

ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD

13 June 2026

QUESTIONS – FIRST NOTICE PAPER v2 –published 10 June 2026

- 1) The Revd Cllr Robert Donald (St Albans Deanery) to ask the Chair of the DBF:

'We receive a Diocesan Board of Finance annual report on its work and its committees but when was the last time Diocesan Synod members were given the opportunity to debate and agree the number, purpose and outcomes of the 7 committees currently set up under the DBF to ensure they are all still needed and are fit for purpose?'

Tim Coulson, DBF Chair will respond:

The agenda for Synod is set by its Standing Committee, Bishop's Council, advised by that Council's Agenda Committee. I will ask the Agenda Committee to consider the point made in this question and I would be very pleased to discuss with Robert what he would find useful from such a debate.

The DBF as the financial executive of Synod is primarily elected every three years by Synod members. It is responsible for organising its affairs including establishing any committee that it considers appropriate, with the exception that the Property Committee and the Glebe Committee are also established in line with ecclesiastical measures. The DBF receives Minutes of the meetings of these Committees and reports on specific items of business.

- 2) The Revd Cllr Robert Donald (St Albans Deanery) to ask the Chair of the DBF:

'Given Diocesan Synod has the responsibility of agreeing the annual Diocesan Budget which involves the work of these committees, how can members have more information provided about them, exercise some control of their expenditure and outcomes and have greater ownership of their aims?'

Tim Coulson, DBF Chair will respond:

In line with the answer to the previous question the DBF has accountability to Diocesan Synod as its financial executive of Synod, and the ultimate exercise of control held by Synod members is through elections to the DBF held every three years. The DBF exercises responsibility for its committees as the financial executive of Synod and on its behalf.

The DBF is committed to openness and responsiveness to requests for information from Synod members. Questions can be addressed to the Diocesan Secretary at any time and through formal synod question processes. The structure of the diocesan

budget is such that individual committees do not have specific budget allocations. The constitution of committees, including membership, accountability and terms of reference are set out on the diocesan website.

The request for synod to have information about the committees and have greater ownership of their aims will be included in the question that I will ask the Agenda Committee to consider. A possibility would be for a summary of the Terms of Reference and membership of DBF Committees to be given to the next Synod.

3) The Revd Tom Lilley (Cheshunt Deanery) to ask the Bishop of Bedford:

'As we prepare to welcome our incoming diocesan bishop, what practical steps or processes are in place to ensure that the leadership and senior decision-making life of St Albans visibly reflects and serves the theological breadth of the diocese, including where there are differing convictions on Living in Love and Faith? In particular, how will this enable clergy and laity across the diocese to continue to flourish with confidence and trust, and to know that the breadth of theological conviction within the diocese is meaningfully represented at senior levels?'

The Bishop of Bedford will respond:

Thank you Tom for your question. I am interpreting 'senior levels' as particularly relating to Bishop's Staff ⁽¹⁾. All members of Bishop's Staff are fully committed to the flourishing of all clergy and laity in our Diocese. Members have a breadth of views on a number of subjects, and this is complemented by our Assistant Bishops ⁽²⁾. There is the representation of a wide range of theological viewpoint in our decision-making bodies, especially Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod.

I will ensure that your question is drawn to the attention of +Andrew.

⁽¹⁾ Bishops, Dean, Archdeacons, Diocesan Secretary, and the Director of Mission and Ministry, with the Bishop's Chaplain in Attendance

⁽²⁾ +Rob Gillion, +John Gladwin, +Christine Hardman, +Luke Irvine-Capel, +Rob Munroe, +Robin Smith, + Stephen Venner, +Rob Wickham

4) Mr James Stewart (Sharnbrook Deanery) to ask the Chair of the DBF:

'In an answer to a question at the last meeting about the sustainability of the annual parish share request of £750 per church member, the Chair observed that "over the past four years stipends for incumbents have increased by 23.5%, whilst the average cumulative movement in parish share requests has been an increase of less than 0.5%. This has been possible because of our total return investment policy, reduced contributions to the clergy and church workers pensions schemes (but not reduced pensions) and through cost control and reductions."

According to the accounts prepared for this meeting of synod, stipends paid to parish clergy have increased by 7.7% (£489k) over the past four years (2021-25) whilst parish

share received has increased by 2.3% (£299k) over the same period. Can Synod be provided with an explanation of why the actual numbers in the accounts are so different?

If expenditure on stipends has only increased by £190K more than the parish share over this period, whilst investment income is £1,632k higher and pension contributions £525k lower, can synod be provided with an explanation of where the surplus £1.97m, raised from parish share, is going?

Tim Coulson, DBF Chair will respond:

The figures I provided to Synod in March were based on the increase in individual stipend levels and average parish share increase, both covering the period 2022-26. These figures were correct.

Dealing first with clergy stipends, the calculation in the question is based on the total cost of clergy in the years compared. There are several elements to the explanation of why the figures are different.

- Firstly, the figures I gave in my answer to Synod in March covered the five years from 2022 to 2026, whereas the question uses the period from 2021 to 2025. The stipend increase from 2021 to 2022 was 2.0%. In my calculation, that increase is excluded and replaced by the 2026 increase of 6.8%, resulting in a larger overall increase.
- Secondly, the stipend line in the accounts includes Curates and Archdeacons. The stipend costs for these clergy members need to be removed to give a like for like comparison.
- Thirdly, the number of incumbent status clergy in 2021 is higher than in 2025. The figures need to be adjusted to provide a like-for-like figure.

Applying these three elements produces an increase of 17.6% for the period from 2021 to 2025, which is close to the 16.9% calculated in the question. There will be other smaller changes due to the movement of clergy in and out of the Diocese in each year and the fact that increases in stipends are applied in April and do not apply for the whole year.

Turning to parish share, as in the first part of the question, the reason for the difference lies in what is being measured. The 0.5% was based on the increase of the Parish Share requested between 2022 and 2026. The 2.3% in the question is based on the actual change in parish share received between 2021 and 2025. Applying Parish Share requested to the same 2021-2025 period produces an increase of 5.6%. The most significant year (2026, with a reduction in the average parish share request of 3.5%) is included in my answer in March but excluded from the calculation in the question.

Finally, turning to use of the 'surplus', without the detail of the figures provided, I am not able to agree them in full, but I do agree that they are similar to those that I have. I assess that total return has increased by £1,303k. Total costs for clergy have risen by £393k as we also have to include the increase in National Insurance and the various grants that are paid when clergy move posts. All income from the endowment funds is

entirely applied to the payment of stipends. It does allow us to release income from other sources for other purposes. Since 2021 we have increased spending on our property portfolio by £1,424k and to increase grants to parishes by £428k.

Finally, turning to use of the 'surplus', without the details of the figures in the question, I am not able to agree them in full, but I do agree that they are similar to those that I have. I assess that total return has increased by £1,303k for 2025. However, it is more helpful to assess the impact over the four years since the total return investment policy was introduced. The increase in Endowment Investment income over that time is £4,223k. In the same period other income has increased by £2,609, mainly from increased rentals. Total costs for clergy have remained relatively static, rising only by £73k; increases in stipends have been largely covered by pension contribution reductions. All income from the endowment funds is entirely applied to the payment of stipends. It does allow us to release income for other purposes. During the period from 2022 to 2025 we have spent an extra £4,571k on housing and awarded a total of £2,237k in grants to parishes.

- 5) Mrs Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery) to ask the Chair of the DBF:

In the papers for the finance webinar on 12 March diocesan synod members were consulted on budget assumptions for 2027 including the assumption that the aggregate parish share request would need to increase by 3%. On what, evidenced, basis does the DBF consider it reasonable to keep increasing the parish share?

Tim Coulson, DBF Chair will respond:

The presentation in advance of the finance webinar identified ten variables for which assumptions need to be made within the budgeting process. These include the general rate of inflation and the expected increase in the National Stipend Benchmark to be determined by Archbishops' Council. It was suggested in the webinar and in subsequent discussions held at the DBF and to be held at Bishop's Council that inflation assumptions of 3% and 5% should be modelled in budgeting. The National Stipend Benchmark increase from 1 April 2027 is expected to be 3%. Against this background an initial assumption for discussion at the webinar was a 3% average increase in parish share request.

Parish Share requests were reduced by an average of 3.5% in 2026 because of an increase in investment income. Therefore, if a 3% average increase is required in 2027 the average level of parish share request in that year will remain below the level of the 2025 average parish share request.

When other budget assumptions are confirmed, including a recommendation to the DBF on the level of reserves that should be held, a full budget proposal will be developed. There will be an opportunity for members to contribute to this at the consultation webinar on 15 September.

- 6) Mrs Emma Robarts (Buntingford Deanery) to ask the Chair of the DBF:

Why is the DBF even considering putting more money into "mission" projects in selective churches (which is what the finance webinar slides seem to mean when they refer to "missional investment in parishes" in the alternative to increasing stipendiary clergy numbers), instead of making its top spending priority paying for stipendiary clergy (including their NI, stipends, housing and pensions)?

Tim Coulson, DBF Chair will respond:

In the answer to the previous question, it was stated that there were ten variables that needed to have assumptions set for the purpose of budgeting. The final variable was described as investment in parishes, and it was simply noted that any such investment would be discussed by both DBF and Bishop's Council. No decisions have been made about the ability or desirability to include investment in parishes in a budget to be proposed to Synod.

Since 2022 parishes have been able to apply for grants for net zero projects and mission initiatives. The two main committees of Diocesan Synod have supported these grant programmes: the DBF designating funds for investment and Bishop's Council determining the allocation of designated funds between alternative uses. Parishes receiving mission grants provide formal reports on the impact and progress of their projects. These have been overwhelmingly positive.

- 7) Dr Hannah Kinsey (Stevenage Deanery) to ask the Diocesan Secretary:

'Following the successful SMMIB funding bid, two roles are currently being advertised by the Diocese, both working as part of the Alban Way. One as a pastoral worker, the other as a schools worker. In both person specifications, the candidates applying for these roles only need have "an understanding of and sympathy with the life and work of the church of England in St Alban's Diocese". There is no Genuine Occupational Requirement for the people in these roles to be practising Christians. Why do the people in these ministry-facing roles need only have an understanding of the work of the church of England?'

Mr David White, Diocesan Secretary, will respond:

The DBF takes legal and HR advice in relation to the use of a Genuine Occupational Requirement in recruitment. Occupational Requirements provide a lawful route for specific roles be filled by an individual of a particular religion or belief, such as a practising Christian. However, this is permitted only if certain criteria are met under Schedule 9 of the Equality Act 2010.

In the diocesan or parish context an Occupation Requirement may be used where a role's duties are closely tied to the Christian practice of the organisation so that only someone who shares that faith can fulfil them.

If a role is advertised as having a Genuine Occupational Requirement this can be challenged under the Equality Act. As a consequence, this requirement is not applied widely in diocesan roles.

The presence or absence of a Genuine Occupational Requirement does not impact on the ability of a recruitment process to ensure that only a fully suitable candidate is appointed.

- 8) Dr Hannah Kinsey (Stevenage Deanery) to ask the Chair of the Nominations Committee:

'Recently, Diocesan Synod received an email from the nominations committee stating that additional members to Diocesan synod would be co-opted or nominated to synod who would have skills to make Diocesan Synod younger and more diverse. Please could synod have an update on this exercise? I.e. Who has been nominated by the Bishop, which church they attend, what skills they are bringing to Diocesan synod, and how the nominations committee decided who was being nominated by the Bishop and who was going to be co-opted?'

Dr Tim Coulson, Chair of the Nominations Committee, will respond:

The Nominations Committee received expressions of interest from individuals for co-option or nomination to Diocesan Synod. The Committee decided to recommend five clergy and five laity to Bishop's Council, which is the only body that can nominate individuals for co-options by the Houses of Clergy and Laity. Bishop's Council considered these recommendations on 8 June and agreed to nominate these individuals to the Houses of Clergy and Laity. Arrangements for meetings of the two Houses will be described at the Synod meeting.

The Bishop of Bedford, as Acting Bishop of St Albans, has the right to nominate to Diocesan Synod without consultation. The Nominations Committee recommended one individual to the Bishop for nomination to Diocesan Synod, but that individual subsequently withdrew their willingness to be nominated. The Bishop of Bedford has informed Bishop's Council of his intention to nominate four individuals to Diocesan Synod; these individuals were not considered by the Nominations Committee.

- 9) The Revd Chris Kilgour (Cheshunt Deanery) to ask the Director of Mission and Ministry:

'It is encouraging to see the continued growth of the Alban Way and to read, and watch, the experiences of those who have been part of the various cohorts. As it reaches its fourth year, has there been any analysis of how the theological breadth of the diocese is represented across the individuals, and churches, who have been part of the programme (whether participating or leading and directing)? If so, are there particular traditions or theological backgrounds that appear to be over or under represented, and are there plans to address this?'

The Revd Dr Canon Tim Lomax, Director of Mission and Ministry, will respond:

Thank you for the helpful question. The independent evaluation of The Alban Way did not capture church tradition or theological background as a formal metric, largely because these categories can be difficult to define consistently. One of the aims of The Alban Way, particularly within the young adult stream, is to cultivate a generous orthodoxy, bringing together participants from across the breadth of the Church to learn from one another through prayer, discipleship, pilgrimage and mission. The development of a shared Rule of Life has proved a particularly valuable way of creating common ground whilst honouring difference. There are also some limitations to any analysis of church tradition. Individual young adults may hold theological convictions that differ from the churches they attend and it would therefore be inappropriate to categorise participants themselves according to theological tradition. Without wishing to get into a subjective categorisation of traditions of the parishes from which participants have come, I have simply listed below the churches that are represented by the participants.

The Alban Way – young adults stream

Church	Archdeaconry	Number completed
All Saints Houghton Regis	Bedford	3
All Saints, Clifton	Bedford	1
Bedford Uni Chaplaincy	Bedford	1
Christ Church Bedford	Bedford	6
Christchurch Ware	Hertford	1
Hub Church	St Albans	5
Oak Church Stevenage	Hertford	6
Saint (Hackney)		1
Soul Survivor	St Albans	3
St Luke's Watford	St Albans	1
St Albans Cathedral	St Albans	2
St Andrews Biggleswade	Bedford	1
St Andrew's, Hertford	Hertford	1
St John the Apostle & Evangelist (St John's), Watford	St Albans	1
St Johns Hatfield	Hertford	4

St Lukes Hatfield	Hertford	1
St Lukes Leagrave	Bedford	2
St Mark's Barnet Vale	Hertford	1
St Marks Colney Heath	St Albans	1
St Mary's in St Margaret's and St Andrew's in Stanstead Abbots	Hertford	1
St Mary's Cheshunt	Hertford	1
St Marys Church Apsley	St Albans	1
St Mary's Church, Redbourn	St Albans	1
St Mary's Pirton	St Albans	1
St Mary's Watford	St Albans	1
St Mary's, Hitchin	St Albans	1
St Michael & All Angels Church, Bedford (Elstow Team Ministry)	Bedford	2
St Michael and All Angels, Lemsford	Hertford	1
St Michael's & All Angels, Elstow	Bedford	1
St Michael's Birchwood	Hertford	1
St Nicholas, Hockliffe	Bedford	1
St Paul's Letchworth	St Albans	1
St Paul's St Albans	St Albans	1
St Peter and St Paul, Flitwick	Bedford	1
St Peter's Church, Mill End	St Albans	1
St Thomas' Wilbury	St Albans	1
The Church of Transfiguration, Kempston	Bedford	1

Whilst the earliest cohorts showed a greater concentration towards the lower church end of the tradition spectrum, participation has broadened over time as awareness of the programme has grown. We are increasingly seeing churches send participants year after year, with young adults themselves becoming some of the programme's strongest advocates amongst their peers.

The Alban Way – Schools Stream

The schools stream has now engaged more than 500 pupils, the churches represented to date are:

St Mark's, Hitchin

St Mary's Cheshunt

All Saints Renhold

St Helen's Church, Wheathampstead

All Saints, Clifton

St Francis, Luton

St Nicholas, Wilden

Parish of Norton (St George's & St Nicholas)

St Ethelreda with St Luke, Hatfield

St Giles Church, Codicote

St John's Church, Watford

This suggests particularly strong engagement from churches within the higher church traditions, whilst still drawing participation from across the wider breadth of the diocese.

It is also worth noting that the leadership, teaching and oversight of The Alban Way intentionally draws from across the breadth of the diocese. Clergy, lay leaders and contributors from a range of church traditions have shaped the programme, reflecting our desire that participants encounter and learn from the richness and diversity of the wider Church.

Overall, this analysis suggests that The Alban Way is engaging churches and young people from across the theological breadth of the Diocese of St Albans. Whilst some traditions are currently more strongly represented than others, the pattern over time has been towards greater breadth of participation and we remain committed to ensuring that the programme continues to serve the whole diocese and participants of all traditions.