

## Annual Report to Barham Parish Council on the activities of Claydon & Barham Church – May 2026

As members will be aware, the Church in Barham serves both Claydon and Barham apart from Barham Green which is served by Henley Church. The Church is one of 3 Churches which together with Henley and Gt Blakenham form the Claydon Benefice and we share a single Rector. Sadly, our current Rector, Rev Tracey Caswell, will be leaving us at the end of this month after just over 2 years' service to take up a post in Norfolk where her husband is employed. We are very sad to lose her and she is very sad to leave so soon but a married life living apart is not good for anyone so we do understand. Whilst we have a vacancy for a Rector the Church will continue to operate as usual through the dedication of retired priests, other volunteer ministers, and our Churchwardens. We pray that a new Rector will be called to serve here before too long.

During the past year we have continued regular Sunday and Midweek services in the Church which are quite well attended. We have also held a number of fundraising events to raise funds for the maintenance of this 800+ year old building. Our principle has been for many years that those who support the Church's Christian ministry should finance the day to day running of the Church and the cost of providing a Rector whereas it is reasonable to look to the wider community to help fund the maintenance of this ancient grade 1 listed building and the burial grounds around it and the burial grounds at Claydon which are part of our community's heritage. We have also run events to raise funds for other charities. Our annual Summer Fete, Open Air Band Concert at Barham Hall and Christmas Experience are all very much part of the life of the community and have been very well supported.

Barham Churchyard is reputed to be the largest rural Churchyard in the county – it certainly seems like it when it needs cutting! We are grateful for grants from both parish councils as well as many, many hours of voluntary work which keep our Churchyards in good repair as a community asset. As well as the voluntary work we employ our local Community Interest Company – Realise Futures – to help with the workload.

Members will be aware that, as part of the planning consent for Barham Meadows, a large area of land between the Church and the development was transferred to the ownership of the Church together with £60k to develop it for the "benefit of the Church". The funds are held by MSDC who will only release them as appropriate proposals are approved for work on this land. The aim being that we would construct an additional car park together with a new access drive to the Church from the new estate road. However, since the arrangement was put in place by the original outline planning process, archaeological surveys of the land have resulted in the levels needing to be raised and a no-dig restriction being put in place to protect the archaeology. Despite these setbacks, we proceeded with the land transfer which was completed in December 2025. We are now seeking discussions with the Planning, Archaeology and Highways departments of Local Government to establish what we can do within the restrictions placed on the land.

Councillors will be aware how desperately the bridleway access to the Church needs building up and somehow resurfacing. This has been acknowledged by the County Council Byways department and we are awaiting their suggestions/proposals.

The Church does consider it very important to be part of and to serve our local community. In addition to pastoral care, we continue, with others, to run the Sunday evening Soup Kitchen in Ipswich; house a branch of the Bacon Road Free Library in the Church; and to run a free Friday Morning Drop-in in the Church Hall. We support both the Stowmarket and Families-in-need Foodbanks with donations of food and finance. We are grateful to our County Councillor, Chris Chambers, for supporting our Friday heating costs through his locality budget.

Roger Colthorpe

On behalf of Claydon and Barham PCC