

Re-organisation proposal for the Benefice of Bentworth, Lasham, Medstead and Shalden (BLMS)

Due to financial difficulties in the Diocese of Winchester, plans are being considered at the moment for a re-organisation of the North Hampshire Parish Boundaries, of which the Benefice of Bentworth, Lasham, Medstead and Shalden, within the Deanery of Alton, is a part. If agreed upon, this would make the saving of one stipendiary post (vicar), as the individual BLMS parishes will be merged with already existing parishes. The proposal is that the parishes of Bentworth, Lasham and Shalden will merge with the Parish of the Resurrection in Alton and the parish of Medstead with the Parish of the Good Shepherd, Four Marks. This is part of the consultation process which will be ongoing in the next months.

There is an information pack issued by the Diocese of Winchester which gives more information about the proposals for the Deanery of Alton. Please read those additional papers which should be on this web site.

An important aspect of how churches are managed is called governance. The governance options for the present BLMS churches are that, when joining the parish in Alton or Four Marks respectively, they could:

- a) Remain as Parish Churches
- b) Become individual 'Chapels of Ease'
- c) Convert to 'Festival Churches.'

In remaining a Parish Church, it retains its PCC; its burial, baptism and wedding rights and the obligation to pay its parish share (known here as the CMF).

Description of 'Chapel of Ease'

A chapel-of-ease can have any number of services (a minimum of 6 is recommended), but does not normally (traditionally) have burial, baptism or wedding rights, though the Bishop could licence it for such. It is there for occasional or regular worship, serving people in that area for whom the parish church is perhaps distant. It does not have its own parish or Parochial Church Council (PCC), but is within the parish of the nominated parish church and is looked after by that church's PCC. There is no parish share specific to the building. A parish church could have several chapels-of-ease "dependent" upon it.

Description of 'Festival Church'

A Festival Church will normally be a parish church, and will have its own PCC, or share one with another parish church (or more than one). It can have any number of services (a minimum of 6 is recommended), has baptism, burial and

wedding rights and will pay parish share (CMF). The idea is that there will be an emphasis on festivals and special events, both ecclesiastical and secular, with enhanced community use and sharing of the building. A Festival Church is not defined in law, but will operate under the provisions of the appropriate Canon (Church) law.

So the difference is that basically between a parish church with a PCC, and one that is not. A Festival Church is a parish church which has elected to vary its service pattern to suit its circumstances, but still has the rights and responsibilities and governance structure of a parish church. Please see: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/strategic-planning-church-buildings/festival-churches>

This is the community's opportunity to think about the future of the BLMS churches, and what direction we should go, having considered the possible outcomes. The Bishop of Basingstoke and his team have set up meetings for the Parochial Church Councils (PCC) to be able to ask questions about how the Diocesan proposals will work and affect us, including governance and finance if our churches were to merge with parishes in Alton and Four Marks. But we want to know your views and any questions that you may have so that we can refer them on to the Bishop and his team at that meeting.

These questions need to be sent in writing to individual church wardens/PCC secretaries as soon as possible before the meetings with the Diocese will take place, which is the 24th March for Medstead, and the 29th March for Bentworth Lasham and Shalden:

Bentworth: Cathy Dumelow cathy.dumelow@gmail.com
Liz Preece preece64@gmail.com

Lasham: Maurice Goor mauricegoor@btconnect.com
Michael Del Mar avenuefarmhouse@outlook.com

Medstead: Ingrid Owen-Jones blmsbenefice@gmail.com

Shalden: Peter Rankin pandmrankin@gmail.com

The Diocese has requested that parishioners **do not contact the Bishop's Office directly**, and that any correspondence comes through our PCCs.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this proposal and we ask for your prayers as we face these challenges.