

Journeying together: a summary of Diocesan Synod, 18 October 2025

Diocesan finances and our Net Zero Carbon strategy were the focus of conversation at the Derby Diocesan Synod, as it met for its 147th session on Saturday 18 October in St John's Church, Walton.

This was the first meeting chaired by Rev Dr Jason Ward since his election as chair of the House of Clergy earlier in 2025. He began by paying respects to Rev John Drackley, who held various posts within the diocese including that of Secretary to the Diocesan Advisory Committee, who died on Sunday 29 June. Jason also paid tribute to Rev Canon Julian Hollywell, and thanked him for his ten years as Chair of the House of Clergy, which was met with warm applause.

Bishop Libby was invited to give her presidential address, which she began by recording a short message of greetings for the Diocese of Bujumbura in Burundi, with whom we have partnered on [this year's Bishops' Harvest Appeal Trees for Peace](#), and who are celebrating their Golden Jubilee this year!

The recording of the message of congratulations, love and thanksgiving can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/w5gO7lpPcJA>

The Trees for Peace campaign is still accepting donations, and you [can give online via the GiveALittle website](#).

Picking up on the common purpose of both dioceses, to enable and sustain the people of God in both mission and ministry, +Libby went on to share her reflections on the purpose of Synod. She explored the root of the word in Late Greek: 'syn' meaning assemble and 'hodos' meaning journey, and how that reflects Synod calling to journey together for the sake of our diocese.

As we journey together, +Libby laid the challenge that we must first know ourselves: both in the experience and gifts that we bring, but also our identity in Jesus Christ. She reflected on her own journey recently – coming back from her sabbatical and the many conversations that have been a blessing to her since her return. She gave thanks for specific events, including the Bishop's Badge services 'which are where stories of the Kingdom are surfaced', and also the recent Clergy Conference which offered much-needed space for our church leaders to 'dwell richly together'.

+Libby also spoke of the privilege she had recently of [speaking in the House of Lords debate on the Crime and Policing Bill](#) that is currently being considered by Parliament, and for the working group of Bishops who are considering the outcomes of the Living in Love and Faith conversations that have taken place in recent years.

She closed by reminding Synod members of their sense of vocation, exercising leadership for our diocese as those together on the way with Christ:

“We may only physically be together for short periods, but these meetings are staging posts along the journey we are on. We each, and therefore we together, travel with Christ - Christ is our peace and he has reconciled us into his body. We do this in his name.”

Down to business – diocesan finances

The minutes of the previous meeting, Saturday 14 June were approved with minor corrections. There were matters arising out of the minutes around Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF). It was shared that +Libby proposes to ask three members of the House of Clergy and three members from the House of Laity to convene and consider together a means for Synod members to further engage on PLF at a future meeting.

As Synod transitioned into a general meeting of the Derby Diocesan Board of Finance, Canon Mark Titterton, Executive Chair of the DBF, took over as chair. Mark outlined the current financial challenges: that on the current trajectory of finances we are not able to sustain our current level of clergy without increased Common Fund contributions from parishes.

Canon Will Hagger, Diocesan Secretary, gave an overview of the financial situation in more detail, sharing that “as it stands, the 2026 budget does not present a sustainable situation”, and mentioning the various channels that the DBF has explored to bring in further funds. Will explained that bids to the Diocesan Investment Programme (DIP), which were originally planned to be in excess of £15million, would now be capped at a maximum of £5 million (£2 million for the triennium 2026 to 2028, and £3 million for the next triennium 2029 to 2031).

Will also shared that stopping the year-on-year decline in Common Fund is critical to sustaining resources to support future growth, and that if the DBF isn’t able to secure additional funds ‘we will soon have to cut our cloth accordingly.’

Martyn Marples, Director of Finance and Operations, explained the budget proposals for the next year, and again gave reference to the reducing future financial stability of the diocese over the next five years. He highlighted the current risks around budget setting, including diminishing reserves, delicate financial markets, inflation and income from Common Fund. He explained that there would be a letter of intent sent to parishes to consider what their future Common Fund contributions might be, as well as highlighting the many ways in which the Parish Support Team can provide advice, guidance and assistance to parishes around financial matters.

Martyn gave notice that Bishop’s Council would consider a proposed roadmap to financial stability ahead of the next Diocesan Synod. This was followed by a group

discussion around the priority given to Common Fund payment by parishes, and the factors that parishes consider planning Common Fund contributions.

Synod members were asked to consider a couple of questions: what they might do to influence their PCCs to give greater priority to Common Fund in their budgets, and also what support they would benefit from the Parish Support Team in having those conversations.

The comments back from the floor of Synod were constructive and positive, recognising the financial situation that the DBF faces and a desire to engage with the Parish Support Team more. Members also commented that parishes have responsibilities for the upkeep, maintenance, health and safety of their churches, which carries a financial cost. Some churches have commitments such as staff salaries and other ministry costs that they currently place as their first consideration. It was also noted that budget planning cannot be separated from mission action planning, and the importance of values-based budgeting. Other comments centred round the need for better communications and engagement from the Parish Support Team, and for a rationale for giving to be developed. The legacy of the Covid, and churches' roads to recovery after the pandemic are also a major factor.

There followed a procedural motion on the budget to be adopted before the general meeting was concluded.

Upon taking the chair, Peter Kelsey, Chair of the House of Laity, presided over the vote to approve the budget:

'That this Synod approves the Budget for 2026 as proposed by the Diocesan Board of Finance ('the DBF') and authorises the DBF to expend a sum not exceeding £11,589,094.'

The motion was passed.

Net Zero Carbon – our progress and our strategy

Peter invited Will Rolls, Net Zero Carbon Programme Manager, to give a progress update on the implementation of our Net Zero Action plan.

Will began by explaining the context that the world faces around climate change: its impact and human cost in terms of displaced people, food insecurity and agricultural failure, and the additional mental health burden that the climate crisis places on people, especially younger people.

He reminded Synod that the Church of England adopted creation care as the fifth mark of mission in 1990, and that Christians have long since been ambassadors for justice around climate and the wider environmental impact.

Will then shared the progress that has been made locally to date. Two churches, All Saints Glossop and St Peters Belper, have been awarded Gold Eco Church status, and Derby Cathedral has earned Silver. The Eco Church Scheme is run by A Rocha UK, a Christian charity working to equip Christians and churches to protect and restore the environment – for God, nature and all people. As of the end of 2024, there are 1870 Bronze, 899 Silver, and 40 Gold Church of England Eco Churches. The scheme is a fantastic resource for encouraging churches – you can [find out how to earn an Eco Church award on the A Rocha website](#).

Emissions in Church of England schools have also decreased as a result of continued investment in energy efficiency upgrades, and the DBF property team have retrofitted two vicarages to include an air source heat pump. Other vicarage property enhancements include installing smart heating controls, improving insulation in roof spaces and, where possible, installing triple-glazed windows.

Will also introduced Gordon Sephton, who has recently started in the role of Church Decarbonisation Officer, and who is now in the process of meeting with churches to discuss their Net Zero options.

There are, of course, challenges that remain. Some churches may not recognise the importance of the climate crisis, or may be intimidated by the cost. Some may lack capacity or expertise, or an understanding of what the implications of climate change are. There are also concerns around the faculty application process, access to funding and lack of clarity around the support which is available.

Will outlined the Parish Support Team's strategy to address these concerns and to build on the positive work that is already happening around parishes – the strategy is to educate and inform, to connect parishes to each other and to expert advice, and to provide practical and administrative support. This was followed by an open discussion around the ways in which the Parish Support Team can assist.

On the subject of what training and workshops churches would benefit from, comments from the floor included how to access grants and finance, examples of successful projects and case studies, and how to explain this topic in terms that people can engage with rather than just academically. There were also comments around what communications support can be given, especially around social media, the availability of online resources, and the routes for sharing information through governance channels (and other means!)

Peter thanked Will for a comprehensive discussion and for the opportunity to debate.

Final deliberations

Will Hagger returned to the stage to give an update on Diocesan Strategic Planning, and referenced again the DIP bid. He also gave an update on the work to develop Growing

Faith Networks and a decision that we are awaiting in November around a bid to support racial justice work in the diocese.

There was a brief update from the Diocesan Board of Education given by +Libby, where she shared that Carolyn Shoyer will soon leave her post as Director of Education with our agreement with the Diocese of Leicester for a joint Director post having come to an end. Liz Seymour will step up as acting director until the post can be filled again.

Finally, thanks were given to Rev Canon Matt Barnes who is stepping down from the role of Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC). Synod welcomed Michael Byer as DAC chair-elect, who is expected to take up the post from 1 November.

Synod will gather again for its 148th meeting on Saturday 14 March.