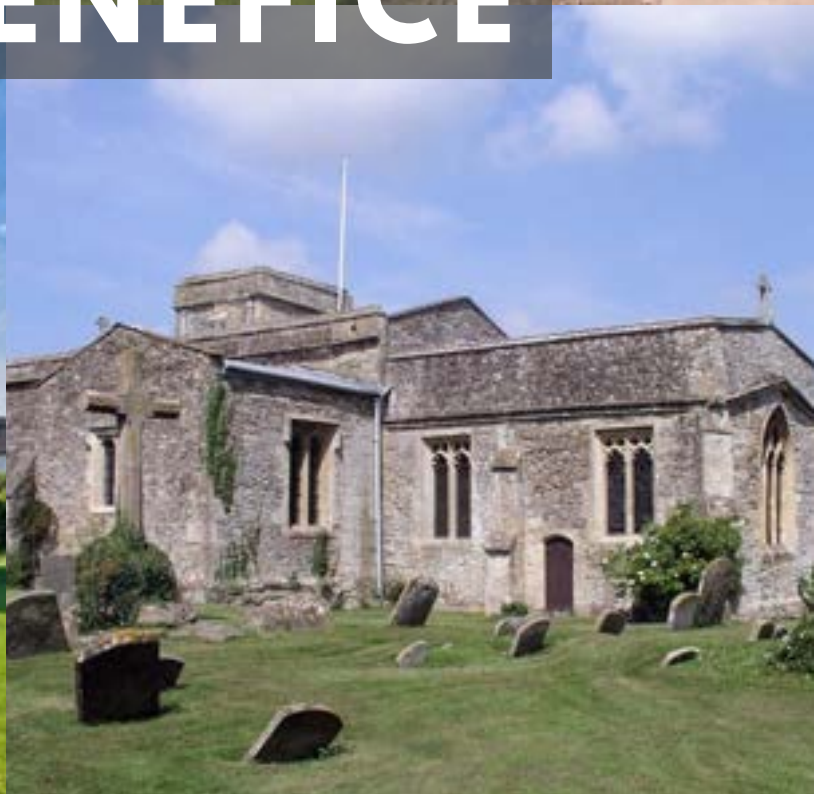


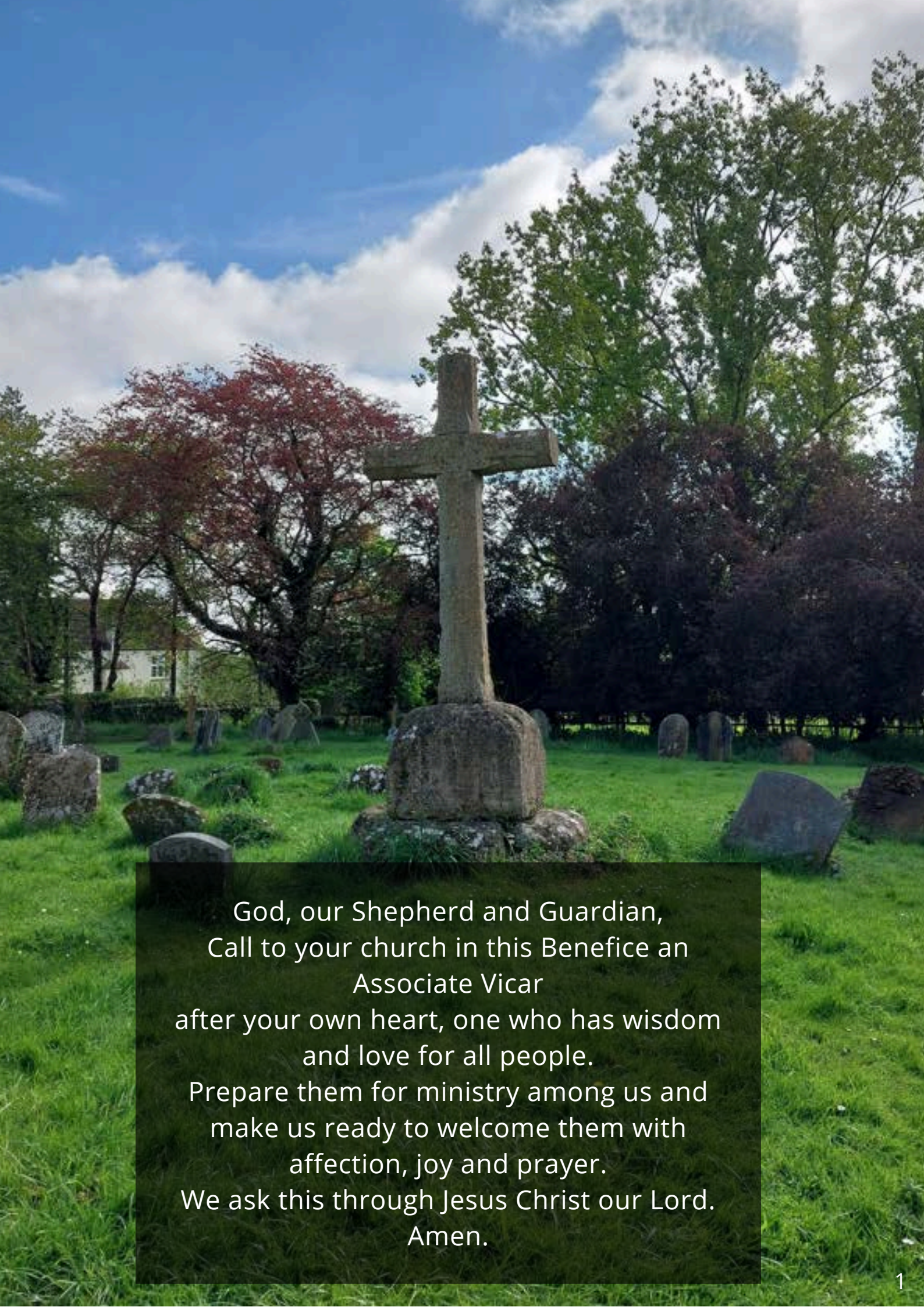


VALE BENEFICE



BENEFICE PROFILE FEBRUARY 2025

Grove | Hanney | East Challow | Denchworth



God, our Shepherd and Guardian,
Call to your church in this Benefice an
Associate Vicar
after your own heart, one who has wisdom
and love for all people.
Prepare them for ministry among us and
make us ready to welcome them with
affection, joy and prayer.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.



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FOREWORD FROM THE BISHOP



Dear potential applicants,

I am delighted that you are reading this profile and encourage you to pray about whether this position might be the role to which God is now calling you.

The people of this benefice are praying for a colleague to join the new in post Vicar who is passionate about walking with people to help them deepen and live out their faith in Jesus, as well as engaging with people of all ages to help them in their search for Jesus. If you are committed to developing your own spiritual life, and able to draw alongside others, please read on and learn about all the potential this role offers to work as part of a team, as well as independently.

This is a varied role and there will be opportunities to minister alongside the existing team, discerning together what specific roles might be according to individual gifts and interests. From the profile you will get a sense of the energy in this benefice and the ambition for the growth of the Kingdom of God – through encouraging worshippers in their discipleship, through working with schools and local established communities, through mission to new areas of housing and through partnership with others in the deanery and with ecumenical partners.

The benefice recognises that this is a challenging and fulfilling role and are clear on their responsibility to support whomever God calls here. They continue faithful in prayer in this discernment process and will offer their full support to their next Associate Vicar which includes friendship, guidance and enabling a healthy rhythm of rest: a protected day off, holiday, time for retreats and development.

You will find a friendly deanery with supportive colleagues. Our episcopal area and diocese are in good heart, expectant for all that God will do and thankful for all that God is doing.

Please pray about whether you might be the right minister to join us. If you decide to apply, I would be delighted to receive your application for this key position and look forward to the possibility of welcoming you as a potential colleague and partner in the Gospel.

With every blessing

+ Gavin Dorchester

The Rt Revd Gavin Collins, Bishop of Dorchester

FOREWORD FROM THE VICAR



Dear potential colleague,

Eight years ago, I was in your position, reading through the parish profile for the Associate Vicar of the Vale Benefice.

I was drawn to that role by the opportunity to work collaboratively with the then Vicar, across a benefice with lots of opportunities for mission and ministry, leading in parishes with diverse styles and traditions.

In January 2024, the Vicar retired and during the vacancy, I felt God calling me to continue to serve in the Vale Benefice over the coming years, but the question arose, in which role was God calling me to serve in; remaining as the Associate Vicar or by becoming the Vicar?

I chose to apply for the Vicar role, as I wanted to continue to serve the congregations and community that I have grown to love over the last 8 years, as they entered a new chapter in the life of the Benefice. There is a growing desire to work more co-operatively across the Benefice, developing our discipleship and growing in evangelism. I wanted to be involved in helping to shape and nurture this new benefice vision.

Our vision is to be a benefice where people come to faith in God our Creator, grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ and live out their faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This will involve building on the strengths of each of our parishes, recognising the challenges of being in growing communities, addressing areas of development across the Benefice and creatively embracing new ministry opportunities.

I hope that you will feel drawn to join me, in working collaboratively across our four parishes, in this new vision-led adventure as a benefice. Together, we will have the privilege of seeing where God takes the congregations and communities we are called to serve and guide.

Please do contact me if you would like to have an informal conversation before applying, I would be delighted to hear from you. You can contact me on 07739563894 or at vicaralec@valebenefice.org.uk.

God bless,
Alec Gill
Vicar of the Vale Benefice

WELCOME TO OUR BENEFICE



This document introduces our Benefice, sets out what we are looking for in our next Associate Vicar, describes how we will support them, and provides a snapshot of our four churches. We hope it will help you discern whether God is calling you here.

Our History

The Vale Benefice, formed in 2013, consists of four parishes: Grove, East Challow, Denchworth, and East & West Hanney (see [Appendix 1](#) for a map of key places in the Benefice). Grove was previously a single parish, and the other three were a group of churches served by one Vicar for 18 years. The Benefice was created to include two full-time clergy posts. In 2016, the Rev Alec Gill became Associate Vicar, and in January 2025, he was appointed Benefice Vicar. This marks a new chapter in our journey, as we focus on deeper collaboration in mission and ministry.

The population of the Benefice has grown by 50% in recent years, with new schools and expanding communities (see [Appendix 2](#) for further details of how our Benefice is expanding). While we are already active in local outreach, there are growing opportunities to engage people in the search for faith in Jesus.

The strong desire of the four parishes is to build upon the foundations that are now well established, in order to grow and broaden our worshipping congregations and to embrace new opportunities for mission and community involvement.

BENEFICE MISSION AND VISION

As a Benefice, we believe that our core mission is to love God and love our neighbours. Our vision is to grow, deepen, and broaden our worshipping congregations while engaging with our communities in mission and service. We aim to see people of all ages **come to faith, grow in faith, and live out their faith** locally. As we enter a new phase, you will play a key role in helping us develop and deliver this vision.

We seek to achieve this by building on our foundations of worship, fellowship, and missional service, while developing evangelism and discipleship across the Benefice. Through prayerful reflection and consultation, we've identified the following opportunities and challenges:

- Supporting and developing our school ministry
- Developing discipleship within our church communities and expanding our work with children, young people and families
- Addressing the wellbeing needs of our communities
- Engaging evangelistically with our local and new housing communities





OUR BENEFICE OPPORTUNITIES

Ministry Opportunities

This full-time stipendiary post is an exciting opportunity for an Associate Vicar who has a passion for discipleship and evangelism, and seeks to work collaboratively in a clergy team, across a multi-parish Benefice.

The Associate Vicar will work alongside the Vicar, supporting him to lead and develop the Benefice in line with our mission and vision, taking on various roles across the parishes. Together, they will determine how best to use the Associate Vicar's skills and passions to meet the needs of the Benefice.

Future Opportunities

As you read this document, you'll see the breadth of activity already taking place in our churches. But as our communities continue to grow, are you the person to join our ministry team and help us as we engage with the opportunities we have?

It will require a person with energy, flexibility, and a commitment to collaboration: someone with the desire to work in partnership with people who have been faithfully following the Lord for many years, some who have just met Him, and others we rarely see in church. We welcome applicants who are open to working within a broad spectrum of Anglican spirituality, embracing the diversity of traditions and worship styles across our Benefice, from Book of Common Prayer to Messy Church; from formal Common Worship Communion liturgy to Services of the Word with high levels of congregational - and community - interaction.

May you know God's presence – and prompting – as you explore the rest of our Profile.





OUR NEXT ASSOCIATE VICAR...

Working collaboratively under the oversight of the Vicar in ministry and mission, you will help enable the Vicar to focus on providing leadership and direction across the Benefice.

To fulfil your role as Associate Vicar you will be:

- Committed to developing your personal spiritual life through worship, prayer, Bible reading and spiritual reflection
- Careful to maintain your own emotional, mental and physical wellbeing in order to fuel your life and ministry
- Able to draw alongside people, providing spiritual leadership, encouraging others to come into faith in Christ and deepening their relationship with God
- Experienced in evangelism and connecting with those outside our church communities and seizing opportunities to develop their faith
- Capable of working as part of a team, leading a team and working independently
- Self-aware and committed to excellent safeguarding practice

Our Associate Vicar will help in developing the Benefice's vision-led ministry. In collaboration with the Vicar, you will be:

- Supporting our church communities to grow in faith and numbers
- Developing our work with local school communities, including being a foundation governor and taking school services in local schools and our parish churches
- Developing and deepening discipleship, including through small groups
- Creatively growing and supporting our communities in the new housing developments
- Growing our ministry to children, young people and families
- Taking part in the work of our four PCCs
- Offering pastoral care and support
- Engaging with the communities in which we serve

You will be taking part in and leading a range of Anglican styles of worship from sung Eucharists and BCP to Messy Church. This will include multiple Sunday services in different parishes, weekday services, and occasional offices across the Benefice. You will also be involved in preparing people for baptism, confirmation and weddings.

You will also be working across the Deanery, and with other local Christian denominations and faith groups.

You will hold a valid UK driving licence and be able to provide your own vehicle.

WHAT WE CAN OFFER AND HOW WE WILL SUPPORT YOU

This is a challenging and fulfilling role, and we want you to enjoy a sustainable and healthy work-life balance so you can give your best to it. We recognise that no minister can operate in isolation from the support, friendship and advice of others in their ministry, and we will do all we can to support you. This will benefit both you and our churches.

Ways we offer you our support:

- Vicars in our diocese are entitled to a weekly protected day off and 36 days holiday a year. While recognising the demands of ministry, we take seriously God's command for a sabbath. We want you to develop a healthy rhythm of taking time away to restore your soul
- We believe, too, that personal development never ends - we will actively support you in this area, releasing the time for retreats and opportunities for learning
- A welcoming and flexible Incumbent who is looking forward to sharing responsibilities according to where each of your giftings and passions lie
- A supportive team - our Benefice is blessed with retired clergy, honorary clergy, a licensed lay minister, volunteers and congregations actively involved in trying to discern and follow where God is leading us
- We offer a spacious and fully equipped vicarage, with a well-maintained garden. It is adjacent to St John's Church in Grove but with its own separate driveway (for further details of the vicarage, see [Appendix 3](#)).



Alec



Andrea



Sarah

More specifically our team includes:

- Our Vicar, Alec Gill, who has been in post since the beginning of the year and prior to that has been our Associate Vicar since 2016
- Andrea Morgan, our Benefice Administrator, who works out of the office at St John's
- Licensed lay minister Sarah Shackleton, a retired local GP who qualified as an LLM in late 2023
- A number of honorary and retired clergy who generously give their ongoing support across all four of our churches
- Churchwardens, treasurers, PCC secretaries, parish safeguarding officers, members of the Parochial Church Councils (Each parish has its own PCC meeting and clergy attendance is shared between the Vicar and Associate Vicar)
- Volunteers engaged in a range of activities across our Benefice – e.g. running village activities, school governors, presenting Open the Book at our C of E schools, a parent and toddler group; running warm spaces; our Sunday clubs (toddlers, primary and secondary children); a Sunday night youth group at St John's

ST JOHN'S, GROVE

We are a loving and vibrant church with a mix of traditional and modern worship styles, and recently refurbished buildings that are well used by the community. We are blessed to have many mature Christians in our congregation and have seen a number of young Christian families join our church after moving to the area.

Our parish vision prayer:

Lord God, fill us with the Spirit of Jesus that we may be a Christ-centred church, growing in numbers, faith, fellowship and mature Godliness. Help us to share His hope for our hurting world and His love for all creation. Grant that we may take an active part in building a flourishing and inclusive community in Grove.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

This introduction to St John's has been informed by a detailed questionnaire completed by more than 80 members of our church family, and four subsequent workshops which took a deeper dive into some of the recurring themes highlighted in the questionnaires.

www.groveparishchurch.org.uk



SERVICES AND SMALL GROUPS

Our congregation has a wide range of ages and we have three very different services each Sunday.

The 8am Holy Communion service keeps to the much-loved traditional wording of the Book of Common Prayer. The average attendance is around 9.

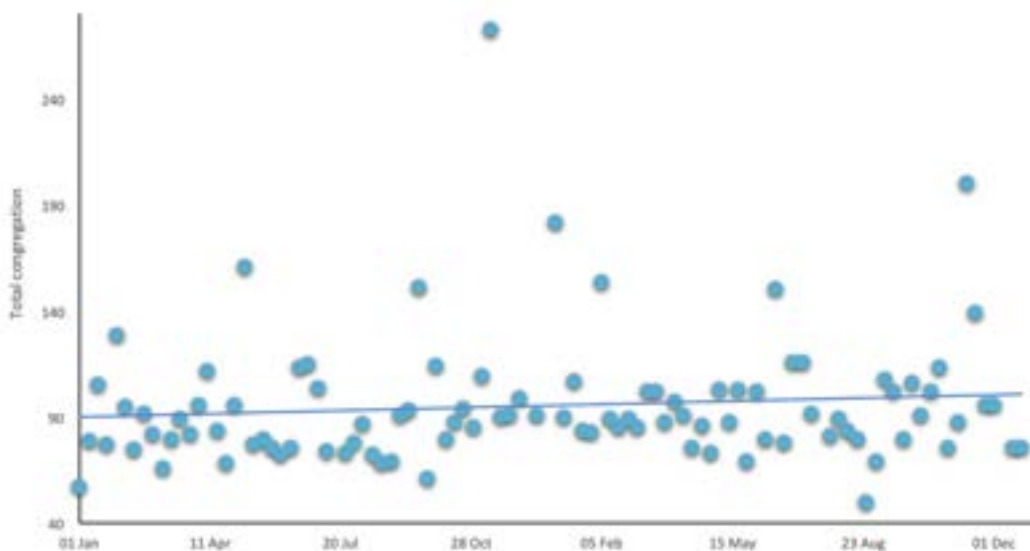


The 10.15am service is for all ages, with music led by our worship team. In 2024 it had an average attendance of 95 which is growing (see graph below) and is almost back to our pre-pandemic average of 100. Refreshments are served after the service and a majority of the congregation stay for informal coffee and chat. This service is also streamed online with an average of 17 unique viewers each week.

"I feel we are a very loving church, and we are a good mix of modern and traditional which I feel caters to multiple groups. We are a family church."

(Quote from questionnaire response)

Number of worshippers at 10.15am service in 2023 and 2024



Previously, we have also had a 6pm evening service, which offers the chance to explore quieter forms of worship and includes time for contemplation and discussion. We hope that when our capacity increases we will be able to resume this.

There is also a 30 minute said Holy Communion service, held at 10am every first Wednesday of the month. 11



We have now run three Messy Church events, which are growing steadily. We are interested in exploring different types of services such as café church, more Messy Church, contemplative services, outdoor services and services aimed at youth.

We also have Friends on Friday (fellowship, sharing and outreach aimed at older members of the congregation), and several prayer groups. In our recent discussions there was a desire to expand the opportunities for meeting in small groups throughout the week, both for prayer and for deepening faith.

Volunteers

Our recent questionnaire showed people think of us as a welcoming and caring church – and this is in no small part due to our dedicated volunteers. We are blessed with a committed group of regular volunteers, enabling our services to run each week, and who ensure there is a family feel to our church. Approximately 75% of the people on our electoral roll volunteer in some capacity. Having such a team shares out the tasks and gives these volunteers a feeling of belonging. Nevertheless, we would always welcome more people onto the rotas...



“Whilst a ‘traditionalist’ I have grown to love some of the different ways that have been introduced to worship God.”

(Quote from questionnaire response)

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WORK

Children and young people are an integral part of our worshipping community, and our recent discussions have revealed a strong appetite to develop this aspect of our church life further.



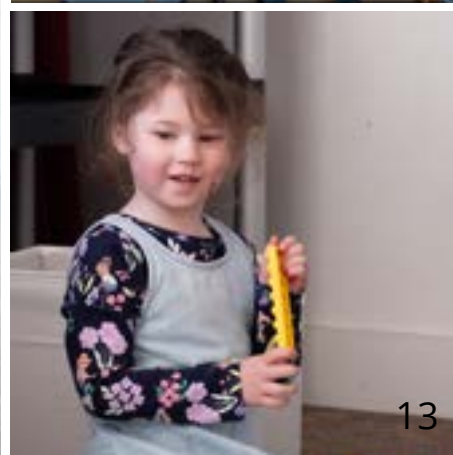
Children are warmly welcomed into the first part of each service and have opportunities to take part, for example helping on the tech rota, reading and making a joyful noise with tambourines and other small instruments!

During the Sunday services there is a space in our church hall for families with under 2s. The service is live-streamed to a TV there so parents can still engage with it.



In addition, we run three other groups on Sundays: Bubbles for pre-school children, Oasis for primary-aged children, and Pathfinders for those at secondary school. Again, this is led by committed volunteers with age-appropriate worship, craft and activities.

We also run a youth group on Sunday evenings for Year 8s and above.



ST JOHN'S IN THE COMMUNITY

St John's and its members are involved in a range of activities with and for the community each week, and our facilities are in regular use. Located centrally in Grove, we have plenty of opportunity to be a key part of our local community.

St John's PCC is the umbrella organisation for GroW, a family community group, run by a committee of volunteers. The church supports them by being the employer for three members of staff (although they are line-managed by a committee member) and providing a legal organisational structure in terms of HR and Finance for them to work within. They raise all their own funding through grants and donations from local councils and organisations.

We have a popular toddler group that runs every Wednesday, welcome meals for newcomers, meals for families with new babies, and boardgames afternoons.

Our buildings are well used by community groups beyond the church, such as Brownies and Guides, U3A, chess, badminton, dance fitness and many others.

Schools

We have strong links with Grove C of E Primary School with termly assemblies in school and termly return visits to the church. The school is keen to increase this and see the Benefice clergy more often. The school has two foundation governors from our church already but they are keen to have one of the clergy as well.

St John's C of E Academy's phased opening started with nursery children in September 2023. Excitingly it has the distinction of being a brand-new Church of England all-through school. The secondary phase will welcome year 7 students from September 2025 - its site still being under construction. Ultimately the school will provide education from nursery through to Year 11. Sarah Shackleton (our LLM) is a foundation governor there.

Engaging our community in 2024

- 10 blessings / thanksgivings / baptisms*
- 15 funerals / interments*
- 3 weddings*
- 2 church fetes
- 11 boardgames afternoons
- 5 warm space lunches
- 2 Messy Church events
- Carols around the Christmas Tree

Beyond essential Foundation Governor roles, volunteers from our church visit Grove C of E weekly and St John's Academy periodically for lively 'Open the Book' Bible story re-enactments. We host an annual Prayer Space - popular with both children and staff - for Grove C of E and an ecumenical group that meets termly to pray for all local schools.

*these numbers are all reduced compared to 2023 while we have had less capacity for occasional offices.

MISSION LINKS

St John's supports several local, national and international mission activities.

We were one of the four churches who founded Cornerstone, a Christian bookshop and café in Grove, in 1995. It is an independent charity with board members and ongoing financial support provided by the four churches.

All staff are committed Christians or in sympathy with Cornerstone's Christian ethos, and most volunteers come from the four churches in Grove. Cornerstone has a reputation for quality food and a friendly welcome. It won the CRT 2023 'Bookshop of the Year' award.

It is also used as a meeting place and St John's regularly hold events here. There is scope for all the churches to use it more often and for it to become a key part of our local mission at St John's.



The PCC has committed to putting aside 6% of our budget for mission with a view to increasing this moving forward. This year we are supporting the Wantage and Grove Street Pastors, the Wantage and Grove Foodbank, Little People (which provides support to local families in need) and Sweatbox (which is a community space for young people).

We will also provide financial support to several national and international causes, including:

- Marcio Ciechanovicz and Noemi Celeti, a Brazilian family working and serving God in Brazil, through CMS
- A Rocha International
- The Clewer Initiative: Church of England human trafficking initiative

FINANCE AND PCC

Most of our congregation contribute directly through the Parish Giving Scheme (PGS). We still have some ad-hoc donations given at services and other events, either by cash or through a card machine.

Our total unrestricted giving income, including tax recovered, was £125k in 2024

We also received just over £14k in 2024 from the lettings of our rooms and hall and we expect to do so again in 2025. We have a house that was purchased for a curate that is 52% owned by the PCC and 48% by the diocese. All costs for the house are in that proportion and when we have no curate the house is rented out and we receive 52% of the rental income.

Whilst the 2024 accounts are currently being independently examined, we do not expect there to be any material changes to these figures. Our budgeted general income and expenditure for 2025 is around £160k which, whilst greater than the actual in 2024, we see no reason not to meet this or at least balance the income and expenditure.



St John's has a strong PCC which meets on alternate months, currently on a Tuesday evening at the Cornerstone in Grove. This receives reports from all the subcommittees in rotation but always includes churchwardens', finance, FMG (maintenance), and safeguarding items. The PCC currently has 18 members including those co-opted for specific roles, such as our treasurer and Parish Safeguarding Officer.

Safeguarding within St John's is excellently led by Anne Cheeseman, our Safeguarding Officer, supported by the PCC and churchwardens.

OUR BUILDINGS

St John's is a modern church building set in a large plot positioned centrally in the current village.

- The church has wooden pews which can be removed for more informal services when required
- All the church buildings currently have gas central heating, which in the church and hall is due to be replaced as part of an ongoing environmental improvement project, already part funded by grant income
- The church hall was refurbished and extended in 2019, providing additional storage, a 'Changing Places' accessible toilet and a seating area, as well as projector screens for film nights and meetings
- We also have toilet facilities in the church foyer and St John's Rooms
- There is a kitchen area adjoining the church hall which was refurbished in 2009, with a dishwasher added more recently
- The church and church hall have a fully integrated audio-visual system which includes a projection and live-streaming capability for use during services
- There are hearing loop facilities in the church, church hall and in the lower room of the St John's Rooms

The recent Quinquennial Report of 2022 highlighted no urgent infrastructure work for the church.

The St John's Rooms building was completed in 2000 and is positioned alongside the main church. The rooms provide us with:

- additional toilets
- a church office
- a small kitchen
- a large lobby area
- 1 large meeting room downstairs and one upstairs. There is also a small counselling/meeting room downstairs



Church Hall



St John's Rooms

ABOUT GROVE

Grove is a large Oxfordshire village situated to the north of Wantage. According to the 2021 census, it has a population of about 8000 people. In 2021 21% of the population was under 15 years old, and 52% between 20 and 59 years old. Grove is about 12 miles south of Oxford, adjacent to Wantage, and has predominantly modern housing.

Grove has seen a large development of housing over the last few years which has significantly added to the local population since the last census.

Grove benefits from direct bus links with Oxford, Wantage and Didcot. There is a mainline railway station at Didcot with direct links east into London and west to the southwest and south Wales.

Within the Grove area employment is provided at Grove Technology Park, Williams F1 and Crown Packaging Manufacturing UK. Further afield, there are significant employment areas at Milton Technology Park, Harwell Science and Innovation Campus, as well as Oxford.

Moving forward, we would like... "To grow our church in numbers as our community here in Grove continues to grow."

(Quote from questionnaire response)

Key issues in Grove include the huge expansion of local housing. This has had an impact on all the local services which are struggling to cope with the large number of new residents in the area.



ST NICHOLAS, EAST CHALLOW

At St Nicholas Church our mission and vision is to provide a vibrant and growing Christian witness in our local community and more widely, through worship, pastoral, evangelistic and social activities and other initiatives, so that we may draw others to experience the love of God. To grow our congregation, broaden its age profile and to deepen its commitment, we are actively seeking and initiating opportunities for greater community involvement.

We are committed partners of our Benefice and strongly support the Benefice-wide activities and initiatives, and see that involvement and our working together as important aspects of our future.

We have emerged from the relatively recent restrictions of the pandemic with a strengthened commitment and determination, and with our congregation and resources undiminished. We recognise the need to move forwards and to strengthen and develop further our worshipping community.

We are excited by the recent appointment of Alec Gill as our Vicar. We are looking forward to supporting him and working with him as our Benefice evolves under his leadership. We see a timely appointment of an Associate Vicar as an important factor in our development, and share the vision of the person we seek.



PATTERNS OF WORSHIP

Our worship is predominantly Eucharistic, using Common Worship, with weekly services on Thursday and Sunday mornings. This is supported by occasional Lent and Advent courses, sometimes lay led, and special non-Eucharistic services.

We have an increasing number of non-Eucharistic services, which include Harvest Thanksgiving, Service of Memories, Carol services, St George's Day and Remembrance Sunday, aimed at attracting a wider cross-section of our community. Recent innovations have been well-attended services on the village green to mark the coronation of King Charles III and for singing carols in the lead-up to Christmas.

The average Sunday attendance is approximately 25 to 30, and there are currently about 40 on the Electoral Roll.

The congregation is remarkably constant and dedicated in their attendance, and support enthusiastically the combined Benefice services associated with major festivals and the patronal festivals of the individual parishes.



There is extensive lay involvement in our worship, through the provision of sacristans, sidespeople, servers, organists, readers, those leading intercessions, assisting in the distribution of the sacrament. Lay led non-Eucharistic services are conducted when there are no ordained ministers available, and we are developing this service based on Common Worship New Patterns for Worship.

OUTREACH AND MISSION

Our outreach and broader mission to our village community takes a variety of direct and indirect forms.

An important aspect of our pastoral mission is the monthly production and distribution of our parish magazine, the 'Challow News'. This is produced by the church and distributed free to every household in the parish, now some 500 households. It provides both the Christian message and community news.

We have delivered 'Welcome leaflets' to the new housing developments that have occurred in the last 5 to 10 years, comprising of > 100 houses. We have recently (autumn 2024) revised our welcome leaflet.



We have strong links with our village Church of England controlled primary school, and the school has two foundation governors from our benefice. Members of our congregation present 'Open the Book' bible stories to school assemblies weekly; an initiative started locally in East Challow, and now widespread in the Benefice and Deanery. The church is actively involved in 'end of term' services, other school assemblies and in the provision of 'Prayer Space' in church.

We are working closely with our local Cubs / Beavers pack to create more opportunities for their involvement in services.



Members of the congregation take an active part in many village activities, and are members of different village organisations, including the Parish Council and the Village Hall Committee.



The village was actively involved in our WWI centenary celebration project in 2014/15, which obtained a Lottery Heritage Fund grant for the refurbishment of our WWI Memorial Lych Gate and for an exhibition / project exploring the village's involvement in WWI and the links to the current residents. The village strongly supported our fundraising for the major church reordering project that took place in 2018. The reordering provided a more welcoming and practical entrance, a kitchen and toilet facilities. The decorating of the church for major festivals and events, such as Harvest, involves many villagers who are not regular church attenders.



We have recently started a Coffee Morning in church on the first Thursday of each month, to offer fellowship, company and a warm setting for anyone in the village.

Our church is open every day during daylight hours, for prayer and quiet contemplation, and much appreciated and used by the village. The prayer tree and candles in church are well used and indicate a fulfilled need in our wider community.

Our congregation is committed to providing a warm welcome to occasional visitors and to potential new members of the congregation; this has in recent years resulted in a number of new regular members of the congregation.



Our 'A church near you' web pages have been recently substantially updated and extended, and linked to the Challow News and other important documents; and is being regularly updated. This is now attracting approximately 200 views per week. In parallel our internal and external notices boards are regularly updated, and include special displays to advertise the major events and festivals.

CONGREGATION

Our worship, other activities and the administration at the parish level run smoothly due to the willingness of our congregation to commit to the support of our services, the PCC and other committees, and to volunteer for all the important ancillary tasks such as flower arranging, cleaning and maintenance of the churchyard. There always seems to be someone available to fulfil those tasks. This hard work and dedication is seen as an important part of our Christian witness.

The occasional offices, baptisms, weddings and funerals, are all supported by the congregation and are seen as important opportunities for pastoral care, support and witness. In 2022 there were two blessings and thanksgivings, one wedding, two funerals and three burials of ashes, in 2023 there were two blessings and thanksgivings, one wedding, and one funeral, and in 2024 there were two blessings and thanksgivings, and one funeral in the church.

The congregation attach much importance to their hospitality and warmly welcome casual visitors or potential new members. Since the church reordering, coffee and cake are available in church after every Sunday service. This is seen as an important part of our fellowship and pastoral support. It is well supported and is supplemented by other occasional social activities.

The PCC meets every two to three months, and has nine members including churchwardens, secretary and treasurer. The PCC has an adopted Safeguarding Policy and has an appointed Safeguarding Officer, in line with Diocesan guidelines. A Health and Safety policy is in place, and is regularly reviewed and updated.



RESOURCES AND CHURCH BUILDING

The church finances are sound and return a modest surplus each year. The parish share is paid in full each year, and was approximately £14,000 in 2023. The total income and expenditure for 2023 was approximately £27,000. The figures for 2024 are similar, but not yet approved by the PCC and APCM. There is an adequate reserve for future shortfalls and minor restorations and repairs. This relatively healthy financial situation is due to generous and sacrificial giving within the congregation and the wider community, income from fundraising such as the '200 club' and revenue from the advertising in the Challow News.

The commitment of our community to support our church was demonstrated by the fundraising for the £70,000 required for the major reordering in 2018, where half of the funds were from donations and fundraising events, raised within a 12-month period, with the remainder of the funds from a number of different grants.

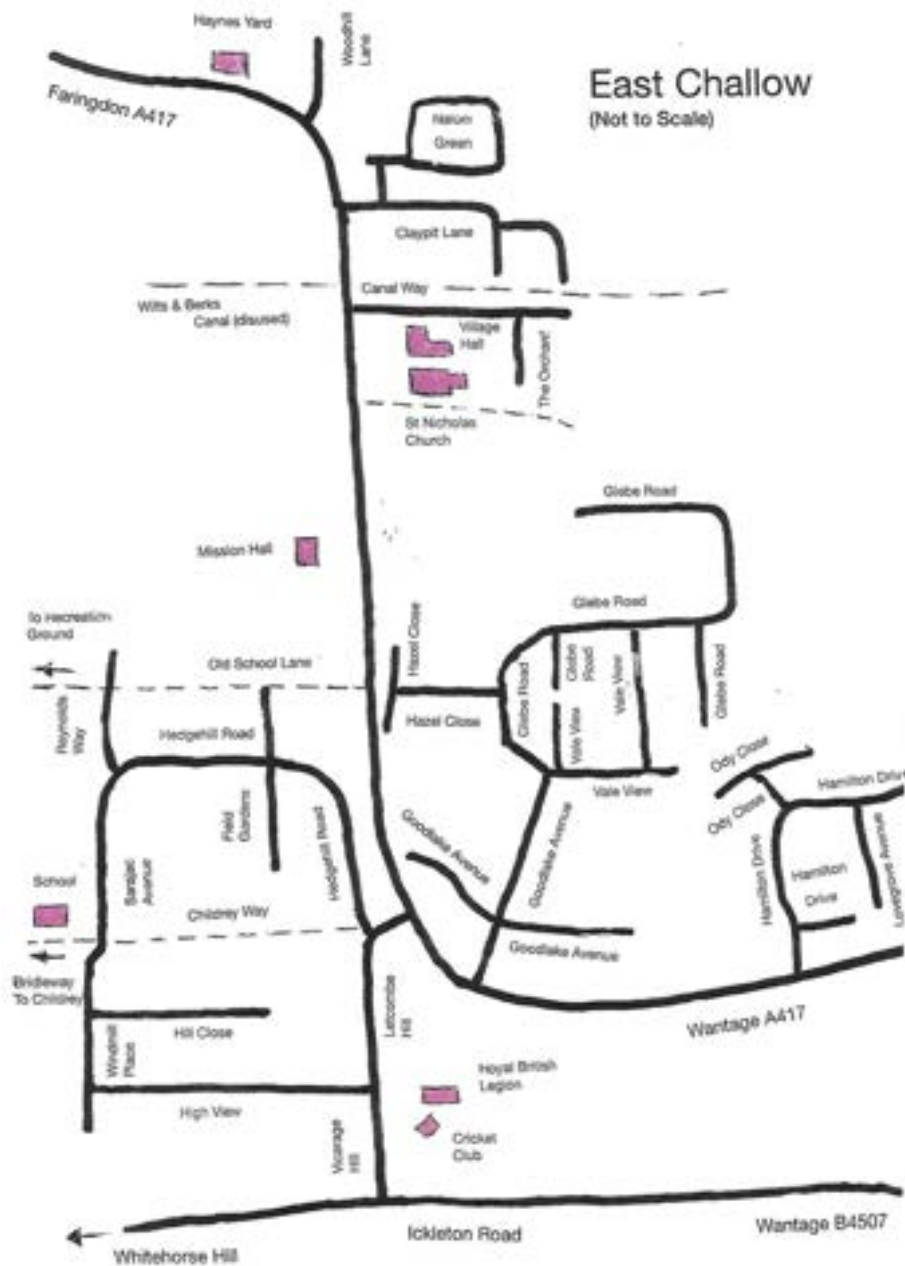
The congregation support a number of domestic and overseas charities on specific Sundays throughout the year, including the Bible Society, Royal British Legion Poppy appeal, Children's Society, Christian Aid, and nominated charities for our Harvest appeal; these are reviewed by the PCC each year.

The church is a Grade II listed building, which originally dates from the 12th / 13th century, and was extensively restructured in the 19th century. The Victorian restructuring largely reflects the current layout, and the church can seat approximately 100 people. The church is well ordered, decorated and adorned, and is in good repair. The last Quinquennial Inspection was in 2021, and raised no major problems. Many of the relatively minor issues raised have now been completed or are in the process of being addressed with an ongoing maintenance programme.



In 2018 a major reordering of the entrance / front of the church was completed. This provided a small kitchen, and a disabled access toilet. Importantly it made the main entrance more accessible and provided a more welcoming entrance area. These developments have made the church more useful and suitable for a wider range of activities and has enabled a greater and more flexible use of the space. In 2022 a new modern sound system, sponsored by a generous donor, was installed, and has provided better acoustics, more flexibility and a greater range of musical options.

PARISH OF EAST CHALLOW



East Challow is a relatively small village to the west of Wantage, separated by a narrow green belt. It now has a population ≥ 1050 (2021 census) and has grown by at least 50% in the last ten years due to three major housing developments which have increased the number of dwellings by approximately 100 to 150.

The village has a number of small industrial and commercial activities on the edge of the village, which include a garage and petrol station. Although the Deanery is on the whole modestly affluent, East Challow is not one of the more wealthy dormitory villages that are adjacent to Wantage. The village has a well-used and well-equipped village hall, a vibrant cricket club and Royal British Legion club. It has a Church of England controlled primary school, which is part of the multi-academy Cambrian Learning Trust. The school was recently expanded using Section 106 funds and has a nominal roll of between 100 to 120.

ST JAMES, DENCHWORTH

Denchworth is a historic village, of about a thousand acres and a population of 166, split across 78 households. Surrounded by extensive farmland, its origins are shrouded in mystery. There is evidence from the Abingdon Chronicles that there was a settlement there in the 7th century, and by the time of the Norman Conquest, it was significant enough to be recorded in the Domesday Book. The village has several attractive thatched and timber framed buildings. The Manor House dates back to the late 15th century and owners have included Press Baron, Lord Beaverbrook and Sir Edward Montague Compton Mackenzie (writer and author of 'Whisky Galore').

Another literary connection with the village is Mary Hardy, sister of the novelist Thomas Hardy, who became school mistress at the National School in 1863. Part of her role involved playing the church organ. Letters she wrote show her struggling with this onerous duty. The Victorian organ is largely unchanged since then and still continues to vex the three organists who play regularly for services. The major land use in the village continues to be, as it has for centuries, a mixture of arable and livestock farming.



Locally, the village is famous for its public house, the 17th century Fox Inn, a traditional country pub, with a deserved reputation for family friendly service and quality food and for its 'Ostentation' of peacocks, which wander at liberty around the village.

The village has a thriving, energetic and committed Parish Meeting and villagers are well served by the weekly 'Village News'.

There is a spacious and well-equipped Village Hall.



The Parish Church of St James is a Grade 2* listed building of historic importance. Most of what is visible was built in the 13th and 14th century, but there are traces of an earlier building. The tower houses four bells which can be played through a carillon system. The church was restored in the Victorian era and has recently been refurbished, mostly due to the generosity of local people. The church once housed a 'Chained Library' and one of its volumes is still on display at the church.



OUR MISSION

The mission of St James, as it has been for nearly 1000 years, is to be the always present Christian witness in the life of the village. The church is left unlocked during the day for quiet contemplation and prayer. And, whether it is an occasion of joy, such as a baptism or marriage, a time for mourning, such as the funeral of a member of the community, or an act of commemoration, such as the observation of Remembrance, St James is the spiritual home that unites the village.

There are 19 on the Electoral Roll (which is currently being revised). There is a 10am service of Holy Communion every Sunday, with the churchmanship being a 'middle of the road' where all can feel at home. The regular, welcoming, and committed congregation ranges between five and twelve people, though the church is often full for services such as the 'Patronal Festival', the Advent carol service, the Christmas Carol service, and Christmas. For Remembrance the congregation is joined by 'Beavers' and 'Squirrels' from Grove. The village has also commemorated the anniversary of the cessation of the First World War by planting a Rowan tree.



Although there are vacancies on the PCC, and there is no current Churchwarden, the church administration is executed with efficiency and the church is currently solvent (although recent work required through the Quinquennial and a failure in the security system has chipped away at our capital reserves). Going forward, its challenges are likely to be those facing many rural parishes: stagnation in congregation numbers, with a rising age demographic; and, the strain put on finances by rising costs. The recent Quinquennial Inspection revealed that whilst the sanctuary is in good shape, there is considerable work to be done to flooring in the tower, which will require fundraising activity. Denchworth St. James are deeply grateful for the continued support of other churches in the Benefice in terms of attributing the Parish Share. The church is looking for an Associate Vicar who understands the needs of rural communities and can work with us to grow the work of the church in Denchworth.

ST JAMES THE GREAT, HANNEY

The parish of St James includes the two villages of East and West Hanney with some outlying homes, totalling around 900 houses with a population of about 1800. There is a broad demographic including many younger families recently moved into new housing. Employment rates are high in the area which includes Oxford, Harwell and Didcot. There are excellent train and road links with London, the Midlands and the West Country.

We have:

- Two separate parish councils and there is a geographical divide between the two villages. However every society, club and organisation (church of course included) embraces both villages as one community
- A village church school of 190 pupils
- Two pubs, one community-owned
- A volunteer-run Community Shop
- An Indian restaurant and takeaway and a family-owned Italian restaurant and hotel
- A thriving and very well-equipped village hall
- Villagers who are involved in a variety of societies, organisations and clubs



OUR CHURCH IN THE COMMUNITY

More than 15 years ago the PCC determined that its principal mission was to put the church at the heart of the community. It has worked hard to do so. As a result:

- Villagers value the church for their baptisms, weddings, celebrations and funerals. The churchyard remains open, and is cared for and is a place of peace and quiet for all
- The church is open 365 days of the year for private prayer and reflection
- The church organises and hosts the village's biggest annual event, the Michaelmas Fayre, which is held in and around the church and includes stalls manned by villagers and organisations, a silver band, Morris dancers, a large RHS-style competition, teas provided by the WI, and a BBQ at The Plough (community-owned pub but tenanted). Numerically about a third of our villagers attend. Profits made are donated to local community organisations
- A community-focused pre-Christmas Holly Fair is held in a barn in East Hanney where village artisans take stalls, we serve seasonal refreshments and importantly sell holly!



- In some years a village picnic is organised by the church at the time of the Patronal Festival
- Our members visibly take part supporting a number of village organisations. Our parish secretary, for example, is chairman of the community company which owns The Plough and a number of the congregation volunteer in the Community Shop
- We work very closely with the school to assist in providing a Christian education for all our village children. We visibly and practically support the school's own activities including fundraising

Our Church in the wider community

We try to look outwards beyond our immediate community. We do this in our collective prayers and our parish charitable giving. We do so where possible in our deeds - for example helping and supporting refugees and those struggling from poverty in communities both near to and far from ours. At Christmas we donate all the collections at our services to appropriate local and national charities.



OUR WORSHIP

Our mission is to broaden and strengthen our congregation by being encouraging and approachable in our use of Common Worship. There is strong emphasis on participation and involvement by the majority of the congregation in our services:

- Averagely our Sunday Sung Eucharist is attended by between 20 and 30 adults and under normal times we hold a midweek said Eucharist. At present the constraints of the building limit our provision of children's activities during the service but nevertheless relevant materials are always available
- We have a congregation twice each week of 190 school children, once when we attend the village school to share Open the Book and second when one of our priests leads their assembly. These children and some parents also attend special services in church four times a year
- A home group meets fortnightly co-ordinated by one of our honorary clergy and attended by about a dozen members of the congregation. It focuses on the Gospel reading from the previous Sunday and members take it in turn to lead
- At Christmas about a third numerically of the village joins our services. Our best attended service, Carols around the Crib (which is really a pop-up nativity held in a barn with as many Marys, Josephs, kings, donkeys and shepherds as turn up) has a congregation, many participating, of over 300
- Easter brings in many villagers and visitors – and not just for the egg hunt!
- We lead the Royal British Legion Service of Remembrance, when possible a Drumhead, with an attendance of 200+ led by the local silver band
- We have held village services on all important national occasions, including the Platinum Jubilee, the Coronation, and marking both the declaration and end of WW1 and involving our civic and community leaders





We are not precious about our liturgy. Our principal services take the form of an approachable Common Worship Eucharist. Each of our priests, including our honorary clergy who mostly live in the village, have their own style and approach which is warmly embraced.

Our music ranges from traditional hymns accompanied by an organ to sung pieces led by a group of musicians and we have been working with the School to include children where possible. Everyone in the congregation is encouraged, if they wish, to take part in reading, leading the intercessions, acting out Open the Book stories in church, bringing up the Elements, serving refreshments and providing welcoming sidesmen etc.

OUR PEOPLE

We have a hardworking PCC which is harmonious and active. Development of our worship is delegated to a worship committee which includes all involved clergy. We have made great strides through this because we can devote time outside the general running of the parish. We have no problems in covering our services because of the huge support and input of retired clergy who also assist throughout the benefice and sometimes the deanery.

Our organist is one of the churchwardens and we also have additional organists and professional and non-professional musicians who help with our services and in the school. We number amongst our regular congregation people from a wide diversity of Christian traditions including anglo-catholic, charismatic evangelical, Baptist, URC, and Methodist.

We also welcome the support of many villagers who are not otherwise church attenders who ring our bells, arrange our flowers, mow our grass, decorate our church on great festivals, and just help us provide the village with its church.

Pastoral care

We see a vital part of our mission to be providing pastoral care to our community and beyond. We are fortunate to have the Benefice's vicar as a resident and our three retired clergy living in the parish but our lay members also play their part. We have a good intelligence network, through our work in the parish, which lets us know when and where help is needed. Because our members are involved, villagers know they can turn to us for support. We work closely with our parish councils and are consulted by them where appropriate.



BUILDING AND FINANCE

Our church is a Grade II* listed building dating probably from Saxon times and retaining most of its Norman features. It is in good order and passes its quinquennials. We are awaiting approval of our re-ordering proposals which will provide better facilities for the church including a usable parish room, lavatory facilities and better catering provision. These will also enable us to make some important aesthetic and practical improvements to our worship space – our ambition is to make our church even more appealing for all ages to use and offering a warm and welcoming fellowship. These improvements will also broaden the use of the building for meetings, social activities and other events.

<https://ohct.org.uk/church/west-hanney-st-james-the-great/>



Our finances

Due to past and present efforts we currently have substantial reserves and a healthy cashflow. We have a robust Planned Giving scheme and receive an annual grant from the Hanney Lottery which we established and continue to manage. Thanks to careful stewardship and the generosity of villagers we already have substantial funds towards the planned re-ordering project.

OUR PLACE IN THE BENEFICE

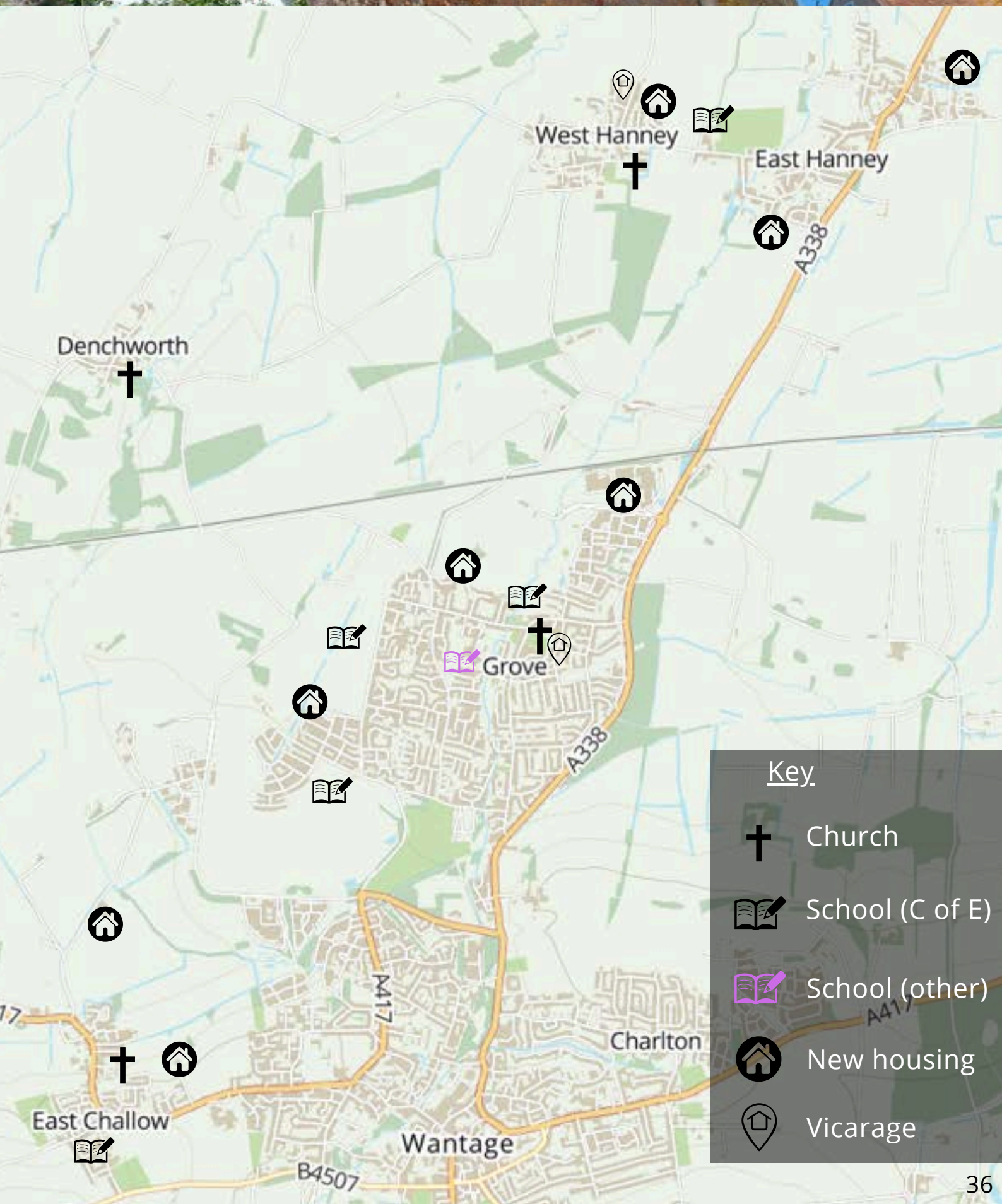
The creation of the Benefice has been a completely positive experience for our parish. As part of a wider group, but retaining entirely our own identity, we have been able to experience the ministry of priests and fellow Christians from many backgrounds and traditions within the Church. From its inception the Benefice has worked harmoniously together. It is a great family of which to be a member.



APPENDIX 1: MAP OF THE BENEFICE

GOOSEY 13¼
EAST CHALLOW 3

WEST HANNEY 2
CHARNEY BASSETT 2
LONGWORTH 5



Key



Church



School (C of E)



School (other)



New housing

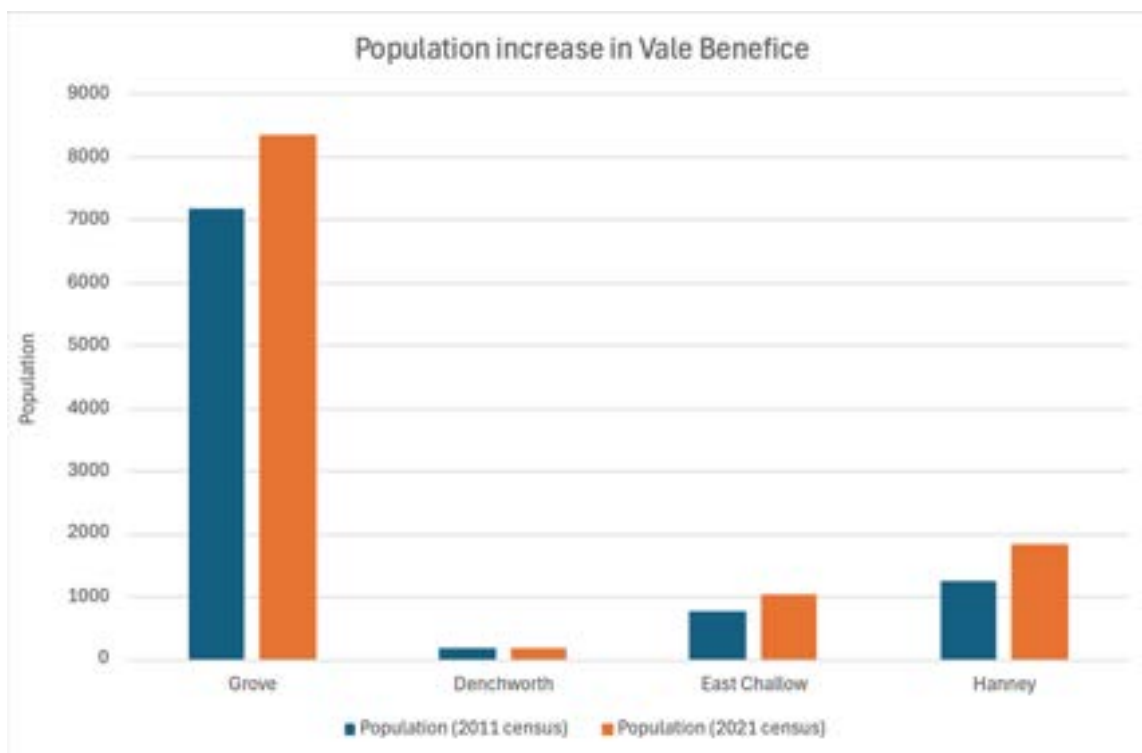


Vicarage

APPENDIX 2: GROWTH OF THE BENEFICE

This page details the expansion of Grove, Hanney and Challow through the building of new homes over the last 10 years. This massive building programme has given a huge opportunity for mission to draw new families into the life of the different churches and to find faith in Jesus Christ. All the churches have capacity to accommodate new families and have a strong desire to see more people coming to faith.

| | Electoral roll | Capacity of church (estimate) | Average weekly attendance |
|--------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Grove | 120 | 150 | 112 |
| Denchworth | 19 | 100 | 8 |
| East Challow | 36 | 102 | 29 |
| Hanney | 20 | 120 (will reduce after reordering project) | 23 |



Grove has had 3268 homes approved since 2016. So far only around a third of these are completed and occupied. It has another 531 currently in planning applications.

Hanney has had the largest population increase by percentage since 2011 (47%) and has another 45 houses awaiting planning approval.

East Challow has had 221 new homes built since 2009.

APPENDIX 3: THE VICARAGE

The Vicarage is a modern five-bedroom detached house set in the middle of a large plot laid mainly to lawn. Although close to the church, the house feels secluded and has separate access to the church down a private drive. They are linked by a short path which can be lit at night.

The house has gas central heating. It also has solar panels fitted to the roof, which is estimated to reduce electricity bills of the incumbent by £200 pa. Any money from the sale of unused electricity goes to the diocese.

The downstairs accommodation:

- Large office/study which is accessed before going into the main house, and has built-in cupboards and comprehensive shelving
- Downstairs cloakroom
- Large sitting room with door leading to small patio area
- Dining room with hatch into the kitchen
- Newly fitted kitchen with an external door leading to a patio
- Utility room with a built-in sink and space for washing machine and tumble dryer

Upstairs accommodation:

- Master bedroom with built-in cupboards and en-suite shower room
- A further 4 double bedrooms
- Separate toilet
- Bathroom

Outside:

- Single garage (separate from the house) with ample parking
- Two patios and a large lawn area with low maintenance shrubs and a small herb garden. The church ride-on mower is available to use.

