

A Strategic Plan for the Deployment of Clergy

1. The number of clergy available for stipendiary parish ministry in the Church of England will decline over at least the next decade as larger numbers reach retiring age than emerge from the lengthy training necessary for ordination. This is despite ever growing vocations to non-stipendiary ministry. While Salisbury Diocese could probably continue to attract, and could certainly afford, the current numbers of stipendiary clergy, to do so would risk depriving those Dioceses that cannot achieve their numbers. Therefore Diocesan policy is to reduce Salisbury's number of stipendiary clergy in line with the projected national shortfall so as not to exceed our 'share' (2.5% of the total for England) determined by the so-called 'Sheffield formula' that bishops agreed some 30 years ago.

Implications for Dorchester

2. Although the exact methodology for apportioning the Diocese's share of available clergy between Deaneries has not yet been agreed formally by Diocesan Synod, it seems clear that this Deanery will need to find additional cuts on top of those recently taken, bringing the number of stipendiary clergy¹ down to 8 (originally 10, now 9), with an increase in unpaid House-for-Duty (HfD) posts² to 3 or 4 (originally 1, now 2); a 20% reduction in stipendiary clergy over the decade 2007-16.

Deanery Reaction

3. The Deanery is against simply stretching our remaining clergy over ever greater numbers of parishes; both for fear of imposing impossible burdens on already busy clergy, and the disruption that continual reorganisation would cause to our aspirations for stronger links between parishes. Equally we reject concentrating the remaining clergy in just a few of the larger population centres, travelling out to parishes as necessary (sometimes called a 'minster model'³). While this might offer greater collegiality for the clergy, it would strain, if not destroy, the identification of clergy with laity that has been a strength of the Church of England since the Middle-Ages. We reject even more an outright withdrawal from rural parishes as has been forced on other Christian denominations.

4. Instead the Deanery intends to move towards a structure where a complementary mix of full and part-time, stipendiary and non-stipendiary, clergy work in 'partnership' to deliver mission and ministry across specific 'zones'⁴ of the Deanery consistent with our geography. Within each 'zone', 'clusters'⁵ of small parishes will be identified that have a sense of shared identity enabling them to work together and share resources. Above all, we will ensure that each parish, and each 'cluster', has an identifiable clergy leader, however work may be divided up within the 'partnership'. We are relaxed about clergy working part-time (as HfD or with other employment) believing that no worse, and possibly a lot better, than fewer full time clergy stretched over proportionately more parishes.

5. The Deanery is particularly concerned that the short-term attractions of substituting HfD could, by throwing more management burden on the remaining full-time clergy, make it difficult for those moving on from their time as curates to find a suitable Post-of-First Responsibility (PFR) in the Deanery. We believe it is essential for the long-term health of the Church that we retain at least one potential PFR in Dorchester itself and at least one other PFR in the rural parts of the Deanery.

The Natural Communities of the Deanery

6. We can hardly complain that parishes do not work together as a benefice if those benefices do not reflect natural communities. The communities of this Deanery are dictated by the valleys that dissect the chalk downs from the north and south 'Ridgeways', constraining the pattern of settlement and the routes in between. The Deanery divides naturally into 4 'zones' (plus 2 stand alone 'clusters'), each with an identifiable character and its own particular set of issues:

- a. The '**Central**' zone, essentially the county town of Dorchester itself (DT1 postcode), is home to c50% of the population of the Deanery and c25% of the Church membership, with major new development at Poundbury. It has a fully fledged Team Ministry with 3 full-time stipendiary (one in a PFR), plus a number of non-stipendiary, clergy, who also cover some adjacent rural parishes: West Stafford, Winterborne

Monkton & Herrington, and the 'redundant' parishes of Winterborne Came and Whitcombe (accounting for about 1/8th of the total between them). While we recognise the benefits of 'critical mass' in Dorchester, we are concerned that, if it takes on yet more adjacent parishes, it would become so large in proportion to the rest of Deanery that the others could not achieve similar 'critical mass'.

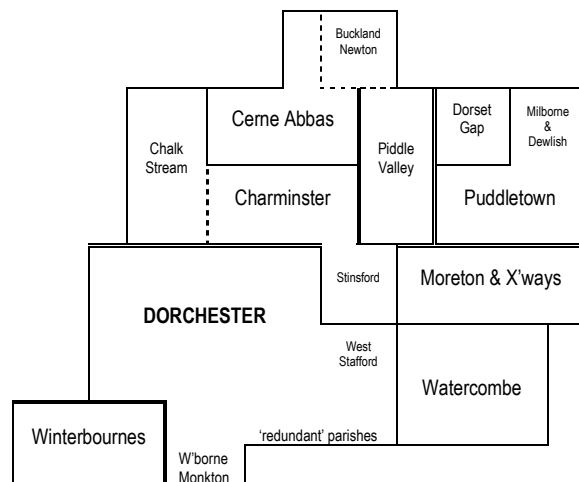
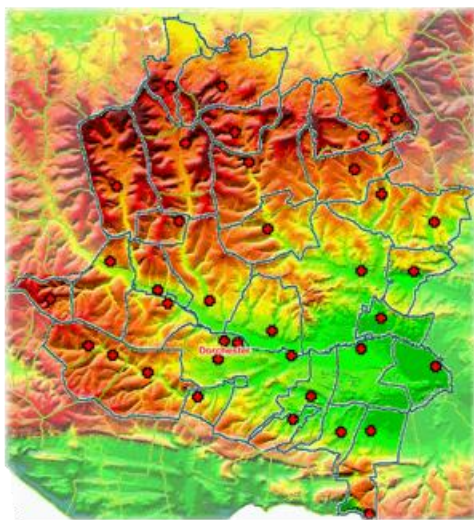
b. The **Winterbournes** (a classic 'cluster', now a unified parish) with Compton Valence have for many years been too small to justify a full-time stipendiary (FTS). There is a strong local identity and it is a natural HfD (or part-time) post. Where an outside 'Priest-in-Charge' is necessary for any reason, Dorchester is the only logical source. Thus the South-West is necessarily an adjunct to the Central zone; distinct but inextricably linked.

c. The **North-West zone** is defined by 3 valleys (Frome, Sydling & Cerne) running up from Charminster through the chalk downland to the Ridgeway. There is a major new development at Charlton Down. Buckland Newton sits anomalously just beyond the Ridgeway and is more part of the Piddle Valley than Cerne. The NW zone has just reduced from 3 to 2 FTS clergy, with an HfD now in the 'Chalk Stream' (another classic 'cluster') under Charminster as P-i-C. Given the size of the remaining benefices, a further reduction to 1 FTS would be out of the question, even with generous HfD substitution.

d. The **Piddle Valley** is another classic 'cluster' like the Winterbournes; of similar size and with equally strong local identity, but with more complex external relationships. In character it more like the valleys of the NW zone (except in relationship to Charminster) than the 'Puddles' downstream. But school and other catchments point towards Puddletown and it has a good direct route to Dorchester rather than via Puddletown. The Valley's poorest links are eastwards to the 'Dorset Gap' 'cluster' with whom it is currently brigaded as a rather awkwardly configured Benefice.

e. The **North-East zone** falls into 2 distinct parts: the 'Puddles' stretching out towards Bere Regis, and Milbome & Dewlish along with the 'Dorset Gap' 'cluster' stretching out towards Blandford. Routes to Dorchester run via Puddletown, the only sizeable centre of population, and the A35 dual-carriageway through Puddletown Forest, giving the same stand-off that Charminster and the Frome floodplain give to the NW zone. This zone, together with the Piddle Valley, is currently served by 2 FTS clergy stretched thin by geography. A reduction from 2 to 1 FTS clergy would require the creation of 2 HfD posts, one of which would need to be in the 'Dorset Gap'⁶ where currently there is no clergy housing⁷.

f. The **South-East zone** is made up of closely interwoven parishes stretching out from Dorchester towards Egdon Heath and along the South Dorset Downs to the Purbecks. The only large centre of population is the new and expanding village of Crossways which, as yet, has no church building of its own. The SE zone is more contiguous with Dorchester than the NW and NE zones (due to geography and Fordington's historic status⁸), and the Dorchester Team cover some of the closer rural parishes. The remainder (the bulk) of this zone is currently served by 2 FTS clergy, although one is combined with a busy Diocesan post effectively making that 1.8 FTS. Any reduction here would require the Diocesan role to be made explicit as a part-time post, or removed elsewhere if an HfD post were to be substituted.



← Topographical map

^ Proportional map ^

Outstanding Issues

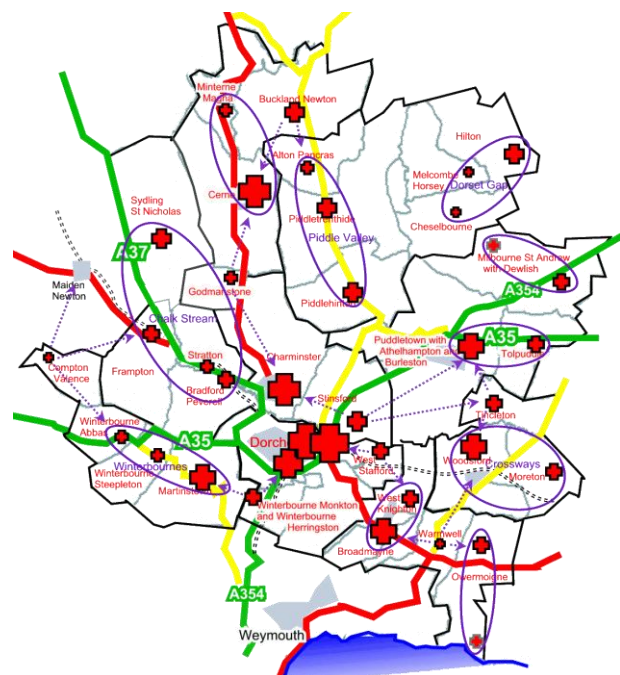
7. The most significant unresolved issue, whether the Diocesan system for apportioning clergy that is eventually introduced (see para.2) will retain the disincentive against PFR and in favour of HfD of the original proposal, is outside the control of this Deanery. We hope that it will be more even handed, and this deployment strategy has been prepared on that basis.

8. The most significant issue within Deanery control is whether the Piddle Valley 'cluster' sits better in the North-East zone, or as yet another valley of the North-West zone (albeit not one connected to Charminster), or just possibly as an adjunct to Dorchester like the Winterbournes. Related to that issue, and in some ways the key to it, is whether Buckland Newton (a largish parish about 30% of a 'Diocesan average' benefice) should remain with Cerne Abbas or join the Piddle Valley 'cluster' as the topography (and the B3143) might suggest; we believe returning Buckland Newton to Sherborne Deanery, from whence it came 8 years ago, would be unwelcome.

9. The arguments are finely balanced; but we think it likely that any HfD in the Piddle Valley will be placed under Cerne Abbas. In that case, the Buckland Newton issue can be left to evolve naturally since both BN and the Valley would come under the same (Cerne) incumbent. The Piddle Valley HfD would, of course, still have to maintain links with Puddletown to ensure continuity of pastoral care as children move from First School in the Valley to Middle School in Puddletown. The NE 'partnership' would then be only 1 FTS and 1 HfD (in the Dorset Gap), but we see no merit in a wider 'partnership' between the NE and SE zones since distances would be too great (Hilton to Holworth is 17 miles over narrow country lanes). And, with all FTS posts in the NW and NE then having HfD management responsibilities there is no scope for a PFR in either.

10. The association of some of the smaller rural parishes with neighbouring 'clusters' is not always self-evident and would be worth a review. But the numbers involved do not significantly affect the overall picture and the issues can safely be left for resolution through dialogue with the parishes when the time comes. The parish affiliations in question are:

Parish:	Currently with:	Alternative(s)?
Warmwell,	Watercombe	Crossways
Tincton,	Crossways	Puddletown
Stinsford,	Charminster	NE or Dorchester
Godmanstone,	Cerne Abbas	Charminster
Compton Valence	Winterbournes	Frampton or MN
Winterb'ne Monkton	Dorchester	Winterbournes
West Stafford ⁹	Dorchester	West Knighton



Partnerships for Mission

11. The 'partnerships' referred to so far have been for pastoral ministry: 'Pastoral Partnerships'. But the Church must move forward in Mission as well as tending the existing flock. By their nature, 'Mission Partnerships' should be dynamic and responsive to changing circumstances, so perhaps best not set in concrete by a plan such as this.¹⁰ Many Mission initiatives will occur within a single zone; others will involve the whole Deanery, such as that to secondary age children at The Thomas Hardye School. But some Mission Partnerships will straddle zone boundaries, such as that to children at Puddletown Middle School (NE and SE zones) or St Osmund's MS (NW and Central). And some Mission Partnerships could stretch beyond Deanery boundaries. Many of our people travel for work, leisure or healthcare to and from Weymouth: why not a Mission Partnership to reach them?

Curates and Readers

12. Curates, OLM, NSM not of 'incumbent status', and Licensed Lay Minister (LLMs) all make a valuable contribution to pastoral ministry. That we have not, in the interests of clarity, included them in our main analysis is not to denigrate their vocation. We foresee all such ministers taking a greater leadership role and look forward to a situation where the 'curate' (stipendiary, OLM/NSM or LLM) assumes as prominent a pastoral status in the minds of parishioners as does the 'vicar'.

13. We are not persuaded of the benefits of wider licensing (to adjacent benefices or the whole Deanery): any of the above can already minister with the incumbent's permission, and we find it hard to envisage circumstances when they would do so without permission, even if licensed. But we do hope to move towards more dynamic licensing where the Rural Dean, in consultation with incumbents, is able to review and, subject to the willingness of the individual, redistribute these valuable 'non-incumbent' resources across the Deanery to meet changing requirements.

Lay Involvement

14. At a time of increasing shortage of ordained clergy, it seems self-evident that any roles that do not demand ordination should be undertaken by lay persons wherever possible. There is plenty of Lay talent within this Deanery: Church Wardens and parish secretaries/treasurers already do a sterling job. But there is more that the laity could do to provide leadership at the 'cluster' level and support at the 'partnership' and Deanery level. In the longer term it might be possible, with Diocesan support, to enact formal measures to offload responsibility for all matters temporal (fabric, administration etc.) from the clergy, freeing them to focus on spiritual leadership.

The Way Forward

15. The timing of clergy moves, not being subject to central planning, must bear some uncertainty. But there are at least 3 benefices that will become vacant before 2016, possibly more, so the Deanery should have flexibility in achieving the required cuts. The worst outcome for the Deanery would be if cuts were to be imposed simply in the random order that vacancies occur, rather than taking a longer view and moving steadfastly towards the desired structure.

16. The essential elements of the Deanery's desired structure, allowing that there may have to be variation at the edges in response to changing circumstances, would be:

- a. at least one experienced FTS, able to provide leadership to a 'partnership' of HfD, PFR and/or part-time clergy, in each of the Central, NW, NE and SE zones; **(so 4)**
- b. the equivalent of another experienced stipendiary (could be 2 part-time) to allow margin for roles such as Rural Dean, Training Officer etc; **(+1=5)**
- c. at least one potential PFR in Dorchester itself and at least one in the rural parts of the Deanery, both of which we assume would be FTS¹¹; **(+2=7)**
- d. an expectation that all FTS, except PFR in their early years and some with Diocesan appointments, would take a cross-Deanery lead on an appropriate Mission portfolio;
- e. sufficient other 'vicar equivalent'¹² NSM, HfD, and part-time clergy to take the total of all types of clergy, stipendiary and non-stipendiary, in each 'partnership' to 1 'vicar' for every 150 'members'¹³ (so requiring 5HfD or part-time)¹⁴. **(+2.5=9.5 'vicar equivalents')**

17. Clearly there are pinch points: if we fall below 7 full-time, our ability to accommodate PFR would be eroded, which would risk triggering a self-sustaining spiral of decline; and below 5 our proposed structure would become unviable, necessitating far more radical solutions than these.

Janet Smith
Rural Dean

Roger Holehouse
Lay Chairman

Notes:

¹ Strictly speaking: full-time equivalent (FTE) stipendiary clergy in 'incumbent status' posts. Part-time clergy count pro-rata; stipendiary curates (strictly 'assistant curates'), being under training, are not counted. The fact that part-time, Team or Associate Vicars, Priests-in-Charge etc may not be 'incumbents' in strict legal terms is glossed over in this paper and 'incumbent' used to mean the person the parish would perceive as their 'vicar'.

² HfD is a type of non-stipendiary appointment where a parsonage house is provided in return for a fixed number of days service (usually 2 days per week plus Sundays), but the 'incumbent', often but not always a retired stipendiary on pension, is not otherwise remunerated. It will usually be necessary, for reasons that need not bore the average reader, for a full-time stipendiary from an adjacent Benefice to be appointed as 'Priest-in-Charge' (P-i-C) to provide 'cure of souls' on a 24/7 basis.

³ Before the Middle Ages, priest often lived together in 'Minster' churches for mutual support, travelling out to parishes to conduct their ministry, but they did not live full-time in their parishes as now.

⁴ The terms 'partnership' and 'zone' are deliberately neutral on whether the arrangement is simply informal cooperation between benefices, formal cross-licensing, 'Group', or 'Team' ministry. 'Partnership' refers to the people and organisation; 'zone' refers to the geography.

⁵ The term 'cluster' is deliberately neutral on whether the arrangement is simply informal cooperation between parishes, formal 'Joint' PCCs, or legally united parishes.

⁶ The Dorset Gap cluster alone is a little smaller than would be normal for an HfD post, but some adjustment around Dewlish and Milbourne might balance workloads with the full-time stipendiary at Puddletown.

⁷ Suitable houses in the Dorset Gap parishes do not come on the market very often. Fortunately there is, in near term at least, there is an experienced NSM living in his own house within that 'cluster' who might be prepared to take on the post of 'Vicar'.

⁸ Fordington grew up as a rural village close up to the walls of Dorchester but never really part of the town. The parish ('Fordington Fields') merged seamlessly into the surrounding countryside, without natural barriers such as the River Frome presents to the NW or Puddletown Forest (Heath) to the NE.

⁹ The parish of West Stafford has now been unified with Dorchester, as the 'redundant' parishes of Whitcombe and Winterborne Came have been for many years. Any reallocation elsewhere, while not impossible, would be administratively tedious involving lengthy legal processes.

¹⁰ It may be that the requirements of Mission might dictate a different deployment of clergy to that for Pastoral work. But since we believe that Mission is often best carried out by the clergy providing leadership for the laity, it seems a prudent initial assumption for Mission deployment to follow that for Pastoral ('*Base the officers with the troops.*'). Independent deployment for Mission is best viewed as 'Pioneer Ministry'.

¹¹ Not that we would rule out other options; it is just that they are very difficult to plan for in advance.

¹² 'Vicar equivalent' is a concept we have found necessary to introduce to recognise that non-stipendiary ministers have pastoral 'value' even though they do not 'cost' (aside from housing costs for HfD). It does not yet form part of the Diocesan methodology. We propose that HfD are valued at 0.5, which seems to reflect the current reality (although contracts are usually for 0.3>0.4). Newly qualified clergy in PFR we propose should be valued at 0.8, at least in their early years, to reflect their lesser experience. Full-time stipendiary would, of course, be 1. Others, part-timers or NSM, would be valued on a pro-rata or case-by-case basis.

¹³ This is not to suggest that number of 'members' is the only metric of clergy workload, but within the limited demographics of this Deanery, the extra load arising from the greater population in urban areas ('occasional offices' etc.) is balanced by the extra load from the greater distances and number of churches in rural areas. To use the diocesan apportionment formula (like a 'derivative' on the stock market) would just complicate matters and change nothing.

¹⁴ Deployed as follows:1) Winterbournes 2) Chalk Stream 3) Piddle Valley 4) Dorset Gap 5) in the SE zone.