



THE RIDGEWAY BENEFICE

FAITH AND FRIENDSHIP ALONG THE RIDGEWAY

Benefice Profile

Spring 2026



Heavenly Father, we thank you for the churches of this benefice, and thank you for the ministry of those who are taking our services and delivering your word in our villages.

We pray that you will guide us as we look for a new Rector, that we may work together to portray the essence of our churches and the opportunity that they represent.

Almighty God, enlighten with your holy wisdom those who are to choose a faithful pastor for this benefice; that we may receive one who will speak your word and serve your people according to your will.

Lord in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Message 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.

There's no getting away from the fact that parishes of the Ridgeway Benefice are deeply rural but, in being so, they offer so much to a Rector who understands what it means to be a minister for the whole community, who will embed themselves in daily life and is able to engage with people from all walks of life and all ages. If you are someone who has the vision for this, who is warm, friendly, approachable, adaptable and with a sense of humour and a steady hand, then please do read on.

The people of the benefice are praying for someone with these qualities, as well as someone who displays a lively faith in Jesus, has a sense of prayerfulness and who can offer inspiration and wise leadership when faced with challenges.

They are looking forward to working with their next Rector to develop the place that the local churches have at the heart of their communities, as well as reaching out further through being present at events and activities. There has been a strong tradition of active lay ministry



and leadership within the benefice, and there are currently a number of people who assist with ministry and practical tasks but there is also scope and enthusiasm for this to be increased.

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



Message from the Area Dean

Wantage Deanery is the smallest in the Diocese, covering a coherent geographical area roughly coterminous with the catchment area of the main local secondary school. We have a supportive Chapter, all of us relatively new in our current posts, so the new Rector of Ridgeway will have the opportunity to help shape our shared mission, with a likely focus on schools, young people, care homes, and new areas of housing.

Ridgeway Benefice offers a rare opportunity for manageable rural ministry, although the new incumbent will need to consider what pattern of worship is needed to sustain spiritual and communal life. This post would suit someone who is ready to go with the flow and pace of rural ministry, and who embraces the opportunity it offers to sit more lightly to questions of tradition and the issues that preoccupy the national church.

I am happy to arrange a conversation with any potential candidate (see email address below) and please be assured of the Chapter's prayers for your discernment.

Katherine

areadean@wantagedeanery.org.uk



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Welcome

Thank you for your interest in our Benefice Profile.

In this document we describe our benefice, and our aspirations for the future. We hope this will help you to discern whether God may be calling you to be our next Rector.

The Ridgeway Benefice is a group of six village churches, set amid beautiful countryside, partly within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Each church is deeply rooted in its local community, playing an important role in marking the major milestones of life and offering a trusted Christian presence. Our congregations and churches enjoy wide support across the villages and are valued as an integral part of community life.

The benefice offers all the richness of rural ministry: the joys of close-knit communities, and the opportunity to nurture both spiritual growth and deeper connection.

If you feel called to a pastoral and community-focused ministry in a rural setting, with the opportunity to nurture faith, encourage growth, and shape the next chapter of our shared life, we warmly invite you to read on.

Our next Rector

Opportunities/Challenges

The challenges that we face, as a rural benefice, are not unique to us, but we see this time of transition as a moment of possibility, and we are seeking a Rector who will work with us prayerfully and creatively as we discern what God is calling us to become.

We are a benefice of six churches, each valued within its village community. We would love to build on the strong local support we enjoy, helping more people to see the church as a welcoming and active centre of faith and community life.

We are seeking, with our new Rector, to develop a creative and sustainable pattern of worship across the benefice, supported by lay leadership and collaboration. Because our six churches lie within a relatively compact geographical area, travel time between churches is manageable and we would welcome someone willing to sustain a pattern of three clergy led services each Sunday. This enables a visible priestly presence across our communities, and the building of the vital relationship between congregations and Rector.

One of our hopes is to explore how we can extend our reach beyond our regular congregations, equipping others to share in ministry and service.

All our churches share a desire to engage more with children, young people, and families, and we would welcome fresh imagination in nurturing intergenerational church life.

We are also mindful of the older members of our congregations and would like to further develop our Anna Chaplaincy and Pastoral Ministries.

The benefice was created by an Order in Council in 1977. This established a Joint Council to cover the whole benefice and organised the 6 churches into 4 parishes, each parish having a PCC. There is a Treasurer for the Council who manages benefice funds contributed by the parishes to cover benefice expenses, but the Joint Council itself has not operated for a period of years. The PCCs are mindful that the formal structures laid down for governance do not align with the way the churches actually work. We aspire to refresh our governance arrangements so that they liberate us and avoid being a burden.

Person Specification

We are praying for a new Rector who will come among us with energy, warmth, and heart for rural parish ministry. We are looking for someone who will enjoy building strong relationships with our congregations, and who will also have the vision and confidence to reach out beyond, helping our churches continue to be at the centre of village life.

The characteristics we are looking for

A priest who will engage wholeheartedly with our regular congregations, valuing the strengths of each church community and nurturing them in faith.

Someone able to lead and inspire, equipping and enabling others to share in ministry, so that together we may grow the reach of our churches across the benefice.

At ease with the wider role in the community which is required of a rural rector.

A priest who can adapt sensitively to local needs and opportunities, while holding a clear focus on shared priorities, discipleship, and the spiritual flourishing of our parishes.

The ability to work collaboratively with volunteers.

Able to work with us to develop clear and supportive ways of working together, helping us strengthen communication, delegation, and shared responsibility across the benefice.



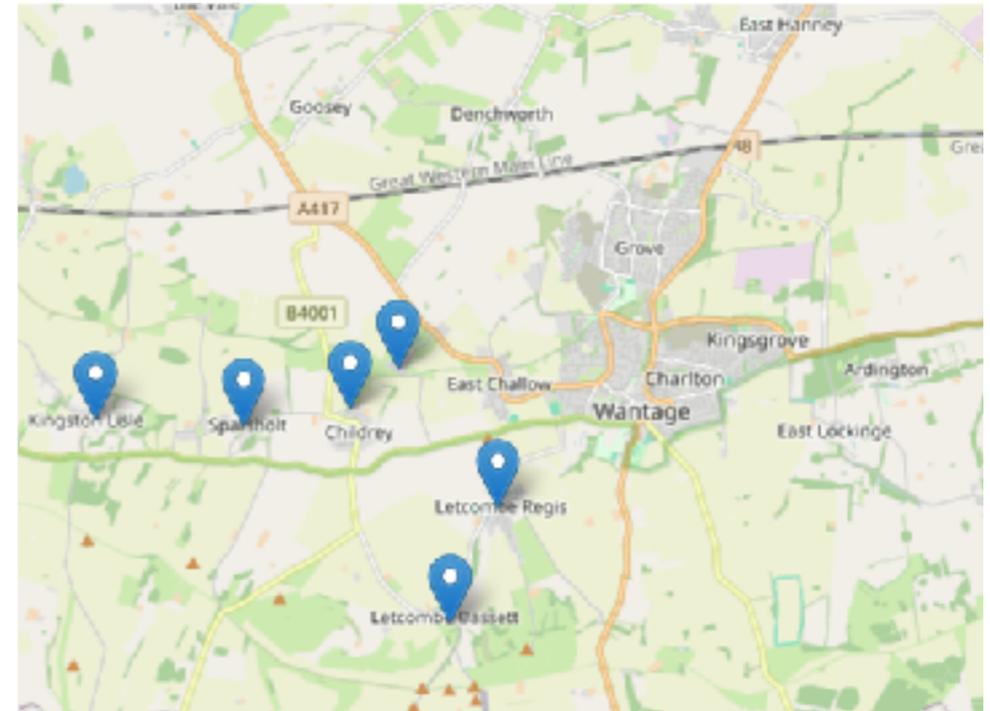
The Benefice: Its Parishes and Resources

The Benefice and the Surrounding Area

The Ridgeway Benefice is in Southern Oxfordshire, a few miles from the attractive market town of Wantage. It lies at the northern edge of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and the Ridgeway long-distance path. Our six villages enjoy the character and tranquillity of rural life, surrounded by open countryside, footpaths, and the landscape of the Ridgeway itself.

Each of our villages has a strong sense of identity and community. Village life is active and well supported, with a range of local groups, events, and traditions that help bring people together. The churches play an important part in this shared life, offering hospitality, pastoral care, and a Christian presence at the heart of each community.

Although we are rural in setting, we are well connected. Wantage and Grove are close by and



provide a wide range of services, schools, shops, healthcare, and transport links. This means that the benefice offers a distinctive balance: the joys of village ministry and close community relationships, alongside the accessibility of nearby towns and growing population centres.

The area is attractive to a broad mix of residents, including long-established village families, commuters, and those drawn by the quality of life in this part of the county. In Letcombe Regis there is the Richmond Retirement Village which has over 300 residents. This is the only retirement/care home in the benefice and the only major housing development in recent years.

Significant development has taken place nearby however, as the neighbouring village of East Challow has increased in size considerably in the last four years and the nearby towns of Wantage and Grove are continuing to grow very rapidly.

The Ridgeway Church of England Primary School in Childrey is the only school in the benefice and has good links with the church. The school itself has an excellent reputation (www.ridgeway-ce-primary.com). There are a number of other primary schools in the Wantage and Grove area that are attended by children from the benefice.

King Alfred's Academy is the main secondary school and sixth form in Wantage (www.kaacademy.org). But with the large amount of new housing in the area, the new St John's Church of England through school in Grove opened for primary in 2024 and secondary pupils in 2025. In addition, there are several independent schools close by.

There is a weekday bus service which runs through part of the benefice to Wantage, but most residents rely on cars, bicycles, hooves and their feet for transport. The new Rector will therefore need to use motorised transport to get around the churches.

Currently within the benefice there is one open pub, the award winning The Greyhound Inn in Letcombe Regis, and a few small shops and cafés across the villages.

You will find people from all walks of life here. Some are involved in traditional rural activities such as agriculture and race-horse training, but there is also a good mix of all professions including commuters to London. Local employers include Vodafone near Newbury, industrial estates at Didcot and science parks at Harwell and Culham. The Williams Formula One team is also based in Grove, just north of Wantage.

In the wider ecumenical landscape, following the closure of the Childrey Methodist Chapel, there are no other places of worship in any of the villages of any denomination or other faith. As a result many villagers of other denominations choose to come to our churches or seek pastoral care from us because "It's my village church". However there are good links with other churches and traditions through the deanery.



Our Benefice

Part of the Wantage Deanery, the Ridgeway Benefice is a group of four parishes with six churches, each of which serves an individual village.

Parishes with two churches:

- Childrey and West Challow
- Sparsholt and Kingston Lisle

Parishes with single churches:

- Letcombe Regis
- Letcombe Bassett

All the churches have strong individual characters, and each one operates their own church council. They have met their Parish Share in 2025 and two churches are also fundraising for building work at present. All the parishes are rural. Our worship is middle of the road in style, in the main. The limited number of services in each of our churches means that there is little scope to appeal to different groups with specific liturgies. However we are all delighted to welcome children and families at any service, and do our very best to make everyone feel comfortable in our congregations.

The Ridgeway Benefice Ministry Resources

Currently in the benefice there is one active retired priest. There is also an Anna Chaplain, whose ministry to older people is primarily within the retirement village, but also to those in the wider benefice. Her work includes three

services a month in the retirement village, home communion, pastoral care, end-of-life support, and funeral ministry. There are four other lay people who are variously authorised to preach and lead worship. In addition there are a number of other retired or non-stipendiary clergy in the wider area who occasionally assist covering services when requested.

Under our previous incumbent a Ministry Team, consisting of the retired priest, Anna Chaplain and lay people authorised by the Bishop to support ministry, operated as a source of support and advice to the Rector.

Ridgeway Benefice Pastoral Resources

There is a small group of people who have expressed an interest in pastoral visiting. The formation of a clear method of operation was suspended by the departure of the Rector, but this is an area we are keen to develop further.

Other Lay Resources in the Benefice

Some parishes are open to lay led services and would like to explore the use of lay resources to allow more services of different varieties to take place. We also want to equip more lay people to take up roles such as leading intercessions.

A team of volunteers from across the benefice present 'Open the Book' to the pupils at the Ridgeway School, Childrey.

Patterns of Worship in the Benefice

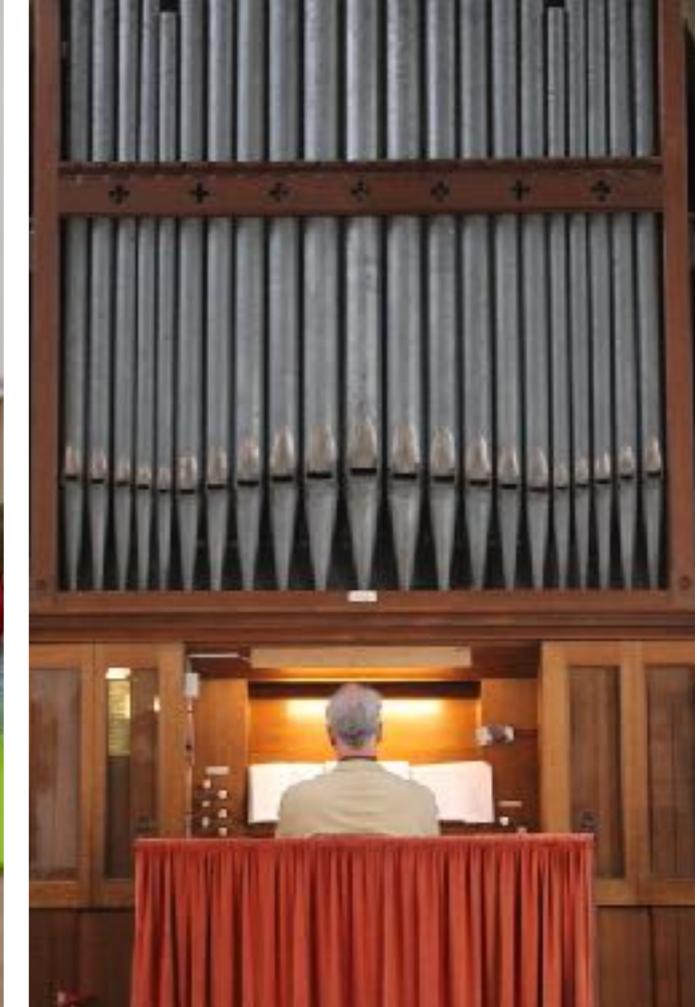
During the interregnum the churchwardens have gained support from retired clergy, diocesan staff and other local priests to enable one service of Holy Communion in each of the churches of the benefice per month. Three lay led services are also held per month. Additionally there is a weekday traditional Evensong every week and a monthly Taizé style service.

The use of modern English is predominant in most churches but services range from BCP to Messy Church style.

Before the interregnum only one church was regularly visited more than once a month by the Rector on Sundays. It is felt that this is not enough to build a strong relationship between the congregations and their priest.

Festival services are spread between the churches in accordance with local tradition and the limits of resources.

In order to ensure that the pattern of services is sustainable, collaborative, and supportive of growth we would welcome a Rector who can help us develop worship life that both honours our traditions and encourages renewed engagement.



Some Parish Statistics

	Childrey	Kingston Lisle	Letcombe Bassett	Letcombe Regis	Sparsholt	West Challow	Total
Electoral Roll	30	25	37	47	44	23	157
Capacity of Church	180	100	75	120	160	50	685
Annual Income 2024	27,133	12,918	14,423	26,247	26,408	8,800	115,929
Parish/Benefice share	11,178	4,351	5,014	20,667	6,361	4,219	51,790
Reserves 2024	40,041	23,838	18,868	138,340	90,260	31,077	342,424
Population: ONS 2021 Census	516	214	168	656	309	248	2,111

Average attendance at our Sunday services: 2024

	Childrey	Kingston Lisle	Letcombe Bassett	Letcombe Regis	Sparsholt	West Challow
Average att. 2024 8.30am Holy Communion	8.7	N/A	9.2	N/A	N/A	N/A
Average att. 2024 10.15 Holy Communion	19.6	25.2	N/A	25.2	16.4	N/A
Average att. 2024 10.15 Service of the Word	N/A	N/A	13.8	17.3	N/A	8.7
Average att. 2024 4.00pm Holy Communion	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10.6

Occasional Offices: Baptisms, Funerals/Memorial Services and Weddings: 2024

	Baptisms	Funerals	Burials	Burial of Ashes	Weddings
Childrey	6	2	0	3	4
Kingston Lisle	0	1	0	0	2
Letcombe Bassett	0	3	2	1	2
Letcombe Regis	2	8	4	1	3
Sparsholt	1	0	0	0	1
West Challow	0	1	0	0	1



Administrative Support

The benefice is aware that the Rector requires administrative support and provided this for the previous incumbent. We continue to budget for around £6000 per year for a part-time administrator for approximately 6 hours a week. The duties of the administrator include the production of the monthly benefice newsletter, supporting the Rector in the administration and invoicing for life event services and maintaining files for seasonal orders of service.

Communications

Communication across the benefice is supported through our regular newsletter, *Signpost*, which remains the principal way parishioners receive information about forthcoming services, church events, and other aspects of our shared life, including a 'Thought for the Month' piece. *Signpost* is delivered by a dedicated team of volunteers to every home across the benefice, and is also distributed online to those who prefer to receive it electronically.

Information about services and special events are also shared through Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, helping us to reach a wider audience within our communities. Some of our churches maintain their own Facebook presence but there is also a benefice wide Facebook page. There is scope to develop this area.





Benefice Charities

The Rector is, ex officio, a governor of the Ridgeway Church of England Primary School in Childrey, so experience in this area would be an advantage. In addition there are a number of small charities of which the Rector is a trustee. All of them have existing trustees who undertake the management of those charities, ensuring that the Rector's involvement is shared and well supported.

One example is the Letcombe Regis Church of England School Trust, which continues the educational legacy of the former village school, following its closure in 1996. The Trust provides grants to young people from the ecclesiastical parish of Letcombe Regis to promote their education, including social and physical training and where financial assistance is needed.

The Rectory

Ridgeway Rectory is located in Letcombe Regis, 2 miles from Wantage, in a quiet position with views to the Berkshire Downs. It is a detached four-bedroom house with a double garage, a spacious front garden and lawns at the back which run down to the Letcombe Brook.

The diocese is currently undertaking a significant renovation project and installing a new air source heat pump heating system.

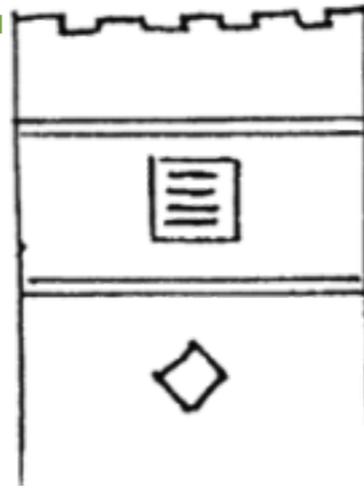




Our Church Communities



St Mary's, Childrey



The Village

Childrey is situated three miles west of Wantage. It has a Church of England primary school, a village shop with busy cafe, village hall, garage and several other small businesses. There is a large playing field with a pavilion and children's playground. There is a wide range of active social groups and community activities in the village. These include WI, Little Ducks Pre-School, Tuesday Club for senior citizens, Village Choir, and 'Chillbusters' Soup Lunches over the winter.

Church Life

In 2015, the PCC agreed an outline plan to sustain St Mary's for the future which is updated and reviewed six-monthly.

The four objectives of the plan are:

- To explore how the church can engage with the next generation to ensure St Mary's is sustainable for the future.
- To promote use of the church facilities for the village.

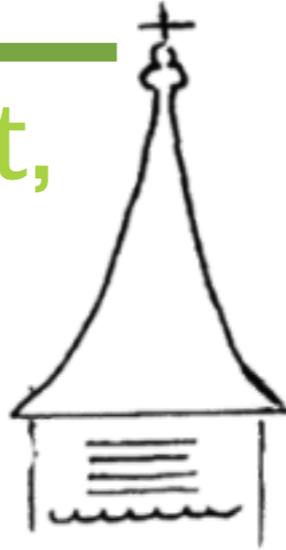
- To encourage the use of the church for fund raising events.
- To extend the reach of the church into the community and to provide inclusivity for the whole community into the church.

As the Ridgeway CE Primary school is in the village we welcome them to church for end of term services and the Open the Book team visits the school fortnightly. In 2025 we successfully restarted running occasional Messy Church afternoons.

We have small but dedicated groups of volunteers who arrange flowers, ring bells, clean the church and look after the churchyard. We also host concerts and work well with Childrey Parish Council as well as having a regular programme of social events to raise funds for the church and for charity.



St John the Baptist, Kingston Lisle



With the restoration complete and the village involved, we aim to continue increasing our congregation, to add further to the musical life of the area and to attract more visitors into our fine old church.

The Village

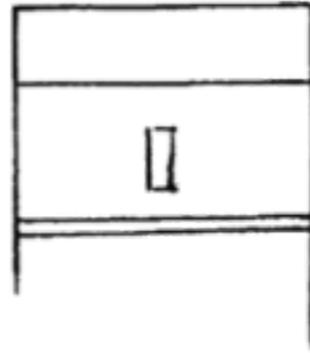
Nestled on the northern flank of the Lambourn Downs, Kingston Lisle lies five miles from Wantage. The parish consists of Kingston Lisle, Fawler and Kingstone Warren, which is one of three local racehorse-training yards. There is a village hall but no other community buildings.

Church Life

We aim to attract as many people as possible to the Church and it has regular congregants and considerable support from monthly online donors. We welcome children and have made efforts to ensure that the atmosphere is one in which children and their parents feel at ease. Services are advertised via Signpost and by email and WhatsApp reminders as well as notices on the gates and noticeboards. We ensure the Church is open at all times and endeavour to have coffee after most services to build on our sense of community.



St Michael and All Angels, Letcombe Bassett



The Village

Letcombe Bassett is a small village in the lee of the downs. There is a Village Hall but no other community buildings. There is little direct employment in the village except for farming and racehorse training.

In alternating years the village has organised a Gardens Open day with the proceeds shared between the Village Hall and the church. In addition, in 2025 we organised a successful fundraising Michaelmas Fayre, even having a local micro-brewery create 'Bassett Angel Ale' for the event.

Church Life

The church is viewed as an important part of the fabric of the village by most villagers.



The church is supported financially by regular giving from people who are not often in the congregation and the traditional Crib Service attracts nearly 100 village children and adults. Churchyard clearing mornings attract support from occasional church goers as well as regular attenders. The church operates the monthly 'St Michael's Lunch Bowl'. This free social event is for everyone and attracts 15-20 people for a warming mid-week lunch.

As a PCC we want to be a church which enables the congregation to grow. We will do this by:

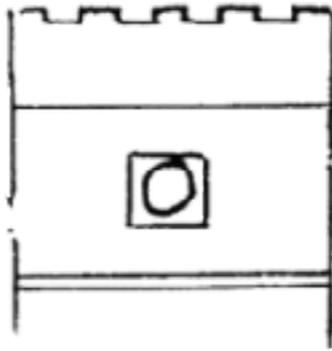
- A. Investigating with the new Rector a pattern of services which will enable them to develop a closer relationship with the congregation.
- B. Supporting those in the benefice who are authorised to lead services and to preach and encouraging others to take part in reading, leading prayers and other elements of worship.
- C. Ensuring that our services include music which supports worship, and that we offer refreshments in a social time after worship.

To support the position of the physical building as a centre for the community for life events we aim to:

- A. Keep the church open, clean, attractive and well cared for at all times.
- B. Ensure that the churchyard is well looked after.
- C. Investigate the possibility of installing a toilet in the building to make it more usable.



St Andrew's, Letcombe Regis



The Village

Letcombe Regis nestles in a hollow in the Downs. The village has long been associated with farming and horse racing but in more recent years there has been the development of the Richmond Retirement Village, housing around three hundred residents, with a shop and café in the lodge. It has the support of an Anna Chaplain to help with the Pastoral and Ministry needs of the Richmond residents and others in the benefice.

There is a large Village Hall which is adjacent to the Letcombe Regis Sports & Social Club and some tennis courts. Football, cricket and darts teams are run by the Club. The Greyhound in Letcombe Regis is currently the only operating pub in the benefice.

Church Life

Dedicated volunteers help with the maintenance of the interior of the church and its grounds. The wildflowers in the churchyard with the splendid appearance of Snowdrops and

Daffodils, attract many outside visitors, with a dedicated fundraising day.

When we can, our bells are rung for services, weddings and other special occasions by a group of ringers. We aim to have sung hymns at all Sunday services, with the help of a small choir and an organist.

St. Andrew's has become well known in the benefice for hosting a number of excellent Concerts over the past few years, enabled by a dedicated volunteer organiser.

Our congregation in the main is one of loyal elders, yet we are always open to new initiatives and welcoming the younger generation.



Holy Rood, Sparsholt



The Village

Sparsholt lies at the foot of the Berkshire Downs between Childrey and Kingston Lisle. It includes the hamlet of Westcot ½ mile to the west. The village has historic links with Queen's and Corpus Christi Colleges. In recent years, local employment has developed from a dependence on agriculture and horse-racing to include a variety of professions and small businesses.

Church Life

We are lucky to have a very supportive team who clean the church, arrange beautiful flowers and keep the church grounds looking immaculate. It is our mission to build upon this base to encourage a new generation of young people to come to church and to make it a more inviting and accessible place to all.

Our plans for the future can be summarized as follows

A. Make the church a welcoming place for families to come to worship. This will include finding ways to have

accessible worship for all ages. We will offer refreshments after services to encourage people to stay on and talk.

B. Build on the strong community links which were evident in the general support of the church in the village.

C. Raise money to renovate the building. In addition to repairs to the fabric we will install a kitchenette and WC, improve heating and lighting and increase the peal of bells from 4 to 6. This will make the building more usable by all ages, and also increase its use for other events.

Fundraising on a considerable scale will be a challenge to the parish, but we also view it as an opportunity to persuade the whole village community to engage with a project that will be of lasting benefit to all.



St. Laurence, West Challow



The Village

West Challow is a village in a delightful rural setting with views to the Ridgeway and open countryside. It is about two miles west of the market town of Wantage in the Vale of the White Horse. There is a small amount of employment in the village including farming and a small trading estate behind Mellors garage on the A417.

The small village hall, a rebuilt barrack hut has been recently refurbished. By arrangement the church has use of the village hall for its own activities.

Church Life

Our small church has a particularly contemplative and still feeling to it. It is listed as a Small Pilgrim Place. The reserved sacrament for the Ridgeway Benefice is kept in the ambry.

We are well supported in time and money by the local community, even those who do not attend church often.

Our plans for the future include:

- A. Connecting better with the village by using different services and service times to make us more accessible to families
- B. Preserving that special feeling of contemplation and continuing our Taize worship.
- C. Improving the fabric of the church. This will ensure the integrity of the building and make it a more welcoming place for people to come.

St Laurence's is open daily and we encourage people to stay and chat after services, when we provide coffee and biscuits to build on our sense of community.



Our Church Buildings

Childrey, Kingston Lisle, Letcombe Bassett and Letcombe Regis have completed significant works within the last ten years or so. These included the addition of toilets in Letcombe Regis and Childrey, these are the only two churches which have running water and toilet facilities. Both Sparsholt and West Challow have plans in prospect for refurbishment.

None of the churches have dedicated parking areas. All the churches, except for Kingston Lisle are wheelchair accessible into the nave, but none are fully accessible to the altar. Churchyards at Childrey, Letcombe Bassett and Letcombe Regis are open for burials and ashes, those at Sparsholt and West Challow for ashes only.

Quinquennial reports are due for Kingston Lisle and Letcombe Bassett in 2027, for Sparsholt in 2028 and for all the other churches in 2029.

The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Childrey

The church is Grade 1 listed. It has a number of notable architectural features such as the ancient

font, fine brasses and 15th century stained glass. The church is in a generally good state of repair. Significant works were undertaken in 2014 when a kitchenette and WC were installed in the South Transept. We have an active bell-ringing team which practises weekly and rings for services. The Quinquennial is due in 2029. It is not expected that a need for any major work on the fabric will be required.

St. John the Baptist, Kingston Lisle

Allegedly founded in response to pagan worship on White Horse Hill, the 12th Century church of St John the Baptist has 14th Century wall paintings and 15th-19th Century woodwork. The Victorians left the interior largely untouched, adding a porch and vestry.

The church had a £400,000 restoration in 2019. The works involved repairs to the roof, timbers and walls, new heating and lighting, minor reordering of the interior and restoration of all the woodwork. A new pipe organ has been installed.

St. Michael and All Angels, Letcombe Bassett

St Michael's is a small Grade II* listed church, with the main building thought to date from the 13th century. In relatively recent years extensive restoration work was carried out and the church is in good condition both inside and outside. The 2022 Quinquennial report showed only small maintenance jobs to be done. All of these have been completed.

St. Andrews, Letcombe Regis

The Grade II* listed church is at the heart of the village. The first documentary evidence of a village and church is in The Domesday Book of 1086.

Restoration projects have taken place in the last ten years or so. These include the toilet facilities, cupboards in the choir vestry, a kitchenette, as well as a new gate and the relaying of the flag stones on the church path.

The Church of the Holy Rood, Sparsholt

The Church of the Holy Rood (Holy Cross) which is open every day is a fascinating Grade 1 listed building. The first church in Sparsholt was between 750-1000 and we are very proud to have three remarkable 14th century oak effigies. Some 13th and 14th century stained glass also survives in the church. A project for extensive improvements to the church is under way.

St Laurence, West Challow

The church of St Laurence is a Grade II* listed building and a small pilgrim place www.smallpilgrimplaces.org. We are very proud of our two ancient bells, one of which dates from 1283, and is understood to be the oldest English bell bearing the bell founder's name.

The latest quinquennial report showed a need for some maintenance and we are working on raising funds for these repairs.



The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Childrey

