

SEVERN VALE DEANERY

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 25th February 2021 via Zoom (*thanks to Seven Towers Benefice for hosting*).

Attending:

Clergy: S Mason (Area Dean), J Hyde, J Longuet-Higgins, L Bloom, D Gill, A Mepham, J Perkin, M Smith
Laity: S Padfield (Chair), R Parker (Parish Share Officer), M Richardson, S Riddick (Secretary), D Wright (Treasurer), L Ashenden, R Blandford, K Carpenter, J Churchill-Wood, R Cottell, M Cowdrey, G Davies, F Down, D Elson, R Ensor, S Fellowes, G Goodman, E Harbottle, A Herbert, C Hill, N Hogg, A Holland, C Jakeman, C Langham, E Magee, H Murphy, A Nicol, J Smith, J Starr, C Steadman, L Ward, R Williams, C Wilman

Apologies:

Clergy: S Cooke, P Donald, S Godsell, K Mepham, P Phillips, S Skepper
Laity: H Dunsford, C Hitchins, E Lovell, C May

The meeting began at 7pm with initial prayers (led by John Longuet-Higgins and Jacqui Hyde) plus the usual welcomes (including to those joining us via Zoom for the first time).

Simon Mason next introduced the Reverend Ali Mepham, who is currently serving as an interim minister for the Diocese and for the immediate future is assigned to Severn Vale. Ali explained that his role is an evolving one, but essentially he is working with parishes/Benefices in vacancy or transition, with a strategic focus on the best ways of working together. He is already helping out in Westbury and Highnam (both in vacancy), and this will likely expand given our present circumstances (see below).

The **Minutes** of the meeting held on 3rd November 2020 were then approved without amendment. There were no matters arising not already covered under subsequent agenda headings.

Simon Mason and Sue Padfield updated Synod on the **Deanery Strategic Planning Process**. This has of course been complicated by the Covid-19 pandemic and various lockdowns, but progress has been made. The Reverend Dana Delap (who is helping lead the process across the Diocese) has met with Chapter, while Simon and Sue have also met with the Archdeacons. **Mapping exercises** have been completed for most of the Deanery, together with analyses of what we have learned from the unusual circumstances of the last twelve months under the general heading of the "**4 R's**" (being Retain/Resist/Return/Radical). Both of these subjects are now being refined to ensure consistency.

Simon informed the meeting that although for financial reasons the Diocese still needs to reduce the number of ministers (probably by nine), the previous focus on each Deanery losing two current posts and gaining one "pioneer/outreach" position has been modified, and reshaping will now depend on the results of the planning process.

Sue then talked a little more about **mapping**. In essence we are trying to understand our churches and communities via questions such as where things are; what we look to; population sizes; new housing developments; usual Sunday attendances; existing links between parishes and Benefices; and our available resources. The next stage will be to hold various meetings (either in clusters of neighbouring and similar benefices, or individually as circumstances dictate), using this information together with further guidance from the Diocese to assess the best way forward. It is hoped these meetings will happen in the next two weeks.

In response to a question from Nigel Hogg, Sue confirmed that Westbury is yet to complete its mapping exercise, but Ali Mepham will be working with people there to make progress. She agreed to send Nigel what other Benefices have done, to ease the process. It was also noted that Highnam has started but not completed its own exercise.

As regards the **Vacancy Situation and Available Support**, both Westbury and Highnam are currently in vacancy and Seven Towers is about to join them. As detailed above, Ali Mepham is already helping out. Recruitment efforts have not been halted by Covid-19, but have certainly been hampered. It was noted under this heading that churches are largely closed across the Diocese until at least 12th April, but tentative steps are being taken towards outdoor services at Easter (and possibly indoors at some churches, including Minsterworth and Blaisdon). All necessary precautions on hygiene etc must of course still be in place.

Jacqui Hyde now spoke about **New Housing** across the Deanery. Most Benefices are seeing activity on this front, but the largest development (c. 3000 houses) is the Innsworth/Twigworth/Longford scheme, which is proceeding at pace. The Diocese is looking at how best to serve this, with a full-time pioneer minister being considered. Sports ministry is already active in this area. Other sizeable developments include 1500 houses in Brockworth and 500+ in Churchdown; although these remain largely the responsibility of the relevant Benefice, Diocesan-wide materials are available for use and can be tailored to suit. Jacqui promised to speak to Mike Smith regarding the Brockworth housing.

Simon Mason commented at this stage that the Church of England as a whole is thinking about how best to use its surplus land for affordable housing.

Meanwhile PSALMS is being merged into OneLife, but "ground-level" work has not really been affected.

On **Parish Share**, Roger Parker presented his normal report, and commented that the Deanery as a whole has done quite well given the hit to parish-level income from Covid-19. Grants to recover lost income (such as hall hire, fees etc) remain available until June for those who wish to pursue the opportunity. It was noted that after 13 years Roger is to stand down as Parish Share Officer; we are all very grateful for his hard work, and will find some way to show our appreciation when lockdown ends. Derek Wright has kindly agreed to take on the role, so we are now looking for someone to take over as Synod Treasurer. As has previously been discussed, this is not an onerous role and we would be very grateful to hear from anyone interested in putting themselves forward.

On **Diocesan Synod**, two meetings have been held since we last met. Written reports have already been circulated and were taken as read. Perhaps the most important issues for us are as regards the new church-wide Vision and the financial difficulties being experienced at the Diocese.

The **Treasurer** presented the accounts for 2020, and noted that funds are in good shape – largely due to the lack of physical meetings meaning no associated expenses, and a reduction in training similarly caused by lockdown. For 2021, 14 subscriptions currently remain outstanding.

On **Training**, Jacqui Hyde is interested in courses looking at "older people", for example in care homes or isolated at home – both from a ministry and spirituality perspective. It was agreed this was worth pursuing. **GTS** is also continuing to run online courses, including one presently on Temple Theology; it was agreed these were useful and we could perhaps support them with available funds. Finally under this heading **Chris Langham** of Shurdington has volunteered to assume the role of our Eco Church Adviser, and she briefly introduced herself then referred to two relevant courses now being held at Diocesan level. Thanks were recorded to her predecessor, Chantal Whitehouse.

There was no **Other Business** of note, and the meeting finished with the Grace at just after 8.30pm.

Steve Riddick, March 2021