Kensington Episcopal Area

[Nb This is an early draft produced for consultation on the appointment of a new Bishop of Kensington. A fuller Area Profile, including a summary of the Diocesan 2030 Vision, the Area Plan and stories & photos from local parishes is in preparation for candidates and for Bishop Sarah’s Advisory Panel. To comment on what should be included in the final document please contact the Archdeacon of Middlesex.]

Local Context

The Kensington Episcopal Area is the western area of the Diocese of London, and coterminous with the Archdeaconry of Middlesex. Across six deaneries (below), it covers the London Boroughs of Kensington & Chelsea, Hounslow, Hammersmith & Fulham, and Richmond-upon-Thames (North of the River – known as Hampton Deanery). Kensington Area also contains the only deanery in the Diocese that is outside the boundaries of Greater London – the Borough of Spelthorne, which is in Surrey.

Kensington Area has a population approaching one million (pending 2021 census data), equivalent in this respect with many entire Dioceses in the Church of England, and larger than several. The population is growing, and there are many major areas of new housing development, including around Heathrow, Brentford, Earl’s Court, and in North Hammersmith, particularly around the White City estate.

The Area stretches from central London to the western stretch of the M25 – “From Harrods to Heathrow!”. There are communities of high-density inner-city housing, luxury mansions and everything in between, as well as Royal Parks and even areas of farmland and large reservoir lakes. We have pockets of extreme wealth (including some of the wealthiest streets in the country) and of serious poverty, suburbs, and outer London estates as well as communities for whom the Thames creates a riverside context. Heathrow dominates employment in the north-western corner of the Area, whereas in many other places, commuters daily head into central London on the numerous train and tube lines.

Hounslow is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in London, with its town centre church of Holy Trinity, for example, including congregations which worship in Gujarati, Hindi, Brazilian Portuguese, and another in Russian, alongside its English language services. We have a significant number of other non-English speaking services in Kensington Area parish churches, including French, Italian, Farsi, Tagalog, and Ukrainian congregations.

Kensington Area is the UK base for a significant number of Christian denominations from across the world, including Russian, Greek, Syrian and Armenian Orthodox, Coptic and many others. They provide ministry for congregations of Christians from around the world and the current Bishop of Kensington chairs a regular meeting for their bishops who organise joint
services and action on issues of common interest such as faith-based persecution around the world.

The Grenfell Tower fire took place in one of the parishes in 2017. As well as the local churches immediate response to the disaster, responding to that tragedy has been a significant part of Bishop Graham’s recent ministry and in the life of Kensington Deanery. The disaster helped focus attention on the issue of housing across London and the need for good quality housing that meets the standards outlined by the Archbishops’ Housing Commission.

The Church of England Locally

There are 91 benefices, at least 9 New Worshipping Communities and 37 church schools in the episcopal area, as well as major hospitals and prisons, some of which are served by CofE chaplains. The Bishop of Kensington has held the diocesan brief for prisons in recent years, as three of the prisons in the diocese lie within the Area. Eleven parishes are under the oversight of the Bishop of Fulham through the arrangements contained in the London Plan. Four parishes in the Area are designated Resource Churches and there are three Youth Minster parishes which are committed to partner with local churches in reaching and serving young people.

The Area is served by around 300 clergy. Of these, 170 are stipendiary (including 53 locally supported minsters) and 45 are self-supporting. There are nearly 20 chaplains (serving hospitals, prisons and schools) and another 65 clergy hold PTO. The Area is also served by 64 LLMs/Readers and many other Lay Commissioned Ministers.

A significant ministry in the Kensington Area is the accompaniment of those exploring ordained ministry. More than 50 people are currently in the discernment process, led by the Area Director of Ministry and supported by a team of parish priests and lay assessors. We currently have more than 70 ordinands already in training. A third of those recommended in 2021 were of Global Majority Heritage and more than half were women. The London base for St Mellitus College is located in one of our churches and trains a significant proportion of Kensington Area ordinands amongst students from all over the country.

One of our benefices is Holy Trinity, Brompton, known for being the home of the Alpha Course and the source of numerous church plants and resource parishes in London and around the country. HTB’s own congregations account for nearly a quarter of our Sunday worshipping community in the Kensington Area and around 1-in-6 of our stipendiary clergy, most of whom are locally funded.

During the pandemic, most Kensington parishes moved swiftly online. With buildings now reopened, the new opportunities of video-linked services, courses, youthwork and daily prayer continue to be explored. The crisis also led churches to build on the already significant commitment to meeting local community need. Existing foodbanks and community provision have been joined by new initiatives across the episcopal area, including clothes banks, debt counselling and work amongst refugees. Several areas also have long-standing networks of church-based seasonal homeless shelters, staffed by church volunteers.

Church buildings across the Area range from ancient and listed buildings to modern halls and community centres. A major challenge for the next few years is to help churches reach NetZero
in carbon emissions as soon as possible and we are encouraging all parishes to join the EcoChurch scheme.

The Area Team

The Bishop of Kensington is based in Twickenham, near the geographical centre of the Area. The bishop works with a staff team made up of the Archdeacon of Middlesex, Director of Mission, Director of Ministry, Schools Chaplain, Finance Adviser, Safeguarding Adviser and administrative staff. The Kensington Area Leadership Team is completed by the six Area Deans, a Dean of Women, and a Dean of Cultural Diversity, each of whom is a full-time parish priest.

2030 Vision and Area Plan

[Summary of the diocesan vision and focus on the Area Plan implementation]

Local Stories

[Stories from local parishes and Christians, focused around the Ambitions and Priorities of the 2030 Vision]

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