

Walking the Wessex Way

A Strategic Mission & Ministry Development Plan

Appendix 1: Diocesan Strategy

“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

Vision & Strategic Development

1. In recent years, our diocese has been involved in an ongoing process of discerning and designing a new missional strategy to guide us through the next 10 years. At each stage we have sought to adapt and refine our aspirations, objectives, targets and plans in light of feedback, data, analysis and learning from previous SMMIB and SDF projects¹.
2. A critical element of this was in 2024 when Bishop Philip shared his invitational vision for our diocesan community: **‘Walking the Wessex Way’**. This is our story and vision for the Diocese of Winchester, offering four lenses – **Loving, Serving, Learning and Growing** – through which we can reflect on where God is leading us. [INSERT LINK](#)
3. At the core of this vision is a desire for a shift in culture and perspective – helping the communities of our diocese to build on our legacy of grace as we celebrate our shared current mission and ministry, whilst looking to a Christ-centred future with confidence and hope.
4. Whilst inviting all parishes to reflect on their local response to this vision, the Bishop’s Staff Team have considered this invitation for those areas of ministry that fall within their spheres of control. These **‘BST Commitments’** have been shared with the wider diocesan community and represent a core element of our diocesan strategic framework for the coming years. [INSERT LINK](#) These can be summed up as:
 - i. Ensuring our models of ministry are appropriate for the third decade of the 21st Century.
 - ii. Ensuring the health and growth of the Church, that it might be fit for mission.
 - iii. Paying due attention to clergy well-being.
 - iv. Addressing issues of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).
 - v. Investing significantly in ministry with children and young people.
5. Some of these (e.g. ii. & v.) are explicitly addressed in what follows and for which we are seeking funding. Others (1, 3, 4) are no less important to us, and are already being addressed in various ways. Thus 1. is a key responsibility in the role description for the new Bishop of Basingstoke; we are developing a significant programme to address issues around clergy well-being; and we have

¹ ‘Going Fast or Going Far’ has been a pivotal piece of research for guiding our next steps.

also been working hard to address issues of diversity with, for example, our Synod approving our new Racial Justice Strategy last year [INSERT LINK](#)

6. At the same time, in partnership with colleagues from the national Vision & Strategy Team, we commissioned a review of **Health & Vitality indicators** of all our Benefices, seeking to understand the missional and financial health and sustainability of our diocesan community. This work was intended to help us understand trends, and patterns across our worshipping communities, helping to inform and advise the next stage of our strategic journey.

Missional Challenges & Opportunities

7. The detailed findings of the Health & Vitality Analysis are shared in **Appendix 3** summarising the trends and insights.
8. This piece of work has been both logistically and emotionally challenging – identifying the huge amount of dedicated ministry, generosity and service that happens across our diocese daily, whilst also noting the breadth and spread of challenges we see.
9. With over **60% of Benefices** identified as currently ‘**vulnerable**’ or ‘**fragile**’, the scale of missional challenge before us is clear. Our ministry to **children, young people and families** is inconsistent. Within these statistics and trends, however, are widespread signs of hope and joy. For example, in 2024 we saw a **6.8% increase in Worshipping Community** (national average of 1.8%).
10. Despite the national trend, **vocations** to lay and ordained, authorised and licensed ministry in our diocese continue to grow. We have a strong and exciting pipeline of missional leaders coming through, with no signs yet of it slowing down. **Appendix 4** offers more details on the missional impact of this pipeline and our wider strategic people plan.
11. Added to the challenges at benefice level, our Strategic Mission & Ministry Development Plan has also had to acknowledge the scale of financial challenge faced at a diocesan level.
12. As a diocese with very low levels of historic assets and endowments per capita (31st out of the 42 dioceses), many parishes in deprived communities (c. 500k people) but no LInC funding, we are highly reliant on the giving and generosity of our PCCs to fund our mission and ministry. As parishes have struggled with declining attendance and ever-increasing costs and complexities of compliance, our diocesan deficit has grown. Robust and positive action has been taken to address this (see Appendix 6) but it is clear that the DBF does not have the levers or capacity to address the scale of financial sustainability on its own.
13. The complexities of the interactions of these challenges are not simple. Quick, focused interventions have their place, but in order to move to long term sustainable ministry, it is clear that we need to be looking at least **10 years ahead**.
14. As part of this shift to a diocesan wide development strategy, it is vital that we move away from a series of standalone strategic interventions to a coherent diocesan wide mission strategy. Part of our aspirations for Walking the Wessex Way therefore, is that we move from our strategic projects being seen as additions to our mission to them becoming part of our day to day ministry and practice.
15. Taking all these elements together, and wrapping them in prayer, we have been able to create our 10-year **Diocesan Strategic Mission & Ministry Development Plan**.

Overview of Objectives (draft)

We seek a revitalised Church growing in breadth, depth, numbers and confidence.

Growing



- A. A **x% increase** in our Worshipping Community over the **next 10 years**, with a reduction of our average age profile of **x%**.
- B. Achieve a **x% increase** in the number of benefices that are missionally and financially sustainable over the next **10 years**.

Loving



- C. Our worshipping communities becoming **younger, and more diverse**, better reflecting the totality of the communities we serve.
- D. To ensure all new ministerial and missional activity is safe and open to all, built on a diocesan wide commitment to **safeguarding** and **accessibility**.

Serving



- E. A sustained and fruitful increase in outreach, service, evangelism and engagement in on our most **deprived communities**.
- F. Build on the renewed national investment in **clergy wellbeing**, to properly support, care for and value our ordained colleagues across the breadth of their responsibilities.

Learning



- G. To expand our **lay and ordained ministry** training and discernment pathways, helping to ensure authorised ministry is open and accessible to all across our different communities.
- H. Building on what we have learned through our previous strategic interventions, we seek to continue growing our **base of knowledge** and leaning through monitoring, reviewing, and assessing all our missional activities, to help inform and guide our support and planning for years to come.

*These objectives and the related measurable outcomes and targets are explored further in **Appendix 8**.*

Strategic Mission & Ministry Development Plan

1. To achieve these overarching objectives, we have sought to understand the trends and themes arising from our Health & Vitality review. This has highlighted that the majority of benefices that are facing the most severe challenges around sustainability are either in our most deprived communities or those with the smallest populations.
2. This is not a surprise and not a criticism of those leading those benefices.
3. Historically, we have continually reduced our ministry investment in our most **urban, deprived, and diverse communities** as local giving has been unable to fund the cost of clergy. The lack of capacity in these densely populated areas, has resulted in low attendance per capita making resourcing local mission (both in terms of finances and people) an ever-increasing challenge. This has been especially true in Southampton and Bournemouth.

Ministry Investment per capita: Low

Levels of Deprivation: High

4. In our **rural communities**, the small population sizes, combined with the high number (per capita) of historic church buildings and PCCs, has resulted in too few people trying to carry too heavy a cost. Whilst clergy allocation per capita is high, due to the large geographical areas they cover, the complex parish structures they lead, and the high number of buildings they are responsible for, this leadership resource can often feel diluted and insufficient, reducing capacity to invest in growth and outreach leading to an artificially high **age profile** of their worshipping communities.

Ministry Investments per capita: High

Ministry Investment to infrastructure: Low

5. The Health & Vitality Review has also shown that there is some missional strength, potential and opportunity in many of our **other benefices** i.e. those not in rural or urban contexts, where relatively small increases in attendance and/or giving would lead to a higher sustainability rating. There is however also a degree of fragility within many of these places meaning we must not take their current health for granted.

Missional Capability: High

Missional Capacity: Low

6. Any diocesan level strategy inevitably struggles with the inherent tension with CofE structures – we are one but many. We attempt to offer a diocesan wide vision and strategic approach, whilst recognising that each part of our diocese is separate and independent. **We are one body, with many parts.**
7. Our approach has therefore been to create a flexible strategic framework that can be applied across a range of contexts. In doing this we have had to balance the clear understanding that a ‘one size fits all’ solution will never work, with the pragmatic reality that we cannot deliver 233 separate strategic interventions across all our parishes.
8. Our solution to this conundrum has been at two levels. First, we have concluded that any strategic interventions and support must be offered at benefice (122) not parish (230) level. It is our belief that this approach will ensure a more holistic and unified approach to the strategic challenges and opportunities across our diocese.
9. Second, we look to offer **three project strands** each of which is adapted and designed to meet the strategic missional needs of different parts of our diocesan community. Each strand is built on the same **strategic principles** (see below), flows from the same vision of **Walking the Wessex Way**, and seeks to contribute to the same overarching strategic **objectives**, building a revitalised Church growing in breadth, depth, numbers and confidence.



Growing Rural Parishes Programme.

- a. The **Growing Rural Parishes Programme** will seek to address the challenges associated with rural ministry through changing culture, building breadth and resilience within leadership teams, and supporting capacity and functionality in practical and operational matters as well as support for reaching more **young people and families**. This will build on the success of our existing programme and will give many additional rural parishes the opportunity to be part of a 3 year-long missional learning community and to receive a modest sum (£35k) to invest in communications and training and some part time ministerial, mission or operational support.



Believing in Southampton and Bournemouth.

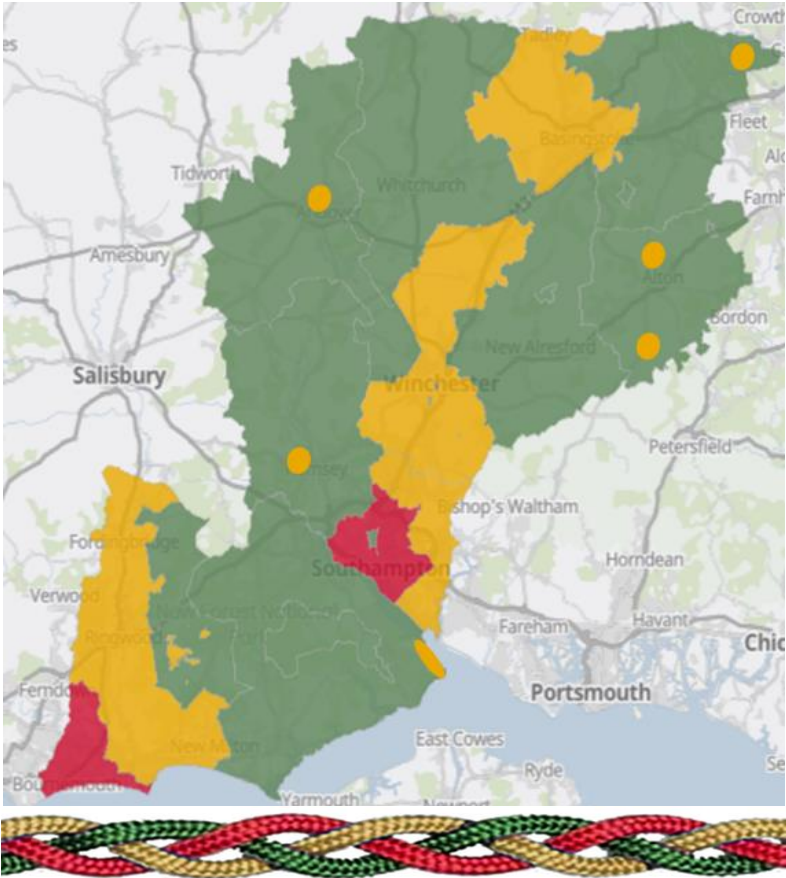
- b. Believing in Southampton & Believing in Bournemouth will offer bespoke projects for our two largest conurbations serving our youngest, most diverse, and deprived communities. Based on learning from elsewhere in the country, the main objective will be for each deanery to work together more closely in evangelism and to grow the existing congregations as well as to start numerous new worshipping communities (of various sizes, traditions and with various different foci) across the conurbations. There will be a renewed focus on helping many of our congregations to **grow younger** whilst simultaneously seeking to bless older people. A locally based mission team working alongside a Deanery Leadership Team in each area will help provide targeted support and development to address the missional challenges - investing in capacity and support for our lay and ordained ministers and volunteers.



Benefice Development Programme

- c. The **Benefice Development Programme** will then offer a mechanism for seizing the potential and opportunity in other parts of our diocesan community. With an overt focus on **growing younger**, and increasing missional and financial resilience, the Benefice Development Programme will increase our Diocesan wide missional strength, by supporting benefices to develop fully-costed forward looking Benefice Development Plans, supported by specialist advisers, with funding and resource available from a central budget.

10. This cord of three strands will provide a **standardised framework, that is consistently bespoke** to help our diocesan community grow, serve, love and learn.



1Need to get Hannah to do this better!

Cross Cutting Themes

Update when outcomes framework finalised, linking project objectives back to strategic priorities.

The table below summarises how the outcomes of each of these strands align with the CofE’s three national priorities.

	Younger & More Diverse	Mixed Ecology	Missional Disciples
Growing Rural Parishes			
Believing in Bournemouth & Southampton			
Benefice Development			

Principles

As we have sought to develop these plans, we have been guided by the following principles:

1. **Based in prayer:** Our plans must start from a place of humility, placing our trust in Christ, seeking his guidance and wisdom in all we do.
2. **Bespoke:** At the foundation of the parochial structures, is the understanding that every community is different. Whilst challenges will be similar, the context, people and constraints will always create a unique mixture. Bespoke support is therefore always required.
3. **Prioritised:** The need for support is greater than our capacity to respond. We will therefore prioritise those where both the need and potential is greatest. Within this we will unashamedly prioritise investment in benefices and plans that will most support ministry to children, young people and families.
4. **Evidence Based:** There is wealth of qualitative and quantitative data, statistics, research, and experience across the Church. We must ensure our plans and priorities must be considered and challenged through this base of knowledge.
5. **Co-created:** Local clergy, ministers and laity are the experts on their communities. Leaders and peers in other benefices have vital relevant experience and knowledge. The Diocesan team bring a range of expertise and perspective. It is our belief and experience that only by mixing all these expertise together can we truly create sustainable plans, based in detailed local knowledge, peer-group learning, supported by wider experience.
6. **Resourced:** Plans without resources are just documents. To bring about the scale and speed of change and development we seek, all benefice plans will require resource – people, financial, and experiential. Each plan will be fully costed, with dedicated expert advisers identified to support the local team in the implementation and delivery.
7. **Times of Transition & Opportunity:** Leading change in the Church is hard. It is our belief that using times of significant transition and opportunity in benefices, as springboards for wider change planning, provides the greatest chance of success. Wherever possible, we will seek to develop Benefice Development Plans at points of change and transition in benefice life (vacancies, pastoral schemes, demographic changes etc.)
8. **Structurally Aware:** The structures and legislation of the CofE are not designed to facilitate or enable top-down imposed change. Experience shows that where change is forced rather than invited (even for the best possible missional reasons) the damage to all involved can be long lasting. We are therefore committed to working within this reality, recognising that perspectives within the Church are so divided on so many issues that we can never please all. All benefices will therefore be given a right to opt-out of the programme if they so wish.
9. **Flexible:** The future is uncertain. Our plans are not always God's plans. We must ensure adaptability and flexibility are baked into our plans to allow us to respond to changes contexts, challenges and priorities.

CH
June 2025 v3a