

After many months of journeying, The Beacon in the Forest Minster Community was recently launched to the Northwest of Leicestershire.

We spoke to Simon Parr, Lay Worship Leader at St Botolph's Church in Shepshed and Revd Adele Adshead, Transition Oversight Minister for the Minster Community, for an insight into the process, the highs the lows, and their hopes for the Minster Community going forward...



Simon Parr - Lay Worship Leader at St Botolph's Shepshed

My name is Simon Parr, I'm a Lay Worship Leader at St Botolph's Church in Shepshed, serve on the PCC and am a Deanery Synod Representative.

Over the past few years, I've been closely involved in helping St Botolph's engage with the Shaped by God process, acting as a link between our parish and the wider diocesan journey. Alongside that, I was part of the Minster Community Coordinating Group and the writing group that developed the Beacon in the Forest proposal.

After journeying all these months, how does it feel to have launched?

It feels both joyful and humbling. It has been really encouraging to see ideas, conversations, and prayer from the past few years come to fruition. The journey hasn't always been straightforward — there have been moments of uncertainty and challenge along the way — but the launch service felt like a genuine celebration of churches coming together.

At the same time, the launch isn't an ending; it's the beginning of a new chapter. The Beacon has been lit, but now we begin the work of living into that vision together. There is still much to discern, build, and grow.

The name Beacon in the Forest reflects both our geography and our calling. A beacon is a light — something that offers hope, guidance, and celebration — and it also connects with a local hill known as Beacon Hill. The "Forest" points to our setting within the National Forest and speaks of growth, renewal, and new life. Together, the name captures our desire to shine God's light while growing deeply rooted faith across our communities.

What have been the biggest challenges and created the most worry – both during and ongoing?

One of the biggest challenges has been navigating a process that has intentionally been bottom-up. While that has allowed local voices to shape the vision, it has also meant living with unanswered questions for longer than might feel comfortable. There are still answers to be sort now even though we have launched. Naturally, that has created anxiety at times — particularly around finances and how sacramental ministry will be sustained across the community, especially given that we currently have relatively few clergy both stipend, non-stipend and clergy with Permission to Officiate in our area.

There has also been the challenge of holding together different parish contexts, traditions, and expectations, while trying to form something genuinely shared rather than imposed. Hence we have the line "our ministry is to be local, distinct and shared across the minster community".

From a personal perspective, I do think schools could have been more visibly engaged earlier in the process. At St Botolph's, we have strong relationships with both Church of England and community schools, and those schools are often deeply interconnected with neighbouring villages and parishes (sadly not in our minster community). That represents a significant missional opportunity.

What has surprised you?

What has surprised me most is the depth of goodwill across the churches. Even where there have been questions or disagreements, there has been a genuine desire to listen, to stay in relationship, and to seek what God might be calling us to, together. The level of trust that has grown through honest conversation has been both unexpected and deeply encouraging.

Where have you found joy, collectively and independently?

Collectively, the joy has come from moments of shared worship, prayer, and laughter (we have come together on occasions for shared worship and prayer) — especially when people from different parishes have come together and realised how much they have in common. Independently, I've found joy in visiting other churches across the community and seeing the unique character and faithfulness of each place.

Any glimpses of glory and/or recognition of where God's at work in the group?

I've tried visiting most of the churches in our Minster Community as I could (since I was part of the writing group and what we proposed would affect each parish in our community), and I would strongly encourage others to do the same. What stands out everywhere is passion — people deeply love their churches, their buildings, and the communities they serve. There is a real desire not just to survive, but to grow, to welcome, and to share the love of God. That shared longing feels like a clear sign of God already at work among us.

What are the hopes for the MC going forward?

For St Botolph's, one very practical hope is for renewed ministerial oversight. We have been without an incumbent for over three years, and spiritual direction and stability would be a real gift.

For the wider Minster Community, my hope is that we truly learn to recognise and share the gifts God has placed among us. As was reflected in the launch service, each church brings something distinctive and unique, and together we are stronger. If we can support one another well and work collaboratively, I believe we can show God's love more fully to the communities we are called to serve.

Revd Adele Adshead, Transition Oversight Minister

A word from the Revd Adele Adshead, Transition Oversight Minister of the Beacon in the Forest Minster Community and vicar of St Mary in Charnwood, Nanpantan.

What does it mean to you to be the Transition Oversight Minister for the Beacon in the Forest MC?

As with any new role, it feels daunting but also right for this time. It's important to note the 'Transition' element to my role and that it is for up to 12 months! I haven't felt called to be an Oversight Minister going forward, but holding a period of transition seems possible and I think that's what God has asked me to do.

In many ways it's a natural extension to the role I have played as coordinator throughout phase 2 of the process, working together with others to put together the proposal and try to discern how God might be calling us to work together. There are lots of 'togethers' in that sentence, and perhaps that says something about how I see my role – holding us together as we work through the process. I don't have a clear vision of where we are going, and a priority for us will be to work with Archdeacon Claire to appoint the Oversight Minister as a key role in the Ministry Team going forward.

Where have you and are you seeing God on this journey?

Good question! Firstly, and perhaps controversially, in the process. Having to share storyboards, discuss strengths and weaknesses and think how we might work together has helped us to grow. Change is never comfortable, but neither is discipleship! And it's been good to see grace, generosity and a concern for one another growing over time.

Also, at the start of phase two, once we knew our group of churches, we began meeting informally to get to know one another first as clergy, then as all licensed ministers, expanding then to those with key roles and now everybody – meeting for prayer and worship and continued fellowship. These meetings have been uplifting with a sense of God's presence communicated through our relationships with one another as well as in our shared worship.

And for me personally, there was a particular meeting when Beth Cluer from the diocesan team was coming to answer questions about the process and the proposal. She was ill and, as coordinator, I ended up in the hot seat. It isn't where I wanted to be and much prayer ensued! The meeting was more positive than I had expected - I had great support from colleagues and other members of the team and there was a joyful sense of God's presence and purpose amongst us. Although it hadn't been my choice, I had a sense of being where God wanted me to be. With hindsight, I can see that it was perhaps God's preparation for saying yes to the Transitional Oversight role!

How are the Minster Community already working together?

There was a joint choir and participation from all the churches on Sunday at the commissioning service. Some people asked me afterwards when the next joint service would be!

Building networks is part of our proposal and something I hope will happen organically with a bit of encouragement. There is the beginnings of a network of children and youth leaders, with a WhatsApp group. Treasurers have met once and I hope will meet again before long.

Also, anecdotally, the crossroads near St Mary's is closed for roadworks on Feb 1st so we can't meet for worship at 10am. Instead of looking for another venue, we reached out to St Botolph's who have kindly invited us to join them for their All Age service.

What are your hopes going forward?

On an immediate and practical level, that the process for appointing the Oversight Minister goes smoothly and that God is already preparing someone to take on that role

That relationships of grace and generosity will continue to grow amongst the churches and that together we will discern God's leading at every step

That we see God's kingdom breaking through, with stories of people coming to know and follow Jesus, and lives transformed.

And above all, that we are faithful and obedient, and grow in trust and love of God, whatever the future may bring.