

Forest Deanery Strategic Plan

Deanery Synod Update April 2024

How we got here

The Deanery Strategic Plan (DSP) process started towards the end of 2019. In February 2020 Deanery Synod looked at what it means to journey together and what we would need to be equipped for the journey. We considered how we might share the gospel a fresh in this place and how we might reimagine the deanery. A map was then created with populations, places of work, schools, housing, care homes, hospitals and other places where people gather.

The timing of the launch of this new planning process did not expect a global pandemic or the response it would require from all of our communities. It is fair to say that this process has been much longer and drawn out than expected.

The DSP working group has met each February and November since then with additional focused discussions or pieces of work in between. In January 2021, there was agreement that we were building consensus around what should be in the plan. In June 2021, the Archdeacons made a Facilitator available to each Deanery to support the development of the plans given the additional workloads and complexities of lockdown.

Our facilitator Keith helped us present the developing plan to Deanery Synod in July 2021. 3 areas of focus, relationships, deepening faith and resources were developing. Some areas were identified as needing additional work with the changing landscape we found ourselves in.

In February 2022 the working group did a stock take after churches had worked through the challenging process of reopening post lockdowns. By November 2022 a SWOT analysis had been undertaken and a DSP Survey shared through Deanery Synod.

The working group created an action plan that was discussed with archdeacons and bishops in April 2023 to identify activities that would allow mission to flourish, primarily through parishes. This discussion informed the next revision of the DSP that was presented to Deanery Synod in May 2023. Further work was undertaken by the working group to revise the plan before all the Deanery plans were presented to the Bishops and Archdeacons at an Away Day in November 2023. This version of the plan was presented to Deanery Synod later that month.

Where we are now

We now have a Deanery Strategic Plan that is ready to be put into action. The plan is descriptive, not prescriptive. That is, it seeks to set out the values and culture we want to foster throughout the deanery and the future we want to create together. It does not seek to tell people what to do, but offers opportunities for everyone to get involved. There is a sense to that we need to be diligent in prayer and open to the guidance of God through our work rather than believing we have all the answers ourselves. The plan values:

- A commitment to the Forest
- Acting locally
- Sharing and making connections
- Seeking justice

The vision of the DSP is **allowing mission to flourish, primarily through the parishes; maintaining focal ministry and removing obstacles.**

Our 4 pillars

Focal ministry

Focal Ministers are people called to serve the church in a public-facing role in their parishes. They are authorised by the Bishop, supported by the diocese and rooted to provide a regular presence in a congregation and/or community. Focal Ministry Teams take responsibility, with the oversight of a member of clergy and relevant others, for the development and delivery of mission and ministry in a parish.

Our DSP seeks to identify, develop and support focal ministers across our communities to be the public face of the church in that place, to build teams and lead ministry. This should allow for better local pastoral relationships and support clergy who are often spread over wide geographic areas.

Youth ministry

Ministry to primary schools was highlighted as a success within the development of our plan with lots of different initiatives like Open the Book and Messy Church already taking place. A weakness was identified in our support for young people in our secondary schools. All our parishes have children of secondary school age, but only 4 parishes have a secondary school in them.

This pillar seeks to explore opportunities to collaboratively develop better ministry with young people across our deanery with a particular focus on how church can be involved in our secondary schools. This will involve work directly with young people but will also explore opportunities for Christians to be involved in the governing and running of our schools too.

Buildings

Right from the initial mapping of our DSP, buildings have been identified as a particular challenge and concern for many parishes. This pillar of our plan will identify specific areas in which we can collectively support one another as we care for and develop the use of our buildings.

Supporting the development of 'Friends of' groups, attracting community and grant funding, joint purchasing, mutual support and Diocesan expertise and input will all form part of this pillar.

Training and support

In many of our parishes, many roles are done by a few people. This pillar aims to support those working diligently, and often silently, to keep our buildings open and activities taking place. It also seeks to identify ways in which we can better recruit and encourage those with a ministry as an officer in the church, for example developing new churchwardens and treasurers.

Diocese wide themes

As Bea reported to Deanery Synod in November 2023, when all the deanery plans were presented at the Away Day, 6 broad themes captured the activities from ours and the other deaneries.

- Development of collaborative ministry - our pillar of focal ministry
- Growing faith - our pillar of youth ministry
- Church buildings - our pillar of buildings
- Administration and governance - our pillar of training and support.
- Finance
- New housing developments

It is worth stressing that our pillars have not been given to us from Church House or a central process. Our pillars have been directly developed out of our work and feedback within this deanery and are owned by us. It is worth noting however that across the Diocese, deaneries are facing similar challenges and this central feedback is helping to shape the support that Church House offer to us.

It may be a surprise that we do not have a particular focus around finance. There is a process currently to develop and share a new plan for parish share. We will have opportunities to feed into this process as Deanery Synod and parishes. This may develop further areas for focus in future but was felt better to be led centrally across the Diocese together, rather than individually.

Pillar leads

Following the last Deanery Synod, we have combined the Deanery Standing Committee and DSP working group and updated the membership. Thank you to those who came forward to join the group. The membership is now:

- Bea Erskine - Area Dean (Mid-Wyedean)
- David Gardiner - Assistant Area Dean (Lydney)
- Chris Witham - Deanery Lay Chair (Cinderford with Littledean)
- Bev Bowles - Deanery Secretary (Newnham)
- James Parsons - Deanery Treasurer (Tiddenham)
- Sarah Bick (Mid-Wyedean)
- Steve Harrison (Bream)

We are seeking a few more members to ensure we have representation from across the deanery, so if you're interested, please speak to Bea.

Whilst we want the plan to be owned and implemented by the deanery as a collective, we appreciate that it is necessary to provide some support and structure to each pillar. As such, the pillar leads will be a facilitative role, building and supporting groups of people who share an interest in that particular area of focus. Pillar leads will also report back to Deanery Synod about activity within their pillar.

Focal ministry - Sarah Bick
Youth ministry - Steve Harrison
Buildings - Chris Witham and Bea Erskine
Training and support - Bea Erskine

If you want to get involved with a particular pillar, the pillar lead should be your first point of contact.

What we're doing

Training and support

Kate Stacey from Church House will be coming to Deanery Synod in July to talk about the different training and support that will be available centrally. Ahead of this, we will be collecting data on officers and vacancies across the deanery to establish a baseline position and understand our training and development needs.

Buildings

We have established an up to date contact list for all churchwardens across the deanery. A churchwarden survey has been sent out to all churchwardens. We will collate and publish the outcome. This will then inform future areas for support and how we can collectively work together.

Youth Ministry

We have collected contact details for groups and organisations currently involved in the provision of youth ministry and services across the deanery. An initial meeting will be setup to bring together everyone who is currently working in youth ministry or interested in starting. Collectively this group explore and develop opportunities to develop youth ministry across the deanery.

Focal Ministry

We want to hear from you. We'd like PCC's to think and pray about where there are opportunities to develop focal ministers. You may or may not have some one in mind, but can identify a need or an opportunity. If you'd like to know more about focal ministry, please speak to Sarah Bick. Once we've identified opportunities for focal ministry across the deanery, we'll develop plans for how to support and encourage this.

What we need you to do

1. Pray that we will allow mission to flourish, primarily through the parishes; maintaining focal ministry and removing obstacles.
2. Talk to your PCCs and communities, share the plan and this document with them.
3. Encourage people to get involved and get involved yourself.
4. Encourage your churchwardens to complete the churchwarden survey.

Notes

- The Deanery Strategic Plan is available on our website: <https://forestdeanery.org.uk/dsp/>
- Sign up to get involved in a strategic pillar here: <https://forestdeanery.org.uk/dsp/get-involved>