.com)), fishing, a running club, and two bowling clubs. In addition, the National Cycle Network runs straight through Billingham, and the world-class white water facility at the Tees Barrage is only a few miles down the road.

If you want to join a team or just cheer them on then you could take your pick from Billingham Town FC ([www.billinghamtownfc.net](http://www.billinghamtownfc.net)), Billingham Synthonia FC ([www.synners.co.uk](http://www.synners.co.uk)), Billingham Rugby Club ([www.billinghamrugby.co.uk](http://www.billinghamrugby.co.uk)), Billingham Synthonia Cricket Club ([billinghamsyncc.play-cricket.com](http://billinghamsyncc.play-cricket.com)), Billingham Stars Ice Hockey Team ([www.billinghamstars.co.uk](http://www.billinghamstars.co.uk)).

The Forum is also home to the larger of the two theatres in the area ([www.forumtheatrebillingham.co.uk](http://www.forumtheatrebillingham.co.uk)), the other being the Theatre Upstairs, home to the Billingham Players ([www.billinghamplayers.co.uk](http://www.billinghamplayers.co.uk)). There is a new library in the town, there are a number of social clubs, and several pubs across Billingham and Wolviston.

---

## HOUSING, TRANSPORT AND HEALTH

Due to the way the town has developed, housing in Billingham is very varied. Much of it is, however, quite dense. Only a modest proportion is in blocks of flats. The oldest housing – some of it very old indeed – can be found in the village centres of Billingham Green and Wolviston, and the outlying hamlets of Cowpen Bewley and Newton Bewley. In both cases, there are ribbon developments along what were once the main roads north and south. Housing grew up at Haverton Hill, but is now demolished, and then ICI company housing around the north side of Billingham Green.

The next phases, around and to the north of the town centre, and near St Luke's, were local authority housing. There are some flats in these areas, mostly low-rise, but some taller blocks in Low Grange. In many of these areas the assumptions of the town planners of the time were that private cars would remain a comparative rarity, so parking and access are often poor. On the other hand, there are generous open green spaces and play areas.

More recent developments to the north and west, have been largely private developments. Although many are larger properties, they remain fairly dense, with a few exceptions. Recent years have also seen new developments in the village of Wolviston itself, and very close to St Aidan's church on the old Billingham College site. There remains a mix of private ownership, local authority housing, private landlords and housing association properties.

Overall the town is fairly compact. The new A19 bypass removes a lot of the through traffic, and the legacy of the old A19 gives the town two good main north-south arteries. Lying at the junction of the A19 and A689, and close to the A66 gives Billingham excellent access in all directions: to Hartlepool in the west, Sunderland and Newcastle to the north, Middlesbrough and York to the south (linking to the A1), and Darlington, Sedgefield, Bishop Auckland and Durham to the west and north west.

There are still reasonable bus services in the town, though some routes have been cut back, and the station has an hourly service in each direction on weekdays northwards to Hartlepool, Sunderland and Newcastle and southwards to Middlesbrough. East Coast main line services can be joined at Darlington, and Grand Central services at Hartlepool or Eaglescliffe. Billingham has several health centres providing GP and family health services, a number of dentist surgeries both private and NHS, and opticians. There are hospitals close by in Stockton, and further afield in Hartlepool and Middlesbrough.

---

## PLACES TO VISIT

The transport infrastructure of the north east is quite exceptional, giving access to numerous recreational areas in an hour or less, including the North York Moors and Whitby (30 minutes to 1 hr); beaches at Seaton Carew (15 minutes) and Redcar, Marske and Saltburn (30 minutes); the Durham Dales (40 minutes); the Yorkshire Dales (1 hr); Durham City (40 minutes); Sunderland (30 minutes); and Gateshead, Newcastle and York (1 hour).



## APPENDIX 2: THE GROWTH OF BILLINGHAM IN MAPS

OS REVISED NEW SERIES – 1903-1904



OS POPULAR EDITION – 1925

