

Message from Bishop Robert

28 April 2026



There is nothing quite like coming home. Coming home at the end of a long day working, or from a trip away, or even a short break or holiday. The activities we were engaged in may have been joyful or challenging, uplifting or discouraging, but coming home promises a space to relax, to be oneself, and to recuperate, recalibrate, and rest.

Essential to this, of course, is a good place to live. A place in which we can feel confident, secure, and warm, with good neighbours and, of course, good boundaries. These are the things that change a house into a home and place that home within a community, and this is something that I believe every man, woman, and child has the right to expect. It is something that, as a society, we should be confident in committing to provide for all as a basic right.

This is why, over the last few years, I have been committed to playing my part in the work of the Church in housing. This is a visible extension of our ministry, witnessing to the love of God and building the Kingdom. Over this time, I have seen this work move from ideas – ideas that coalesced around the publication of the *Coming Home* report in 2021. That report challenged the Church both to use its voice in advocacy for good housing and to bring together those who shared this commitment, challenging local and national government and developers to work together for the good of all. It also led to the formation of the Church Development Agency.

Daniel Mayes is the Chief Executive of the Development Agency, and he writes this:

“The Church Development Agency (CDA) exists to help the Church turn our vision for housing into practical action: building homes, strengthening communities, and stewarding land well. The CDA currently benefits from a three-year £1.7 million grant from the Oak Foundation and is now around 18 months into this programme. This catalytic funding has enabled the CDA to move from aspiration to delivery by building professional capacity, strengthening partnerships, and establishing a credible housing pipeline designed to scale beyond any single project. This work has been further supported by at least £300,000 from the Archbishops’ Housing Grant Programme.”

Alongside the CDA’s wider national work, there is also a focused local programme of direct development that is already making a difference in this diocese. In Willersey, a 60-home scheme is currently in the planning process and progressing towards planning committee consideration. In Shurdington, work is now on site: the roof trusses and felt have been completed on Plot 1, and the aim is for at least one

completed home by the end of the summer. In Norton, planning permission has been secured for a new vicarage and an additional house, with the expectation of being on site this summer, including the delivery of a net-zero-carbon parsonage, supporting clergy wellbeing while reducing long-term running costs.

The homes that the CDA is building will be to the highest environmental standards, reducing energy costs for those who live in them. They are not just for our diocese, but currently span another nine dioceses, comprising around 40 projects, with a pipeline of approximately 1,000 homes identified for development, some of which may become Church Housing Association homes.

This growing confidence in the work was reflected when the Oak Foundation's President highlighted the CDA programme and invited Benjamin Preece Smith and Daniel Mayes to present directly to the Foundation's trustees in Geneva. I continue to ask for your prayers for them as they share this work, and for wisdom for those entrusted with stewarding resources in service of the common good.

After so much work over a number of years, it is so exciting for us as a diocese to see this work, to which we have committed ourselves, coming to fruition. At a time when housing feels fragile, uncertain, or out of reach for so many, this practical sign of what it means for the Church to be present in bricks and mortar is an outworking of our commitment to life in all its fullness for all – using our resources so that more people may find not just a house, but a place to come home, and to flourish within a community rooted in hope.

It is, I believe, work in which we as a diocese can be justifiably proud.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font. The first letter 'R' is large and prominent, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left. The rest of the name is written in a more compact, flowing script.