

**WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD**  
the First Session of the Nineteenth Synod  
and a general meeting of the  
**WORCESTER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED**

held at St Helen's, Worcester on Monday 4 November 2024

Hugh Richards and Diane Cooksey were elected to be the Chairs of the Houses of Laity and Clergy respectfully.

**Opening worship** was led by Jamie Klair from All Saints Worcester.

Nine questions were raised under **Standing Order 71**. You can read these and the written answers [here on the diocesan website](#).



Bishop Martin gave his **Presidential Address** reflecting that we are made by love, with love, for love. His address said thank you to the synod for being here, laid out some of what lies ahead of us as a diocesan synod in this triennium and offered a challenge. [You can read it here](#).

Diocesan Secretary, Andy Todd, led a short item of **synod induction** seeking to equip members to contribute well, and to make the most of the opportunities that arise from membership of Diocesan Synod.

Andy explained that the purpose of synod is very broad and therefore works best when we look at the big picture, not necessarily the fine detail. This detail is dealt with by committees, which do really vital work and members were encouraged to consider whether they might be able to support by becoming a member of one or more of those committees.



A broad spectrum of views and opinions are represented in our diocese and Synod is an important way for those voices to be heard. Andy asked members to encourage others to come forward to be part of synod where there are vacancies in a particular deanery.

Members should read the papers and talk to each other, particularly seeking out those who might have a different view to them. They should take the opportunity to ask questions and not be afraid to offer challenge. There is always the opportunity to influence the agenda if there's something members feel passionate about.

Synod has an important role between General Synod and the parish. Andy asked members to think about how they could act as a communication channel between synod and their deanery and parish. And please pray!



The Transformation Programme Director, Damian Herbert introduced an item focusing on the **New Worshipping Communities priority** of our Diocesan Transformation Strategy, together with an update on other developments.

Damian started by reminding those present of our diocesan priorities and the impact that the programme is already having in our parishes.

Kim Brown, our New Worshipping Communities Enabler explained that in the 18 months since the start of our transformation programme, 50 new worshipping communities have started in our diocese and another 15 are in the planning. These are reaching new people who have never been to church. She talked about the learning community which is currently running to support those setting up and leading new worshipping communities and a new model which will be starting in the new year



Synod were shown a short film about a NWC which has recently started at Tardebigge Church in Redditch. [You can watch this here.](#)

There was an opportunity for Synod to ask questions.



The **2025 budget proposals** were presented by the Diocesan Secretary, Andy Todd, and Director of Finance, Shaun Mooney, on behalf of the Bishop's Council and Standing Committee. [See Andy's slides](#)

Andy explained that we were focusing on the operational budget, which doesn't include projects funded by the national Church.

Bishop's Council recommended a budget with an operating expenditure of £7.96m and an operating income of £6.5m. This would result an operating deficit of £1.41m, brought into a breakeven position using our reserves.

Bishop's Council also proposed a 3% increase to clergy stipends which is ahead of inflation and ensures our diocese stays 'mid table' compared to other dioceses. Exceptionally this year, we are able to fund this increase without any increase in Ministry Share due to a reduction in clergy pensions contributions.

However, Andy explained that the changes to National Insurance announced in the Government's Budget will cost the diocese £120k each year. We are therefore asking that the part of NI increase relating to clergy stipends should be covered by a modest increase in Ministry Share (1.1%).

These changes mean a proposed budget of £8.05m expenditure and £6.61m income.

Other elements in the 2025 budget include:

- A £110k increase in the parsonages budget to reflect increased activity and in response to the impact that this has on clergy wellbeing.
- Safeguarding staffing costs increased in response to the recent INEQE safeguarding audit.

Synod asked a number of questions of clarification on the budget including on the Lowest Income Community funding, the use of Total Return funding, and the level of clergy stipends.

Given the late changes to the diocesan budget following the National Insurance increases in the Chancellor's Budget, Hugh Richards suggested that Bishop's Council should look again at this during its January meeting.



The Director of Finance moved that:

*“This Synod approves the 2025 budget presented by the Bishop’s Council and Standing Committee for the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited, which provides for operational expenditure of £8.05m in 2025, and operating income of £6.61m.”*

This was passed with 1 abstention.

Synod moved to become an Annual General Meeting of the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance. Chair of the DBF, Wadham Downing moved the following resolutions:

Resolution No.1:

*“The Company hereby approves the budget of the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited for 2025, as approved by the Diocesan Synod in its immediately preceding business.”*

This was passed with 1 abstention.

Resolution No.2:

*“That Crowe LLP be appointed as Auditors to The Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited”.*

This was passed unanimously.



The Chair of the diocesan Climate Crisis Task Group (CCTG), David Hewlett, presented the revised **Diocesan Environmental Strategy and Terms of Reference of the CCTG**. [Read the diocesan environmental strategy.](#)

He started by saying that it has been 15 years since diocesan synod first made a commitment to tackling environmental issues – our diocese has tried to be at the forefront of change in this area.

The amended diocesan strategy focusses on three areas:

Eco Church – everything we do in our churches should be infused with the gift of creation and our want to nurture it. We are well on our way to meeting this target, helped by a series of deanery champions.



Working towards net zero carbon emissions by 2030 – this is a really challenging target, particularly when there is so much else going on in our churches. We want to build up a picture of what really works for churches, road testing different projects to enable offer different solutions for different types of churches. Money remains a problem – the CoE is putting in significant resources to address the climate crisis and the CCTG wants to support parishes in this area. It is a really hard task but we need to bite the bullet.

Church's role in public witness – We want to work hard to tackle climate change because it is our deepest response to our faith and God's creation. We need to celebrate what we're doing and take a lead in society.

Comments from Synod members included points made on carbon offsetting, closure of churches and the fact that the world is watching.

The strategy and terms of reference were both approved with 3 votes against.



Following concerns over the communication of measures by the Church of England to make redress in respect of historical slavery issues, a motion was presented by Robin La Fontaine on behalf of **Malvern and Upton Deanery** calling on the Church Commissioners to promote informed public and media understanding of their role in such circumstances.

Robin explained that there had been concern recently in parishes regarding decisions made by the Church Commissioners on the use of their funds, with some individuals stopping their giving to their parish church as a result, and it was important that they are aware of this. The Church Commissioners need to explain themselves better and consult more widely and they also need to consider the unintended consequences of decisions they make.

Bishop Martin made it clear that this is not about the rights and wrongs of chattel slavery or the merits of the fund, but about the communication and consultation by the Church Commissioners.

*"This Synod urges the Church Commissioners to promote informed public and media understanding of their role, and to work towards timely and pro-active engagement with parishes through their Dioceses when considering the allocation of funds not prima facie related to the Commissioners' responsibilities for the mission and ministry of the Church of England or which may adversely affect stewardship in its parishes."*

There was a chance for synod to make comments and ask questions. Bishop Martin explained that if passed, he or the Diocesan Secretary will write to the Chair of the Church Commissioners to ensure the point is made clearly.

The motion was passed with 36 in favour, 6 against and 9 abstentions.



A motion was presented by Kate Hurst, Churchwarden of the Shelsleys, on behalf of **Kidderminster and Stourport Deanery** concerning Sustainable Church Flowers.

Kate explained that the use of floral foam or oasis is relatively new. It has only been used since the 1940s and enables micro plastics to go into the water stream. The Sustainable Church Flowers group based in the Diocese are happy to support parishes in switching to the use of locally grown, seasonable flowers and foliage which is arranged without floral foam.

*That this synod, embracing the principles of the Sustainable Church Flowers movement which encourages a living into the Fifth Mark of Mission by promoting the use of local, seasonal and fully biodegradable/ compostable flowers and foliage without floral foam (oasis).*

- 1. Encourages the use of locally grown flowers and foliage, wherever possible, throughout the churches of the Diocese*
- 2. Strongly discourages the use of all floral foam (and its substitutes) in all churches and churchyards across the Diocese.*

This was passed with 45 votes in favour, 2 votes against and 4 abstentions.

Bishop Martin proposed from the Chair that we should take this motion to General Synod.

*This synod requests the General Synod debate the previously passed motion.*

This was passed with 4 votes against and 3 abstentions.

Diocesan Synod approved the appointment of the Venerable Robert Jones as a **Trustee of Holland House** for a term of three years with 1 abstention.

Bishop Martin closed the meeting in prayer.

