



Going fast or going far?

SDF Phase 1 end-of-programme external review

For The Diocese of Winchester

Brendan Research
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Executive summary

In 2018, the Diocese of Winchester launched Phase 1 of what was initially called the *Winchester: Mission Action* programme. With the help of £4.32 million from the Strategic Development Fund (SDF), the diocese invested in the following projects to respond to key mission opportunities:

- Benefice of the Future (BoF)
- Invest for Growth which included Resource Churches, church plants and pioneer hubs
- Major Development Areas (MDAs)
- Student Evangelism

Key achievements include:

- Benefice of the Future released local lay and ordained leadership and led to a culture change where rural parishes give sacrificially to support the ministries of other parishes within their benefice.
- In Southampton and Andover, revitalising two civic churches as Resource Churches led to transformative growth, refurbished buildings and further phase plants and revitalisations.
- Benefice of the Future and Resource Churches/church revitalisation projects continued and evolved. Although Student Evangelism stopped in 2022, 6 of 8 churches kept on student workers.

This programme achieved a remarkable amount considering the standing start and complex political dynamics in the diocese. Subsequent phases of SDF/SMMI funding are evidence of the open and accountable relationship that developed between the diocese and Strategic Development Unit (SDU) during Phase 1.

Learning includes:

- More emphasis on change management was needed to complement programme management.
- The diocese was justified in closing some projects early due to weaknesses in programme design although more care was needed over *how* they were closed.
- Despite the need for strategic change, ecclesiastical structures are robust in defending the existing. It is better to wait and time pastoral reorganisations and revitalisations well rather than force them.
- The Resource Churches appear to have a somewhat detached relationship with the diocese.
- The success of Benefice of the Future may be to do with the kind of 'connected rural' found in Hampshire with easy access to amenities, good transport links and strong social networks.
- The fxC journey or 'serving-first' model of classic pioneering is unaffordable within a SDF programme where a full-time stipendiary pioneer is required to lead. This is a painful but helpful 'reality check'.
- Data gathered at Student Evangelism project end indicates only a modest number of non-churched students 'came to Christ' suggesting much of the growth of students and young people in large churches occurs through transfer growth.

Recommendations for future work include:

- Give space/resource for 'blue sky thinking' around effective ways to share the good news of Benefice of the Future - now the Growing Rural Parishes Programme (GRPP) - more widely across the diocese.
- Follow-up with ministry training providers to ensure ordinands are being trained for the kinds of leadership skills needed for rural multi-parish benefices (MPB) in ways that BoF and GRPP are modelling.
- Ensure opportunities for lay leadership in the diocese are not being missed, looking to encourage licensed lay leadership in large churches as well as small, rural ones.
- Be aware of the hidden pressures that multiple stakeholders and expectations place on Resource Church leaders and their teams and offer more support during times of change/difficulty.
- Do not let the experience of pioneer hubs in Phase 1 be the end of the type of pioneering that might help reach people that attractional church or 'worship-first' models can't reach.

Background

This programme (now referred to as Phase 1) was launched in 2018 as part of a wider concerted effort to prioritise mission and growth in the diocese, recognising fast-changing population demographics including:

- Younger and more diverse communities now living in major urban areas
- Increasing numbers of younger families and extensive new residential and employment developments in medium-sized urban areas
- A migration of professionals, wealthy retirees and affluent families to rural areas

At the 2016 diocesan conference, twelve priorities were identified to develop financial strength and mission capacity as part of an overall strategy to develop ‘Sustainable Growth for the Common Good’.

Six of the twelve - alongside projects prioritised by interest groups - were consolidated into four projects presented in the 2017 Stage 2 bid for SDF under the overall title ‘Winchester: Mission Action’.¹

Acknowledged as ambitious, the diocese argued that such a programme was needed to achieve a ‘step-change’ across the diocese from maintenance ‘towards transformational and sustainable growth.’

In December 2017, the diocese was awarded £4.23 million from the Church of England’s SDF to match fund these four projects over three years, costing an overall £8.5 million.

The original Phase 1 projects were:

Project name and description	Why prioritised?
Benefice of the Future to pilot working toward efficiencies of scale, intentional diversity and differentiation to support vibrant rural ministry	Important to invest in rural areas as well as urban To find ways to revitalise rural benefices To find ways to develop sustainable rural mission and ministry models
Invest for Growth to support the establishment and growth of: - Resource Churches in major conurbations, - Church plants (overlapping with plans for Resource Churches and Major Development Areas) -new pioneer hubs to grow fresh expressions of Church (fxC) in areas of urban deprivation	To address historic underinvestment in urban areas To build strength and capacity in key urban areas External support offered by HTB/CRT for Resource Churches Phase plants/revitalisations to support vulnerable sub/urban parishes Dovetailed with MDAs and Student Evangelism projects ‘Ground-up’ pioneering preferred by the then Bishop of Southampton Strong support from diocesan synod and Southampton deanery To deploy pioneer ministers to support and release lay pioneers
Major Development Areas to develop ministry and worshipping communities on new housing developments	A priority for the then Bishop of Southampton & Bishop of Basingstoke So much new housing required a proactive response Dovetailed with plans to church plant under Invest for Growth
Student Evangelism to look for new models in student evangelism within Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE)	A priority for the then Bishop of Winchester as national lead for HE/FE A way to discover effective student evangelism models A way to re-focus student outreach with a base in parishes Dovetailed with plans under Invest for Growth

In 2020, the Strategic Investment Board approved the diocese’s request for Phase 1 to be extended to 2022, to close some projects and reallocate budgets for a tighter focus on Resource Church revitalisations and Benefice of the Future. However, following the Phase 1 re-baselining, surplus Phase 1 funding from closed projects were reallocated to Andover to support an expanded vision.

This programme coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic - a factor in slowing progress across all projects - and a painful and confusing time of adverse change for the diocese culminating in the resignation of +Tim Dakin as Bishop of Winchester in 2021.²

¹ *Winchester: Mission Action* Second Stage Application for Strategic Development Funding (2017)

² <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/8-september/news/uk/wounds-licked-diocese-of-winchester-is-ready-to-move-on> [Accessed 30 September 2024]

Programme achievements

Benefice of the Future

Funding period: 2017-2021

Mission theory: Worked on the pre-supposition that rural parishes contain a relatively high proportion of committed Christians serving churches. If benefices were offered funding, leadership training and team coaching to support these Christians working together yet respecting the individuality of each parish, new ways of working would emerge that would lead to revitalisation.

Targets and actuals for three* benefices:

	Targets	Actuals	Notes
Growing benefices (worshipping communities) by 15% with at least 60% from missing generations.	15%	-4.8%	Missing generation attendance not gathered.
New lay leaders	30	38	
New vocations to ordination and licensed lay ministry	4	3	
Curates progressing to rural incumbencies.	3	1	Of 4 curates serving BoF benefices, only 1 continued on in rural incumbency
No. of new forms of worship (originally fxC)	5	5	3 of 5 were aimed at a younger age group 1 was already in existence**
Total attendance across new forms of worship	100	-	3 of 5 initiatives were short-term/not continued. No attendance data gathered for nfw.
A distinct brand identity developed in each benefice.	3	3	
Simplified structures and governance.	3	3	As appropriate. See below.
More effective use of technology.	3	3	

*This data is taken from the 2021 internal end of project report. Two additional rural benefices, Bright Waters/Whitchurch and Burghclere, were added to the project in late 2020 and only took part for 12 months with no data collected or reported on. While Burghclere received funding for administration support, the incumbent moved on partway through and the incoming incumbent preferred not to continue with the project. Bright Waters progressed well but is now part of Growing Rural Parishes so will be considered in the Phase 4 evaluation.

**The Informal Service at Odiham in North Hampshire Downs benefice began before the project, but it was said that BoF enabled healthy growth by creating space for local leadership to emerge. *'It would have been much harder to resource without BoF'* as it would have been another demand on incumbent's time.

Successes:

- Release of local lay and ordained leadership
- Emergence of ministry leadership team models
- Process of choosing a benefice visual identity was a helpful and meaningful exercise for parishes
- Centralising of administration and advances in internet connectivity took place in time for COVID-19
- Culture change achieved where parishes now give sacrificially to support the distinctive ministries of other parishes within their benefice
- Quarterly support/coaching gatherings were experienced positively by clergy and lay participants
- Parishes' resultant attitude to - and relationship with - the diocese (and CMF giving) is very positive

Challenges:

- The overall numerical attendance growth targets were unrealistic
- It took time and energy to win over the high proportion of passive supporters
- Attracting a younger demographic to the quarterly support/coaching gatherings
- Developing and resourcing sustainable rural fresh expressions of Church (fxCs)

What helped:

- Careful selection of pilot benefices with able and enthusiastic incumbents
- Incumbents understood it was short-term funding for long-term planning e.g. 10 years
- The project did not insist on a prescribed order or speed of action plan
- The project worked *with* informal/relational dynamics of rural contexts not *against* them
- Consistent relational support and input from Archdeacon of Winchester
- Lay training through BCM delivered quality content yet on a realistic time commitment
- Action Learning Sets³ on the support/coaching gatherings inspired participants' confidence
- Benefices were not *forced* to go down the route of joint PCCs

What hindered:

- It has proved unexpectedly difficult to share the good news of BoF more widely across the diocese

How and why BoF outcomes were or were not achieved:

The mission theory proved sound in that the project was successful in honouring the Christians already serving their rural contexts. Through funding, support and coaching, ministry in these benefices was revitalised.

This project gave clergy and lay leaders space to reflect, pray, plan and problem-solve together in ways we've not seen in other rural projects. The quarterly support/coaching gatherings were spoken of very positively; the low-key, relational dynamic was vastly preferred over a more formal training course. The Action Learning Sets affirmed very healthy dynamics e.g. each context is unique, local wisdom exists to respond to ministry and mission challenges, not everything will succeed, and some things need time to form.

While the branding exercise was core to the process, these incumbents facilitated this in ways that celebrated the diversity of each parish at the same time as forming a benefice identity.

Encouraging parishes to engage first on a non-contentious issue like I.T. connectivity helped individuals get to know one another and work together on a relatively 'easy' task, rather than starting with challenging and emotionally-charged issues of shared governance or finance.

Of the curates placed in these parishes as part of the project, one is now a rural incumbent. Another went on to be an associate minister in a rural MPB but then took up a diocesan role. The two who left the diocese are a reminder that circumstances, needs and vocation have multiple pulls.

Working with an overall numerical growth target risks masking the modest growth of some parishes, in among those whose patterns of attendance have shifted from weekly to monthly, or simply *cannot* grow due to local demographics. Patterns of house-buying/selling affect how many young families live in villages because where parents stay (even though their adult children move away) no new young families can move in. In some villages, children are away at boarding school.

With four new ways of worshipping achieved alongside the existing 'informal service' at Odiham, there appears to be creativity in finding new ways to engage but possibly less of a need for anything too tightly labelled as church. It looks probable that in these parts of rural Hampshire, traditional church still connects with residents. That may explain why attendance numbers at these new forms of worship were not tracked.

We suspect many of the outcomes were achieved because of the *type* of rural context - 'connected rural' - with easy access to amenities and good transport links that attract a good number of working or retired professionals who are happy to offer their skills on a relational basis (see Appendix A).

³ <https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/ETF-guide-to-action-learning-sets.pdf> [accessed 8 October 2024]

Invest for Growth: Resource Churches

Funding period: 2018-2022, with funding extended for Andover

Mission theory: Based on the rapid growth of Love Church Bournemouth, further Resource Churches to revitalise churches in major conurbation centres would generate similar energy, resource and growth.

Targets and actuals:

	Targets re-baselined in 2021 ⁴	Actuals 2022	Actuals 2024	Notes
St Mary's Southampton				
Attendance ASA*	650	538 AWA 618 WC		
Previously un or de-churched attenders	20%		22%	2024 Congregational survey [^]
Average age of attenders	Under 40		<35	2024 Congregational survey [^]
Working toward phase plants	2	2	3	St Wins Totton and Lords Hill. Delivery of these occurred in SDF Phase 2 and 4 With the St Barnabas site plant in 2024
Basingstoke**				
St Mary's Andover now Andover Parish***				
Attendance AWA at St Mary's Andover	300	274 AWA 415 WC Stats for Mission 2022	359 AWA 444 WC Diocesan reporting pack Q3 2024	Target for 2022 taken from forecast AWA p. 7 of 2021 Change Request
Attendance at St Paul's Knight's Elham	40			Currently added to above. Eventual goal is for Andover Parish to report attendance as separate congregations.
Attendance at St Michaels West Andover	80			
Attendance at St Michael's Knight's Elham	-			
Previously un or de-churched attenders	30% (by end 2025)	7%		

*Attendance was measured differently over Phase 1. Average Sunday Attendances (ASAs) was used more at the start but Average Weekly Attendance (AWA) and Worshipping Community (WC) more toward the end as requested by the diocese to align with their other projects.

[^]St Mary's 2024 annual survey had the average age group as 18-29. However, publicity and the survey uptake was higher in the evening service than the morning services, which skewed the results. The actual total congregation average age is estimated as being below 35.

**As documented in the November 2018 Change Request document, plans for the Resource Church in Basingstoke outlined in the original bid proved impossible to deliver in Phase 1 due to a lack of consensus in the deanery and clergy chapter and uncertainty around Resource Church location. This was delivered in Phase 3.

***The 2021 Change Request document detailed qualitative and quantitative outcomes for Andover Parish to have achieved by the end of its 2nd Phase in 2025 including percentage of un or de-churched attenders and average age of attenders. The latest congregational survey in Oct 2024 indicates only 7% are from an un- or de-churched background and so it is unlikely that they will achieve the target of 30% by the end of 2025.

⁴ Winchester Mission Action Programme Change Request (December 2021), p. 13.

Successes:

- Growth has been transformative, with attendance growth targets almost met or on track
- Revitalised city/town centre civic parishes in two of six largest conurbations in the diocese
- Growth achieved despite not being typical HTB planting contexts - especially Andover
- Both St Marys' buildings are attractive and flexible spaces with Andover rented by outside users
- Phase plants and further revitalisations have occurred (although on longer timescales)
- Both responded heroically to COVID-19 and developed social action programmes

Andover's experience of engaging in an initial Integrated Needs Analysis with partners is used each year as a case study within the Accelerator Programme at Holy Trinity, Brompton (HTB) for training church planters on the importance of 'place' and understanding context. (see Appendix A).

Challenges:

- The difficult, time-consuming and expensive dynamics of major building refurbishment
- St Mary's Southampton leadership and parish feeling they were left to cope with meeting the considerable building refurbishment overspend which was not their fault
- Collecting consistent data to track the detailed outcomes of de- and non-churched growth targets and missing generation targets
- In Andover, merging PCCs and bank accounts to create Andover parish has been a '*procedural nightmare*' with the perception of little help from the diocese or national church

What helped:

- The Strategic Development Team's oversight in managing the building refurbishments instead of the architects
- Accessing external grant funding to pay for additional staff team
- Support from HTB and the Churches Revitalisation Trust⁵

What hindered:

- Unhelpful messaging around launch of St Mary's Southampton due to clumsy social media advertising 'Are you looking for a new church?' which felt like it was endorsing transfer growth
- COVID-19 prompted a focus on social action rather than early networking with neighbouring local clergy/parishes
- Largely unchanged numerical growth targets despite complex pastoral reorganisation in Andover
- Sometimes a perceived lack of pastoral support from the diocese in difficult seasons as well as a perceived lack of cooperation from the Resource Churches in supporting the diocese

⁵ [Home - Church Revitalisation Trust \(crtrust.co\)](https://www.crtrust.co/) [accessed 8 October 2024]

Invest for Growth: Church plants

Funding period: 2018-2022 with a planned extension no longer needed when the leader left in early 2022

Mission theory: No detailed theory of mission. St Nicholas near the North Stoneham estate MDA was belatedly selected as a congregation to be revitalised as a church plant because the building was already promised Section 106 funding⁶ from Eastleigh Borough Council for refurbishment.

Targets and actuals for one church plant*

North Stoneham	Original targets	Targets re-baselined in 2021	Actuals (in summer 2021**)
Attendance	60+ by end of 2020	120+ by end of 2025	30
	40% de/non	40% de/non	9%
	50% missing generation	50% missing generation	<i>Not tracked although 30% U18 noted</i>
Significant engagement in local service to community			Contact with an estimated 546 people in Autumn 2020 through community events

* Two of the church plants outlined in original Stage 2 bid document - Manydown and Picket Twenty - were intended for/overlapped with plans for MDAs and are considered in the MDA section of this report. St Barnabas Southampton was delayed due to governance and pastoral issues and has taken place more recently with a team from St Mary's Southampton. St Clement Bournemouth became a phase plant of St Swithun's/Love Church Bournemouth without the need of SDF.

**This data was collected by the Pioneer Minister. Actuals recorded to summer 2021 only as Pioneer Minister was appointed to a new role in Autumn 2021 so energy faded to continue to track outcomes with no new leader taking over.

Successes:

- Despite challenges, 16 attended small groups, 7 people had moved into leadership and 12 young people were involved in youth work in summer 2021
- Alongside this ministry, but funded through other sources, St Nicholas - a 15th century, grade 1 listed building - underwent much-needed refurbishment

Challenges:

- Moving church online during COVID-19 with new relational contacts who weren't yet churchgoers
- Despite refurbishment, St Nicholas is a small space which couldn't support big church gatherings or a Sunday school, and led to a resource intensive all-age style of worship

What helped:

- Appointment of a Pioneer Minister to lead living on the North Stoneham estate
- An incumbent who was supportive of the Pioneer Minister
- Planting team of around 10 from Highfield Church, Southampton

What hindered:

- Confusion over whether this ministry was better understood as an Invest for Growth project or a Major Housing Development project
- Numerical targets were more suited to Resourcing Church planting (a worship-first approach) whereas this was originally pioneer work from scratch (a serving-first approach)⁷
- North Stoneham and Basset PCC and incumbent felt they had little say in what was done - St Nicholas was chosen without consultation so there was no ongoing sense of ownership

⁶ Under Section 106 of the [Town and Country Planning Act 1990](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/32/section-106), financial contributions can be sought from developers towards the costs of providing community facilities as a result of a new housing development taking place. <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/legal/guidance/how-community-organisations-can-bid-for-section-106-funding> [accessed 1 October 2024]

⁷ M. Moynagh (2017) *Church in Life*, London, SCM, pp. 44-58.

- Lack of clarity over whether this was a Highfield plant or a Benefice plant impeded ongoing support
- Lack of enthusiasm/disinterest in completing quarterly progress reports that asked for numbers (rather than good news stories) and not being sure if anyone was looking at them

Invest for Growth: Pioneer hubs

Funding period: 2018-2020

Mission theory: Limited mission theory in the bid. Inspired by the hub in Sholing, Southampton, increasing the number of hubs would deploy Ordained Pioneer Ministers and lay pioneers to plant fxC in urban areas where the church has been weak historically. Sharing lives and accommodation would combat isolation and burn-out.

Summary of pioneering hubs targets in the original 2018 Stage 2 funding bid:

- Pioneer hubs to be launched in Maybush (by January 2018) and in Andover (by January 2019)
- 20 new fxC to be begun in Southampton and 10 new fxC in Andover with 70% of fxCs lay led
- Each fxC to include 20 participants, 35% unchurched and 25% participants under 30 yrs old

Successes:

- Southampton parishes/clergy worked collaboratively on their deanery Mission Action Plan (dMAP)
- The existing work of the Pioneer Minister (OPM) was supported through SDF allowing Monty's in Sholing, Southampton to develop as a sustainable fxC (now a Charitable Incorporated Organisation accessing grant funding)
- Southampton Pioneer Connection formed and continues to support and inspire local mission leaders

Challenges:

- From what we were told, this project was an 'after-thought', originally excluded and then belatedly included to be faithful to the 2016 diocesan conference consultation process
- The inability to recruit to the pioneer hub posts
- Careful thought was given to how appropriate outcomes might be tracked (Outcomes Star) but proved difficult to operationalise

What helped:

- Pastoral care from the Bishop of Southampton enabled a good ending for OPM when funding ended

What hindered:

- Despite the energy around the idea for the St Birinus Community to train/support pioneers in the diocese, it was felt that the diocese's experience of this kind of pioneering was limited
- Local leaders were not allowed to see wording of job adverts or advise on where to advertise
- Anecdotal feedback described job adverts as sounding too institutional
- Lack of those with first-hand pioneering experience on interview panels for pioneering posts
- Three key senior staff members supporting this project moved out of the diocese in 2020
- There was too much emphasis on establishing BMO governance before the project was underway
- Unrealistic expectations that 10 fxC with 20 people each from scratch was achievable in 3 years

How and why Invest for Growth outcomes were or were not achieved:

It is not surprising that both St Marys Resource Churches have achieved their growth outcomes given the significant financial investment and support of HTB/CRT in training, sending and supporting leaders and teams.

In addition, they have benefitted from Student Evangelism funding. It is impressive that they have achieved what they have given COVID-19, building refurbishment delays/overspend and serving in contexts of higher deprivation than is normally associated with the classic HTB model.

Tracking where growth is coming from (de/non backgrounds and missing generation percentages) has proved almost impossible. The expectation that local leaders would take responsibility for tracking data was not prioritised at the programme’s start. Aside from St Mary Andover’s one-off exercise on a church weekend (with a data bias toward committed members rather than newcomers/fringe) and St Mary’s Southampton’s 2024 congregational survey, leaders have chosen not to make this a priority. Resource Church leaders expressed frustration that the programme expected regular and substantial financial giving from a high percentage of attenders from de/non-churched backgrounds and the missing generation while serving areas of deprivation.

All those involved at St Nicholas at North Stoneham did as well as they could, given the muddled expectations at the heart of the project. When the building of houses did not keep to schedule, plans shifted from this as pioneering MDA work on the estate to a church plant revitalisation at St Nicholas with outcomes attached more commonly found in Resource Churches. The COVID-19 pandemic was particularly disruptive; the fledging community of new families on the estate were not ready for worship online.

Although the mission theory was not detailed in the original bid, local leaders involved with the pioneer hubs were clear on theory when interviewed; their plans were informed by the experiences of Ian Mobsby and his founding of new monastic community Moot⁸ in London and the pioneering expertise of Urban Expression.⁹

The slow, small, relational ‘serving-first’ approach to pioneering church seems very much at odds with an SDF programme designed for rapid growth in 3-5 years. Assumptions that the diocese would be able to fund this beyond 2022 through the Common Mission Fund and Mission Growth Fund - as was stated in the bid - are indicative of a far more financially healthy diocesan landscape at the start of the programme. This was an expensive model requiring significant ongoing financial investment. It is still difficult to see how this could have succeeded in this shape of programme.

Major Development Areas (MDAs)

Funding period: 2018-2020

Mission theory: As with church plants, no detailed theory of mission beyond the recognition that moving the church planter/pioneer onto an estate earlier rather than later supports more effective engagement with new residents as they move on to estates.

Targets and actuals:

In the 2017 stage 2 bid, 6 MDAs were identified with targets for developing church plants or fresh expressions of Church as well as establishing church schools and/or Launchpad nurseries. Across all MDAs, it was hoped 6,000 people would be reached.

In actuality, the following occurred:

Picket Twenty and Augusta Park Andover	Curate at St Mary’s Andover (trained at the Gregory Centre) was asked to plant on Picket Twenty in the church school. Clergy house bought. But COVID-19 then hit and the curate’s work was re-focused back on St Mary’s Lighthouse Project. £10,969 was awarded to Knights Elham parish to begin an informal fxC called Morse (20/30 people) in community building on Augusta Park. It started well but stretched parish resources. Then vicar’s post was cut. Now the Parish of Andover is expected to resource ministry.
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⁸ [St Mary Aldermary | Moot Community | England](#) [accessed 1 October 2024]

⁹ <https://www.urbanexpression.org.uk/about.html> [accessed 1 October 2024]

Centenary Quay Southampton	No SDF money spent. Scope of project remained unclear so was removed from Phase 1 in 2021 re-baselining.
King's Barton Winchester	£3,891 spent. Nearby parish of St Barnabas Weeke and Community Development Enabler ran social events. But building developer changed/delayed plans and opportunities to develop church school and Launchpad nursery (i.e. to build in other church connections) didn't happen.
Manydown Basingstoke	No SDF money spent. Building of housing development severely delayed. Removed from Phase 1 in 2021 re-baselining.
South Basingstoke	No SDF money spent. Building of housing development severely delayed. Removed from Phase 1 in 2021 re-baselining.
North Stoneham	See previous section.

The 2021 re-baselining change request confirmed funding for MDAs had stopped with funds re-directed to other projects.

Successes:

- The programme's Community Development Enabler helped local parishes to organise outdoor summer events as an early step of building community and getting to know residents on MDAs
- For a short time, MORSE - a fxC by Knights Elham parish - gathered 20/30 people on Augusta Park

Challenges:

- The unpredictability of housing developments left the diocese with no control over timing
- Developers were reluctant to plan for community provision early on due to concerns about finance
- Work was not sufficiently established to move meetings online during COVID-19
- COVID-19 meant plans for the curate at St Mary's Andover to plant on Picket Twenty were disrupted. The curate was re-routed back to St Mary's/the Lighthouse Project to respond to social need
- Sustaining the fledgling fxC MORSE when the priest of Knight's Elham's post was cut

How and why MDA outcomes were or were not achieved:

We were told a lot of consulting took place on how to plant Christian communities on MDAs. This included reviewing national case studies of church schools acting as church hubs, dioceses taking on the management of community centres and developers building churches with Section 106 money.

Yet, with the benefit of hindsight, it is unsurprising that the challenges of working with delayed housing developments, working with multiple partners (including schools and nurseries) and coping with the COVID-19 pandemic meant this project's outcomes were not met.

This project also suggests that local parishes are more limited in being able to resource ministry on MDAs than originally thought, whether that is initiating work or continuing work once the initial leader has moved on. Where this is exacerbated by the overall reduction of stipendiary clergy, we were told SSM and curacy posts may help.

Regarding outcomes, a highly relational approach was planned to initiate contact with new residents and build community from scratch, yet ambitious Resource Church/church plant attendance targets were set.

As the diocese now looks to Resource Churches to provide momentum and resource for mission on MDAs - certainly in Andover - it will be good to see whether a 'worship-first approach' can grow sustainable Christian communities/churches on these housing developments.

If the newly-elected Labour government delivers more housing, an updated piece of national thinking around MDAs would be welcomed in light of post-COVID-19 financial constraints. For example, can MDAs be included in Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment (SMMI) funded programmes with tight targets when a diocese has so little control over timelines? Is the acquisition of new church buildings on MDAs prudent when there are so many existing church buildings that need maintaining?

Student Evangelism

Funding period: 2018-2022

Mission theory: No mission theory. Project sought to provide a ‘*step-change in the engagement of churches in HE and FE ministry by funding churches to recruit student ambassadors*’¹⁰ for evangelism.

Targets and actuals*:

	Targets**	Actuals	Notes
New discipleship-based approaches to student evangelism	-	4 HE 5 FE	No qualitative data available to discern development of new models/approaches
Contact with FE students through new relationships established by congregations and deaneries by end of 2019	3,000	1500pa	No data available to tell HE and FE apart
A 200+% increase in numbers of HE students attending churches in the diocese by end of 2019 (then extended to 2022)	200	150	Rather than the original 200%, the 2021 re-baselining exercise confirmed 200 as target for HE/FE students attending church, Alpha and midweek groups
Increase the number of students ‘coming to Christ’ to 1% per year by 2020 (then extended to 2023)	1,400	20	
30 trained Student Evangelism Workers deployed across the Diocese by 2020 (then extended to 2023)	30	20	Mix of trained staff/paid roles and volunteers
Resource Churches engaging with FE and HE institutions in their geographical contexts	2	2	Although Andover rather than Basingstoke
Local churches remodelled with a student focus by 2023	8	7	No data available to discern remodelling

*Data was gathered in 2022 for - and summarised in - the internal end of project report. All but one student worker responded.

**Targets also included 1) 100% of major HE institutions included in dMAPs by the end of the project but this was not tracked and 2) the development of an Apologetic Framework for Evangelisation Education and Culture which was not prioritised.¹¹

Successes:

- Although students have come to Christ in relatively small numbers, many have had their faith strengthened and have taken active or even leadership roles in their churches
- The work of the funded posts has been well-supported by church leaders and volunteers
- Pastoral care proved a helpful way of building relationships and trust with FE colleges

Challenges:

- Working with ambitious outcomes focused on evangelism did not take into account the culture of educational institutions who have to work with PREVENT policies that protect young people from any kind of extremism and radicalisation
- There is some cynicism that this was a sideways way to inject more funding into Resource Churches and phase plants to help them reach their outcomes and justify financial investment

What hindered:

- Losing the Student Mission Enabler early on hampered its development as a diocesan project, leaving workers with no wider connection to the diocese/the project
- Disappointment from some that existing Anglican chaplains or churches with an existing student ministry were not initially consulted or involved in this project

¹⁰ M. Collinson (2020) Student Evangelism Project Overview internal paper, p. 3.

¹¹ One student worker commented that students nowadays are ‘post-apologetic’ - they do not arrive at university with well-thought through world views to be debated in the way they did, say, ten years ago.

How and why Student Evangelism outcomes were or were not achieved:

With no clear mission theory yet ambitious targets around evangelism, we were told, '*The bishop had a model no one could understand*'. Therefore, using the funding to support student workers in large churches made sense as these were the churches interested in student ministry.

There was no regular tracking of outcomes which may have been due to the premature departure of the Student Mission Enabler. The bid emphasised the potential for this project to capture detailed learning; it is therefore a shame that neither the Student Mission Enabler, nor the Director of the School of Mission who was subsequently given responsibility for overseeing the project, tracked this learning. The data gathered in 2022 (at the close of the project) suggests growth is more transfer growth than conversion growth if low numbers are recorded as 'coming to Christ'.

Stakeholders noted that different approaches are needed with Further Education (FE) compared with Higher Education (HE):

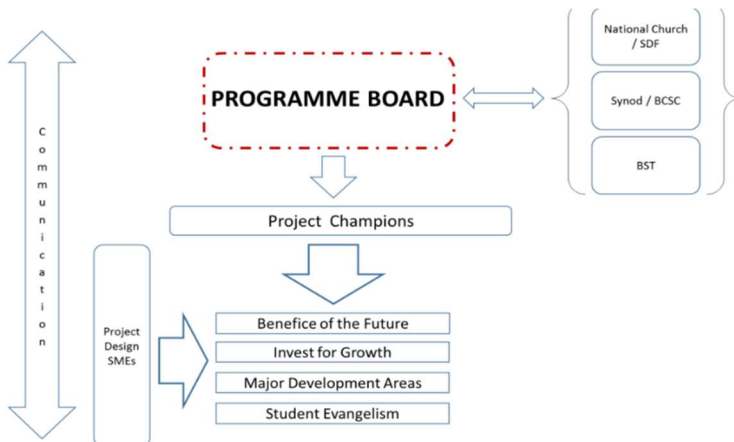
- FE feels more like detached youthwork with non-churched under 18s requiring enhanced safeguarding.
- FE feels more like the last part of school with students still living at home and therefore not looking for new communities to belong to.
- FE requires all-year-round patterns of ministry rather than working within academic terms.
- FE engagement 'holds up a mirror' to middle-class church congregations. Where so many church members have experienced HE rather than FE, this creates an additional cultural divide to navigate.

Therefore, St Mary's Andover work in Andover College and St Wins Totton Pillar project¹² are significant for the ways they are building relationships with young people in FE contexts through well-being support. We hope an external review of Phase 2 will include a more detailed exploration of the Pillar project.

¹² <https://stwins.org/thepillar> [Accessed 10 October 2024]

Implementation

Section 6 of the Stage 2 bid document outlined the following governance structure:



In practice:

- The Strategic Development Office/team did not take shape to the full extent it was outlined in the bid. A very good strategic development programme manager was appointed although this meant the programme was **overly reliant on one person**.
- The Programme Board ended up **acting as more of a delivery group than an executive board**. It proved difficult to agree which members of senior staff should remain at a strategic level and which were involved in day-to-day operations. What the Project Champion role entailed was not altogether clear. By the end of 2022, the Bishop’s Staff Team was finally established as the strategic oversight - offering the direction of travel - with the Programme Board managing operations.
- It took more **time than anticipated to integrate the programme into existing diocesan systems and processes**; the existing finance system could not cope with the coding of SDF costs in the early years and some very complex faculty applications were needed with the help of the DAC, along with far more architectural support than the usual quinquennial requirements.
- Where pastoral reorganisations and other proposed changes in the original bid were resisted by local parishes, **ecclesiastical structures were robust in defending the existing**. Considerable time, energy and ‘trust capital’ were expended in the diocese fighting for the new.
- The enabling roles envisaged in the bid proved more difficult to recruit to - or hold on to (the Rural Mission Enabler, Community Development Enabler and Student Mission Enabler) **although a solid team of project officers was in place by the end of Phase 1**. We note no fundraiser or communications officer continued to work with the programme as outlined in original bid.
- Phase 1 was **heavily affected by the leadership style of the then Bishop of Winchester**. He preferred what he called a ‘whole systems’ approach to change. Change included cutting all parish support roles, establishing a new School of Mission and cutting 22 incumbencies during COVID-19. While this sort of approach may work in some contexts for creating energy around the chaos of the new and different, we were told - overall - so many different changes of direction were experienced by most in the diocese as disruptive and destructive.

Finance

The table overleaf shows the SDF Phase 1 spend and budget by project.¹³ It shows the years in which the various projects incurred expenditure and indicates the complex nature of this programme. From the documents we have been shown, it appears that the budget has been very well adhered to, with minor movement from the budget in most cases.

The exception to this is the Resource Churches, where St Mary's Southampton drew down £400,000 SDF funds early from the St Mary's Andover budget, to cover an overspend on the building work. The diocese then paid £400k from the Winchester Diocesan Board of Finance to cover the building works in Andover.

The diocese appears to have done an excellent job in monitoring and observing progress throughout the complex projects, pivoting as required, and dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. While the projects may not have had the exact results intended, in comparison with other programmes there is remarkably little evidence of the turmoil, either from the pandemic or the resignation of the diocesan bishop.

¹³ This is based on the *SDF Phase 1 Budget v Actual April 2024* spreadsheet in the SharePoint folders, with clarification from Steve Hill.

	SDF Spend To Date	Remaining Allocated Budget	Final SDF Budget	Original SDF Budget	Movement	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Benefice of the Future £299 k Spent £0 k to spend £299 k	£ 43,303	£ -	£ 43,303	£ 45,851										
	£ 33,508	£ -	£ 33,508	£ 39,102										
	£ 63,138	£ -	£ 63,138	£ 63,077										
	£ 41,311	£ -	£ 41,311	£ 34,400							X			
	£ 22,111	£ -	£ 22,111	£ 19,171							X			
	£ 95,762	£ -	£ 95,762	£ 102,784										
	£ 299,133	£ -	£ 299,133	£ 304,385	£ 5,252									
Major Development Area £175 k Spent £0 k to spend £175 k	£ 33,934	£ -	£ 33,934	£ 10,969										
	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -										
	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ 3,891										
	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -										
	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -										
	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -										
	£ 141,296	£ -	£ 141,296	£ 170,496										
	£ 175,230	£ -	£ 175,230	£ 185,356	£ 10,126									
Student Evangelism £290 k Spent £0 k to spend £290 k	£ 38,850	£ -	£ 38,850	£ 36,925										
	£ 37,400	£ -	£ 37,400	£ 27,000										
	£ 30,400	£ -	£ 30,400	£ 30,400										
	£ 36,925	£ -	£ 36,925	£ 36,924										
	£ 22,800	£ -	£ 22,800	£ 22,800										
	£ 30,400	£ -	£ 30,400	£ 30,400										
	£ 30,400	£ -	£ 30,400	£ 30,400										
	£ 62,716	£ -	£ 62,716	£ 66,543										
	£ 289,891	£ -	£ 289,891	£ 281,992	£ 8,499									
Resource Church £1,874 k Spent £194 k to spend £2,068 k	£ 1,348,510	£ -	£ 1,348,510	£ 925,585	£ 422,925									
	£ 525,869	£ 194,377	£ 720,245	£ 1,140,322	£ 420,077									
	£ 1,874,379	£ 194,377	£ 2,068,755	£ 2,065,907	£ 2,848									
Diocesan Support £711 k Spent £86 k to spend £797 k	£ 710,816	£ 86,041	£ 796,857	£ 782,303	£ 14,554									
	£ 710,816	£ 86,041	£ 796,857	£ 782,303	£ 14,554									
Pioneer Hubs £215 k Spent £0 k to spend £215 k	£ 214,789	£ -	£ 214,789	£ 225,279	£ 10,490									
	£ 214,789	£ -	£ 214,789	£ 225,279	£ 10,490									
Church Plants £310 k Spent £0 k to spend £310 k	£ 310,111	£ -	£ 310,111	£ 388,713	£ 78,601									
	£ 310,111	£ -	£ 310,111	£ 388,713	£ 78,601									
Reallocated Funds £0 k Spent £79 k to spend £79 k	£ -	£ 78,600	£ 78,600	£ -	£ 78,600									
	£ -	£ 78,600	£ 78,600	£ -	£ 78,600									
	£ 3,874,349	£ 359,018	£ 4,233,367	£ 4,233,395	£ 32									

Sustainability

Regarding **continuation of projects**, the momentum from the successful pilots of Benefice of the Future led to the Growing Rural Parishes Programme¹⁴ begun in 2023. Equipped with the learning gathered from the earlier work, the new programme invites further benefices to apply for £30,000 to revitalise their rural ministry with funding to award three benefices for three years.

Both Resources Churches were in a strong position to continue beyond Phase 1 with phase plants or pastoral reorganisation. The delayed Basingstoke Resource Church became part of Phase 3. The congregation at St Nicholas is slightly bigger than before but - due to capacity - the incumbent is unable to develop the work.

In terms of **continuation of outcomes**, the Student Evangelism ceased in 2022 as a diocesan project but 6 out of the 8 churches continue to fund student ministry at a local level with similar outcomes.¹⁵ We were told that nationally there is a marked reduction in the number of paid students worker posts so it is to these churches credit that they continue to resource this ministry, especially in FE contexts.

Looking beyond the end of Phase 1, the growth curves of attendance at St Mary's Southampton are looking strong with an almost 500 ASA and a worshipping community of 717 reported in 2023.

We anticipate the growth in phase plants and revitalised parishes to be slower although subsequent evaluations can track this. St Mary's Andover finds itself at a difficult juncture 1) being in vacancy 2) needing to decide where/how The Lighthouse Project develops 3) recovering from a time-consuming pastoral reorganisation which was only finalised in May 2024 and 4) attending to local politics and building issues that come with three additional churches.

Within the wider shifting financial situation of the diocese, **financial sustainability** of these ongoing projects has been a greater challenge with all continuing projects reliant on further SDF or now SMMI funding as part of the Diocesan Investment Programme.

Both Resource Churches are paying all the diocese has asked them to pay into the CMF but currently they are paying a lower/subsidised rate to allow them to prioritise numerical growth, discipleship and planting or parish revitalising. This does ease the burden of financial pressure on Resource Church teams although both have accessed external grant funding to pay staff team salaries.

In terms of **lasting impact**, it may be too soon to tell whether the change in culture with the BoF pilot benefices arrests the decline in numerical attendance or whether the Resource Churches reach the stage where they can fully cover their costs.

However, these continuing rural and urban projects prove that revitalisation and growth is possible. Both St Marys have brought much-needed mission momentum and resource to their towns and city centres.

Inevitably, there is some negative impact where projects were stopped before the end of the programme, especially for those involved at local level who were made to feel it was their fault that projects failed. We note anecdotal observations that some very good mission-minded parish priests left the diocese as a result or have stayed but remain wary of diocesan strategies.

¹⁴ <https://winchester.anglican.org/growing-rural-parishes/> [Accessed 10 October 2024]

¹⁵ Interestingly, one student worker was so passionate about discipling students who have recently come to faith that attending church was not the important outcome but rather working with them one-to-one so they would be equipped to sustain their spiritual life when they returned home and had no large, lively church to attend every Sunday.

Learning

Was the decision to close some projects early justifiable?

Due to the way the programme was designed, yes, it was justifiable to close the pioneer hubs and MDAs and reshape the programme. By then, it had become clear that not enough time had been given to initial consultation and proof of concept in the original bid and COVID-19 adversely affected projects that were late in starting. However, in terms of *how* the projects were closed, it would have helped if senior staff had:

- taken time to communicate well about why funding was ending prematurely. For pioneer hub stakeholders, lack of communication reinforced their perceptions of centralised control and secrecy.
- found a way to honour the commitment and sacrifice that went into projects that closed e.g. it was 'heart-breaking' to know that collaborative work at deanery level achieved nothing.
- taken greater responsibility in admitting the original design of programme was flawed:
 - because the size and complexity of programme led to challenges in making it operational.
 - without enough flexibility to explore if pioneer hubs could develop in less expensive ways.
 - for not erring on the side of caution regarding the financial sustainability of project posts.

Does success look different in urban and rural contexts?

Yes. Phase 1 demonstrates success in rural contexts is subtle. Growth in attendance is modest at best or about maintaining numbers. The culture or mindset shifts are the successes which include:

- developing ministry teams that reposition the role of incumbent to team leader and facilitator.
- developing MPBs with a shared identity yet respecting the distinctive identities of each parish.
- working as a benefice to generate lay vocations and - in this context - an increase in financial giving.
- encouraging creativity to find ways to connect with residents that make sense in a rural context.

In urban contexts, Phase 1 projects indicate it is appropriate to expect a breath of mission activity as long as there is realism over how much can be achieved at any given time. This breadth includes:

- numerical growth and engagement with the missing generation.
- social action and civic involvement where appropriate.
- planting/revitalising energy and capacity.
- partnership working within and beyond the church.

Yet it is obvious that many contexts fall between rural and urban. The downside of the tight focus on Resource Churches and BoF is that everything in between is assumed to be less important, creating resentment.

For all geographical contexts, good teamwork is unavoidable, as is the quality of discipleship nurtured; wisely, leaders in both rural and urban contexts talked of the need to nurture missionary disciples as their core priority.

As has been modelled so well with BoF, we were left wondering what would happen if leaders in sub/urban contexts were trusted by the diocese to know their contexts and offered space/support to explore ideas for revitalisation and generative ministry.

How key has clergy or lay leadership been to the success of these projects?

These projects demonstrate that both kinds of leadership are vital. There is a paradox at the heart of the continuing projects that the kind of clergy leadership required is the kind who know how to nurture teams and release into - or affirm existing lay leaders in - positions of responsibility.

On a practical level, these projects could not exist without laity working as student workers, administrators, handling social media, leading home groups/Alpha courses and PCC members managing the technicalities of

church revitalisations and pastoral reorganisations. The Strategic Development office/team are lay, as are the architects, heritage advisers and building contractors.

This - and other feedback gathered - raises questions of whether:

- links can be improved with ministry training providers training clergy for this kind of rural MPB ministry-team-leader incumbency and BoF offered as a case study.
- existing licensed lay leaders are modelling what is possible in ways others can see.
- there is a diocesan policy for lay ministry.
- enough care is taken on the part of the incoming/revitalising Resource Church teams to not fall into the trap of assuming all that went on before in the church was worthless.
- opportunities for ‘those in the pew’ to explore licensed lay ministry is being missed in larger churches with a paid staff team.

Is there a link between the size of the programme and effectiveness of the programme?

While the desire to see dramatic change and growth was highly commendable, we were told the size of Phase 1 hindered its effectiveness in the follow ways:

- As the first programme of its kind for the diocese, it took more time than anticipated to develop the infrastructure needed for a large and complex programme.
- For a relatively small programme office/team, the size of programme made it additionally challenging to track outcomes and re-baseline outcomes in appropriately contextual ways.
- The bigger the programme, the bigger the financial ‘cliff edges’.
- Many of these projects needed ‘space to breathe’ which size, complexity and timing did not permit.
- Size contributed to the overly structural way it was managed as perceived by those ‘on the ground’.

Where size **helped** the programme’s effectiveness:

- Large and complex revitalisations of key city and town centre civic churches now feel like beacons of hope to many in the diocese.
- Resource Churches and larger churches benefitted from the Student Evangelism project.
- With the energy and resources of both St Marys, it is now easier to pivot to where God leads.
- Size is also about ‘longevity’ and ‘reach’. For example, BoF pilots planned their projects on a 10-year timeframe. St Mary’s Andover’s secular partnerships extended their reach beyond church circles.

Impact of SDF programme requirements on outcomes

What helped outcomes?	What hindered outcomes?
The SDU’s focus on larger urban areas helped the diocese develop a strategic focus on opportunities in main areas of population	The SDU’s move to funding ‘urban only’ programmes delayed the diocese in developing the GRPP programme as a follow-up to BoF
Requirements gave the diocese a shape to work with where they had no prior experience of running such a programme	The over-engineered Stage 2 bid was not challenged and became difficult to operationalise in practice
The programme funded the Strategic Programme team which was essential to manage the programme	The Strategic Programme team felt ‘remote’, not helped by bid contents remaining confidential, not shared with stakeholders
Structured change control was vital in preventing project ‘creep’	Early project complications and assumptions that SDU were only concerned with numbers led to a disinterest in local leaders tracking some outcomes
It is healthy - or good practice - for a diocese to remain accountable for how central money is spent	No challenge at bid stage of <i>how</i> the % of attenders from de/non-churched backgrounds could be tracked in practice
Consultancy support from SDU was very helpful	Survey fatigue creeps in if large churches are expected to complete CRT or Big Church surveys as well as SDF programme surveys
Regular progress reports were good for maintaining momentum	Recording templates needed some contextualising to make sense for those at a local level who needed to complete them

Further lessons learned:

- As has no doubt been captured in the evaluations of other early SDF programmes, **a greater emphasis on change management** was needed early on to complement programme management approaches. People-related change requires ‘soft’ skills, especially where the status quo is being so heavily contested.
- Inserting this programme ‘on top of’ existing church structures led to something of a ‘split personality’ for the diocese. Where pastoral reorganisations were planned, **ecclesiastical structures were robust in defending the existing**. It would have been far better to wait for key clergy or laity to move/retire rather than fight parish structures that, as one interviewee commented, will ‘*haunt the diocese for years to come*’.
- **Much has been learned about managing large building projects** and not allowing architects to run amok. Far sharper questions are now asked. Does a building need minor refurbishment (like Love Church) or major refurbishment (like St Mary’s Southampton)? How will renovations serve the mission of the church?
- The then Bishop of Winchester’s ‘resilience’ decisions in 2021 which led to cutting 22 incumbencies during COVID-19 and the furloughing of stipendiary curates **were massively disruptive** as the deployment of stipendiary curates was based upon Phase 1 strategic priorities.
- The success of Benefice of the Future may be related to the kind of ‘connected rural’ found in Hampshire with villages well-networked in terms of amenities, transport and social connections which churches are able to access and build on. **Upscaling this model to other types of rural may not work**.
- Size of multi-parish benefice has not affected BoF outcomes. The more important factor is whether a group of **parishes gravitate to the same larger villages or towns** for their amenities and relational networks.
- Benefice of the Future **achieved considerable cultural change for modest investment** but, beyond those directly involved, interviewees admitted they knew little about it. Creative communication is needed to share good news stories effectively in ways that instil confidence and not resentment.
- Resource Churches have created capacity and momentum, modelling that Resource Church revitalisations can work in less affluent contexts. However, there are **hidden pressures** on Resource Church leaders to consistently deliver multiple objectives to multiple stakeholders.
- A few of the more innovative projects appear to have oblique relationships with the diocese, such as Monty’s in Sholing. Even the St Marys Resource Churches seem to have something of a **detached relationship with the diocese** where support from - or trust of - the diocese seems to be low.
- Phase 1 confirmed the fxC journey or ‘**servicing-first**’ **model of classic pioneering is unaffordable** within a SDF programme where a full-time stipendiary pioneer is required to lead. This is a painful but helpful ‘reality check’; now alternative ways of enabling this kind of pioneering might be explored.
- Data at the end of the Student Evangelism project indicates **not many non-churched are ‘coming to Christ’** which calls into question how much student growth in large churches is a result of transfer growth.
- Any progress with **FE colleges is a major achievement** given this sector feels like a ‘desert’ in terms of the wider church’s mission. Work by St Win’s Totton and St Mary’s Andover demonstrate this is long-term work. Wellbeing work is understood as a vital part of the discipleship journey *before* conversion.

Conclusion and recommendations

With such a large and complex programme, we are aware we are unlikely to have captured every detail. With the wider changes in the diocese during this period, the COVID-19 pandemic, no easy audit trail to follow and inconsistency of internal end of project reporting, it is impossible to isolate completely the factors that helped or hindered the programme's effectiveness. At the very least, we hope this report has captured key achievements and areas of learning.

This programme achieved a remarkable amount considering the standing start and the complex political dynamics that arose from a programme designed and overseen by strong-minded, talented senior staff with contrasting instincts for mission, some of whom left mid-programme.

The Strategic Development office/team did extremely well to cope with the enormity of the task, track progress on behalf of the diocese and consult with the SDU on proposed change requests. This speaks positively of the open and accountable relationship between diocese and SDU which enabled learning on both sides for further SDF/SMMI funded projects.

We note the paradox that for a programme designed to enable innovation, the size, complexity and speed of its design did not give space to pilot new approaches and learn from them. The exception is Benefice of the Future which stands in marked contrast to the other projects in the programme for the way it gave space for participants to reflect, permission to fail and time for things to emerge. The sense of trust in the diocese that BoF helped to strengthen for those working at parish level is very precious.

It would be great a shame if fxC pioneering - where church is guest not host - was not ever tried again due to this experience with the pioneer hubs. It is still unknown just how much Resource Churches grow by transfer growth; the Student Evangelism Project suggests there has been less conversion growth among young people than hoped. The uncomfortable question lingers: who will reach people in contexts that Resource Churches can't? Where 'reimagining church' remains a key diocesan priority, what affordable pioneering models may evolve as a contrast to attractional church for those who say they 'don't do church'?

We are aware the diocese is still convalescing from so much adverse change. The well-known African proverb - *'If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together'* - does seem particularly apt given the prior consultation, relational work and time required to deliver such an ambitious change programme in a way that would lead to a positive *'step-change'* felt by all, not just by those directly involved in these projects.

Suggested recommendations:

- Give space/resource for 'blue sky thinking' around effective ways to share the good news of Benefice of the Future - now the Growing Rural Parishes Programme (GRPP) - more widely across the diocese.
- Follow-up with ministry training providers to ensure ordinands are being trained for the kinds of leadership skills needed for rural multi-parish benefices (MPB) in ways that BoF and GRPP are modelling.
- Ensure opportunities for lay leadership in the diocese are not being missed, looking to encourage licensed lay leadership in large churches as well as small, rural ones.
- Be aware of the hidden pressures that multiple stakeholders and expectations place on Resource Church leaders and their teams and offer more support during times of change/difficulty.
- Do not let the experience of pioneer hubs in Phase 1 be the end of the type of pioneering that might help reach those that attractional church or 'worship-first' models can't reach.

Appendix A: Short case studies

A culture change in the North Hampshire Downs benefice

In the rural parishes of the diocese, informal approaches work best. Benefice of the Future (BoF) would not have worked as an imported programme or formal directive from the diocese. Revd Simon Butler reflected that, *'Rural ministry works with the relational. The last thing rural parishioners want is for church life to look like work life. Many volunteer, often wearing multiple hats, but don't want their volunteering to be formalised because that depersonalises what they do. Church is where you belong, not a place where you have a role.'*

Therefore, in North Hampshire Downs, the Benefice of the Future funding felt like a *'vote of confidence'*. It took seriously those committed Christians who were already serving their 12 parishes and enabled subtle but substantial change by offering funding to improve I.T., administration and develop visual branding.

The visual branding exercise resulted in a new visual identity and a new name for the benefice: More to Life (see <https://www.moretolife.church/>). In consultation with Basingstoke-based marketing agency The Escape, yellow-orange was chosen as the distinctive colour as it was not 'taken' by any other local advertising.

Revd Simon Butler explained, *'Visual branding invokes trust from one parish to another. Villagers recognise the branding, having sampled it elsewhere. After five years, it is paying dividends. We now employ someone to support our communications and run our social media.'*

However, care must be taken with the visual branding. A balance is needed over what is centralised as the benefice and what remains particular to each parish. *'If you remove too much, you remove life. A single PCC would kill the energy here.'* The benefice exists to serve its parishes not vice versa.

As incumbent of this multi-parish benefice, Simon's role involves spending time with his ministry team members - all of whom serve in a public role. This ministry team meets weekly for a bacon roll and a coffee to decide who will take on the leading of services, school assemblies, alpha courses and bible study groups. Non-Eucharistic services are led by those with the Bishop's Commission for Mission (BCM). The team now includes 10 clergy, 60% of whom are 'home grown'.

While it has taken 'thick skin' to keep working with those who were initially resistant or passively supportive, taking part in BoF *'nudged the dial'* of goodwill, created a sense of momentum and generated a ministry team so large that we *'don't have enough slots in the rota to give to people'*. Furthermore, the benefice has gifted two days a week of Simon's time to the diocese to develop a rural strategy for this and neighbouring dioceses.

Churches are grateful for the funding that supported so many lay leaders through BCM training as part of being a pilot benefice. For many, BCM was about recognising ministry they already had, and congregations have been keen to see 'their own' succeed in upfront leadership. Through the BCM training, Simon continues to push the benefice ministry team to deepen their theological engagement so the deep devotion in these village churches - especially in the over 50s - is enriched by critical thinking across the piece.

As part of BoF, leaders were invited to take part in gatherings organised by the Archdeacon of Winchester. These gave leaders time and space to explore creative ideas for mission that would work in their mostly tiny populations. The Action Learning Sets reinforced the sense that they were the experts in their contexts.

One of the deepest shifts in culture change has been the acceptance that - for some parishes - financial support of children, young people and families work in the benefice may not directly affect their own church attendance. This has been a huge turning point as small wealthy parishes are happy to help fund a youth and families' worker who coordinates work with local schools across the deanery.

St Mary's Andover's decision to invest in initial research

When Revd Chris Bradish arrived in Andover in 2018 with a team to revitalise St Mary's as a Resource Church, he commissioned a piece of initial research on the town as a learning exercise for the church. The research cost under £10,000 in total and was jointly funded by the parish and university (via a community interest pro-bono research fund). It was conducted by public health researcher (and now St Mary's member) Emma Wilkinson and Professor Geoffrey Meads from the University of Winchester.

The resultant report¹⁶, *Making Sense of Andover's Mission: An Integrated Needs Analysis*, was shared in October 2019 and examined innovations, resources, formal systems, challenges, needs, collaborative networks, and the diverse narratives across the town. In many respects, it did not reveal anything new; it confirmed Andover was a market town that grew into a new town from 1960s London overspill without adequate civic infrastructure and long-term planning for expansion. Compared with other towns in the county, Andover has higher levels of crime, deprivation, a younger population, below average levels of educational attainment (on a national scale) and increasing demands on the NHS to respond to loneliness, bereavement and mental health needs.

Key to the research process were interviews with the NHS Primary Care Trust and Test Valley Borough Council who were well underway with the Andover Vision - a 20-year vision backed by a collaboration of businesses and charities - with key goals to rejuvenate the town and improve the health of those who live there.

The research process brought the church's voice to these conversations and the church became a catalyst for closer 'strengths-based' relationships between the Andover Vision stakeholders.

The research meant Chris was able to curate further partnership-working around the launch of the report. Chris's networking ability armed with research findings acted as a catalyst to *'open doors very quickly'*. With a humble attitude of seeking to learn what was already happening, relationships of trust were established between the church, council and the Primary Care Network (PCN) at a critically early stage in the civic church's revitalisation. Recruiting Emma Wilkinson to the team (at the conclusion of the research project) was also vital to establishing deeper networks with partners over time, identifying new opportunities, and helping the church retain its voice as a 'thought leader' within this space.

Critical to the success of these relationships was a shared 'world view' between key leaders about what good leadership in the public square looked like. The approach was relational, successes were always shared and inter-organisational politics were unusually low. The problems that needed solving were bigger than any one organisation could manage on their own. Equally, there was clarity around how their agendas differed which helped to maintain healthy boundaries and alignment over time. The organisations learned to complement each other: let each one lead through the other, give each other space and intuitively adopted aspects of 'asset-based community development' methodologies i.e. the shared mission kept the local community at the heart of their work. They did this alongside embracing the need for some quick wins to create momentum and accepted that 'disruptive' leadership had a part to play (the reordering of St Mary's would stand as a good example). Trust within this small circle of leaders grew quickly and created a platform for relationships lower down these organisations to grow and flourish.

Andy Ferrier CEO of Test Valley Brough Council reflected, *'Chris and his team had a broad vision but were astute in their philosophy about wanting to understand how St Mary's could play a part. What was needed in terms of demographics? Where could it add value?'*

¹⁶ The report is available as a PDF on request from hello@stmarysandover.org

COVID-19 was a 'proving ground' for these new relationships, especially for St Mary's. Inspired by HTB's swift response to offer leadership in the crisis, the church was quick to respond to where help was needed. Post-COVID-19, a social action hub evolved of several projects including CAP, Kintsugi Hope, food projects and bereavement and loneliness support. The successful delivery added credibility to the church's reputation in the town as an organisation that could 'get stuff done' - and do it well.

With successful external grant funding, this grew into The Lighthouse Project. It has since taken on such a momentum of its own that it requires a new vision for where and how it develops next. A very significant outcome to date has been the successful delivery of a shared office space project between the church and the PCN Team - with the Council as landlord. This is currently subject to its own in-depth evaluation and review. This 'place-based' approach has opened up further social capital across the town, deepened networks (with inter-organisational referral pathways developing) and supported the church in its own development - especially through the pastoral reorganisation. Critically, through careful articulation of boundaries and service development alongside other organisations, the Lighthouse has also become a major tool for evangelism and growth within the life of the church itself.

St Mary's was a relatively small but committed congregation engaging in its civic role before Phase 1. The funding from SDF provided a degree of financial clout and momentum which has brought substantial change. Described by another denominational leader as now having '*a strong civic presence*', St Mary's has not only experienced numerical growth at both Sunday services in a building that feels clean and bright, but the church is witnessing on the other six days of the week, measurable in its impact through patient healthcare outcomes.

Appendix B: Research methodology

This end-of-programme review gathered evidence with a critically appreciative perspective - celebrating progress and signs of God at work, whilst also asking challenging questions. It was tailored to the Terms of Reference set out by the Funding & Learning team in London and the Strategic Development Team in Winchester diocese.

Using a strongly qualitative approach, this evaluation drew on the following sources:

- 1) **Desk-based review of existing diocesan Phase 1 documentation** via Sharepoint which included numerous documents including the 2017 SDF Mission Action Stage 2 bid, re-baselining documents, internal end of project reports for Benefice of the Future and Student Evangelism, St Mary's Southampton close out report, St Mary's 2024 congregational survey, Statistics for Mission (SfM) dashboards, reporting packs and much more.
- 2) Further **qualitative data** including:
 - Individual interviews with 18 stakeholders by Zoom or in person
 - Visits to - and conversations with - clergy and laity in two rural benefices, clergy and laity in two Resource Churches and one Phase Plant and three student evangelism workers.

All research has its **limitations**. Though we are confident that we have used the most appropriate methods to achieve the aims of the evaluation, the following limitations must be acknowledged:

- Some key stakeholders are now living and working outside the diocese. Some were happy to be interviewed. Others declined. Therefore, there are few gaps in reporting.
- During the rural site-visits, we listened to the views of clergy and one church warden, but we were not able to capture the wider perspectives of congregation members or villagers in those benefices.
- We were not able to speak to anyone directly involved in the MDA project except for those involved in North Stoneham which became an Invest for Growth project.
- Capturing an accurate picture of the life of a diocese in every detail is impossible; with its multi-layered, complex and ever-changing dynamics, this evaluation can only be a reflection of what those interviewed and surveyed shared. Peer review within our team and diocesan feedback following the interim and draft full reports assisted in the synthesising of diverse perspectives.

Researchers

We acknowledge our long-standing appreciation for pioneering and mission as a potential research bias alongside being female, white and middle-class. Claire attends a liberal catholic Anglican parish on the east side of Sheffield. Fiona serves as an Ordained Local Minister in the Church of Scotland.

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Brendan Research specialises in statistical, qualitative, and geographical analysis for Christian organisations and denominations, bringing over 20 years' experience of conducting research and review work for faith communities.

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