

The Two Rivers Benefice

North Essex



Benefice Profile 2026

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THE DIOCESE: A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP GULI



Covering Essex and East London, Chelmsford is one of the largest, most diverse dioceses in the Church of England. We are home to more than 3 million people representing many socio-economic, ethnic and faith groups and a fantastic variety of cultures and traditions.

We have enormous opportunities for mission and service and considerable challenges to face and resolve as we continue to deal with the local, national and global challenges that have a direct impact on our parish churches, schools, chaplaincies and the communities we serve.

It is within this context and following a period of listening and discernment that started when I became Bishop of Chelmsford in 2021, that we set out a future direction of travel as a Diocese with a focus on [travelling well together](https://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/travelling-well-together):

- Our purpose is to love God and to love our neighbour; to worship faithfully and empowered by the Holy Spirit, witness to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ as we serve the extraordinarily diverse array of local communities in Essex and East London.
- Our approach is to enable and empower parishes and worshipping communities to discern how they are to be God's people in their own very different local contexts and as part of one diocesan family.
- Underpinning our approach is an invitation to a way of being articulated by shared diocesan values which might shape how we travel together, support each other and provide mutual accountability.

Since I became Bishop of Chelmsford, I have witnessed people's great warmth and I have seen first-hand, the wonderful things going on in our parishes and schools. Any new priest joining us in the Diocese of Chelmsford does so at a time of challenge, a time of change and most significantly a time of hope for our Church in this most diverse and vibrant of dioceses.

+Guli

Bishop of Chelmsford

Find out more about our Diocesan Direction of Travel and Values:



www.chelmsford.anglican.org/travelling-well-together

THE DEANERY:

A Message from Revd Mark Payne, Area Dean and Helena Gee, Lay Chair

The Deanery of Hinckford is amongst the most rural in the Diocese, covering a vast geographical area on its northern edge. It is a wonderful place to live and work, offering the beauty of rural East Anglia with easy access to towns and cities. Together we encompass the Benefices of North Hinckford, Two Rivers, Hedingham and Upper Colnes, Chappel and Wakes Colne with Great and Little Tey and the Halstead Area Team. Across the Deanery we offer worship from the different traditions of the Anglican Church, and we are blessed with amazing colleagues, lay and ordained. We have many superb church Primary Schools and good relationships with many of the other Primary and Secondary schools in the area.

The Deanery also offers a close knit and supportive Chapter, who are always looking to uphold one and other in mission, ministry and fellowship. The Chapter meets regularly for prayer, support, information sharing and planning, and annually for a retreat or quiet day – not to mention a Christmas Lunch in January!

Our Deanery Plan is available upon request, and its main objectives are to support ministry with more children and young people, as well as providing stepping stones for adults who are curious about faith and encouraging and enabling vocations.

Synod is a place where we can be encouraged and inspired by each other's stories and enriched for our parochial ministry.

If you're reading this, please know that you are in our prayers and that we look forward to ministering alongside whoever becomes the next Incumbent of the Two Rivers benefice.

Revd Mark Payne

Helena Gee

Area Dean Deanery

Lay Chair

The Two Rivers Benefice: Benefice Profile 2026

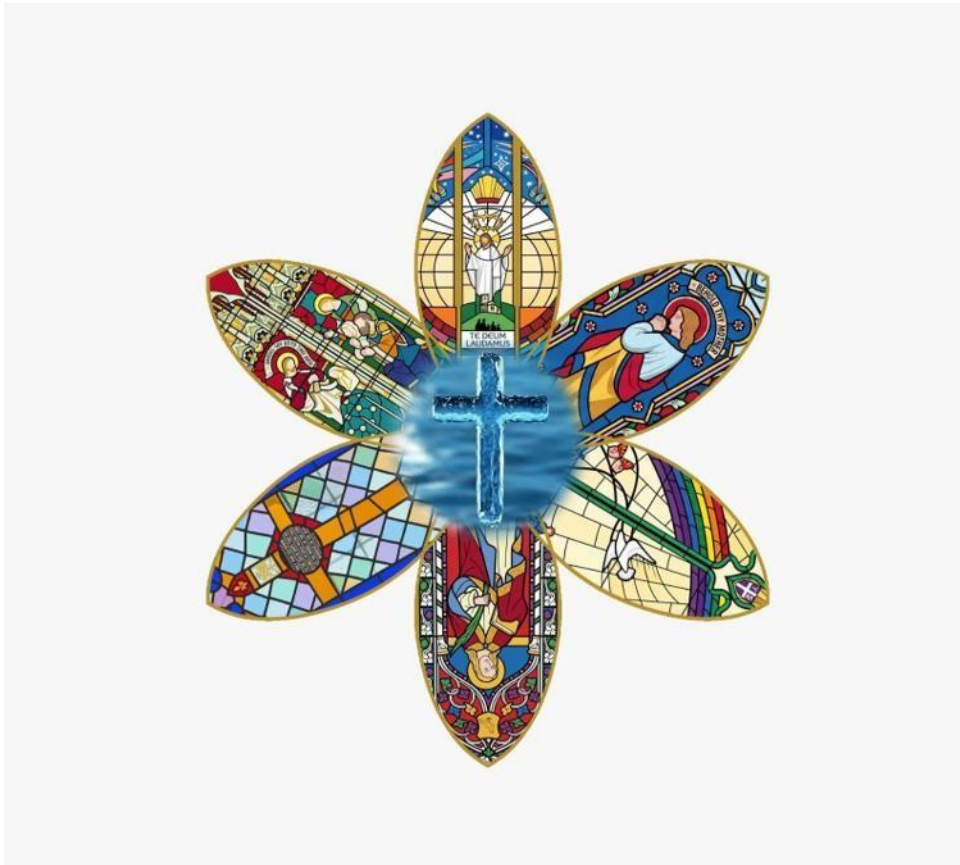
Foreword

We give thanks to God for all that has been accomplished in recent years through faithful ministry, prayer, and partnership across the parishes of the Two Rivers Benefice. As we enter a new season, we look forward with hope and trust that God will call the right person to lead us into the future. We offer these pages as an introduction to who we are, what we value, and the opportunities that lie ahead.

— *The PCCs of the Two Rivers Benefice*

Welcome

We are five parishes, six churches, and one family – serving our villages in love, growing together in faith and welcoming to all. We look with hope to the future and to the person God is calling to lead us forward in mission and ministry.



About the Benefice

The Two Rivers Benefice lies in the beautiful north-west corner of Essex, where the Rivers Stour and Colne rise. It comprises the parishes of Steeple Bumpstead with Sturmer, Helions Bumpstead, Ridgewell, Birdbrook, and Ashen. The Benefice sits within the Diocese of Chelmsford and the Stansted Archdeaconry, in the Colchester Episcopal Area.

Our villages are surrounded by farmland and woodland, offering a strong sense of rural identity. We enjoy close community ties, shared worship, and a rhythm of life that values presence, partnership, and prayer.



Worship and Community Life

Across the Benefice, worship ranges from BCP Evensong to All-Age Family Communion. Each parish brings its own distinctive flavour to worship, and together we share regular Benefice services and festivals. Lay leadership, music, and hospitality are key strengths.

Regular activities include: Coffee @ Church, the Cavell Community Choir, the Fellowship Group, the Big Breakfast Club and Monastic Mix. Our churches are open daily, serving as both spiritual and community centres.



Schools and Young People

We maintain strong and joyful partnerships with Ridgewell Church of England Primary School and Steeple Bumpstead Primary School. Weekly Collective Worship, Family Services, and seasonal celebrations connect children and families to the life of the church. Creative worship and school-led services at Christmas, Easter and Harvest build meaningful bridges between church and community.



Our Strengths and What We Offer

- Faithful and enthusiastic congregations who serve generously and joyfully.
- Dedicated lay ministers, readers, and worship leaders
- Well-maintained church buildings, most with modern facilities
- Active community life, from choirs to coffee mornings
- A strong sense of rural identity and mutual support
- A Benefice Fund enabling some paid administrative support.
- A welcoming clergy house: The Vicarage, Steeple Bumpstead – a four-bedroom two-bathroom home with study, two downstairs cloakrooms and garden.
- Three LLM's and a retired (PTO) Clergy



What We're Looking For

We are praying for a new incumbent who will:

- Lead with faith, humility, and vision
- Preach and teach God's Word
- Encourage discipleship for new enquirers and mature believers and prayer across all ages
- Enable and encourage lay ministry and the vocations of all
- Build bridges with families, schools, and local groups
- Work collaboratively
- Engage personally and lead and train others in Pastoral care
- Love the countryside, rural life and ministry and nurture the whole Benefice community
- A good sense of humour and a willingness to get involved.
- A broad appreciation of music would be an asset.



Why Come Here?

Here you will find warm-hearted people, rich community life, and beautiful countryside. The Benefice offers space to grow, serve, and belong. We value prayer, hospitality, and hope – and we long to see God's kingdom flourish in this place. There is much to cherish and much to build upon.

Our setting is peaceful yet well connected – within easy reach of Haverhill, Saffron Walden, Bury St Edmunds, and Cambridge. We are well provided with supermarkets, shopping centres, sports centres and secondary schools. We have a wide choice of automotive and electrical service centres.



Opportunities for the Future

- A chance to encourage and lead willing and able congregation members (and teams) in discovering and establishing new ways of connecting with our local communities.
- Strengthen family and youth engagement
- Deepen discipleship and prayer across the Benefice
- Encourage the development of outreach working with active and enthusiastic PCCs.
- Sustain pastoral care and presence in every parish
- Continue strong collaboration within the Deanery
- Strengthen and maintain our regular Sunday Worship services

St Augustine of Canterbury, Ashen

Parish Overview

Ashen is an attractive village with some 325 residents including an increasing number of young families. It is situated in the Stour Valley with a history going back to the Domesday Book.

It has an extensive conservation area with the Grade I St Augustine's Church at its centre. Apart from the Church, the village has a good range of other amenities including the recently refurbished village hall and community garden, a well-used sports pitch and playground, in addition to public transport connections to local centres such as Clare only about one mile away.

It is closely linked with the Church School in Ridgewell. There is an equestrian centre and gliding club as well as other recreational activities in addition to numerous well-supported events during the year, many of which are centred on the church, such as the fête, art exhibition, lectures, concerts and quizzes, in addition to regular coffee and other meetings. Overall, it is an active and friendly community.



Worship and Church Life

St Augustine's offers two services each month – a CW Holy Communion and a BCP Evening Prayer – both followed by refreshments and fellowship.

On other Sundays, the congregation joins worship with neighbouring churches across the Two Rivers Benefice, particularly at Ridgewell, Birdbrook, and Sturmer, maintaining strong fellowship and mutual support.

The faithful congregation shares actively in the ministry of the church through readings, intercessions, flower arranging and cleaning rotas. Services such as Harvest, Remembrance, and Christmas are particularly well attended, drawing in the wider community.

The church is beautifully adorned with hand-crafted floral displays and remains a cherished place of prayer and continuity in village life.



Mission and Community Engagement

Ashen's mission is grounded in faithful worship and active service within the community. Parishioners maintain close links with Ridgewell Primary School through the churchwarden's role as school governor, and members take part in the Cavell Community Choir.

Each year, the parish supports the Haverhill Food Bank through Harvest giving and runs creative and community events that combine fun with fundraising and friendship — including the long-running Teddy Bear Tower Parachute Jump, Art Exhibition and BBQ, and the popular Jazz Concert.

Other activities include beetle drives, lectures, and joint benefice initiatives such as Carols around the Pubs. Easter and Christmas cards are distributed to every household, maintaining a pastoral link with the whole community.

These events express the church's desire to share the love of Christ in practical, joyful and inclusive ways.

The Church Building

St Augustine's Church is a Grade I listed building dating from the 12th century, standing at the centre of the village.

Its notable features include:

- The oak entrance door (c.1380)
- Two of the oldest bells in England (c.1330) as part of a ringable peal of 3 bells.
- Four original oak "cow pews" (c.1410)
- Three beautiful stained-glass windows on the south side of the chancel

This ancient and much-loved church continues to bear witness to God's faithfulness through the generations, offering a tranquil and prayerful space for all who visit.



Opportunities and Aspirations

As part of a small but active village community we seek to build on that role in fostering our close links with the community as a whole. . We aspire to welcome to the church all members of the community and those from elsewhere, whatever their particular belief or none. We have a number of younger families moving into the village. We want to take this opportunity to develop our links with these new families and the younger members of our community as a particular part of our programme for the year ahead. We particularly want to bring joy and love into the lives of all as part of the Church's mission through our services and all our activities.

"As part of God's family, we strive to share Christ's love to all, for the glory of God."

St Augustine's, Birdbrook

Parish Overview

Birdbrook is a small, rural village of around 390 people, set amid beautiful North Essex farmland approximately two miles from Steeple Bumpstead. It is surrounded by open countryside, rich in wildlife, and enjoys a strong community spirit.

The church stands in the centre of the village beside the recently restored Plough Inn, close to the Community House, duck pond and playground. The Community House hosts a bowls club, a Ladies' Group, and other village gatherings.

The historic Moyns Park, once the home of Lord Mountbatten, is a local landmark. Birdbrook lies within easy reach of Saffron Walden, Bury St Edmunds, and Cambridge, and retains the peace and character of traditional village life.



Worship and Church Life

St Augustine's lies at the heart of Birdbrook's spiritual and social life. Two services are held each month:

- Morning Worship on the second Sunday, and
- Benefice Holy Communion on the fourth Sunday.

Seasonal services are well supported: the Carol Service (with choir), Christmas Day Communion, Harvest, Remembrance, Plough Sunday, and Rogation Sunday all attract many from the village and beyond.

A large team of volunteers supports worship through reading, intercessions, music, flowers and hospitality. Two regular organists and a Licensed Lay Minister serve faithfully alongside the clergy. Refreshments after services offer a time of welcome and fellowship, and visitors often comment on the warmth of the congregation.

Mission and Community Engagement

St Augustine's has a strong sense of service and partnership with the wider Benefice. The church is open daily for prayer and reflection, cared for by members of the PCC.

There is a Warm Hub every Friday in the Community House, and food collected at Harvest supports local food banks. A book stall inside the church invites visitors to browse and donate, helping to fund maintenance and ministry.

The parish gives regularly to the Royal British Legion, Christian Aid, and Addenbrooke's Hospital.

The churchyard includes a well-kept War Memorial and a plaque commemorating American airmen from Ridgewell whose bomber crashed locally in 1944 — reminders of Birdbrook's enduring ties to service and remembrance.

Parishioners are also involved with Ridgewell Primary School and other community groups, deepening links between worship and village life.



The Church Building

St Augustine's Church dates from around 1050 and is a Grade I listed building. Extensively restored in the 1880s, it remains bright and welcoming, with light-coloured woodwork and windows that create an uplifting atmosphere.

Key features include:

- Restored bells (1993) housed in a small bell cot
- A millennium window by Susan McCarthy
- A pipe organ installed in 2002
- Oak carvings of animals and foliage on the communion table and choir stalls, reflecting the rural life of the parish

Facilities include a kitchen, WC, and children's play area, ensuring the church can host community events as well as worship.

The church benefits from the generosity of past parishioners, notably Edith Clara Young, whose legacy continues to support upkeep and ministry. Weddings and baptisms are frequent, drawing both residents and those with family connections to Birdbrook.



Opportunities and Aspirations

Birdbrook enjoys a strong sense of community and a loyal congregation that works closely with neighbouring parishes across the Benefice. The footpath through the churchyard brings many visitors, offering opportunities for quiet contemplation and social contact.

The church's aspiration is to continue being a welcoming, prayerful and outward-looking Christian presence, deepening its engagement with the village and encouraging new generations to encounter the love of Christ.

"We are one family of six churches, united in faith and service, seeking to share the light of Christ in our villages."

St Andrew's, Helions Bumpstead

Parish Overview

Helions Bumpstead is a small rural village of approximately 440 people, lying close to the Cambridgeshire and Suffolk borders and about 17 miles from Cambridge. It stands at the western edge of the Two Rivers Benefice and is a friendly village with a strong sense of community.

It benefits from having a community-owned pub, a well-used village hall, an active recreation ground, several farms and extensive footpaths. As well as the beautiful mediaeval parish church of St Andrew there is also a busy Gospel Hall, reflecting a wider Christian presence within the village.



Worship and Church Life

Our beautiful and unusually light church is open every day during daylight hours and offers a peaceful space for prayer and reflection, much appreciated by all who come in — as our Visitor's Book testifies: *"A wonderful space – peace and hope."* *"Been coming here for 55+ years and still love it"* *"Church is cool"* (sic)

There are three clergy-led services each month, including Evensong, and both BCP and Common Worship Holy Communion singing from the Common Praise hymn book and accompanied by our small but historic organ. Attendance is modest but faithful and enthusiastic, with special services such as Carol Services, Harvest, Remembrance, Christmas and Easter drawing much larger numbers from across the village.

Each week the church also runs Monastic Mix – a time of quiet reflection combining prayer, song, creativity and contemplation – enabling participants to draw closer to God in an unhurried and creative way.

Twice a year, Children's Activity Afternoons allow families to experience the church and churchyard to explore Christian stories through crafts, games, stories and Easter Garden-making.

We have a loyal team of organists, readers, intercessors, flower arrangers and cake makers.

The churchyard is well managed to provide space for tending graves, informal prayer, and with areas where wildlife can flourish.

St Andrew's seats 80 comfortably (and up to 120 when full).

The PCC and churchwardens are committed to ensuring that St Andrew's remains a welcoming inclusive church open to all.



Church Building

St Andrew's is a well-maintained Grade II* Listed Church, unusually light and airy, with an open churchyard still used for burials. There has been a church on the site since the Norman Conquest; but the present building dates largely from the 14th century.

Its tower contains an excellent peal of eight bells, attracting visiting ringers from far and wide, and supporting joyful celebration at weddings and festivals.

Careful stewardship of legacies from many generations has enabled the building of a beautiful new vestry with accessible toilet and kitchen facilities (completed in 2023), re-ordering the interior to have a Children's Area at the back of the church, as well as keeping up with repairs. A new audio-visual system and screen have been installed.

Mission and Community Engagement

Our new facilities, together with the church's fine acoustics, have opened up exciting opportunities for concerts, community gatherings, and outreach events. Recent examples include film and sports screenings, Scrabble afternoons, and charity events which bring new people into the church. A film club is planned.

We use the Village Hall to hold Soup and Cheese Lunches in the winter, an annual Harvest Supper, and a Christmas Tea, all raising funds for local and global causes.



Opportunities and Aspirations

St Andrew's is a living church at the heart of village life – where as many services and other opportunities for worship as possible are available – and where our activities and engagement with the wider village community aim to ensure that St. Andrew's remains vibrant and relevant in the village.

We want to encourage more people who come to our special services to take a more regular part in our church life, deepening discipleship and involvement.

St Laurence's, Ridgewell

Parish Overview

Ridgewell is a small, attractive village in rural north-west Essex, close to the Suffolk border, with a population of around 500 across 250 homes. It lies among rich arable farmland, much of which falls within a conservation area, and retains a peaceful and traditional character.

At the heart of the village stand St Laurence's Church and Ridgewell Church of England Primary School, next door to one another, forming a natural partnership for worship and community life. There is also a Congregational Chapel, and several active clubs and groups, including the Gardening Club and various community associations.



Worship and Church Life

St Laurence's hosts a monthly Sunday service, drawing worshippers from Ridgewell, Ashen and Birdbrook. These three parishes share ministry and fellowship by rotating services, so that a joint congregation meets in a different village each Sunday.

Services include Morning Praise and CW Holy Communion, led by the Benefice ministry team, including ordained clergy and Licensed Lay Ministers. Worship is rooted in Scripture, warm in fellowship and open in style—traditional yet welcoming of more lively family occasions.

Music is provided by the organ at every service, and the church community plays an active part in readings, prayers, and hospitality. Ridgewell also has a committed team caring for the church and churchyard.

A highlight of the year is the Live Nativity on Christmas Eve—a much-loved village tradition that begins in the church and continues with a walk through the village as the Christmas story unfolds, echoing the journey to Bethlehem and engaging families of all ages.

Mission and Community Engagement

Ridgewell has an exceptional relationship with Ridgewell Church of England Primary School, which is part of The Vine Schools Trust. Clergy lead weekly collective worship, assist with RE lessons, and host a Family Service every half-term. Families and pupils gather in church for major festivals—Christmas, Easter, and Harvest—often sharing refreshments and fellowship in the school hall.

A small team also runs Messy Church events with the school, providing creative, interactive opportunities for families to explore faith together.

The parish plays an active role in Benefice-wide outreach such as Alpha and Christianity Explored, Lent Lunches, and Carols around the Pubs. Locally, St Laurence's has hosted organ recitals, concerts, and BBC Gardeners' World filming—demonstrating its value as both a sacred space and a cultural venue at the heart of the village.

Members of the congregation also volunteer in the school and community, helping to sustain Ridgewell's tradition of service, welcome and witness.



The Church Building

St Laurence's Church is Grade I listed, dating from the medieval period, and can seat around 150 people. It has a fine pipe organ, a well-maintained churchyard still open for burials, and a small peal of bells regularly rung for services and celebrations.

The church is in good repair and cared for by a faithful congregation and supportive wider community who value it as both a historic landmark and a living place of worship.



Opportunities and Aspirations

Ridgewell's close connection with its church school provides a unique doorway into the life of the village and opportunities to engage younger families in Christian faith. The congregation's openness to varied worship styles allows creative ministry that can both honour the church's rich heritage and reach a new generation.

The parish aspires to continue growing in faith, hospitality, and mission—sharing the hope of Jesus Christ with all who live, learn and worship in Ridgewell.

St Mary's, Steeple Bumpstead with St Mary's, Sturmer

Parish Overview

This is the largest and most active parish within the Two Rivers Benefice, covering the villages of Steeple Bumpstead (population ~1,800) and Sturmer (~400).

Steeple Bumpstead is a lively and well-resourced village with a primary school, shop, village hall, two pubs and many active community organisations. It borders Cambridgeshire and Suffolk, attracting both long-term residents and new families.

Sturmer, just a mile away, is a smaller, historic village with a strong sense of identity and heritage, where the church continues to provide a spiritual and pastoral anchor for the local community.



Worship and Church Life

St Mary's, Steeple Bumpstead offers weekly Sunday worship, including Family Communion, Morning Praise, All-Age Worship and a Bereavement Service.

The annual Remembrance Service at the village War Memorial is a major event, drawing large crowds and uniting the community in prayer.

Worship is enhanced through the use of AV technology, allowing wider participation. The church regularly joins neighbouring parishes for Benefice services and enjoys strong links with the local Congregational Church.

Music is provided by a small music group, organists, or digital accompaniment. Regular lay involvement enriches worship, with teams of readers, intercessors and prayer ministers serving faithfully.

St Mary's, Sturmer hosts occasional festival services — at Christmas, Easter, Harvest, and on fifth Sundays — and remains a valued place for reflection, weddings, and local gatherings.

This parish has formally adopted the Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) Basis of Faith, is supported by the CEEC's Alternative Spiritual Oversight (ASO) scheme and contributes its Parish Share through the Ephesian Fund. This adds a welcome variation in the approach to Christian worship, adding both strength and depth to our joint Benefice mission.

Worship is warm, Christ-centred, biblically grounded and deeply rooted in community life.

Mission and Community Engagement

Steeple Bumpstead is a hub for mission, hospitality and discipleship within the Benefice. Regular activities include:

- Weekly Fellowship Group (Wednesday afternoons)
- Coffee @ Church (Thursday mornings)
- Cavell Community Choir (Tuesday evenings)
- Bell Ringing Team (weekly practice and ringing for services, weddings and funerals – most are active members of the congregation)
- Big Breakfast Club (monthly Saturday mornings) and a Christmas Lunch in mid-December
- School assemblies, seasonal services, and pastoral support for Steeple Bumpstead Primary School
- Alpha, Christianity Explored, and youth events
- A lively programme of community events – from *Carols around the Pubs* and *Christmas Tree Lighting to Quiz Nights, Cream Teas, Farmers' Markets, and charity fundraisers*.
- We support 'Reach', the Haverhill Food Bank and the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal.

The church also hosts concerts, film nights and village meetings, serving as both a sacred and civic heart for the community. These activities build relationships and open doors for people to explore faith in Jesus Christ.



Church Buildings

St Mary's, Steeple Bumpstead

A Grade I listed building, St Mary's is a spacious, flexible and well-equipped building seating about 220, with kitchen, toilet, heating and a modern AV system. It is widely used by community groups and well supported by the *Friends of St Mary's Church* who assist with maintenance projects.

The bell tower contains six ringable bells, and the churchyard (now closed) is maintained by the Parish Council. There is a separate extended churchyard on another nearby site

St Mary's, Sturmer

A Grade I listed church with a Norman nave and Romanesque windows, cared for by a dedicated local group. Discussions are presently underway with the aim of transferring the care of the building to Friends of Friendless Churches. Occasional worship continues here, preserving an important part of our shared spiritual and cultural heritage.

Heritage and Notable Features

- Open church: St Mary's, Steeple Bumpstead is open daily for prayer and welcomes many visitors.
- The church contains a memorial to Edith Cavell – “murdered in Brussels; a sometime worshipper” – and visitors often come to view this and the fascinating mediaeval graffiti on the pillars.
- In St Mary's, Sturmer, memorials record local figures such, as Leofsunu who fought at the Battle of Maldon (991), and Revd William Hicks, naval veteran of Trafalgar and former Rector.



Opportunities and Aspirations

St Mary's, Steeple Bumpstead with Sturmer seeks to continue growing as a mission-minded cornerstone of the Benefice – deepening biblical literacy, nurturing younger generations, and resourcing ministry across the wider family of churches.

With committed wardens, generous congregations, and open villages, the parish offers an ideal base for training, music, discipleship and outreach, strengthening the shared life and witness of the Two Rivers Benefice.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Benefice Overview and Statistics

<u>Feature</u>	<u>Detail</u>
Number of parishes	5
Number of churches	6
Population (combined)	c. 3,855
Electoral roll (combined)	c. 142
Average weekly attendance	70–80
Worship pattern	Common Worship, BCP, Family Services
Benefice structure	Shared PCC mission session, local PCC business meetings
Church Tradition	A broad spectrum of churchmanship within each parish. A mixture of traditional and contemporary worship, open to liturgical breadth and welcoming to all.
Deanery	Hinckford (Colchester Episcopal Area)

The Benefice enjoys a strong spirit of collaboration, sharing vision and prayer while local PCCs manage their own buildings and finances. Joint initiatives such as Christianity Explored/Alpha, Coffee @ Church, and the Cavell Community Choir express our shared mission and fellowship.



Appendix 2: Monthly Worship Pattern

Village/Week	1 st Sunday	2 nd Sunday	3 rd Sunday	4 th Sunday	5 th Sunday
Ashen		6.00pm BCP Evening Prayer	10.30am CW Holy Communion		
Birdbrook		10.30am Morning Worship		10.30am Benefice Holy Communion	
Helions Bumpstead	6.00pm* BCP Evensong	9.00am BCP Holy Communion	6.00pm* CW Holy Communion		
Ridgewell	10.30am Morning Worship				
Steeple Bumpstead	10.30am Family Communion	10.30am Morning Praise	10.30am Morning Praise		
Sturmer					10.30am Benefice Holy Communion

*

Evening Services at Helions Bumpstead are at 6pm during British Summer Time and 4pm during the winter months.



Appendix 3: Parish Demographic Summaries (Parish Spotlights 2025)

Ashen

Population: c. 325
Electoral Roll: 11
Average Sunday Attendance: 12-15
Age profile: Mature but balanced
Strengths: Strong village identity, creative community events, faithful congregation
Challenges: Small numbers and limited volunteers
Distinctive features: Teddy Bear Tower Parachute Jump and Jazz Concert

Birdbrook

Population: c. 390
Electoral Roll: 26
Average Sunday Attendance: 10-30
Age profile: Older overall, but strong local loyalty
Strengths: Faithful core congregation, good facilities, generous local support
Challenges: Distance from larger villages
Distinctive features: War memorial, American airmen's plaque, thriving Carol and Harvest services

Helions Bumpstead

Population: c. 440
Electoral Roll: 29
Average Sunday Attendance: 15-20
Age profile: Mature but balanced
Strengths: Excellent community facilities, creative lay initiatives like 'Monastic Mix'
Challenges: Limited numbers for regular services; sustaining lay leadership
Distinctive features: Widely known for hosting well attended special events.

Ridgewell

Population: c. 500
Electoral Roll: 11
Average Sunday Attendance: 20-25
Age profile: Mixed, with strong family presence through Ridgewell Primary School
Strengths: Excellent church–school partnership
Challenges: Limited lay capacity
Distinctive features: Hosts Vine Trust school partnership; centre for Benefice children's ministry

Steeple Bumpstead with Sturmer

Population: c. 2,200
Electoral Roll: 65
Average Sunday Attendance: 25-35
Age profile: Broad
Strengths: Large and active congregation, strong community hub, excellent school connections
Challenges: Sustaining mission across two villages, developing youth work
Distinctive features: Adopted CEEC Basis of Faith; pays Parish Share via the Ephesian Fund



Appendix 4: Finance and Stewardship

Each parish manages its own finances but contributes collectively to shared ministry costs. The Benefice contributes Parish Share faithfully through the Ephesian Fund (for Steeple Bumpstead with Sturmer) and directly to the Diocese for other parishes.

Parish	Parish Share 2025 (£)	Diocesan Proposal 2026 (£)	Notes
Ashen	6,611	8,167	Annual community events
Birdbrook	15,206	19,771	Legacy income supports upkeep
Helions Bumpstead	19,731	21,628	Strong local giving
Ridgewell	6,238	7,724	Active fundraising concerts
Steeple Bumpstead with Sturmer	22,122	26,306	Paid via Ephesian Fund
Total	69,908	83,596	

The Benefice Share offer of £69,908 will be paid in full. Over the last few years, the Diocese has requested that Parishes/Benefices work towards covering their full ministry costs and share of central Diocesan costs. This represented an increase of over 40% for this Benefice, but we have been working towards it. It is proposed that we will contribute in 2026 at the same level as 2025.

Two Rivers Benefice Central Funds

To support the incumbent and provide flexibility, a central account exists to which all the PCCs contribute. These regular contributions, presently £200 per month, are specifically for administrative support and will continue to be available.

There is also a Parish Share Fund. Monies in are from Benefice-wide fundraising events. The last payment from this fund was to assist St Mary's Sturmer's Parish Share. The Fund currently stands at £8,000.

Appendix 5: The Vicarage

The Vicarage is located at 3 Church Street, Steeple Bumpstead, CB9 7DG. It is a modern detached four-bedroom house with a large study, kitchen/dining room, two reception rooms, a separate clergy entrance, and a large, enclosed garden. The house is within walking distance of the church, school, and village amenities.



Appendix 6: The Local Area

The Two Rivers Benefice lies within attractive north-west Essex countryside, with access to Haverhill, Cambridge, Saffron Walden, Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds. Each village has a strong identity and a vibrant sense of community, with pubs, schools, and village halls acting as natural meeting points. Public transport connects the villages to local centres, and nearby towns provide shopping and healthcare facilities.

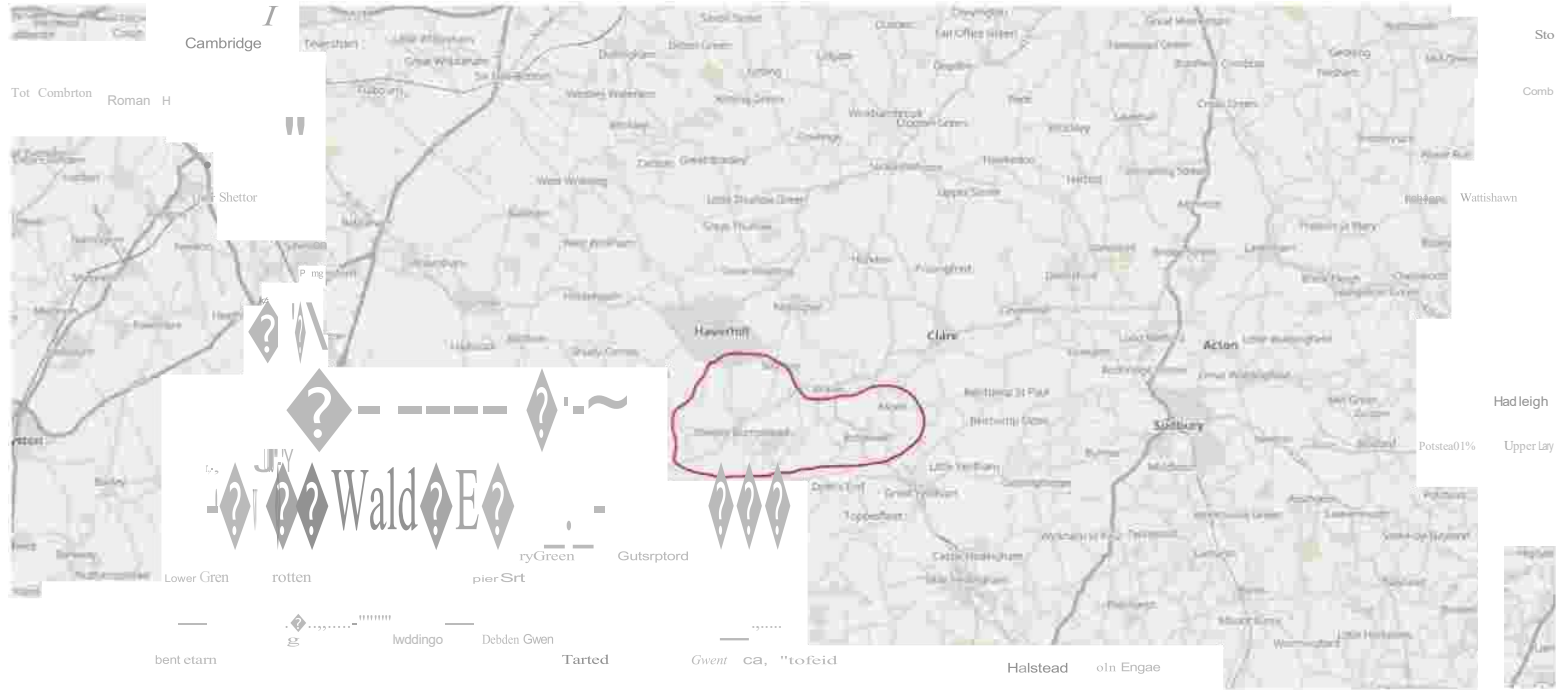


Appendix 7: Key Personnel

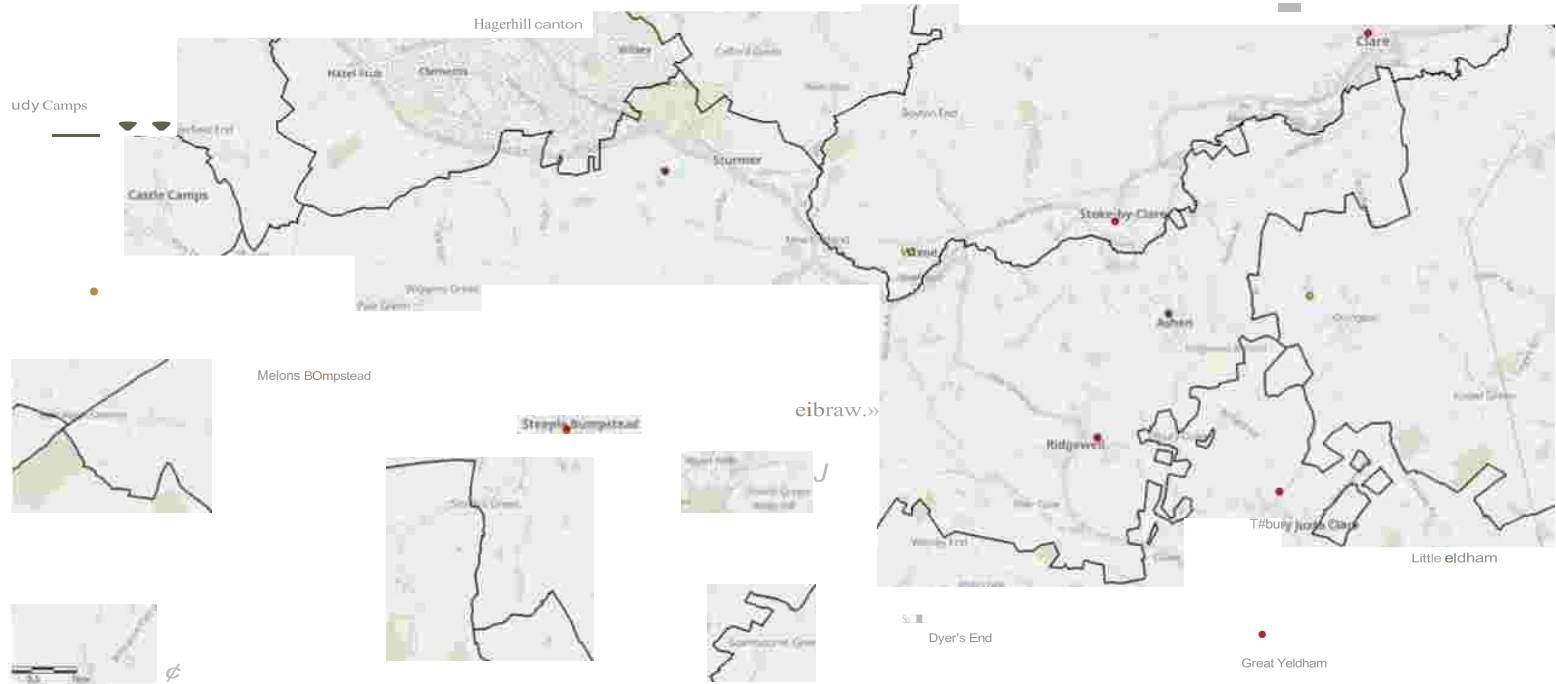
<u>Role</u>	<u>Name</u>
Benefice Administrator	Mrs Nancy Hatch (who after many years' service, has resigned. A successor is being sought)
Retired Clergy	Revd Sue Cruse (PTO)
LLMs	Mr David Buckley (PTO) Mr Steve Norris Mr Charles Scott (PTO)
Churchwardens (Steeple Bumpstead and Sturmer)	Mrs Jenny Cullup-Chapman Mrs Stephanie Power
Churchwardens (Helions Bumpstead)	Mrs Juliet Corfield Mrs Jane Slade
Churchwarden (Ridgewell)	Mr Peter Mullane
Churchwarden (Ashen)	Mr Robin Purchas Mrs Maureen Rigg
Churchwarden (Birdbrook)	Mrs Judi Price
Parish Safeguarding Officers	Mrs Maureen Rigg (Ashen & Ridgewell) Mrs Jane Slade (Helions) Mrs D Robertson-Hughes (Steeple)

Appendix 8: Benefice Map

Map showing wider geographical area



Map showing Two Rivers Benefice Boundaries



“Five parishes, six churches, and one family – serving our villages in love, growing together in faith and welcoming to all”



The Two Rivers Benefice