B. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELATING TO THE DEANERY OF YARDLEY & SOLIHULL

From 1 January 2020 the new Deanery of Yardley and Solihull came into formal being through a Bishop’s order. This followed considerable diocesan and local consultation. The aim is to make a larger unit which will have more resources to share and bring our diversity closer together in Christian unity, ministry and mission. Under the People and Places Framework, the new full-time Area Dean will work alongside access to enhanced resources for the parishes, supporting bookkeeping, buildings and HR functions. This is the fourth new Deanery in Church of England Birmingham, created by joining two existing deaneries together. We hope that by the end of 2020 we will have moved from our 13 Deaneries to 6 new ones.

Yardley and Solihull Deanery is part of the Aston Archdeaconry, and offers a wedge-shaped microcosm of wider society in the West Midlands and across much of the UK. It ‘hangs’ off three arterial routes: the A 34 Stratford Road, A41 Warwick Road and A45 Coventry Road. The parishes in the north and west of the deanery lie in Birmingham, and many are ‘Presence and Engagement’ parishes serving areas with people of diverse ethnic backgrounds and with a majority of people who would identify themselves as Muslim or of faiths other than Christian. The parishes in the south of the deanery lie in Solihull, a separate town with its own local authority, own sense of self and a large rural fringe. Residents here would more likely be of English background, and identify themselves as Christian or, increasingly, ‘nothing’.

Solihull has traditionally been considered wealthy, though this is not wholly true of everywhere; one of the parishes, in particular, contains some fairly high levels of deprivation. However, of the northern Birmingham suburbs, Indices of Deprivation show all but one parish are in the bottom 7%, and eleven are in the bottom 2% of most deprived parishes in the country. A number of community support projects are housed in or work alongside local churches, with refugees and asylum seekers being among the people assisted. Several church-housed food-banks support local families, many of whom are working full-time, with Yardley Great Trust also providing grants and accommodation, especially for the elderly, across the large area of the ancient parish of Yardley.

Most shades of Anglican opinion are represented within the churches of the deanery, from three Society parishes (clustered in the north) to a few evangelical churches, more or less ‘low’ and/or charismatic, centrally and in the south. While Solihull has a rural fringe, the villages and towns in it tend to house wealthy commuters rather than farmers and tractors, and their churches in the south of the deanery tend to be wealthier, larger and (relatively) younger in profile than those in the north, who tend to struggle in terms of numbers and ability to pay their Common Fund, but often excel in terms of faithfulness, service, initiative and generosity. No churches have signed up to Gafcon or Inclusive Church. There are good local ecumenical partnerships across the deanery and positive interfaith relationships are being built, especially in the north where Christian resourcing charities The Faithful Neighbourhoods Centre and The Feast are housed.

Major secular institutions which lie within the north of the deanery include St Andrew’s (the Birmingham City football ground), nearby HMS Forward Naval Reserve unit, Heartlands Hospital and the Webster and Horsfall wire-making factory about to celebrate its 300th anniversary; and, in Solihull, the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham Airport and Birmingham International rail station, and the large Jaguar Land Rover car factory. The envisaged HS2 will also pass through the deanery. There are plans for substantial new housing and other developments in Solihull’s green belt to tie in with this.

The deanery contains eight church primary schools but no church secondaries. All of our schools enjoy close relationships with their churches, and one is a member of the Birmingham Diocesan Multi-Academy Trust (BDMAT). There has been discussion of further schools affiliating to the Church of England in the future and, needlessly to say, there is excellent work going on in many of the other schools in our parishes as well.
The deanery contains 23 parishes / united benefices, comprising 28 churches and 18 incumbents. Two of the churches also have associate vicars, and fairly large staff teams. There are a number of clergy vacancies which are in the process of being filled, several involving pastoral reorganisation and innovative ministry. Our churches are growing more diverse and multi-cultural, all relative to the areas they serve, but we have some way to go in truly reflecting this in our church leadership teams. There are no BMOs. In the north of the deanery there is a history of churches working together in groups, some sharing Clergy, Readers and other lay ministry. Churches in the south are much more used to working independently of one another, although personal relationships (both clergy and lay, as well as between the two) are strong.

The chapter and synod of the new deanery are developing their arrangements for meeting and support under the new Area Dean. Both former deaneries have been very willing to embrace the deanery developments and are keen to explore mutual support of their different contexts.