

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tewkesbury Abbey to Host High Mass and River Avon Blessing in Call for Urgent Action on River Pollution

Event Date: 22nd June 2025

Location: Tewkesbury Abbey and River Avon riverside

Tewkesbury Abbey will hold a special High Mass and Procession culminating in the Blessing of the River Avon, in a bold call for renewed environmental responsibility and action on water pollution. The service, set to be attended by civic dignitaries, environmental groups and members of the public, shines a light on the urgent ecological crisis facing the River Avon—one of the most polluted rivers in the country.

The event is part of the Abbey's commitment to community engagement and its journey through the **A Rocha UK EcoChurch programme**, where it has already achieved Bronze status and is actively working towards Silver. It also aligns with the work of local campaigners including the **SafeAvon Project** run by **Tewkesbury Friends of the Earth**. The scale of the issue is highlighted in a recent Environment Agency report that states **that over 8496 hours of sewage spills into local Avon tributaries were recorded from just seven sewage treatment plants around Tewkesbury in 2024 alone - equivalent to 354 continuous days of pollution.**

The blessing of the river is both spiritual and symbolic, calling on people of all faiths and none to unite in environmental stewardship. It aims to raise awareness of the degradation of the UK's rivers due to untreated sewage and nutrient pollution, and to encourage stronger action from both regulators and polluters.

This will be a moving and visually striking event, beginning with a **High Mass** inside the majestic Tewkesbury Abbey, before a **full outdoor procession** moves through the town and down to the banks of the River Avon.

Led by clergy in vestments, accompanied by incense and sacred music, the procession will include the Abbey choir. There will be readings, hymns, and prayers, culminating in a dramatic blessing of the waters.

The combination of ritual, music, and public witness will make for a **powerful spectacle** - a rare and memorable event not just of worship, but of environmental hope and moral conviction.

The Reverend Canon Nick Davies, Vicar of Tewkesbury Abbey, said:

"We believe that caring for creation is a sacred duty. The Blessing of the Avon is both a prayer and a protest—an act of hope in the face of despair, and a call to stewardship in the face of negligence."

Local volunteers from **SafeAvon** have logged over 2,400 data sets showing persistently high levels of nitrate and phosphate pollution. With over 90 community scientists active along 40 sites between Stratford-upon-Avon and Tewkesbury, public concern is growing.

Geoff Sallis from SafeAvon added:

“We’re devastated by the scale of sewage pollution. Events like this show communities coming together to say: enough is enough.”

The Abbey invites media, civic leaders, environmental organisations, and the wider public to join this powerful moment of unity, reflection, and demand for change.

Event Timings

High Mass 10.30 Tewkesbury Abbey

Procession and Riverside Blessing – meet at the North Porch at around 11.30

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Please confirm your attendance. Images will be available after the event, please also contact for image distribution.

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About Tewkesbury Abbey

Tewkesbury Abbey stands as a vibrant Anglican parish church, offering daily worship, serving the wider town and welcoming visitors, sharing this historic space with our wider community.

As a congregation, we are shaped by our Benedictine and Anglo-Catholic inheritance. Our worship is characterised by rich liturgy, choral excellence, and the use of incense, engaging all the senses to foster a profound spiritual experience. We honour ancient practices while making them relevant to contemporary life, offering a welcoming space for all individuals, regardless of background. For over 900 years daily worship has been offered in the Abbey

which today includes family Services, High Mass, Choral Evensong and Benediction. Service details are available on our website.

As a parish church, we are committed to serving the people of Tewkesbury; hosting children's activities, running alms-houses, volunteering in local schools and working in partnership with other churches and community organisations for the flourishing of our town. We live out our Benedictine commitment to hospitality by welcoming hundreds of pilgrims and visitors through our doors every week. We are a member of the inclusive church network, are committed to becoming an eco-congregation and are recognised nationally as a Major Church within the life of the Church of England.

About SafeAvon

SafeAvon is a project by Tewkesbury and District Friends of the Earth established in 2023, which monitors pollution in the Warwickshire Avon, and its tributaries. **Over 90 volunteers track nitrate and phosphate levels at 40 sites from Stratford Upon Avon to Tewkesbury. Our findings consistently show high pollution levels.**