

Background

Periodically, throughout Church history, it has been necessary to make changes to benefice boundaries in response to population, financial and other considerations. Since the summer of 2021, four stipendiary priests have had oversight of five benefices. This has allowed valuable time to consider what shape four future benefices might take but has meant a period of uncertainty for some. With the resignation of Mark Godson, and with suspensions coming to an end (read below more information on suspensions), there is now a need to agree the shape of four benefices so that recruitment of a fourth Rural Pioneer Priest can proceed.

Whilst 'benefice' remains a recognised (and legal) term for a group of parishes, in the Abbeydore Deanery, we work as clusters of parishes and a benefice may include one, two or three different clusters.

Parish suspensions (read if you wish to know more)

Four benefices (Cagebrook, Ewyas Harold, Black Mountains and Borderlink) in Abbeydore Deanery are currently suspended. This means that no designated vicar or rector has been appointed to the benefice. These suspensions end in 2026. The Bishop and patrons have asked that plans should be put forward to reorganise the deanery so that the suspensions can be lifted and appointments made to each benefice. Every benefice has a patron, or patrons – historically, they appointed and paid clergy. Nowadays they don't contribute to clergy costs at all but continue to have the right to present candidates for appointment.

There are two patrons with large numbers of patronages throughout England – The Crown and the Christian Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS). Both these patrons have joint patronage in several benefices throughout the Deanery. In 2023 the Deanery Leadership Team (DLT) invited both the Crown and CPAS representatives to visit us, to explain that we are now operating in clusters, what we are doing, how we work and to ask for their ideas about pastoral reorganisation. Both patrons were constructive and supportive, and we agreed that we would discuss suggestions during 2024 and let them have our outline plans before the end of this year.

The Bishop and patrons have allowed suspensions to continue whilst the Deanery Pastoral Plan of 2021 was implemented. This has meant that some clusters have been living with a level of uncertainty for some time. We now have to review Benefice boundaries to bring this uncertainty to an end.

What this means for Abbeydore Deanery

It is important to remember that although benefice boundaries will be redefined, clergy and lay leaders will continue to collaborate across the deanery to enable ministry and mission.

And the people of our deanery will continue to enjoy and nurture relationships which transcend cluster or benefice boundaries. All Rural Pioneer Priests operate across the deanery, sharing responsibility for deanery-wide mission projects (e.g. Children and Young People, enabling worship etc.) alongside their oversight of particular clusters. The Rural Pioneer Priests will continue to support and develop local and lay leaders. The recent Deanery Pastoral Plan review data indicates that for the majority of respondents, clusters and mission projects are seen as positive and should continue.

Ideas to work out what combination of parishes might offer practical and attractive roles and allow for suspensions to be lifted were discussed and developed at the Joint Council meeting (operating as the Deanery Mission and Pastoral Committee) on 10th September.

It should be noted that:

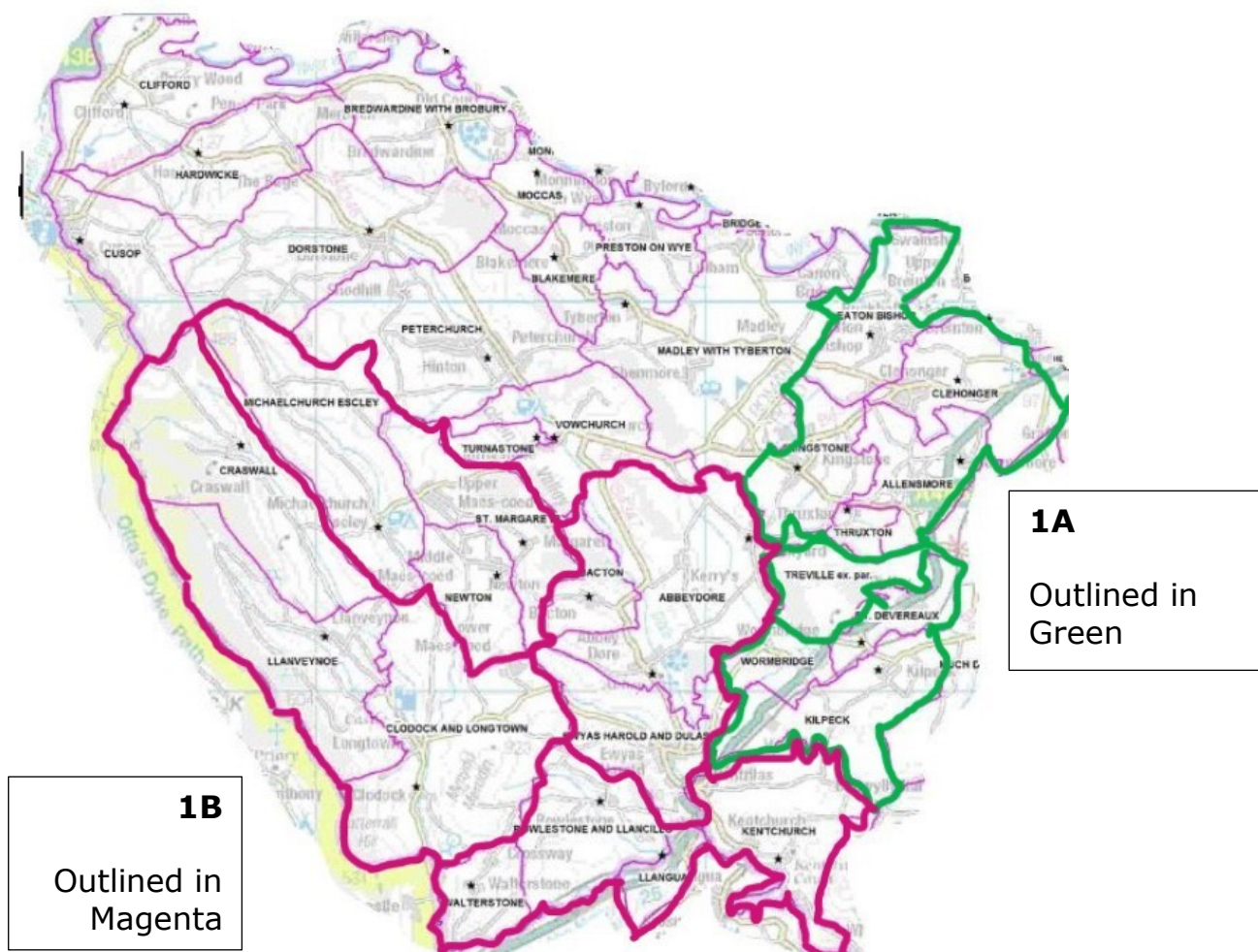
- One benefice, Wyedore, due to its legal status, will not change.
- There is no possibility of a 5th full time clergy post as was made clear in the 2021 Deanery Pastoral Plan.

However the diocese has agreed that an additional part-time post, (this usually means three days a week including Sundays), is a possibility.

Suggestion 1

1A The cluster of three parishes (Wormbridge, Kilpeck and St Devereux) from the current Ewyas Harold Group would join the Cagebrook Group (which currently comprises Kingstone, Clehonger, Eaton Bishop, Allensmore and Thruxton) making 8 parishes in total. This cluster is geographically close to Allensmore and Thruxton, and already have links due to the Whitfield Estate and A465. This benefice would now consist of two clusters. Cate has agreed that she can manage the additional workload.

1B The two remaining clusters in the Ewyas Harold Group (Kentchurch, Rowlestone, Walterstone and Ewyas Harold with Dulas, Abbeydore and Bacton) will join with the two clusters within the Black Mountains Group Newton, St Margarets, Michaelchurch Escley and Craswall, Llanveynoe and Clodock to form a new benefice of 12 parishes. This keeps the Black Mountains clusters together – there are firm links which have grown during the last three years.

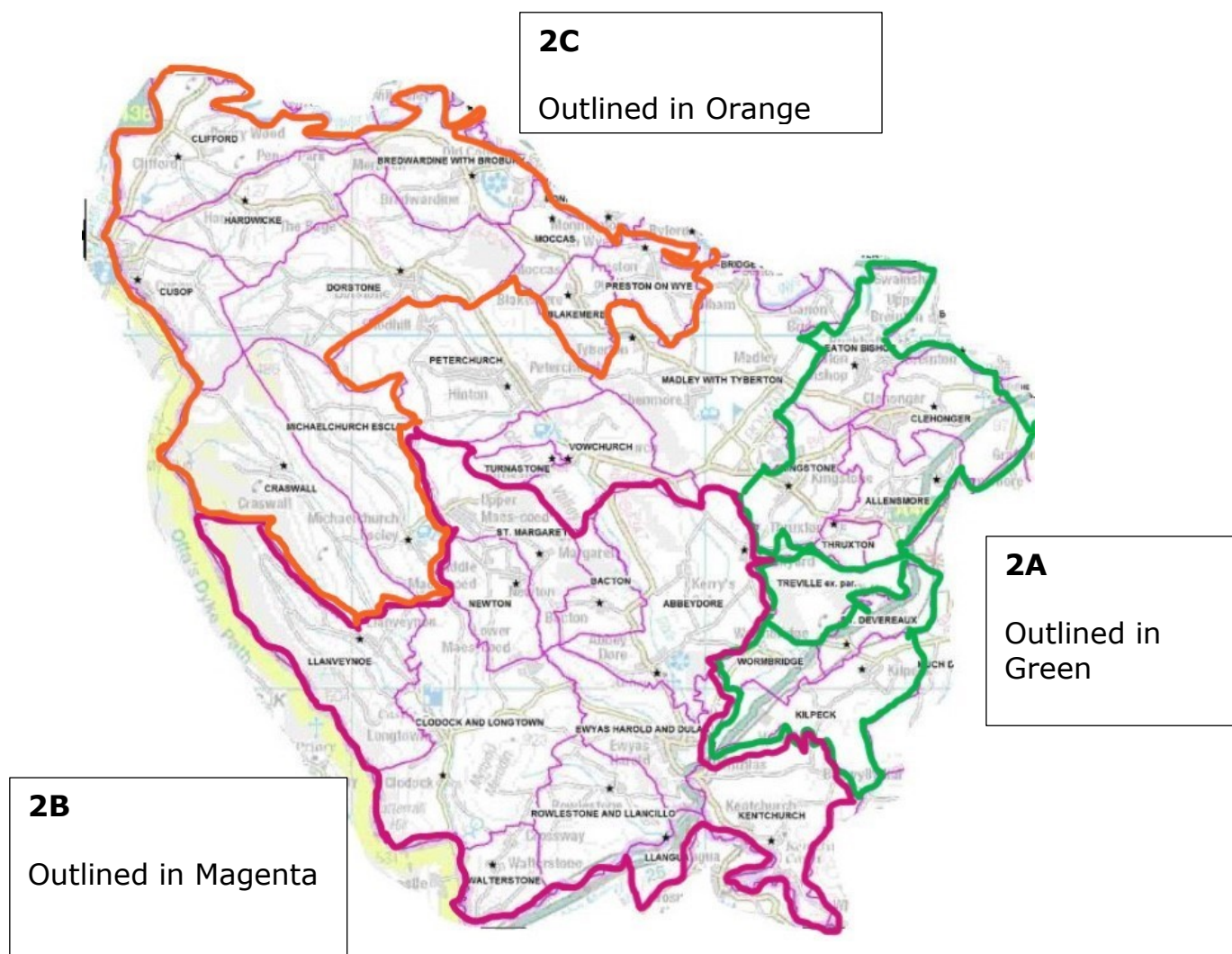


Suggestion 2

2A The cluster of three parishes (Wormbridge, Kilpeck and St Devereux) from the current Ewyas Harold Group would join the Cagebrook Group (which currently comprises Kingstone, Clehonger, Eaton Bishop, Allensmore and Thruxton) making 8 parishes in total.

2B The two remaining clusters in the Ewyas Harold Group (Kentchurch, Rowlestone, Walterstone and Ewyas Harold with Dulas, Abbeydore and Bacton) will join with four parishes of the Black Mountains Group, (St Margaret's, Newton, Llanveynoe and Clodock) making a benefice of 10 parishes.

2C The two other parishes of the Black Mountains Group – Craswall and Michaelchurch will join with the two clusters of Borderlink (Cusop, Dorstone, Clifford, Hardwicke and Bredwardine, Moccas, Blakemere and Preston on Wye) making another benefice of 10 parishes.



Suggestion 3

3A The cluster of three parishes (Wormbridge, Kilpeck and St Devereux) from the current Ewyas Harold Group would join the Cagebrook Group (which currently comprises Kingstone, Clehonger, Eaton Bishop, Allensmore and Thruxton) making 8 parishes in total.

3B The two remaining clusters in the Ewyas Harold Group (Kentchurch, Rowlestone, Walterstone and Ewyas Harold with Dulas, Abbeydore and Bacton) will join with one of the clusters in the Black Mountains Group, (St Margaret's, Newton, Michaelchurch) making a benefice of 9 parishes.

3C The other cluster in the Black Mountains Group – Clodock, Craswall and Llanveynoe will join with the two clusters of Borderlink (Cusop, Dorstone, Clifford, Hardwicke and Bredwardine, Moccas, Blakemere and Preston on Wye) making a benefice of 11 parishes.



3C
Outlined in Orange

3A
Outlined in Green

3B
Outlined in Magenta

These three suggestions and any alternative suggestions offered are now open for amendment and discussion.

Suggested Timetable

- a) Draft document to Joint Council members 23rd September
- b) This document to be released to parishes on 26th September.
- c) Discussion period in parishes 26th September – 19th October
- d) Discussion at The Gathering (Deanery Synod) on Saturday 19th October.
Discussion can continue in the clusters until 1st November when all submissions must be with Anne Lloyd as secretary to the Joint Council.
- e) Final recommendation by the Joint Council 5th November to be submitted to Deanery Synod.
- f) Bill Giles as Lay Chair and Jane Rogers as Rural Dean are happy to come and talk with any cluster any time from late September.
- g) Deanery Synod meeting to be held on 27th November at 7pm.
- h) 28th November Formal consultations with all the parishes concerned with Bill and Jane as Lay Chair and Rural Dean. Each parish has to give its formal consent to the change. Meetings may take place in clusters.
- i) 28th November consultations with all patrons

We would hope that consultations can be concluded by the end of January 2025, earlier if possible. *However, it is important to get this right and so if more time is needed then it is available.*

- j) Once the consultations are concluded and Deanery Synod has formally agreed (this can be done by zoom) then a Statement of Needs can be drawn up and the search for a new incumbent can start.
- k) Decisions made will shape the Deanery Plan and inform further decisions on e.g. housing, pastoral care , communion provision etc.

Jane Rogers

Bill Giles