**THEALE AND ENGLEFIELD**

**Submission of the PCC of Holy Trinity Theale to the Church Commissioners**

**re draft proposals for pastoral reorganisation December 2017**

The churchwardens, PCC and clergy of Holy Trinity Church Theale respectfully bring to the Church Commissioners our unanimous and heartfelt objections to the draft proposals for the dissolution of the United Benefice of Theale and Englefield (= pastoral reorganisation) on 5 grounds –spiritual, moral, missional, legal and practical.

The most important factor for the PCC of Holy Trinity is the absolute conviction that as the body of Christ in this place we must learn to work together in love and unity –retaining our distinct identities with separate Sunday services -but looking outwards to serve the members of our intertwined communities.

The current situation was brought about by the unilateral decision of St Mark’s PCC in Jan 2013 to cut their parish share and their subsequent refusal to work with Theale and the Priest in Charge. The reluctance of some members of Englefield PCC to work cooperatively with Theale goes back to the beginning of the united benefice in the 1970s as evidenced by the various memoranda. This is in marked contrast to the ordinary resident population of both parishes many of whom young and old have longstanding and very positive relationships with both parish churches. It is our hope and prayer that in the light of the principles of collaborative ministry and mission which are at the heart of 21st century ministry the Church Commissioners will reject a plan which is totally at odds with the priorities of the Church of England today

We have set out our detailed objections to the proposals in their present form below and then in the final section suggested a way forward.

Please see appendices for more information about the benefice, the recent history and some key documents.

 In summary the key information about these 2 very different but intertwined parishes and the recent history of their relationship is as follows:

Theale is a large village/small town of 3500 people which will rise to c 4500 in the next few years. Situated on the M4 corridor it is strategically placed with a large business park of c8000 daily, a fast direct railway line to London which attracts commuters, 4 pubs, a large comprehensive school with c 1000 pupils and a large C of E primary school of 320+ etc. The housing consists predominantly of small privately owned housing and a large amount of rental property including a very significant amount of social housing; the Englefield estate owns much of the land and rental property in Theale.

Holy Trinity Church (grade 1 listed) has enjoyed a period of significant growth in the last 5 years. The electoral roll has almost doubled in 4 years (65-122). Sunday morning congregation have increased by 40%, the monthly Family Church attracts 50- 70 and the weekly Mums’ and Toddlers’ group 70-80 and there is a very well attended After School club for Primary age children. There are 3 fortnightly Bible Study groups and several prayer groups. The Priest in charge takes assemblies in Theale Primary School weekly and works regularly in all 3 schools in the benefice. An ecumenical Alpha Course was held recently with St Luke's RC Church. In order to sustain and build on these initiatives when the present post-holder retires ( Jan 2020 at the latest ) a full time Priest is essential as the Bishop of Reading stated clearly in his email in June 2016.

Englefield is a very small village of c 120 people set in a large estate adjacent to Theale. There is a small C of E Primary School. Of the electoral roll of 137, 113 are non-resident. St Mark’s church (grade 1 listed) has a ‘gathered’ Sunday morning congregation roughly the same size as Holy Trinity (av 68); there is a weekly traditional service led by the Resident Priest, a retired clergyman who works 3 days a week and resides in accommodation provided by the Englefield Estate. The income of St Mark’s church is always significantly higher than Holy Trinity and sometimes double - 42k more from regular giving in 2015.

In 2015 Holy Trinity Theale paid £9000 more share than St Mark’s and £11,000 more in 2016.

**OBJECTIONS TO DRAFT PROPOSALS**

1. **SPIRITUAL**

We believe Christians should work together in love and unity and are at a loss to understand the refusal of St Mark’s Englefield to collaborate with us in ministry and mission - especially as that principle is enshrined in the various memoranda and more recently in very clear pastoral letter of the Bishop of Reading to both PCCs in September 2013 (see appendix 4.2).

There have been a number of periods when the 2 parishes have worked well together and especially the first 9 months of the current post-holder’s time in office when a significant number of both parishes met fortnightly for bible study and prayer to the great benefit of all those who attended. The people of Theale and the series of Rectors/Priests in charge have always welcomed links and cooperative working as set out in the various memoranda. There are several core people at Holy Trinity including 2 PCC members who have ongoing close links with the congregation of St Mark’s. They and some at least of the people of St Mark’s who are aware of the current situation wish fervently for the 2 congregations to be working together in love and friendship. 21st Century ministry with its right emphasis on collaboration and mission requires this.

The credibility of the Church and hence of the Gospel itself is being greatly undermined by this refusal of Englefield PCC to work collaboratively with Theale. There is very significant opposition in Theale to the draft proposals, not just from the PCC and the congregation who are completely united in their wish to work in love and unity with Englefield but also from the wider community who are deeply shocked at Englefield's unwillingness to engage with Theale. Our 2 communities are very much intertwined; the 2 churches are a mile apart and the very small community (c120 )resident in Englefield inevitably look to Theale to supply their daily needs – the Coop, the doctors, the library, the hairdressers etc, and the 3 schools all draw pupils from both parishes.

Furthermore any sensible mission strategy to the local community requires working across the benefice (see para 3).

2. **MORAL**

2.1 Englefield’s bid for autonomy creates huge injustice for Theale:

For c25years till 2013 the benefice share was divided by mutual agreement 48% Englefield and 52% Theale. That division was made clear to the Priest in charge on appointment by all 4 churchwardens; there was no suggestion that anyone was unhappy with that arrangement. The goal for Theale was to grow the congregation and therefore giving so that the 52% share was paid. Giving at Holy Trinity has increased significantly each year (from 16k to 28 k in 4 years) and the 52% goal has almost been achieved. We have also obtained government grants worth 100k for the maintenance of our vast iconic grade 1 listed building which costs 6k each year to insure and heat. Currently it feels as if the rug has been pulled from under our feet.

Theale has almost achieved that. With that division Theale which contains much social housing, is entirely viable but without that the parish share becomes an impossible burden. **If the proposed reorganisation goes forward, under the present share division template used by the Deanery, Theale’s share would increase from a challenging but fair 33k to an** **impossible 53k per year.**

St Mark’s Englefield unilaterally decided to reduce its parish share contribution from 48% to c 29% in 2013; this decision was made despite the intervention of the then Archdeacon Ven Norman Russell, the diocesan Director of Finance Nigel Wearne and the Registrar, and began the current debacle. The draft proposals simply legitimise what to Theale seems an incomprehensible reluctance on the part of a wealthy (and potentially very wealthy) parish to support the ministry of a relatively poor parish whose ministry demonstrably benefits a significant number of their own resident population.

In the notes to the current proposals the Bishop of Reading recognises the need for a fulltime priest for the ministry in Theale to build on the significant growth described above. The Deanery Standing committee have also supported the need for a fulltime stipendiary. We have met recently with the Diocesan Director of Finance and the Deputy Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance. Some year on year funding for the next 10 years has now been offered by the Diocese; this cannot receive the necessary approval from the Deanery until 22nd February 2018. Moreover the offer requires that the community of Theale will still need to find an extra £3000 year on year from the already challenging £30, 000 in 2017 to c £60,000 in 2027. We are concerned these proposals fail to address the realities of ministry in Theale where enormous efforts have already been made to increase giving and most of the existing committed congregation are fully- stretched (see Appendix 3 for details of the demographics of Theale’s electoral roll). It also will make the appointment of a mission minded successor much more difficult if he/she is presented with a huge financial challenge which must inevitably detract from outreach initiatives.

2.2 The proposals create an unjust and dangerous precedent for the Diocese; they give the message that any wealthy parish however small who can afford to house their own clergyman can become a separate benefice. This cuts right across the crucial concept that the Church of England as a national church committed to serving the whole community including those who cannot cover the cost of a clergy stipend.

2.3 The Englefield case for separation submitted to the Bishop in May and November 2016 and to the Bishop’s Council in January 2017 contains a number of significant untruths and no compelling case for separation – see following examples:

2.3.1 Their central argument seems to be that that they are more likely to recruit a Resident Priest of calibre in the future if they become an entirely independent parish. In fact the probability is the other way round as the Bishop of Reading agreed twice - a senior clergyman used to working in a team would probably prefer to continue to do so in retirement and would not wish to take on the administrative burden of a parish. It is noteworthy that the advert placed by the Englefield churchwarden without diocesan approval which described Englefield as an independent parish and did not mention it was part of a united benefice did not attract any appointable candidate.

2.3.2The other most serious falsehood is the oft repeated claim that Englefield have ‘paid their share in full’. They haven’t paid their 48% share since 2012 and have hence been a very significant drain on Deanery resources. They have paid merely what the former church warden (now technically Assistant Treasurer but de facto Treasurer and architect of the campaign to separate) has stipulated and which does not include stipendiary costs despite the time spent by the Priest in charge in Englefield school and the outreach initiatives which include people from Englefield. Efforts by the chair of the ODBF and the Deanery have simply been met by a refusal to contribute more.

2.3.3 It is not true that Englefield has played an important part in the deanery. With one notable exception St Mark’s PCC showed no interest in the Deanery at all in recent years (until 2015 when the Assistant Treasurer realised the support of the Deanery was essential for any plan about pastoral reorganization) and at first refused to consider producing a parish MAP.

2.3.4 It is not true that there is currently no friendly communication and collaboration between Theale and Englefield; the Priest in Charge meets monthly with the Resident of Englefield and Lady Benyon and the 2 Englefield Churchwardens accepted the invitation to Holy Trinity’s celebration of The Ascension in May 2017.

There has been to date no opportunity for Theale to challenge the veracity of the Englefield submission - the promised conference on the future of the Benefice did not happen.

M**ISSIONAL**

 St Mark’s is predominantly a ‘gathered church’ but it has a responsibility also to the ordinary people and families who live in the rented accommodation on the Englefield Estate. The weekly service on Sunday morning at St Mark’s is a very traditional Anglican service which meets the needs of the predominantly older congregation who attend but is unlikely to attract unchurched families.

A number of residents of the families living on the estate come along to Holy Trinity toddler group on a weekly basis and 2 have helped run it. They also attend Family Church alongside other families connected with Englefield school, but St Mark’s refuses to support the ministerial costs of these 2 vital outreach initiatives.

Englefield Church of England school is itself a good example of the impossibility of dividing up the ministry of these 2 intertwined parishes. There are many more children who live in Theale than Englefield who attend Englefield school. Part of the catchment area of the school is in Holy Trinity Parish and the Priest in charge currently chairs the Foundation Governors committee at Englefield school. The draft proposals appear to have taken no account of the anomalies that would be created for the pastoral care of the pupils at the school.

Conversely a joint mission strategy reaching out to the children and families of Theale and Englefield could have a very significant positive impact on the community.

Theale Green Comprehensive school situated in Theale parish is a good example of the importance of a joint mission strategy for the 2 parishes. Theale and Englefield Church of England Primaries are the 2 nearest feeder schools of the Comprehensive and there is considerable openness by the school to cooperative working with the community and Primary schools.

 4. **LEGAL**

4.1 The proposals as they stand constitute a clear breach of the 2011 Act which requires that any pastoral reorganisation must provide for the 'better cure of souls and the furtherance of the mission of the Church of England'. (2.19)

The current proposals to dissolve the benefice do not meet this key criterion for Theale or Englefield or the wider church:

4.1. 1 For Theale: If the benefice is dissolved, Theale's parish share will go up (at current figures) from a potentially manageable c £33k to an impossible £53k using current share calculations. Theale is a long way from being able by itself to fund a full-time stipendiary priest and all the current new initiatives like our toddler group, Family church and the schools work will not be sustained or developed.

4.1.2 For Englefield:

a) The needs of young families resident on the Englefield estate are not catered for by St Mark’s. Many come along to the Toddler group and Family church in Theale. These families, like the families of Theale, need a fulltime priest in Theale to retain the opportunity to access the Gospel in a way relevant to their needs.

 b)There is a much greater likelihood of Englefield not being able to find a suitable retired priest to lead them since retired clergy are less likely to wish to run their own parish and are likely to want to work as part of a supportive team.

4.1.3. For the rest of the Deanery and the wider church;:

a) There is an added burden to contribute to funding Theale if Englefield do not contribute to the stipendiary costs.

 b) The Gospel is brought into disrepute by the refusal of a very affluent parish to support and work with a much poorer neighbouring congregation. The proposal if accepted would reinforce the pervasive view that the Church of England is governed by money, wealth and power.

c) The proposal flies in the face of the key emphases of 21st Century ministry namely Mission and Collaboration

d) It creates a damaging precedent which encourages other small wealthy parishes who can afford to house a priest to apply to be separate.

e) The traditional position of the Church of England as a National church which provides clergy for all regardless of wealth is undermined.

 f) Nothing is solved for anyone by separation. The existing situation of a stand off by Englefield PCC and a refusal to engage with Theale is in the eyes of many an offence to principles of love and unity amongst Christians which are at the heart of the Gospel.

4.2.The Act also requires that there should be 'an avoidance of prejudgement.’ However:

* In May 2016 the Bishop of Reading announced that he had decided to dissolve the benefice.

( commuted later to the statement that he had decided to recommend to the AMPC that the benefice be dissolved.)

* Then during what we were told was a period of ‘informal consultation’ he wrote to the Theale first churchwarden before he had seen any of the views expressed by PCCs etc in the consultation saying that ‘he had taken the decision on the advice of a mediator to propose the dissolution of the benefice.’

4.3 There has been a lack of due process throughout the history of this saga. These include:

1. The failure by the Bishop to convene a meeting at the beginning of the saga in 2013 (or at any time since) with all interested parties to find a solution despite several commitments by the bishop that this would happen.
2. Initial conversations about the possibility of dissolving the benefice taking place over several months c Dec 2014– Feb 2015 including between the Bishop and Englefield, without the knowledge of Theale PCC and Priest in charge.
3. The Bishop’s email to both PCCs to say that he would not consider dissolving the benefice until 2018 at the earliest (when the Deanery MAP needs to be revisited) – a pledge subsequently ignored.
4. The fact that the proposal to create 2 new separate benefices is not in the current Deanery MAP and has never been approved by Deanery Synod. The proposals were approved in Nov 2016 by a group of some of the Standing Committee but they did not discuss how a fulltime priest in Theale which they agreed was needed might be funded.
5. The cancellation of the planned Day conference in May 2016 at a few days’ notice re the future of the benefice to consider together all the possible options which had involved for Theale many hours of preparation and rearrangement of personal plans like holidays. Instead the Bishop informed the various parties that ‘he had decided to dissolve the benefice.’
6. The failure to circulate all papers or even allow time at this May meeting for them to be circulated and read meant a significant opportunity for resolution was lost. The meeting went ahead with no clear purpose. (see Appendix 2 for details of this major failure of due process.)

**5. PRACTICAL – A Better Way Forward**

**This is the 21st century. Ministry with its emphasis on collaborative ministry and Mission has changed since the 1970s. It is not acceptable that a tiny parish whatever the wealth and power and public generosity of some of its members should continue to rely on a ‘special relationship’ with the Bishop or the diocese. The principles of love, justice, truth and the universality of the gospel and each person’s right to hear it whatever their income should be paramount.**

**It is the unanimous view of the churchwardens PCC and clergy of Theale that it should be possible to find a legal solution that recognises the value and validity of the gathered congregation of St Mark’s and the role of the Resident Priest to run their day to day affairs, whilst at the same time requiring them (perhaps as a condition of them having their own Resident Priest??) to remain a united benefice and work in collaboration with Holy Trinity Theale, supporting the outreach work in the 3 schools of the benefice and amongst children and families by paying half the benefice share.**

**We believe that any new legal arrangement for the 2 parishes should preserve some sort of unity and leave a way open in the future for a proper collaboration between the 2 intertwined parishes which could materialise in the future when personalities have changed. This solution must be a normal arrangement like team ministry that everyone recognises and not a special relationship based on privilege,**

**The present proposal should be put on hold until the long promised conference about the future of the benefice is held. We suggest this should be chaired by a senior minister or diocesan official outside the Berkshire Archdeaconry. Solutions around Team Ministry or Estate Church/Proprietary chapel or the Deanery suggestion of a parish of Englefield with the footprint of the church should now be discussed in detail. A team ministry would give Englefield more of the autonomy it craves whilst a Proprietary Chapel does the same but acknowledges the non-parochial nature of the ministry; the share issue would still need resolving. *(see Appendix 5 for discussion of options submitted to Bishop for conference discussion)***

**Theale PCC accept that it is impossible to compel collaboration and cooperation. An alternative but less satisfactory alternative if the benefice were to be dissolved would be to provide Theale with a permanent endowment of half the parish share to enable the parish to build on the ministry and mission of the past 5 years which requires a full time stipendiary priest. The Englefield estate which has started this process are the obvious group to supply the funding; they have the funds to provide it and as landowner of much of the land and housing of Theale have a business and philanthropic interest in providing for the wellbeing of the people of Theale. Alternatively funding could be found by the Deanery or Diocese adopting a share template used by many other deaneries and dioceses which takes account of ability to pay in calculating stipendiary costs and allocates clergy on the basis of pastoral and missional considerations.**

**What is unacceptable is that the future ministry in strategic Theale should be threatened because of the refusal of Englefield to pay a fair parish share commensurate with their income and the desire of a small but powerful group in that parish who are campaigning for total autonomy which is completely at odds with the Gospel imperatives of love and unity.**

**There is a huge mission opportunity in Theale but it requires a fulltime priest in the future to work with the congregation under God to realise it. It is the hope and fervent prayer of the PCC, Churchwardens and clergy of Theale that the Church Commissioners will find a solution which is in tune with the priorities of mission and collaborative working and at the same time ensures the provision and funding of a fulltime mission minded priest in Theale.**

**There has to date been no opportunity to seek together a way forward for the 2 parishes. We hope and pray that the Church commissioners will require that efforts are at last made to find a legal solution which genuinely allows both parishes to thrive.**

***The PCC, Churchwardens and clergy of Holy Trinity Theale. December 2017***

**APPENDIX 1**

**Key facts about the Benefice of Theale and Englefield**

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|   | **HOLY TRINITY, THEALE****Original Patron: Magdalen College, Oxford** | **ST. MARK’S, ENGLEFIELD****Original Patron: Englefield Estate Trust Corporation Limited** |
| Current Population | \*c.3,500 | \*\*c.120 |
| Planned Population | \*c.4,500 | \*\*No planned expansion known |
| Electoral Roll | 122 *(2014=113)* | 137 (113 non-resident)(*2014=126)* |
| Average Sunday attendance | 60-70 (plus 90 monthly Family Church 50 -70) | 68 |
| Income 2014 | £51891 (including unique legacy of £22,227) | £71,423 |
| Income 2015\*\*\* | £41,538.53(+Government grant of £100k for repair of roof) | £50,912 |
| Parish Share paid 2014 | £21,059 | £17,192 |
| Parish Share paid 2015 | £24,350 | £17,162 |
| Parish share paid 2016 |  £28k |  £17k |
| Church Building | Grade I listed (annual insurance premium £3815, heating £2400) | Grade I listed |
| Schools, businesses, etc | * Business Park with c.8,000 workers a day
* Railway station – fast trains to London
* Large comprehensive school, over 1,000 students
* Outstanding primary school, c.320 children
* Large nursery
* Local shops, restaurants, cafés, 4 pubs, hotel and businesses in the High Street
* Medical Centre, Dentist
* Golf course
* Archdeaconry offices planned in Theale
 | * Local primary school c.100 (the largest group of children attending come from the Parish of Holy Trinity, Theale)
* Village shop with café
* Garden centre
* Nursery
 |

 *\*figures given by Theale Parish Clerk.*

*\*\*nb the Ecclesiastical Parish of Holy Trinity Theale includes North Street. North Street, however, is in the civil Parish of Englefield*

*\*\*\* Holy Trinity’s income has been growing steadily but the congregation is relatively poor – many live in social housing on benefits, many are young parents struggling to pay bills or OAPs see below*

**Key facts about demographics of Theale core congregation**

 Electoral roll grown from 65- 123 since 2011
 Of whom c 38 in full-time work, 8 in part time work
 51 are pensioners many living on OAP
 5 are in fulltime education
 Many live in rented accommodation .

**APPENDIX 2**

**Summary of Recent History of the United Benefice 2011 -2015**

**The Current Legal Situation**

In 1976, Englefield was merged into a joint benefice with Holy Trinity, Theale. From 1976 the Rector of the joint benefice was the incumbent at Theale and this situation continues although the title was changed to Priest in Charge in 2001. The non-stipendiary Resident Priest in Englefield attends to pastoral duties and runs the parish on a day to day basis with St Mark’s House being

**Summary of Events since 2011**

(From perspective of Ann and Peter Templeman, Priest-in-Charge and Associate Priest)

I was appointed Priest-in-Charge in 2011 with my husband, Peter, as Associate Priest. We had expressed an interest in going to a Parish where there was a potential for growth and a Church of England School. The Archdeacon, Ven Norman Russell, thought we would be suited to the challenges of Theale; there was a church school with a Headteacher wishing to engage with the church and a large, growing village/small town, strategically placed on the M4 corridor with a large business park (c.8,000 workers a day coming into Theale) and an increasing number of commuters utilising the railway station.

We were told that Holy Trinity had struggled financially for some years and we were clear that our priority was Mission in order to draw more people into the life of the church, and ultimately, to increase giving.
All 4 churchwardens told us about the 52% (Theale) / 48% (Englefield) split for the parish share; all 4 made clear the goal was to build the giving so that Theale would be able to pay the 52%. At no time did the Englefield wardens indicate that they were unhappy with this division, which we understand has been in place for about 25 years.

We were told little about the church in Englefield other than that there was an Estate church with a retired Priest, who was pastorally responsible for those who lived on the estate and who conducted Sunday services which attracted a good congregation from a wide area.

We only discovered on arrival that I was expected to Chair PCC meetings in Englefield and there were responsibilities in my role as Priest in Charge which meant I was to have a greater involvement with St. Mark’s than I had initially understood.

We had a very warm welcome from both Parishes and in the first six months of our Ministry here, members of both congregations enthusiastically attended house groups, mid-week services and teaching sessions. The only exception to this warm welcome was the reception of one churchwarden who summoned me to his house just before I was due to chair my first PCC meeting at Englefield and told me to ‘Back off Englefield’ - an instruction he delivered on at least 2 other occasions. This ran counter to the attitude of everyone else at the time in Englefield as well as the clear steer from the Archdeacon about my responsibilities at Englefield.

When the Churchwardens of Englefield told us of Brian Spence’s retirement, they made it clear that it was not necessary for me to be involved in the search for a successor or in the affairs of St. Mark’s during the “interregnum”. The Archdeacon disagreed. There were some inevitable tensions. The immediate root, however, of the current situation, was the unilateral decision by St. Mark’s PCC in January 2013 to reduce their Parish Share from the historic 25 year old 48% contribution to c.29% (now reduced unilaterally to 11% (this, despite the involvement of the Diocesan Registrar, John Rees, the Director of Finance, Nigel Wearne, the Archdeacon and the Area Dean). St. Mark’s have not wavered in that decision despite continuing efforts by the above and their successors.

It was only subsequently in the midst of the above controversy that we learned that the history of the United Benefice had been a troubled one for all the 40 years of its history under every Rector/Priest-in-Charge (this is evidenced by the various memoranda produced by successive bishops and the large files which reside in the offices of the Bishop of Reading and the Archdeacon). I agree entirely that now is the time for nettles to be grasped and a solution found which can provide the basis for effective ministry in both parishes in the future.

St. Mark’s Englefield have clearly felt that their ' special arrangement’ whereby the Estate provided housing for a resident Priest means that they can maintain the autonomy they had enjoyed before the formation of the United Benefice. As a result the Rector/Priest-in-Charge of Holy Trinity Theale who holds the ‘cure of souls’ of both Parishes, has always been in a very difficult if not impossible position whereby his/her legal role in Englefield is at odds with the expectations of some leading members of the parish.

Pace the Englefield submission to the Bishop of Reading in May 2016, the importance of cooperation between the 2 parishes in enshrined in the original documentation and has been emphasised in successive memoranda by 3 bishops.

Since the Englefield unilateral decision in 2013 there has been no progress on finding a fair distribution of the benefice share which both parishes can accept; moreover the Englefield stress on autonomy in the face of the legal requirement for the Resident Priest to have a working agreement with the Priest in Charge has contributed to the strained situation.

Throughout the difficulties of the past few years, the congregation of Holy Trinity Theale have maintained their determination to maintain as good relationships as possible with the congregation of St. Mark’s and would very much like to return to the excellent relationships they had when we first arrived at the end of 2011 as they firmly believe that the work of God will best flourish in Theale and Englefield if the two Parishes are genuinely collaborating.

**APPENDIX 3**

**Recent Events; May 2015 –June 2016- The Aborted Day Conference**

May 2015

The Bishop announced to both PCCs and clergy his plan to call a Day Conference in June 2016 to discuss the future of the Benefice.

January 2016

The Bishop fixed the date of this conference as 31st May 2016, and asked PCCs, clergy and Deanery to submit submissions by the end of April 2016 on various options on the way forward put together by the Deputy Registrar, Bishop, Archdeacon, Area Dean, Lay Chair and Deanery Treasurer. All parties were assured that the conference was to be an open discussion and nothing had yet been decided.

May 2016

The Bishop’s office sent an email on Friday 13th May asking the Priest in Charge, Associate Priest at Theale and two Churchwardens to attend a meeting on Thursday 19th May. One Churchwarden was out of the country at the time and the Associate Priest had a meeting in London. The meeting was rearranged for Wednesday 25th May at 9.20am while one Churchwarden was still away and the leading PCC representative was also unavailable. The Bishop began the meeting by saying that he had read the submissions from both parishes, it was clear there was no scope for mediation and then said: “I have decided to dissolve the Benefice.”

We informed him that we had not ourselves had the opportunity to read the Englefield submission, though a paper copy had been given to the absent Churchwarden for his “personal use” (he had been expressly asked by the Englefield Churchwarden not to share this with the rest of us). The Bishop expressed surprise at this and apologised that we had not received it, implying that it should have been sent by the Archdeacon’s office.

Subsequently, I rang the Archdeacon’s office and asked the Archdeacon’s secretary to send a copy, which she did with apologies that I had not received one before. As I was away from my own computer, I only received it on my phone and was not able to study it in detail until the day of the conference.

On May 31st, I rang the Archdeacon’s office to check Englefield had received our submission; she replied that she was fairly certain they had, but the Archdeacon would attend with 9 hard copies just in case. She explained that it had been difficult knowing what information was being sent out by her office and by the Bishop’s office.

An hour before the conference was due to begin, I noticed that in the Englefield submission on page 7 in response to the first option of retaining the status quo, Englefield had suggested a way forward which I felt might be acceptable to all parties. I rang the Bishop immediately. It was clear that he hadn’t seen the potential of this suggestion and indicated that he was very happy for it to be discussed at the conference.

The Bishop began the conference by indicating that he had made the decision to recommend to the Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committee (AMPC) that the Benefice be dissolved on the grounds that we had reached an impasse and there was no possible way forward.

The Archdeacon then talked through the necessary legal processes towards dissolution.

Theale was then invited to give a presentation.

At the Bishop’s suggestion, I mentioned the possibility of a version of Option 1 that Englefield had suggested in their submission explaining that she had only just had the opportunity to read it. At that point, the Churchwarden of Englefield said that they had not seen our submission. I said that the Archdeacon’s secretary had assured me that Theale’s submissions had been sent to everyone but just in case not, the Archdeacon had bought hard copies with her. Englefield Churchwarden said that she had rung the Bishop’s office asking to see the Theale submission but he had refused to give it to her. I suggested that the conference took 5 minutes to read the submissions before we proceeded. This suggestion was vetoed by the facilitator as there was insufficient time.

The Assistant Treasurer then made a presentation on behalf of Theale; she made clear that we did not feel the route to the Bishop’s “decision” was acceptable on both pastoral and procedural grounds. We had been invited to a conference to discuss the future of the Benefice; we had spent many hours debating the options and praying and thinking through the various scenarios presented; several had made personal sacrifices to be there, only to be told that a decision had already been made. There had been no forum in which lay people from Theale had been able to present their views to the Bishop.

Moreover, there had been a possible way forward if the paperwork had been properly examined beforehand and discussed by all parties…

We made it clear that we appreciated that Englefield could not be forced to work collaboratively but a dissolution of the benefice meant that our parish share would go up by an impossible 20k; this meant that there was a genuine likelihood of Theale not being able to have a full-time Priest after the retirement of the present clergy. A fulltime priest was absolutely essential if the Mission in Theale and all the recent growth was to be sustained and developed.

In the ensuing discussion there was a general agreement that Theale did need a full-time Priest in the future and the Bishop has now confirmed this in his statement.

There was then a discussion about how this might be achieved if the benefice were to split. I am to discuss the possible extension of the Parish footprint into Calcot with the other benefice clergy. The Deanery will have discussions about the share allocation.

Ann Templeman June 2016

**APPENDIX 4**

**Some key documents relating to the proposals:**

**1. Nov 2012 email from Archdeacon of Berkshire to Englefield PCC re proposal to cut parish share**

**To Members of Englefield PCC**

I am always reluctant to get drawn into the details of parish organisation which properly belong to the Rector or Priest in Charge, the churchwardens and PCC though I do endeavour to be available to offer help on request.       However I do from time to time, if I have concerns about matters of law or due process, draw the attention of PCCs to their rights and statutory responsibilities.      It is because the emails to PCC members and copied to me do to my mind *prima facie* raise issues of a formal nature, that I am sending this email for the avoidance of doubt and for your consideration.

The PCC is both a corporate body and a charity, subject to general charity law.       Although PCCs with revenue income less than £100,000 do not need to lodge their annual accounts with the Charity Commission, for purposes of accountability they are instead required to send a copy of their independently examined accounts as presented at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting to the Diocese.     PCC members therefore like other charity trustees carry liability jointly and severally if financial decisions are taken without due diligence.       As the PCC is the legal owner of church funds, financial decisions cannot be delegated or left to the Rector/Vicar/ Priest in Charge, Churchwardens, treasurer or anyone else.     Every member carries personal responsibility, though the risk is very small ***provided*** the PCC follows due process, does not act contrary to the law and exercises due diligence.

As the PCC owns the church’s funds, it and it alone, quorate and acting corporately can agree budgets, make financial policy and approve the independently examined annual accounts prior to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting.        Moreover, it can only do so when meetings have been properly called with due notice (10 days) and with a properly prepared agenda.       I have attached a link above to the Church Representation Rules on the Church of England website.       The relevant section is Appendix 2 at the end and you will see that unless there is a vacancy in the Benefice, the only person with the responsibility and power to call a meeting of the Council is the Rector or Priest in Charge.

It would appear that significant changes in the financial policy of the Council are being mooted.      They seem to be changes which will have consequences for Theale, the other parish in the Benefice and might also have significant consequences in my view for the reputation of Englefield within the Deanery and the Diocese.      Whatever you may decide, for the reasons set out above it is clearly a matter for a considered PCC discussion.

If I may be a little less opaque, David’s financial table has allocated all of the £23,000 part of the share which the Deanery has allocated to the two parishes in the Benefice entirely to Theale.       Worked through it gives Englefield a total parish share of £12,682 and Theale a share of £40,741.      The Church of England has long had a “one nation” approach to its responsibilities.       The better off dioceses in the south bear a larger proportion of national costs for the education and training of future clergy etc than impoverished dioceses with high unemployment  like Durham and Wakefield.      Within the Diocese, the more fortunate deaneries provide some help for areas of relative deprivation in places like Milton Keynes.     In deaneries with wide divergences of wealth and income between parishes such as Reading and Bracknell, efforts are made to ensure that churches in the more challenging parishes are able to flourish.      I sat through a parish share debate at Diocesan Synod earlier today and it was very clear that most members continue to be committed to this general approach which has considerable New Testament mandate, see *eg* “ 2 Corinthians chapters 8 &9.       The PCC might like to reflect carefully on the potential for reputational damage in the Deanery and the Diocese.

**2. Pastoral letter from Bishop of Reading to both PCCs Sept 2013**





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**3. Theale response to Day Conference June 2016 – email to Bishop19/06/16**

Dear Bishop
 We have delayed responding to the Day Conference you convened on Tuesday 31st May until we had taken time to pray, reflect and consider what was said before during and after the meeting.
  Our considered reactions in brief are as follows:
 In general
1. We are delighted that you have acknowledged that 'Theale clearly needs a full-time priest after the retirement of the present post holder to continue  the excellent work being done here'.

2.We are deeply saddened that you and the Archdeacon are prepared to reward the Englefield refusal to work collaboratively and their insistence on autonomy. This to us runs counter to Jesus' teaching about the Church as His body.

3.We recognise that you cannot compel collaboration but you can encourage growth and Mission. We have grown very significantly in both numbers, discipleship and giving -there cannot be many other parishes in the Archdeaconry who have grown more than us over the last 4 years. We have taken to heart the clear charge from you and the Archdeaconry to focus on Mission not Maintenance. However at  the Conference we felt we were being presented as a problem to be solved rather than an exciting opportunity to be celebrated, supported and encouraged. It is essential that  that any new pastoral scheme provides for a fulltime stipendiary minister here to build on this growth.

 4.We are very concerned about the precedent created by the 'decision' that any very small community which has enough money to house a retired clergyman will be able in the future to become entirely separate. At the same time a (relatively) poor parish with huge potential could well be deprived of the stipendiary ministry it needs.

 5.We are equally concerned that any decision about Theale and Englefield should be taken without reference to the situation in the wider Deanery.

6.We will continue to do all we can in Theale to grow the kingdom: Mission and discipleship will continue to be our priorities.

7. We will continue to work with the Deanery to increase our ability to pay the parish share. Please note however that we are working flat out on this already and it is not helpful to suggest we just need to try harder. We have already put in place virtually all of the measures that have been mentioned. Most of our congregation are genuinely giving all they possibly can.

8. We were pleased to read in your last email your view  that ministry should be allocated according to need. If this is so, it is essential that the Diocese and Deanery use a different method of share allocation to the current one since now  it seems parishes usually only receive a fulltime priest if they can pay for one.

 In detail
 It   is clear to us and to those we have consulted that the process of the Conference was seriously flawed:
a) We were assured by the Conference was to be a genuine opportunity for all parties to explore the various options we were presented with and as a PCC spent much time and prayer considering these and writing our submissions. In fact we were summoned to a meeting at very short notice just a few days beforehand which only one churchwarden could attend and were informed that you had 'decided to dissolve the benefice'. Procedurally this seems to cut right across the law which is very clear that there must be 'avoidance of prejudgement,' . Pastorally it is demeaning and demoralising
 b) There was equally a lack of due process in the failure to circulate the various submissions to the clergy and PCCs
 c) As a result of the failure to circulate the paperwork and give both parishes a chance to air their views a very significant opportunity to find a compromise suggested in the Englefield submission on option 1 was missed..
 d) You referred to the agreed purpose of the Conference -to find a way that the work of God in both parishes might flourish- and indeed the law requires that the Mission of the Church is the chief criterion for any Pastoral reorganisation; yet the 'decision' was announced with no concrete plan as to how Theale might be able to retain a full-time stipendiary Priest in the future despite the explicit recognition that this was essential to build on the growth over the last 4 years.

 In the light of all the above we want to ask you to take a step back and provide an opportunity for a full discussion on various options particularly the one mentioned under option 1 in the Englefield submission and the Deanery proposal to reduce the Englefield footprint to that of the church.

There needs to be  consideration of what is really in the interest of both parishes based on accurate information. In addition given your preference for dissolving the benefice there should be on the table  a draft pastoral scheme with concrete plans, approved  by relevant parties to provide for a fulltime priest in  Theale in the future if the current united benefice is dissolved.

Best wishes
Revs Ann and Peter Templeman, Churchwardens Paul Doyle and Philip Morgan, Deanery Synod reps Noel Hedges and Wendy Larkin, Margaret Elliott  PCC rep

**4. Petition to Bishop of Reading by Theale PCC that expected Conference be held**

 **( No reply received)**

Dear Bishop
  Those members of Holy Trinity PCC who met with the Archdeacon in July were grateful to be able to tell her in person of their strong objections to your recommendation that the benefice of Theale and Englefield be dissolved. Many of them have put in writing to her their reasons for this view.

 The Archdeacon's email of 11th August has been circulated to all members of Theale PCC; this email comes to you first to record our confusion about the 'consultation' process she describes. If this is a consultation, then may we take it that you have moved away from your original 'decision ' and are now prepared to consider the views of all the interested parties?

Secondly as a PCC we wish to petition you, our Bishop that we now sit down with the Deanery and representatives of Englefield and have the meeting we were promised on May 31st to consider prayerfully together all the options. Now we have read the submissions of Englefield and the Deanery it is clear there are a number of possible options we should discuss.
We look forward to hearing from you. Yours sincerely
Greta Hayter (PCC secretary) on behalf of The PCC of Holy Trinity Theale. 5th September 2016
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**5**. **email to Bishop of Reading re draft proposal 12th October 2016**

Dear Bishop
Thank you for your letter of 10th October. I write on behalf of the PCC and clergy of Holy Trinity who are completely united in their views.

We are especially grateful for yours and the Deanery's firm and continuing support of Theale, your recognition of all the growth that under God has taken place in the last 5years and your sharing of our conviction that  this requires the appointment of a full-time stipendiary priest  when the present post holder retires.

The PCC and the clergy of Holy Trinity Theale remain united in their belief that as such close intertwined neighbours we should be collaborating with Englefield in mission and ministry and are very sad Englefield do not wish to work with us in this way. We do however accept that you can't force people to collaborate.

 We therefore would be prepared to accept the draft scheme if and only if the financial provisions for a fulltime stipendiary priest in Theale for the foreseeable future were in place and guaranteed.
However they seem to be far from in place. The Deanery's proposal of giving Theale Recovering Deanery status for 5yrs plus is helpful and we were pleased to learn that the rest of the Deanery won't be penalised if Theale  has a shortfall in parish share. However there is no mention of a new way of calculating share dependent on income and need and it still looks as if Theale is being expected to pay for their clergy at the same rate as much richer parishes in the Deanery.

Our greatest concern is that no one is going to want to apply for the post here after the retirement of the present post holder if the emphasis is not on mission and discipling but on a hugely unrealistic fundraising goal which the parish knows from past bitter experience is counterproductive and demotivating.

Before therefore we can support the proposed scheme there needs to be clarity about the share Theale will be required to pay in future and if it is more than our 52% of benefice share how it is to be funded. It is also imperative that the new Deanery  MAP beginning in 2018 with the statement that Theale needs a full-time stipendiary priest after the retirement of the present post-holder  is agreed by Synod. At present the Englefield submission states  that they do not think Theale should have a full-time stipendiary and we know of a Deanery incumbent  who agrees : an  addendum to the current plan which is about to run out  is not sufficiently reassuring.

We appreciate that you are keen to push this process forward; it seems to us to be wholly counter- productive to do this before ensuring that secure funding for Theale is in place as currently  we have no choice but to object.

We understand that the Archdeacon's enquiries into possible sources of fundraising have not yielded any results. **As  I wrote to the Archdeacon (see below, copied to you) the most logical source of funding is the Englefield Trust as it is Englefield with their desire for complete legal autonomy who wish to separate and so  have created this much increased share burden on Theale. The Englefield Estate own a very significant part of the land and housing in Theale. The Estate therefore has a vested interest in maintaining and developing the well-being including the spiritual well- being of the population of Theale. A permanent endowment of 50% of the parish share would secure the future ministry here. I imagine a discussion initiated by you is much more likely to get somewhere than a cold call by us.**

We have yet to see any corporate Deanery prayer about the situation: this is a plea that the work of God in our 2 parishes is the most important criterion for any recommendation and the flourishing of His work needs to be maximised by any Pastoral reorganisation: for Theale this requires a full-time mission-minded priest and the post when it becomes vacant will need to be offered as one with an emphasis on Mission and discipleship and not fundraising.

With prayers and best wishes, Ann

**Appendix 5**

**CONFLATION OF ORIGINAL RESPONSES OF PCC and PRIEST-IN-CHARGE TO THE BISHOP’S PAPER**

**RE: OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE BENEFICE: April 2016**

**“To find a legal solution which most enables the work of God to flourish in Theale and Englefield”**

**What are the characteristics of your preferred future?**

1 That the Church of God should flourish in Theale and Englefield.
2. That both parishes should once again work collaboratively for mission in love and unity as they did for the first 6 months of our ministry here.
3.That Theale and Englefield should remain a united benefice
4.That the benefice should have a full-time stipendiary incumbent for the foreseeable future
 which is essential to maintain and build on all the various Outreach initiatives of the last 4 years
5. That both parishes should be asked to pay a parish share commensurate with their ability to pay***.***

**Comments on the key options in Bishop's paper**

1**. Status quo:** - (2 parishes in United benefice as now with an incumbent based in Theale and a retired clergyman as Resident priest based in Englefield in housing provided by the Englefield estate.)

The troubled history of the benefice since its inception in the 1970s indicates that despite attempts of several Bishops through memoranda this system does not work in its present form; the mismatch between the legal role of the incumbent and the reluctance of Englefield to engage with him/her and work collaboratively with Theale has made the role of the incumbent untenable.

 We do believe however the basic structure of 2 parishes in a United benefice as now with an incumbent based in Theale and a retired clergyman based in Englefield could work but the structure needs to be that of a Team Ministry in which both priests work collaboratively across the benefice especially on Mission and the Resident Priest is answerable to the Bishop and the Diocese not the Englefield Estate. See more detailed comments on Team Ministry no 4.
**2. Creation of 2 separate benefices**

We disagree strongly with this option for the following reasons:

1. our spiritual unity in Christ as interdependent members of His Body in the context of the local church; - the dissonance of any proposal about separation.

b) the priority of Mission and the need for collaboration in outreach between our two intertwined communities. The current situation whereby the 2 parishes are not cooperating in Mission means that the 2 major outreach initiativesof Holy Trinity –the monthly Familychurch and the weekly toddler group both of which include a number of young families from Englefield- are not as strong as they might be if both parishes were contributing helpers and funding to this important work.

c) the requirement for effective Mission of sharing of resources on the principle of ‘ability to pay’.

d) the need for a full-time Stipendiary Priest in Theale to build on current outreach initiatives and meet the pastoral needs of a growing church and population (c4,500).

e) The demographics of Theale and the Mission situation which mean that it is neither just nor realistic to expect Theale which is a relatively poor Parish with much social housing to meet all the stipendiary costs – in fact it is tantamount to asking Theale to commit financial suicide.

f)The injustice of a special arrangement which enables a very small (2 people) but wealthy Parish which can provide free housing to have their own resident priest.

(cf the comparison with the refusal to let a middle class village in the south pay for its own policemen on the principle of ‘equitable policing’)

**3. Proprietary chapel/ Estate church / (recent Deanery proposal that Englefield parish would be its own footprint and they should lease the church from the Diocese/Church Commissioners**

This is similar to the paper sent to the bishop and Archdeacon in Jan 2016 suggesting that Englefield should become a church outside usual diocesan structures and ‘become what they are’ eg Estate church/proprietary chapel etc if they were not prepared to work collaboratively with Theale.

This option is very similar: has the merit of allowing Englefield the independence it desires without the diocese and deanery having to compromise or make an exception to the key principle of collaborative working which is at the heart of the archdeaconry plan and was the title of the last clergy conference. It would also give Englefield some of the freedom they require in appointing a new Resident Priest.

The financial implications for Englefield are currently unclear though we were given to understand St Mark’s church is owned by the Church Commissioners and in order for it to become an Estate Church or Proprietary chapel then the Englefield Estate would be required to pay rent or buy the building. This could work if this money could be used to fund the historic 48% of the benefice share and hence the ministry in Theale.
**4. Team Ministry**

This is an attractive option as it recognises the essential collaborative nature of 21st century ministry and at the same time gives Englefield more official independence and its Resident Priest greater authority with the conferment of the cure of souls of the parish.
In this case both all clergy as now would as now be licensed to the whole benefice but also be required to minister across the benefice and act as a team.
If this is to work however Englefield would still need to pay roughly half the benefice share as they had done for c25 years until their unilateral decision in 2013 to cut their contribution by c20%.

Moreover it is vital that if Englefield is allowed to have its own Priest by ‘special arrangement’ then that Priest is housed by the Diocese not by the Englefield Estate.

The current situation whereby the Resident Priest in practice owes first allegiance to the Englefield Estate rather than the Bishop or Diocese has created huge problems. The Diocese would need to pay a peppercorn rent for suitable housing to the Estate and then the Resident Priest should have the same terms and conditions (and appointment process) as all other House for Duty posts which this would become.

**5. The amalgamation into one single parish**

It is the view of the PCC that this suggestion gives a legal backing to what should be a theological reality – one interdependent group with both congregations having real responsibility for and an interest in the flourishing of the other. However, we recognise it would be very difficult to design a workable PCC structure that allowed for the extreme differences between the two parishes in size of parish, demographics and income..

**Further suggestions not mentioned in Bishop's paper:**
**6.** The retention of two separate parishes in one united benefice with just one Priest who has the cure of souls in both parishes and takes services in both

This is a solution which meets the missional needs of the benefice and could really be workable as it would be relatively straightforward for both churches to move their morning service time by 30/45 minutes to allow the incumbent to take both Sunday services and the occasional offices are quite manageable for one person.

It removes the anachronistic ‘special arrangement’ enjoyed by Englefield which seems so unjust in the present climate of clergy shortages (including retired clergy). At the same time it solves the parish share situation as Englefield would require the services of the Priest-in-Charge of the Benefice and therefore would have no reason not to pay their half of the Benefice share. The Deanery would no longer have to support the Benefice. Both parishes would retain a degree of autonomy but would also need to work collaboratively.

This is however unlike to be a solution to win favour with Englefield.

**7. One parish with one Priest**

Although this also addresses the anachronism of the Special arrangement and the shortage of clergy and would require both worshipping communities to work collaboratively and share resources, we recognise this would be difficult to work in practice for reasons outlined in No. 6.

**The view of the PCC and clergy of Theale would therefore be that the solution which best fits the Biblical nature of the church as the interdependent Body of Christ , working together in love and unity and the Church’s commitment to Mission would be:**

**1 Remain as a united benefice and become a Team Ministry - or if agreement cannot be reached re equitable division of benefice share:**

**2. Englefield become a church outside diocesan structures eg Estate church/Proprietary Chapel nb If Theale is forced to split then an alternative source of Diocesan funding must be found for half the essential stipendiary post eg-:**

**a) a permanent endowment from the Englefield Trust (this latter put forward in Sept 2016).**

**b) the appointment of a Chaplain to the Business Park as part of Theale’s full time stipendiary post (eg a third or a half) –funding found from a Mission Diocesan pot or pioneer funding pot ?**

**Important foot notes**:

(i)We feel strongly that Theale and Englefield should not be considered in isolation from the rest of the deanery and perhaps beyond: any pastoral reorganisation must be part of a coherent plan for the whole deanery since every change has a ‘knock on effect’ of possibilities for other reorganisation in the Deanery and would limit other options. The haste of the current debate has meant that proper attention has not been paid to the ‘bigger picture’.

(ii) We understand the Deanery and diocese are about to reconsider the current share formula which certainly as far as Bradfield Deanery is concerned takes no account of ‘ability to pay’ or pastoral needs when apportioning stipendiary costs. The conclusion of these conversations is directly relevant to the future of the benefice of Theale and Englefield.