

## ELY DIOCESAN SYNOD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Ely Diocesan Synod held at St Mary's, Ely on Saturday 9 March 2024

The meeting opened with worship led by Mrs Cathy Watts, Warden of Readers. Revd Iain Osborne was commissioned as Deputy Director of Strategy, Revd David Newton as Diocesan Director of Ordinands and Revd Canon Gill Jessop as Retired Clergy Officer

Prayers were offered for the speedy recovery of Paul Evans, Diocesan Secretary, following cancer surgery, along with grateful thanks to Revd Canon Brian Atling for assuming the role of Acting Diocesan Secretary in the interim

*Canon Simon Kershaw, Chair of the House of Laity, in the Chair*

1. **Apologies for Absence received**                      House of Clergy 22                      House of Laity 17
2. The **Minutes** of the meeting of Diocesan Synod held on 14 October 2023 were agreed and signed. There were no **Matters Arising**.

**Questions submitted to Diocesan Synod on 9 March 2024 under Standing Order 86** by David Brock, Granta Deanery:

*I ask the following question of the Secretary (or the acting diocesan secretary):*

*Why was I not immediately told when I inquired on 16 November 2023, or on 16 December, 24 January or 7 February, either that no Deanery Synod standing orders are in place; or, in the event that they are in place, were they not supplied to me?*

*I ask the following question of the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, (who is also the Diocesan Secretary's line manager):*

*Is the Diocesan Office and its staff adequately resourced and supported to carry out all their duties, whether or not arising from the diocesan synod, including during times of vacancy or change of diocesan bishop and of staff illness?*

In answer to Mr Brock's first question, the Acting Diocesan Secretary, Revd Canon Brian Atling, responded that the 1991 Deanery Synod Standing Orders were in the process of being updated. He gave his assurance that the 1991 Deanery Standing Orders would be reinstated on the Diocesan website as soon as possible. A lay member of Diocesan Synod has volunteered to update the 1991 Standing Orders in line with the 2019 Diocesan Synod Standing Orders and these would be issued to Rural Deans and Lay Chairs for consultation as soon as they are finalised. Lay Chairs will be encouraged to use them as part of Induction Packs for new Deanery Synod members.

The Chair of the Ely Board of Finance (EDBF), Canon Tim Walters, assured members of Synod of the importance of EDBF staff welfare and wellbeing to all members of Senior Staff, highlighting the benefits and comfort of the new building, the consideration of staffing levels and regular objective reviews of projects and tasks. He also assured members of Diocesan Synod that the offices were adequately resourced.

**Safeguarding Annual Report:** Ms Rebecca Boswell, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, and Jon Chapman, Independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel presented the Safeguarding Team's Annual Report which had been circulated. She highlighted the maintenance of the Safeguarding team's business focus in a time of change, unrest and difficulty for its members following the publication of the Jay Report. In 2026 there is a planned audit of the Safeguarding Team by the Elite Group, focussing on the three-year Diocesan strategy against the National Standards

In order to support parishes better in their safeguarding practices and around the Parish Dashboard, a member of staff's hours have been increased.

Sincere thanks were given to the Safeguarding Team and to Mr Chapman

The **Presidential Address** from the Bishop of Huntingdon is summarised below:

“Bishop Dagmar offered thanks to Diocesan officers and especially to the Revd Canon Brian Atling for stepping into the breach during the Diocesan Secretary’s medical leave.

In her address she reflected on the “mode of aggression” (Hartmut Rosa) which characterises the way we live and experience life. She applied this to our political life with forthcoming elections (our democracy can feel so fragile because it cannot thrive in this aggressive mode), to the wars in Ukraine and Gaza wars, to the ecological crisis, to the way we treat each other personally and to our relationships within the church.

We know that our Christian ethic points us into a different direction, namely patterns of mutuality that reflect God’s love towards others, where our righteousness is bound up with our nourishment of each other.

I Kings 3, Solomon’s prayer for wisdom and understanding, points with the original Hebrew word to the importance of hearing which needs to go alongside having a voice to be heard, in fact not only hearing but wanting to hear, a listening heart.

May our churches be spaces where a listening heart can be practised and experienced, not least for survivors of church abuse and racism.

Encouraging parishes in political constituencies to work together for hustings, please note that as soon as a General Election is called, there will be resources for hosting hustings provided by the Church of England nationally.

In the Mothering Sunday Gospel from John 19 we find the foundations of the church, new relationship forged by and in Christ, experiencing a new birth, implying mutual love, respect, care and protection.”

**Net Zero Carbon and Ely Church Buildings Partnership** - a presentation by Geoffrey Hunter (GH), Head of Church Buildings and Pastoral Department.

GH outlined the history behind the Net Zero Carbon initiative, the funds made available to the Diocese of Ely (£15k in March 2023, followed by a further £131k grant in September 2023). The Diocese of Ely contributes to the cost of a regional liaison officer and has appointed a Net Zero Carbon Officer (Sacha Watson) who will work with Revd Canon Nigel Cooper as Diocesan Environmental Officer. Grants have also been received for demonstrator projects in churches and houses. Further grants may be made available.

GH then recounted the background to the Ely Church Buildings Partnership relating to churches identified for closure. A pilot area has been identified in the Diocese of Ely (the three Leightonstone Benefices) where there is enthusiasm to embrace the project. Buildings for Mission grants 2023-2025 are being offered by the Church Commissioners.

**Topics for future Synods** were invited to be considered in round table discussions and handed to the Bishop of Huntingdon for onward circulation.

**Business of the Ely Diocesan Board of Finance:** Canon Tim Walters (TW), Chair of the Ely Diocesan Board of Finance, advised that the annual audit for 2023 was in progress and that this was planned for completion on 15 April 2024. He advised that the out-turn for 2023 was most encouraging and better than budgeted although figures were yet to be finalised; Ministry Share receipts at 95% of request were approximately the same as for 2022 and that investment income had been slightly higher than anticipated. Clergy costs had been kept within budget, although housing and housing maintenance costs had increased significantly and were undergoing a revaluation following a sizeable deficit on the Housing budget in 2023. Grateful thanks were passed to Mrs Stella Green, Property Manager, for her work with the parsonage houses. TW noted that it is hoped the Annual Accounts 2023 will be prepared for approval by Diocesan Synod at the June meeting 2024.

The budget process for 2025 has started. There will be a clergy stipend increase of 7% in April 2024 with an anticipated rise of 4% in April 2025 (with a corresponding Ministry Share increase of 3%). He advised that it was necessary to have the correct number of staff in place to support these processes.

**Project Lancaster:** After almost four years, the new Diocese of Ely Offices and Training Centre, Etheldreda House, is ready for opening to staff on 22 April 2024. The building's completion was delayed by just two weeks and, although there had been approximately 400 items on the snagging list, this has reduced to approximately 60 items. Throughout the entirety of the build and construction phases, the Relocation Board has been kept informed of progress and received weekly updates from the Project Lancaster Working Group. The hot desk booking systems, together with signing in process and room bookings procedures, are currently being worked on.

Mrs Rebecca Cowburn, elected lay member to General Synod, gave a summary of the proceeding at the February sessions of **General Synod**. The Jay Report was received 3 days in advance of the meeting, and consequently there had been no time to discuss it with the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser or the Independent Chair. The debate about Living in Love and Faith had been adjourned for further work until the July meeting.

Dr Jonathan Chaplin brought a **Private Member's Motion** to Diocesan Synod

**The motion:**

1. *That this synod regards the House of Bishops' three statements on the Israeli-Gaza conflict since October 2023 as seriously deficient, and calls on it as a matter of urgency to issue a new statement which, inter alia:*

- *while reiterating its condemnation of Hamas's attack on 7 October, condemns the military assault by Israel on Gaza since then not only as morally unacceptable, but as involving numerous egregious violations of international humanitarian law (as detailed in the UK Lawyers' Open Letter Concerning Gaza of 26 October 2023 and the Order of the International Court of Justice of 26 January 2024);*
- *affirms that an explicit recognition of the decades of forced dispossession, illegal occupation, systemic discrimination and continual brutalisation inflicted on the Palestinian people by the Israeli state, all amounting to a suppression of their legitimate right to national self-determination as established in international law, is essential for a proper understanding of the conflict and its resolution in a way that is conducive to a just and sustainable peace that must include independent Palestinian statehood.*

2. *It also calls upon other diocesan synods to pass similar motions at the earliest opportunity and to convey them to the House of Bishops.*

After discussion it was agreed with the Proposer (Dr Jonathan Chaplin) and Seconder (Revd James Shakespeare) that the motion should be divided into two parts (per numbered points above) and debated accordingly.

Following debate, the first part of the motion was carried: the second part of the motion was defeated

Part 1 For the motion:	23	Against the motion:	15	Abstention:	11
Part 2 For the motion:	10	Against the motion:	27	Abstention:	12

Canon Dr Felicity Cooke, as Vice Chair of the Diocese of Ely **Vacancy in See** Committee (ViSC), presented an update on the process to appoint the next Bishop of Ely. She advised members of Synod that the six elected members of the Ely ViSC had met with the six nationally appointed colleagues over Zoom. The short listing of candidates would take place in mid-May, with interviews taking place on 11 and 12 July.

The **Bishop's Council** Report was delivered by Revd Canon Brian Atling, Acting Diocesan Secretary, in the medical absence of Canon Paul Evans. He advised that interviews for the new Diocesan Director of Education were shortly to take place and that there would be an Education update at the November meeting of Bishop's Council.

Sheena Bridgman, Elections Lead, advised that the election for members of Diocesan Synod for the 2024-2027 triennium would begin in May, with a final date of 15 July 2024. Newly elected Diocesan Synod members would attend their first meeting on Saturday 19 October, taking up their roles on 1 August 2024.

The last meeting of the current triennium's Bishop's Council would take place in November 2024 with elections taking place in the autumn 2024. The first meeting of the newly elected Bishop's Council would take place in January 2025.

The last meeting of this triennium's Synod will be 19 June 2024.

Any Other Business - none submitted.

The meeting closed with prayer at 12.55pm