

**Minutes of a meeting of Lichfield Diocesan Synod
30th November 2024, 9.30 am, Aldridge Church Centre**

Present:	The Bishop of Lichfield (President) The Bishop of Shrewsbury The Bishop of Stafford The Bishop of Wolverhampton 42 clergy members 40 lay members
In attendance:	Mrs Julie Jones (Diocesan Secretary) Mr Jonathan Hill (Director of Finance) Mrs Jess Dace (Deputy to the Director of Finance) Mr Mark Davis (Director of Education) The Revd Simon Foster (Head of Mission Team)
Apologies:	19 clergy members 19 lay members

The President assumed the Chair

1. Welcome and Opening Prayers

The Revd David Sims led an act of opening worship.

Bishop Michael welcomed all. He then The President paid tribute to the work of John (Tug) Wilson, the outgoing Lay Chair of Synod, for his many years of conscientious service. Members showed their appreciation with a round of applause.

He then also thanked Helen Palfrey, who was soon to step down as Diocesan Mothers' Union President and nominated member of Synod, for all her work in this role. This was also greeted with applause.

Members were asked to keep in their prayers Gilbert David and Chris Gill who were unable to attend for medical reasons.

The Bishop of Wolverhampton was warmly welcomed to his first meeting.

2. Presidential Address

Bishop Michael then gave his Presidential Address, speaking about the debate on Assisted Dying that had taken place in parliament the previous day, the result of which he was deeply disquieted by. Also, the restored Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris had opened, and he noted that our church buildings could be powerful reminders to people of the enduring reality of the Christian faith, standing invitations to enter more fully into engagement with the life-giving gospel. There were many other ways in which people of the diocese could encounter the living God through contact with chaplaincies, schools and community projects, in friendships freely built, in service gladly offered. He asked that as Synod engaged with its agenda, that we prayed earnestly that God would give us wisdom, discernment and faith to tackle our challenges and to build on our opportunities so that God's Kingdom may be built among us.

[The full text is available in the folder of papers on the diocesan website](#)

The Chair of the House of Laity assumed the Chair

The new Chair of the House of Laity, Amanda Robbie, introduced herself, and explained that it was proposed to adjourn the agenda item on National Financial Allocation, as new information had been

received on this matter with new proposals expected from the National Church. She then formally proposed the adjournment, and this was clearly approved by a vote.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and Matters Arising (DS24/11/01)

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd July 2024 were approved and signed by the President accordingly. No matters arising had been notified.

3. Towards Net Zero Carbon (DS24/11/02)

At the Chair's invitation Emma Popo (Net Zero Carbon Project Manager) and Jan Firth (Net Carbon Zero Officer) gave a presentation to introduce the **Net Zero Carbon Action Plan 2024-30**. This set out the diocese's response to the national church's goal to become net zero carbon by 2030. She explained the definition of NZC, and how it could be achieved by firstly, reducing our emissions to under 10% of our baseline levels, and secondly by offsetting what could not be reduced. Jan Firth then spoke in detail about the Eco-Church Scheme, which it was felt could be key in us achieving our goal. She encouraged members to contact her for more information and presentations for churches on this. Emma continued by speaking about developments relating to clergy housing, and then talked through the headlines of the action plan and how it could be implemented across the diocese, churches and buildings, clergy housing, schools, offices and land. The plan was multi-faceted and needed support from all to succeed but Emma was confident that with this support much could be achieved.

The Revd Abbie Walsh (Lichfield), spoke about the Diocesan Green Team, of which she was a member, explaining that it was informal group who had been working together to support each other in initiatives of creation care. She felt strongly that what had been presented was a faithful response to the climate crisis that believed that renewal and resurrection were possible. She then commended the following:

This Synod, recognising

(a) that there is a global climate emergency, caused by global heating and climate change and that this is a crisis for God's creation

(b) that there is a rapidly increasing issue of climate injustice, as the poorer nations in the global south are affected first, therefore

(i) every individual Anglican Christian is strongly encouraged to practise creation care at the heart of their daily, prayerful and sacrificial following of Christ;

(ii) commits as a diocese to welcome the Action Plan presented on November 30th 2024 and resources for sustainable living including:

- policies and procedures to minimise waste and increase use of renewable energies;*
- the incorporation of creation care into liturgical practice;*
- discipleship and other resources to support our worshipping communities in deepening commitment and understanding;*

and in order that this target can be achieved

(iii) requests a report to Synod every 12 months on progress, beginning in 2025.

The Revd Neil Robbie (West Bromwich) thanked Emma and Jan for their work. He explained he wished to move an amendment to the motion set out (full text is appended to these minutes). He then proposed the following amendment:

This Synod, recognising

(a) that the earth is the Lord's, everything in it and all who live in it.

(i) all people are commanded by God to care for and steward the earth for the benefit of this and future generations, working with Christ, the first fruits of the new creation, towards the renewal of the earth;

(ii) that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe, turning the hearts of the wicked to righteousness, which includes acts of thoughtful, caring, sacrificial stewardship of the earth.

(b) that there is a rapidly increasing issue of climate injustice as not all regions suffer the effects of climate change equally

(i) that whilst developed nations have working infrastructure and sufficient material resources to mitigate the effects of extreme weather, poorer nations in the majority world lack the means and social policies to cope with extreme weather, therefore:

(ii) God calls every individual Anglican Christian to practise creation care as part of their daily, prayerful and sacrificial following of Christ;

(iii) every individual Anglican is encouraged to be unashamed of the gospel, calling everyone to turn away from actions which deny God's ownership of all things, including greed, corruption and extractive economic practices which lead to a lack of investment in social infrastructure such as drainage, water treatment, waste collection, building regulations, property insurance and renewable energy infrastructure, as we hold out the full forgiveness and hope of Christ with the call to follow him as he renews the earth.

(iv) commits us as a diocese to welcome the Action Plan presented on November 30th 2024 and resources for sustainable living including, but not limited to:

- policies and procedures to minimise waste and increase use of renewable energies;*
- the incorporation of creation care into liturgical practice;*
- discipleship, vocational, evangelistic and other resources to support our worshipping communities in deepening commitment and understanding in order that these goals can be achieved*

(v) requests a report to Synod every 12 months on progress, beginning in 2025.

The Revd Preb Pat Hawkins (General Synod and Chair of the DAC) was thankful for the original motion and the amendment and was supportive of both. She also thanked Emma and Jan for their encouraging, realistic and hopeful presentation. She commented that there was a need for good, informed advice on heating systems and she was concerned in that regard about the capacity of the DAC, which, she said, could not possibly broker that advice to every parish. She also commented that help and advice regarding temporary solutions whilst considering the longer term was also needed. Her final point was around joined up thinking, and she was very surprised that the goals of the new diocesan strategy did not include net zero carbon.

The Revd Preb Sarah Schofield (Wolverhampton and Lead Chaplain of Wolverhampton University) was delighted to support the amendment put forward. She stressed that it was currently very difficult to be an Anglican in Higher Education and she was very excited by what was being presented. It was an opportunity for evangelism for the church and to engage with the interests of students, taking the Gospel into our universities.

Mr Geoff Locke (Newcastle) thanked Emma and Jan for their work on the strategy. Noting that the environmental situation was described as a crisis, he said too that we faced multiple crises in our church including lack of volunteers, the nature of marriage, safeguarding and finance. Addressing one such crisis, took away resources from another, and he felt this was a very significant problem. He therefore asked who could carry out the work involved to implement the strategy.

The Revd David Sims (Walsall) spoke about his experience of dealing with environmental issues as a former Geography teacher, and he wholeheartedly supported both the original motion and the amendment, and was enthused by the plan presented, which he felt was ambitious and realistic. He added that he would welcome more theology throughout the plan to explain why we were striving to achieve the aims it contained.

Mr John Wilson (General Synod) welcomed the plan, but asked that a glossary of abbreviations used be provided. He then said that he was concerned that our churches were not in a position to make the changes outlined due to unsuitable systems that would require considerable cost to upgrade. He also echoed Geoff Locke's point regarding who would be able to carry out the work and give the time commitment needed. He therefore felt that the timescale of 2030 was questionable.

The Revd Preb Simon Davis (Rugeley) whilst acknowledging the concerns raised, supported the motion saying that its essential direction was something the Gospel called us to. He felt that the international dimension was important, as we needed to play our part in responding to issues across the world. He wholeheartedly supported the motion, although all aims may not be achieved by 2030.

The Revd Preb Briam Leathers (Uttoxeter) passionately supported the amended motion as it set out the reasons behind the sacrificial actions needed.

Dr Michael Davie (Oswestry) echoed previous comments around churches need for financial help and for help from the DAC.

Mrs Penny Allen (General Synod) was fully in favour of the motion and believed it was essential that everyone engaged with it. As a member of the Glebe Committee she also reported that the Committee was analysing all land holdings in the diocese with a view to carbon offsetting. She was grateful for the presentation and asked that it made available to members. She wholeheartedly supported all the work that was taking place, but liked the simplicity of the original motion, as it was perhaps more accessible to those outside the church. Lastly, she encouraged members to think about the small things that churches could be doing, as well as the larger projects.

Mr Rob Surl (Shrewsbury and Wrekin) said that in general, fewer words and more action was needed. Given that we faced the need to reduce carbon, the damage being caused to the environment and the commands of Scripture, he welcomed the strategy. It was a clear framework for dialogue, support and action. He also welcomed the original motion, as it was clear, simple and easily communicated, although the theology was not clearly articulated, but assumed. He suggested that, if passed, the amendment be appended to all future versions of the strategy. If not passed, then he suggested the essence of it be incorporated into the strategy.

A vote then took place on the acceptance of the amendment, and this was clearly carried.

Jan Firth then spoke about the category within Eco Church of "Global and Community Engagement" which implored churches to partner and work with countries that were struggling with climate change.

Emma Popo addressed the concerns raised about the DAC's capacity, noting that Giles Standing, the DAC Secretary was part of the Net Zero Steering Group. A priority in the next six months was to increase access to expert advice.

She also acknowledged the points raised about theology, saying that it was assumed, and the strategy was aimed at setting out how aims could be achieved, rather than why. She was however now considering how something might be added to the document that did not impact on its clarity.

The Revd Dr Abbie Walsh then moved the amended motion.

This was voted upon and carried with 3 abstentions.

The Chair of the Board of Finance assumed the chair

5. Budget 2025 (DS24/11/03)

The Chair of the Board of Finance introduced this section of the meeting, setting the scene for the Budget presentation. All the diocese's activities required funding, and the budget would set out how this would be achieved, how funds would be spent and how they would be used to support parishes. He pointed out that central costs as shown in the budget, were very low for an organisation of the Board's size. A further forty-five parishes had asked for assistance in completing their accounts, but staffing was not being increased, rather reorganisation was taking place to enable this support to be offered whilst existing work continued. He acknowledged the current difficulties faced by all, but asked members to take back a message to deaneries and PCCs asking them to bring to God their individual giving and ask Him to show you His will for them and their future giving. He urged members to encourage the deaneries to discuss this important subject, and also clergy to preach on it. He reflected that there had been many difficult periods in the past and throughout history, but God had always been with us. He added that if current givers gave £1 per week more, this would have a significant positive impact. He also spoke about the impact of giving time to your church in a multitude of roles, which, no matter how small, were important to God. He closed by saying "we came into this world with nothing, and we will leave this world with nothing. In the meantime, everything we have is a gift from God. So please ask God, how much of what he is giving you, you can give back".

The Finance Director then presented the Budget for 2025, full copies of which had been circulated to members. He explained that the budget presented had been necessarily amended following the Government's recent budget, and this amended budget had been approved by Bishop's Council at an extra-ordinary meeting on 19th November.

The main reason for the amendments were changes in Employers' National Insurance. This had been increased but bigger impact had been due to the lowering of the threshold for paying this (annual cost of £293,0000. Ways of financing this had been looked at. Adding the cost to the Common Fund, reducing costs, increasing the vacancy factor, deployment or the property budget had been looked at but were not viable options along with adding to cost to the deficit. It had been agreed to provide for the cost through reductions to salary and stipend increases for 2025, thereby removing the additional cost to assist with future budgets.

He went to explain that the budget reflected the challenges we currently faced, income being the most difficult, as was also the experience in parishes. However also costs were rising at a quicker rate than income.

He highlighted the following headlines:

- The Board was using £1.672 million of reserves to finance the budget.
- Total Return income would increase to £650,000.
- Resourcing the Future to increase to £564,000
- General Reserves of £458,000
- Common Fund formula to increase by 2%

- Subsidised Cost of Deployment £58,770
- Real Cost increased to £66,484 (£63,484 inc TRA)
- Stipend increase of 4.5%
- Pensions rate down 1% to 24%
- Salary increases 4%
- Inflation range 3-7%
- Vacancy factor increased to 15%
- Overall expenditure increases 2.22%
- Income down by 0.58%

He wished to point out that the vacancy rate was neither intentional nor aspirational, and no appointment had been blocked or vacancy extended due to diocesan finances. He would happily accept an overspend if vacancies were lower than anticipated. He also explained that the Common Fund formula had a built-in vacancy factor and was a subsidised Cost of Deployment – not the cost of a minister.

Important factors behind the budget remained of concern, including:

- Cashflow
- Energy and Council Tax increases
- Changes in rental rules
- Sustainability/closed churches
- Listed Places of Worship Grant changes
- Lack of volunteers
- Changes in legislation

Some of these could be mitigated by our own actions such as maximising assets, and outside the budget there was national church funding for particular posts. Work had already begun on property priorities such as insulation and solar panels and changing our approach to managing glebe assets. Priority was also given to maximising resources available and utilising Giving Direct and digital giving, for example.

The difficulties of the cost of living faced by all were appreciated, but “small and simple” actions could make a big difference. An example of everyone on an electoral roll in the diocese giving £1 extra per week would equate to £1.92 million more in income. He reiterated the importance also of saying thank you to our donors, volunteers and to each other.

In conclusion he reminded members that it was important not to confuse challenging times with negativity. There was much to remain grateful for and so much to give. We were still very much in control despite circumstances and still had options for discussions. We must continue to work together. He ended with phrases from the Serenity Prayer “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can”.

The Chair then moved that:

The Board be authorised to expend in 2025 a sum not exceeding £16,445,987 as representing the net unrestricted expenditure for the year ending 31.12.25.

The Finance Director then moved that:

The Board of Finance Budget for 2025 be received

Mr John Wilson (General Synod) wholeheartedly thanked the Finance Director and team for all they did for the Diocese.

He then asked if a template letter about Listed Places of Worship Grants could be sent around to members so that they could approach their MP.

The Finance Director said that this had been sent out in the Diocesan Bulletin.

The Revd Neil Robbie (West Bromwich) echoed sincere thanks to the Finance Director and team. He had been reflecting on how parishes approached training and equipping parishioners in Discipleship, Vocation and Evangelism, on which about 5% of the parish budget was spent. He asked senior leaders whether there could be more consultation with parishes on training needs and discussion on whether we moved to a model (similar to academies) where choice was available as to training providers.

Bishop Michael acknowledged the point and said that consideration would be given to it.

Mr Phil Dooley (Wolverhampton) asked if clergy were approached whilst in training and challenged about their choices of areas to work in, and perhaps to give more consideration to urban areas.

Bishop Michael appreciated the point of this question. He added that Theological Education Institutions were diverse and our influence on them varied. He was however grateful for this challenge.

Mrs Penny Allen (General Synod) said that “talking up” the diocese was very important. She was very grateful for the support offered in the diocese that equated to £10,000 per year for every full-time post and wanted this to be acknowledged. She spoke about the work of the Glebe Operations group in managing land and maximising it as an asset. This was becoming increasingly important. She also warmly thanked the Finance Director and team and hoped that everyone present would leave grateful for everything that was done on their behalf.

Votes then took place on both motions set out, and these were carried unanimously.

6. Deanery Synod Representation for the Connect 2 BMO (DS24/11/05)

A paper setting out a proposed scheme for deanery synod representation for the Connect 2 BMO had been circulated previously.

The Revd Simon Davis (Rugeley) asked for further information about the BMO.

The Archdeacon of Stoke-upon-Trent explained that Connect 2 was a congregation started in Brown Edge, Leek Deanery in 2019. It had been set up by a Bishop’s Mission Order (BMO) – a legal process by which a worshipping community could be established outside of, but in relationship with, parish structures). The BMO had now been renewed indefinitely and the proposal provided for deanery synod representation to enhance relations with Leek Deanery (a mechanism for which was set out in Church Representation Rules). The approval of Diocesan Synod was required.

The Revd Iain Baker (Newcastle) asked how many BMOs there were in the diocese and whether they all had such representation.

The Diocesan Secretary said that she would confirm this in writing as she did not have the information to hand.

The Archdeacon added that not all BMOs would necessarily have representation in this way as they operated in different ways, and some may not benefit from it.

The Chair then moved that:

This Synod approves the proposals laid out in DS24/11/05

This was voted upon and carried with 3 abstentions.

7. General Synod Report (DS24/03/06)

A Report, by Chris Gill, of the July Sessions of General Synod had been circulated previously. There were no questions.

The Chair then moved that:

The report of the General Synod sessions in July 2024 be received.

This was voted upon and carried unanimously.

8. Question Time

The Question Time paper was the discussed, which contained which contained twenty-three written questions and answers and written answers from diocesan officers. The following supplementary questions were then raised:

In respect of Question 4, The Revd Neil Robbie (West Bromwich) added that the real cost of deployment was calculated by dividing the costs of running the diocese by the target number of clergy, currently 216. As clergy numbers fall and, if the diocesan costs remain fixed, then the real cost of deployment would increase. This seemed to him to be an unsustainable financial model for parishes and ultimately for the diocese. Could the diocese consider a review of the model?

The Diocesan Secretary said that this was a very complicated question which needed more consideration and so she would provide a written answer.

In respect of Question 12, the Revd Paul Kingman (Stone) asked about the basis for the figures shown in the answer given regarding goals for congregational numbers (60 and 300).

The Archdeacon of Stoke-upon-Trent answered that the figures were not based on a model but on reasonable aims following research which brought together possibility and interest expressed.

The Revd Paul Kingman (Stone) then also asked whether there had been any discussions with non-Anglican churches whose congregations had already had good numbers of young people who possibly were pupils of the schools and colleges that were mentioned.

The Archdeacon replied that it was not evident from talking to ecumenical colleagues that these churches were attended by good numbers of young people.

In respect of Question 13, Mr Steve Vince (Wulfrun) asked if there could be analysis where parishes had been vacant for 12 months or more, as to the reasons why.

In respect of Question 16, Mr John Tooms (Trysull) was grateful for the answer given. He spoke about experience in his own church and wondered whether there was a possibility of looking at the DAC system nationally with a view to saving money.

The Revd Preb Pat Hawkins (General Synod and Chair of the DAC) said that it was worth noting the problem and as previously mentioned, building up expertise on specific areas. She noted however that without the DAC, churches may have to approach other bodies who may not be as sympathetic to issues

faced by churches. She recommended the Church Buildings Council website, which explained about Ecclesiastical Exemptions, and why DACs and Faculty Permissions were needed.

In respect of Question 20, the Revd Steve Nicholson (Oswestry) had not seen any Lichfield vacancies listed on the Pathways website, and asked if there was a reason why the diocese did not use it.

Bishop Michael said that after analysis it had been evident that Pathways had not been particularly effective in attracting applicants.

In respect of Question 23, Mrs Josephine Locke (Newcastle) asked whether it was only full-time Archdeacons who conducted exit interviews, or did Acting Archdeacons also conduct them in their archdeaconries?

The Diocesan Secretary answered that it was the full-time Archdeacons who had done so, partly because the Acting Archdeacons also had their parish work. She looked forward to there being 4 full-time archdeacons in the near future, so that there could be consistency in this.

Mr John Wilson (General Synod) Tug Wilson asked members to consider carefully when asking questions and particularly for information, what the purpose was, as there was a cost, both in time and in turn financially, to every answer given by diocesan staff.

11. Issues facing the Diocese in 2025 – a reflection from the Diocesan Secretary

The Diocesan Secretary spoke on the occasion of her last meeting in the role before retiring at the end of the year. She reflected on her over fifteen years in the role, including attending forty-three meetings of Synod, reflecting on some of the difficulties faced throughout and those in the present and future. She also spoke of some of the wonderful highlights of her time and the many and reasons for hope. She thanked officers and members for their support throughout.

12. Farewell to the Diocesan Secretary

Bishop Michael led Synod in expressing its heartfelt thanks to Julie for her service over the last 15+ years, and expressed love and prayers for Julie in the future. This was greeted with warm applause. Bishop Matthew then led prayers for Julie.

Bishop Michael closed the meeting in prayer.

The following items were deemed to have been noted by the Synod:

- Standing Committee Report (DS24/11/07)

All papers and presentations are linked from the web page [here](#).

JD February 2025

*I want to thank the environmental group for the amazing work which is being done to move us toward Net Zero Carbon. This is vital work. I am fully committed.
Thank you.*

Christians should be the most passionate, caring and sacrificial stewards of creation.

We worship the God who made everything.

We know the God who deeply, deeply loves all he has made.

And God commands us to steward the earth for the good of this and future generations.

A few years ago, a sixth form RE teacher asked me to take a class on eschatology. She was concerned because her pupils had adopted a hopeless and anxious view of the end time. Fascinatingly, they cast themselves as the Saviours of the earth.

I was once a convinced and anxious atheist myself. On many nights, I would lie in bed, awake, thinking about what would happen when the sun burns out and all life on earth dies.

I found this knowledge deeply troubling. Things have changed in changed in 30 years.

The death of the earth may now occur before the death of the sun as we humans crucify the planet, but

We believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

We believe in Jesus Christ

who was crucified, died, and was buried;

On the third day he rose again the first fruit of the new creation. He ascended to his Father

He will come to judge the living and the dead. He is making all things new.

His kingdom will have no end.

This faith in this Jesus turns our anxious fear to joyful hope.

Whether the earth dies first, or the sun dies first Death in Christ precedes resurrection in Christ

Our work is not to save the earth

Our work is to join with Christ the Saviour He is at work

to renew all things

We are to combine careful, sacrificial stewardship of the earth with joyful, hopeful evangelism.

We are to establish patterns of stewardship and worship now which we will carry into the new creation.

Here and now, we acknowledge that Climate change is affecting every part of the world.

We acknowledge that Climate injustice means not all people are affected equally.

The effects of Climate change have more severe effects on river deltas, low lying islands, sub-saharan Africa and hurricane or cyclone zones and inflict greater pain on those poor souls who live in those regions.

To love and care for those poor, suffering souls will require more than achieving Net Zero Carbon. Christians need to go the extra mile.

When floods hit Cumbria or Shropshire, people suffer dreadful loss, but we have the resources and infrastructure in this country, including the Christian practice of creating a common pot for insurance against disaster.

People can recover relatively quickly. And we are making increasing efforts to re-wild, re-forest and slow down the runoff.

But when monsoon rains hit Bangladesh or South-East Pakistan, people are left destitute.

When corrupt government officials and wealthy business owners extract wealth from a nation, the people suffer.

The wealthy buy luxury properties in London and superyachts in Monaco, rather than investing in drainage, clean water, sewerage treatment, waste collection or renewable energy infrastructure.

And so we must not be ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God for salvation for all who believe in Christ, the Saviour.

Jesus turns the hearts of the wicked to righteousness, from greed to generosity, from self-care to compassion. The fruit of the gospel is reduced corruption and increased social care and cohesion.

Net Zero Carbon is vital. Even secular folk know this. Our motion can tell the better story and go the extra mile

Let the motion also reflect our joyful hope for creation in Christ's resurrection from the dead.

And let's commit ourselves, as global Anglicans, to Net Carbon Zero and global evangelism with the fruit of social justice.

I move the amendment which stands in my name.