

CRAVEN ARMS BENEFICE PROJECT
in the Archdeaconry of Ludlow, part of the Diocese of Hereford
We're seeking a full time, stipendiary
Pioneer Priest
(Legally, Assistant Curate, not in training)
to live and serve in the Craven Arms Benefice...

The Profile you are reading represents the fruit of a lot of prayer, planning, talking, listening, dreaming, and hoping which started in 2018, developed through 2019 and on into the beginning of the pandemic, and then took a new direction from 2021 onwards.

Thank you for asking for it, reading it, and responding to it. We are so excited to have reached this point, and we are praying for everyone who reads the profile, that God will be speaking to them and to us as we all work together to discover who God is calling to work here in this special part of south Shropshire.

The Profile is in four parts:

- First, general background to the area, the Project, and the existing parish churches.
- Second, the person specification for the new, full-time, role of Pioneer Priest
- Third, some information about the Deanery, from the Rural Dean.
- Fourth, some information about Housing

We've deliberately structured the Profile this way and included information about the villages and the existing parish churches because, although this vacancy is for the new role of Pioneer Priest, the role is one part of our overarching vision for the future of God's Church in the market town of Craven Arms and its surrounding villages. That means we want people applying for the role to see how the Pioneer Priest role would fit with the wider work in the Benefice and Deanery.

The closing date for applications is **23rd March 2023**, visits for shortlisted candidates will be on **19th April 2023**, and interviews will take place on **20th April 2023**.



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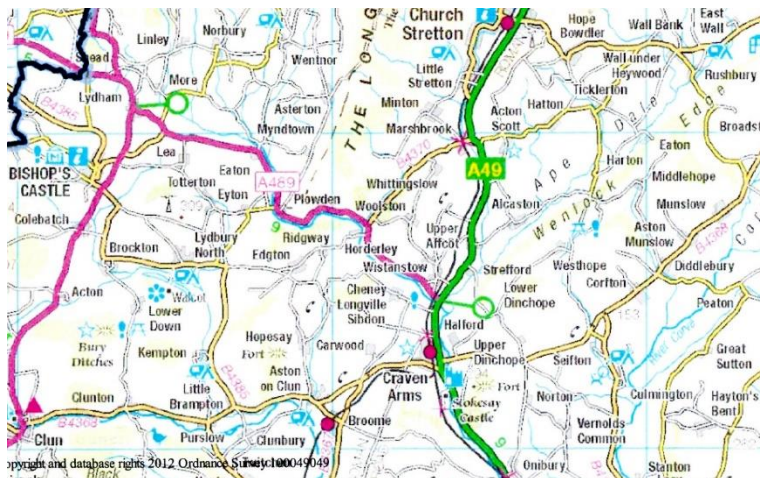
The Revd Geoff Garrett
Rural Dean, Condover Deanery

Introduction

The Craven Arms Benefice consists of three parishes: Acton Scott, Craven Arms (incorporating Halford and Stokesay) and Wistanstow. There are four Parish churches in the benefice but none within the town of Craven Arms itself.

There are two elements to the Craven Arms Benefice Project. One, the role of House for Duty Vicar, has just been filled. The new Vicar's focus is on providing pastoral and missional leadership to the whole benefice, especially the villages that surround the town of Craven Arms.

The second – this post currently advertised – is to focus on the urgent need to provide a strong Anglican mission to the growing population living in the market town of Craven Arms, where there is currently no permanent Anglican Church Community despite having a population approaching 3,000 people and set to grow further, and where there are significant issues linked with deprivation. This will be provided by a Pioneer Priest working within the town.



Part One – General Background to the Area, the Project, and the Existing Parish Churches

The Communities and Communication

The population of the Benefice is:

Craven Arms (Stokesay and Halford)	2,609
Wistanstow	806
Acton Scott	104
Sibdon	82

The population of Craven Arms has more than doubled in the last 40 years and is predicted to increase further with substantial allocation of land for new housing.

Shropshire Council sees Craven Arms as a key strategic Market Town on the A49 and in spring 2021 published its intention to invest £4.5m to expand the business park, create a food park, and improve the infrastructure (Broadband and 5G). There are significant pockets of deprivation within Craven Arms, but it is also seen as a commuter town for people working in Shrewsbury, Wolverhampton, and Hereford. The majority of the new housing is large family-sized accommodation emphasising the need to reach out to families and young people. There is a Traveller site on the outskirts of the town.

In terms of Indices of Multiple Deprivation, the town of Craven Arms itself, separate from the Benefice and the local government area as a whole, is in the 30% of most deprived deciles nationally. This covers income deprivation, employment deprivation, health deprivation and disability, education deprivation, barriers to housing and services, crime, and living environment deprivation. There are a higher than average number (for Shropshire) of people aged both 0-10 and 80+ in the town.

The poverty and deprivation in Craven Arms is, to some extent, hidden – as is often the case in rural areas. It is no less real for being less obvious.





Craven Arms exhibits an almost unique status and socio-economic cultural mix within the Diocese of Hereford and is among the more sizeable communities in south Shropshire. Employment features a mix of light industry, agricultural supplies and machinery, some service industry, a halal abattoir and some office and professional services. The work associated with agriculture and the businesses supporting agriculture generates a substantial proportion of the overall income. There is a wide range of incomes, with many people working more than one job.



The benefice contains two schools both of which welcome church links. The Stokesay Primary School, in Craven Arms, is part of the TrustEdCSAT Alliance Multi-Academy Trust, and Wistanstow is served by a Church of England (VC) Primary School. Secondary schools are in Ludlow, Church Stretton, and Bishops Castle, with students travelling to them by train, or school bus.

The community has its own locally-run supermarket (Tuffins), a mainline railway station with direct trains to south Wales and Manchester, a doctor's surgery, pharmacy, veterinary practice and a range of other shops and food outlets. There is a popular and busy Community Centre with sports facilities and the Shropshire Hills Discovery centre has café run by a charitable foundation (Grow, Cook, Learn). 'Flicks in the Sticks' is a regular feature; rooms can be hired for social occasions and there is a permanent exhibition which attracts tourists.

The Halal abattoir is operated by a significant Muslim community. This strong Muslim community has its own mosque and Imam, with whom there are excellent neighbourly links. There is also within the town a strict Mennonite community who have built their own church, coffee shop and furniture business, and a Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall. The Methodists have a hall and chapel in the main street and St Andrew's Community Church is close by in a side street and they run the Food Bank. There is a tradition of shared worship between the Anglicans, the Methodists, and St Andrew's for major festivals. During the winter months and available throughout the year for small group meetings and worship, is the Pilgrim Centre, situated in a side street, close to the town centre. This is maintained by Craven Arms PCC. There is a Filling Station that meets twice a month.

For more detailed census & deprivation info see CRAVEN ARMS MARKET TOWN PROFILE Spring 21
<https://shropshire.gov.uk/media/19069/craven-arms-profile.pdf> and CUF POVERTY SURVEYS – STOKESAY -
<https://cuf.org.uk/parish/180364>

Geographically both Halford and Stokesay are now part of Craven Arms and their local Council is Craven Arms Town Council. The other villages have their own Parish Councils.

The villages are set in the delightful rolling hills of south Shropshire, an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty including the Long Mynd, Wenlock Edge, Ironbridge and Corvedale. Centres of population include the historic towns of Ludlow (15 mins), Shrewsbury (45 mins) and the new town of Telford (45 mins), all with good and varied shopping and hospitals in the latter two. Craven Arms has its own train station linking it with Ludlow, Church Stretton, Hereford, Shrewsbury, Cardiff, Swansea, and Manchester. Our small and vibrant cathedral city of Hereford is 50 minutes away by car. There is an hourly bus service linking Shrewsbury and Ludlow, which includes Craven Arms on its route.

The Challenge - How will the overall project work?

The Craven Arms Benefice Project involves the appointment of two posts: a full-time stipendiary Pioneer Priest who will initially be licensed as an Assistant Curate (not in training) to the Rural Dean for the first 18 months, as this is a Deanery Project, and a House for Duty priest who will be the incumbent for the whole Benefice. The new House for Duty incumbent took up his post on 31st January 2023.

The Pioneer Priest will start to work in the town of Craven Arms, prayerfully discerning where and how to set up a new worshipping community and offer outreach and missional activities in the town. It is hoped that the Pilgrim Centre will be used as a base for services and other events alongside PCC use as the ministry begins. It is our prayerful, hopeful, expectation that the Pioneer Priest be in a position (with support) to set up a Bishop's Mission Order within the town within 18 months of the start of the Project. This is not to replace anything that is already happening. At that point, the Pioneer Priest would be re-licensed as the Leader of the BMO.

In practice, the two roles will work collaboratively with the Pioneer Priest focusing on mission, but there will inevitably be an overlap between the two roles e.g. life events, and potentially engaging in pioneer work in the surrounding villages especially where e.g. youth are connecting into Craven Arms Town.

The recent formation of a Deanery Group Ministry has laid the foundation for giving greater flexibility allowing informal cross-boundary working and will facilitate the smooth working of a BMO in the deanery. This collaborative approach is central to how the Deanery wishes to work in mission and ministry. The Pioneer Priest will be a full member of the Deanery Chapter and of the Diocesan Learning Community, which will result in the sharing of best practice and mutual support.

The need for an Anglican community in the town of Craven Arms is clear and aligns with the Church of England vision of the cure of souls in each parish, with a presence in each community. The only Anglican presence currently in Craven Arms is a twice-monthly 8am service at the Pilgrim Centre.

The Anglican churches across the Benefice and the Deanery are united in their desire for someone to come and work alongside them to lead pioneering, missional work so that the many people who live and work in Craven Arms who are not currently linked with a Christian church may be reached with the good news of Jesus Christ.

As Luke 10:12 states "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few". Now is the time to send new labourers into Craven Arms in order to build on the foundations previously laid, in ways that God will lead us into and which are likely to focus on engagement with children, families and 11-15 year olds. The new Pioneer Minister will need to discern what the key initiatives/events are to connect with these groups. It is envisaged that a new thriving Anglican community will rise up in Craven Arms but we must be willing to remain adaptable and take a flexible approach as to what this might look like as it emerges. The Pioneer Minister will be key to galvanising the already-existing missional energy, and developing lay leaders from the Anglicans already active in the area and those from other nearby churches. The House for Duty Incumbent will lead the existing parish churches and help them to respond to their communities through worship, mission and pastoral care.

The Pioneering Mission Project



Pilgrim Centre Hall

Overall project, main objectives and desired outcomes

Under God to establish an Anglican Worshipping Community meeting weekly in Craven Arms, which will grow to become a mature church.

The shape and nature of this community will emerge over time. It is hoped that a fresh expression would initially meet in the Pilgrim Centre due to the absence of any other Anglican Church building in the town of Craven Arms. With a focus on families, children and young people, it is important that a flexible approach be adopted in order to respond to the needs/wishes of the local community. As the community grows, an alternative venue could be sought such as the Community Centre, which has meeting rooms, or the local primary school. More speculative ideas have also been suggested, including buying the Craven Arms Hotel, refurbishing it, and opening it as a Christian Hub in the town for the benefit of the residents, but these would require a lot more work, and different funding streams, so would be longer-term options.

Empowerment of Laity to Re-imagine Mission & Ministry for the 21st Century

Working with the existing congregations, and potentially across the Deanery, will be vital to the project. The importance of building lay teams to support the mission and ministry in Craven Arms is a key learning from the Diocese's SDF-funded Intergenerational Mission project. Teams will be essential in continuing the delivery of previously existing initiatives e.g. Open the Book and Messy Church as well as exploring others e.g. Youth outreach, increased schools work, support for vulnerable families and evangelistic courses.

Working with other agencies for the common good and the flourishing of those in the town of Craven Arms – longer term aim

Building working relationships with the Town Council, the mosque, the school, social services, and others - and further developing ecumenical links - the longer term aims of the Pioneer aspect of the project would include identifying the core underlying issue(s) of inequality and deprivation in the town and working collaboratively to overcome them.

Desired outcomes: It is vital that the Pioneer Priest be given the opportunity once in post to discern where the focus of mission should be in Craven Arms, and appropriate outcomes will be agreed by listening to God and the people of Craven Arms. The monitoring of performance against the objectives set will be outlined in the Bishop's Mission Order as the mission initiative develops. The following are examples of the type of outcomes for similar projects:

- The Average Weekly Attendance stats for the new worshipping community.
- Effective outreach to children and young people through engagement with the schools and youth work.
- Number of new disciples, baptisms, and confirmations
- Number of trained Lay Leaders - vital to sustainability
- The BMO will be encouraged to be as generous as possible and contribute to the Diocese's Common Fund for provision of ministry, giving 10% of its income to the Common Fund.

If you would like to receive the full background papers which formed the basis of the internal diocesan funding bid for the project please ask the Archdeacon of Ludlow.

Ecumenical Partnership and Mission

As well as the Anglican churches, Christian presence in the community is provided by Craven Arms Methodist Church and St Andrew's Community Church. There is an excellent tradition of good relations and shared working and the Churches worked together on Messy Church and Experiencing Easter. Members from the local churches also run a twice a month Filling Station. The cultivation of good working relationships remains essential.

Discussion of how to help the schools has continued. Open the Book was run by Church members from across the benefice in both Stokesay and Wistanstow Schools before COVID, but has not happened for over 18 months. One of the Interim Ministers who led the parishes in the vacancy for a Vicar went into Wistanstow School to take assemblies and shared in the Christmas and Easter Services for Stokesay School held at St Andrew's Church. The Archdeacon has formed useful links with the Multi-Academy Trust which Stokesay School is part of, and the school has the Imam on the Local Governing Board, and is interested in re-establishing its links with the town's Churches.



The local food bank is run by St Andrew's and supported by the Churches and Mosque. The Methodist Church and Hall is located centrally in Craven Arms and the latter was well used prior to COVID.

The existing parish churches

The Craven Arms Benefice consists at present of four churches and the Pilgrim Centre

- St Margaret's, Acton Scott;
- St Thomas, Halford; whose future is under review
- St John the Baptist, Stokesay with the Pilgrim Centre in Craven Arms a venue for worship and other activities and the Vicarage
- Holy Trinity, Wistanstow:

The four parishes are now three distinct parishes with Halford and Stokesay PCCs combined into Craven Arms PCC. The other two parishes have their own PCCs which meet separately.

The former group of parishes and present benefice were in vacancy from 2017 and were well cared for by retired clergy. In February 2021 Mark and Clare Sanders were licensed as SSM Interim Ministers for up to 2 years with the intention of helping the parishes, Deanery and Diocese find a way forward. They too are retired and they worked with the other retired ministers to cover Sunday services and occasional offices. From September 2021 a revised and sustainable (by 1 person) pattern of services was introduced and has been affirmed at a recent review. Mark and Clare worked creatively and effectively with the PCCs and congregations to prepare them for the dual role of the pioneer and HfD ministries to bring understanding of a support for the ways in which these ministries will work for the benefit of all. Mark and Clare stepped back at the end of their two-year licence period once the new House for Duty Vicar was licensed at the end of January 2023.

Pattern of Services

	Acton Scott	Pilgrim Centre	Stokesay	Wistanstow
1 st Sunday	11.00am Holy Communion	8.00am Holy Communion		
2 nd Sunday			10am Holy Communion	11.00am Holy Communion
3 rd Sunday	11.00am Family Service	8.00am Holy Communion		
4 th Sunday			10am Holy Communion	11.00am All Age Worship
5 th Sunday	Benefice Holy Communion / other service at one of the churches			

Other services are added to this by agreement, e.g., an Evensong in the summer months at Wistanstow and Acton Scott, and Carol Services in Advent. It was hoped that this pattern would allow new opportunities for worship and mission to be added.

ST MARGARET ACTON SCOTT

Acton Scott is a parish of just over 100 people. Many have lived in or near the parish for generations. The village is dispersed with a number of hamlets nestling into Wenlock Edge. The Estate Home Farm had been a working historic farm open to the public from Easter to October since the 1970s and gained prominence as the location for the TV series 'Victorian Farm' in 2007/8. Shropshire Council, which operates the farm has recently announced a public consultation on the future funding of the attraction, which may lead to its withdrawal. There is an active campaign against any closure with supporters from across the country. The village has its own hall which is a venue for social events including 'Flicks in the Sticks' showing of recent films which has re-started recently, and a very popular Bonfire Night in an adjoining field. Village events have often focussed on fund raising for the Church or the village hall.

There are a number of people actively involved on a Sunday preparing for and taking an active part in the services; music is accompanied by a CD or a young and promising organist and sometimes by a gathered choir for special occasions and periodic bell ringing (there are three bells). An experienced organist is usually employed for Occasional Offices and Special Services. The numbers vary from 8 – 30+ and include some villagers who now live in Shrewsbury. The Family Worship and festivals are supported by some younger families and the pre-COVID outdoor Sunday Service Picnic and BBQ were popular.

CRAVEN ARMS: STOKESAY WITH HALFORD & SIBDON CARWOOD

STOKESAY

St John the Baptist church, Stokesay is currently the main parish church for Craven Arms and is located to the south of the town but with few local residents. It has a very special place in the community with a good number of occasional offices and it is surrounded by the main graveyard for Craven Arms which is filling up. It is next to Stokesay Castle (in the ownership of Historic England) which is accessed using the church path, so as a consequence there are many visitors to the church. The Castle staff open the church each day. There is mission potential to be further developed with c. 20,000 visitors p.a.

The congregation are responsible for setting up the church and keep it beautifully. The music is mostly through a CD operated by a member of the congregation. Numbers have been affected by COVID and have stabilised at between 9-14. Coffee after the services has been re-started. At times the numbers are now smaller than the other churches in the benefice. There was a good response for the two invitation services at All Souls and Christmas Eve where up to 40 came. The challenge of communication with the wider community is particularly felt here.

The 8am Holy Communion is at the Pilgrim Centre throughout the year and numbers have kept at 7-12 – some the same people but not all. The 10.00 Eucharist during the winter months is also held in the warmer Pilgrim Centre, but has not resulted in increased attendance.

There is much potential for reviving and growing such things as Messy Church and getting back into the school once it is possible. Messy Church has not re-started.

HALFORD

St Thomas' Church, Halford is situated just to the east of Craven Arms, and is surrounded by a few houses. Its population is about 100-150 spread over an area to the east of Wenlock Edge.

In recent years a number of approaches to services have been tried. Before COVID Stokesay cancelled its service once a month to join Halford. Questions of redundancy were raised by the then Halford PCC as early as 2008.

COVID stopped even the monthly service and there was little urgency for worship to begin again once it could – and little or no comment from the community about this.

The issue of closure was raised again in 2020, following the union of the two parishes of Stokesay and Halford and the creation of one PCC. Suggestions of alternative uses and Festival Church were considered but the PCC felt these did not provide a long-term solution.

2 public meetings were held in November 2021 after a letter drop and publicity in a local paper. 22 members of the public joined PCC members and Interim Minister to discuss the situation. No viable alternative use was discerned but people were invited to respond and can still do so. Some people expressed a desire to be kept informed and a few have offered to help the PCC fund raise. It was made clear at the meetings that this does not provide a long term option for the PCC. Feelings are mixed, and sadness in the community noted. In 2022 the formal first stage of closing the Church for public worship began and the report from the Church Buildings Commission has been drawn up for the Bishop.

In September 2022 another public meeting drew 45 people and 10 people of mixed ages agreed to begin meeting with an Interim Minister to understand what the options for the future are and October saw the beginning of a dialogue between this group and the PCC.

WISTANSTOW

The parish covers a considerable area and a population of about 800 with 150 in the village. There is a compact village with a community shop, pub and very good Village Hall and room. Wistanstow School is a C of E voluntary controlled school with over 60 on role across 3 classes plus the under 5s which was added in 2008. The School is now federated with two other villages and share a Headteacher who has three schools under her care.

There are a number of small hamlets as well as the main village which reach from the edges of the Long Mynd across to Wenlock Edge and some businesses along the main A49.

The worship is now based on the same pattern as the other churches of the benefice. The congregation set up the church and keep it beautifully. There is a group of people willing to read at services. Congregations have been from 10 – 50 over the recent period. The regular organist moved away in autumn 2021 and since then services have been accompanied by a CD. An organist is employed for special services, weddings and funerals.

The majority of fundraising events held prior to COVID were held in Wistanstow Village Hall. The hall which is a very popular venue for wedding receptions for both 'locals' and people from much further afield was donated to the parish by Mrs Greene of The Grove in the 1920s. It is run by a Management Committee. A series of very successful Platinum Jubilee events were centred mainly around the Village Hall.

The Benefice, COVID, and the consequences

Like parishes elsewhere the pandemic has adversely affected the life of the church and communities. The Interim Clergy initiated Zoom services in February 2021 until worship in churches was started again at Easter 2021 at first one service per week and then using the new agreed timetable. The disruption caused by COVID has affected all the Churches in the area.

In mission terms the differing projects in the parishes ranging from schools work to lunches had stopped and are just beginning again. Some of the Open the Book volunteers are keen to restart and recruitment and safeguarding processes are beginning with the other churches. Other ways of reaching young people have also been affected. It remains difficult to plan. When the Archdeacon introduced the idea of Pioneer Ministry this was welcomed as a way of addressing some of the mission needs.

Part Two – The Pioneer Priest Person Specification (legally Assistant Curate, not in training)

We are praying for a priest who:

- Has a deep, personal, Christian faith and is rooted and grounded in prayer and Scripture
- Is a pioneer and innovator, able to work independently, and excited by the prospect of building a new worshipping community from scratch
- Has experience of church planting or creating/leading missional communities or Fresh Expressions
- Has a heart for the hidden and lonely, and wants to reach into “the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible.”
- Is imaginative in discerning new, context-specific, ways to reach out to those who have never had links with church, to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them in word and deed
- Is an effective communicator, and can teach the deep timeless truths of Christian faith clearly in ways that connect with people in the 21st century, particularly families, children, and young people
- Has experience of building and/or motivating teams to work collaboratively in mission, developing the gifts and talents of others as they emerge
- Is comfortable with using and developing IT and social media as a way of building links with the community
- Will be able to build positive relationships with Stokesay School and other community groups
- Will build positive working relationships with the House for Duty incumbent and Deanery colleagues

An Enhanced DBS Disclosure is required for this post.

Craven Arms is easy to walk or cycle around and it has bus and rail links, however in order to travel more widely in the area and around the Deanery and Diocese, the person appointed would find it more convenient to use their own transport.

Part Three – The Deanery of Condover

Welcome to the Deanery of Condover

You will be welcomed into a friendly and supportive team of clergy serving 6 Benefices stretching from Craven Arms in the south, up along the A49 through Church Stretton and Dorrington to Condover in the north. The large Benefice of Much Wenlock is located to the east and the villages which make up the Apedale Benefice are situated between Much Wenlock and Church Stretton. We are very well supported by a large number of retired clergy who are mostly based in and around Church Stretton. Before COVID we met twice a year as a 'Wider Chapter' to which stipendiary, non-stipendiary and retired clergy are invited as well as both serving and retired Readers. It is hoped that we could reinstate these meetings again in the near future.



We are currently looking at ways in which the deanery can best serve its parishes and support and resource each other in our outreach, mission and ministry. We will have the support of Elizabeth Wild, the Diocesan Local Ministry Team Leader to facilitate our discussions and planning in Chapter, Deanery Synod and at Benefice level too. The clergy and deanery synod have already started prayerful thinking around these issues alongside implementing current initiatives:

- The deanery has recently become a Group Ministry which preserves the integrity of Benefices and Parishes, but allows us to work more collaboratively and creatively across the deanery as a whole.
- The recent appointment for Apedale which used to be a 0.6 post is now a full-time post which means the new incumbent working within the current Apedale Benefice as well as supporting the Wenlock Group working collaboratively with the Wenlock Team Rector to work through the ministry across the two benefices. The Group Ministry is enabling this to happen more effectively.
- There is a well-attended 'Filling Staios' running on a monthly basis in Craven which brings together people from surrounding parishes and have cross-benefice co-operation to run them.

We are in exciting as well as challenging times as we seek to implement the Diocesan shared values of being Prayerful, Christ-like, and Engaged.

Inevitably COVID has made its mark on the deanery and we are very much in the mind-set of thinking seriously about re-imagining ministry across the deanery. We are in the process of revisiting our Deanery Plan to be proactive about how we can provide the ministry across the deanery which is needed. Craven Arms is a major part of our thinking through the Deanery Plan and is an exciting opportunity for pioneer missional ministry in the town as well as supporting traditional Church of England parish ministry in the parish churches.

We would love you to come and join us in this task.

Geoff Garrett, Rural Dean

Part Four – Housing

House for Pioneer Priest – Greenfield Road, a large, well-presented, semi detached, centrally-heated, three-bedroomed house with a large insulated garden room, sitting room, dining room and garage

