

THE PARISH OF BILLINGHAM



PARISH PROFILE

JANUARY 2026

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PART A: INTRODUCTION

AN INTRODUCTION FROM BISHOP SARAH

This is an exciting time to be exploring joining the Diocesan family in Durham Diocese. We are on the cusp of a fresh chapter in our mission and ministry together. We are currently discerning with the National Church who will be the next Bishop of Durham, called to lead as we seek to make real our vision for the transformation we so desire across our Diocese. We are deeply encouraged by the award last year of significant national funding, demonstrating real confidence in our vision.

Our strategy for transformation and missional growth ('Called to Fruitfulness') is an opportunity and invitation for each of our parishes to step out in faith together, responding practically to our priorities to Challenge Poverty, Energise Growth, Care for God's Creation and Engage with Children, Youth and Young Adults. Making this a reality it will look different in every community. In some places it will come about in collaboration with others. Nobody is expected to do everything immediately or alone, but we are all invited and expected to find ways to respond relevantly.

In Billingham this feels particularly relevant. We sense the importance of Energising Growth – in discipleship and in the number of people served by and engaging in the life of our churches. We also sense the importance of Challenging Poverty, Engaging with Children and Young People and Caring for God's Creation in an area with lots of families, with some significant pockets of poverty, and with deeply rooted communities that still look to, and are open to, the local church.

In praying for a new Team Rector we are looking for someone excited by and wanting to be part of this vision and new future. Together we pray hopefully

Loving God, guiding the people of Durham Diocese faithfully through the years:

We thank you for saints who have marked our path,

young and old, known and unknown, from all places and in all walks of life.

Help us to find your way in our generation:

transformed by your truth, sharing your life, blessing our communities. Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen

We look forward to meeting together and sharing in this with you.

In Christ,

+Sarah

Acting Bishop of Durham



AN INTRODUCTION FROM THE OUTGOING CHANGE RECTOR – DAVID BROOKE –
AND THE TEAM VICAR – MAHALHA WACHEPA

David says:

I hope you will read this profile and find yourself as excited by the possibilities, as I am excited by the energy, faith and hope that is evident everywhere in the life of the parish as I step down and retire.

I have had a long association with the parish, and love it deeply. Witness the fact that my wife and I chose it quite some years ago as the place to buy a home, and live in retirement. As an incumbent, I was responsible for two of the former parishes. Then, as Area Dean, I led the processes of the team parish being formed, guided it through the first year of life, before handing the baton to others.

Ten years later it came as a huge surprise to be called back to Billingham as Change Rector (Interim Priest-in-Charge, technically) to help the parish through some growing pains and challenges. My appointment was for three years, but due to the underlying strength and spirit of the parish the task took far less, and so it is time once more to pass the baton, after two and a half amazing years.

This is a parish where – more and more – we really do ‘team’ in every sense. And so, the post of Team Rector calls for some special skills and qualities – for the ability to discern vision collaboratively, for the ability to shepherd communities through change, for real spiritual breadth and depth, and for huge emotional intelligence. Above all it needs someone who will approach it with deep faith, endless flexibility, and an open heart towards the community and churches.

And so, I encourage you to read, pray and reflect seriously on whether you, like me, might be experiencing a surprising call to Billingham – to be alongside Mahalha and the rest of this amazing team in the next stage of God’s journey for them.

Mahalha says:

It’s now two years since I joined Billingham Team Parish as a Team Vicar. I joined this team with excitement and love for the people in Billingham. In the two years I have been here, I have experienced the numerical and spiritual growth, and there is hope for the future.

In this parish, we work as a team in every aspect. We have 4 churches with one PCC. The post of Team Rector calls for some special skills and qualities: have some emotional intelligence, ability to lead different styles of worship and be able to work collaboratively within the team.

It needs someone who will approach it with deep faith, prayerful, endless flexibility, and an open heart towards the community and churches.

This is a parish where we live by faith, seeing where God is and what he is doing, and recognising his goodness. We do recognise challenges and accept them, at the same time we give thanks to God for his generosity, and we feel content with what we have.

Therefore, I encourage you to read, pray and reflect seriously on whether you, might be experiencing a call to Billingham – to work alongside me and the rest of this amazing team.

We think this is a wonderful opportunity, in a wonderful deanery, in a wonderful diocese, in a wonderful part of the world. Now we're praying that God will move the right person to come and join us in loving our town, our community and our churches.

Once again, that really is our prayer. Now let us tell you a bit more of the story...

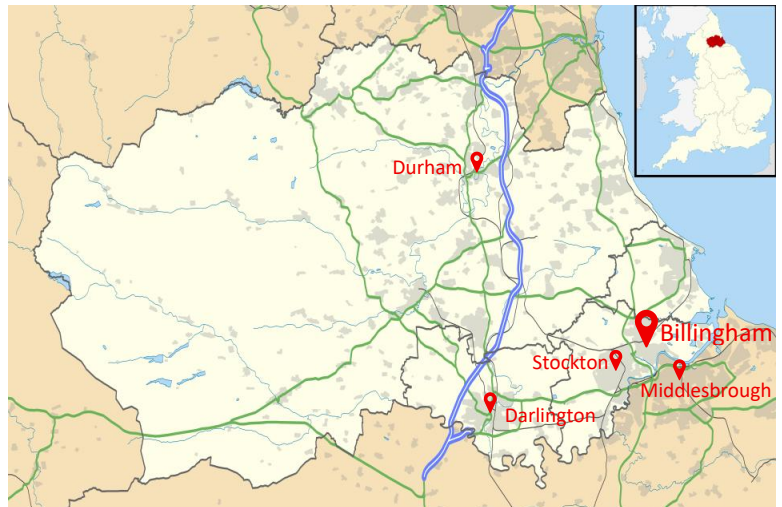
David Brooke and Mahalha Wachepa
Retired Change Rector and Team Vicar

PART B: THE BILLINGHAM STORY

INTRODUCING BILLINGHAM

From Saxon beginnings, through rapid expansion to support the chemical industry, to its current position as a town of around 38,000 people, Billingham has a long and varied history. While Billingham faces many challenges (some of them common to planned new towns across the North East) it is a place with a strong sense of community. Billingham people love their town, and they invest themselves in it.

The area continues to have many families with strong local roots, with different generations spread through the town. The parish also includes the highly deprived, but uniquely vibrant Clarences community along the Tees (near the famous Transporter Bridge), the hamlets of Cowpen Bewley and Newton Bewley, and a considerable area of industry.



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THE STORY BEHIND BILLINGHAM TEAM PARISH

Fast rewind to 2010. The parish of St Peter Wolviston is part of a group with five other villages. St Mary Magdalene has been vacant for almost a decade. The priest-in-charge of St Aidan, leaves ministry. The long-serving Vicar of St Cuthbert announces his intended retirement. But the deanery of Stockton is thinking hard and long about how deeper collaboration across groups of churches can build a better future. In 2010, Billingham faced a moment of opportunity.

Beginning in February 2011, representatives of the five PCCs, including St Peter Wolviston for the first time, began to meet, pray, and dream about a new future for Billingham. A clear vision quickly emerged around a vision to become a closely integrated, single-parish, team ministry, focused on discipleship and mission, and by November 2011, draft proposals were shared. Over the next year, careful consultation took place, and the parish came into being on Easter Sunday 2013.

During the run-up to Easter 2013, and in the immediate period afterwards, the parish was overseen by the Area Dean (who has since Jan 2023 served us as Change Rector). Support came through the deployment of a gifted curate in training, and a number of other interim clergy who were also committed to the vision. Momentum built, and a new clergy team came together, with a strong emphasis on collaboration and chemistry, as well as character, capability and calling. And equally importantly, we knew that the team meant more than the clergy – the team was all of us.

Meanwhile, a number of strands of work went on, which continue to bear fruit today:

- New initiatives took root and drew the parishes together. Just one example was a worshipping community for mums and tots called **Play and Praise** which began at St Aidan's, but quickly led to a second congregation at St Peter's.

- The pandemic saw that reduce to a single worshipping congregation at St Peter's, but the flame never went out, and the **second Play and Praise** community at St Aidan's relaunched in 2024. Together, they are a key part of our outreach, other things have grown from them, and new plans are being shaped even as this profile is written.
- The link with local primary schools began to change shape, and in 2023 was centred on a small but highly committed **Open the Book** team. That too has burgeoned, tripling in size, and reaching eight of our local primary schools, including one dealing with children with particular needs.
- That led to **Experience Easter**, **Experience Christmas** and this year **Experience Advent** events, that have drawn in countless new leaders and reached a fantastic number of children and families – not to mention the school staff who have come and taken part.
- Our work with people at risk of social isolation through our **Get Along Group** sessions has blossomed. New leaders have emerged, and we now have three groups meeting each month as well as a collaboration with Wolviston Village and Community Centre to offer a fourth similar opportunity.
- A parish office based at St Aidan's was established, staffed and operational daily during the week. Administration processes were brought together, and confidence grew. Now we can't really remember not having a shared central office.

That is in no sense a complete list, but it illustrates the way in which new life has been emerging where there was perhaps post-pandemic tiredness, and lost momentum.

BEGINNING THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

From its establishment in 2013 the Parish dealt with many challenges. The five churches had fragmented congregations and were presented with financial challenges associated with the upkeep of ageing buildings. The PCC had a large and divided membership. Nevertheless, the single Team Vicar managed to provide services in each church while supporting the occasional offices for a population of 37,000. All the while, he managed amicably to slim down to 4 churches. The Parish Share generated at that time was £84,000pa (~£103,000 in today's terms)

Efforts to recruit a Rector proved unsuccessful. The Parish undertook a mini-Partnership in Missional Church exercise under the guidance of two Lay Development Workers, one of whom was the diocesan lead for PMC. They proved to be transformational in linking together our church congregations, and that drew in new energy and started some new thinking. They lead the Parish through a Prioritisation process designed to test the suitability of a Parish to accept a Rector. A team was formed, and the parish embarked on the full three-year PMC process shortly before the Change Rector was in post.

The Prioritisation Process highlighted governorship issues that required the aid of a Rector experienced in handling these problems as an interim to appointing a more permanent candidate. A suitable candidate, Revd. David Brooke, was appointed on 18th January 2023. Revd. David's credentials were ideal for the job because of his understanding of the Parish. He was the original steering force underlying the formation of the Parish in 2013.

To support Revd. David's stewardship of 4 churches and a large population, Revd Mahalha Wachepa was licensed on 5th September 2023 as Team Vicar. Mahalha had lived in Stockton for quite some years, serving as a Churchwarden and Authorised Pastoral Assistant at Stockton Parish Church before undertaking ordination training. Her curacy was in Durham North Team Ministry, and she brought all kinds of new gifts, but all

wrapped in the commitment to collaboration that is so key in this parish. Mahalha's home nation is Malawi, and her coming to Billingham has opened up a number of opportunities to form links with a parish there.

PROGRESS AND BUILDING MOMENTUM

Rev. David immediately began to tackle the issues troubling our Parish.

- He persuaded two churches to combine their congregations into a single mother church at St Aidan's with a strong central congregation worshipping every Sunday. Without the resources to provide services every Sunday at the remaining two churches, (St Peter's and St Cuthbert's) he provided services every other Sunday.
- He persuaded the PCC to slim down membership and instilled a more conciliatory tone to meetings. He began the process of uniting our congregations.
- He began, as early as May 2023 the process of closing St Cuthbert's thus laying to groundwork for improving our finances and for further integration.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Surveying the last couple of years, here – in rough order of occurrence – are just a few of the highlights, which have brought us to where we are today as we seek a new Team Rector.

- As many as forty people are now engaged with the worshipping community at St Aidan's, which meets every week at 11am without fail, and where we blend the old and the new in our own particular, and pretty informal way.
- At the same time, the two former congregations of St Peter's and St Cuthbert's have blended and knitted together, worshipping alternately in the two churches, embracing a style of traditional worship. This is mostly a separate congregation that have blended and have also grown.
- At the APCM in spring 2023 we streamlined the composition of the PCC and started making better use of the Standing Committee, as well as setting up a Finance Group.
- On 5th Sept 2023 Mahalha was licensed and almost immediately launched ***Afro Beat Praise and Worship Dance for Wellbeing***, a monthly night of dance and worship which has drawn together all ages and kinds of people.
- Starting in May 2024 we worked to put together a comprehensive financial strategy and between July and September (Generosity Month again) ran a full-blooded finance campaign, which saw an encouraging response.
- In September 2024 we ran our first Alpha Course for years, in parallel with a Confirmation Course and a substantial group – mainly but not all adult were confirmed.
- In June 2025, reflecting on our growing diversity, we ran the ***Difference Course***, and saw a wonderful group of people building new foundations of openness and learning new skills to share with others as we handle – and rejoice in – diversity.
- In Autumn 2024 we had learned that St Aidan's needed a new south roof, which would cost an eye-watering amount. Over summer 2025 we have got a project underway to replace most of the roof with solar panels, reducing our bills and generating income.
- The permissions are nearly in place, and a loan has been agreed with the diocese to cover what we cannot raise ourselves or through grants. And meanwhile, we are on the way to registering with Eco-Church and looking comprehensively at the path to Net Zero by 2030.

- In November 2024 we were approached by a local Redeemed Christian Church of God parish to make use of St Luke's church on Sunday mornings (when we do not hold services there). After a long process we signed an agreement on 28th Sept 2024 and their first service is on 5th Oct. This brings us both a new relationship in mission, and new income.

THE NEXT STAGE FOR THE TEAM

We see being a team as a source of strength not a weakness, and we don't expect anyone to be good at everything. We want the team to be diverse in personality, spirituality and skills – complementary to each other. That takes work because difference generates both heat and light. That is why we ran the [Difference Course](#) and we are trying to embed the core practices of being present to each other, being curious and interested in each other, and reimagining the possibilities for a new future in all aspects of parish and community life.

Already we are growing into a team where we recognise and draw on each other's strengths, and support each other at all times. What we are seeking now is someone who shares that vision, will make it a top priority, and won't try to mould the parish in their own image. We share a commitment to collaboration.

We recognise that our Ministry in Billingham must expand. Unifying our individual churches around a central mother church has been a source of strength. But there is more to do. Discussions are underway to divest ourselves of St Cuthbert's church. With careful stewardship this could provide the opportunity to further consolidate our congregations. This is a large Parish. Our vision is to fully unlock its potential for growth.

WHAT IT WILL LOOK LIKE TO INHABIT YOUR ROLE

This role emphasises someone with the following qualities:

- Ordained ministry, including experience in pastoral care and mission.
- Proven ability to provide spiritual guidance, set strategic direction, and encourage discipleship.
- Excellent communication, empathy, and ability to listen effectively and build positive relationships.
- Capacity to work effectively within a team of clergy, delegate appropriately, and support the gifts and callings of others.
- Experience leading change and transformation creatively and collaboratively.
- Proven ability to manage a varied and demanding workload.
- Ability to handle conflict constructively and resolve issues within the community.
- Experience working with diverse groups, including different denominations and wider community.
- Familiarity with digital tools to connect and engage with the community.

PART C: THE CHURCH BUILDINGS AND THE CONGREGATIONS

The five parishes that were brought together in 2013 were all originally part of the historic parish of Billingham, with St Cuthbert's as the sole parish church. Wolviston was the first to become a separate parish, reflecting the fact that until the 20th century, the village heart of Wolviston and the area around Billingham Green were the main centres of community, separated by large areas of farmland.

Successive waves of development moved the centre of the town north, and gradually bridged the gap between Wolviston and Billingham, resulting in the pattern of community we have today. New church

buildings were added as the town grew, and the parishes were formally subdivided as new congregations took root, all within a couple of decades.

Just a few years ago, the congregations within the parish were strongly rooted in particular churches – to talk of St Luke’s, for example, would have been to talk both about the building and the congregation. Now things are different, with a greater sense of unity, new worshipping communities, and more fluidity. We’re starting to try to talk of being church (singular), church buildings and congregations, rather than using the word ‘church’ to mean all those things. And when we say ‘parish’, we mean the wider communities we serve, not just our regular attenders, the electoral roll, or the PCC.

WORSHIP AND OUTREACH

WORSHIPPING CONGREGATIONS

From Easter 2023, the PCC agreed a new calendar of worship which has now become our settled pattern. It has faced up to the fact that trying to be ‘fair’ to all the diminishing local congregations, and rotating services around the buildings, was confusing and people were falling away as a result.

So, in the new pattern, things are much clearer – as well as being more varied and richer:

- On Sunday mornings...
 - There is a traditional style of worship service at 9.00am alternating between St Cuthbert’s and St Peter’s, which is communion almost without exception.
 - There is a multi-generational service at 11.00am at St Aidan’s every week, again normally with communion. This service has a Common Worship core but draws on other resources and a wide range of music.
 - On fifth Sundays, we all meet together as one church family at St Aidan’s, with every congregation involved.
- On Sunday evenings...
 - **2nd Sunday (Together @ 3)** continues...hosted at St Peter’s on the second Sunday at 3.00pm!
 - On the first and third Sundays of the month, *Come and See* meets at St Luke’s, which is informal, lay-led, and does not include communion. However, it truly is a worshipping community in which to explore and grow deeper in faith and discipleship.
- Midweek...
 - There are communion services every Wednesday at 10.00am alternating between St Peter’s and St Luke’s.
 - We ***Pause to Pray*** every Thursday at 7.00pm, hosted at St Aidan’s at 7pm.
 - ***Play and Praise*** meet on Mondays (St Aidan’s) and Fridays (St Peter’s) at 9.30am in term time.

THE DIOCESAN PRIORITIES

There are four key priorities that the churches in our diocese are working at. We are also working hard at them, though there is still room to develop further.

- ***Energising Growth*** will rest on a continued renewal of discipleship, and a restored confidence in the gospel, and a long-term re-engagement with our communities. While we have made great strides with this, there is more to be done. There is clear appetite for something new to emerge, especially among

our newer members, and conversations have begun about what we do beyond confirmation or Alpha, for example.

- **Challenging Poverty** will call us out of our comfort zones, and involve new and re-vitalised partnerships. Some of the poverty is in out-of-sight-out-of-mind communities such as the Clarences, but much is right on our church doorsteps. God has been sending us people for whom life is a struggle, and they are beginning to show us how we can make a greater difference.
- **Engaging with Children and Young People** is beginning to look very different, as we build on the good work going on today, re-think our relationship with the many schools. As we reflect on the future of **2nd Sunday (Together @ 3)** we wonder whether there is scope for a completely new worshipping community, and we are keen to explore chaplaincy in the secondary school, starting small and experimentally.
- **Caring for God's Creation** is coming to the fore as we prune our church building stock and renew what we retain. There is ample scope for us to aim high in terms of our own carbon footprint, and the current solar and battery storage project is a major step in the right direction.

SCHOOLS

There are good links with primary schools across the parish, with lay teams involved in school life in a variety of roles from taking collective worship, talking to classes, hosting school services in church and serving on governing bodies. There is an Open the Book team, which has grown to 8 trained volunteers. There is an open door to form a closer link with the local secondary school.

Of particular interest is the possibility in the next couple of years of launching a new congregation based at Priors Mill Primary School. Priors Mill has a new head, who is very supportive, and the school is in the final stages of joining the Melrose Multi-Academy Trust.

CARE HOMES

Lay members of the churches have built good links with some care homes in recent years, visiting and holding services on a regular basis. Some of this work is done ecumenically. Home Communion services are taken by lay members of some congregations who visit the housebound.



THE BUILDINGS

ST CUTHBERT'S

Founded in 860AD, St Cuthbert's is a Grade 1 listed building.

The worship tradition of the established congregation is strongly liturgical, but with considerable creativity at times. The building is a very popular choice for occasional offices – many of the multi-generational families in the town still see it as their 'home church'. However, the congregation is very small and maintenance is a constant challenge.



Disability access is mixed, typically for the age and type of building. The toilets are located with the vestries, and although roomy are not specifically adapted for accessibility. The PCC owns a nearby hall which can be rented by the community. It is well maintained, heavily used and a good source of income. The extensive churchyard is closed except for the burial of cremated remains and further burials. It is under the care of Stockton Borough Council.

The PCC was very concerned about the strain that St Cuthbert's as a building puts on parish finances and energy, and the discussions led to the formation of the Friends of St Cuthbert's Billingham Green as a separate charity.

The Friends have mounted a fantastic public campaign, raised substantial funds, and run a series of highly successful events which have generated a lot of attention and energy – beyond the capability of the PCC

In the meantime, with services, pastoral offices, and Friends' events continuing, the Friends hope to continue working with the parish and diocese to secure grant funding and become ready to take over the church completely at a future date through a further scheme to change the use and transfer ownership. At that time, while it will no longer be a parish church, it is hoped on all sides that the Bishop will grant permission for a new pattern of worship and special services, overseen by the parish and clergy.

ST PETER'S

Until the mid-20th century, Wolviston village stood at the crossroads of major routes to Durham, Sedgefield, Sunderland, and all points south and north. Now, due to successive bypass measures, it is slightly cut off, separated from the rest of Billingham by busy roads. There is a strong sense of village identity, with Wolviston primary school, a number of shops and a Post Office. Nevertheless, it is very much a satellite of the town and there is a high footfall past the church



The well-maintained present building dates from 1876 and the extension (from 1972), includes meeting facilities, kitchen and toilets, and accessibility is relatively good. A new boiler and hot water system is shortly to be installed, and there are good AV facilities in both church and parish room. The building stands in a large churchyard in two parts, one of which is open for burials. The churchyard is extremely well maintained by a group of volunteers who also tend a wildflower strip and construct bug hotels

Until ten years ago, all worship was from the Book of Common Prayer, and a strong attachment to the traditional forms remains. On the other hand, Common Worship is now in regular use, with considerable seasonal creativity. St Peter's is the base for one of our two **Play and Praise** congregations, and also currently for our **2nd Sunday (Together@3)** congregation working with children and younger families (this is under review). St Peter's has embraced diversity: there is always a good buzz, visitors are made extremely welcome, pastoral support is quietly and effectively offered, and there has been modest growth in 2024 and 2025.

ST AIDAN'S

St Aidan's was built as Billingham expanded rapidly in the late 1950s. It is centrally located in the town of Billingham as a whole, conveniently close to the town centre, and with good parking and substantial facilities. There is no churchyard.

The worshipping area is open-plan and there are newly installed AV screens enabling us to worship in a variety of ways. A meeting 'pod' (quick and cheap to heat) and comfortable furniture have been introduced in part of the Lady Chapel to provide meeting and social space.

In addition, there is a large entrance lobby with level access, good storage, a large hall with a stage (in need of removal), a well-equipped kitchen (with a food hygiene certificate), and a unisex accessible toilet and separate ladies toilets. The new parish office is at the end of the hall nearest the street entrance, and has independent access. Sketches of a possible renewal of the community facilities have been drawn up, but this is a future project.

Areas of the building complex are in need of refurbishment, but it is generally in very good condition and the PCC regards it as a significant asset which should be further developed. It is increasingly central to the life of the parish as well as the geography of the town. As well as being well used by the parish, it is popular for events and groups, and a source of income.

St Aidan's congregation does not conform to any stereotype of Anglican churchmanship, and there is a spirit of openness and expectancy. Becoming a single parish has been fully embraced, and there has been no fearfulness about losing local identity, particularly as a warm welcome has been given to the congregation of St Mary Magdalene.



ST LUKE'S

St Luke's is located in the Low Grange area (the northeast) of Billingham, adjacent to a Community Centre and shops. It was built in 1964, as a plant from St Aidan's, in a large and fairly dense area of housing – some of which hides pockets of real deprivation.

The simple, modern building is light and airy, seating is flexible, in good condition, and relatively cheap to maintain and run. There is an entrance lobby, a good-sized meeting room, a vestry and toilets. There is no churchyard.

As our worship patterns have evolved, and we no longer have Sunday morning worship at St Luke's, the majority of members now worship at St Aidan's and are fully incorporated there, very much strengthening the spiritual backbone of the parish.

Former St Luke's members have responded generously and creatively to the changes, and although the church building will now be used by the RCCG on Sunday mornings (and possibly Thursday evenings), St Luke's is part



of our midweek worship pattern, and we launched a new evening congregation with a distinctive character in 2023 – *Come and See* – which is led by a Lay Reader, and has grown its own leadership team.

ST MARY MAGDALENE – NOW CLOSED FOR WORSHIP

St Mary Magdalene became unusable some years ago and the PCC was unable to repair it. The building was formally closed late in 2024, after full public consultation, and is in the care of Durham Diocese who are seeking an alternative use.

Meanwhile, we celebrated the mission and Ministry of St Mary's at St Peter's early in 2025, and former members have joined faithfully with the worshipping communities at St Aidan's or St Peter's. Their faith remains very much alive, and they are active in service and mission, in particularly at the CofE Primary school.



WOLVISTON VILLAGE RECTORY



The Rectory is a recently purchased, beautiful 5-bedroom detached property with 2 reception rooms. It lies on the southeast corner of Wolviston village green. Wolviston Primary School is about 100 yards away from the Rectory and St Peter's Church is 5 minutes' walk away. The Village Community Hall with Football Field and Wolviston Village Women's Institute lie opposite the Church. St Aidan's church is 5 minutes away by car. Similarly, less than 5 minutes by car brings you to the A19/689 dual carriageway junction with fast, efficient links north, south and west. A Sainsbury's Superstore opened just across the A19 junction in November 2025.

Full details of the property can be found here: [Rectory Right Move Listing](#)

PART D: BILLINGHAM THE TOWN

The social character of the team parish varies considerably. There are relatively affluent areas and, by contrast, very deprived areas across the team parish – some obvious, and some hidden. In terms of local politics, Billingham is served by [Stockton on Tees Borough Council](#), and has its own [Billingham Town Council](#).

The rapid expansion of the community was a direct result of the expansion of the internationally important chemical industry in the area. While employment in the industry has declined somewhat in recent years, output has actually risen. There is still a strong chemical industry presence in Billingham, and we are proud of our industrial heritage.

But the industrial landscape of Billingham isn't completely dominated by the chemical industry: there are a variety of food-related businesses based here too. Billingham has been home to a potato crisp factory, affectionately known as the 'Crispy', for many years, and in 2007 became home to one of the largest tomato producers in the UK. Quorn is also made here! Several trading estates with well-established small businesses have developed, including a cluster of high-technology companies at Belasis Business Park.

INDUSTRY

Alongside the bank of the River Tees are huge industrial works. The chemical works still referred to by many as ICI is now operated by a number of companies. The strength of this industry was based on the synthesis of ammonia at Billingham in 1928. The ammonia-based fertilisers transformed world agriculture and led to the licencing of similar plants throughout the world. It rapidly expanded to manufacture nylon and polyester before creating a highly diversified range of specialist products such



© [Trevor Littlewood](#)

as antifreeze and detergents. Today the area hosts a special cluster of engineering expertise now being utilised by the government to establish a second seminal industry based on Zero Carbon technology.

There is a significant recycling plant in Haverton Hill, as well as marine fabrication. There are vast chemical terminals and storage facilities near the mouth of the Tees at Seal Sands. A plant for the recycling of 'ghostships' lies just over the parish and deanery boundary and also a nuclear power station repurposed to producing advanced modular reactors (AMRs).



© [MPF](#)

In the past twenty years there has been a remarkable effort to clean up pollution from heavy industry. The air is cleaner, seals have returned to the Seal Sands, and a huge variety of birds now pass through Billingham as they migrate. The RSPB nature reserve at Saltholme opened a few years ago and is well used by birdwatchers from far and wide, as well as school groups.

Nevertheless, concerns around industrial safety are a feature of life in the town, with hydrogen being stored underground locally.

SHOPPING

In common with many planned new towns, there are a number of groups of local shops dotted around the housing estates. While these supplied all needs in the early years of the town, today they are often centred around a Sainsbury's Local or the equivalent, with takeaways, hairdressers and other local shops alongside. The main supermarkets are Tesco, Aldi and Asda – Tesco near to the town centre, and Asda and Aldi within it. A greater variety of retail outlets can be found along Station Road and Mill Lane in Old Billingham, in Wolviston village, and along Wolviston Road.

Despite prize-winning floral displays, and the injection of life from the annual Billingham International Folklore Festival, the fully-pedestrian town centre has suffered the same fate as many across the country, with a number of unused retail outlets. Even so, the town centre boasts chemists, bakers, cafés and charity shops, plus many of the usual high street names. There are ambitious plans in place for a regeneration of the town centre and the recent opening of new stores has helped to lift the atmosphere.

Meanwhile, the service area adjacent to the A19 at Wolviston has been developed considerably, and a new retail park is about to open on the west of the A19/A689 junction this may well change how the people of Billingham shop and the development may begin to build bridges between Billingham and the newer developments at Wynyard.

SPORTS AND LEISURE

Billingham Forum – recently refurbished at a cost of £18m – attracts over one million visitors annually and is the centrepiece of the leisure facilities in Billingham. The Forum provides a swimming pool, an ice rink, squash courts, a top-class gym, and a couple of sports halls as well as a sauna and café area. There are also various fitness classes, a few more gyms, dance classes, and badminton at venues around the town. The Forum is also home to the larger of the two theatres in the area

(www.forumtheatrebillingham.co.uk), the other being the Theatre Upstairs, home to the Billingham Players (www.billinghamplayers.co.uk).



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If you prefer to be outside when playing your sport then there are football pitches (including an all-weather pitch), a golf course (www.billinghamgolfclub.com), fishing, a running club, and two bowling clubs. In addition, the National Cycle Network runs straight through Billingham, and the world-class white-water facility at the Tees Barrage is only a few miles down the road.

If you want to join a team or just cheer them on then you could take your pick from Billingham Town FC (www.billinghamtownfc.net), Billingham Synthonia FC (www.synners.co.uk), Billingham Rugby Club (www.billinghamrugby.co.uk), Billingham Synthonia Cricket Club (billinghamsyncc.play-cricket.com), Billingham Stars Ice Hockey Team (www.billinghamstars.co.uk).

There is a new library in the town, there are a number of social clubs, and several pubs across Billingham and Wolviston. There is a new library in the town, there are a number of social clubs, and several pubs across Billingham and Wolviston. Billingham is also home to the Billingham International Folklore Festival of World Dance, which draws

traditional and contemporary dance companies from all over the world. Further afield culture and leisure can be found in Stockton's Globe Theatre and the Glasshouse International Centre for Music in Newcastle.



HOUSING, TRANSPORT AND HEALTH

Due to the way the town has developed, housing in Billingham is very varied. Only a modest proportion is in blocks of flats. The oldest housing can be found in the village centres of Billingham Green and Wolviston, and the outlying hamlets of Cowpen Bewley and Newton Bewley. In both cases, there are ribbon developments along what were once the main roads north and south. Housing grew up at Haverton Hill, but is now demolished, and then ICI company housing around the north side of Billingham Green.

More recent developments to the north and west, have been largely private developments. Although many are larger properties, they remain fairly dense, with a few exceptions. Recent years have also seen new developments in the village of Wolviston itself, and very close to St Aidan's church on the old Billingham College site. There remains a mix of private ownership, local authority housing, private landlords and housing association properties.

Overall the town is fairly compact. The new A19 bypass removes a lot of the through traffic, and the legacy of the old A19 gives the town two good main north-south arteries. Lying at the junction of the A19 and A689, and close to the A66 gives Billingham excellent access in all directions: to Hartlepool in the east, Sunderland and Newcastle to the north, Middlesbrough and York to the south (linking to the A1), and Darlington, Sedgfield, Bishop Auckland and Durham to the west and north -west. From the A1, the A66 provides a quick route to the Lake District.

There are still reasonable bus services in the town, though some routes have been cut back, and the station has an hourly service in each direction on weekdays northwards to Hartlepool, Sunderland and Newcastle and southwards to Middlesbrough. East Coast main line services can be joined at Darlington, and Grand Central services at Hartlepool or Eaglescliffe. Billingham has several health centres providing GP and family health services, a number of dentist surgeries both private and NHS, and opticians. There are hospitals close by in Stockton, and further afield in Hartlepool and Middlesbrough.

PLACES TO VISIT

The transport infrastructure of the north east is quite exceptional, giving access to numerous recreational areas in an hour or less, including the North York Moors and Whitby (30 minutes to 1 hr); beaches at Seaton Carew (15 minutes) and Redcar, Marske and Saltburn (30 minutes); the Durham Dales (40 minutes); the Yorkshire Dales (1 hr); Durham City (40 minutes); Sunderland (30 minutes); and Gateshead, Newcastle and York (1 hour).

CONTACT DETAILS

For more information or an informal conversation, about this post, please get in contact with

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