

Holy Trinity

CORNFORTH

St Luke's

FERRYHILL

St Aidan's

CHILTON



DIOCESE
OF DURHAM

Contents

5. Introduction

6. Mission, Discipleship, and Community

10. Worship

11. Buildings

14. Assets

15. The Vicarage

16. The Parishes

18. The Future

21. Details



Letter from ICM

In 2024 the two parishes requested the support of an Interim Change Minister in order to consider the closure of one or more church buildings. During the two years they have done that and much more!

The two PCC's have worked with commitment and dedication on tackling some of the key challenges identified in the 2024 Vacancy Audit Process (VAP). In addition, relationships with the wider community have grown and there is a deep desire from the PCC's and across the church communities to look outward to their communities, build on key relationships and be a blessing to them – finding new ways to be present and use their resources wisely.

Mission and vision planning aspects of the VAP are still to be undertaken. This means the new incumbent is able to journey with them while they discern the direction of travel for this next stage of the churches' journey. In the meantime the cross-parish mission support group, started under the previous incumbent, has reformed and recently met with the Growing Mission enabler for Children's work to explore ways forward and they have also been hosting school visits to St Luke's.

There is considerable potential for estates ministry, new worshipping communities, engagement with social issues and a very real heart for their communities across all three areas.

The PCC's both report that trust has grown between PCC members and also between the worshipping communities. It is hoped these positive relationships will provide a good foundation for the ongoing work of becoming one parish. This is in part due to the PCC's increased willingness to listen attentively to one another, be honest about their concerns, ask open questions and engage with challenging conversations.

The parishes have received ongoing support from the Diocese in various forms and the Diocese is committed to health and flourishing of this new parish.

Main Focus of the ICM ministry - buildings update

During the 24 months, Chilton decided to close St Aidan's and form one parish with Cornforth and Ferryhill. Whilst they originally planned to keep, run and meet in their parish centre, a recent building report highlighted a substantial amount of work is needed on the building. They are currently considering other options including whether to let it to an interested community group on an Albermarle lease or simply sell it. It is likely Chilton PCC will wish to continue worship at St Luke's, once the church building closure is finalised and explore establish a house group/local bible study group in Chilton to ensure a continued local Christian presence.

Whilst Cornforth and Ferryhill have been considering closure of Holy Trinity, a decision was made by the PCC in March 2026 to postpone making the decision for up to 18 months (to be reviewed each 6 months). There are a number of concerns about closure that still remain to be addressed, a small rise in community engagement and news of an unexpected legacy all of which have added complexity for some PCC members and they wished for time for further consideration.

I am happy to speak with prospective candidates to share more about my experience of the parishes.

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Introduction

We are three warm, welcoming, and friendly churches in County Durham in a season of renewed missional focus. Having been overseen by an Interim Change Minister for the past two years, we are excited to build on the progress we have made as we reach out with the love of God to our communities.

Living in communities experiencing deprivation, the need for the transforming power of the gospel and a church that cares for its neighbours is pressing.

We are currently two parishes but, as St Aidan's Chilton has recently resolved to close its building, we are in the process of becoming one parish. This will make governance for our new Priest-in-Charge much easier and open up new opportunities to reach out missionally to Chilton.

We are seeking a Priest-in-Charge who can cast vision and drive it forwards, who can help us explore new ways of worshipping together, and help our churches grow younger, deeper, and wider.



Mission, Discipleship, and Community

Where We Are

The parishes are currently in a season of renewed focus on mission and outreach, with several encouraging developments taking shape.

The Monday Evening Fellowship continues to provide a welcoming and accessible space for those who are exploring faith or are new to Christianity. Meeting at Cornforth House, a central location in Cornforth, the group gathers to study the Bible, pray together, and build relationships over food. The group has a relaxed and hospitable atmosphere, helping it feel less intimidating than a traditional church service. Reading the Gospel for the following Sunday helps prepare participants for worship, while engagement with other biblical texts offers a wider scriptural context.



We recently re-established our Mission Team and we've begun to clarify our priorities, with increasing contact with local schools identified as a key area for growth. Schools are being invited to visit the church and take part in services, strengthening links with families and young people. The team is also exploring a number of initiatives, including an Experience Easter event, a Funeral Fayre in partnership with the local Co-op funeral director, and participation in a neighbouring parish's Exploring Christianity course, with a view to running a similar course locally.

Alongside the regular socials and fundraising activities, this Halloween we ran a couple of new events aimed at engaging young people and the local community. At St Luke's, we hosted a Halloween disco, where every child received a gift, a little book about the Christian faith and had a great boogie to boot.

Holy Trinity set up a pumpkin light trail across Cornforth, sourcing pumpkins from local businesses and blessing people with hot chocolate.



Several members of St Aidan's church help run the local Scout Group and this winter, we hosted a sleepover in our church hall.

St Aidan's also runs a range of great social events, from the weekly craft and chat to monthly socials like Pea and Pie night and a good bingo.

We are keen to find simple ways to introduce faith naturally into social activities and developing a stronger culture of invitation across the parish.

In support of worship and leadership, a Lay Worship Leader team met in September 2025, bringing together those trained through the diocesan course to lead occasional or special services. The first lay-led service was warmly received by the congregation.

At Holy Trinity, a small group recently held a day of prayer and fasting for the local community and the discernment of the church's future. Although only a few were able to attend, those who did found the time of shared prayer deeply valuable.

Though these are small seeds, they point to real progress in recent years, and we have a growing recognition that mission must be central to the life of our churches as we move forward.



Where We'd Like to Be

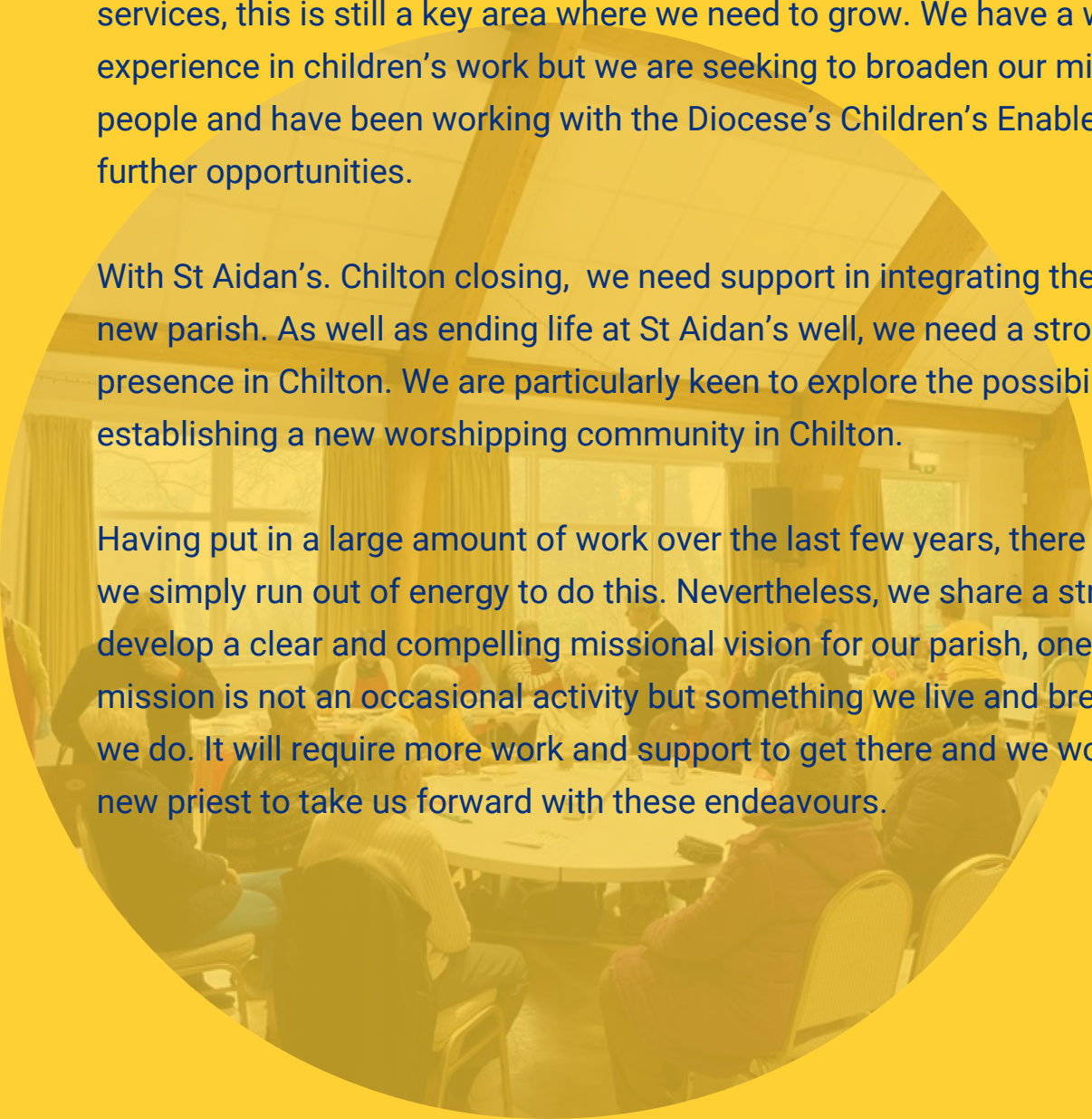
However, despite the progress we have made there is still much to do.

We have introduced the diocesan priorities to the PCC and Mission Group, and we display them in our churches as well as listing them on the agendas of Cornforth and Ferryhill PCC meetings. However, we acknowledge that these priorities are not yet fully embedded in our parish life, and we have not yet discerned clear mission priorities of our own. The parish hall at St Luke's is excellent and there is great potential here to utilise it for our collective mission and generate revenue.

We currently have no children or young people regularly involved in the life of any of our three churches. Although we continue to offer baptisms, we have not yet established ongoing relationships with baptism families beyond the service itself. Though we've taken a small step by inviting schools to visit and take part in services, this is still a key area where we need to grow. We have a wealth of experience in children's work but we are seeking to broaden our mission to younger people and have been working with the Diocese's Children's Enabler to explore further opportunities.

With St Aidan's. Chilton closing, we need support in integrating the village into the new parish. As well as ending life at St Aidan's well, we need a stronger missional presence in Chilton. We are particularly keen to explore the possibility of establishing a new worshipping community in Chilton.

Having put in a large amount of work over the last few years, there is a danger that we simply run out of energy to do this. Nevertheless, we share a strong desire to develop a clear and compelling missional vision for our parish, one in which mission is not an occasional activity but something we live and breathe in all that we do. It will require more work and support to get there and we would love our new priest to take us forward with these endeavours.



Worship

In February 2025, we adopted a new pattern of worship across our parishes, with Holy Communion being the centre of our worshipping lives together.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
9.30am	St Luke's, Ferryhill		St Luke's, Ferryhill	
11am	Holy Trinity, Cornforth	St Aidan's, Chilton Joint service	Holy Trinity, Cornforth	St Aidan's Chilton. Joint service

On fifth Sundays we have a joint service at 10am, rotating around each of our churches.

Worshippers in our churches receive a warm welcome and are joyful, happy places to praise God. Typically our services are Common Worship, Holy Communion services with organ (or recorded) accompaniment. However, we would love help in thinking about how our services could be more inclusive of all ages.

Tweaking our service patterns has already had a good impact, with a growing relationship between the congregations at St Luke's and St Aidan's. With the growth and development of committed lay leadership, could enable a pattern of weekly worship in each location.

There is a lack of public transport between the communities, especially on a Sunday which make combining congregations at a central worship location difficult. With the growth and development of committed lay leadership, this could enable a pattern of weekly worship in each location. However, we are exploring how we could maintain a worshipping presence in these three areas without a church building but at present there are no clear answers.



Buildings

St Luke's, Ferryhill, is a Grade II listed building, The church building itself is of a good-size and has some beautiful stained-glass windows. Like many listed buildings, it is not without its challenges. It can be difficult to heat effectively, and we need to explore more efficient and sustainable heating solutions. Beyond that, the building is in good condition with no substantial works required on it.

We are fortunate to have an attached parish centre which is an exceptional asset to the local community. The centre is spacious, well maintained, and includes a licensed bar, giving it significant potential to support mission, ministry, and the development of a thriving community hub.



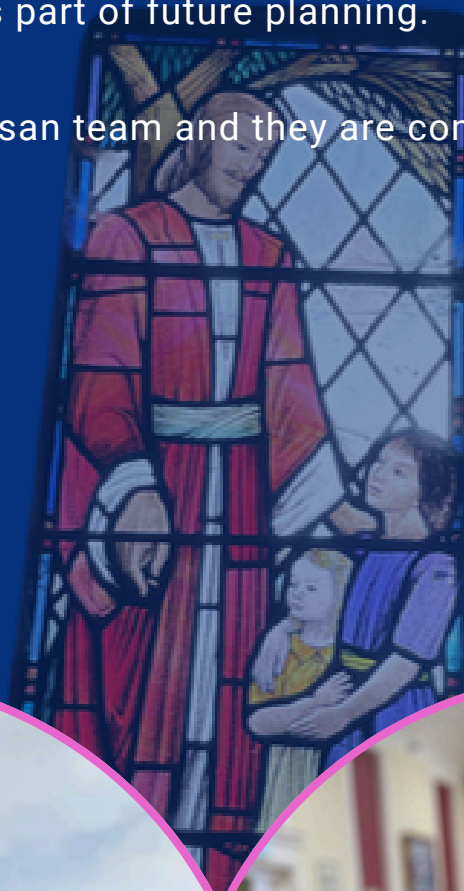
Sitting right on the village green and known as 'The Jewel in the Crown', Holy Trinity, Cornforth, is also a Grade II listed building. Talks and one public consultation have taken place about possible closure with a period of discernment as to God's will for the building of Holy Trinity in Cornforth. While the church continues to be cared for, there remains some outstanding masonry work and some work needed on the roof that will require addressing should the building remain in use.



In Chilton, we are preparing for the planned closure of St Aidan's church in 2026. The Public Notice period for a Pastoral Scheme to close the church and to unify the parish of Chilton with the parish of Cornforth and Ferryhill is underway. Assuming no objections are raised, which we are not anticipating, the scheme is likely to be implemented in early summer 2026.

Alongside this, St Aidan's church hall requires substantial investment over the next two to ten years in order to remain well maintained and economically viable. It's well used by the community It would be prudent to consider an economic viability study as part of future planning.

There is an excellent diocesan team and they are committed to supporting us through this process.



Assets

Cornforth and Ferryhill

Our typical annual income tends to be between £40-50,000 with our annual expenditure slightly over this. We are seeking new opportunities to use the hall at St Luke's to generate revenue.

£40-50K

Approx. Income

£51,000

Expenditure (2025)

Chilton

Our typical annual income tends to be between £20-25,000 with our annual expenditure tending to match the year-by-year fluctuations.

£20-25K

Approx. Income

£20-25K

Approx. Expenditure

£25,000

Total Reserves

£7000

Total Reserves

Finance and governance has been an area where we've faced some challenges in recent years. However, with the help of our ICM we have made some positive steps in these areas and our confidence and trust in one another has improved.

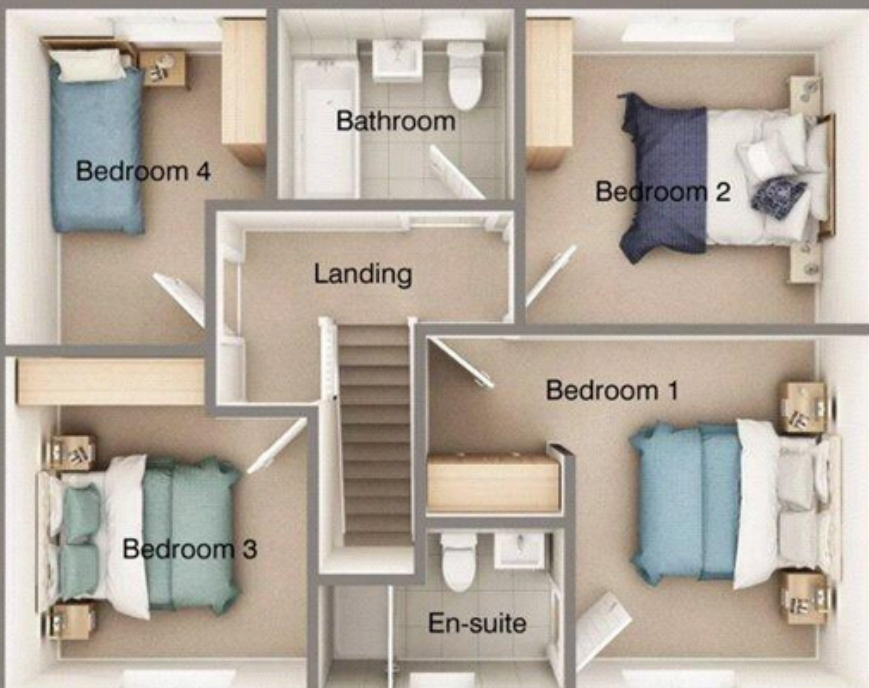
We're trying our best to get a handle on the finance and governance aspects of the building closures and, on the merging of our parishes, will need support as we establish a single PCC with the appropriate structures and processes in place. We hope this merger will, among other things, make our governance far simpler going forwards.

The diocese is committed to having a stable, well-governed parish in this area and offer support as and when they can.

The Vicarage

The property with this post is a recently purchased, 4 bedroom new-build house in Chilton.

For the full details about the house, please see the Rightmove listing here:



4
BEDROOM
DETACHED

The Parishes

Cornforth and Ferryhill

Cornforth and Ferryhill is a parish spread across two communities - the town of Ferryhill and the village of Cornforth. It is a parish with high levels of deprivation, with an IMD Ranking of 652 (with 1 being the most deprived and 12,178 being the least). The parish is bisected by the East Coast Main Line which gives Cornforth and Ferryhill the feeling of being two distinct places.

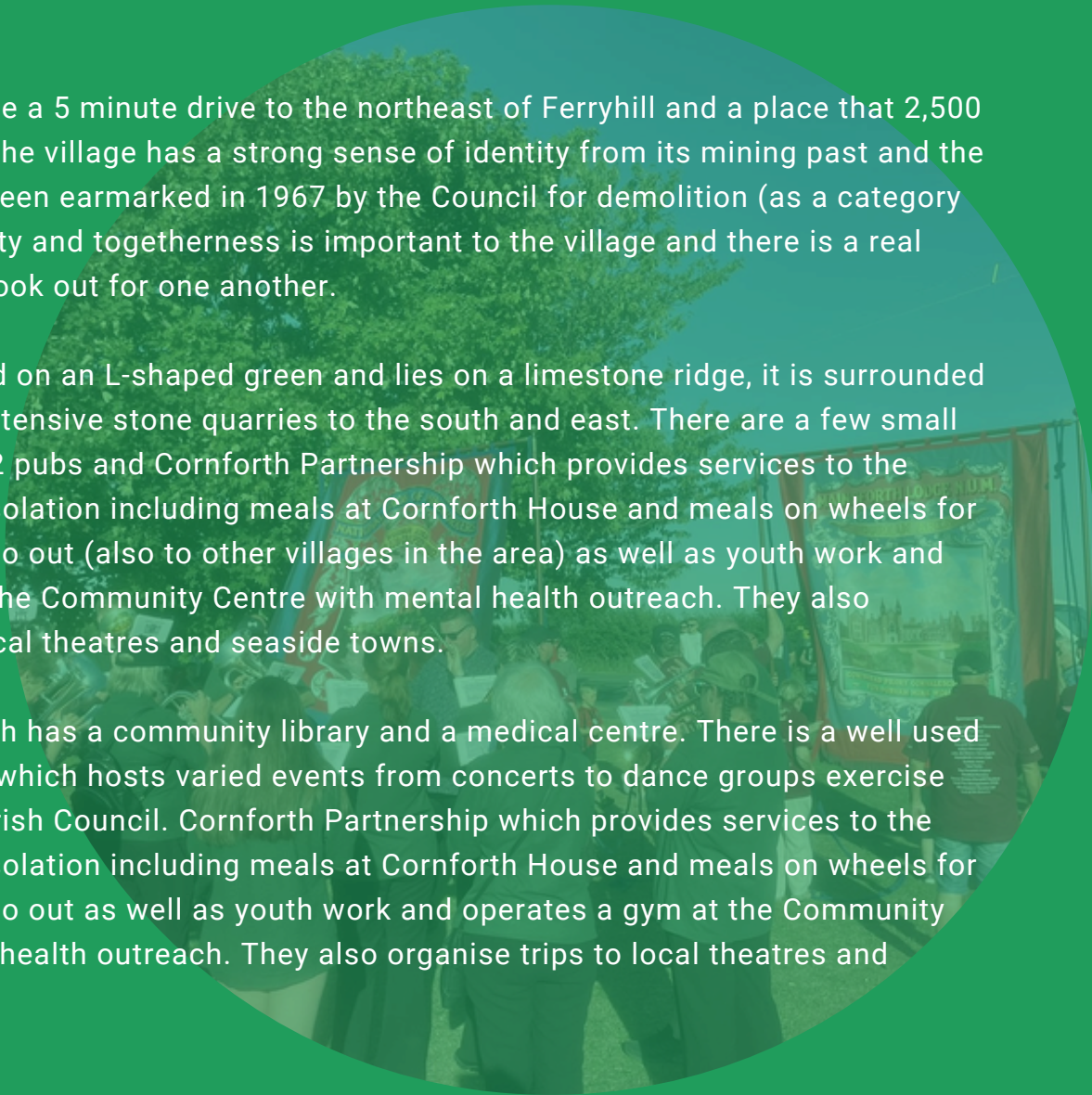
Situated around 7 miles south of Durham city on the Old Great North Road, Ferryhill is a town of around 12,500 people, predominantly made up of retired people and lower income families. Ferryhill has a strong coal mining heritage, with mines recorded in the area as early as the 1300s. Despite the final colliery's closure in the 1960s, the town still has a strong coal mining heritage and the Durham Miner's Gala is still a highlight of the calendar.

Ferryhill has a leisure centre, a working men's club, several pubs shops and dozens of takeaways. For the sporty out there, there are several sports clubs including cricket, bowls and football.

Cornforth is a village a 5 minute drive to the northeast of Ferryhill and a place that 2,500 people call home. The village has a strong sense of identity from its mining past and the shadow of having been earmarked in 1967 by the Council for demolition (as a category D village). Community and togetherness is important to the village and there is a real sense that people look out for one another.

Cornforth is centred on an L-shaped green and lies on a limestone ridge, it is surrounded by farmland with extensive stone quarries to the south and east. There are a few small shops/takeaways, 2 pubs and Cornforth Partnership which provides services to the elderly to prevent isolation including meals at Cornforth House and meals on wheels for those who cannot go out (also to other villages in the area) as well as youth work and operates a gym at the Community Centre with mental health outreach. They also organise trips to local theatres and seaside towns.

In addition Cornforth has a community library and a medical centre. There is a well used Community Centre which hosts varied events from concerts to dance groups exercise classes and the Parish Council. Cornforth Partnership which provides services to the elderly to prevent isolation including meals at Cornforth House and meals on wheels for those who cannot go out as well as youth work and operates a gym at the Community Centre with mental health outreach. They also organise trips to local theatres and seaside towns.



The Parishes

Across the two settlements there are 5 primary schools, 1 secondary school and a pupil referral unit. In addition to a whole host of amenities from pubs to doctors to football clubs. The parish is also close to the larger town of Spennymoor, with a further array of supermarkets and restaurants.

Chilton

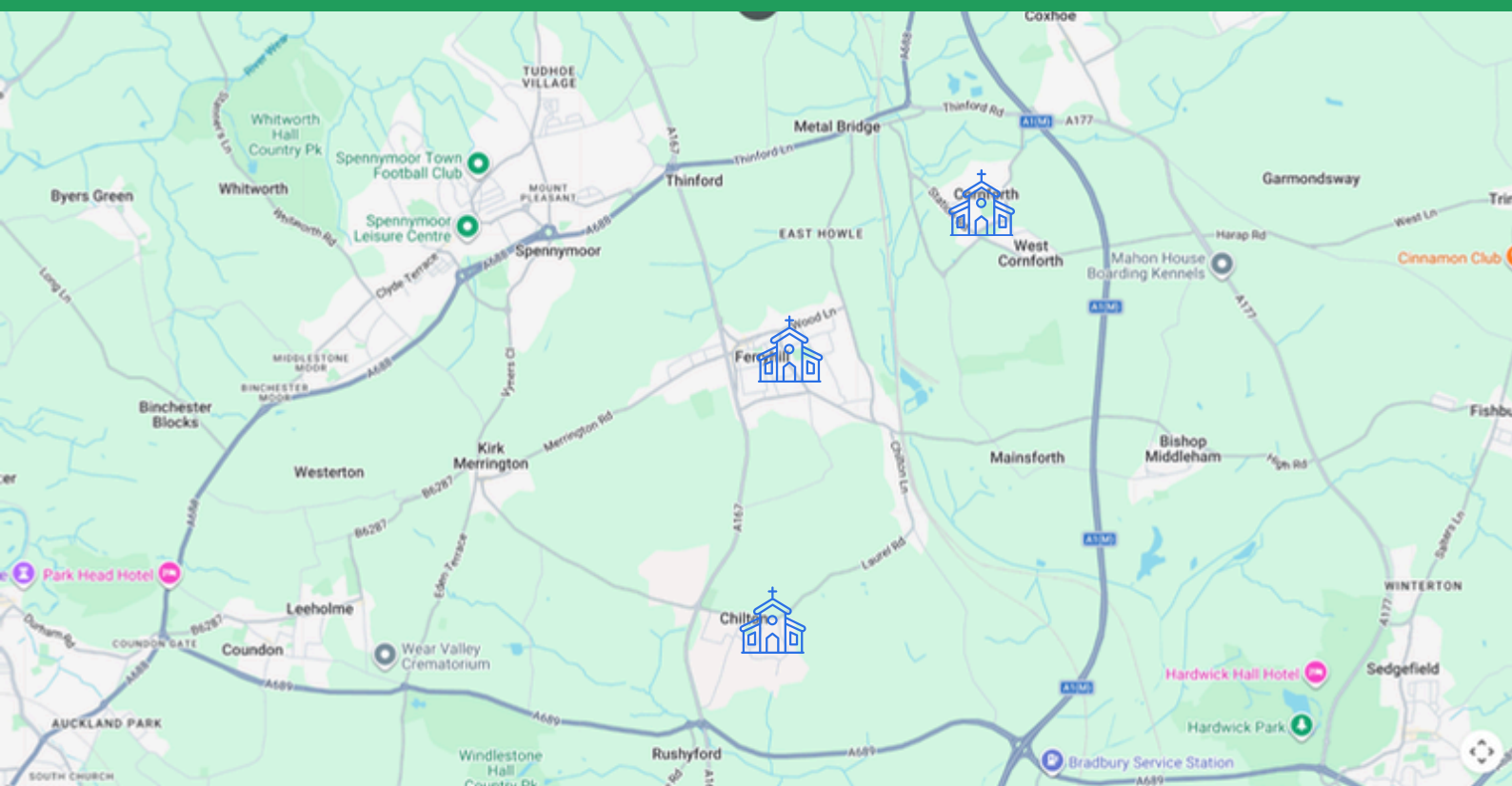
A quick 5 minutes' drive south of Ferryhill is the small town of Chilton with a population of around 4,500 people. Like its neighbouring parish Cornforth and Ferryhill, Chilton is a parish with some levels of deprivation with an IMD Rank of 1719, placing it in the 15% of the most deprived parishes in the country.

For much of its existence, Chilton was part of the parish of Ferryhill. But as with many places in the North East, as the coal industry in the area grew, so did the population and Chilton became a parish in its own right. Today, Chilton has two schools, 1 primary and 1 SEN, in addition to the GP and pharmacy in the town.

For the green-thumbed, Chilton has a large and popular set of allotments, with over 200 plots on the edge of the town. Though the mining industry has now gone, the rolling hills and lush green fields remain, making it an excellent place for walking.

The town of Newton Aycliffe is a few minutes' drive south of Chilton, extending the provision of the area further.

Cornforth, Ferryhill, and Chilton are all within touching distance of the A1(M), with bus routes to larger towns such as Darlington and Bishop Auckland.



The Future

We have been through a significant period of change in recent years, with more to come. We are merging together to form one parish; we've discerned one building closure and are exploring another and, naturally, this comes with sadness. However, it also provides the opportunity for a fresh start and a chance to reimagine how to be the church, worship the Lord, and reach out to our communities with the hope of the gospel. We are particularly excited by the chance to start a new worshipping community in Chilton.

Opportunities

- Buildings in good locations
- Warm, welcoming congregations
- Good facilities
- New build estates to reach out to
- Renewed missional passion
- The capacity and desire to grow

Challenges

- Navigating building closures
- Ending life at St Aidan's well
- Ageing congregations
- Help reimagining church without a church building

Who We Are Looking For

Someone Who...

- Is friendly and approachable to people from a range of backgrounds
- Has a strong and enthusiastic faith
- Has a passion for communities experiencing deprivation
- Has missional energy
- Has a desire to see young people, children, and families come to faith
- Is a confident leader

Someone Who Can

- Broaden our worship to be more inclusive of all ages
- Help us as a community discern how to serve God in these three places
- Develop connections between our church communities and local schools
- Establish a ministry that makes faith come alive for young people
- Give confidence and draw out gifts and skills in the congregation
- Encourage growth in the church
- Cast vision and drive it forwards
- Grasp the governance

What We Can Offer

Loving and supportive congregations who care for each other and the Priest-in-Charge.

Positive and supportive PCCs.

A solid group of teams committed to enhancing the missional, social, and worshipping life of our churches.

A willingness to be led into the future God calls us to.

**Do you feel called to join
us on our journey of
faith?**

Get in Touch!



Details

To enquire about this post, please get in contact with



The Ven. Libby Wilkinson

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Holy Trinity Cornforth



<https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/13541/>

St Luke's Ferryhill



<https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/13543/>

St Aidan's Chilton



<https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/7351/>



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