

Walking the Wessex Way

Strategic Mission & Ministry Development Plan 2025

Diocesan Synod Update May 2025

“As this legacy of grace has shaped our past so it should shape our future too, as we walk the same path countless others have walked before us – a path of service, of learning, of growth – and of love above all.”

Bishop Philip
Walking the Wessex Way 2024

Context

1. This report is offered to Diocesan Synod to update them on the progress of the consultation process on our draft Strategic Mission & Ministry Development Plan 2025¹.
2. As previously shared with Synod, whilst our diocese has so much to celebrate and give thanks for, we do face serious questions and challenges in the areas of missional and financial sustainability and growth. The need to to secure national funding to help address these concerns, and intentionally invest in ministry and mission across our diocesan community is an opportunity we must embrace.
3. The challenges of finding strategic approaches that meet the aspirations, priorities and needs of our varied communities and ecclesiologies, whilst also aligning with the national objectives is not simple. We are grateful for all those that have engaged in this process to date pragmatically and openly, accepting that a degree of compromise will be needed.
4. We hope this update report will enable Synod to offer any further input and reflections on the proposals to allow us to finalise our application for submission to the national Team in September.
5. Diocesan Synod will be asked to formally ‘endorse and commend’ the Strategic Mission & Ministry Development Plan at a special meeting on the **1st of July** (to be held on Zoom).
6. Final approval of the detailed application and project plan will be undertaken by the Bishop’s Council in their capacity as Directors of the Board of Finance, in consultation with colleagues in the national team.

Consultation Process

7. The consultation process began in earnest in February. Since our last meeting the following have occurred:

¹ The initial summary of the plans can be viewed here: <https://winchester.anglican.org/our-next-bid-have-your-say/>

- a. Presentations and discussions at two Clergy Breakfast Briefings
- b. Consultation and feedback at Diocesan Synod
- c. The four open consultation meetings (online and in person) have been held.
- d. The remaining 2 open consultation meetings have been booked and advertised.
- e. The 6 workshops/focus groups with specific groups have been booked and invitations sent.
- f. The Bishop of Southampton has held a number of meetings in both Southampton and Bournemouth with key stakeholders to share the initial plans.
- g. The online consultation forum has been opened <https://winchester.anglican.org/our-next-bid-have-your-say/> and 23 responses have been received so far.
- h. The Diocesan Secretary and the Strategic Programme Manager have met with the Head of Diocesan Support in the national Vision & Strategy Team to discuss our draft plans.
- i. The Bishop of Winchester and the Diocesan Secretary met with the co-Heads of the Vision & Strategy Team.

8. We are deeply grateful to all those that have taken the time to engage in this process, and for the thoughtful and considered responses they have offered.

9. The feedback has been quite broad and varied in approach, but some themes have started to emerge:
 - a. Growing Younger
 - b. Use of data and use of language
 - c. What about Basingstoke?
 - d. Prioritising support
 - e. Support for benefices and leadership teams
 - f. Clarity needed on what will be possible under each project strand
 - g. Greater detail on project plans, timescales, budgets etc
10. During the consultation, we have also received a few specific ideas and proposals for local missional initiatives and community engagement opportunities. Some of these might fit well into Benefice Development Plans or Growing Rural Parishes and we will seek to explore these further at the appropriate time.

Response to Feedback

11. We have taken time to consider all the feedback received to date and offer the following points in response.
 - a. **Growing Younger:** The need for a greater and more overt emphasis on Growing Younger in our bid has been a consistent theme in much of the feedback. This should include not just children and families, but also those in their twenties and thirties. This is something we fully accept and support and will be happy to make far more overt in the Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Plan. In practical terms we will set overt objectives for increasing the number of younger people in all three project strands, and ensuring that the potential impact on younger generations will be a key criterion for

selecting and prioritising Benefices to join the Benefice Development Programme.

Whilst not as strong, we have also received feedback that any focus on younger generations must not be seen to alienate older generations.

- b. Use of data and use of language:** Some of the feedback has focused on concern and anxiety around the use of data to categorise benefices. A few respondents have reported that the benefice dashboards have felt like a judgement or criticism of their ministry. We are saddened to hear this and restate that our intention for collating and analysing the data was to help us understand the depth of challenge across our diocese in order to evidence the need for funding to provide necessary levels of support.

The Bishop's Council have reflected on this and have concluded that the need to use this level of data to evidence our bid and understand our shared challenges remains vital and proportionate. It will be a necessary ongoing element to monitor and evidence progress in coming years if we are to be able to draw down national funding.

We are however committed to ensuring that the information is shared with benefices in a supportive manner, seeking to build the Dashboards based on experience and feedback each year. We are also open to considering changing the names of the Groups to better capture the intention of the categories. One set of revised names suggested during the feedback was as follows:

- i. **Flourishing** to become **Rooted & Growing**
- ii. **Healthy but...** to become **Steady with Potential**
- iii. **Struggling** to become **Faithful in Fragile Contexts**
- iv. **In need of review** to become **In need of support & accompaniment**

We are open to using these revised names but would be keen to hear if others have alternative suggestions.

Another area that arose in some discussions was around the name of the Benefice Development Programme. Some feedback suggested that the use of the term Benefice was not overly familiar to many people and could be confusing. Given that the programme is designed to be applied at benefice level (whether multi parish benefice or single parish benefice) it is a technically correct description but may not resonate widely.

The Bishop's Council is open to changing the name and would welcome suggestions.

- c. What about Basingstoke?:** This question, or variations on it, has been raised in a few meetings. In essence, people have been seeking to understand why

we have determined that Southampton and Bournemouth require separate project strands, when Basingstoke (and some of our other conurbations) do not.

The rationale behind this decision is driven by the comparative population sizes and the impact of previous and current strategic development projects. The population of Bournemouth is nearly double that of Basingstoke town. A large-scale intervention in the Basingstoke Parish is already in progress with some years of funding left to run. We therefore feel that the remaining parishes in and around Basingstoke would be strong candidates for the Benefice Development Programme without the need of a separate project strand. A similar rationale would be made for Andover, Eastleigh and Winchester.

- d. Prioritising support:** The question of how benefices would be identified and prioritised for support was raised. This is of particular relevance to the Benefice Development Programme and Growing Rural Parishes Programme. The Bishop's Council have considered this issue and concluded that a nuanced approach is needed.

It is proposed that the primary route will be to invite benefices to apply to join the programmes – this methodology has been used well with the Growing Rural Parishes Programme already. All eligible Benefices would be invited to submit applications for consideration by a small panel, who would assess them against an agreed set of criteria (such as impact on younger generations, readiness for change, potential for growth, deanery views, alignment with Walking the Wessex Way, missional impact etc.)

This approach would align with Principle 8, that our plans should be 'Structurally aware' and not seek to impose change and intervention on our benefices.

The Bishop's Council did however feel it was also important for the process to still honour Principles 1 (Based in Prayer), 6 (Times of Transition & Change) and 9 (Flexible). To this end they propose that some Benefices might be offered support proactively, on occasions when need and opportunity might unexpectedly arise.

- e. Support for benefices and leadership teams:** Closely linked to the above, is the question of what support benefices and leadership teams will receive in navigating these new ways of working. We are acutely aware of the pressure many of our clergy and volunteers are already under. We therefore need to keep any new processes as straightforward and simple as possible, whilst still ensuring we are good stewards of all the resources entrusted to us - implementing protocols that will satisfy the national funding body.

As part of the bid, funding will be sought to appoint dedicated posts to work alongside our clergy and benefices in exploring the missional opportunities, developing plans and accompanying them in implementing and delivering them.

In addition to this, we are also propose seeking funding to appoint a **Ministry Wellbeing Officer** to expand and coordinate our current wellbeing support for clergy and ministers as they address the challenges of their roles.

- f. **Clarity needed on what will be possible under each project strand:** Some feedback has sought absolute clarity on exactly what might be permitted in particular contexts under the proposed plans. Would youth workers be funded under GRRP, or would building works be included in Serving Southampton for example?

Part of our approach and underlying principles for the strategy is that we should retain as much flexibility to respond to the needs and opportunities in each area. That desire must however be balanced against our need for any support to be evidenced based and in line with the overarching national requirements for the funding to be overtly used to increase growth and sustainability. How these different principles interact in each case will be different, affirming the need for bespoke, co-created plans to be developed.

- g. **Greater detail on project plans, timescales, budgets etc.:** The final broad theme of feedback received was a desire for a far greater level of detail of the programme plan itself, with a few people seeking detailed budgets, timescales and project dependencies etc.

As noted at the start of the consultation process, we made an intentional decision to start consulting whilst plans were still in development and not finalised – seeking early input in case there was a strong sense that we were on the wrong path.

The level of detail requested by some, is vital and will be produced as part of our application. This will involve a huge level of detail, budgets, timescales and evidence for the national team to consider. We will not however be asking Diocesan Synod to consider and approve that level of detail. Those tasks will appropriately be undertaken by the Executive Team and the Bishop's Council.

12. Diocesan Synod is asked to note this feedback and responses, and be prepared to discuss any further outstanding issues, ideas or concerns at the meeting.

13. *If members wish to raise detailed questions of detail, we would be grateful if these could be shared in advance to help ensure a full and proper response can be offered.*

Duration of Programme and Quantum of Bid

14. In developing these plans, we have been clear that this needs to be a long-term programme of investment and change over the next 10 years. Our colleagues in the national team are deeply supportive of this approach. We had therefore been hoping to submit a single application to cover the funding for the whole duration.
15. The national Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Board does not officially have a maximum allocation of funds for each Diocese to bid for – instead wishing to assess each application on its own merits. In practice however there is an informal expected allocation for each diocese. We now understand that the most Winchester should reasonably expect to bid for, is around £10m. This would cover the costs of the programme for the first 4 years.
16. At the end of the year 3, we would be able to start the process of bidding for further funds to cover years 5 to 10. It has however been made very clear to us that we cannot assume the remaining funding will be forthcoming. This will depend on national allocations to this funding stream and the progress and impact of our first 3 to 4 years of work.
17. This creates a complex challenge in drafting our bid. We need to remain clear that our aspiration is that this is a 10-year, long-term strategy, whilst also ensuring the first phase (years 1 to 4) could, if necessary, have clear impact by themselves. We will continue to engage with colleagues in the national team to ensure this approach can be achieved without disadvantaging our benefices.

Conclusion

18. Overall, our sense so far is that there is broad support, excitement and enthusiasm for the plans from those that have engaged to date. Many questions have rightly been raised, but very few (if any) outright objections to the principles and overarching design of our plans have been received.
 19. In light of this we hope to continue to develop and refine our plans in the coming weeks. Subject to any further feedback and discussion at this meeting of Diocesan Synod, it is our firm aspiration to bring final plans to the meeting on 1 July for your endorsement and commendation.
 20. We ask that Synod continue to hold the Diocesan Team in your prayers, as we seek the necessary wisdom, discernment and fortitude to bring this work together.
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