

# Our Vision

# Planning Report

# 2024



**The Box River Benefice**

*Boxford, Edwardstone, Groton,  
Little Waldingfield and Newton*

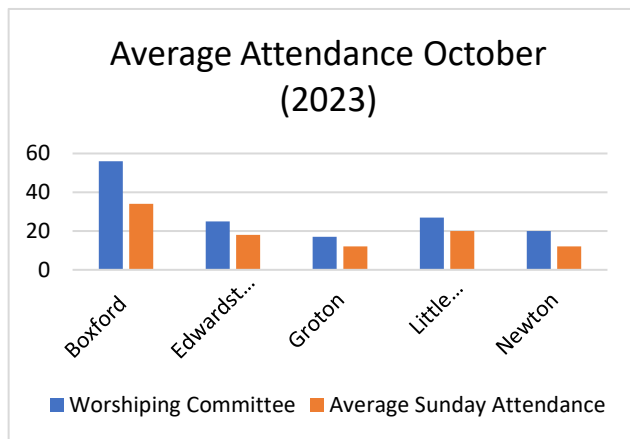
## Vision Action Planning Outcomes 2024.

Members of our churches and the wider public engaged in our Vision Evenings in January and February 2024. Through wide collaboration and sharing of wisdom we hoped to draw up a vision for our churches over the next few years.

The sessions started in prayer. We were reminded that the Church was God's, not ours. God had always fed and nurtured it and he continues to today. The real challenge for us is to discern where he wishes us to put our energies. It is essential that we try and gauge what God wants for his Church in this place, because otherwise our endeavours will all be useless. If we just go off pursuing our own agendas, then sooner or later, they would fail. Whilst our buildings are vitally important to our mission, even these should not become such a distraction so as to obscure our primary purpose which is to live as a community of Christians regularly gathering together to serve God and the people of this part of Suffolk, and encouraging others to join in.

### Where are we now?

We began by considering where we are at the moment. Using numbers taken from the Church of England's Parish Returns Database, we were able to see how four of our five churches have seen attendance bounce back since Covid to levels not seen for a decade or more. This was reaffirmed in the numbers attending during the Christmas period in 2023, and was testimony to the hard work already being done by so many to help our churches thrive:

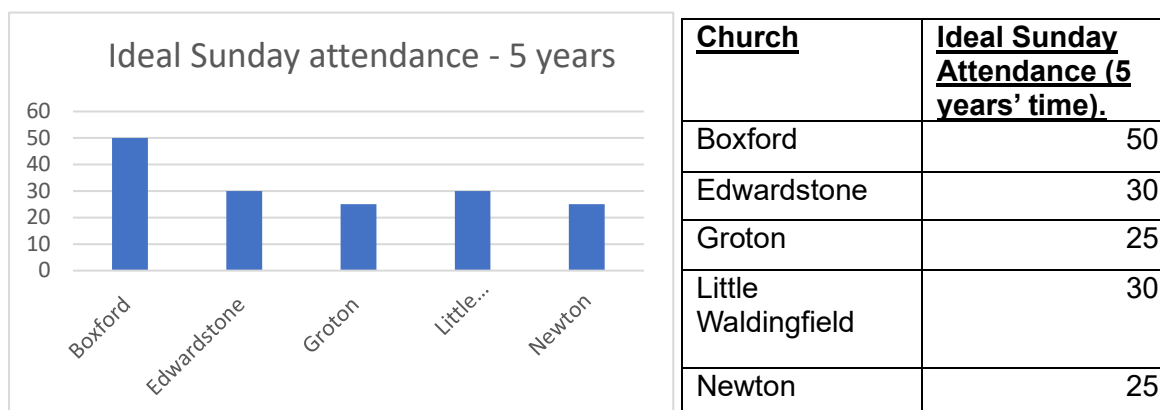


<u>Church</u>	<u>Worshipping Community</u>	<u>Average Sunday Attendance</u>
Boxford	56	34
Edwardstone	25	18
Groton	17	12
Little Waldingfield	27	20
Newton	20	12



## Where Our Churches Would Like to be in 5 Years?

We then asked each church to put a figure on where they would like to see their congregational numbers in five years' time, being mindful when deciding this of what may be necessary in terms of numbers if the church is to remain sustainable:



### Role Holders and Staff:

Each church was then asked what personnel they thought would be necessary in order to see further growth.

<b>Boxford</b>	<b>Edwardstone</b>	<b>Groton</b>	<b>Little Waldingfield</b>	<b>Newton</b>
Administrator x2	Administrator		Administrator	Administrator (x2)
Rector	Rector	Rector	Rector	Rector
Associate Priest Priest with PTO	Associate Priest	Associate priest	Associate Priest	Associate Priest
Lay reader	Lay reader	Lay reader		Lay reader
Youth/children's minister		Youth/children's minister		Youth/children's minister (x2)
Churchwardens x2	Churchwardens x2	Churchwardens x2	Churchwardens x2	Churchwardens x2

### Aspirations for Other Aspects of Church Life.

We then asked what you'd like to see happening in respective churches and what might be necessary to make that happen – it was generally recognised that the biggest challenge to any plans would be garnering enough volunteers and encouraging more people to commit to their local church on a regular basis.

<b>Church</b>	<b>Volunteers</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Community outreach and pastoral care</b>	<b>Extra resources</b>
<b>Boxford</b>	Fundraising team Regular serving team Regular rota: reading, intercessions, stewards, tea and coffee, flowers etc PCC Secretary and More PCC Members Another Churchwarden	Wine tasting Christmas fayre Holiday clubs More community activity Bell ringing	Continue foodbank Maybe visiting some secondary schools as well as primary schools Food Bank Parish Office in church (vestry hour)	Social media presence Effective heating Toilets Proper church sign

<b>Edwardstone</b>	Minimum of 10 more (3 of which aged 50-65, 3 of which aged 25-40) Churchwardens	Fewer events but those that attract more people Raise the profile of funds Gardening and coffee Summer picnic Dog-walk	Engage with benefice Welcome newcomers to the village Voluntary group to visit housebound/ ill/ elderly	Outsourced events - other groups own the venue - organisation and logistics are minimal Diary for events- a year for each
<b>Groton</b>	Minimum of 10	Parish socials - e.g. tea party	Contact new neighbours Study course	
<b>Little Waldingfield</b>	A PCC of greater numbers (12) Churchwardens Verger Flower volunteers	A wider range of activities (not necessarily religious) - e.g. concerts etc Sunday School - creche family	To enhance levels of awareness of situations - e.g. illness, death A more 'visual' presence within the village	More village awareness of the needs of the PCC Central funding Responsibilities of the PCC regarding the fabric of the building moved to the Diocese
<b>Newton</b>	Cohort of 30 - mixture of ages 6 PCC members	2 services per month Regular community events using the Nave - CCT Expand community events	Better relationship with NPC Continue to work towards planning charities	Benefice events Send out survey on what building updates we can do 2 youth workers for benefice



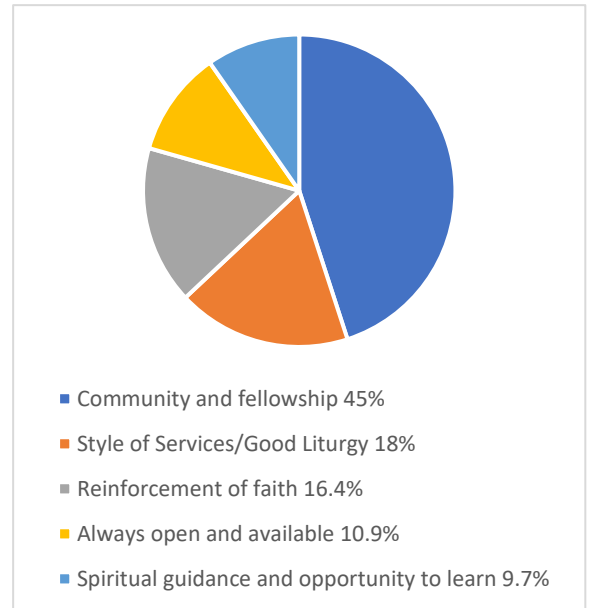
## What Do We Value About Our Churches?

During our vision days, we asked what you valued most about our churches. This was in order to understand and look to build upon those things people most valued. The thing people valued most was the Community and Fellowship (45%) the local church provided. The second most valued thing was the Style of Services and the Good Liturgy (18%). Third was the way the local church Re-enforced Faith (16.4%). There were many other insightful responses too. You can find them here:

1. Community and Fellowship 45%
2. Style of Services & Good Liturgy 18%
3. Reinforcement of Faith 16.4%
4. Always open and available 10.9%
5. Spiritual Guidance and Opportunity to Learn 9.7%

Other responses included:

- Music (piano, organ...)
- Opportunity to serve others
- Continuity
- Opportunity to get away from the world and sort out our minds
- Special services (Christmas, remembrance...)
- Church Tradition is deepening
- Place of reflection
- Youth and children's minister- amazing what they do with limited resources
- The History of the building
- The beauty of the space and environment
- Different spaces where we can worship and reflect
- Now beginning to use the building more widely (not just for services, but for everything)
- Our churches are very dynamic/ flexible
- Welcoming aspect, befriending (tea and coffee especially)
- Our priest is so welcoming to all and understanding with young children- even when they are making noise- it makes the parents relax and feel comfortable



## What We Value about Faith.

We then asked everyone present what they most valued about their own faith. This was in order that we could learn a little more about where people were on their faith journey and how we might enable that to deepen and grow:

### **Boxford:**

- Time to unwind/ focus
- Uplifting aspects
- Music as a path to faith
- The prospect of aiming for glory in the highest, even if you fail
- Faith nourished by sharing it
- Very personal
- A moral compass sadly lacking in society today
- Hope and support- God is always with you

### **Edwardstone:**

- Reflective space
- Moral code
- Communicating with lost ones
- Asking for guidance and strength

**Groton:**

- Peace and reflection
- Christmas

**Lt Waldingfield**

- Security and a sense of meaning, belonging and hope; beyond the material.
- Moral compass

**Newton:**

- Opportunity to think differently
- Space to think about family
- Ability to deepen faith and offer God our thanks & worries



## Challenges Facing Our Churches.

At the vision days, we asked what you thought were the biggest challenges facing your local church. Most widely discussed was how, like so many voluntary organisations since Covid, all of our churches face significant challenges around encouraging people to commit to attending regularly and volunteering, to ensure the core functions of the church can flourish. These two things are the biggest threat to our ability to maintain our churches. Here are these and other responses according to church:

### **Boxford:**

- Attracting people to the PCC
- Volunteers to commit to supporting current activities and lead on implementing new ideas
- Need an actual church sign, not just a noticeboard
- Financial sustainability & raising funds
- Increasing Attendance
- Lowering the average age profile of those who attend
- Understanding what we can offer the community
- Not losing sight of faith and worship
- Widening variety of services
- Attracting younger congregation
- Wider visibility for children (parents knowing their kids are welcome)
- Disabled access
- Toilet
- Church always warm, welcoming and accessible for other people to use it
- Make the church a better space for younger people to come into- a central part of the community
- Making the building and congregation more welcoming and inclusive

### **Edwardstone:**

- Need more volunteers to support ageing PCC
- Fundraising and funding
- Need to attract more people of a younger demographic
- Understanding finances
- Increase Attendance
- Welcoming and accessible

### **Groton:**

- Widening variety of services
- Attendance
- Relevance to residents
- Financial sustainability
- Make it more welcoming and accessible
- Maybe a bible study?
- More PCC members and volunteers
- Continuing to streamline structures/bring benefice together

### **Little Waldingfield:**

- Losing congregation & volunteers due to older age
- Constantly having to use reserves/financial sustainability
- Maintaining church fabric
- Continuing to bring benefice together/ streamline structures

### **Newton:**

- Meeting the parish share/financial sustainability
- Attendance
- Volunteers
- Not enough people to do things





# Aspirations for Our Churches Looking Forward.

## 'The sky is the limit'.

We then asked you to dream big and write down what you would like see happen. Everyone was encouraged not to worry about resources at this stage, imagining there were no restrictions or limits on what we can achieve, under God's direction:

### **Boxford:**

- Toilet
- Host for village events
  - o Cinema night
  - o Music/ beer festival
  - o Cheese run/ trundle
- Bigger social media presence
- Event organiser
- Community lunches
- Use the churchyard more
- Disabled access
- Remove side pews
- Create a more comfortable meeting space for larger groups
- Someone to organise follow-up for life events (Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals)
- Anniversary cards for life events
- Someone to spearhead a welcome from the church for all new residents to the village/s
- Invite school children to do readings at services like they do at Remembrance and Christmas
- Make church a main hub of community life
- More volunteers
- Increase those who attend
- Become a community of teaching and learning

### **Edwardstone:**

- Engage more volunteers to help look after isolated and lonely
- Reduce/ manage increasing bureaucracy which generally achieves nothing
- Be better funded/ financially secure
- Use communications better e.g. website, advertisement
- Increased congregation and more services
- More activities using the church building
- Provide food/ activities for school holidays
- Events
- Parish picnics
- Beer and hymns
- WhatsApp updates- for visits, services etc for those who don't have/ don't check emails
- Star at Christmas

### **Groton:**

- Local musicians in Groton
  - o Especially children
- More community focus
  - o Events, picnics etc
- Parishioners lunch

### **Little Waldingfield:**

- Reaching out to all corners of the village community
  - o Limitless!
- Someone to spearhead a church welcome to all new residents to the village/s
- Remove pews
- Provide kitchen/ toilet facilities

- Better use of the church
- More social occasions
- Art sales
- Renew concerts

**Newton:**

- Co-ordinate community more effectively
- Run more groups to impact on all aspects of church life
  - o Charity groups, action groups etc



**‘Realistic Actions’ – Bringing Things Back Down to Earth.**

We then asked you to write down action points that you felt were realistic for us to pursue together over the next 12 months and 3 years. The importance of identifying who would lead on these was emphasised and also what resources would need to be sourced.

**In the next 12 months**

**Boxford:**

- Consult with the community on building plans
  - o Need to access the BCBF
    - consult the diocese on architects plans top obtain their preferred options
- Stewardship banner
  - o E.g. “it costs £... to keep this church open, can you help?”
- Put up a church sign at the gate
  - o PCC to action
- songs of ‘praise-athon’
  - o £1 to vote for your favourite hymn
- Messy vintage
  - o Messy church but for adults
    - Would need volunteers and refreshments
- Be more welcoming with new visitors
  - o Befriending – find a lay person to follow it up!
- Develop a lay team to provide pastoral response
  - o Select suitable volunteers
    - Train, equip and oversee
- Persevering with teaching and learning opportunities.
  - o Clergy
- Church used as central hub for events
  - o Need more of a social media presence for this

- Make sure we take photos and share what we do with young people!
- Simplify language
  - o Call the family service a family service!

### **Edwardstone:**

- Extra people on the PCC
  - o Approach villagers
- New incomers to village and church
  - o PCC to allocate someone to send a welcome from church
- Encouraging churchgoers to engage
- Garden party
  - o Need volunteers for this – ask villagers
- Welcoming committee
  - o At least 4 volunteers

### **Groton:**

- Children wanting to engage with the Godly Play areas in church
  - o Find someone who is willing to take charge of this
- Summer party in the churchyard
  - o Involve others by asking villagers to help, especially those who have not been asked before.
- Summer events, e.g. picnic
  - o Involve others by asking villagers to help
- Winter events e.g. Dance?
  - o Involve others by asking villagers to help
- Collective dog walks
  - o PCC to consider forming a church walking group

### **Little Waldingfield**

- Discussions with Church Parish Rooms and the playing field
  - o PCC to advance
- Survey the village to ascertain what this church might be used for
  - o PCC to advance

### **Newton:**

- Toilet/ building works
  - o Send out survey to ask what people most want
- Improve churchyard environmentally
  - o Explore grazing sheep, goats etc

## **Next 3 years**

### **Boxford:**

- Make building available/ suitable for events
  - o Need facilities- toilet, disabled access, storage
    - Fundraisers will be needed for re-ordering project
- Private Sunday school/ meeting room inside the church
  - o Could potentially generate income as well
- Block off an area of the churchyard for wild flowers
  - o Snowdrop blanket, daffodil patches
    - Involve the children- their own little garden
- Hire a part-time children and youth worker
  - o Need funding
    - will need to make a full application for this

### **Edwardstone**

- Have another big fundraising event each year
  - o Involve others by asking villagers to help
- Get a churchwarden

- Coordinated diary of events
- Parish email

### **Groton**

- Grow congregation and volunteers
  - o Lay members to invite other villagers
- Offer a welcome from the church to new villagers
  - o PCC to allocate someone to send a welcome from church
- Variety of services/music styles
  - o Worship team
- Growth in numbers to get volunteers
  - o Lay members to invite other villagers
- Diary of events
- Welcome banner
  - o PCC to advance

### **Little Waldingfield**

- Outreach services to be developed
  - o PCC
  - o Worship Team
- Recruit churchwardens
- Take pews out- chair sponsorship
  - o PCC to advance
- Yoga sessions

### **Newton**

- Grown congregation and volunteers
  - o Lay members to invite other villagers
- NPC, Church and Newton Trust work together!
  - o CILS





## **What Happens Next?**

**Over the next few months our PCCs will be thinking about these findings and beginning to put together an action plan for the future. This will include key focusses for each church and the benefice as a whole.**

## **What can you do now?**

**It would help our churches significantly if you could consider:**

- **Supporting your church community by attending regularly**
- **Volunteer for some small role**
- **Consider joining the PCC of your local church to help it function**
- **Contribute financially on a regular basis to enable your church to pay its way.**



**Thank you for your time and effort in helping us in this important process. Not only has it produced a whole host of good ideas, it was also evident that there is lots of positivity and goodwill around our benefice. It is also clear that our church communities have been moving in the right direction in recent years. With the help of God, may that continue through the years to come.**

If you have any thoughts you'd like to add pertaining to any section within this report, we continue to welcome feedback, just email [boxriverbenefice@gmail.com](mailto:boxriverbenefice@gmail.com) and we will incorporate it into our ongoing discernment.