

**ANNUAL REPORTS
of
DIOCESAN BOARDS AND COMMITTEES
FOR 2025
(excluding the Diocesan Board of Finance)**

CONTENTS

1. The Bishop's Council
2. The Board for Mission and Ministry
3. The Board of Patronage
4. The Diocesan Advisory Committee
5. The Diocesan Board of Education
6. The Environment Group
7. The Property Committee
8. The Verulam House Fund Trust

Bishop's Council and Standing Committee of the Diocesan Synod: Annual Report 2025

The Council fulfilled a dual role and function, acting as the Standing Committee of the Diocesan Synod and advising the Diocesan Bishop on any matter about which he consulted the Council. The Council also exercised the role of the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee. During the year, the Council met on six occasions.

Membership: The new triennium commenced in January. The Bishop of St Albans welcomed both new and returning members, who received a presentation from David White outlining Diocesan governance and the roles and responsibilities associated with Council decision-making. Emma Critchley also presented on the work of the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee. The Council appointed members to the Agenda Committee, DMPCEC and Board for Mission and Ministry. Following the relocation of Kavita Dowsett in July, a casual vacancy election was held, and Colin Bird joined the Council as a lay member in September.

Vacancy in See: Following the announcement in January of the Bishop of St Albans' retirement on 31 May, the Vacancy in See process commenced. The Council elected the Very Reverend Jo Kelly-Moore as Chair and appointed David White as Secretary. The Diocesan Statement of Need was completed and six diocesan representatives to the Crown Nominations Commission were elected by the Vacancy in See Committee. National Church led consultations, took place in May.

Diocesan Finances: The Council approved several allocations from 2024 designated funds, arising from additional investment income available and used for stipends. These included up to £39.2k as interim funding for the Alban Way pending potential Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) funding, £60k for Minor Repair and Improvement Grants for church buildings and £250k for Mission Initiative Grants. The remaining £150k would be retained for allocation at a later date. Council members recommended to the Diocesan Board of Finance that the National Stipends Benchmark be adopted from April 2026, resulting in a 6.8% increase in stipends.

Safeguarding: The Council received regular operational updates throughout the year. The Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Panel and the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer attended a meeting to provide further insight and assurance.

Governance: The Council expressed its thanks to the Nominations Committee for its work in supporting committees to become younger and more diverse, whilst recognising that further progress was needed. It was agreed that the Nominations Committee would consider advising the Acting Diocesan Bishop and the Houses of Clergy and Laity on nominations and co-options to Diocesan Synod.

Risk Management: The Council reviewed and noted the 20 highest rated risks on the diocesan risk register with the associated mitigation actions.

Joint Working and Partnerships: A joint meeting of the Bishop's Council and the Diocesan Board of Finance was held in March and noted the respective but overlapping roles of the two bodies. At a subsequent meeting the Council expressed its support for the reformation of the Governance Restructuring Working Party. The working party was tasked with preparing a feasibility study on the potential integration of the two bodies.

In October, the Council endorsed the proposal to explore and develop the opportunity to develop a woodland burial as a ministry opportunity.

Reports and Updates: The Council received and considered reports and updates from the following bodies:

- (i) the **Racial Justice Action Group** and noted continued implementation of the Racial Justice Action Plan.
- (ii) the **Diocesan Environment Group**, including progress made on the implementation of the Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Action Plan.
- (iii) the **Board of Education** and welcomed Duncan Gauld as the new Director of Education in June.
- (iv) the **Agenda Group**, which met on five occasions to consider future business of Diocesan Synod. In January, the Council approved the proposed changes to the Group's constitution.
- (v) the **Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee Executive Committee** and approved the proposed changes to the Committee's constitution in January. The Council considered responses to the first-stage consultation on proposals to dissolve the Hertford Team and to divide the benefice into four new benefices. The Council agreed to process to the next stage and the Hertford Team Ministry scheme came into effect in October. The Pastoral Scheme relating to Hemel Hempstead completed all formal stages. Acting as the DMPC, the Council endorsed the draft Bishop's Mission Order for Soul Survivor, Watford.
- (vi) the **Board for Mission and Ministry**, which reported that the MMDR process was being refreshed and on the development of new discipleship resources for those at an early stage of their faith journey.
- (vii) **Growing Younger and More Diverse Programme Board**, with updates from the Bishop of Hertford on the SMMIB funding application. This included a revised bid timeline and progress on key projects in Watford, Luton and Hatfield. The Council supported the submission of a bid for £3.5m, together with an additional £1m in principle funding bid (for payment in the 2029-31 triennium), by 30 October for consideration by SMMIB on 11 December.

Mission and Ministry Support Team: Annual Report 2025

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

Main achievements from 2025

Board of Mission and Ministry: Nine new members were elected to serve for the next triennium. They bring a breath of experience and expertise in ordained and lay ministry, youth work, counselling, coaching and education which is further enriching governance discussion.

Conferences: Sixty Rural Dean and Lay Chairs met with senior staff in February, concentrating on 'Participating in Christ's Mission', particularly in the contexts of their own deaneries. Thirty clergy from a range of contexts and church traditions gathered for the fourth Symposium on the Mixed Ecology of Church. Many attending value the opportunity for theological reflection and sharing experiences of trying new things.

Team development: Tim Lomax took time for Extended Study Leave, building on his doctoral research into cultivating a vibrant mixed ecology of church by writing the draft of a new book. Nick Smith joined the Flourishing Churches Team as Church Growth Officer for Bedfordshire.

MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT TEAM: Revd Mark Rodel (Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry)

Main achievements from 2025

New Ministry Strategy: *Listening Together* was launched across deanery synods and other settings. This prayerful process enables clergy, lay leaders and congregations to reflect on how God is calling the Diocese to develop ministry in the coming years. Progress was made on widening participation in ministry, with plans drawn up for research into barriers faced by under-represented groups seeking lay or ordained ministry. Work advanced on scoping a possible new Diocesan Discipleship resource, envisaged as an accessible podcast-based tool to complement existing courses.

Vocations: Increased numbers explored calling to lay and ordained ministry. The team hosted events such as 'God Calling,' 'Life in the Vicarage,' and the annual Candidates Conference, refreshed online resources, and re-established a presence at a school careers fair. The Ministry Experience Scheme also relaunched, with three participants beginning year-long placements.

Ordination: 25-27 ordinands in training through the year and 14 new deacons ordained - double the previous year's number. Candidates were supported throughout discernment, training and financial planning, and curacy placements for 2025 were successfully secured despite housing pressures. Matching for the 2026 cohort progressed well.

Lay ministry: New candidates entered training for Reader Ministry, the new Enabling Ministry Course launched with 27 participants, and the Lay Leaders of Worship programme grew steadily. Flexible pathways helped more people explore and develop their gifts.

IME2: Work began on reshaping the programme to strengthen formation and improve support for Training Incumbents. We continued to prioritise wellbeing, offering wellbeing-related training within IME2 alongside the Year of Spiritual Renewal and Wellbeing.

Team development: We continued to strengthen the integration of our work across the team, developing a more seamless experience for those we serve. As part of this, we articulated our shared purpose: '*We enable people to respond to God's call, be nurtured in their discipleship, and equipped in their ministry*,' and began a programme of listening to those we accompany, starting with ordinands and Readers in training. Despite changes to the staffing structure, the team continued to provide consistent, prayerful and proactive support for all in the Diocese exploring and exercising their ministry.

FLOURISHING CHURCHES TEAM: The Revd Kate Lomax (Flourishing Churches Lead)

Main achievements from 2025

Mission Action Planning: 94 % of parishes have now engaged in MAP, with four churches progressed from never having created a MAP to having an up-to-date MAP for the first time.

Support: A series of webinars were held in key aspects of giving and planning for mission. An online prayer event began for those involved in ministry in the rural church. We held a follow-up session for churches who had attended LyCiG. We provided training and resources to first incumbents and other leaders on how to lead missional change

Hope for Rural Churches: We held our first worship gathering as part of the project.

Giving Campaign: Parishes who engaged in the campaign increased their regular giving by an average of 16%. The most successful saw a 30% increase in regular giving! Three Giving Case Study videos showing best practice in parishes have been watched 275 times. In-depth strategic Giving Advisor support to 34 new parishes, in addition to ongoing support for many other parishes carried over from previous years. 40 contactless small grants of £250 were made to parishes in 2025 including full support for each parish from Digital Giving Assistant with purchasing a suitable device, setting up accounts and getting the device up and running in the church. A 'Thank You' short film resource for parishes to use was created.

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

Main achievements from 2025

Formation through prayer: The Alban Way continued to form young adults and children through prayer, pilgrimage, and shared discipleship. This year's cohort included 25% participants of Global Majority Heritage and a significant number of neurodivergent young adults. A new UK pilgrimage to Lindisfarne has widened access, alongside the Camino.

Training and confidence: Youthscape Essentials and Launchpad supported volunteers, clergy, and emerging leaders with accessible, practical training. Participants reported increased confidence and a shift towards more relational, dialogical approaches to ministry with children and young people.

Rural mission and collaboration: Small mission grants, combined with training and support, enabled deanery-wide youth ministry in rural contexts. In Shefford & Ampthill Deanery, churches are pooling leaders and resources to walk with young people together across the deanery.

Local impact: Simple, locally rooted initiatives are bearing fruit. In Silsoe, a pop-up hot chocolate outreach now connects with around 90% of children and young people in the village, creating significant ripple effects among families and the wider community.

THE ENVIRONMENT: Rachel Johnston (Environmental Officer)

Main achievements from 2025

Deanery Eco Champions: Appointed in Biggleswade, St Albans, Watford and Wheathampstead deaneries to provide support and encouragement for parishes in their environmental and sustainability work.

Eco Church: The numbers of churches involved in Eco Church and progressing to Bronze and Silver awards continues to grow, with 37% of all churches now registered on this free scheme

which provides a framework and resources for churches to develop their environmental work as part of their Christian witness.

Carbon Literacy Training: Courses have been successfully delivered online and in-person, as a one-day course and in a format for small groups.

Churches Count on Nature/The Big Green Week: An increased number of churches planned events involving schools and their local community in activities ranging from a Bug and Bloom Hunt at St Mary's Royston to the launch of a new wildflower meadow in St Mary's Watford Green Space.

Diocesan Board of Patronage: Annual Report 2025

Terms of Reference: To exercise any right of patronage held by the Board in relation to (currently 22) benefices across the diocese 'in accordance with the provisions of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986'.

Living God's Love: The Board engages 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 of Living God's Love. In making appointments and in continuing contact with the benefices in its gift, the Board supports 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:

- Aldenham, Radlett & Shenley Team – team rector Oliver Blease (formerly a team vicar); John Castle (team vicar – Aldenham)
- Langelei Team (Apsley End, Bennetts End, Kings Langley, Leverstock Green) – team vicar David Jones (Apsley End and Bennetts End)
- Ouzel Valley Team (Billington, Hockliffe, Heath & Reach w Egginton, Leighton Buzzard, Linslade and Sandhills) – team rector David MacGeoch (previously a team vicar)
- Toddington & Chalgrave – Ian Smith

In addition, Plurality Orders were made in the following cases:

- i. The suspension of the patron's right of presentation at *Wilden with Colmworth & Ravensden* ended upon the making of a Pastoral Order providing for the benefice to be held in plurality with Bolnhurst w Keysoe and Tim Wilson became the first incumbent to hold the two benefices in plurality.
- ii. The Bishop's Pastoral Order providing for the benefice of *Arlesey with Astwick* to be held in plurality with the benefice of Gravenhurst, Shillington and Stondon came into effect and Jenna Dearden became the incumbent of both benefices on the date of the Order.

The appointments made in 2025 continue to allow 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. Once again, Board members noted the low number of candidates for many appointments, an issue also reported in other parts of the country.

Current vacancies

As at 31st December 2025, there were vacancies in the Board's livings at:

- Oxhey, St Matthew
- South Mymms & Ridge

Pastoral Reorganisation

The Board was consulted on proposals for possible changes to ministerial provision or suspension of presentation in a number of cases. In several team ministries the number of team vicars was temporarily increased to allow a further team vicar to be appointed in a team rector vacancy. If a team rector was subsequently appointed internally, the number of team vicars was then reduced back to the establishment number.

Membership of the Board

The members of the Board are: *Ex officio* - *The Bishop of Bedford (non-attending); the Archdeacons; Elected by Diocesan Synod - The Revd W Gibbs, The Reverend E Keene, The Revd S Underwood, Mr N Challis, Mr J Kurien, Mr D Roberts, Mrs M Roberts, Mr M Taylor.* The 6-year term began with a meeting of the Board in person, allowing good discussion among new and longstanding Board members about the Board's role and practice, stimulated by an information booklet produced for the Board by Dr Jacob Kurien. The Board elected the Reverend Susannah Underwood as the Chair for a further term. Subsequent meetings were held online or by email correspondence.

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

Diocesan Advisory Committee: Annual Report 2025

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.

A view from the (Acting) Chair

The work of the DAC in 2025 has followed well established patterns. The routine tasks of maintaining churches and churchyards always involve a surprising amount of administrative work. Committee members and office staff have, as usual, devoted long hours to scrutiny of the detail involved in this work. This year the Committee commended nearly 300 pieces of such routine maintenance and repair. However, a greater part of the time at Committee meetings was occupied, as it usually is, by lively discussion of more substantial projects involving major re-ordering, notably at Tewin, Wheathampstead and Kings Langley. In all these cases the ongoing development of the proposal has meant that it was considered at several meetings throughout the year. As always, a major concern was striking a balance between 21st century expectations in terms of such provision as access, toilets and kitchen facilities, and the preservation of historic fabric and furnishings. An access ramp at Woburn, the re-ordering of the porch at Redbourn and the relocation of the historic screen at Sharnbrook were among examples of such concern arising this year. Then there is the unexpected, and the DAC finds itself exploring new topics. This year was no exception. Proposals came from two parishes seeking to introduce icons into the parish church, and this led to lengthy debate on the place of icons in the Church of England. And perhaps even more unusual, the Committee had to give advice on a proposal to commemorate a woman condemned as a witch in the early 18th century. So, in 2025 the DAC once again gave advice on a great diversity of proposals, from the routine to the ambitious and the controversial.

Significant projects – impact in parishes:

Royston, St John the Baptist – Seven years after the severe fire in the tower of St John's and two and a half years since the celebration of the completed restoration and reordering, the church has finally been taken off Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. Freak storm damage to a tower parapet wall in 2022 kept the church on the HAR Register, but its repair was completed, allowing Historic England to do a final inspection in 2025.

Redbourn, St Mary – A proposal to improve welcome, accessibility and heat retention by replacing the south porch inner door with a framed glass door illustrated the importance of obtaining a specialist heritage significance report on the existing door as a historic artefact and on its context, allowing a proper assessment and an amended proposal that would retain it in the church. This, coupled with a strong justification for change, enabled the DAC to support the project and the Chancellor to grant a faculty for the work.

Sutton, All Saints – The church has an unusually strong relationship with the village church school. In early 2024 some DAC members experienced the weekly whole-school service, with a short introduction for parents beforehand. The focus of the school for the church's mission, community outreach and sustainability, and the need to improve the openness of seating for children and to increase the capacity as the school grew through local reorganisation, formed the justification for a reordering project. In 2025 a faculty was granted after the parish had carefully developed the project to tread the line between heritage and the needs for sustainability and use.

The DAC continued to see the development of proposals for the provision of basic facilities – toilet, servery and welcome space – in churches such as **St Lawrence, Steppingley** and **St Mary the Virgin, Westmill**. Churches including **St Peter Sharnbrook**, **St James High Wych** and **St Mary Woburn** have sought to make their church building more fully accessible to people in their congregation and visitors. In Sharnbrook the first phase of work is focusing on improvements to gates and paths, while at High Wych and Woburn the priority has been to create step-free access into the church. The DAC has provided written support for the principle of access for all via the same entrance where possible.

Stevenage St Andrew & St George was designed as the “cathedral of the New Town”. Issues have combined to make the church building vulnerable in recent years and particularly in 2025, when vandalism and metal theft added to significant problems with the condition of the fabric. However, it is also a beacon of community engagement, and improved governance and the appointment of a new church architect have provided impetus to proposals for major repairs.

Processes: The DAC has worked with the Chancellor and Diocesan Registry to produce **Additional Matters Orders**, simplifying the permission process for matters ranging from third-party hiring and guidance, filming (updated provisions) and churchyard scaffolding for neighbours, to electric heating and updated churchyard regulations (see below).

Churchyards: Following a national review of churchyard regulations by diocesan chancellors, the DAC has worked with the Chancellor to review, update and re-issue the St Albans Churchyard Regulations, guidance and statutory forms. The DAC, staff team, archdeacons and Registry have continued to see a high volume of complex and pastorally difficult cases. This led to training being offered to clergy and churchwardens on churchyard management, including memorial safety demonstrations by memorial mason Richard Lee. In a suburban context, **St Albans St Mary Marshalswick** integrated access, welcome, community engagement and biodiversity in an imaginative project.

Project Development and Management: As ever, much of the time in committee meetings and at site visits – perhaps the most valuable DAC contribution to those parishes – was taken up by discussion about major projects as they developed from initial needs and ideas to detailed plans. At **St John the Baptist Widford**, a plan to house the village archive as a heritage and community engagement project was one of the drivers for major reordering and the provision of a gallery. **St Mary Shephall, Stevenage** have been planning the development of the parish hall for some time, but a DAC site visit with a new project architect allowed improvements to be identified in the planned configuration and layout of spaces. **St Peter Watford** are progressing a project to redevelop the church hall and are now looking at improvements to allow the 1960s church building to function well for worship, outreach and community activity during the hall building works. The project includes local history – the existing font was fashioned from a lamp stand found in the garden of the local Methodist church – and sustainability, with insulation and a move to fossil-fuel free heating on the agenda.

Net Zero Carbon, heating and sustainability: The Diocesan NZC Officer worked with the DAC’s technical advisers to update a suite of heating resources for parishes and undertook research comparing the comfort of different heating systems. An analysis of QI reports showed no greater prevalence of damp in churches with under pew or infrared heating compared to space heated churches. Emerging technologies including heated pew cushions at **St Mary Carlton**, fast response electric underfloor heating at **St Andrew Cuffley**, and hybrid heat pump, pew, and far

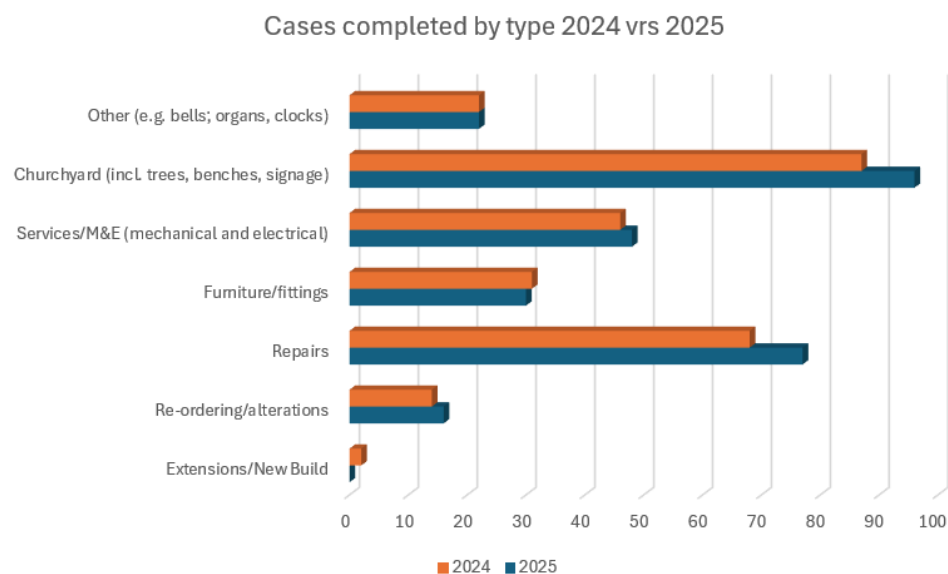
infrared heating at **Holy Cross Sarratt** were implemented. **St Nicholas Harpenden** developed a heat pump-based hybrid scheme to significantly reduce carbon emissions. Several complex churches justified the short-term replacement of a gas boiler due to a combination of user requirements, technical and financial constraints. Christ Church Chorleywood, All Saints Hertford, St Paul St Albans and St Mary Hitchin were granted faculties after detailed consideration by the DAC. The Chancellor considered each case on its merits and directed that specific conditions should be adhered to; more recently she has set out the conditions she is likely to apply in such cases to assist the DAC in providing advice to parishes.

Quinquennial Inspections and Repairs: **St Mary Meppershall** and **St Botolph Aspley Guise** were among many parishes to undertake repairs. Meppershall was previously on the Heritage at Risk Register and Aspley Guise was impacted by the Government cap on the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, whose future is not certain, and which remains a vital means of support for parish churches as well as cathedrals. The need and priorities for repair are primarily identified in the five -yearly programme of inspections by the church's architect or surveyor. During the year architect James Ford sadly died; Iain Frearson announced his retirement as did Bob Wilson, John Barker, Stefan Skanski and Russell Hanslip, whilst Jerry Lander and Helen Axworthy approached retirement. It was good to see that new architects and surveyors are continuing to join the St Albans list of active inspectors.

DAC role and constitution; membership: Pam Ward (architect) retired as a DAC member and the Committee paid tribute to her contribution to the work of the DAC. Chris Muhley (diocesan organ adviser) replaced Will Fox, who remains a consultant, whilst Dr Jana Schuster (Historic England) remains available for consultation but is not a DAC member. Following the death of Teresa Britt in December 2024, Dr Christopher Green continued to steer the work of the DAC as acting chair throughout 2025.

Appendix: 2025 Statistics (2024 in brackets)

- 6 (6) DAC meetings
- 37 (39) DAC site visits
- 131 (151) church visits by DAC support officers
- 289 (270) cases completed



Board of Education: Annual Report 2025

Flourishing System Leadership

The Board works with 136 schools, 102 of which remain within the maintained sector and 34 academies, including 5 multi-academy trusts. This work coalesces around two broad areas:

1. The role of the DBE as the relevant religious authority for church schools in the Diocese of St Albans (school organisation)
2. The role of resourcing and supporting church schools to live their unique Christian vision for education (Christian character of church schools)

Whilst the new proposals under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill make recommendations to level the landscape in a mixed schools' economy, these are yet to be realised. Hopefully there will be further educational developments in the form of a DfE White Paper bringing forth further action on SEND and school structures. A lack of clarity from the DfE on policy direction continues to cause challenges across the system in all sectors.

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 2025, 135 out of 136 schools joined the SLA. 2025 saw the facilitation of 59 training and development events. 132 schools engaged with at least one of these over the course of the year. Three senior leaders from St Albans were awarded grants to attend the 2025-26 cohort of the Church School Leadership Course run in partnership with Chelmsford Diocese.

In September 2025, four new Headteachers started in post and one school will enter the 2025-26 academic year with Acting Headteacher arrangements. The DBE, through its SLA, is providing coaching for the first two years of headship to 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 several 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 the overall number of church school places. Hertfordshire County Council put forward proposals in the autumn of 2025 for two church schools to close by the end of August 2026, and these are progressing through the Council's consultation process with a final decision in the spring of 2026.

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 support all of the children & young people in their care 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.

Two diocesan schools are now part of the DfE's new flagship intervention programme for school improvement, Regional Improvement for Standards & Excellence (RISE). 39 capital building projects were supported in VA school, with funding totalling around £2.4m. Of these, a significant number were for roofing works, with several projects focusing on the safeguarding of our school sites.

At the second annual National SIAMS conference in London in September 2025, our very own Dr Ryan Parker, RE & Christian Ethos Adviser, gave one of the keynote addresses. Using his wide-

ranging research into RE teaching, he explained new innovations in the subject. Key to this is the understanding of superdiversity within religions. For example, within the Church of England, there are many different approaches to worship. Throughout the worldwide Christian tradition, there are many more and Ryan explained the way in which it is necessary for educators to equip young people for this superdiversity through a well-balanced RE curriculum. This is often described as a worldviews approach, looking at people, pedagogy and evidence seeking. This detailed and thoughtful presentation was well received by the conference delegates.

Seven schools in the Biggleswade area successfully made the transition from 3- to 2-tier provision under the Central Bedfordshire re-structuring programme. This reorganisation will eventually lead to the creation of three new CofE secondary schools from existing middle schools in our Diocese. The Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust welcomed St Leonard's Heath & Reach Academy in September, bringing the total number of schools in DSAMAT to 15.

Living God's Love with Creativity and Purpose

Watford St John's Primary School thoroughly enjoyed taking part in their first ever Cathedral 'Away Day'. Their Year 5 children found the Abbey a beautiful and inspiring place to be. *'What was special to me - was lighting a candle in the spot where St Alban is believed to have sacrificed himself to protect a priest. It felt powerful to be part of something greater, standing in the very place where such a meaningful act took place.'*

Christ Church Chorleywood School have been exploring the meaning of spirituality for them. They came together for a very special 'Awe and Wonder' afternoon, where each class explored what spirituality means to them and what inspires awe and wonder in their lives. They came together for a special act of worship to celebrate the afternoon and share with one another what they had learnt that week. The Awe and Wonder work has sparked thoughtful discussions, creativity, and shared moments of wonder across the whole school and encouraged children to think more deeply about what fills them with joy and makes them truly unique and special.

At St Mary's Primary in Ware, Year 5 classes travelled to Bedford to explore three places of worship: a mosque, an Anglican church and a Sikh gurdwara as part of a faith tour. They seized the opportunity to ask many questions and came back with a better understanding of what connects the faiths of Islam, Christianity and Sikhism.

Victoria Infant School, Berkhamsted, introduced some new members to their school family - class Prayer Bears. Each class has a Prayer Bear sent home with a child every Friday. While children have the bear, they think about the school values of kindness, respect, resilience and thankfulness.

Sutton VA Primary School held a 'Grand Opening' of their new buildings that have enabled them to become a Primary School (formally Lower). Bishop Richard conducted a blessing of the new hall and classroom and led Collective Worship that was enjoyed by the school community, the contractors, architects, CBC officers, local residents and church. It was a proud moment in the school's history!

St Mary's Stotfold Primary were delighted to welcome back Chris Andrew from Project Touchline. Chris delivers a brilliant programme, teaching Christian values through sport. Each session starts with an inspiring collective worship, then sport coaching sessions for classes, integrating Christian values such as kindness, respect and perseverance into the game.

Spiritually Flourishing School Communities

The theme for this year's School Leaders Conference was 'Spiritually Flourishing School Communities: *culture, curriculum and collective worship*'. Spirituality sits at the very heart of education; it relates to who we are and how we understand, relate to and act with/for others and the world. Over 100 people attended the conference, including Headteachers, Trust Leaders, members of the DBE, clergy, chaplains and other diocesan staff.

We were delighted to welcome a range of excellent speakers: *Jane Banister, Paul Rusby, Rebecca Swansbury and Tony Eade*. Workshops took place in the afternoon from key speakers. Several Headteachers and academy trust leaders provided positive feedback on the day.

One Headteacher commented, '*I wanted to write to thank you and the team for an amazing conference day on Tuesday. I don't know how you do it but you always have the knack of organising things that need to be shared and heard. In an increasingly difficult time for Heads, myself especially, I felt lifted by the day and 'Thank you so much for all you do for our schools - it is so appreciated.'*

Schools Team

Following a comprehensive recruitment process, Mr Duncan Gauld, CEO of the Chess Valley Primary Learning Trust, was appointed as the new Diocesan Director of Education in February 2025 and took up post on 1st June 2025. The Board is grateful to Charlotte Johnson, Deputy Director of Education for stepping in as Interim Director of Education and for all the Schools Team staff in ensuring stability and a smooth transition.

Sadly, we said goodbye to Belinda Copson at the end of the academic year in August 2025. Belinda was our governance adviser, who retired from her permanent role, one in which she had served for many years. We thank Belinda for her service and dedication to school governance over this time and are grateful for all her work as a valued member of the Schools Team.

Diocesan Environment Group: Annual Report 2025

Overview and Strategic Direction: During 2025, the Diocesan Environment Group (DEG) provided oversight and support for environmental and sustainable work across the Diocese and monitored progress towards the Silver Eco Diocese award. The Group supported a shared diocesan vision for sustainability as an expression of 'Living God's Love', underpinned by the Diocesan Environment Policy and the Net Zero Carbon strategy. The Diocesan Environment Policy was reviewed and updated to reflect growing understanding of environmental challenges and responses.

Governance and Group Development: The Group agreed a refreshed strategic approach, moving beyond reporting to include focused discussions with officers and stakeholders. A Net Zero Carbon Implementation Group was established, and draft constitutional amendments were prepared for approval in 2026.

Eco Church and Deanery Engagement: Progress continued with the Eco Church programme, with 37% of churches registered and 57 Bronze and 33 Silver awards achieved. Deanery Eco Champions were appointed in Watford, St Albans, Wheathampstead and Biggleswade to support local environmental action. An increased number of churches and schools held events during *Churches Count on Nature/The Big Green Week* in June, which included a Bug and Bloom Hunt at St Mary's, Royston, and the launch of a new wildflower meadow in St Mary's Watford Green Space. The Friends of St Peter's, Berkhamsted, won a Green Flag award for their work to create a welcoming space for community, heritage and nature at the Rectory Lane cemetery.

Carbon Reduction and Training: Carbon reduction initiatives included the launch of *The Great Switch for Creation* campaign and continued delivery of Carbon Literacy training in both in-person and online formats, including adaptations for small groups.

Buildings and Energy: Demonstrator projects at Mill End and Dunstable were completed, providing learning for future energy efficiency works. New resources and updated advice on heating replacement were developed by the DAC.

Cathedral: The Cathedral submitted an application for a Gold Eco-diocese award and appointed a Sustainability Projects Officer. The Diocesan Environment Officer attended the third Community Showcase held at the Cathedral, to highlight the range of activities happening across the Diocese.

Funding: Seven Major Net Zero Carbon Grants were awarded, totalling £91k, alongside ongoing Quick Wins Grants.

Property Committee: Annual Report 2025

The Property Committee is the statutory body responsible for overseeing the management of clergy housing, covering around 280 homes across the Diocese. The committee is also responsible for the diocesan office building in St Albans. Our clergy are at the heart of parish life, and their homes provide them with a safe and comfortable place from which to serve their local community. The diocesan Property Team is responsible for overseeing the maintenance, sale, acquisition, development and letting of empty properties. The Property Committee oversees their work and provides strategic and fiscal accountability.

Resourcing: In recognition that historic improvements funding has not been sustainable for maintaining housing condition, in 2025 the DBF substantially increased the 2026 budget for clergy housing improvements, drawing on alternative funding sources outside the Common Fund, primarily the Property Ring-Fenced Fund (accrued from historic property sales).

The DBF approved expanding the Property Team from four roles to eight in 2026, partly by in-housing the quinquennial inspection and work programme (after decades of out-sourcing to Rumball Sedgwick), and partly by drawing on the Property Ring-Fenced Fund for a three-year fixed term role dedicated to improving capital efficiency in the portfolio by releasing value through development to fund improvement works, thereby replenishing the fund.

Strategic housing review, assessment and data collection: The Committee developed a standard for assessing the suitability of clergy housing to support ministry. This is the first of three standards to be developed: the liveability and maintainability standards will be developed in 2026 with the support of the new surveyor and incorporated into a revised quinquennial inspection process by the end of the year. Better data will inform the new five-yearly strategic review cycle for all housing.

Development projects: Headwinds in the development sector including increased finance and construction costs, planning issues, and team capacity restricted progress on development projects. Projects at Rickmansworth and Watford Christ Church made slow progress. Other sites were put on hold and several additional sites with planning/development potential were identified, pending the arrival of the new Asset and Development Manager.

Stock turnover: Purchase of the interim house at Watford St Peter completed and offers were accepted for replacement parsonages in New Barnet and Totternhoe. The Committee approved the sale of a former curate house in Borehamwood. Three new curate houses were acquired. A garden sale was completed at Bovingdon, and garden sales at Cranfield and Watford St Andrew were still pending at year end.

The DBF changed its policy on curate housing to centralise the cost with the DBF, with management delegated to the Committee. This ensures housing supports the placement of curates in the most appropriate training parishes to support their move into full-time ministry, rather than the location of housing dictating where training occurs.

The PCC at Broxbourne objected to the proposed sale of their 1823 vicarage which suffered water damage in early 2024. A historic listing application was made by The Georgian Society. The

Church Commissioners will consider the objection in 2026. In the meantime, contracts were exchanged on a corporate house purchase for the new rector.

Improvements, repairs and quinquennial inspections: Significant repairs and improvements were completed on houses at Mill End and Farley Hill. The former curate/glebe house in Sandy experienced serious fire damage and significant subsidence was being investigated at Woburn Sands. 59 quinquennial inspections were completed and repairs scheduled. Tree surveys to identify health and safety liability were completed and urgent works undertaken. The fire alarm system in Holywell Lodge was also replaced.

The Committee continued to offer occupants an annual grant of up to £250 to cover the cost of materials for carrying out decorations. 49 applications were received in 2025 but only 27 claims were made.

Net zero carbon by 2030: Net zero carbon demonstrator projects revealed that our data on which houses are insulated is flawed, as insulation installed in the 1970s may have failed since then. The government also released the long-awaited updates to standards and methods for EPC assessment, which includes updated recommendations for properties. As a result, our £50k funding for retrofit assessments will now be focused on undertaking EPCs and insulation borescoping across the portfolio. This work will occur in 2026.

The Elstow demonstrator project funded by the Church Commissioners was completed. We expect to access further such funding in 2026. Circa £500k additional funding from Diocesan Synod will be targeted to clergy housing improvements, particular those that affect clergy wellbeing and utility costs.

Rental income: Rental income continued to climb in 2025, topping £1m, up from £737k in 2024 and £569k in 2023. This is partly due to diligent letting during vacancy.

Changes to tenancy legislation abolishing fixed term tenancies will now come into effect in 2026. Housing a minister of religion remains valid grounds for notice. However, the potential use of this ground must be recorded in the tenancy agreement to be exercised. The DBF updated all its tenancies to reflect this. PCCs were also advised of this requirement. If they do not update their tenancy agreements, gaining possession of curate houses when required may be difficult.

Committee business: Several new members joined existing members of the committee at the start of the triennium. John Butler served as chair of the Property Committee for several years and stepped down in September. The committee, DBF and Property Team would like to thank John for his years of faithful service. Deputy chair Thomas Snell has kindly stepped up to chair the committee.

The committee agreed in November to significantly evolve its business in 2026 away from operational detail to better governance by focusing more effectively on compliance, performance, strategy and risk management, supported by better data collection and reporting by the Property Team. The work of the team has grown significantly over the last triennium. The committee now provides necessary strategic guidance and accountability.

Verulam House Fund Trust: Annual Report 2025

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. October saw the last meeting of the triennium, 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.

The Trustees met online, in person and in a hybrid format four times during 2025 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. A review was taken in the year, and it was decided to change the investment portfolio. All shares in M&G were sold and reinvested in CBF property fund, and half of the CBF accumulation shares sold were reinvested into new manager Sarasin. This decision should yield a greater return for future years as well as be in line with the Church of England Ethical investment policy. Since this transfer was made, CCLA has become part of the Jupiter Group. Their performance has come under scrutiny with a number of Dioceses concerned about it. Our Diocese's Asset Committee is keeping it under review. The trustees will be informed of any decisions they make. The overall financial position remains healthy; however, the fund value of the Trust has dropped by £34k to £2.43 million. Dividends were lower due to the timing of the M&G sale and purchase in Sarasin. Interest was also lower as more grants had been awarded the cash balance was less. The income 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 and interest from investments for the year totalled £41.2k 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 £90k. In 2024 this was £45k 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

27 bursaries were awarded in 2025 compared to 24 in 2024. The total expenditure on bursaries was **£33,137.93** as compared to expenditure in 2024 of £18,633. 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 **£57,395.18** to 06 projects within the Diocese, as compared to £26,457 to 13 projects in 2024. The range of activities supported is shown below.

Project Name	Project nature	£ Amount
YSRW	Diocesan Year of Spiritual Renewal and Wellbeing	40,000.00
St Paul's Letchworth	New Wine leadership conference for five staff	700.00
Christ Church, St Albans	Support with their Monday night Supper Club outreach programme	1,500.00
The Alban Way	Towards costs for members to undertake a pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago	3,695.18
PCC of St Francis Church	Youth and Young adults exchange trip to Turkey	8,000.00
St Albans Cathedral	Towards the costs for a Children and Families Worker post	3,500.00