



DEANERY STRATEGIC PATHWAY

Updated 17th April 2026

Introduction

This Strategic Pathway represents both our shared hopes and our practical commitments for the next five years. At its heart is the conviction that **God is already at work among us**. Our task is to notice, celebrate, and join in with what he is doing. That means living out a **narrative of abundance rather than scarcity**, choosing to focus on God's provision, the gifts of our people, and the opportunities that surround us, rather than being overwhelmed by challenges.

The pathway is designed as a working resource for **Deanery Synod, Chapter, PCCs, and parish conversations**. It sets out outcomes, outputs, and SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound), while leaving space for creativity, prayerful discernment, and innovation as we journey together. A part of our plans will be to engage key personnel, which will include a Deanery Strategic Lead (or DSL) and possibly a Deanery Youth Connector (or Family Worker).

Our work will be guided by six basic principles:

- **Prayer at the centre:** every plan begins and ends in prayer.
- **Abundance mindset:** celebrate God's work and tell the stories.
- **Boldness and innovation:** try new things, take risks, and learn together.
- **Sustainability and succession:** ensure projects can continue beyond external funding.
- **Partnership:** work across parishes, benefices, and with external organisations.
- **Pastoral care:** honour and nurture our older congregations while building for the future.

This pathway is not about creating endless new projects. Instead, it is about fostering **mutual flourishing**, enabling clergy and laity to serve with joy, and ensuring that our congregations, buildings, finances, and ministries are **vibrant, relevant, and sustainable** for generations to come.

Our Vision

We believe God is calling Stroud Deanery to be a flourishing community of churches, rooted in prayer, bold in mission, and united in serving the Kingdom.

We commit ourselves to a **once-in-a-generation opportunity**: to transform our worship and witness, invest in future generations, and steward our resources wisely so that the Church in this Deanery not only survives but thrives.

This pathway sets out our **outcomes, outputs and SMART goals for the next 5-7 years, across five strategic areas**:

1. Communications
2. Congregations
3. Ministry & Leadership
4. Buildings & Assets
5. Children, Youth & Families

1. Communications

Communication within the Deanery exists primarily to share information, promote events and services, and help parishes and their congregations stay connected with the wider life of the Church across the Deanery. It enables us to tell people what is happening, invite participation, and ensure that opportunities for worship, prayer, and community engagement are visible to all.

Deanery communications will therefore focus on **promoting activity across the Deanery and providing a reliable channel through which parishes and their congregations can share information with one another and with the wider community**.

Outcome:

A Deanery that communicates clearly and consistently, sharing information about services, events, and initiatives so that parishes, congregations and communities are better connected and more aware of the life of the Church.

Outputs:

- A Deanery communications approach focused on **promotion of services, events, and initiatives** across the Deanery.
- Clear and appropriate **digital channels** (e.g. website, social media, email) through which information can be shared.
- Guidance for parishes on **submitting information and using Deanery communication channels effectively**.

SMART Goals:

- **By 2026:** Identify appropriate media platforms for Deanery communications and develop best-practice guidelines for how these platforms will be used for parish, benefice, and Deanery communications.
- **By 2027:** Launch a Deanery Digital Hub (likely through the Deanery website) that promotes services, events, and key activities across the Deanery.
- **By 2028:** Each benefice to have at least one identified communications contact who can share local information with the Deanery communications team.
- **By 2028:** Deliver at least one Deanery-wide communications campaign promoting a shared event, season, or initiative across multiple parishes.

2. Congregations

We will embrace the “three horizons” approach, celebrating what has gone well, recognising what may be coming to an end and investing in “green shoots” for the future. Synod and Chapter will be places where we share encouragement and accountability, ensuring that discipleship remains at the heart of all we do.

Outcome:

Congregations growing as faithful disciples of Jesus, as worshipping communities that are alive, relevant, and sustainable.

Outputs:

- Worship that speaks to coming generations while sustaining older members.
- Regular discipleship pathways (Alpha, small groups, prayer networks).
- Encouragement of shared vision through preaching, prayer, and resources.

SMART Goals:

- **By 2026:** Each benefice to identify one area of worship innovation (fresh expression, contemporary service, family-focused worship etc).
- **By 2027:** Each benefice to launch active discipleship groups beyond Sunday worship.
- **By 2029:** Deanery-wide “Discipleship Journey” story to be shared via our comms campaign.

3. Ministry & Leadership

We seek to discern together how clergy and lay people can flourish in the ministries God has given them. The Deanery will explore creative and collaborative approaches to ministry, including new patterns of deployment, lay leadership development, and posts that support mission across parish boundaries. Particular attention will be given to emerging communities and new housing areas.

In all of this, diversity of gifts and experience will be essential for the creativity, sustainability, and health of our ministries.

Outcome:

A team of clergy and lay leaders deployed wisely, resourced well, and released to serve with energy and joy, doing more of what gives them life, and less of what drains them; so that inspired, enlivened ministry can take root and grow across the Deanery.

Outputs:

- A Deanery-wide approach to **clergy and lay deployment**, enabling collaboration across benefices where appropriate.
- A culture of teamwork in which clergy and lay leaders are encouraged to identify where they thrive, and where others might complement them, reducing stress and releasing people to minister from a place of strength and joy.
- **Training, encouragement, and discernment pathways** for lay ministries and vocations, recognising that the growth of the Church depends on the gifts of all God's people, not only the ordained.
- Exploration of **strategic ministry posts** that could resource mission and transformation across the Deanery. Already identified are:

1) **Deanery Strategic Leader (DSL)**

This role is currently funded for three years and line-managed by the diocese. As of March 2026, Stroud Deanery remains in consultation with Deanery Synod to discern how best to use this funding and the opportunity it presents to support mission and renewal across the Deanery. A review process will be built into the development of the role. It is acknowledged that Funding beyond the initial three-year period will need to be explored, and a sustainable plan agreed before recruitment to this post.

2) **Family Worker and/or Youth Work Connector**

A role focused on supporting children and families and helping to bridge the transition between primary and secondary school communities, potentially in partnership with existing schools such as Thomas Keble and Archway.

3) **Stroudwater Missioner**

Exploring the potential for a mission-focused role serving communities within the Stroudwater benefice, helping to develop new expressions of church and strengthen engagement with local communities.

SMART Goals:

- **By 2026:** Begin a conversations on clergy and lay deployment, identifying areas where collaborative ministry across benefices could strengthen mission.
- **By 2027:** Establish at least one new strategic ministry post or pilot project to resource mission in a key area of the Deanery.
- **By 2028:** Develop and support pathways for lay leadership in every benefice, with opportunities for training, discernment, and encouragement in ministry.

4. Buildings, Assets and Finances

Our church buildings are a blessing, but they are also a big challenge. We will develop a Deanery vision for our buildings that is creative, prayerful, and mission-shaped. Together, we will support parishes in maintenance, develop new uses where possible, and discern faithfully when release or closure is necessary.

Outcome:

Church buildings that are fit for purpose, mission-focused, and sustainable.

Outputs:

- A Deanery-wide buildings audit.
- Shared expertise in maintenance, contracts, and community use.
- Clear plans for buildings that cannot be sustained.
- Shared financial strategies and accountability.

SMART Goals:

- By 2026: Deanery Finance Group established.
- By 2026: Deanery Buildings Group established.
- By 2027: DLT to enable the Buildings Group to build and maintain a directory of trusted tradesmen for the range of tasks relevant to maintaining buildings and their grounds
- By 2027: DLT to enable Finance Group in finding alternative income streams, both locally and at a Deanery level.
- By 2028: Buildings Group to complete audit of all Deanery buildings, including fabric condition, utilisation level, capacity, facilities, accessibility, parking, limitations & restrictions, energy efficiency and community use etc.
- By 2028: Each benefice to have a buildings plan (invest/repurpose/release), which may draw on the finance and buildings groups. This will involve conversations about how to end some of our church communities well.

5. Children, Youth & Families

Children, young people, and families are not just the “future of the church” but its present. By building strong partnerships with schools and community organisations, and by investing in ministry among children and young people, we will seek to ensure that our Deanery is a place where families encounter Jesus and grow as disciples.

Outcome:

Every person in the Deanery, from the youngest child to the oldest adult, is invited into the life-changing love of Jesus, supported in growing as a disciple, and encouraged to explore their own calling in God's Kingdom.

Outputs:

- “Stay & Play” groups within walking distance for families with under-5s.
- Fresh Expressions of family worship in each benefice.
- Youth hubs linked to the three secondary schools, alongside Deanery-wide youth gatherings and events.
- Strong partnerships with organisations such as **Sportily**, **The Door/Illuminate Project**, and local schools, and exploration of roles that can resource ministry among children, youth, and families.

SMART Goals:

- **By 2027:** Map what is going on for children, young people and families across the benefice.
- **By 2027:** Launch weekly “Stay & Play” groups in most benefices.
- **By 2027:** Each benefice to host at least one Fresh Expression of family-focused worship.
- **By 2028:** Employ a Youth Connector or Deanery Family worker, to establish youth hubs linked to secondary schools, with regular drop-in provision.
- **By 2029:** Engage 500+ children and young people annually in Deanery-wide children, youth, and family initiatives.

Postscript

The Deanery Strategic Pathway is not a static plan but a living document, which must be shaped at every stage by prayer. Prayer will keep our vision responsive, dynamic, and open to where God is leading us next. As our context changes and this work develops in practice, so our plans must be willing to change with it.

If this is to be successful, we must walk this pathway together: in Synod, Chapter, PCCs, and local conversations, so that it becomes not just a Deanery document but a shared journey of faith, hope, and mission. We will also seek to connect with other Deaneries and with the Diocese, learning from what is being tried elsewhere, sharing what we are discovering, and contributing to the wider renewal of the Church in this region.

This pathway is not about making decline less painful, but rather building a Church that is stronger, healthier, and more ready to serve the communities around us for generations to come.