



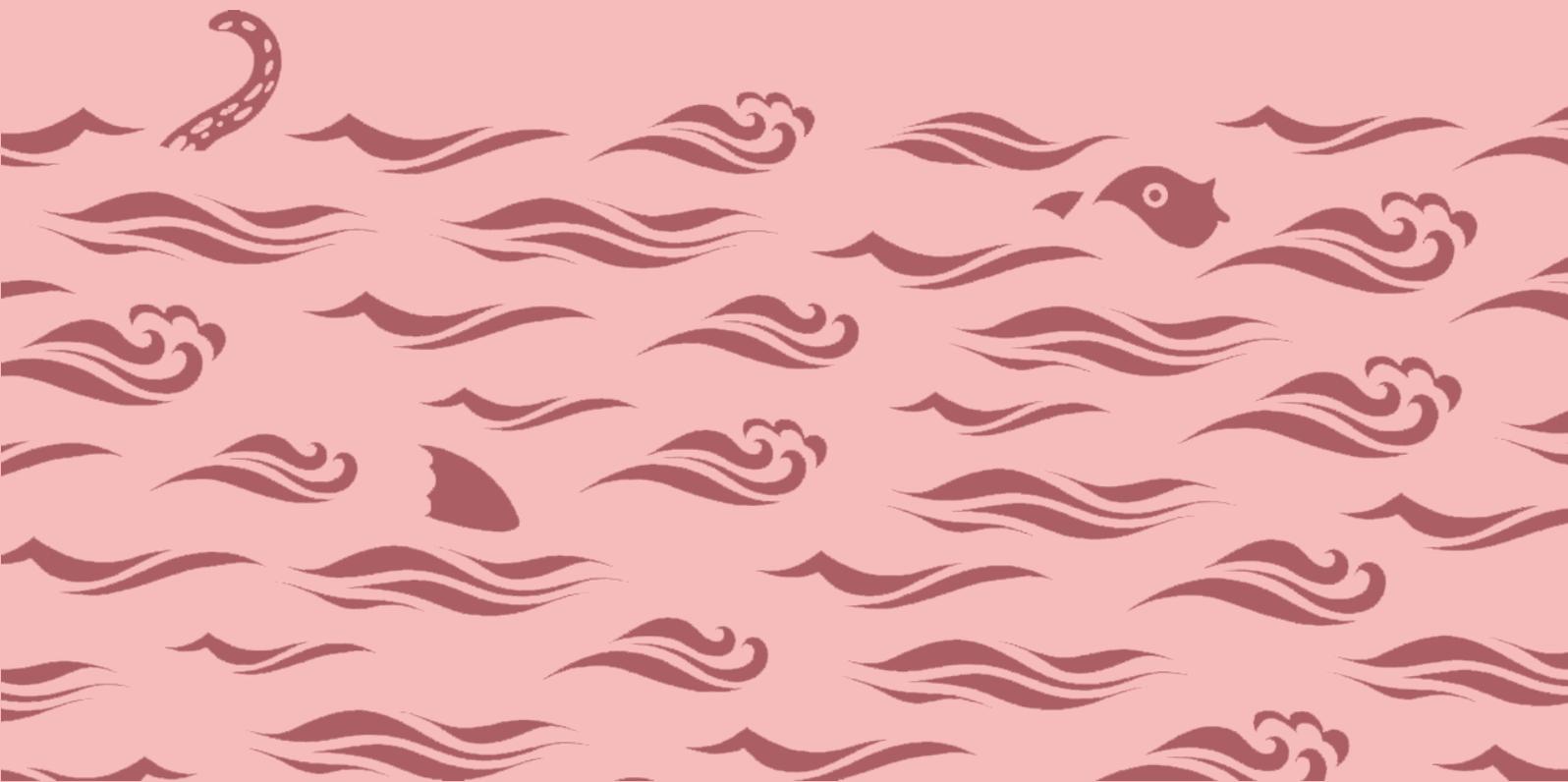
**BRENDAN
RESEARCH**

The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

Evaluations of Growing in God Strategic Development Funded Programmes 2019-2025

- **Alive and Kicking: Growing in God in the Countryside**
- **A Rising Tide: Inspiring Ipswich**

Brendan Research
January 2026



This one document contains both evaluation reports completed for the Diocese of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich in 2025, in the order they were undertaken.

The executive summaries have been extracted from the original reports and placed at the beginning of this document for easy access.

Acknowledgements:

For **Alive and Kicking**, thank you to the Venerable Sally Gaze (Archdeacon for Rural Mission) and Andrew Gosden (Project Manager) for their support in making initial contact with interviewees, coordinating our in-person visits and sharing project documentation.

Thank you to all those who met with us to offer their reflections. As this evaluation coincided with the internal Appreciative Inquiry exercise also taking place, a special thank you to those who gave time to contribute to both processes in close succession.

For **A Rising Tide**, thank you to Karen Macfadyen (Project Manager) and Helen Smith (Project Administrator) for their support in making initial contact with interviewees, coordinating our in-person visits and sharing project documentation.

Thank you to everyone who met with us in person or online to offer their reflections. Thank you to those leaders who invited us to visit community gatherings and join in with worship. Lastly, thank you to those who completed a short survey on their experience of taking part in the Growing Leaders course.

The team and project board are to be commended for asking us to capture feedback from a broad range of stakeholders, including those who did not engage with the project. This willingness to see all perspectives represented in this evaluation is courageous and future strategic diocesan plans will be the richer for it.

Claire Dalpra, Elspeth McGann and Richard Tiplady

Brendan Research



Contents

Introduction from the diocese	4
Executive summary: Alive and Kicking	5
Executive summary: A Rising Tide	6

Alive and Kicking: Growing in God in the Countryside

Relevance and context	9
Research methodology	10
Project achievements	11
Illustrative summaries (South-East): Emerge and Place by the Water	14
Learning around contributing factors	15
Learning around missional design	17
Illustrative summaries (West): Red Lodge and Chadbrook Benefice	19
Implementation	20
Sustainability	22
Illustrative summaries (North and county-wide): Bungay and Agricultural Chaplaincy	23
Learning around cultural transformation for rural mission (and transferability to other dioceses)	24
Conclusion	26
Appendix A: A summary of GiGitC project expenditure	27
Appendix B: A summary of Lightwave Community income and expenditure	28

A Rising Tide: Inspiring Ipswich

Relevance and context	30
Achievements	31
Efficiency	37
Finance	39
Sustainability	41
Overall learning	42
Conclusion and recommendations	44
Appendix A: Research methodology	46
Appendix B: Quantitative data in full	47
Appendix C: Findings from the Growing Leaders survey	48



Introduction

In 2018 the diocese applied for Strategic Development Funding (SDF) with the desire to capitalise on the structural and cultural changes underway as a result of our Diocesan Bishop's leadership. It had been identified that our vision and calling was to be a diocese of 'flourishing congregations making a difference', with priorities to grow in Depth, Influence, Number and Younger. SDF funding was sought for a programme of work to spearhead and accelerate development and change in two contrasting contexts.

The first was urban - in Ipswich. Comprising 23% of the diocese's population, Ipswich had the youngest age profile in the county. Against a backdrop of congregational decline, there was clear potential and a feeling that an intentional injection of resources could bring increased missional and financial strength.

The second – in a diocese that is overwhelmingly rural - was in rural Suffolk. The call was to act boldly and innovatively to grow new ways of being church which focused on making and growing disciples alongside the parish-based model.

Together, it was envisioned that SDF investment would enable the diocese to build on existing momentum in both an urban and rural context to deliver growth in numbers of disciples, in leaders and in giving; to move towards more of a mixed ecology of church; and to generate learning and culture change that would have a continued impact beyond the end of the projects.

Seven years on, we are delighted and grateful for what has been achieved through the two projects of Growing in God in the Countryside and Inspiring Ipswich. Prayer has been at the heart of everything and God has blessed the work in many ways. We recognise the dedication, commitment, inspiration and energy of the project leaders, teams, boards, and the many people involved in the work of the projects - and thank them all. It has been a challenging journey at times, as is reasonable to expect from projects designed to initiate and accelerate change in long-established structures and cultures. But without a doubt it has changed the diocese, capitalised on and accelerated change as was hoped, and moved us towards growth.

We have chosen to publish the evaluations of this SDF-funded programme of work to share with others what we did and what we learnt, hoping that this may inform future work. As well as sharing what we achieved and what worked well, we wanted to reflect on what was more challenging and where things didn't go so well. The expertise and insight of our evaluators, Brendan Research, has been valuable in drawing out and articulating this. We hope the result both celebrates what has been achieved and captures lessons and considerations for the future. For us, the learning will certainly inform our plans and work in the future.

For further information on any of the work you are welcome to contact the Diocesan Office.

Gary Peverley
Diocesan Secretary, Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich



Executive summary

Alive and Kicking: Growing in God in the Countryside

Growing in God in the Countryside was a project in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich begun in 2019 with two workstreams. With a focus on mission in a rural context, it sought to develop a community of small ecclesial groups and of fresh expressions of Church known as the Lightwave Community, as well as acting as a catalyst for cultural transformation in rural mission across the diocese.

The project was most successful in the first of these two aims, while the second aim remains largely unexplored and unevidenced in this report. A variety of factors contributed to a division between these two aims, and this report focuses primarily on the outcomes and learning from the first aim, while also reflecting on what can be learned with regards to the challenges encountered by the second.

The report also includes six short summaries of different small groups and fresh expressions of Church that have emerged through the Lightwave Community, which serve to illustrate the breadth and variety of outcomes across the project in different types of rurality.

The project has enabled the release and flourishing of a considerable number of individuals and groups to explore and experiment with new ways of being Church and of making disciples in the rural context. Although this has not been without its difficulties, the overall impact is positive. The report notes that Lightwave was helpful in supporting local leaders:

... who want to develop something outside of traditional Sunday morning services - especially worship that suits different learning styles or that meets outdoors. The discipleship pathway model gave local leaders confidence to create fuzzy-edged gatherings for newcomers to explore faith without undue pressure.

The project was most effective where it supported the release of local resources and pioneers who already existed or were latent within the diocese, rather than making external appointments to new pioneering posts.

A diocesan-wide Bishop's Mission Order (BMO) provided an effective support infrastructure for new groups, without overburdening existing PCCs. The BMO consists of a dispersed missional community with its own charitable status, alongside benefices and, like them, under the bishop. However, this development of a parallel structure was not without its opponents, and the future relationship between the two is currently being discerned.

The challenge of 'embedding' this new structure into the existing ones is a priority, albeit doing so in a way that doesn't stifle the creative impulses and energies that have been released through the project. The Lightwave brand, family and movement are valuable to members and advocates, and something would be lost if it were not to continue. Effective means must be developed to allow the old and new structures and their members to build relationships and to learn from one another. The language of mixed ecology is only worthwhile where all the different parts of the ecosystem recognise their need for one another and hold one another in mutual esteem.

As one of the first diocese-wide BMOs (Bishop's Mission Order) in the Church of England, and with a distinct and positive focus on the challenges of rural mission, this project has much to offer other dioceses in terms of learning about the practice of mission in similar contexts.



Executive summary

A Rising Tide: Inspiring Ipswich

In 2019, the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich launched the Inspiring Ipswich project to develop the wider diocesan vision strategy Growing in God. Comprising 23% of the diocese's population, Ipswich deanery had the youngest age profile in the county, rich in potential for growth.¹

Over £1m of diocesan investment was supported by £2.677m of Strategic Development Funding (SDF) to resource a project team led by the Archdeacon of Ipswich. With a vision to see the deanery transformed, led by strong and energised ministry teams, work developed under four workstreams: 1) deanery leadership, planning and strategy 2) parish development, 3) pioneering and new worshipping communities and 4) church planting.

The project exceeded its ambitious outcomes by making **36,376 new contacts** with those outside the Church (against a target of 13,000) and seeing **1,944 new disciples** attend a church service or new worshipping community at least monthly (against a target of 1,300). However, it struggled with its target of 6,500 faith explorers, seeing only 2,513.

Against a target of 26, **57 new worshipping communities** have been counted in the deanery as the project comes to an end in December 2025. This includes three church plants (fewer than the target of six).

Interviewees identified building relationships with new people, responding to practical need and mission-minded clergy as being the most effective ways of making new disciples. The networking and nurturing of lay leaders has been hugely significant in deepening discipleship.

The project was led by a thoroughly dedicated 'powerhouse' of a team who were quick to pivot to needs arising, working creatively to meet project aims. **Patterns of congregational decline have been dramatically reversed** as Statistics for Mission show worshipping congregation and child AWA figures are higher than they were in 2019 (and demonstrating drastically different attendance patterns to the rest of the diocese).

Even those who were less involved recognise something of the 'a rising tide raises all ships' dynamic and the momentum around mission has been a galvanising force for the deanery that has affected most churches' attendance directly or indirectly. Interviewees confirmed the mutual support that now exists among most of the clergy and that life in the deanery is now *'less about managing decline and more about managing growth'*.

Yet, the high achievements of the project have come at a high cost.

Many of the difficult dynamics described by stakeholders are not unique to this project; tensions evident in national debates about whether national mission funding should be spent on projects or parishes were present here at local level. In this project, the high-pressure nature of the project was unhealthily demanding for some, those clergy who chose not to engage felt more isolated than before and some church planters felt unsupported. The emotion from the huge pressure placed on the team and the diocese when senior leaders left the project prematurely still feels raw.

As the project comes to an end, as well as celebrating the achievements, local stakeholders are keen to highlight the high-cost nature of the work and the pain it has caused for some inside and outside the project. Feelings run deep. Noting the positive changes catalysed by the project, senior diocesan staff advocate moving forward with the project's values (but without fixed targets or timeframes) to develop a healthier work/life balance for all involved.

¹ Inspiring Ipswich & Growing in God in the Countryside: Stage 2 Application for Strategic Development Funding, p. 8



Any similarly ambitious project in this diocese (or another diocese) must weigh up to potential achievements against cost as decision-makers consider the following **recommendations**:

- Continue to invest in the new gifted clergy in the deanery. They are an important asset.
- Continue to encourage deanery networking in non-governance spaces across the diocese.
- Where projects set high expectations, be wary of the culture of overworking that can easily accompany high targets and provide support for those leaders who are not used to this.
- A town-wide approach makes sense to those outside the church, but there are some downsides to this deanery or archdeaconry project that needed mitigating against including the conflict of interest that comes with a combined Archdeacon and Project Director role.
- Post-project, focus on growing deeper as well as growing new. Ambitious targets of making new contacts, explorers, disciples, churches and congregations inevitably mean time and energy to grow deeper (embed, mature, sustain) and manage other parish responsibilities was limited.
- Communicate trust in clergy by careful messaging, ongoing consultation and setting realistic targets.
- When designing a project to work with a mix of churches from different traditions, be sensitive to language and concepts that communicate well within different traditions.
- Have courage to develop a church planting strategy that suits the culture and context of the diocese, but don't underestimate the components that need to be in place.
- Be utterly realistic about the degree of inevitable disruption an ambitious project like this brings to every level of church life and put as many measures in place as possible to deal with problems, hurt and confusion in a constructive way.
- The turnover of senior leaders in SDF-funded projects should be core to a diocesan risk assessment and needs to be acknowledged as an issue at national church level.





**BRENDAN
RESEARCH**

Alive and Kicking

Growing in God in the Countryside end-of-SDF-funding external review

Claire Dalpra and Richard Tiplady
Brendan Research
August 2025

We have included six illustrative summaries in this report to demonstrate the variety of small ecclesial groups and fresh expressions of Church modelling different approaches that suit different types of rurality.

Relevance and context

In 2019, the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich launched the Growing in God in the Countryside project (GiGitC), one of two substantial diocesan projects¹ supported by Strategic Development Funding (SDF) and initiated to develop the wider diocesan vision strategy Growing in God.²

Supported by £2.27 million from the Church of England's SDF, the £2.99 million Growing in God in the Countryside project was ambitious for a mostly liberal-catholic diocese with - then - limited experience of pioneering and mixed ecology. Recognising the diocese is overwhelmingly rural, this project was designed to grow the number of new disciples in a context of small populations, ageing congregations, limited provision for children or young people, clergy isolation and the burden of building maintenance.³

Canon Sally Gaze - a rural mission consultant - was appointed 18 months before the project started by the Bishop of Dunwich to lead on the design of the project. Following her appointment as Archdeacon of Rural Mission, the project launched with two streams of work:

- 1. Developing a dispersed missional community (under a BMO)** - which evolved as the Lightwave Community - made up of small ecclesial groups, fresh expressions of Church and rural resource hubs.
- 2. Catalysing cultural change for rural mission** - designing future support for rural mission to support all clergy and laity, facilitating initiatives such as the Formational Community for Church Planters and Pioneers and the interdiocesan learning community for rural resourcing churches.

In the project design, the BMO was intended to act as a second operating system within the diocese, similar to that used in some larger businesses who use a smaller, more agile entity involving enthusiasts from the core business to try new ways of doing things.⁴ Thus, it would be able to provide some mission R&D to the diocese, creating synergy with the second purpose of catalysing cultural change.

The project aspired to grow 1,200 new Christian disciples of all ages in the rural context by the end of 2024. Taking into consideration the upheaval caused by COVID-19 partway through, some project work has been extended to 2027 with a small amount of additional funding from the Strategic Ministry and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB).

A note on terminology: In practice, some people mistakenly refer to the Growing in God in the Countryside project as 'Lightwave' for short. This needs correcting; the difference is that Growing in God in the Countryside (or GiGitC) was the time limited SDF funded project now ending. The Lightwave Community is the dispersed mission community started by the project which continues to exist as a CIO, under its Bishop's Mission Order (BMO).

¹The second SDF project - *Inspiring Ipswich* - focused on the town of Ipswich and is due for review in autumn 2025.

²Our vision and calling is to be a diocese of "flourishing congregations making a difference", our priorities being to grow in Depth, Influence, Number and Younger...
Inspiring Ipswich and Growing in God in the Countryside: Second Stage Application for Strategic Development Funding, p. 7.

³*Inspiring Ipswich and Growing in God in the Countryside: Second Stage: Application for Strategic Development Funding*, pp. 8 & 67-70.

⁴This is a concept borrowed from John Kotter's 8-step change management model.
<https://www.kotterinc.com/methodology/8-steps/> [accessed 05/08/2025].



Research methodology

This review was timed to capture learning before Archdeacon Sally Gaze's post comes to an end and in time for a national rural conference hosted by the diocese in September 2025.

We gathered evidence from a critically appreciative perspective - celebrating progress and signs of God at work, whilst also asking critical-friend-type questions. The process was shaped by the Terms of Reference set out by the Funding & Learning team in London and the Strategic Programme Team and Lightwave Team in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

Using a strongly qualitative approach, this evaluation drew on the following sources:

- 1. Desk-based review of existing diocesan project documentation** which included Inspiring Ipswich and Growing in God in the Countryside Second Stage: Application for Strategic Development Funding plus appendices, change request documents, minutes of project board meetings, BMO/CIO Lightwave Annual Reports including videos and photos from Lightwave's 2025 AGM, GIG projects Learning Log, formational community papers, mid-project discernment report and a report of Phase 1 and 2 of the 2024/25 Appreciative Inquiry exercise.
- 2. Further qualitative data including:**
 - Individual interviews with 11 stakeholders by Zoom or in person, with responses from one stakeholder via email.
 - Visits to - and conversations with - leaders of all three rural hubs, local clergy working in partnership with two of these hubs, leaders/teams of a further four Lightwave groups and a gathering of Formational Community of Church Planters and Pioneers for storytelling and a meal. Furthermore, it was a privilege to join in with Sunday morning worship at Holy Trinity Long Melford and Sunday evening worship at Red Lodge (Forest Heath) and chat to attenders after each service.

All research has its **limitations**. Though we are confident that we have used the most appropriate methods to achieve the aims of the evaluation, the following limitations must be acknowledged:

- During the site-visit, we listened to the views of clergy, lay leaders and some congregation members, but we were not able to capture the wider perspectives of all congregation members or villagers in every benefice.
- Capturing an accurate picture of the life of a diocese in every detail is impossible; with its multi-layered, complex and ever-changing dynamics, this evaluation can only reflect what those interviewed shared. Working as a two-person team along with diocesan feedback following the interim and draft full reports assisted in the synthesising of diverse perspectives.

Researchers

We acknowledge our long-standing appreciation for pioneering and mission as a potential research bias. Claire attends a liberal catholic Anglican parish on the east side of Sheffield and worked for Church Army's Research Unit for 22 years. Richard is a former CEO of a church-planting mission agency and a former theological college principal, with a personal interest in the theological formation of pioneers.



Project achievements

Development of the Lightwave Community

- The Lightwave Community (or 'Lightwave' for short) is a six-year-old dispersed community operating under a Bishop's Mission Order with charitable status, providing support and accountability for rural pioneers, working in collaboration with local parishes.⁵
- It shares with the whole diocese the goal of making disciples, **working intentionally to 'make disciples who make disciples'** in rural areas through small ecclesial groups, their value-based practices and discipleship pathways. The latter is now used more widely in the diocese by mission-minded clergy.
- Lightwave ABCDE value-based practices⁶ have been consistently promoted, ensuring groups remain outward looking and - as noted in the Appreciative Inquiry exercise - where so often small missional communities can turn inward, Lightwave 'has avoided this' which is 'a remarkable achievement'.⁷
- Lightwave is good at seeing new disciples involved in mission from the start. **Particularly strong is the expectation that - through prayer - new leaders and helpers will emerge** from the wider community. Once identified, mission and ministry are shaped around them as much as possible.
- Details of actuals against targets (at end of 2024)⁸:

	Target	Stretch ⁹	Actuals	Notes
New rural disciples ¹⁰	1,200	1,500	657	47% of new disciples are children and young people. ¹¹ 300 new disciples are from rural hubs.
Small ecclesial groups/ Lightwave groups	45	60	41	Over 5 years, 60 started but some have stopped. 3 new groups began in 2025.
Fresh expressions of Church	45	60	33	4 new fxC began in 2025.
Rural resource hubs	3	3	3	Mini rural resource hubs have developed alongside the 3 funded hubs.*
New regular/planned givers	100	100	68	In 2024, monthly income (through planned regular giving) was £8,694 with an average per giver per month of £128. (The average in diocese was £58/month in 2023.)
Lightwave group leaders	-	-	77	Over 5 years, 77 leaders have led but some have moved on to other ministries and some groups have grown into different forms of ministry. Currently, there are 49 group leaders.

*Chadbrook Benefice and Place by the Water have developed as mini rural resource hubs. In addition, the rural/urban cluster of Bridge Communities joined Lightwave Community and has some aspects of a resource hub as defined within the Lightwave Community.

- As of 2025, 19% of benefices within the diocese have small ecclesial groups engaging in outreach and an estimated 60 out of 111 benefices have received some degree of support for mission from Lightwave.¹² Numerous training opportunities were offered to support rural pioneers including the mission shaped ministry course and Launchpad. **Training with relational and experiential elements were particularly appreciated by local stakeholders** e.g. Envoy coaching, sharing stories at Lightwave gatherings, visiting nearby examples of outreach.

⁵ In the bid Lightwave was called the Suffolk Fresh Expressions Community - a holding name to get charitable status and apply for grant funding. Lightwave emerged as the name through prayer and consultation with early adopters.

⁶ All Involved, Becoming Disciples, Creating Community, Doing Evangelism, Encountering God.

⁷ R. Matthews (2025) Final Report from Phases 1 and 2 of the Discernment Process Concerning the Future of the Lightwave Community in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, p. 7.

⁸ Lightwave CIO Annual Report 2024.

⁹ These 'stretch' targets were the original targets from a sense that - through prayerful discernment - 1,500 disciples was the God-given goal to aim for. Revised targets were agreed after the budget for the project was reduced before it was finally awarded in December 2018. The stretch targets were kept as aspirational.

¹⁰ New disciples are defined as those not previously regularly attending any church. Regular attendance is defined as monthly attendance.

¹¹ Lightwave CIO Annual Report 2024, p. 5.

¹² Taken from the diocese's 'Key Learning to Date' included in bid for STF/SMMIB funding.



- Lightwave was described by local leaders as helpful for those who want to develop something outside of traditional Sunday morning services - especially worship that suits different learning styles or that meet outdoors. The discipleship pathway model gave local leaders confidence to create fuzzy-edged gatherings for newcomers to explore faith without undue pressure.
- Acknowledging that this is not the only mission taking place in the diocese, clearly some Christians have felt able to thrive through involvement with Lightwave in ways that were less possible within traditional parish alone.¹³ For example:
 - Parish clergy involved in oversight of mission spoke of the prayer support from the Lightwave team, support with safeguarding administration for an increase in local leaders/volunteers and Archdeacon Sally's coaching for how to develop disciples, especially from outreach already begun.¹⁴
 - For those wishing to engage in mission who, for one reason or another, feel the need of additional or different support to what can be given by a local PCC, Lightwave gives them permission to exist, support in applying for grant funding, a way to connect with like-minded practitioners and the chance to be part of something bigger that feels exciting, validated by senior diocesan clergy.
 - Some existing urban fresh expressions of Church have come under Lightwave governance because the governance was flexible for their developmental stage and context and made them accountable to trustees who understood pioneering.
- The three rural hubs recorded a total of 12 confirmations up to the end of 2024 and the number of baptisms that have occurred because of Lightwave involvement are estimated to be:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Lightwave-associated benefices	157	33	118	162	140	127
Hubs/Groups	0	1	5	14	8	8
Total	157	34	123	176	148	135

Contributing to culture transformation for rural mission

- Building on the pattern of bishop's evenings in the existing Auxiliary Ordination Pathway¹⁵, Archdeacon Sally Gaze began the Formational Community for Church Planters and Pioneers (whether part of Lightwave or not). Serving around 25 leaders, it nurtured pioneering vocations through mutual sharing and modelled rooting ministry in spiritual disciplines. At the same time, it benefitted those new to the Church of England in learning together about the riches of Anglican traditions, liturgy, saints and seasons and ways they are being used in pioneering. As well as connecting pioneers, it also enabled the two bishops to connect with their lay pioneers and hear their perspectives.
- The project gave birth to Suffolk in Prayer - an ecumenical movement of prayer which was especially active in COVID-19. The project also enabled Doorstep Carols during the Christmases affected by COVID-19.
- The project enabled the development of a new Rural Chaplaincy team as a Lightwave group and enabled its transfer to wider diocesan ownership in 2024/5.
- The project hosted an interdiocesan and interdenominational rural resourcing church learning community. This led to learning between dioceses which will be shared in the national LoveRural conference in September 2025 and in a Grove booklet in 2026. The project collaborated with Myriad¹⁶ in starting the Growing New learning community. This brought urban and rural pioneers and pioneering teams together to learn from each other and created synergy in the diocese between urban and rural mission.
- Since 2018, the project has contributed to **nurturing/supporting new rural pioneering vocations** within the diocese in the following ways:

¹³ This was a question raised in R. Matthews (2025) Final Report from Phase 1 and 2 of the Discernment Process: Concerning the Future of the Lightwave Community in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, p. 7.

¹⁴ This is not to say that clergy and their teams cannot do this by themselves, but the sheer number of spinning plates in multi-parish benefices means the Lightwave Community has been very helpful for keeping discipleship a priority.

¹⁵ This is the diocese's course through which experienced lay readers train for local ordained ministry.

¹⁶ Myriad facilitates learning communities for lay church planters - a pathway/process designed by the Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication <https://ccx.org.uk/myriad-pathway/> [accessed 05/08/2025].



Level of Support	Those who became...			
	...ordained/ ordinands	...licensed lay leaders	...other kinds of lay leaders ¹⁷	...incumbents who support/oversee pioneers
Input through mentoring and prayer for those leading some kind of Lightwave ministry	9	9 (5 licensed as pioneers)	40	19
Input of early formation/training through formational community or mentoring	9	8	2	
Some input e.g. attended a small group course	15	7		
Relational support through chaplaincy, GiGitC initiative or Lightwave-associated benefice	19	1		

¹⁷ For example, Lightwave group leaders, lay elders, chaplaincy support team and office holders.



Illustrative summaries (South-East): Emerge and Place by the Water

Emerge Rural Hub

Began: October 2020

Where: Playford, on the outskirts of Ipswich

Type of rurality: Connected rural i.e. commuters, young families.

Leadership resource: One full-time licensed lay leader. (From January 2025, the leader is 0.6).

Places/times of meeting: Weekly in village hall on Sunday am, meeting in homes/gardens for Gather, Bible Book Club, Gardening Club and engaging in outreach like Singing Ducklings in Grundisburgh Village Hall.

Key challenges:

- Start delayed due to changes in leadership and COVID-19.
- In hindsight, not a location one could easily plant out from again.
- Vacancies and changes in local beneficed clergy made the building of partnerships more difficult.

Integration with parish life: Collaborations with three benefices including Alpha, Little Borrowers wildlife initiative in churchyard, children's outreach events and clubs, schools work and village youth club.

Key achievements:

- Growing a core team and credibility from scratch.
- Intergenerational church with families doing local outreach who wouldn't have gone to parish first.
- Growing new disciples (including 8 baptisms/confirmations).
- Discipleship of teenagers: 'youth take-over' Sundays, Youth Alpha, and plan for youth congregation.

Why they needed Lightwave: For appropriately-shaped governance, authorisation, finance and accountability, prayer support, networking and peer learning with other parts of the Lightwave Community.

Place by the Water

Began: Began before Lightwave, but joined in 2019 and moved to Shottisham January 2022.

Where: Was on a farm in Kirton, now at Shottisham Vicarage by the River Deben, east of Woodbridge.

Type of rurality: Deep rural (with shrinking populations), rural farms/landowners.

Leadership resource: Self-supporting curate (0.2 for benefice) and 0.4 as Lightwave House for Duty.

Places/times of meeting: Fortnightly Sunday Suppers (fxC), fortnightly The Well gatherings, courses such as the Identity Course, quarterly family days, retreat days and parish or individual retreat bookings.

Key challenges:

- It's hard to 'live by faith' and be reliant on grant funding for financial support.
- It's hard to measure impact numerically when ministry includes seeing the faith of existing churchgoers transformed and a lot of 1-1 work with damaged or disillusioned Christians.

Integration with parish life: Shottisham congregation has grown from 4 to 20 - 2 come to Place by the Water.

Key achievements:

- A place of faith development and healing for a wide variety of people.
- Growth of Sunday Suppers as a fxC which complements and builds up the local parish.
- Helped people stay connected with church on Zoom during COVID-19.
- Now appreciated by the diocese as a much-needed place of hospitality, prayer and retreat.

Why they needed Lightwave: For appropriately-shaped governance, authorisation, finance and accountability, prayer support, networking and peer learning with other parts of the Lightwave Community.



Learning around contributing factors

What helped the project:

Listening: The project design came about through missional listening sponsored by Rural Ministries. The mid-project spiritual discernment process in 2022 and the Appreciative Inquiry exercise for the Lightwave Community in 2025 enabled further listening and helped both project and community learn and adapt. Although sometimes difficult to hear mixed feedback, leaders' persistence to keep asking 'Where is God at work in the rural Church?' helped position the diocese at the forefront of the national rural conversation.

Championing of pioneering by senior leadership: Rt Revd Mike Harrison, the Bishop of Dunwich, championed the project from the start. Bishop Mike recruited Archdeacon Sally Gaze to the diocese from the neighbouring Diocese of Norwich, sponsored and advocated for the BMO and chaired the Growing in God in the Countryside project board. His episcopal lead was very much missed when he left the diocese.

Understanding of rural ministry by senior leadership: Archdeacon Sally's expertise '... was invaluable. She understands the small, and the importance of service and story-telling in a rural context.' Although in hindsight there were some drawbacks to the new post being made an archidiaconal one, many rural Christians were encouraged by an explicitly rural role having such senior status.

Diocesan staff support: For a diocese new to pioneering, the diocesan staff team (and registrar) provided excellent support to get new HR, safeguarding, finance and legal systems in place for the never-been-tried-before BMO/CIO.

Nurturing the grassroots stars: Rather than trying to recruit lots of pioneers from elsewhere to rural areas, the project sought to resource local 'stars' to develop their vision by funding them a day a week as Rural Outreach Pioneers. This meant local work blossomed swiftly with a better chance of being locally sustainable and developing new leaders.

What hindered the project:

External deadlines: The pressure of SDF bid deadlines meant background consultation work was done swiftly and with early adopters. More time for consultation was needed with sceptics before project launch. Also needed was more time with diocesan staff helping them understand that the dual operating system was not a separate entity.

Inaccurate and evolving terminology: Too many different terms and labels were used for aspects of the project, with considerable confusion over what was project and what was Lightwave (many assumed they were the same thing) and therefore there was only a limited understanding of the two different workstreams.

The growing use of the term new worshipping community in the wider Church, in place of the overlapping concept of fresh expression of Church, also contributed to confusion. While some would argue in practice these terms mean the same thing, others value the concept of fxC for its work with the non-churched, using the longer fx journey of 'serving-first' rather than 'worship first'. There is a danger that pioneering work with the non-churched is overlooked with this change.

Timed funding for appointments: Several appointments (on common tenure) were enacted over-quickly due to this being a time-limited project. This did not allow enough time for on-the-ground vision building or waiting for the right person to emerge.

Hindrances to local ownership of finance: The generous central finance invested in the project meant that the need to give was less visible to potential Lightwave donors at local level. The timeframe available for the



SDF project funding was not sufficient to establish Lightwave hubs and then gradually taper central funding in order to encourage the building of local giving and fundraising to support financial sustainability. In addition, these hubs have an emphasis on working with people with whom growth of stewardship is more challenging - children and young people and those new to faith with non-churched backgrounds. Despite this, fundraising has been achieved and is a key element of current and future sustainability and a factor in attracting ongoing funding externally, including from the NCIs, which will allow more time to achieve sustainability.

There are limitations in the way the national Church measures church attendance in reporting Lightwave attendance, especially fresh expressions of Church (fxC) data. FxCs often meet monthly in term time, so when dioceses are required to record attendance in the month of October, some fxCs do not meet because of the half-term school holiday. For fxCs and many rural parishes where meetings are less frequent, Average Weekly Attendance (AWA) does not reflect the size of the groups in a meaningful way. If larger churches hold special services in October, then the AWA numbers can be inflated. For these reasons, the project team have much preferred using the new disciples measure.

Leadership support of innovation

Innovative projects that challenge the status quo need a high degree of support and advocacy from senior leadership. Interviewees expressed their gratitude for the many senior staff who worked extremely hard to accommodate and support the project. Dioceses considering such projects should recognise the need for:

- Visible and engaged episcopal support, with adequate time given to developing a clear understanding of what is needed for the project to be fruitful.
- United senior leadership able to advocate for the project and challenge negative narratives from the very start. The pace of the project hampered adequate time being invested in this during the development and early stages of the project.
- Close senior level coworking with the Mission and Ministry team. A lack of opportunities for this early on meant the Lightwave Community became too separate to be a second operating system, and opportunities were missed where engagement would have supported the project.
- Leadership willingness to help navigate difficult dynamics. Some pioneers walked away feeling they'd failed because they'd not been warned that local churches would react negatively. Equally, some mission superiority - although unintentional - probably didn't help. Both 'sides' need a degree of humility and enabling leadership can help facilitate these dynamics.
- Consideration of challenges that may arise from differences in church tradition. In this case, some suspect that difficulties sprung from a difference in church tradition, with Lightwave operating more from an evangelical perspective within a more liberal catholic diocese.



Learning around missional design

Ecclesial small groups

In a rural context, a discipleship strategy with small ecclesial groups at its heart has significant strengths in:

- Living out shared values
- Needing designated leader/s who engage in small group leader training
- Keeping people and relationships (not programmes) as key
- Generating new leaders
- Bestowing legitimacy on even the smallest groups in tiny centres of population
- Needing no financial outlay
- Demonstrating that growth and reproducibility is achievable

Requiring the small groups to commit to leading a fresh expression of Church (fxC) or mission project (trying new approaches to connect with new people) reinforced the outward focus of the groups - **making disciples who make disciples**. In reality, some fxC began before small groups, and for others, they began in parallel or afterwards.

The small group dynamic works particularly well for being able to resource social events (always popular in rural contexts) and outdoor fxCs rotating around a multi-parish benefice; the exploratory nature of forest/wild church fits well with gathering in different countryside locations and PCCs are pleased and proud when their churchyard is used, which helps build trust.

Yet it should be noted that in some traditional rural parishes, there is no culture of small group discipleship, so this strategy remains a challenge where there is no time or interest for it.

A diocesan-wide Bishop's Mission Order (BMO)

Created in 2018, this was one of the first diocesan-wide BMOs in the Church of England. Some described it as an ingenious way to support new groups that did not burden already-burdened PCCs. Others recognised that its impact has been limited to only some parts of the diocese.

For other dioceses who wish to consider a diocesan-wide BMO, be aware of the following:

- The evidence suggests that such a structure will encourage fresh expressions of Church to emerge and find helpful governance.
- The structure also makes it easier for pioneers to be recognised by the diocese.
- The BMO is likely to want to feel more like a mission movement and keep procedures to a minimum.
- Being diocesan-wide, it is less likely that anyone will object to its set-up - avoiding the 'not in my patch' opposition - but keep in mind that inevitably some will feel it has been 'done to' them.
- A parallel structure with no parish boundaries in a context where parish boundaries are deeply cherished is incomprehensible to some and therefore threatening (especially when so big in scope).
- It may be less intimidating to those threatened by a BMO if it were granted to a smaller geographical area to develop prototype small groups and fxCs to model what is intended and inspire creativity.
- There is a scattergun nature to the work across such a large geographical area. Travel time from one end of the diocese to the other is considerable, which makes in-person meetings time-consuming. It is inevitable that not all parishes will be impacted in the first few years.
- A diocesan-wide BMO does not have to be designed in tandem with a new archdeacon post without jurisdiction. If such a post is created, the post-holder will still need to work through geographical archdeacons for archidiaconal functions, which feels counter-productive.
- In hindsight, the title 'Archdeacon for Rural Mission' played unhelpfully into mistaken narratives that Lightwave was claiming superiority/exclusivity of all rural mission in the diocese.



Paradoxically, **the diocesan-wide BMO for the Lightwave Community feels like the project's greatest strength yet also one of its greatest challenges.** In seeking to provide a second operating system, some very subtle manoeuvring was needed to see the BMO create 'space' distinct from the larger, normal diocesan structures and yet remain connected in order to see it embedded into diocesan systems. Examples of the practical outworking of this paradox include:

- Gathering community members in-person, yet not wanting to be perceived as meeting separately too often and taking people away from parish.
- The meeting of numerical targets to demonstrate project effectiveness was evidenced in the Statistics for Mission of local parishes where Lightwave has had an impact, as well as in the Lightwave BMO annual reports.
- Lightwave leaders work hard to generate giving from new people and apply for grant funding - to avoid giving being transferred from existing parish giving.

Lightwave rural hubs

In the Stage 2 bid document, rural hubs were called rural resourcing churches, but this language was modified locally as the term generated expectations of more resources to share than were available. However, they were intended to be of a larger scale and scope to the other Lightwave groups, creating critical mass for discipling younger generations, planting further groups and coordinating collaborative work across wider areas.

Although three contexts for potential hubs were identified at bid stage, only one (Red Lodge) - developed into what became known as a rural hub. It proved additionally challenging to create two further rural hubs. One was planned in and around Otley Agricultural College (now part of Suffolk New College) but following an OFSTED inspection and a change of management, this plan was no longer tenable and the hub restarted on Zoom during lockdown in Playford. In Bungay, an approach was taken to appoint an incumbent who would also lead the hub. The first post-holder was not comfortable with this and handed the leadership to the associate leader. More recently, a new Bungay incumbent has taken on the leadership of the hub, leading to much greater collaboration.

The three rural hubs have developed contextually as three uniquely different churches. Staying faithful to the small ecclesial group values, they have grown by multiplying the number of small groups/gatherings, which helps with the sometimes inapt spaces they must meet in. Over the six years, Red Lodge counts 160 new disciples among their attendance, with Bungay counting 98 and Emerge/Playford 42.

All three have taken longer to develop than outlined in the original bid, but with delays in recruiting leaders, no dedicated buildings of their own nor a large group of Christians moving to be part of the plant, this is hardly surprising. They remain at modest stages of resourcing local parishes, with only Red Lodge coordinating such resourcing in a more widely accepted and strategic way. The three hubs' resourcing role is most evident within Lightwave - and in the growing diocesan network of pioneers - delivering small group training and supporting/inspiring Lightwave group leaders and pioneers.

While not as well developed as anticipated in the original bid, these hubs are important to the project for demonstrating that:

- There are non-churched people not being reached through multi-parish benefices who are facilitated in coming to faith by a different contextual model alongside parish church.
- There is a younger demographic, not being reached through multi-parish benefices who are facilitated in coming to faith and witnessing to their neighbours by a different contextual model alongside parish church. All hubs have created a degree of critical mass for children's and youth discipleship at some depth.
- The existence of Christian community outside the parish model can be an enrichment of the mixed ecology and can extend reach to new people, predominantly complementing rather than competing with small parish churches in multi-parish benefices.
- There are people who will give generously to this kind of pioneering ministry who were not previously giving to parish churches.



Illustrative summaries (West): Red Lodge and Chadbrook Benefice

Red Lodge Rural Hub (now called Forest Heath)

Began: 2019

Where: Red Lodge, along the A11 corridor (an old truck stop).

Type of rurality: Extended village from a (now) 20-year-old new housing development.

Leadership resource: Leader, assistant leader (from 2021) and a small team of part-time workers.

Places/times of meeting: Used local sports pavilion but now based at St Christopher's (a Methodist/Anglican LEP) with different congregations meeting on Sunday and many groups meeting throughout the week.

Key challenges:

- No building (and seeking to build their own building being a lot of work).
- Governance for working as an Anglican Methodist hub in an Anglican-Methodist parish.
- Working at financial sustainability when many new disciples are under 18.

Integration with parish life: Considerable crossover with Sunday morning services at St Christopher's. Team have been supporting other parishes in mission and this is now extending to starting small groups and fxC.

Key achievements:

- Lives transformed by commitments to follow Jesus and numbers baptised.
- Seeing new leaders and volunteers emerge from the community - a few almost miraculously.
- Securing £79.5k of grant funding for Helping Hands and over £11k for food bank (from 2020 to 2024).
- Holiday clubs, after-school clubs and youth church, so 'a centre of excellence for youthwork'.

Why they needed Lightwave: For appropriately-shaped governance, finance and accountability, for help with publicity/advertising and grant funding, prayer support, networking and peer learning with other parts of the Lightwave Community and - moving forward - to operate as a resource for the deanery.

Chadbrook Benefice

Began: Before 2019

Where: Five churches to the north of Sudbury in Long Melford, Alpheton, Shimpling and Lawshall.

Type of rurality: Large rural village and rural farms/landowners.

Leadership resource: Parish clergy and lay team, including two Rural Outreach Pioneers.

Places/times of meeting: Weekly 4 o'clock Community fxC with different styles of gathering in different parts of the benefice, Connect Under 5s fxC, youth worship band and men's ministry.

Key challenges:

- Keeping on top of the many demands of a multi-parish benefice, including administration.
- Hidden rural deprivation and social isolation.
- Being all things to all people in rural parishes.

Integration with parish life: A mixed ecology that feels normal within the benefice.

Key achievements:

- Mission momentum has grown steadily.
- The volunteer team has grown from 3 to 30.
- Building connections with local farmers/landowners has helped outdoor church and social events.

Why they needed Lightwave: To think through discipleship pathways beyond starting initiatives, for support from a leader who has led growth in a rural context, for prayer support and to reinforce that all rural churches have assets: 'What is your church rich in?'



Implementation

Staffing

Central team 2019-2024

Post	FTE	Start and end dates of funding
Administrator and Prayer Coordinator	1.0	2019-2024
Communications Missioner	0.5	2019-2024
Project Manager and Finance	Varied	2019-continuing until 2026 on 0.4
Archdeacon for Rural Mission	1.0	2019-2025 (including time off for cancer treatment)
Associate Leader/Leader Designate	0.5	Mid-2025 onwards

Hub staffing 2019-2024¹⁸

Post	FTE	Start and end dates of funding
Red Lodge Leader	1.0 to 0.5 from mid-2025	2019-continuing with curate and SMMIB funding
Red Lodge ROP/Assistant Leader	0.8 to 1.0	2019-continuing with SMMIB funding
Red Lodge ROP/Children's & Families Worker	0.4 to 1.0	2019-continuing with Beacon Area funding
Red Lodge Café Manager	0.6	2023-2025
Red Lodge Youth Leader	1.0	2024-continuing with SMMIB funding
Emerge Leader	1.0 to 0.6	2020-2025 hub giving has been contributing
Emerge Youth Worker ROP	A day and a half a week	2024-2025
Bungay Incumbent (originally Hub Leader)	0.3 funding towards f/t post	2021-2025-continuing with parish giving
Bungay Leader (originally Associate Leader)	1.0	2022-continuing with SMMIB funding
Bungay Community Choir Director	22.5 hrs a week term time	2022-continuing with SMMIB funding (for music)
Bungay Administrator	A day a week ROP	2024-continuing with SMMIB funding
Place by the Water Leader	p/t House for Duty	2019-2024-continuing with giving and grants

In addition, the project made a part contribution to three curate posts and four incumbent posts in benefices who couldn't afford a full-time incumbent and had potential for growth and outreach.¹⁹

Staff were not furloughed during lockdown and, despite the many limitations of COVID-19, some aspects of the project blossomed e.g. using Zoom to stay connected across the county, developing the Helping Hands outreach at Red Lodge, Doorstep Carols and the birth of Suffolk in Prayer with other denominations.

Archdeacon Sally Gaze and Andrew Gosden (Project Manager) were described as the 'glue' that held the varied and dispersed people and projects together. A lot of the managing fell on Archdeacon Sally's shoulders as she took on much of the mentoring. We note intermittent mention of the Lightwave Community Council having to rely on project staff.²⁰

¹⁸ Funding supported a total of 11 Rural Outreach Pioneers (a day a week). Most ROPs served for two years.

¹⁹ Appendix A includes details of the amount of funding spent on this part-contribution to parish clergy.

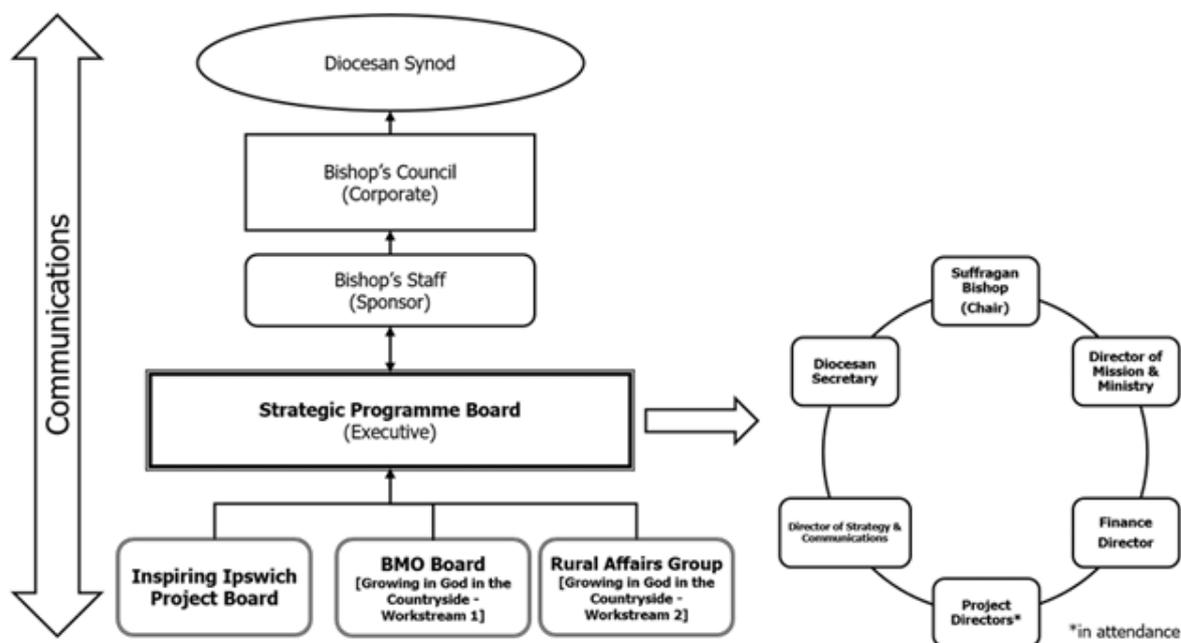
²⁰ GiGitC Project Plan 2022 Measures and Milestones, p. 5.



While on paper staffing looks relatively generous, the site-visit was helpful in demonstrating **how much team members give above and beyond paid hours**. One stakeholder commented that pioneers in the diocese ‘have to work hard because they have a lot to prove, while working in areas with historically low church engagement.’ We are therefore concerned about the workload of continuing staff members as Archdeacon Sally and Andrew Gosden’s posts come to an end.

Governance

Section 5 of the bid document²¹ outlined the following governance structure:



The single BMO Board acted as the project board for GiGitC for the first two years. From 2021 onwards, **the governance functions of the GiGitC Project and the Lightwave Community were separated out**. A project board - chaired by Bishop Mike Harrison, the Bishop of Dunwich - managed the time-limited funded GiGitC project and the Lightwave Community Council managed the Lightwave Community BMO/CIO. This helped lessen the tension of one person - Archdeacon Sally - being both project lead and leader of Lightwave Community.

Interviewees reflected that the project was managed well, monitoring progress and **collecting data without being too heavy-handed**. The Lightwave central team concluded it was often easier to telephone Lightwave group leaders to ask for an update on numbers along with a pastoral chat rather than send out email reminders which were not always responded to promptly.

The project’s engagement with deanery structures was raised by a number of stakeholders. Some thought more work should have been done engaging and communicating with rural deans and deanery synods. Others felt deanery workshops were not a good use of time as deanery structures have not been primarily shaped for mission and are made up of people with different opinions regarding new projects. It often comes down to whether the rural dean has ‘bought into’ the vision and will advocate for the project as part of the ministry of the deanery.

²¹ *Inspiring Ipswich and Growing in God in the Countryside Second Stage: Application for Strategic Development Funding, p. 11.*



Sustainability

It was expected that central team posts would end in 2024/5. The roles which were anticipated to continue included the leaders of the rural hubs²² and the continued provision of a leader for the mission community with a strong voice on 'Bishop's staff'.

Despite much effort, planning for sustainability was slowed by Archdeacon Sally's sick leave and both bishops leaving the diocese in 2024/25. The Archdeacon of Suffolk is chairing the project board and the additional SMMIB funding means some roles are sustained until 2027, but some decisions are waiting the arrival of the new diocesan bishop while the diocese has been under the leadership of the interim bishop.

Sustaining the Lightwave Community

The small ecclesial groups and fxC look set to continue as they are dependent on the energy and commitment of unpaid volunteers. All being well, the new disciples in these groups/fxCs will continue to grow (and make further disciples). Groups/fxCs are being encouraged to review whether now is the time for governance/finance to come under PCCs (if not already). The Agricultural Chaplaincy Lightwave Group has transitioned to become a recognised diocesan ministry under the supervision of diocesan staff.

The Lightwave Community BMO/CIO looks set to continue to exist in what looks to be a slimmed down role for the governance of those groups and hubs whose mission cannot be covered by a PCC and for informal support of the wider network of groups. It is anticipated that the leadership position will be taken on as a 0.5 role by Diane Grano, one of the current hub leaders who has already gained substantial experience in chairing the BMO council and mentoring hub and group leaders. Through the recent Appreciative Inquiry exercise, how Lightwave should continue is being discussed with a wide group of stakeholders. Existing diocesan staff are willing to take on parts of the ministry - indeed some are already stepping into training roles - and some elements such as the formational community are being de-branded to clearly communicate what was always the case - just not fully understood - that these are ministries for all within the diocese.

The sustainability of the rural hubs with funded staff is concerning. The journey to full financial sustainability of paid leadership from hub giving looked unachievable by 2024 and SMMIB funding has helped give more time for two of the three hubs to work for this by the end of 2027. The other has stronger giving and lower costs (0.6 FTE leader) and is on a path to full sustainability. The downsides of cliff-edge funding are being felt keenly by the project and the Lightwave Community with a wish that other funding models had been available in 2018 - either tapered funding at the start or end. It is hard to apply for grants when work is fully funded.

Things do feel somewhat precarious as, without Archdeacon Sally, no one will know all these projects first-hand. Furthermore, it would be a shame if a move to 'slim down' Lightwave, and see Lightwave groups embedded under the governance of parish PCCs where possible, discouraged the starting of more small ecclesial groups to build on the momentum of the last six years. Similarly, the preservation and oversight of the Lightwave Community and its missional energies requires a similar kind of archidiaconal and episcopal support in the future as that which has allowed for its development to date.

²² *Inspiring Ipswich and Growing in God in the Countryside Second Stage: Application for Strategic Development Funding*, p. 105.



Illustrative summaries (North and county-wide): Bungay and Agricultural Chaplaincy

Bungay and Beyond Rural Hub

Began: 2022

Where: Bungay, near Lowestoft serving the deanery.

Type of rurality: Small market town surrounded by very small villages.

Leadership resource: Full-time clergy leader, term-time Associate Leader and Choir Director, a day a week administrator (and from 2025, a part-time Children's and Youth Worker).

Places/times of meeting: Sunday 4pm weekly and midweek activities (Alpha, Spud Club).

Key challenges:

- Development of mixed ecology in deanery delayed when previous incumbent stopped leading hub.
- This required the associate leader to step into hub leadership which put pressure on the other hub staff and slowed the development of the hub's missionary effectiveness.
- Christians of different denominations who want to be part of hub and home church at same time.

Integration with parish life: Although integration was delayed, very warm relationships have developed and the new parish incumbent is working closely with the hub team.

Key achievements:

- Growing a core team and credibility from scratch.
- The discipleship of young people: Youth Alpha, youth band, hosted Youthscape Essentials Training.
- Collaborative work with Bungay Primary School (not a CofE school).

Why they needed Lightwave: For governance and financial support, finance and accountability, training for contextual mission, prayer support, networking and peer learning with other parts of Lightwave.

Agricultural Chaplaincy

Began: 2020

Where: Diocesan-wide.

Type of rurality: Farming communities.

Leadership resource: Volunteer lead chaplain and team.

Places/times of meeting: Team meets monthly on Zoom. Chaplaincy available 24/7.

Key challenges:

- Hidden stress and high suicide rates, exacerbated by family inheritance issues.

Integration with parish: Doesn't fit well into a parish or benefice as chaplains feel like 'benched footballers'.

Key achievements:

- Bringing comfort and the knowledge that the church cares for people in the agricultural sector.
- Chaplain speaks the language of farmers and helps parish clergy to connect/understand.
- Four services a year at Bury Cathedral celebrating rural festivals.
- Proactive with media and fundraising e.g persuading local businesses to contribute.
- Celebrating farmers do more than farm and do a lot for churches/communities in practical ways.
- Working well alongside the previous diocesan agricultural chaplain who was extremely supportive.

Why they needed Lightwave: To grow a diocesan-wide team, to mentor chaplains to pioneer in new ways, governance, help with fundraising and applying for grants. Chaplaincy doesn't directly benefit local parish, but Lightwave helped the team to recognise where they needed to consult and collaborate through the oversight of an archdeacon.



Learning around cultural transformation for rural mission (and transferability to other dioceses)

Although this was intended as a separate workstream, we were not given much in the way of specific evidence to explore what has actually happened. Senior diocesan clergy are convinced that GiGitC has helped the diocese to rethink rural, and lots of incumbents have been encouraged to try new things. It has helped to inculcate a sense of prayer and mission and hope in some places and in others it has helped to further develop good things that were already happening.

It was hoped that the existence of the Lightwave Community alongside conventional diocesan structures would, among other things, help with the following:

- restoring the importance of all ages in rural ministry.
- synergy with the work of church schools.
- rurally adapted ministerial training.
- rurally appropriate ministerial deployment.
- rural social and business engagement.
- helping rural church buildings to find their proper place and 'vocation'.
- nurturing connections between parish and fxC in rural mixed economy ministry.
- establishing an ongoing culture of adaptability and learning.

From the report content noted above, it is evident that there has been a degree of work and learning in these areas, but we were unable to examine any of them in any detail.

What is of more significance for this question of catalytic impact is what happens to Lightwave groups now that GiGitC draws to an end? Can they be 'reintegrated into' traditional parish structures, as some would hope? Or can a way forward be found that allows Lightwave to retain its role as a catalyst, a provocateur, and a vehicle for mission for those not drawn to the traditional parish system? If integration means subsuming Lightwave into longer-standing structures until it is all but invisible, then something vital will be lost. How can the messiness and complexity of the current reality be allowed to continue in a fruitful and productive way for the benefit of the whole diocese, allowing both Lightwave to continue to flourish and a broader benefit be felt across the diocese?

The Theos report *Doing Good Better: The Case for Faith-Based Social Innovation*²³ suggests that sometimes what is needed is not more but different - new ideas, new approaches, new practices. Innovators work at a small scale, developing their ideas and prototypes before looking to see if they can be taken up at scale. This requires a hospitable environment and, given that religious institutions often have strong leadership structures that hinder the emergence of entrepreneurial behaviours, the report asks how such an environment might be inculcated. It quotes with approval the late Pope Francis' 2013 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelisation is always 'new'.

²³ P. Bickley (2017) www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2017/05/03/doing-good-better-the-case-for-faith-based-social-innovation [accessed 20/07/2025].

The question then arises, how can these new things sit alongside the existing, in such a way that they are mutually supportive rather than competitive? How can churches do the same things better while also doing things differently? How can Lightwave be allowed to remain true to itself and its values, while the inherited parish structures are also helped to grow and to flourish? How can they learn from each other?

What follows is not a blueprint, but an exploration of ideas that might be of value to these discussions.

It has been suggested that all organisations, including churches, need to learn to be ambidextrous, that is, able to do the current things well while also developing new approaches. It takes considerable managerial skill to maintain the complexity and diversity of the current realities. By way of contrast, entrepreneurial skills are needed to take advantage of new opportunities. And it is the role of leaders to hold both the managerial and the entrepreneurial together in creative tension. It is the remit of senior clergy with pastoral oversight (bishops with archdeacons) to hold the two together through enabling leadership.

It is the enabling function of leadership that bounds the organisation within the safety of policy, bureaucracy and administration, whilst also enabling the people within the organisation that comprise the complex adaptive system to find freedom to experiment, innovate, and respond to new realities.²⁴

Enabling leadership is a particular skill set that mobilises and resources others to act and knows when to step back and allow new things to emerge.²⁵ Enabling leaders know that the catalysing of cultural transformation for rural mission (or mission of any kind) is based on the unleashing of the skills and gifts of many different local people. It knows when to be highly visible in supporting these change agents and when to be invisible and allow them to flourish. At times, it is itself a catalyst, standing up for others and challenging the Church to be bolder, and at other times it needs to step back so that others can rise up. To be such a leader requires an extraordinary combination of conviction and deep humility, speaking up to enable space for others and yet also stepping back so that those others can then step forward. Enabling leaders are comfortable with tension and willing to make others feel uncomfortable. They have to be willing to take risks and to be able to cope with failure. They are comfortable with uncertainty and are confident that even in situations of great ambiguity there will be signs and patterns that provide clues for guiding action. This kind of strategic enabling leadership is essential in catalysing change for rural mission.

Enabling leadership also serves by creating adaptive spaces that sit between the operational/managerial leadership of the existing church structures and the entrepreneurial behaviours of the pioneer. Adaptive spaces are places that allow networked, informal, and egalitarian interactions that foster the generation of new ideas. Adaptive spaces allow the informal (entrepreneurial) and formal (operational) systems of an organisation to interact and connect in productive ways. They might not be permanent; they might be temporary and occasional rather than systemic and formal. But they exist to allow for communication and learning between groups that might otherwise rarely meet, and to grow trust and cohesion where there might previously have been suspicion. So where might these adaptive spaces exist within the diocese?

²⁴ R. Elkington and A. Upward (2016) 'Leadership as enabling function for flourishing by design', in *Journal of Global Responsibility*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 126-144.

²⁵ M. Uhl-Bien and M. Arena (2017) 'Complexity Leadership: Enabling people and organizations for adaptability', in *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 46, pp. 9-20.



Conclusion

This project is an amazing piece of work in a difficult-to-change culture and has developed an encouraging number of groups not far off intended targets. We heard it said that when a fresh expression of Church gathers 60 or 70 people it inspires so much hope that rural ministry is alive and mission is possible.

The community have been careful to track new disciples only (not total attenders), so the modest 657 reported so far indicates something of the number of de- and non-churched impacted which is quite an achievement (given the additional constraints of COVID-19). To keep this report concise, the stories of creative mission and individual lives changed have been summarised. To read more, visit www.lightwave.community.

All stakeholders spoke of the way the project has acted as a catalyst for new things, releasing mission-minded leaders and helpers who were - in many places - already doing mission. It has brought change and disruption by its mere existence as it challenges the status quo. Small ecclesial groups and discipleship pathways are now used more widely in diocesan plans and conversations, although the wider catalysing of cultural transformation for rural mission remains largely unevidenced beyond the anecdotal.

We hope the Lightwave Community will continue as a BMO as, with the project ending and Lightwave losing both Archdeacon Sally and Andrew Gosden in 2025, there is fragility; new-found faith needs careful nurture. Furthermore, maintaining and developing Lightwave is one way the diocese can live with the creative tension of providing adaptive spaces to pioneer new things alongside the traditional existing structures. We hope the new leaders of Lightwave will find they have advocates among the senior staff of the diocese.

Recommendations

- Continue Lightwave branding for the foreseeable future to lend stability with project staff leaving (and without adding yet more new language). This juncture offers a unique opportunity for clearer messaging about what Lightwave is and isn't.
- Advise local leaders to use what works best in their mission context in terms of Lightwave branding.
- Recruiting pioneers to rural areas is difficult - look for those already doing mission locally and resource them. If the Rural Outreach Pioneer Scheme isn't being continued, make sure there are ROP-type opportunities for lay and licensed lay pioneers, especially where they haven't got incumbent support.
- If/as the Lightwave Community is slimmed down as groups are embedded under parish governance, don't stop encouraging small groups, discipleship pathways and fresh expressions of Church as normal for all parishes in mission - whatever their church tradition - and continue to make the option of BMO governance available for those who need it.
- Through the Red Lodge experience, celebrate that the diocese now has experience of building church from scratch for any new areas of housing that develop along the A14 corridor and north of Ipswich.
- For future funding bids, keep in mind that:
 - Terms that work on paper in a strategy document need to also clearly communicate in everyday conversation to minimise confusion.
 - Ambition should be for long-term influence/change not short-term numerical growth - 6 years is just a starting point.
 - Church tradition is a big factor and to have advocates and case studies across a breadth of traditions will help win over sceptics.
 - Protect the chance to innovate in mission, and ensure the development of 'adaptive' spaces where the new and the existing can learn from one another.



Appendix A: A summary of GiGitC project expenditure²⁶

St Edmundsbury and Ipswich DBF	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	GRAND TOTAL	GRAND TOTAL	Better (worse) than latest CR
Growing in God in the Countryside to 31st March 2025	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Actuals	Year Total	Year Total	Year Total	Year Total	Forecast	As per Sept CR Approved 15/9/22	
SDF Contribution											
Central Support											
AD for Rural Mission/Leader LW	50,718	50,290	49,912	56,439	43,405	49,928	13,948	-	314,640	357,881	43,241
<i>SMMI/STF Funding</i>	-	-	-	-	(19,722)	-	(89,030)	(30,982)	-	-	-
Project Manager	25,776	36,847	33,007	32,586	32,130	33,554	25,874	21,565	241,339	208,382	(32,957)
Communications Missioner	6,560	13,826	18,116	18,655	18,461	19,720	2,128	300	97,766	106,656	8,890
Admin & Prayer Co-ordinator	18,236	25,149	25,204	25,831	27,202	28,798	-	-	150,419	152,010	1,592
Recruitment	5,872	1,432	-	-	-	1,450	-	-	8,754	9,304	550
Training and Development	1,512	5,802	6,377	1,066	1,757	4,446	22,211	-	43,171	45,000	1,829
Start up - Project	23,853	3,195	6,485	6,728	4,671	3,345	-	-	48,277	40,000	(8,277)
Central costs - potentially 5 posts	-	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	-	-	15,000	18,000	3,000
Software - Churchsuite	38	357	669	1,134	1,164	1,364	284	-	5,009	4,502	(507)
Website development / branding	380	-	86	1,896	-	-	2,320	-	4,682	4,682	-
Resourcing Church Community	912	3,538	3,639	2,056	6,261	20,614	6,673	3,075	46,769	28,150	(18,618)
Central Support Total	133,858	143,437	146,495	149,391	138,051	166,218	73,437	24,940	975,826	974,568	(1,258)
Lightwave Rural Hubs											
Red Lodge Lightwave Hub Ministry	15,374	49,213	50,851	50,975	49,664	25,183	13,948	-	255,208	274,132	18,924
Emerge Lightwave Hub Ministry	19,166	53,634	49,779	49,998	49,106	51,539	-	-	273,221	281,185	7,964
Bungay Lightwave Hub Ministry	-	-	15,804	77,707	69,066	49,790	50,240	16,473	279,080	268,506	(10,574)
Part time rural outreach Pioneers	916	10,488	54,135	58,601	51,443	66,622	62,214	39,679	344,099	278,261	(65,838)
RRC Capital - 3 churches start up	2,070	7,801	4,656	13,149	10,912	7,607	14,065	-	60,261	60,000	(261)
Housing where no property avail	10,500	2,000	15,258	13,675	11,020	2,923	-	-	55,376	83,516	28,141
Benefice additional funding	-	-	-	-	25,300	36,548	34,620	11,419	107,887	121,000	13,113
Lightwave Rural Hubs TOTAL	48,026	123,136	190,483	264,105	266,512	240,212	175,086	67,571	1,375,131	1,366,601	(8,531)
Community Engagement / Events	65	3,016	1,063	259	258	-	-	-	4,661	28,144	23,483
Project Evaluation	-	-	-	-	-	3,991	16,000	-	19,991	20,000	9
Less Strategic Capacity Funding	(17,436)	(21,542)	(17,026)	(17,264)	(17,708)	(20,024)	-	-	(111,000)	(111,000)	-
Less underspend DBF (BUDGET AD)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(6,591)	(6,591)
To be allocated	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,127	1,127
Total SDF	164,513	248,046	321,015	396,491	387,113	390,398	264,523	92,511	2,264,610	2,272,849	8,239
DBF Contribution											
Project Director Housing Costs	14,324	15,693	16,200	16,200	16,200	16,200	-	2,383	97,200	97,200	0
Curate 1	-	22,724	51,603	50,310	30,612	-	-	-	155,249	148,699	(6,549)
Curate 2	-	-	-	23,875	46,634	48,500	8,006	-	127,015	161,469	34,454
Curate 3	-	-	-	-	25,112	51,391	53,366	27,481	157,350	162,358	5,009
Learning Community	-	-	-	11,214	12,062	12,726	(1,440)	-	34,563	30,000	(4,563)
Curate Funding for hub leader	-	-	-	-	-	25,814	25,807	-	51,622	-	(51,622)
Gap to original contribution/budget	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6,591	6,591
Total DBF	14,324	38,418	67,803	101,599	130,620	128,818	59,932	29,864	622,998	606,318	(16,680)
Strategic Capacity Funding PM	17,436	21,542	17,026	17,264	17,708	20,024	-	-	111,000	111,000	-
ADDITIONAL FUNDING (DBF or SMMI/STF)											
Archdeacon for Rural Mission (SMMI/STF)	-	-	-	-	19,722	-	69,064	-	88,786	101,592	-
Associate Lightwave Leader (STF)	-	-	-	-	-	-	19,966	30,982	50,948	91,912	(51,622)
Additional Funding Totals					19,722	0	89,030	30,982	139,734		
GRAND TOTAL	196,273	308,006	405,844	515,354	535,441	539,239	324,455	122,375	2,998,608	2,990,167	(8,441)

²⁶ This summary is taken from 2025 SDFRP4+CIOP4 Combined Actuals+Outlook 30 April-2025 Dt2. The small projected overspend comes from the fact that the diocese agreed to pay for a year of one hub leader's curacy from the curate budget, in addition to the curate funding already committed.



Appendix B: A summary of Lightwave Community income and expenditure

Group / Hub		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 Jan to June
General								
501	Income	5	682	2,788	9,890	5,448	12,702	16,524
501	Expenditure	-	155	3,212	2,867	3,933	5,482	7,641
501	Current Fund Balance	5	532	109	7,131	8,646	15,866	24,750
Red Lodge								
502	Income	94	17,540	63,641	73,931	91,170	92,497	66,591
502	Expenditure	-	8,537	48,145	71,156	71,146	102,368	44,016
502	Current Fund Balance	94	9,097	24,592	27,367	47,391	37,520	60,095
Emerge								
503	Income	5	4,537	8,400	16,930	15,370	33,789	11,269
503	Expenditure	-	-	374	1,203	668	1,630	20,414
503	Current Fund Balance	5	4,542	12,568	28,294	42,996	75,156	66,010
Place by the Water								
504	Income	-	7,696	10,315	15,161	14,288	25,039	27,994
504	Expenditure	-	5,450	8,709	16,050	14,874	15,140	20,883
504	Current Fund Balance	-	2,246	3,852	2,963	2,377	12,276	19,387
Safe Harbour - now all transferred to St Helen's Ipswich								
505	Income	-	-	13,959	32,908	29,703	17,915	180
505	Expenditure	-	-	8,897	26,389	20,400	28,046	10,902
505	Current Fund Balance	-	-	5,062	11,581	20,883	10,752	30
Pilgrims Together								
506	Income	-	-	544	136	-	-	-
506	Expenditure	-	-	272	-	-	408	-
506	Current Fund Balance	-	-	272	408	408	0	0
Bungay and Beyond								
508	Income	-	-	-	2,569	17,857	17,487	25,501
508	Expenditure	-	-	-	303	7,920	14,168	15,242
508	Current Fund Balance	-	-	-	2,266	12,203	15,522	25,781
Agricultural Chaplaincy - now integrated with the DBF/Mission and Ministry								
509	Income	-	-	-	5,000	5,214	1,360	724
509	Expenditure	-	-	-	4,834	2,250	4,308	468
509	Current Fund Balance	-	-	-	166	3,130	182	437
Bridge Communities								
510	Income	-	-	-	-	80	177,030	18,432
510	Expenditure	-	-	-	-	-	48,775	35,215
510	Current Fund Balance	-	-	-	-	80	128,335	111,553
TOTAL								
	Income	103	30,456	99,647	156,525	179,129	377,819	167,215
	Expenditure	-	14,142	69,609	122,802	121,191	220,325	154,782
	Current Fund Balance	103	16,417	46,455	80,178	138,115	295,610	308,043



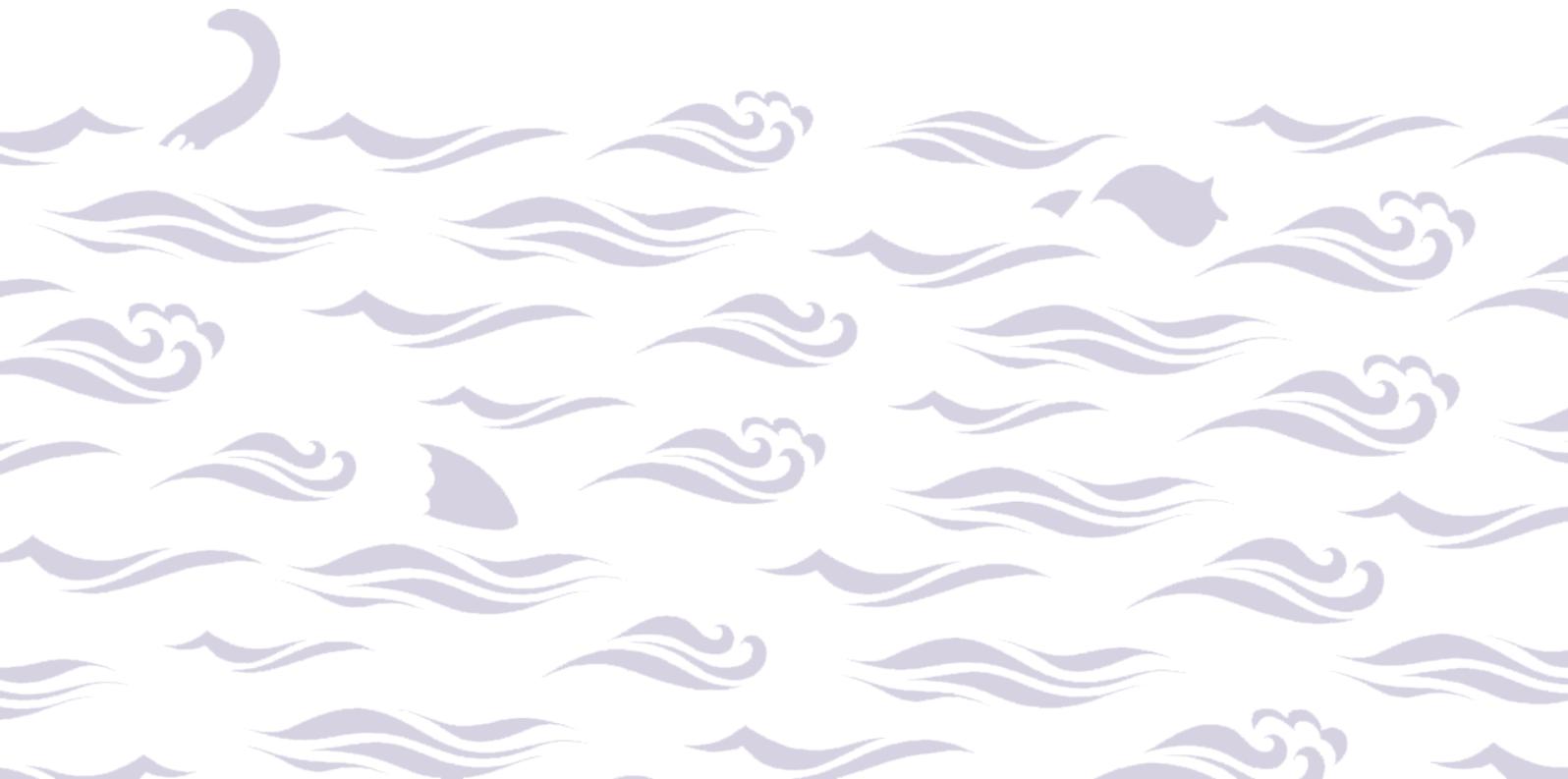


**BRENDAN
RESEARCH**

A Rising Tide

Inspiring Ipswich end-of-SDF-funding external review

Brendan Research
November 2025



Relevance and context

In 2019, the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich launched the Inspiring Ipswich project, one of two substantial diocesan projects² supported by Strategic Development Funding (SDF) and initiated to develop the wider diocesan vision strategy Growing in God.³

Comprising 23% of the diocese's population, Ipswich has the youngest age profile in the county. This makes it unique in comparison to the other 17 deaneries in the diocese and rich in potential for growth.

In 2017, the bishops began a programme of intentional missional change in Ipswich to respond to challenges of long-term congregational decline, clergy isolation and prospective areas of new housing with relatively little Christian witness. From three consultation events with clergy and lay leadership, the deanery identified 'communicating good news and growing new disciples' as its primary aspiration.

The vision for the project was to see a deanery transformed, led by strong and energised ministry teams. It sought to look outwards to the people not currently part of the Church, looking beyond parochial boundaries to what could be achieved for Ipswich. It sought to be inspirational, missional, relational and pastoral as it worked supportively and collaboratively with stakeholders, to live creatively and confidently with change.

The project was supported by £2.677m of Strategic Development Funding with over £1m of financial support from the diocese including gifts in kind.

The six-year project (2019-2024) began in March 2019 as Rhiannon King was appointed to the joint role of Project Director and Archdeacon of Ipswich. The project was organised under four workstreams:

1. Ipswich deanery leadership, strategy and planning
2. Parish development
3. Fresh expressions of Church (revised as new worshipping communities)
4. Church planting

The project worked to achieve the following targets as revised and agreed in the Stage 3 bid in early 2019⁴:

- Make **13,000** [15,000] **contacts** currently outside the Church.
- Engage **6,500** [7,500] **faith explorers**.
- Leading to **1,300** [1,500] **new Christian disciples**.
- Double the existing number of **worshipping communities from 25 to over 50**, including 6 [8] church plants, 15 [18] fresh expressions of Church and 5 new congregations.

Taking into consideration the upheaval caused by COVID-19, strategic development funding for the project was extended until the end of 2025.

Post-pandemic, the project was swift to access additional national funding sources including 2022 Posts of First Responsibility Strategic Ministry Funding (toward new clergy posts), SMMI innovation funding (for Perfect Peace), Growing Faith (for schools' work) and more to retrofit additional projects to help fulfil its aims.

² The second SDF project - Growing in God in the Countryside - supported the rural benefices of the diocese and gave birth to the Lightwave Community under a BMO. Both project and community were reviewed in summer 2025.

³ 'Our vision and calling is to be a diocese of "flourishing congregations making a difference", our priorities being to grow in Depth, Influence, Number and Younger...' Inspiring Ipswich & Growing in God in the Countryside: Stage 2 Application for Strategic Development Funding, p. 7.

⁴ The Stage 2 bid targets in brackets were kept as stretch targets on which the yearly targets were based (Appendix B).



Achievements

Workstream 1: Deanery leadership, planning and strategy

Outputs/activity included:

- Forming of the project team
- Patterns of daily and weekly project/deanery prayer times established
- Embedding the Deanery Leadership Team
- New clergy, licensed lay and church plant staff appointments

Perceived effectiveness:

One of the key outcomes of the project has been the arrival of a significant number of newly ordained younger clergy. These new clergy have embraced the Inspiring Ipswich vision (around which their jobs were shaped), even if they sometimes found its goals and targets to be a source of considerable pressure. They have formed a mutually supportive group, albeit sometimes at the expense of wider relationships with other clergy in the deanery. All spoke highly of support received on the Suffolk Ministry Development Programme.

With the Archdeacon of Ipswich as Project Director, the project in effect took over the pastoral and ecclesial deanery networks and structures to deliver its objectives. Deanery chapter and synod were described as previously lacking spark and cohesion. While some parishes/clergy chose not to engage in the life of the project, most conclude the deanery is now well served by gifted clergy united around a vision for mission. It was hoped the strong Deanery Leadership Team⁵ would take over leading on strategy during the project, but a lack of spare capacity has limited them in doing so.

Plans for a Resource and Innovation Hub (alongside the project's office space) at St Nicholas Centre did not develop as planned due to high running costs and the move to more home working post-COVID-19.

Workstream 2: Parish development

Outputs/activity included:

- Training for leaders including Growing Leaders, Kintsugi Hope, LyCiG, Going4Growth, Envoy
- Conferences, missional leaders' lunches, social events on how to achieve church growth
- Clergy support including training workshops, quiet mornings and help from the Estates Assistant
- Support for mission planning offered to every parish through mission companions
- Alpha training, the 'Everybody Welcome' course and the purchase of digital Start Course resources
- Informal networking through church wardens' breakfasts, treasurer meetings and Readers & LLM parties as well as support, resourcing and networking for Messy Church leaders, Top Up Shop managers⁶ and Alpha course leaders across the deanery

Perceived effectiveness:

All agree the development of non-governance spaces for networking has been effective in supporting parishes for mission. A few expressed regret that the tone at big gatherings seemed overwhelmingly positive; not only did this not always ring true but opportunities to learn from what had not worked were missed. In the early years of the project, the team of mission companions did very well to support the development of mission plans in as many parishes as they did; the mission companions worked sensitively to build trust with local leaders across a breadth of church tradition and varied existing mission engagement.

Stakeholders mentioned different resources as helpful with mission companions, LyCiG and the Messy Church support cited most frequently. Growing Leaders (adapted from CPAS material) was effective in

⁵ Formed in 2017 by Bishop Martin Seeley to lead on vision by resourcing events, training, networking and partnership (while functioning as the Deanery Standing Committee and the Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committee).

⁶ Customers pay £2 for one bag of shopping. Food comes from local supermarkets, FairShare and other local charities.



encouraging lay volunteers to explore leadership, although not all stayed the course. (See Appendix C for feedback from course participants.)

Good pioneer appointments (working alongside gifted clergy) were identified as important contributions to this workstream. That said, it was not without tension. Some parishes looked to the pioneers to operationalise ideas (which the pioneers only had capacity for in some parishes). Even some clergy supportive of the project reflected that the project sometimes pulled lay leaders or clergy away from parishes into work with other parishes or into deanery meetings and missional lunches (helpful though they often were).

Workstreams 3 and 4: Pioneering, new worshipping communities and church planting

Outputs/activity included:

- NWC training and coaching for local leaders by the Pioneer Developers
- Informal networking and sharing of NWC resources and expertise across the deanery including Messy Meet Ups and Messy Vintage
- Plans developed and managed by the Archdeacon of Ipswich for church planting
- Appointment of associate priests and curates to build resources for/after church planting
- Training including church planting workshops, Myriad Growing New and Greenhouse

Perceived effectiveness:

New worshipping communities (NWC) became more dominant during the project with two further pioneers recruited in 2024 to plant 2-3 worshipping communities in socially deprived areas of the town.⁷ NWC were easier to deliver in the timeframe, easier to sustain (low cost) and more feasible across church traditions.

Terminology within the diocese shifted from fresh expressions of Church to new worshipping communities mid-project in line with national trends.

Finding local lay people to lead NWC proved difficult initially and Pioneer Developers Bob Hamilton and Alicia Holmes facilitated training which helped change this.

Project Manager Karen Macfadyen has been heroic in collecting statistics on NWC, taking care to only include those initiatives that fit the definition.⁸ A few eyebrows were raised over whether nursing/care home ministry should be counted where this feels like normal parish ministry, although where clergy and lay teams are working with congregational and creative approaches, there is some precedent for this.⁹

Some interviewees felt the workstreams outlined in the original bid were too prescriptive when the best pioneering consults with local teams and lets context shape what type of worshipping community emerges.

It became evident early on that the plan for six church plants in the deanery was optimistic and funding earmarked for church plant leaders was reallocated. A few wished the project had remained faithful to this original aim; however, most recognised the deanery did not have enough people or leaders to meet targets and despite initial consultation at bid stage, in practice it was more difficult to settle on where churches would plant (both in terms of in whose parish and needing a suitable building). The lack of a strategic plan and the lack of transparency in subsequent decision-making led to a painful planting process for the Bridge Communities and River Church teams. The three churches planted during the course of the project are:

Lindbergh Road Community Church (LRCC) which was planned before the project to connect with a part of St Augustine's parish on a low-cost model. LRCC is valued for its commitment to incarnational mission which has resulted in a weekly pattern of small and varied outreach initiatives. These include Messy Church (originally

⁷It is early days for the new pioneers who started work in 2024 in Holy Trinity and Pinewood, focusing on WAVE (for people with learning disabilities) and school chaplaincy respectively.

⁸The working definition of new worshipping communities encompassed both new congregations (defined as more traditional and liturgical in feel) and fresh expressions of church (which tended to be unconventional and creative).

⁹G. Lings, (2008) 'People Try to Put Us Down: Fresh Expressions with Older People' in Encounters on the Edge no. 40 (Sheffield, Church Army).



with Ravenswood), weekly Sunday afternoon Coffee Cake and Chat on the leaders' front driveway, Sunday 5pm worship, Games on the Green (in summer) and partnership work with KICK and CYM.

Bridge Communities planted from St Matthews in 2020 but suffered significant setbacks - not least launching just before lockdown and a permanent venue proving elusive. As 'church without walls', they meet in homes and rent larger spaces for occasional gatherings and community cafés. With a wider vision for Suffolk, Bridge Communities moved to Lightwave in 2024 for governance, pay parish share and are recruiting a new part-time leader following the departure of their founding leader.

River Church planted from St Augustine's as an HTB Network church plant with a BMO. Based on the waterfront in Ipswich, they are committed to running a termly Alpha course, student nights, an internship programme and a social supermarket. Successful at securing external grant-funding, they have reported the greatest number of new disciples across the lifetime of the project despite feeling they have been under-resourced compared with classic HTB church plants. From 2026, they will pay parish share.

Project outcomes

In seeking to measure the observable changes or behaviours that showed a growth in disciples, faith explorers and community contacts and engagement, data collection (twice a year) focused on three different categories of people engaged through the project.¹⁰

1. Contact - a person currently outside the church with whom contact has been made through a church-led activity.¹¹
2. Explorer - a person who intentionally chooses to engage in understanding more about Christianity and what it means to be a disciple.¹²
3. Disciple - a person who was not engaging in church regularly who starts to engage in some form of church (parish/plant/fresh expression) at least monthly.¹³

Both the number of contacts and disciples have already exceeded the targets and expectations of the project, the number of contacts especially so. These targets have been met or exceeded for every year of the project apart from 2020 (which was likely due to the impact of the Covid lockdowns and restrictions).¹⁴

	Original 2024 target (revised in Jan 2019)	Project total actuals
Contacts	13,000	36,376
Explorers	6,500	2,513
Disciples	1,300	1,944

When the numbers of new **disciples** are distinguished by source, the fxC, new congregations and existing congregations have exceeded the target number of new disciples apportioned to them. Throughout the project, the number of new **explorers** has been noticeably lower than was originally expected. Reasons for this are explored in the Lessons Learned section.

The number of new worshipping communities that have begun has far surpassed the targets and expectations at the project outset. With the exception of church planting, the target for each category of new worshipping community has been well exceeded.

¹⁰Inspiring Ipswich & Growing in God in the Countryside: Stage 2 Application for Strategic Development Funding, pp. 59-60.

¹¹Numbers include contacts made through Top Up Shops, school assemblies and prayer spaces, toddler groups, Christmas services and events, Messy Churches, care bags and services in care homes and funerals.

¹²Numbers include those on explorer courses, those attending groups arising from Top Up Shop ministry and some at Messy Churches and Messy Vintage.

¹³Numbers include growth in main church congregations, church plants, new congregations and fxC e.g. Safe Harbour.

¹⁴See Appendix B for annual targets and actuals data.



The targets for the number of new worshipping communities started were met or exceeded in every year of the project apart from 2020 (which was likely due to the impact of COVID-19).¹⁵ Even when considering the net totals (due to some fxC and congregations stopping), these still exceed the target numbers.

	Original target (revised in 2019)	Project total actuals	Project net totals
Church plants	6	3	3
Fresh expressions of Church (fxC)	15	31	24
New or additional congregations	5	35	30
Total new WC (sum of above)	26	69	57

In considering the impact that the Inspiring Ipswich project has had on the deanery, we can compare the level of change seen in a standard church measure (Worshipping Community) within the deanery to the diocese and the entire Church of England.¹⁶

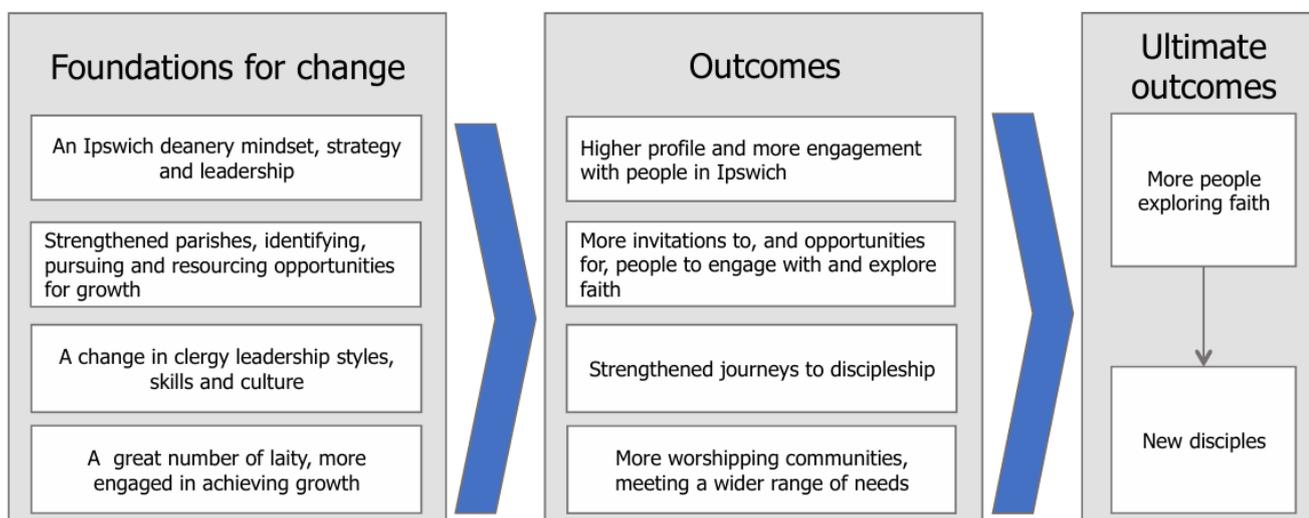
Change in WC between 2019 & 2024	0-10 years	11-17 years	All ages
Ipswich Deanery	+109%	+101%	+20%
Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich	-55%	-20%	-15%
Church of England	-17%	-8%	-9%

The size of the total Worshipping Community within Ipswich deanery has increased by 20% between 2019 and 2024. This level of increase is even more dramatic when seen in the context of the entire diocese’s Worshipping Community decreasing by 15% over the same period.

These contrasts between Ipswich deanery and the diocese are even more stark when considering the 0-10 and 11-17 age groups. The numbers of children and young people have more than doubled in Ipswich deanery between 2019 and 2024, whereas across the diocese they have fallen by a fifth (11-17-year-olds) and more than half (0-10-year-olds) over the same period. **By this measure, Ipswich deanery is demonstrating drastically different attendance patterns to the rest of the diocese.**

Missional design

Summary Theory of Change for Inspiring Ipswich



¹⁵See Appendix B for annual targets and actuals data.

¹⁶Diocese and Church of England data from Statistics for Mission, Data Services Unit, Church of England.



Broadly-speaking, the original Theory of Change proved effective.¹⁷ Stakeholders praised the design of the project for recognising/including in its design:

- the importance of recruiting clergy as leaders in mission as well as developing lay leadership
- some parishes need - and appreciate - help in identifying and resourcing opportunities for growth
- a culture of collaborative working across parishes helps build morale, cross-fertilises ideas and maximises the use of resources
- tracking contact numbers encourages churches to pay attention to their community profile
- beginning more worshipping communities has met a wider range of needs
- the need to be intentional in providing invitations for newcomers to engage with and explore faith has ingrained a 'next steps' culture within churches

However, the experience of the project adds the following important caveats to the Theory of Change:

This diagram does not tell the whole story of the deanery project. It needs a parallel process for ongoing consultation with those clergy and parishes who disengaged from the project.

The Theory of Change focuses exclusively on mission to prioritise growth as the crucial starting point. The diocese and project recognised building repair, parish share and resolving internal congregational/pastoral dynamics are present too and supported clergy in posts of first responsibility with regular meetings to upskill them for these challenges while concentrating on mission. Help from an Estates Assistant was appreciated by many of the churches serving deprived outer estates for his help with buildings, especially where parish profiles had been far from honest about the dire state of buildings and finance.

The original nuanced definition of a 'new disciple'¹⁸ in the Stage 2 bid was inevitably too complex to track in practice, so 'people who were not engaging in church regularly who start to engage in some form of church (parish/plant/NWC) at least monthly' was agreed as the definition once the project was underway. The project has worked painstakingly to consistently track metrics, but it is impossible for any project of this kind to anticipate whether new attenders will end up as committed, serving, followers of Christ within Ipswich deanery congregations in years to come (as per the original definition).

Learning on what has been effective in making disciples

When asked 'What has worked missionally?'¹⁹, the most common responses from interviewees included:

Building relationships with new people. Across all new initiatives, befriending is important; starting an enquirers course or developing worship for new people is not going to work without existing relationships.

Responding to practical need. Top Up Shops were mentioned as good examples of ways churches have been able to respond to an increase in immigrants, refugees and the cost of living; church members are excited to be part of initiatives that so obviously 'look after people outside our doors'. These were described as 'gateways' for churches growing contacts, with the caveat that follow-on must be handled sensitively and not in a way that makes vulnerable people feel they must attend something more to access practical help.

The Growing Leaders course has disciplined churchgoers. Most interviewees agreed the Growing Leaders course has played an important part in deepening the discipleship of lay volunteers. It is a credit to the course leaders (pioneers Alicia Holmes and Bob Hamilton) that one fairly lengthy CPAS course (with some adaptation) run five times worked well for so many in taking time to explore what God is personally calling them to in ministry.

¹⁷Inspiring Ipswich & Growing in God in the Countryside: Stage 2 Application for Strategic Development Funding, p. 20. More detail was outlined in an accompanying paper.

¹⁸Inspiring Ipswich & Growing in God in the Countryside: Stage 2 Application for Strategic Development Funding, p. 133.

¹⁹The evaluation's Terms of Reference requested that we ask this question and report on findings.



Appointing mission-minded clergy to parishes. Some interviewees chose to answer this question by referring to the number of clergy now in the deanery with a vision for mission.

Some interviewees felt they couldn't answer this question. Some felt they were not close enough to the project to be able to comment. Others resisted too much emphasis on a project being able to make 'explorers' or 'disciples' when so much of it is God's work. Some expressed their frustration that the project's definition of a disciple (necessary to track impact) felt inadequate to be meaningful across a variety of church traditions.

Learning from those who chose to disengage from the project

What started as consultation did not continue as consultation. Initial conversations with clergy over a town-wide project were constructive. However, once funding was secured, there seemed to be less communication about what would be funded - and on what basis. Also, project targets lacked realism and did not consider that some churches were already confident in mission. Project jargon needed careful translating into some church traditions; in hindsight, use of the Five Marks of Mission as a framework would have helped conversations. A few clergy felt they were expected to be part of a sub-department of a project they had never signed up for.

A perceived lack of appreciation for mission outside the project. If not careful, time-limited projects with ambitious targets can fall into the trap of implying that before or outside the project, no mission happened/ happens. Alpha, food bank work and church planting were already a feature of parish life in some places. A high degree of sensitivity is needed around messaging, especially when a new project team is formed who are all new to a deanery. The more a project is generously funded, the greater degree of care is needed to acknowledge what parishes manage to do with no extra resource.

Living in Love and Faith differences were impossible to overlook. As a result of LLF, some conservative parishes distanced themselves from other churches within the project and deanery. It is hard to imagine anything the project could have done differently except perhaps more obviously acknowledge the LLF heartbreak rather than move too quickly to focus on mission as a uniting factor.



Efficiency

Staffing

Post	Dates	Notes
Archdeacon of Ipswich/Project Director	2019-2024	1fte. Postholder left to be Bp of Southampton.
Project Manager	2019-2025	Started as 0.6fte with increase to 0.8fte for specific periods.
Communications Lead	2019-2021	0.5fte. Postholder left July 2021 and not replaced.
Administrator	2021-2025	Was 0.8fte and (from 2025) 0.5fte.
Pioneer Developers	2019-2025 2020-2025	2 ft. A third Pioneer Developer started in 2019 but left in 2021 to pursue ordination and was not replaced.
Mission & Ministry Enabler (2y post)	-	Post removed in 2019.
Mission Accompaniment Lead	2019-2025	Pt contract for services up to 2d/month for research/consultancy.
Mission Accompaniers (2y programme)	2019-2021	Mostly volunteers, a few pt contract for services basis.
3 Associate Priests	-	Posts removed and funding reallocated.
6 x 3y Curates (DBF contribution)	2019-2022 2023-2025	3 CP curates funded for CP 1-3. Advertising for second cohort of 3 CP curates was unsuccessful. Funding used for 2 Associate Vicars and 1 CP curate to increase flexibility for recruitment.
Children & Families Pastor at LRCC	2020-2025	0.4fte.
Mission Enabler at St Matthews after CP (2y post)	2021-2023	0.8 fte. To enable rebuilding. Postholder left and not replaced.
Mission Enabler at St Augustine after CP	2023-2025	Appointed for 3y fixed term with review in 2026. 0.3fte funded by project and private sponsor, remainder by St Augustine.
Assistant to Archdeacon of Ipswich (2y post)	2024-2025	0.75fte.
Estates Assistant (1y post)	2024-2025	0.4fte.
Pioneer on Pinewood (2y post)	2024-2026	Ft.
Pioneer at Holy Trinity (2y post)	2024-2026	0.8fte.
3 Children and Families Workers (3y posts)	2024-2027	Funded by 3 x £20k grants towards C&FW posts.

A further 12 deanery appointments were made to new posts or vacancies (although not project-funded posts). Four posts were 'topped up' by national Post of First Responsibility funding. Another 15 appointments were made to short-term, part-time posts (and internships) across the Bridge Communities and River Church - again not funded by the project but from a variety of sources including congregational giving and grant funding.

Interviewees described the project core **team as a thoroughly dedicated 'powerhouse' of gifted individuals** who were quick to pivot to needs arising and fulfil project aims by whatever creative means they had at their disposal. Although the speed and intensity of work was a shock to some, their efficiency and dedication meant all activity was accompanied by exceptional record-keeping. Some clergy found being asked for data twice a year helpful to focus on individuals' faith journeys. The team's enthusiasm was contagious and the gestures of encouragement and appreciation (thank you events for clergy and churchwardens, encouragement cards, chocolates, daily routines of prayer with a focus of every church in turn) did not go unnoticed.

Opinions differed among interviewees as to whether the **size of core team** for a short-term project was justified against the wider backdrop of diocesan (and national) funding constraints for paid posts. Those



working closely with the project argued the team was not as large as it seemed due to numerous part-time roles and staff turnover.

When the Communications Lead left in 2021 and was not replaced, some felt **communications was an important gap** for the project in connecting with those who did not read newsletters or use Facebook. Others felt it would have been a difficult and time-consuming role to recruit to a second time; any new person would have much to catch up with to be effective as different parishes/areas needed different communication strategies.

Governance

The original plan for project governance was faithfully adhered to - monthly meetings of the programme board and project board (to oversee delivery of the project) and weekly meetings for the project group/staff team (to operationalise day-to-day delivery of the project). All conversations with Vision and Strategy in London were constructive and supportive.

Many interviewees commented on the opportunities and problems that arose from having one person in **the dual role of Archdeacon of Ipswich and Project Director**. By combining these roles, Rhiannon King was able to make strategic clergy appointments, keep people to task, hold some sway within civic circles and contribute to ecumenical networking.²⁰ However, the combined role at times caused problems; where clergy struggled under the weight of project expectations, they had no one else to turn to for wellbeing support. In hindsight, the dual role needed some mechanism to take into consideration its inherent conflict of interest.

Many interviewees described the premature departures of Rt Revd Mike Harrison, the Bishop of Dunwich, and Ven Rhiannon King in close succession just over a year before the end of the project, as having a significant impact on project momentum and on the morale and wellbeing of the staff and clergy most closely associated with the project. Both were highly relational leaders whose support was valued. They were so central to the project's direction that their absence was keenly felt. In hindsight, a team of co-leaders to share the leadership role would have strengthened the project for this scenario.

The diocese was able to provide high-quality interim leadership in the absence of the founding leadership. Revd Charlotte Cook and Ven Rich Henderson, the Archdeacon of Suffolk, sacrificially stepped into vacant roles (and for longer than expected) as a steadying presence but did so on top of already demanding workloads. Thus, the team - while deeply appreciative of the support - experienced the loss of +Mike and Rhiannon (and their energy and capacity for the project) as a bereavement. This was exacerbated by having no advance warning (due to confidentiality around senior appointments in the Church of England) despite close working relationships within the core team.

The diocese has continued to respond well by appointing a new Archdeacon of Ipswich and Project Director, Ven Samantha Brazier-Gibbs, to oversee the conclusion of the project and what comes next. They have also recognised the pressure the project placed on new clergy and have extended four of the five-year clergy posts in the deanery to ten-year.

²⁰Ipswich Central, the Mayor's Office, Suffolk Community Foundation, Together for Ipswich.

Finance

This financial summary is taken from the Projects 2025_11 II Budget Summary.

Work Stream	SUMMARY	Stage 3 approved budget Feb 19	Work stream Total	Forecast Y7 spend to Dec 2025	Forecast spend 2026	Forecast spend 2027	FORECAST OUTTURN DEC 2027	Work stream Total
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Central/	Stipendiary Staff (Stipend+pension+housing)	420,813		77,841	0	0	505,531	
Deanery	Central employees (incl recruitment costs)	732,516		116,158	0	0	546,172	
	Rent (DBF contribution) ²¹	90,000		0	0	0	23,235	
	Office running costs + Central costs	49,300		1,780	0	0	48,471	
	Central Costs (HR/payroll/finance)	21,600		21,600	0	0	21,600	
	Hub Start up ²²	42,000		0	0	0	0	
	Evaluation	30,000		20,000	0	0	20,000	
	Software + website	14,140	1,400,369	0	0	0	413	1,165,422
Parishes	Training - GL, Greenhouse, MLL, Growing New, Conferences	95,298		15,286	0	0	32,843	
	Community Engagement & Events	120,000		25,355	0	0	39,337	
	Jun 22 Reset: Mission Priest St P	0		29,167	0	0	105,000	
	Feb24: Estates Assist and Mar24 missional support	0	215,298	13,183	0	0	18,714	195,894
Fexp	Pioneer Developers	577,578		108,993	0	0	575,203	
	Jun 22 Reset: Growth fund	0	577,578	40,000	0	0	70,000	645,203
CPs	CP start up (assumed from sending churches/DBF contribution) ²³	180,000		0	0	0	16,858	
	Curates (DBF contribution)	925,219		182,331	143,966	142,128	835,297	
	Additional Housing costs	145,833		8,700	8,700	8,700	43,888	
	Church Plants 1-3	636,279		16,187	0	0	328,966	
	Mission Enablers (St Matt + St Aug)	0		25,000	0	0	90,357	
	Jun 22 Reset: CP4&5 startup, Feb24: Reduced startup allocation for in-church planting + new Pioneer led startups	0		48,756	0	0	56,654	

Continued on next page.



Feb24 CR6: Pioneer/ Evangelists 2x18m posts 2024/25	0	1,887,331	60,137	70,200	0	149,491	1,521,511
	4,080,576	4,080,576	810,474	222,866	150,828	3,528,030	3,528,030
<i>SDF</i>	2,677,156					2,469,390	
<i>SCF contribution</i>	111,000					111,000	
<i>DBF contribution</i>	1,292,420					947,640	

²¹DBF contribution: Central office released during Covid and not re-occupied. So, DBF contribution in the form of rent not realised.

²²Hub not implemented. Funds repurposed.

²³DBF contribution: Jun 22 SDF acknowledged that £30k per sending church not realistic / won't be realised.



Sustainability

The intense pace of work was always intended to act as a *catalyst* to bring about cultural change. This evaluation marks the beginning of the deanery pausing 'to take stock' and deciding which changes are sustainable as it continues to work with the values of the project going forward.

One of the downsides of having a talented project team working at a fast pace is the challenge it creates in continuing project work when those roles are no longer funded. In hindsight, some wondered if a smaller team working more closely with the diocesan staff (assuming they had sufficient capacity) would have enabled smoother transitions at project end to support ongoing change. However, this might have reduced some of the agility and momentum of the project.

Pastoral reorganisation is planned. Some of the rural deaneries outside Ipswich will be incorporated into the archdeaconry, enabling a fairer distribution of work across the three archdeacons, diffusing some of the Ipswich-focused intensity and sharing good practice more widely. Missional leaders' lunches have now been introduced in the Suffolk Archdeaconry.

The connecting of church wardens, parish treasurers, Alpha course leaders and Messy Church leaders across the deanery to support and resource one another looks set to be a significant part of the project legacy. Given the value of these more informal structures, it is worth asking whether they should be integrated into the more formal deanery structures, or whether their health and value is such that it is better for them to continue as a parallel system. Views will no doubt differ as to the appropriateness of this. The Top Up Shops have enthusiastic supporters in civic leaders and university researchers keen to see them sustained.²⁴

It remains to be seen whether the Deanery Leadership Team lead on strategy as was hoped. Capacity was flagged as a major issue, but we also sensed a little reluctance to work to awkward project targets or to proceed with plans that some clergy/churches had chosen to not engage with (despite the project's considerable efforts to include them). Decisions about ongoing training rest with the diocesan Mission and Ministry team who want to continue LyCiG, mission coaching and Envoy.

Sustainability of new worshipping communities looks encouraging, but how they will fare without pioneer/project scaffolding will be the test. Any plans for more church planting in the deanery and beyond (plants or revitalisations) will have to work sensitively with the sense of wariness left by the experience of this project. Sending churches will need to invest in relationships of trust with receiving parishes to overcome resistance.

Many hope the investment in lay volunteers will bear long-term fruit; the Growing Leaders course encouraged participants to see their vocational exploration as life-long and some are still exploring what/where they are called to as a result. Where some of the original 5-year clergy appointments are now extended to 10 years, an evident sense of relief is felt by those clergy. Given the demographic realities of some of the parishes, achieving the project goals around financial sustainability even over a 10-year timescale will be something of a stretch.

At diocesan level, this project has prompted sharper questions about culture and strategy, seeing the emphasis on mission and networking as good foundations for moving forward to focus on the growing younger and parish revitalisation aspects of the wider Growing in God strategy.

²⁴Manning, Boyce, Coe & Dogaru (2024) *When the Going Gets Tough, the Good Get Going. A Case Study of Ipswich Top Up Shops: Delivering Community Food Provision Across Ipswich*, Institute of Social Justice and Crime, University of Suffolk.



Overall learning

Be wary of high expectations leading to overworking. This was an ambitious project that generated lots of activity to galvanise the deanery to meet its targets. The core team set an incredibly impressive pace to work, which in some parts of the deanery felt like ‘learning to walk while being asked to sprint’. New clergy knew they were coming into a high-pressure environment, very much against the standard advice for new incumbents not to change anything in the first year of being in a new parish. Interviewees warned against so many extra meetings as time is then limited in building relationships with new attenders - noted as one of the most effective ways of making disciples.

There are upsides and downsides to a town-wide project that uses a deanery as a strategic unit:

Upsides	Downsides
Those outside the Church more easily recognise a town-wide project than the parishes within it.	The dual role of Archdeacon/Project Director meant all deanery meetings focused on the project’s targets for mission, leaving less space for clergy to access pastoral support. ²⁵
It allows some churchgoers to glimpse something of being part of a bigger/wider unit with a vision for mission.	Most churchgoers do not understand what happens at deanery level (except deanery synod representatives), so this kind of projects ends up being subtly counter-cultural.
It is an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of church traditions within a town and work collaboratively on a wider project.	It is a challenge to design a project with aims and outcomes that translate equally well into different church traditions.
There are existing pastoral and ecclesial deanery networks and structures to work with as well as informal networking opportunities.	With ambitious project targets, it is difficult to avoid the trap of parishes feeling they are being asked to resource the project rather than the project resourcing the parishes.

A lot of factors need to be in place for church planting. Much has been learned about what is the ‘right’ style of church planting for this diocese and what funding model is realistic - born out of the painful experience of this project. Church planting needs the right leaders, buildings and sending teams and these challenging issues were not tackled early enough. Even though careful work was done in the original bid to articulate the commitment, calling and capacity of a church planting church²⁶, it was hard for large churches to plant once (let alone twice) without an existing culture of church planting; people in the pew didn’t understand why their friends were leaving and sending teams attracted some who didn’t understand the deeper commitment involved. Could the experience of a parish who had previously church planted in the deanery have helped with some of these issues earlier?

Anticipate the turnover of leaders in SDF-funded projects. Early departure and turnover of leaders in SDF projects is a not-uncommon occurrence, and so there needs to be better contingency planning by project boards for this likelihood. High quality and effective leaders are likely to be offered new opportunities to serve elsewhere before a project comes to an end. A higher proportion of lay and/or non-executive members on boards would help to mitigate the impact of the rapid loss of many key staff, which as this project shows is not a hypothetical possibility. Succession planning and the development of effective organisational leadership capacity should therefore be core to any diocesan project’s risk assessment and managed at the most senior levels. If the Church of England is investing in a diocesan project and they value that investment, changes to the senior leaders involved in those projects need strategic consideration.

Communicate trust in clergy despite the need for change. Healthy churches need healthy leaders and lay volunteer leaders need support and encouragement from clergy. Clergy are the main ‘gatekeepers’ and even

²⁵One interviewee gave an example of wanting to share with clergy colleagues the experience of taking a child’s funeral, but meeting agendas focused on mission plans allowed no time for this.

²⁶Inspiring Ipswich & Growing in God in the Countryside: Stage 2 Application for Strategic Development Funding, p. 115.



if church members are keen, clergy negativity invariably prevails. Some of the ‘black hole’ narratives around what the deanery was like before the project arrived hindered clergy engagement rather than helped.²⁷ Even within the project, clergy talked of mixed messages - being told they could try things and fail but, in being asked regularly for numerical data, feeling as though they were not allowed to fail at the same time. This is a difficult dynamic for any project to hold in balance while working to high targets.

Growing new has been the priority. Now comes the season of growing deeper. A huge amount has been achieved through the project by prioritising mission. With its emphasis on generating new contacts, new explorers and new churches, some stakeholders felt too much focused on new numbers and not enough on the growing deeper - the next stages of faith engagement once a new initiative has begun. The team sought to anticipate this with a 2025 conference focusing on discipleship, but some felt it was not enough and now look forward to a pace of ministry that allows for both. The Growing Leaders course was cited as the obvious exception to this.

Faith journeys are not linear or uniform. Interviewees offered the following comments on why the number of explorers was lower than expected:

- Beyond the obvious tracking of numbers of those completing faith nurture courses, it is impossible to discern when exploration blurs into discipleship.
- Different church traditions have different ways of measuring these stages.
- Some individuals make a commitment through a church service (not a course) and others seem to go ‘round in circles’ attending numerous services and courses before making a commitment.
- Where churches already ran Alpha or Start regularly with their fringe, it was difficult to suddenly find ‘big numbers’ to invite people ‘out of nowhere’ to meet big targets when the project began.
- The definitional emphasis on attendance might explain why disciples was high and explorers was low. The number of new disciples might be overly optimistic; while the project has done a phenomenal job in tracking the metrics, it had to rely on local leaders reporting whether attenders saw a church gathering as a new worshipping community.

Prepare thoroughly for disruption. The status quo is challenged by a change intervention of this kind. The more ambitious the intended change, the more disruption is inevitable. Disruption needs to be fully anticipated by:

- Preparing for disruption to impact every level of church life.
- Ensuring there is capacity for support to be available among the wider diocesan staff team.
- Episcopal support to advocate for the wider change piece.
- Trusting diocesan discernment about the aims of the intervention being right for the local context, without getting distracted by new ideas in the wider Church that promise ‘success’.
- Readyng everyone for change by being honest at the start that disruption is inevitable (noting that some do not hear this or choose not to hear this even when communicated clearly).
- Caring for those who must cope first-hand with resistance to change ‘on the ground’ e.g. local clergy, project staff.

²⁷Various interviewees heard Ipswich deanery described as ‘a black hole’ before the project, although no one could tell us who began calling it this. Most agree the deanery was a good place to try something as it needed ‘shaking up’. Statistics for Mission indicate attendance was in decline, but no more dramatically than in some other places in the country.



Conclusion and recommendations

This project has done remarkably well in comfortably meeting so many of its targets and dramatically reversing patterns of congregational decline. In seeking to develop the diocesan strategy Growing in God²⁸, the project shows outstanding progress in growing numbers and in growing younger. It is too soon to tell whether this numerical growth will turn around deanery finances.

Growing in influence is arguably most easily observed in local press and media attention²⁹ and in the coordinated town-wide Top Up Shops, although the latter was not attributable to the project, only supported by it (with help from the project on governance, impact measurement and banners). Top Up Shops demonstrate that it is not only the first two of the Five Marks of Mission that lead to growth.

Even those who were less involved with the project recognise something of 'a rising tide raises all ships' dynamic and the momentum around mission has been a galvanising force for the deanery that has affected most churches' attendance directly or indirectly. Interviewees confirmed the mutual support that now exists among clergy and described the deanery as now 'less about managing decline and more about managing growth'.

Yet, the high achievements of the project have come at a high cost.

Many of the tensions felt (and noted in this report) are not unique to this project. Some tensions touch on wider much-debated issues in church life: whether national mission funding should focus on projects or parishes, whether ambitious targets help or hinder as an incentive and how cultural change is achieved in ancient systems designed to preserve tradition. In this project, the high-pressure nature of the project was unhealthily demanding for some, clergy who chose not to engage felt more isolated than before and some church planters felt unsupported. The emotion from the enormous pressure placed on the team and the diocese when senior leaders left the project prematurely still feels raw.

Feelings may be running particularly high at the close of the project; stakeholders were keen to highlight the high-cost nature of the work and the pain it has caused for some inside and outside the project. It could be argued that the timing of this review is too early and the most valuable learning around achievement versus cost will emerge in five or ten years' time.

Any similarly ambitious project in this diocese (or another) must weigh up potential achievements against cost as part of considering the following recommendations:

- Continue to invest in the new gifted clergy in the deanery. They are important assets.
- Continue to encourage deanery networking in non-governance spaces across the diocese.
- Where projects set high expectations, be wary of the culture of overworking that can easily accompany high targets and provide support for those leaders who are not used to this.
- A town-wide approach makes sense to those outside the Church, but there are some downsides to this deanery or archdeaconry project that need mitigating against, including the conflict of interest that comes with a combined Archdeacon and Project Director role.
- Post-project, focus on growing deeper as well as growing new. Ambitious targets of making new contacts, explorers, disciples, churches and congregations inevitably mean time and energy to grow deeper (embed, mature, sustain) and manage other parish responsibilities was limited.
- Communicate trust in clergy by careful messaging, ongoing consultation and setting realistic targets.
- When designing a project to work with a mix of churches from different traditions, be sensitive to language and concepts that communicate well within different traditions.

²⁸...our priorities being to grow in Depth, Influence, Number and Younger...' *Inspiring Ipswich & Growing in God in the Countryside: Stage 2 Application for Strategic Development Funding*, p. 7.

²⁹Annual reports include summaries of publicity in local press and media.



- Have courage to develop a church planting strategy that suits the culture and context of the diocese but don't underestimate the components that need to be in place.
- Be utterly realistic about the degree of inevitable disruption an ambitious project like this brings to every level of church life and put as many measures in place as possible to deal with problems, hurt and confusion in a constructive way.
- The turnover of senior leaders in SDF-funded projects should be core to a diocesan risk assessment and needs to be acknowledged as an issue at national Church level.



Appendix A: Research methodology

We gathered evidence from a critically appreciative perspective - celebrating progress and signs of God at work, whilst also asking critical-friend-type questions. The process was shaped by the Terms of Reference set out by the Funding & Learning team in London and the Strategic Programme Team and Inspiring Ipswich Team in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

Using a strongly qualitative approach, this evaluation drew on the following sources:

1. Initial **desk-based review of existing diocesan project documentation** which included *Inspiring Ipswich & Growing in God in the Countryside: Stage 2 Application for Strategic Development Funding* plus accompanying papers, change request documents, annual reports, the Big Yellow Folder, Project Board minutes, parish share reports, Measuring Mission data, Sustainability Paper for 2024 SDF review, annual conference feedback and much more.
2. Further **qualitative and quantitative data** including:
 - Individual interviews with 32 stakeholders by Zoom or in person, with responses from two stakeholders via email.
 - Conversations with volunteers helping at three Pop Up Shops (St Mary's, All Hallows and Triangle), Monday Meals and Bubbles (St Peter's), Little Shoots (St Luke's) and the Gusford Lunch Club.
 - Participation in/observation of the Sunday Harvest Procession & Service at St Thomas the Apostle, The TEN and The SIX services at River Church, LRCC's Coffee, Cake and Chat, St Augustine's Bubble Church, WAVE with a focus on disabilities at Holy Trinity, Monday Meals and Bubbles Toddler Group at St Peter's (including a Perfect Peace break-out group), Little Shoots at St Luke's and Lunch Club in Gusford Community Primary School.
 - Survey work with Growing Leader course participants with responses from 24 of 55 individuals invited to take part.

All research has its **limitations**. Though we are confident that we have used the most appropriate methods to achieve the aims of the evaluation, the following limitations must be acknowledged:

1. So much activity has been generated by the project - and from a multiplicity of funding sources - that it is very difficult to evidence clear correlations between outputs and outcomes.
2. During the site visit, we listened to the views of clergy, pioneers, lay leaders and some attenders/members, but we could not capture the wider perspectives of all congregation members.
3. Capturing an accurate picture of the life of a diocese in every detail is impossible; with its multi-layered, complex and ever-changing dynamics, this evaluation can only reflect what those interviewed shared. Working as a three-person team along with diocesan feedback following the interim and draft full reports assisted in the synthesising of diverse perspectives.

Researchers

We acknowledge our long-standing appreciation for pioneering and mission as a potential research bias. Claire attends a liberal catholic Anglican parish on the east side of Sheffield and worked for Church Army's Research Unit for 22 years. Elspeth also worked for Church Army's Research Unit for 13 years and attends a long-standing conservative evangelical church plant in the centre of Sheffield. Richard is a former CEO of a church-planting mission agency and a former theological college principal, with a personal interest in the theological formation of pioneers.



Appendix B: Quantitative data in full

Contacts, Explorers and Disciples – full data

	2019 Target	2019 Actual	2020 Target	2020 Actual	2021 Target	2021 Actual	2022 Target	2022 Actual	2023 Target	2023 Actual	2024 Target	2024 Actual	Project Total Targets (revised 2019)	Project Total Actual
Contacts	750	3017	1200	2224	1800	3127	3000	9518	3750	8664	4500	9826	13000	36376
Explorers	375	82	600	107	900	393	1500	807	1875	652	2250	472	6500	2513
Disciples	53	89	159	72	264	267	319	483	362	581	368	452	1300	1944

New Worshipping Communities – full data

	2019 Target	2019 Actual	2020 Target	2020 Actual	2021 Target	2021 Actual	2022 Target	2022 Actual	2023 Target	2023 Actual	2024 Target	2024 Actual	Target (revised 2019)	Total Actual	Net Total Actual
Church Plants	0	1	2	1	2	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	6	3	3
Fresh expressions of Church (fxC)	2	2	5	2	5	5	2	12	2	7	2	3	15	31	24
New or additional congregations	0	2	1	0	2	3	1	12	1	12	0	6	5	35	30
Total new WC (sum of above)	2	5	8	3	9	9	5	24	5	19	2	9	26	69	57



Appendix C: Findings from the Growing Leaders survey

24 people who had completed the Growing Leaders course responded to the survey out of 55 people who were contacted. Respondents were spread across all of the years that the course was run. 1 person who was unable to complete the course also responded (see Section 2).

Section 1: Responses from those who completed the course

Why take part in the course?

When asked who or what encouraged them to participate in the course, the majority of respondents stated that it was a direct invitation or encouragement from one of the **Pioneer Developers** (38%) or at the suggestion of a member of their **church's leadership** (33%). Others mentioned the course being part of a wider training programme, hearing from a previous participant or simply seeing it advertised in an email.

The impact of the course

All but one respondent said that the Growing Leaders course had enhanced their confidence as a Christian leader and nearly two-fifths strongly agreed that it had. **Since completing the Growing Leaders course, my Christian leadership has developed in the following ways:**

I have taken on a new role	58%
I am more prayerful	54%
I encourage others	50%
I feel more confident in my leadership	50%
I have joined a leadership team	29%
I have undertaken additional training	29%
I am exploring my vocation	17%
I have started volunteering	8%
Other	17%
None of the above	13%

- New roles included Elder (x4), Pastoral team, Lay Chair, Churchwarden, a paid diocesan role, leading a community choir and leading a prayer/meditation group at a Top Up Shop.
- Exploring vocations was to ordination, AOP Ordination and Eldership.
- Additional training was in relation to Children & Young People's ministry, Eldership and Preaching.
- Responses under 'other' included an increased confidence in their ability to lead, being more active in church life, being more aware of spiritual disciplines and their calling and seeing applications for what they had learnt to their secular work.

What was helpful in the course?

- Guest speakers
- Sharing/fellowship with other participants
- Support of a mentor
- Encouragement from the team
- Being introduced to spiritual disciplines (in some cases for the first time)
- The SHAPE personal statement



One respondent said, 'I found the visiting speakers very helpful - to be able to hear from local, inspiring Christian leaders who often shared their own vulnerabilities, routines and thought processes - de-mystifying some practices and processes.'

Three-quarters of respondents said that since completing the course they had participated in **Growing Leaders Extra** events. Many mentioned being encouraged and inspired by hearing how others are doing, **sharing experiences** and keeping in contact with the Pioneers. Others mentioned that the **hospitality** they received made them feel valued. Several spoke of the value of having **'time for me'** where they were able to focus on their own spiritual health and growth as their roles were often focused on supporting others.

Other Growing Leaders feedback

- Some of the pace of delivery was too swift or felt rushed
- Suggestion to share slides in advance
- One person shared that they were provided with extra handouts because of their dyslexia, which they appreciated
- Felt that some of the material from the booklet wasn't covered in the course – make the course/sessions longer or remove content from the booklet
- Very difficult via Zoom
- The course was intense and time consuming particularly if in full time work – 1 or 2 long evenings and a meeting with mentor each month

Wider Inspiring Ipswich content

When asked about other courses, conferences and support available through Inspiring Ipswich that have been helpful, half of the respondents mentioned the **deanery conferences** as helpful. Others mentioned:

- Growing New
- Leading Your Church into Growth
- Envoy
- Greenhouse
- Connect
- Missional Leaders lunches
- The networks that were formed
- Support and advice from the Pioneers

Respondents spoke with **thanks** and **gratitude** for what Inspiring Ipswich has brought to the deanery.

'It has drawn many churches together, creating stronger bonds of prayer and awareness of people in other churches.'

'There is a strong feeling of togetherness and desire to grow together.'

Section 2: A response from someone who was unable to complete the course

One respondent who was unable to complete the course spoke of uncertainty before starting of whether the course was the right fit for them, but said that they chose to trust the Pioneer who suggested it to them.

At some point in the course, they lost their mentor and started to feel disengaged. They say that they weren't given an explanation for the loss of their mentor and their situation wasn't followed up on by any of the team. This led to them becoming disenchanted and they say that they 'lost faith in the course'.

They feel that better communication and responsibility towards participants may have helped them re-engage with the course.



About Brendan Research

Brendan Research specialises in statistical, qualitative and geographical analysis for Christian organisations and denominations, bringing over 20 years' experience of conducting research and review work for faith communities.

We aim to:

Explore - seeking out existing data, quantitative, qualitative or geographic, to answer your questions.

Understand - bringing cross-disciplinary methodology to delve into the data, visualising, testing, summarising.

Report - sharing what we've learned in creative ways to communicate effectively for your audience.

www.brendanresearch.com

