



**The United Reformed Church**  
**South Suffolk Area Partnership (Eastern Synod)**  
[www.urcsouthsuffolkap.org.uk](http://www.urcsouthsuffolkap.org.uk)

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**THE PLAN FOR ALLOCATION OF STIPENDIARY MINISTRY - 7 DEC 2017**

**Introduction**

The Plan, which was agreed by a consultative process within SSAP churches, is based on the principle of placing the 5 allocated stipendiary ministers as follows: One in Hadleigh; Two within Ipswich & East; One in Stowmarket; and One in the West Suffolk Area. There is also an agreed recognition of the flexibility needed to respond to many known and unknown issues affecting deployment. To this end, the remit of future posts in the SSAP will include, as the post to Ipswich and East currently does, a developmental role in assisting the SSAP in determining appropriate use, responsibilities, focus and future direction of churches and ministry.

The Plan does not identify where the stipendiary ministers might reside, and location will be determined by the calling churches through discussions with the Moderator and the Eastern Synod.

The Plan recognises that during 2018 the work of ministry is likely to have to be shared on average between 4 ministers at best, with the departure of Rev Cecil White in January and Rev Chris Wood in the autumn. As there is no certainty in appointments, or dates for them, this will put severe strain on the incumbent ministers, and so contingency plans need to be made, with support from whatever sources are available, including Synod and neighbouring areas.

**Hadleigh & Monks Eleigh**

The Plan is that one minister continues to be based in Hadleigh, Suffolk, with responsibilities towards Hadleigh and Monks Eleigh in the first instance. Given that Sudbury (*one of the churches within this pastorate*) will close January 2018, there arises some spare capacity within this pastorate under the previously agreed scoping.

It is recommended that, for the time being, this element of the scoping be offered where needed within the Area Partnership, probably because of geographical location somewhere within Ipswich & East, thus giving time and scope to explore conversations with other pastorates to establish where future pastoral oversight might be offered to the benefit of all parties involved.

## **Ipswich & East**

It is recommended under the Plan that two stipendiary ministers be based somewhere within Ipswich & East, and that location, roles and prime responsibilities be determined by the churches concerned through the Working Party (representatives from each church). It is proposed that this Working Party become a future Support Group for stipendiary ministers and be a point of contact for the churches.

The churches that will currently benefit from this ministry are Castle Hill, Felixstowe, St. John's and Saxmundham. It is envisaged that there would initially be some support offered to Christ Church LEP while they are in a vacancy situation, noting that, in the first instance, they are exploring the appointment of a Baptist Minister. It is recognised there will need to be some flexibility about the oversight ministry as there are several LEPs within this sector that have Methodist oversight, and the Circuit have already indicated that they would appreciate a closer relationship with the URC in some situations.

The SSAP are delighted that the Moderator and Synod accepted the proposal regarding the introduction of a stipendiary minister within Ipswich & East to be responsible in the first instance to all churches in vacancy and assist in the development of a strategy for the future location and responsibilities of a colleague within Ipswich & East. The SSAP are encouraged that one minister is currently considering the Pastoral Profile, and another has enquired.

It is recognised within the Plan that the stipendiary ministers will be expected to work closely together, alongside all churches, to determine the most effective use of stipendiary ministry, and seek to determine a 'missional strategy' for the whole of this sector of the Area Partnership, as well as contribute to the ongoing conversations with other colleagues on mutual support and sharing of resources for the benefit of the SSAP.

## **Needham Market**

Christchurch LEP (Methodist / URC) currently enjoys oversight from both the URC (Rev Mary Playford as NSM) and the Methodists (Rev Rita Carr) as per the agreement within the original Constitution. Conversations are currently being undertaken to consider the appointment of just one ordained minister from one of the participating denominations on the retirement of Rev Mary Playford (August 2019). It has been suggested that the Methodists are likely to take sole responsibility from this date, but that the usual 'normally alternating ministry' will be envisaged.

## **Stowmarket Group & Debenham**

The Plan is that one minister continues to be based in Stowmarket with responsibilities towards: Stowmarket; Stowupland; Mendlesham; Debenham; and with involvement in the Covenant of Welcome at Haughley.

The SSAP have been made aware that Christchurch LEP, Needham Market, are considering the appointment of one ordained minister from one of the participating denominations (Methodist / URC). It is understood that, in the first instance, the Methodists are likely to accept pastoral oversight from the summer of 2019 when Rev Mary Playford retires. Should the URC subsequently become responsible, the suggestion at this stage is

that the URC minister based in Stowmarket be appointed, with the recommendation that Debenham is moved to Ipswich & East.

In the meantime, it is recommended that discussions take place between the Stowmarket Group and Christchurch LEP to determine how this relationship might be strengthened in both the short as well as long term for the benefits of all concerned.

### West Suffolk Group

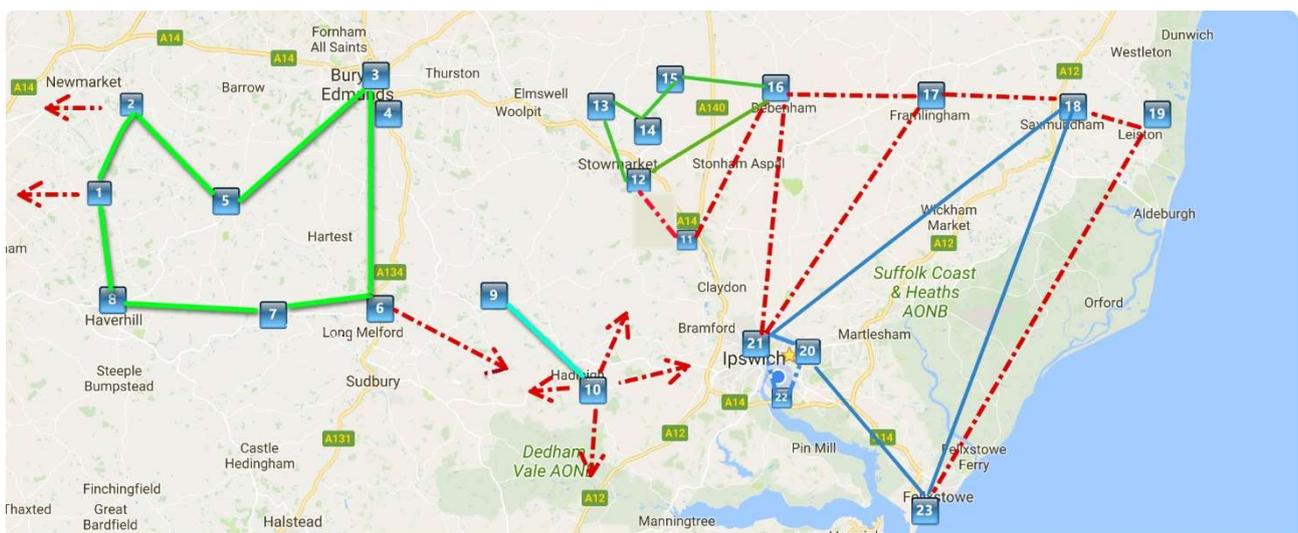
In the first instance, the West Suffolk group continue as they are, consisting of seven churches, with the request that a sole minister be in pastoral charge, a few caveats have been:

- That the Eastern Synod take whatever steps are necessary to transfer Stetchworth and Chevely into the Cambridge Area Partnership;
- That Long Melford, along with Hadleigh and Monks Eleigh, enter into discussions to consider the practicalities / feasibility / implications of creating a Joint Pastorate;
- That the stipendiary ministers within the SSAP are mindful of the extra demands on the minister who will provide pastoral oversight of the West Suffolk Group especially during this transitional period, and take steps to support them and, where possible, ease the load.

**An indication of current and possible future links is shown below**

|                  |                |                   |                    |                      |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Stechworth     | 6 Long Melford | 11 Needham Market | 16 Debenham        | 21 Castle Hill       |
| 2 Chevely        | 7 Clare        | 12 Stowmarket     | 17 Framlingham LEP | 22 Christ Church LEP |
| 3 Whiting Street | 8 Haverhill    | 13 Haughley       | 18 Saxmundham      | 23 Felixstowe        |
| 4 Southgate LEP  | 9 Monks Eleigh | 14 Stowupland     | 19 Leiston LEP     |                      |
| 5 Wickhambrook   | 10 Hadleigh    | 15 Mendlesham     | 20 St John's       |                      |

Solid lines in one colour a current grouping Red dotted lines potential links



## **Conclusion**

The SSAP are hopeful that the discussions that have taken place over this last year, and the general strategy outlined, will be accepted by Synod, so that we can move into 2018 with a clear idea of where we might be going – subject to the appointment of stipendiary ministers to complement those already in situ.

In the meantime, all stipendiary ministers have made a commitment to respond to pastoral issues arising from within the vacant churches, where deemed appropriate. Given the distances having to be covered within this area of Suffolk, we are considering ways that ministers might share information of members in hospital, so that pastoral care in such circumstances might also be shared among us. This is a model we wish to pursue so that, in future, stipendiary ministers appointed within the SSAP might work as a team, covering, where possible, for holidays, sabbaticals, sickness, vacancies, etc. To this end, the ordained ministers have made a commitment to meet regularly for mutual support and encouragement, and to address matters affecting the local churches, Synod and the National Church.

***Rev Chris Wood (SSAP Pastoral Advocate)***

***Mr John Bothams (SSAP Secretary)***

***7 December 2017***