

**ANNUAL REPORTS
of
DIOCESAN BOARDS AND COMMITTEES
FOR 2024
(excluding the Diocesan Board of Finance)**

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Bishop's Council and Standing Committee of the Diocesan Synod: Annual Report 2024

The Council has a dual role and function, acting as the Standing Committee of the Diocesan Synod and giving advice to the Diocesan Bishop on any matter about which he or she consults the Council. The Council also exercises the role of the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee. During the year the Council met four times.

Diocesan Finances: The Council made the following allocations from 2023 designated funds arising from additional investment income available and used for stipends: £400k for Mission Initiative Grant, £50k for the payment of costs of EPCs for parsonage houses and £50k to Local Church Income Generation Support.

Safeguarding: During the year, the Council received regular reports and noted that for several months, the safeguarding team had achieved compliance for clergy mandatory training or 95-100%. On 11 December, the Diocese published its action plan in response to the Independent Review into Soul Survivor by Fiona Scolding KC, which outlined changes to be implemented within the Diocese and recommendations for the wider Church of England.

Governance: The Council considered amendments to governance arrangements during the year and noted the creation of a Nominations Committee by Diocesan Synod. Although there were no changes to its own constitution, Bishop's Council welcomed that the Nominations Committee would request expressions of interest and advise candidates for election to the Council.

Risk: The Council reviewed and noted current and emerging risks on a six-monthly basis.

In January, the Council was informed of the proposal that 2025 be designated a **Year of Spiritual Renewal and Wellbeing** and provided their thoughts for the planning group to take into consideration. They also agreed that the Bishop of Hertford should sign the **Hertfordshire Faith Covenant** on behalf of the Diocese. In July, the Council approved the proposal that the work of the **Closed Churches Uses Committee (CCUC)** should be undertaken in future by the DMPC Executive Committee.

The Council made a number of **appointments**: In January, the Council voted in favour of the four nominations proposed by the Bishop's Staff, to the Vacancy in See Committee. Elections took place in October to fill positions on Boards and Committees for the new triennium which commenced on 01 January 2025. In October, the Council approved the appointment of Ms Cordelia Foster-Mason as a replacement Trustee for St Etherelda's Trust. The Council endorsed the Bishop's proposal to appoint Theresa Britt as the DAC Chair from 1 September 2024: it was saddened to learn of her unexpected and sudden death in December.

The Bishop of St Albans consulted with Council on the appointment of three Honorary Assistant Bishops.

The Council received reports and updates from:

- (i) the **Racial Justice Action Group** and noted that the Racial Justice Action Plan continued to be implemented.
- (ii) the **Diocesan Environment Group** including progress on implementation of the Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Action Plan.
- (iii) the **Board of Education**, which noted the closure of Tonwell School and acknowledged the appointment of Mrs Anna Rodgers as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust.
- (iv) the **Agenda Group**, who had met on five occasions to consider future business of Diocesan Synod and Bishop's Council.
- (v) the **Development Plans Monitoring Group**.
- (vi) the **Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee Executive Committee** and considered draft proposals for pastoral reorganisation to promote appropriate models of ministry to support mission in Hemel Hempstead.
- (vii) the **Board for Mission and Ministry**; in October, the Council amended the constitution, which allowed the Board to co-opt up to three members for their specific remit or area of expertise.

The Council also received reports from the Bishop of Hertford on the work of the **Growing Younger and More Diverse Programme Board**. A Strategic Programme manager and Data Analyst had been recruited. A Director of Missional change for Luton had not been appointed and the Strategic Programme Manager would instead be taking on the role of scoping and consulting on this project. By October, three projects had been agreed in Watford, Hatfield and Luton.

Mission and Ministry Support Team: Annual Report 2024

MISSION AND MINISTRY: Revd Canon Tim Lomax (Director of Mission and Ministry)

Main achievements from 2024

Vocations: The Vocations Advisors team continued to grow; a series of online 'God Calling' events were held, enabling attendees to hear the vocational journeys of people from a range of ministries and to engage in conversations around their own calling; several have now gone on to meet with Vocations Advisors.

Ordination: 7 new Deacons were ordained in the Diocese (6 Stipendiary and 1 Self Supporting), plus 5 new Ordinands entered training at Theological College; the capacity of DDO Team was sustained, so that candidates were seen promptly, ordinands were supported during training, ordinands were matched with training parishes, annual conferences for candidates and ordinands were run, and the finances of ordinands in training were well-managed.

Lay Ministry: 69 people successfully completed Lay Leader of Worship training; 17 people completed the Foundations course either as Enablers or as the preliminary stage of Reader training; 12 people undertook Reader training.

IME2: the officer vacancy was successfully navigated with first an interim officer (Ruth Dennigan) and then the appointment of Em Coley; curacies in difficulty were dealt with swiftly and decisively; positive relationships were established with curates and Readers.

MMDR: Reviews continued to be undertaken successfully and in a timely manner through the transition between DDMMs; reviewers were consulted on how we would implement the Scolding report's recommendations regarding MMDRs.

CMD: The First Incumbency Leadership Pathway was successfully launched in November 2024 with twenty new incumbents signed up; Transforming Conversations was again successfully run for two cohorts.

Bishop's Clergy Residential Conference: The team contributed to the planning and delivery of the Bishop's Clergy Residential Conference in June, where around 250 stipendiary and self-supporting clergy gathered at Swanwick to focus on the theme of Grace.

Mixed Ecology of Church: The third annual Symposium on the Mixed Ecology of Church happened in April enabling a group of around thirty clergy from a range of contexts and traditions to look more deeply at how their own churches contribute to the mixed ecology in the diocese. Many attending followed up with coaching, advanced coaching training, Action Set Learning groups and specific support in leading change.

FLOURISHING CHURCHES TEAM: Revd Kate Lomax (Flourishing Churches Team Leader)

Achievements

Strategic Support: 198 Churches/ parishes received strategic support from the Flourishing Churches team (101 from Giving officers, 97 from Church Growth Officers).

Hope for Rural Churches: 92 people attended the **Hope for Rural Churches** conference in March.

Digital Rollout: 56 contactless devices were distributed to parishes through the Digital Rollout project, and these have exceeded the National Giving Team's income targets by 109%!

Leading your Church into Growth: 53 people took part in the residential weekend in September.

Giving Campaign: Parishes who engaged in the campaign, increased their regular giving by 12.5%, on average as a result.

THE ENVIRONMENT: Rachel Johnston (Environmental Officer)

Our Diocese is committed to achieving the Silver Eco Diocese award, an extension at diocesan level of the Eco Church programme which encourages churches to take practical action on caring for creation as part of their Christian witness.

Achievements

Eco Church programme: During the year a further 12 churches registered for this scheme. 35% of churches in this Diocese are now involved and 54 have achieved Bronze and 26 Silver awards.

Carbon Literacy Training: has been successfully delivered, both online and in-person, as an accredited course devised for the Church of England by the Carbon Literacy Trust and as a short course for all Diocesan staff.

GROWING YOUNGER AND MORE DIVERSE: Revd Daniel Drew (Assistant Director of Mission and Ministry)

The Growing Younger and More Diverse team remained committed to discipleship, leadership development, and expanding ministry impact across the diocese.

Achievements

Growth in Under-18 Engagement: The number of under-18s engaged in worshipping communities increased by 3.4%, rising from 4,258 in 2022 to 4,402 in 2023, demonstrating recovery and renewal post-Covid.

Expanded the Alban Way: Grew from 10 young adults and 4 leaders to 20 young adults and 7 leaders, exceeding diversity targets with five Global Majority Heritage members and neurodivergent participants. Developed a new pilgrimage to Lindisfarne, making the program more accessible.

Strengthened Schools Engagement: The Alban Way Schools Cohort expanded to six schools, including three new partnerships, creating more opportunities for discipleship.

Training and Leadership Development: Over 250+ volunteers trained through Youthscape Essentials, CYM (Institute for Children, Youth and Mission) Children's Leaders Training, and Launchpad youth ministry courses to date.

Innovative Support for Leaders: Launched Open Space Support Events, revamping brunches with a participant-led methodology, and initiated a retreat for leaders working with children, youth, and young adults.

Major Funding Success: Secured £500k in capacity funding from the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) to support expansion efforts.

Board of Patronage: Annual report 2024

The Board engaged with **Living God's Love** through participating in the appointment process and seeking to appoint high calibre clergy who are able and ready to engage fully with the diocesan vision. In making appointments and in continuing contact with the benefices in its gift, the Board supported the outcomes of spiritual and numerical growth.

New appointments: The Board was involved with making appointments as follows and welcoming the priests to their new roles in the Diocese of St Albans:

- Arlesey with Astwick - the Revd Jenna Dearden (priest in charge)
- Barkway, Barley, Reed & Buckland - the Revd Mark Bridgen
- High Cross (in plurality with Thundridge) - the Revd Tim Hall (priest in charge)
- Langelei Team (Apsley End, Bennetts End, Kings Langley, Leverstock Green) - the Revd James McDonald (previously one of the team vicars)
- The Stodden Churches - the Revd Simon Aley (priest in charge)

In addition, the suspension of the patron's right of presentation at Dunton with Wrestlingworth & Eyeworth ended and the Reverend Liz Lavelle (previously the priest-in-charge) was appointed as the incumbent. Within Team Ministries, The Revd Diana Stretton was appointed as a team vicar in the Langelei Team and the Revd David MacGeoch was appointed as a team vicar in the Ouzel Valley Team.

The appointments made in 2024 and in earlier years variously allowed the parishes and benefices to engage in a fresh way with their local priorities for worship, mission and outreach, in some cases after a long or very short incumbency, a long vacancy or a period of change. A feature of appointments in 2023 was the shortage of applicants for posts, reflected in longer than usual vacancies and/or the need to consider interim ministry. It was good to note in 2024 that the situation had improved.

Current vacancies: As at 31 December 2024, there were vacancies in the Board's livings at:

- Aldenham, Radlett & Shenley (team rector) - deferred appointment pending changes within the team clergy
- Ouzel Valley (team rector) - deferred appointment pending changes within the team clergy
- South Mymms & Ridge - but a curate-in-charge serves the ministry and pastoral needs of the benefice.

Pastoral Reorganisation: The Board was consulted on proposals for possible changes to ministerial provision or suspension of presentation in a number of cases.

Membership of the Board: This was the end of the current 6-year term of the Board, whose members were thanked for their contribution. A review of diocesan governance may mean some changes to the role and operation of the Board for the new term of office beginning in 2025.

Appendix

The Diocesan Board of Patronage is a patron of the following benefices:

Aldenham, Radlett & Shenley Team; Arlesey with Astwick; Barkway, Barley, Reed & Buckland ; Chellington Team; Dunton with Wrestlingworth & Eyeworth; Eaton Bray with Edlesborough; Flitwick; Harpenden, St. John; High Cross; Holwell, Ickleford & Pirton ; Houghton Regis; Hunsdon with Widford & Wareside; Langelei Team ; Ouzel Valley Team; Oxhey, St. Matthew; Rye Park, St. Cuthbert; St. Albans, St. Luke; Sarratt & Chipperfield; South Mymms & Ridge; The Stodden Churches; Toddington & Chalgrave; Wilden with Colmworth & Ravensden

St Albans Diocesan Advisory Committee: Annual Report 2024

The DAC is a statutory body whose functions are set out in ecclesiastical legislation. Its role is to advise the Chancellor and parishes on proposals for works to church buildings and churchyards and church furnishings, and to advise more generally on the care and development of churches.

As usual a great part of the DAC's work was connected with making our church buildings more versatile both as places of worship and as places for community use. Much of this work has followed a well-established pattern, providing improved access, creating worship and gathering spaces and introducing or upgrading essential facilities in the form of serveries and toilets. DAC has provided ongoing advice on major schemes of re-ordering and extension at Tewin and Wheathampstead and has encouraged at least fifteen other parishes to proceed with sensitive and well-planned schemes. An increasing amount of time has been devoted to consideration of heating options, and here parishes have benefitted greatly from the work of our Net Zero Carbon Officer, Tom Abraham. Parishes have also benefitted from advice on the funding of projects large and small provided by our Historic Church Buildings Support Officer, Ann Wise, both in visits to individual parishes and in workshops and webinars organised by her. Similar resources have been provided by our Church Buildings Maintenance officer, Liz West relating to the routine maintenance of church buildings, which remains a challenging responsibility for parishes and another major element in the work of the DAC. We are glad to acknowledge the funding which makes these posts possible, from Historic England (HCBSO post) and the Church of England (Buildings for Mission – CBMO post; NZC regional capacity funding – NZC officer post). Two important trends can be traced in the current work of the DAC. Firstly, a continuing recovery of concern in parishes for the care and potential of their church buildings following the lull caused by the pandemic; and secondly, an increasing ability of the DAC to respond to parishes and to offer specialised advice and more site visits – including multi-disciplinary visits to a group of churches in a benefice – through the work of an enlarged DAC staff team with members serving dedicated roles relating to funding, maintenance and church heating.

Access for All

Several parishes are looking at improving the access to and within their church buildings, whilst those planning to provide facilities such as tea points and toilets allowing wider community use of the church seek to make the facilities accessible and welcoming to all. The completed projects at Willian (internal redevelopment), St Albans St Peter (new nave floor and seating) and Renhold (replacement floor) combine repair needs with the desire to make the church building fit for worship, hospitality and outreach.

Project Development and Management

The DAC has provided advice to parishes as they develop major schemes. Many take the opportunity to discuss early plans at a site visit followed by engagement with external consultees. In a few cases parishes have committed substantial funds in engaging professionals and may have to take several steps back to provide Statements of Needs and Significance – sometimes including an assessment of existing historic fittings – and a thorough Options Appraisal, which the DAC advocates to ensure a successful scheme. In one case where a parish wished to undertake a scheme without a lead professional or principal contractor, the DC sought assurance that the parish had the resources to provide the necessary project oversight and management.

Net Zero Carbon, heating and sustainability (TA)

Our work on progressing towards net zero carbon has continued this year with 56 site visits being completed, along with undertaking a variety of research to support and inform parishes as they choose their future heating system. This has included research into the effectiveness of existing heating systems, particularly different types and configurations of under pew heaters. Experimental installations are proposed in three churches using the known technology of thin electric underfloor heating in a church context. We have also provided carbon literacy training to 39 people including clergy, volunteers, and diocesan office staff. New net zero carbon funding streams have become available from the national church to compliment the diocesan grant funds, and these are now helping parishes to identify and implement low carbon opportunities.

Quinquennial Inspections and Repairs

The DAC underlines the importance of QIs to enable each PCC to understand the condition of the church building and to plan for maintenance and repairs. A well-maintained church is welcoming, more energy-efficient and allows the PCC to focus on its priorities for worship and mission. The archdeacons noted some significant delays in the production of QI reports and a small number of cases where the QI was not done when due. The archdeacons and members of the DAC staff team review all QI reports when received, allowing them to offer individual support where a parish faces particular challenges. In cases such as the grade II listed 20th century church of St Andrew & St George, Stevenage, an up-to-date condition survey is the starting point for deciding how to repair the leaking roofs and getting external grants alongside local fundraising to make the work possible. Sometimes the unexpected still happens. When the north aisle roof at Letchworth St Paul was taken off for replacement, a concrete structure was discovered that meant a quick re-assessment and some additional expense to get the job done for the future. Another thankfully very rare case at Stevington, where the replacement of a masonry feature thought to be of Anglo-Saxon origin was authorised and carried out as a straightforward repair, was eventually resolved through the Chancellor granting a confirmatory faculty for the work, subject to conditions including safeguards against similar cases arising in the future.

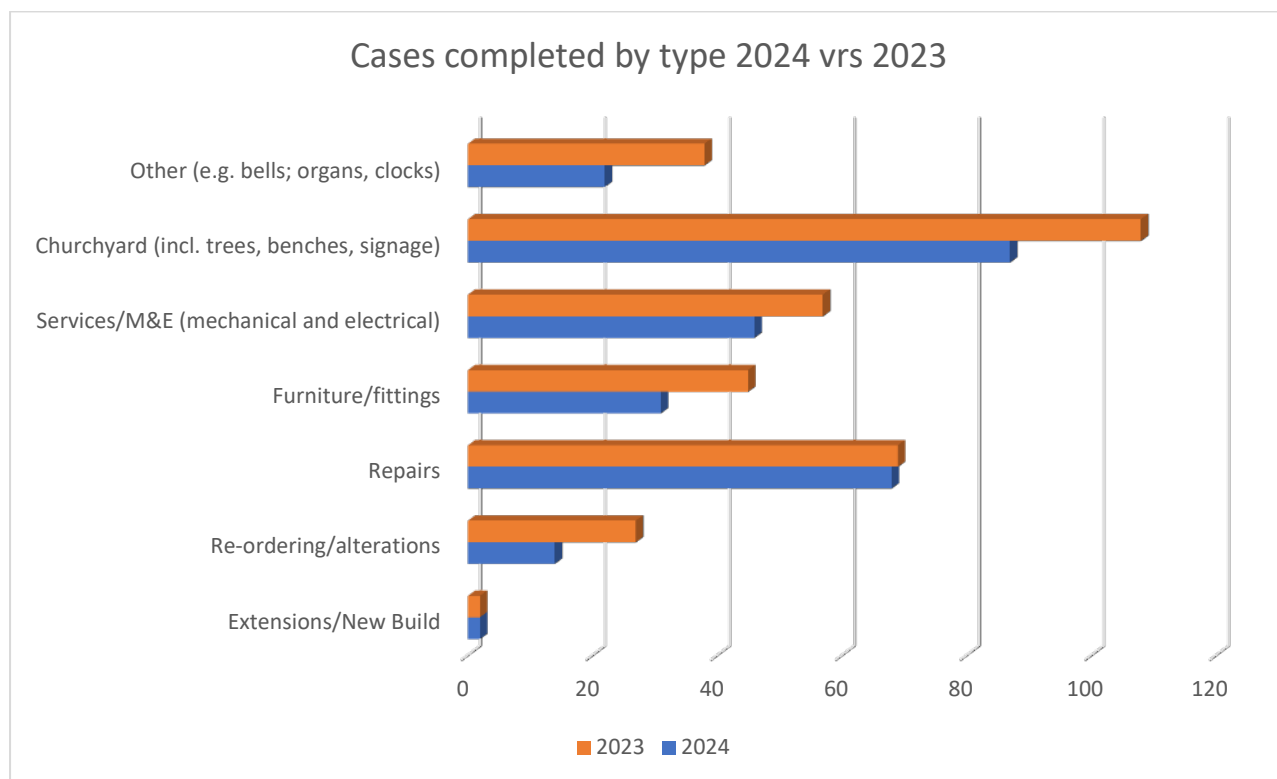
DAC role and constitution; membership

In July the Committee celebrated with gratitude the care and wisdom with which Dr Christopher Green had chaired the Committee and steered its work for 25 years until handing over to Theresa Britt at the end of August. Christopher remains a DAC consultant (furniture; memorials; churchyards). Very sadly, there were two deaths during the year of active DAC members and consultants. In the summer, Evelyn Baker, DAC consultant (archaeology) died after a short illness. Just before Christmas we were shocked to learn of the death of Theresa Britt, who had taken over as DAC Chair only months before.

The Committee noted the provisions of the Miscellaneous Provisions Measure in force from 17 May 2024 (AC/24/GEN11). We have covered the first membership requirement – environmental knowledge – through a specialist architect member and building services consultants. Following Martyn Gates' move away from the Diocese, the role relating to disability issues has been filled by the Reverend Em Coley. The year also saw a change in the DAC organ adviser role, with Andrew Lucas moving to consultant status on his retirement from St Albans Cathedral and Will Fox being appointed as the DAC Organ Adviser. Consultant Paul Jones (electrical and lighting) retired during the year. Historic England Inspector Jana Schuster was welcomed as a DAC member.

Appendix: 2024 Statistics (2023 in brackets)

- **6** (6) DAC meetings
- **190** (115) visits by DAC members and staff.
- **270** (346) cases completed



Diocese of St Albans Board of Education: Annual Report 2024

The DBE works with its 136 schools, the DfE, the Church of England Education Office, local authorities and other stakeholders, to ensure that all its schools are thriving Christian educational communities. The Board seeks to provide stability, pastoral support, expertise and guidance through the work of its Schools Team and its Service Level Agreement (SLA). In September 2024, 134 out of 136 schools joined the SLA. This is the highest uptake the Board has ever seen. 2024 saw the facilitation of 57 training and development events. 121 schools engaged with at least one of these over the course of the year.

Journeys of Hope and Stewardship

2024 saw the arrival of 11 new headteachers in diocesan schools. The DBE, through its SLA, is providing a year's coaching for each of them. It is hoped that by walking alongside them through coaching, headteacher wellbeing will be supported in this vital first year.

The ongoing financial challenges that schools face are well documented. There are a number of schools which are seeing a reduction in pupil numbers. Capacity and demand for school places are not always in alignment. The Board is working with LA partners to ensure that any changes take account of denominational proportionality.

In our Diocese, the access to support for children who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is mixed across local authorities. Our schools continue to be places which treasure the unique gifts of each child and place inclusion at the forefront of their work. This commitment to inclusion can place extra financial pressures on schools. The Board has as a priority the pastoral support of school leaders. It remains grateful for all of those who undertake governance roles voluntarily in support of its schools.

September 2024 saw 8 diocesan schools moving from 3- to 2-tier provision within Central Bedfordshire's educational re-organisation programme. Caldecote and Northill Academies and Sutton and St Andrew's Biggleswade Lower Schools all became primary schools. Edward Peake Middle is now Secondary school. Within their federation, Dunton and Wrestlingworth Lower Schools became respectively a Junior and an Infant school. The re-organisation that is planned and has already commenced in some areas in Central Bedfordshire, will lead to the creation of 3 new CofE secondary schools in our Diocese and will ultimately provide CofE schooling from the age of 4 to 16 in 3 geographical areas.

The Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust welcomed Great Barford Primary Academy in September, bringing the total number of schools in DSAMAT to 14. The new CEO Anna Rogers has a strong vision for DSAMAT moving forward and has strengthened the working relationship between DSAMAT and the Schools Team.

Our schools *Live God's Love* in rich and varied ways

In 2024, Nash Mills Primary introduced Forest School worship. Each Key Stage has regular opportunities to use their outdoor spaces and take time to consider the world around them. Using the diocesan '*Heart for the Earth*' resource, the children are able to reflect on the environment and consider the awe and wonder it inspires.

In the spring term, Northaw Primary were delighted to be visited by the Right Rev Dr Jane Mainwaring, Bishop of Hertford, who came to dedicate their new extension. After a tour of the school, Bishop Jane joined pupils for collective worship led by the school's Reflection Champions. The children also had the opportunity to learn about some of the symbols, such as a mitre and crozier, that identify her episcopal role in the Church of England.

Sutton VA Lower School has now become a primary school. As pupils began preparing for transition to the next year group, as part of their Curriculum in Church work, Revd Alex shared the story of St Thomas who moved to Kerala, India, to build a Church. The children were encouraged to reflect on the story and think about whether change was always only positive or only negative. They talked about the mixture of emotions experienced when facing and going through change. Revd Alex explained that during change, it is helpful to remember our identity and our purpose. Pupils were reminded that they have a Sutton Church of England School identity and their purpose is to 'shine as lights in the world' by living out their school's vision. The National Society has invited St Paul's Langleybury to offer a case study for the national SIAMS library which showcases examples of strong practice that may be of interest to schools nationally. St Paul's has been highlighted for its work on developing its prayer life and an understanding of spirituality. Once the library piece is available, the DBE will work with the headteacher and staff to enable curated visits to the school from fellow diocesan school leaders.

The Board, its schools and care for the environment

The *Heart for the Earth* resources, created by members of the Schools Team, were 'highly commended' in the Training and Education category at the prestigious 2024 Church Times Green Church Awards. *Heart for the Earth* provides a range of materials that encourage children and young people to reflect theologically and practically on the issues of climate change. The materials have been widely adopted amongst diocesan schools. Other dioceses have now begun to share the resources amongst their schools. More on *Heart for the Earth* can be found [here](#).

Year 6 pupils from St Nicholas Primary in Stevenage joined forces with CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children and Send my Friends to School to gain a deeper understanding of Climate Education. The children worked across curriculum strands to explore how the Earth's climate is changing and reflect on its future. The children then shared their concerns, hopes and aspirations for the planet through the medium of art. The school exhibited all the artwork and two of the pieces were chosen to be displayed in the Houses of Parliament, following a visit by the MP for Stevenage at the time.

The Board of Education *Lives God's Love in Education, Enabling Life in all its Fullness*

In July, the Board adopted a new 3-year Strategic Development Plan, with 3 key themes to underpin its work: 'Increasing regional capacity to support growth', 'Planning for change' and 'Championing Courageous Advocacy, Racial Equity, Disability Justice, and Inclusion'.

School Leaders who attended the DBE's Annual Headteacher Conference themed 'Journeys of Hope and Stewardship' in September expressed how much they appreciated the opportunity to listen to inspirational speakers, catch up with colleagues, 'pause and take a breath' and share an act of worship. The Board was pleased to receive feedback such as '*I love the HT conference and think it is so important to be together as diocesan heads*'. The Headteacher Conference in 2025 will explore Spiritually Flourishing School Communities, Culture, Curriculum and Collective Worship.

The Board's biennial Harvest services took place in October. They were joyous occasions where schools within the Diocese came together to worship in the Cathedral. The three services, led by Bishop Alan, were attended by 1449 children and staff from 44 schools, many of which were actively involved through contributing to the readings and prayers or singing with their choirs. Clifton All Saints Academy, Cockernhoe Endowed C of E Primary School and St Helen's C of E Primary School, Wheathampstead, joined Renhold VC Primary School and Oughton Primary School, Hitchin (non-church school) in welcoming a new Year 6 Alban Way cohort.

People

In October, former Director of Education David Morton was appointed as Lay Ministries Officer in the Diocese of Peterborough. Following a comprehensive recruitment process, Mr Duncan Gauld, CEO of the Chess Valley Primary Learning Trust, has been appointed as the new Diocesan Director of Education. The news was greeted with great pleasure and anticipation by the Board, its staff and schools. The Board is grateful to Charlotte for stepping in as Interim Director of Education and for all her work in ensuring a smooth transition.

In December, a number of members of the previous Board of Education were bid farewell, with gratitude for their work and support for the schools in our care. The new Board was constituted and looks forward to the coming triennium.

Diocesan Environment Group: Annual Report 2024

Diocesan Environment Officer: Rachel Johnston

During 2024, the Diocesan Environment Group has continued to provide oversight, support, and encouragement for the wide range of work being undertaken across the Diocese in the areas of the environment and sustainability. Our Diocese is committed to achieving the Silver Eco Diocese award, an extension at diocesan level of the Eco Church programme which encourages churches to take practical action on caring for creation as part of their Christian witness. Eco Diocese provides a framework through which all the constituent parts of the diocese can work together, fully engaged with a shared vision of how working together to build a more sustainable future is an expression of 'Living God's Love'.

The Diocesan Environment Policy sets out our shared vision in terms of theological foundations, aims and objectives, with their practical expression set out in the Diocesan Net Zero Carbon strategy and action plan DS/22/12. During 2024 the DEG reviewed and updated the policy to reflect increased knowledge and understanding of the multiple environmental crises, possible responses, and solutions.

Work has continued in all ten required areas of the Eco Diocese silver award programme:
Eco Church

- During the year a further 12 churches registered for this free scheme. 35% of churches in this Diocese are now involved and 54 have achieved Bronze and 26 Silver awards.
- New criteria for the award scheme have been introduced from September 2024 in the areas of energy and biodiversity. The DAC Biodiversity strategy introduced to parishes this year has provided support and guidance for parishes seeking to improve the management of their land for the benefit of biodiversity and carbon reduction.

Carbon reduction

- The Net Zero Carbon Officer has been working to achieve a better understanding of church heating needs and energy efficiency across the range of church and parsonage buildings by improving data collection and establishing trials of heating options ranging from heated cushions to major projects such as parsonage refits
- Over 70% of parishes submitted energy usage statistics into the Energy Footprint Tool continuing the increasing trend year on year
- Carbon Literacy Training has been successfully delivered, both online and in-person, as an accredited course devised for the Church of England by the Carbon Literacy Trust and as a short course for all Diocesan staff
- The Net Zero Carbon Implementation Group began its work to review work in progress across the Diocese, identify practical problems and resource needs and share information on best practice
- The nationally-funded Net Zero Carbon Quick Wins grants to parishes scheme is underway
- Diocesan Office staff have started a NZC Group with work focusing on travel, food, lighting and communications.

Buildings and energy

- Parsonage retrofits were carried out during the year as the start of a systematic programme of works to increase energy efficiency. Feedback from the October 2024 Synod has been used to inform the Property committee's work to address the high energy costs of a significant proportion of parsonage buildings and concerns regarding fuel poverty.

Schools and education

- The *Heart for the Earth* school curriculum achieved national recognition at the Church Times Green Church awards, receiving a Highly Commended award in the Training and Education category. An introductory video to this curriculum resource is available on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/PqOdOr9W0kQ>
- The introduction of the school decarbonisation tool from the national church Energy Toolkit has improved our understanding of the carbon emissions from this section of the Diocese

Training and development

- Climate resilience and emergency response workshops for churches have been organised by the DAC focussing on current and future threats presented by the changing climate, planning for an uncertain future and practical solutions

Collaboration

- The Cathedral Community showcase event was repeated this year by popular demand, creating a valuable opportunity for a range of community organisations including those with environmental or sustainability aims to network and promote their work
- Working in partnership with other Dioceses and organisations on environmental projects has continued this year, with the DEO and NZC Officer attending courses and meetings for training and sharing of best practice

Celebrating Creation

- Communication of environmental issues, information about resources, funding and training opportunities and celebration of good news stories has been a priority over the past year, making use of Diocesan communications channels to celebrate and encourage environmental work including the achievement of Eco Church awards, and uplifting stories such as the recent churchyard survey at St Michael and All Angels, Waterford, which recorded many new species including rare lichens and the first ever recording of the Nigma Puella spider in Hertfordshire.

Property Committee: Annual Report 2024

The Property Committee is the statutory body responsible for overseeing the management of clergy housing, covering around 280 homes across the Diocese. The Property Committee is also responsible for the Diocesan Office building in St Albans.

The Committee is charged with ensuring that comfortable, secure and well-maintained accommodation is provided for our clergy in the right locations. This includes overseeing acquisitions, sales, developments and lettings during vacancy, and ensuring that repairs and improvements are delivered in a fiscally prudent manner to an appropriate standard. The Committee is responsible for ensuring the Board maintains its statutory obligations relating to quinquennial inspections of housing, and for pursuing the net zero carbon target of 2030 for the housing portfolio.

Housing portfolio turnover

In late 2024 the Committee commenced a multi-year strategic review of housing stock, to take a fresh look at the suitability of our houses for their purpose; their liveability and cost to run for both occupiers and the diocese; and physical condition in light of net zero retrofit standards. The average age of clergy houses is 58 years which is reflected in the high cost of certain works. The Committee will be considering increased turnover to replace older less energy efficient houses with newer modern ones.

The new Rectory in East Barnet was completed and is now occupied. A house was purchased in Luton for the new Director of Luton and has been commercially let pending appointment to that role. Sales of unsuitable and surplus houses were completed, including former parsonages in Bedford, Harlington, Letchworth and Wilstead, and a former curate house in Bedford. Garden land was sold at Stevenage St Mary Shephall. We entered contract to purchase an interim house at Watford St Peter pending redevelopment of the vicarage site and agreed sales of garden land at Cranfield, Watford St Andrew and Bovingdon.

Development projects

Headwinds in the development sector including increased finance and construction costs, planning issues, and team capacity have restricted progress on development projects. Projects at Rickmansworth, Watford Christ Church, Watford St Peter and Leavesden are ongoing. Development plans at Kempston All Saints have been paused pending nearby planning outcomes.

Improvements, repairs and quinquennial inspections

The budget for improvements continues to be challenging for the Committee and has not been at a level to sustainably maintain housing condition across the portfolio for many years. The 2024 budget for improvements was significantly overspent (£636k vs £250k) due to delayed improvement projects falling within this year and reactive improvements following vacancies. Disappointingly, a couple of properties were left in damaged condition by clergy, requiring significant expenditure on refurbishment to restore them to liveability.

Significant improvements were completed on parsonages at Blunham, Hockerill, Ware Christ Church, Little Heath, Borehamwood All Saints and Farley Hill; and on corporate properties at Rickmansworth and St Albans. 45 quinquennial inspections were completed and repairs scheduled. Funding was also committed to surveying trees across the portfolio to establish health and safety liability.

The Committee continues to offer occupants annual grants of up to £250 to cover the cost of materials for carrying out decorations. 43 applications were received in 2024.

Net zero carbon by 2030

£50k funding was granted by Bishop's Council to fund net zero carbon retrofit assessments across the portfolio, to enable us to quantify the expected cost for achieving the target. We expect the assessments to commence in 2025.

The Church Commissioners granted £54k funding for a full house decarbonisation demonstrator project. Works are underway at Elstow which indicate that cavity wall insulation installed in many of our houses in the 1970s may have degraded. Air source heat pumps were also installed at Sandon and Dunstable, and in the new build at East Barnet.

Rental income

Rental income during vacancy was up significantly in 2024 (£737k) from the previous year (£569k). The Parsonage Estate Manager has focused on maximising returns from vacant housing stock. Changes to tenancy legislation expected in 2025 will abolish fixed term tenancies; this will not affect our ability to move tenants on as housing a minister of religion will remain valid grounds for notice.

Productivity

The Property Team (formerly Estates Department) was significantly restructured in 2024, with the recruitment of a strategy and development focused Property Director, supported by a full-time Parsonage Estate Manager and part-time Property Team Administrator (and supported by the Estates and Trusts Officer who focuses primarily on glebe and trusts). Workload across the team is extremely high.

The team are establishing robust administrative processes to improve data collection, financial reporting and monitoring of planned and reactive repairs. The defects reporting system (Fixflo) is well-liked by clergy, ensuring repairs are reported and completed in a timely manner. A new property management database was procured and is being implemented that will enable more sophisticated data collection, reporting and retrieval, and will integrate with the diocesan accounting software and people database. Substantial efficiency gains across the team, diocesan staff and core contractors are expected.

Committee Chair

David Lambert kindly stepped up to chair the Property Committee in 2024 during John Butler's absence, and the Committee and Property Team are thankful for his expertise in doing so.

Verulam House Fund Trust: Annual Report 2024

The objects of the trust are:

- (i) To support diocesan, deanery or parish projects promoting spirituality, education, service or witness and/or
- (ii) To grant bursaries to individuals for the development of spirituality, education, service or witness.

The Trustees are committed to supporting the three strands of "Living God's Love" and welcomed diversity and new applicants. The objects of the Trust align well with the objectives set out in Living God's Love. Specifically:

- (a) Going deeper into God – the Trustees have consistently supported courses of study for both lay and ordained applicants which both help the individuals concerned to gain greater insight into theological issues and also benefit the wider Church when the benefits are disseminated and result in teaching and shared insights with congregations.
- (b) Making new disciples – the Trustees supported several projects working with children and young people in parishes, with support and ministry in schools, faith resources for asylum seekers and support with outreach projects.
- (c) Transforming communities – the Trustees were pleased to support the innovative Citizens of Bedford project working for the common good in local communities.

The Board of Trustees comprises the Chair who is nominated by the Bishop of St Albans, a representative of the Diocesan Board of Finance, and a lay and ordained representative for each of the three Archdeaconries.

The Revd Teresa Wynne retired from full time ministry in the Diocese in the autumn and therefore resigned as a trustee. We are currently in the process of recruiting new members of clergy to restore our full complement and I record my sincere thanks to the Trustees for the time and care they give to consider the applications received and to conduct the business of the Verulam House Fund Trust so wisely and well. During 2024 we have been excellently served by our clerk, Barbara Young, and we give thanks for her work with us, as we do for Glyn Barker, Director of Finance, in his role in overseeing the finances of the Trust. In the autumn this role assisting with the Trust's finances passed to Nichola Baker, the Deputy Director of Finance.

The Trustees met online, in person and in a hybrid format four times during 2024 in order to consider requests for financial assistance for individuals in the form of bursaries and grant applications from parishes and chaplaincies and the Trust routinely seeks assurances from applicants in their activities to minimize Environmental impact as part of the Diocesan commitment towards becoming Carbon Net Zero.

The trustees pay close attention to the performance of their investment portfolio in order to grow the capital sum, and therefore maintain its value in real terms, whilst at the same time yielding interest which can be used for disbursement as bursaries and grants. The overall financial position remains healthy, and the fund value of the Trust has risen by £68k to £2.46 million. The strong performance in investments and corresponding higher dividends in the last quarter, driven by higher interest rates, helped to produce a £4.7k increase in income which, along with a sizeable, accrued cash balance during the last few years, allowed the trustees the freedom to make awards of a greater total value than just last year's investment income. Dividends from investments for the year totalled £49.6k available for dispersal.

The trust has only small administrative costs and the very large majority of investment income is therefore available for disbursement. Requests for the year which are detailed below totalled £45k. In 2023 this was £56.3k and was made possible by using some of the accrued cash balance as a conscious decision by Trustees to generously support strong applications that meet our objects, to be a catalyst for growth in mission and ministry in the Diocese.

Bursaries

24 bursaries were awarded in 2024 compared to 27 in 2023. The total expenditure on bursaries was **£18,633** as compared to expenditure in 2023 of £23,866. The majority of bursaries continue to be granted in support of ministerial education, conferences and retreats, lay training and assistance with extended study leave for clergy.

Grants

The Trustees also made grants totalling **£26,457** to 13 projects within the Diocese, as compared to £32,438 also to 13 projects in 2023. The range of activities supported is shown below.

Project Name	Project nature	£Amount
St Andrew, Luton	Creation of a church and community peace and wellbeing hub	1,912.52
The 2:67 Project	Support towards costs for Illuminate event at St Albans Cathedral	500.00
Step (St Albans and Harpenden Christian Education Project)	Training for youth workers and volunteers	2,000.00
Christ Church, St Albans	Support with their Monday night Supper Club outreach programme	1,015.00
Christ Church, Radlett	Assistance with the cost of a parish pilgrimage to Canterbury	900.00
Oak Church, Stevenage	Behavioural Mentor position working in Barnwell School	1,500.00
The Alban Way	Towards costs for members to undertake a pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago	2,829.00
St Mary the Virgin, Goldington	Grant towards the cost of a part-time Children and Families minister	3,300.00
Reach Project	Bridge Builders online primary school focussed faith sharing project	3,000.00
St Mary, Luton	Coffee shop project for faith outreach and pastoral care drop-in ministry	2,500.00
Bedford Deanery	Deanery befriending service and ministry for elderly residents in local care homes	5,000.00
St Albans Cathedral	Towards the costs for a Children and Families Worker post	3,500.00
The Diocese of St Albans Cricket Team	The purchase of Diocesan branded cricket caps for squad members	500.00