
Stow, Condicote & The Swells Benefice

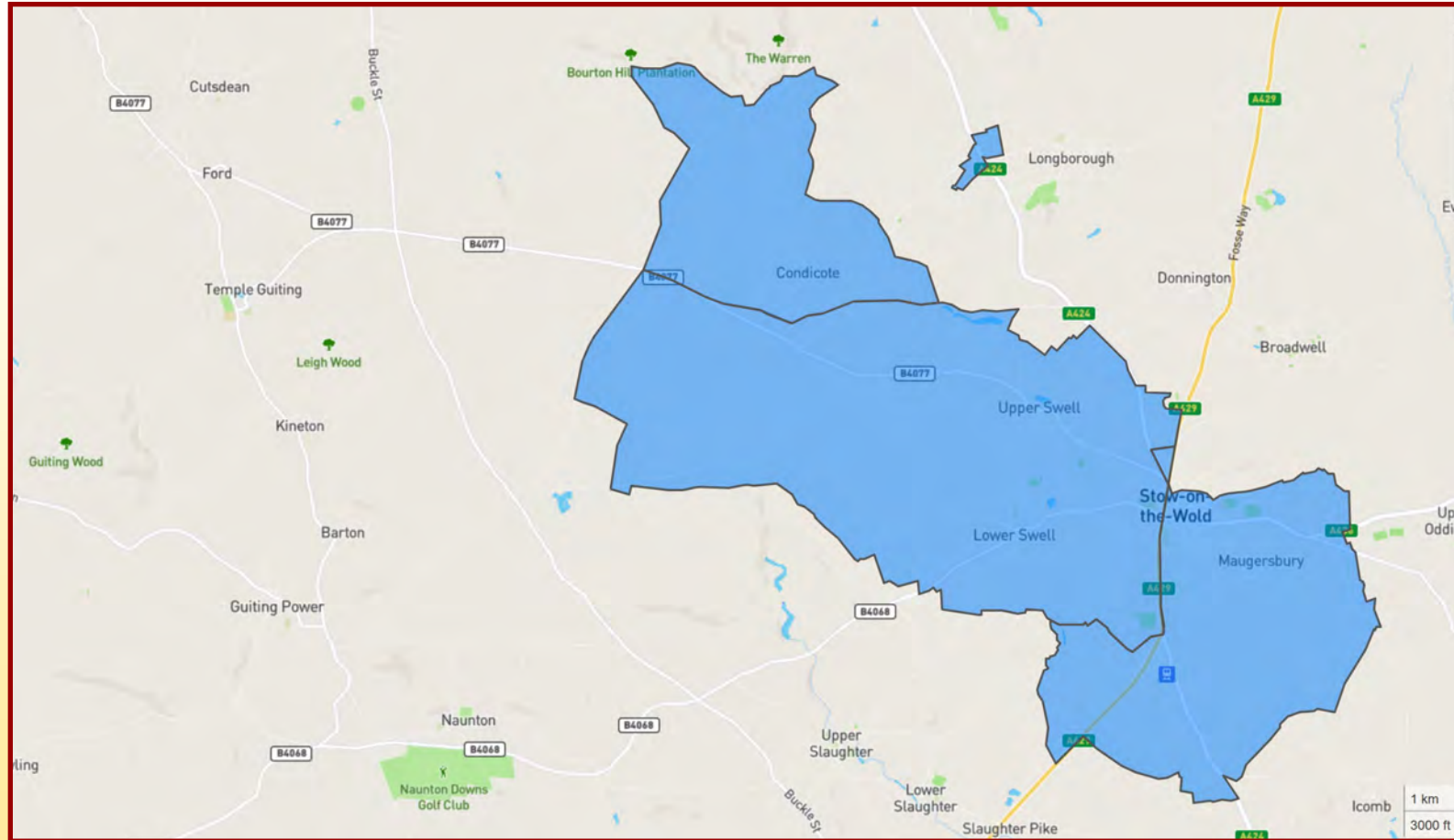


S TOW CONDICOTE & THE SWELLS



A Vision for our Churches in the 21st Century

MAP OF THE BENEFICE



INTRODUCTION

We are the Benefice of Stow, Condicote and The Swells, three parishes situated in the North Cotswolds.

We are seeking a priest-in-charge, for a transitional post of initially three years (with a possible extension to five years).

We are looking for a person who loves God, has a heart for people and is committed to the care of all souls in a changing and challenging world.

Our mission is to welcome all and to serve Christ and our communities.



If you feel that God is drawing you to us, please read on, reflect, pray and consider applying for the post. We would very much welcome your interest.

PERSON PROFILE



We are praying for a man or woman who is committed to serving Jesus Christ in the 21st century, a collaborative leader who will:

- † Inspire us, guide us in our decisions, help us to discern God's vision for our Benefice and to deepen our faith, enabling us all to share God's love and the Gospel of Jesus Christ with everyone.
- † Encourage people to develop their talents
- † Relish the challenge of making the church more relevant to the lives of people of all ages and backgrounds in our congregations and the wider community

And who will be:

- † A 'people person' who genuinely enjoys being with others
- † A prayerful person, a knowledgeable and effective teacher and an imaginative preacher
- † Enthusiastic, with energy and vision, ready to meet future challenges
- † Creative and comfortable with worship in formal and informal settings, valuing the importance of music
- † Kind, compassionate, discreet and humble
- † Able to work well with others, including other denominations, and delegate where appropriate
- † Keen to develop a ministry for families and schools
- † Committed to a culture of safeguarding

ABOUT US

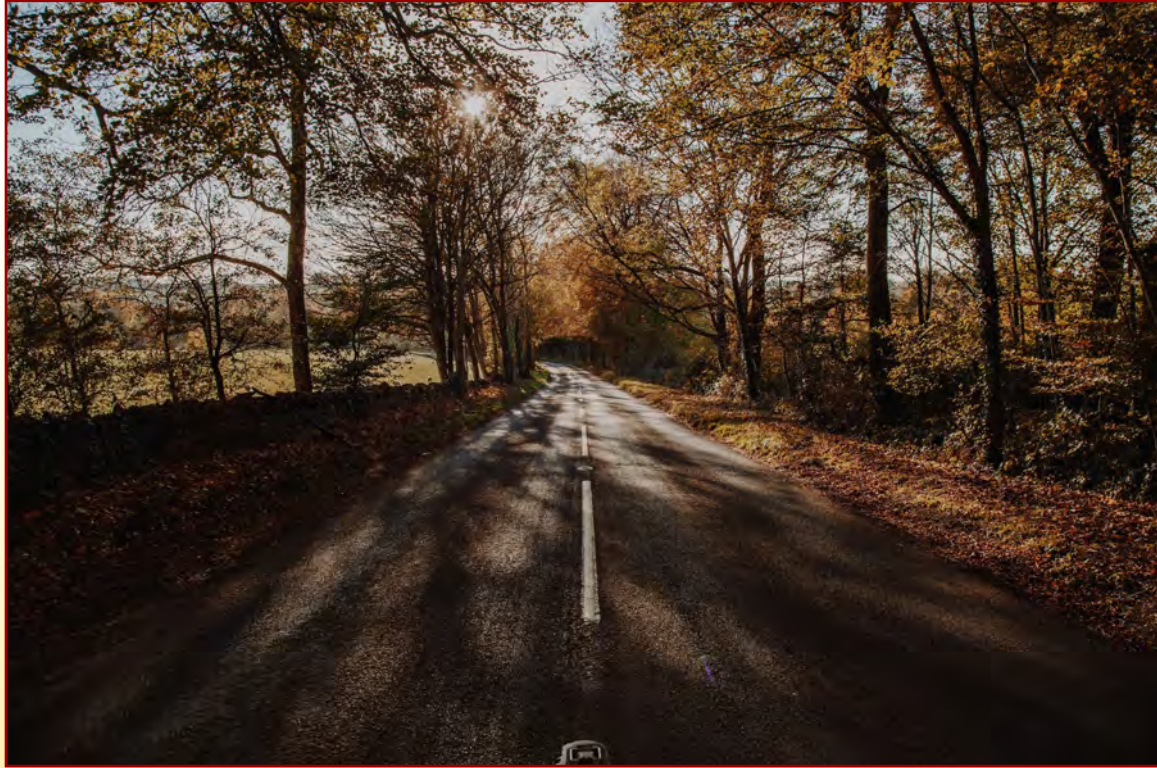
The Benefice of Stow, Condicote and The Swells is part of the North Cotswold Deanery, which is currently carrying out a Strategic Review. Formed 22 years ago, the Benefice comprises the small town of Stow-on-the-Wold, sitting atop a hill, and the surrounding villages of Condicote, Lower Swell and Upper Swell, together with Mangersbury and other smaller communities.

Lying in the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Benefice is surrounded by rich farmland and is visited by numerous walkers and other visitors from around the world.

The popularity of the area has led to a high proportion of second homes and Airbnb properties which benefits the local economy but reduces the number of permanent residents and affordable dwellings. A draft Neighbourhood Plan tries to address some of these issues ([Find out more](#)).



OUR VISION



We believe that the Good News of Jesus Christ is a message for everyone. As a fellowship of Christians, we are called to bring God's love to all people in our community.

Our aim is to build our regular worshipping communities, where people come to know God's love and care, grow in faith, and experience his transforming grace.

WHAT WE OFFER

A glimpse into the life of the Benefice

We have a strong team spirit. The three parishes enjoy excellent relations, supporting each other and working together. Also, the Benefice has strong links with other church denominations and excellent relations with the local communities. Our churches are cherished by local people and used for various events throughout the year.

Stow town centre is a vibrant place with many visitors throughout the year. The villages are tranquil and picturesque.

In Stow, there is a well maintained, compact hall adjacent to the church, ideal for church-based activities. Both Lower Swell and Condicote have thriving village halls, around which the local communities gather.

During the vacancy, we have developed a strong network of retired ministers (although we have none currently active living in the benefice) who have supported our weekly worship, and have conducted weddings and funerals.

The Diocese of Gloucester is committed to the well-being of all clergy and seeks to care across all traditions and rejoice in each other's gifts. Guided by the Life Vision the diocese seeks to set a culture of care and support. [Find out more.](#)



THE RECTORY AND LOCAL LIFE



The Rectory, on Sheep Street in Stow, opposite the end of Church Street and close to the church, is an historic, terraced building, offering an abundance of space, a modern heating system and a beautiful garden.

Highlights include:

- † Grand entrance hall
- † Spacious study
- † Good family space with kitchen and dining/ family room in close proximity
- † Four generously sized bedrooms
- † Two bathrooms and ground floor cloakroom
- † Fully tanked cellar
- † Private, walled garden
- † A double cart lodge at the end of the garden where double gates open onto Back Walls

The closest railway stations are at Kingham and Moreton-in-Marsh, with regular direct trains to Oxford and London Paddington.

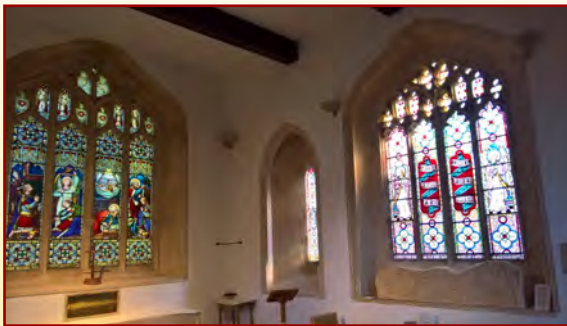
Tourism is of major importance to the local economy, but brings its own problems, including inflated house prices, parking issues and limited employment opportunities. However, local health, schooling and social facilities are good.

[Find out more.](#)

STOW-ON-THE-WOLD



St Edward's, Stow, has been a site of worship for over 1000 years, holding a central place in the town's history and the story of the English Civil War 1642 - 1646. As well as being the largest indoor space in the town, it is the No 1 tourist attraction. Also, we have many enquiries from couples wishing to marry in our churches. The town's population is around 2,000.



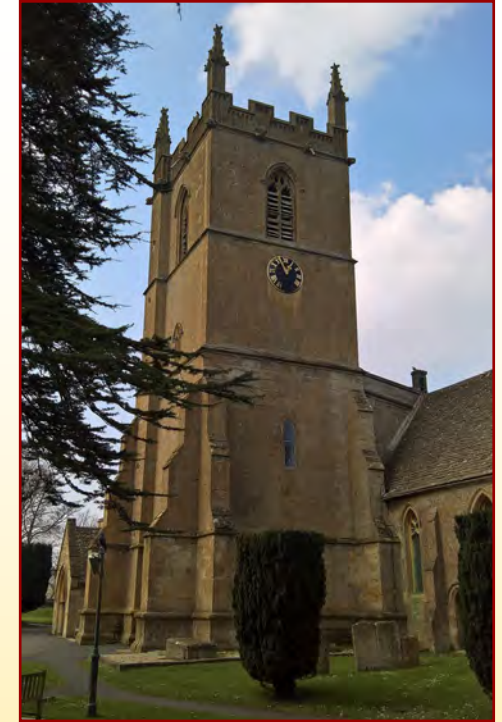
The interior is currently undergoing a re-modelling project and will reopen before Easter 2023 as a more flexible space that remains beautiful but more effectively accommodates all styles of worship, meets the needs of the local community and offers an even better experience for our large number of visitors.

The church is well-maintained and congregations at normal services average 30-40. St Edward's has a high-quality audiovisual system. Services are regularly streamed and we have recently started to run free film nights for local people.



The church boasts a magnificent set of eight bells which are regularly rung by the North Cotswold Association of Bell Ringers.

Church activities include the popular annual Christmas Tree Festival, Mothers' Union events and 'Closely Knit', which meets weekly to enjoy fellowship and engages with our many visitors. Community activities take place in the church, including for example the Music at Stow Festival.



Find us at *A Church Near You*



CONDICOTE



The Church of St. Nicholas of Myra sits at the heart of Condicote, a small and ancient village comprising a population of approximately 140 residents, a quarter of whom are children or young adults.

- † Services - Holy Communion once a month and other lay-led services.
- † Lay support - enthusiastic and creative e.g., Advent & Lent house prayers, "End of Summer Evensong" & BBQ, but attendance at formal Services is low.
- † Strong ecumenical ethos with shared interdenominational leadership at lay-led, informal worship events.
- † Local occupations - professional spheres, farming and agricultural support services.
- † Community events - Christmas Carol Service with West Gallery Choir and Village Christmas Party, Annual open-air Jazz Night, monthly coffee mornings, Neighbourhood Watch, and quarterly newsletter.
- † Opportunities: to develop outreach ministries for young families and young adults in the community.

THE SWELLS



Serving a population of about 400, Swells parish contains two ancient villages, Upper Swell and Lower Swell, a more recently developed area known as Nether Swell and surrounding farms. Other than the farms, places of business are limited to the pub, *The Golden Ball*, and bed-and-breakfasts, although a number of residents work from home.

The two Norman churches are both dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin. The Grade 1 listed church in Upper Swell holds about 60, that in Lower Swell Church around 200.

The pre-Covid Sunday service pattern was to hold at least one service per month in each church. Attendance averages 8-12, except at Christmas and at services for pupils of Swell

Primary Academy (a small Church of England school) and their parents. The PCC has adopted a suggestion by the Archdeacon of Cheltenham to treat the larger church at Lower Swell as a 'festival church' reserved for major occasions.

In a 'normal' year one would expect to see about two baptisms, one or two confirmations, two or three marriages or prayers after civil marriage, and two or three funerals.

Swell Primary Academy is a Church of England School linked to St Mary's Church. The children visit the church as part of their religious education studies and for festivals, such as Harvest, Christmas and Easter. Prior to the pandemic a team of volunteers visited fortnightly to lead 'Open the Book' worship.



CHALLENGES

Like many benefices in the Church of England, we face challenges as we look to the future

The main ones are:

- † Working with an increasingly elderly population and a declining proportion of younger people
- † Achieving financial sustainability
- † Maintaining ancient places of worship
- † Attracting people to Christian fellowship and worship where there is increasing competition with today's working and leisure patterns
- † Ministering to our diverse local communities, given the increasingly distorted demographic of our area, as more homes are being used as second homes and holiday lets
- † Extending a welcoming ministry for visitors to the area and for those who attend special services.



PRIORITY MINISTRIES



We celebrate the fact that Christian worship has taken place in our Benefice for 1,000 years and wish to sustain and extend this spiritual development.

- † Develop forms of worship that support the spiritual needs of our church families and are relevant to the 21st century
- † Ensure our pastoral care arrangements are sufficient and relevant to meet the needs of our communities

We have excellent relationships with our local schools. Until the pandemic, we had flourishing teams of volunteers delivering programmes of 'Open the Book' to Stow Primary School and Swell Primary Academy. We welcome children to special school services for Easter, Harvest and Christmas. Other North Cotswold schools and youth groups participate enthusiastically in our Christmas Tree Festival, while civic services, weddings, funerals and memorial services are an important part of community life.

- † Create new and imaginative ways to extend our involvement with children, teenagers and families and in their settings
- † Be more visible in our town and villages, celebrating and supporting its rich heritage

Many people in our town are elderly, some housebound, others living alone, or in care homes and residential settings. Many are looking for ways to be actively engaged in our community.

- † Ensure we are a caring church, always seeking to meet the needs of the individual
- † Establish better methods of communication and friendship within the community and in a variety of settings



THE BENEFICE TEAM

Our Benefice is small, with three parishes and four churches. Consequently, our team is small, but what we lack in size we make up in enthusiasm.

Currently, we have:

- † Four churchwardens (one at Stow; two in The Swells and one at Condicote)
- † Two Lay Readers (both based in Stow)
- † Two Benefice Safeguarding Leads (both based in Stow)
- † Several organists
- † A treasurer and PCC secretary in each parish
- † A wedding and funeral coordinator (based in Stow)
- † An audiovisual team (based in Stow)
- † The support of the North Cotswold Bell Ringers (in Stow)

A lay membership which has a wealth of expertise and experience in a variety of fields

Several people wear more than one hat but we are a committed team focused on growing God's Kingdom in our Benefice and beyond.



Your place in the team

Coming to our Benefice will require much energy and the willingness to be a team player

In return, you will have strong support to develop your ministry in this place

Find out more at

<https://www.scats.org.uk>



www.scats.org.uk

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