

Deanery synod annual report 2025

Area Dean: Revd Dr Andrew Bunch
Lay chair: Stephanie Lacey
Secretary: Maria Coonick
Treasurer: Mike Sinfield

Deanery synod meetings

We had three meetings in 2025. All of these meetings were preceded by a short act of worship, which helped us to focus on God's love and the work of the church in the deanery. A regular item at these meetings is 'news from the parishes' and we have heard from Revd Harriet Orridge of Steeple and North Aston, Tackley, Revd Steve Stewart of Hanborough and Freeland and Revd Gemma Ferrier, the curate at Woodstock and Bladon. We have also had talks on Christian Aid and Christians Against Poverty (CAP), as well as a useful sharing of parishes' work with children and young people across the deanery.

Comings and goings

In 2025 we had a full complement of incumbents until Revd Jane Wright from the Barton Benefice handed in her resignation in October to take up a post in the Shiplake and Harpsden Benefice near Henley on Thames. We wish her every blessing in her new role. We have three new members on the diocesan synod: Revd Oliver Petter, Revd Gemma Ferrier and Maria Coonick, who joins Mike Holmes as our lay representatives.

Other things to mention

We have carried on our programme of triennial archdeaconry inspections and since the last APCM all the churches in the Yarnton Benefice, St James Nether Worton and St Mary's Woodstock have had a visit. The Barton Benefice will be visited at the end of this year (2026) or the beginning of next.

Work is progressing on mapping 'Pilgrim Paths' in the deanery – led by Melanie McGregor and Richard Francis.

Maria is sending out a regular news sheet to all church wardens highlighting special events across the deanery that could be of interest to all, such as concerts, courses or special services.

A small group has been set up to look at the provision for children and young people in our churches.

Oliver Petter presented a proposal, known as the Woodstock Proposal, to the Autumn Diocesan Synod on behalf of our deanery, which was to be:

The Woodstock Deanery Synod proposes a motion that in multi-parish benefices (three or more), where there is only one stipendiary priest, that the diocese funds additional administrative support so that the priest is freed to fulfil their missional objectives in relation to serving and caring for the people of God

David Tyler, our archdeacon, put forward an amendment:

Instead, we propose that the Diocese should focus on:

- *Support and training to encourage parishes to adopt technology and collaborative models*
- *Providing accessible training and expert guidance*
- *Facilitating peer support among clergy and key officers*
- *Continue to ensure requests for information are only made of parishes where the data is*

essential and cannot be obtained from any other source

These measures offer a more sustainable and equitable approach to reducing the administrative burden across all benefices, which is recognised as a serious issue of concern.

This was carried and the good news is that ‘The Woodstock Proposal’ is being mentioned at meetings across the diocese. For example, at the lay chairs and area deans’ conference in January. We hope that eventually this will all make life for clergy in rural parishes much easier.

This year at the APCM we need to elect new deanery synod reps. The existing rep can stand for another term if they wish to do so.

Stephanie Lacey

Woodstock Deanery, Lay Chair

February 2026