

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



CHAPTER MINUTES

Minutes of the 253rd Chapter Meeting
Wednesday 4 February 2026 at 3.00 pm
Chapter Room

Present: The Very Rev'd Joe Hawes, Dean (JPH)
The Rev'd Canon Katy Cunliffe (KC)
Sue Hughes (SH)
Canon Dr Victoria Johnson (VJ)
Neil Parsons (NP)
Barbara Pycraft (BP)
Paul Torrington (PT)
The Rev'd Canon Matthew Vernon (MV)
Jane Haviland Webster (JHW)

In Attendance: Caroline Rouse (CRo)
Sarah-Jane Powell (SJP)
Fiona Hall (FH) *Arrived at 3.37 pm*
James Mellish (JMsh)
Alice Milligan (AM)
Erin Seligman (Clerk to Chapter)

1. Opening Prayers

- 1.1 The Dean (JPH) opened the meeting with prayer.
- 1.2 Chapter welcomed Alice Milligan, newly appointed Cathedral Architect and Surveyor to the Fabric, to today's meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Mark Pendlington, Terry Stark and Stewart Alderman.

3. Conflicts of Interest

- 3.1 All trustees have filed their updated Conflicts of Interest forms for the new year. All forms have been submitted to the auditor.

4. Notification of AOB (No other business raised.)

5. Correspondence

- 5.1 JPH has received numerous letters and emails of praise and appreciation for the Bishop's enthronement and, on behalf of Chapter, thanked the Canon Precentor (KC) for the successful organisation of the service.

6. Sustainability

6.1 Abbey of St Edmunds, Reborn Project

- 6.1.1 James Mellish (JMsh) provided a brief project update. The application for the delivery phase of the project will be submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in three weeks' time.
- 6.1.2 The Conservation Plan, Masterplan Proposals, Conservation Plan and Capital Works were previously endorsed. The Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England (CFCE) have since

requested a variation to the capital works scheme (change from red to white brick on the Anshelm Building extension and alterations to screening of the heating/ventilation systems within the Cloister). Chapter endorsed these changes.

6.1.3 Chapter received and endorsed the project's Activity Plan (Draft 3).

6.1.4 Chapter received and endorsed the project's Business Plan (Draft 3), subject to typos being amended as discussed.

6.1.5 Chapter discussed the new staffing positions this project will bring, the capacity of the Cathedral site to house the additional employees and the need for a robust business plan to ensure project sustainability after the Heritage funding comes to an end. The Cathedral is expected to gain further income upon project completion through increased visits and spending by visitors, more effective promotion of donation points, elevated Enterprises' sales and a more strategic events calendar.

6.1.6 Income, particularly within Pilgrims' Kitchen, is anticipated to naturally dip from 5 to 10 percent during the project's capital works. This drop will not put the Cathedral in a negative state. The project's delivery phase funding does not include allowances to cover any dip in income due to capital works. The drop in income is only a projection and could be avoidable through good communication and signage.

6.1.7 Chapter was mindful of the risks this project will carry for the next few years.

6.1.8 Upon its creation, the project's CIO will replace the Project Board and solidify the equal partnership of the Cathedral, West Suffolk Council and English Heritage going forward.

6.1.9 The project is expected to add an additional 200 volunteers.

6.1.10 It is hoped the Heritage Fund will approve the project's delivery phase application on 24 June, although it will take several months before their decision can be announced to the public. Rejection of the application seems a low risk given the high level of endorsement to date, but it is the Heritage Fund's decision.

6.1.11 JPH and JMsh will bring project plans on a 'road show' across the county to bring awareness and build support. Project partners will be present as well and Chapter's attendance at these community meetings would be equally appreciated.

6.2 Fiona Hall, Visitor Experience Manager

6.2.1 Chapter welcomed Visitor Experience Manager Fiona Hall (FH), who provided a brief department update as well as her observations since joining the Cathedral.

6.2.2 FH has audited existing signage and will be incorporating necessarily changes.

6.2.3 Volunteers will be offered white and green badge training alongside the town guides. Additional 'special' tours and Tower Tours to be organised. Packaging of tours and incorporation of interesting experiences to be considered.

6.2.4 FH is proposing the start of an annual Christmas Tree Festival. A big-ticket art installation is tentatively booked for October 2027. A proposal re: funding for such a large-scale event will be brought before Chapter at a later date.

6.2.5 FH is reviewing the current structure for welcoming visitors, entry points and how donations are sought. The Welcome Assistants are currently hitting their budget targets each week and have surpassed the set figure for January. Donations are, however, plateauing following last year's training and opportunities for improvement are being reviewed. Tour fees will not be changed this year but will be reviewed the following year.

6.2.6 Some entry areas will be blocked in order to channel visitors past the Welcome Assistants. Once the Lego model is relocated, the welcome desk, pamphlets and Volunteer Welcomers will be moved further away from the main door to allow for the messaging re: Entry by Donation to take precedence.

6.2.7 The Lego model will be moved out of the Nave, but FH is considering how the model may be used in the future (i.e. donations turn lights on or cause church bells to ring). Potential uses within the Abbey, Reborn project are also being discussed with the project partners.

- 6.2.8 The name of the Volunteer Welcomers will need to be changed as they are more focused on providing information, and to alleviate confusion with the Welcome Assistants.
- 6.2.9 FW and the Fundraising Manager are reviewing the Patrons scheme to identify overlaps and ways to maximise return. FH left the meeting at 3.50 pm.

6.3 Finance

- 6.3.1 Caroline Rouse (CRo) presented the Committee with 2025 year-end reports. Net results for 12-month period show an operating surplus of £25,252 against the budget of £7,033, which is primarily due to the receipt of two legacies.
- 6.3.2 A formal valuation of the Cathedral properties resulted in a significant uplift of more than £1.5m.
- 6.3.3 Although the 2025 budget will record a surplus, the actual figure will decline as some items of expenditure (i.e. sound system upgrades, property repairs, etc.) have been brought forward in order to alleviate a challenging 2026 budget
- 6.3.4 The Cathedral received £25k in December from the Church Commissions for the allocated clergy stipend that went unspent while the Canon Precentor post was vacant.
- 6.3.5 The end of 2025 was quite successful, with the Christmas Market, seasonal services and Nine Lessons and Carols in particular having drawn a good amount of income. Messaging will be revised for this year's Christmas services and Nine Lessons to highlight the option to make online donations as few people carry cash these days. Large QR codes will be on the Orders of Service and reminders to donate will be relayed before services begin. Collections will also be split with various charities to escalate giving.
- 6.3.6 Chapter has allocated £2k to the Ancient Library, of which £1k is the annual donation designated for 2026.
- 6.3.7 The Lego project has been fully expensed.
- 6.3.8 The Music Department recently received a £20k gift from an individual donor.
- 6.3.9 The Cathedral has made a £32k accrual for electricity costs related to a faulty meter.
- 6.3.10 A letter inviting those within the Electoral Role to join the Planned Giving scheme resulted in a modest uplift and halted the decline in membership. The Cathedral is also concentrating on drawing young families into the scheme. Messaging from the pulpit on Sundays will be varied and letters inviting all volunteers to join the Planned Giving scheme will be mailed shortly.
- 6.3.11 Chapter received and noted as read the minutes from the 28 October 2025 Finance Committee meeting and the minutes from the 4 November 2025 Planned Giving Committee meeting.

6.4 Buildings / Property

- 6.4.1 Chapter received the Cathedral Architect's report.
- 6.4.2 Chapter approved the appointment of Alice Milligan as Cathedral Architect and Surveyor to the Fabric. AM would like to work at the Cathedral one day each fortnight and join the Eco St Eds Committee. AM's appointment is through her firm, Caroe Architecture, which will cover her insurance and provide the ability to deputise another surveyor should AM be away.
- 6.4.3 Chapter approved the Fee Proposal for Quinquennial Inspection Reporting. The inspection will be conducted within the Cathedral's green lines and will not include the Deanery or Abbey Precincts. AM will liaise with SJP and JPH re: inspection dates.
- 6.4.4 AM thanked Chapter for the appointment and said it will be a pleasure to work at a Cathedral in such good condition, of which she credited her predecessor. She also remarked on the efficiency of the Cathedral's Fabric Advisory Committee.

6.5 Eco St Eds

- 6.5.1 Chapter received minutes from the 8 December 2025 Eco St Eds Committee meeting and a brief update from JHW.

- 6.5.2 Planning permission for the Solar Panel project is expected later this month.
- 6.5.3 The Cathedral and Eco St Eds Committee is incredibly appreciative of the Flower arrangers and looks forward to working with them on ways to incorporate sustainable materials.
- 6.6 Bury Psalter
 - 6.6.1 Chapter received the Bury Psalter's Conservation Treatment Report.
 - 6.6.2 The Cathedral has obtained possession of the Bury Psalter and prepared a proper and secured case. The item will be formally received from King Edward VI Grammar School Foundation during the 5 March Evensong.
 - 6.6.3 Chapter discussed opportunities to charge entry to see the Psalter. Related merchandise will be stocked within the Cathedral Shop.
- 6.7 Safeguarding
 - 6.7.1 Chapter received the Cathedral Safeguarding Principles and the minutes of the 27 November 2025 Safeguarding Committee meeting. Chapter agreed and endorsed the principles as stated.
 - 6.7.2 INEQE audit results will be shared with Chapter and the Cathedral community upon receipt.
- 6.8 Policies
 - 6.8.1 Chapter received an updated Absence Policy for approval, with specific amendments re: Statutory Sick Pay referenced. Neil Parsons (NP) requested employees notify Human Resources or a Line Manager of absences. Return to work meetings should also be conducted with Human Resources or a Line Manager. With these amendments, Chapter approved the Absence Policy.
 - 6.8.2 Chapter will review Safeguarding Policies at the next meeting.
- 7. Dean's Report
 - 7.1 At the Dean's request, Chapter relayed what they would like the Dean's Report to entail going forward (i.e. national initiatives, strategic planning, feedback from the Bishop, Diocesan updates, etc.)
 - 7.2 Chapter paused to prayer for Bishop Joanne and her family and give thanks for her recent appointment.
- 8. Mission
 - 8.1 Music and Worship
 - 8.1.1 Chapter received the Canon Precentor's Worship and Music Report. KC acknowledged recent challenges re: recruitment and retention within the Music Department.
 - 8.1.2 The music scholar programme has come to an end in its current form. Time will be taken to consider what, if anything, might be best going forwards.
 - 8.1.3 Chapter received and noted as read KC's paper on Inclusive Liturgical Language. Services will remain the same, but the Cathedral will allow flexibility on wording.
 - 8.2 LGBTQ+ Inclusion
 - 8.2.1 Chapter received and noted as read KC's paper on LGBTQ+ Inclusion. Chapter endorsed the proposed initial steps, with the exception of flying a progress flag. Chapter noted current guidelines re: the displaying of the St Edmundsbury banner and Union flag only, as well as flags in general currently being used for demonstrations across the world. Cathedral procedures re: flags to remain under review.
 - 8.2.2 Chapter were invited to attend the Cathedral's first Open Table Network service on 14 February. A collection may be taken at the service, with proceeds supporting Open Table. An agreement with the Network will be brought to Chapter for approval at a later date.
 - 8.3 Deputy Warden
 - 8.3.1 Chapter endorsed the appointment of Roberto Gargiulo as Deputy Warden, as agreed at the 3 February Forum.

9. Governance

9.1 HR Strategy

9.1.1 Chapter approved the HR Strategy, with amendments as discussed (removal of 'title' from all application forms, inclusion of environment/sustainability training, requiring new committee members to spend a day on site).

9.1.2 SJP to complete the Trustee Handbook.

9.2 Committee Vacancies / Succession Planning

9.2.1 Trustees review current vacancies on Chapter and ongoing succession planning. Finding a Chapter member with safeguarding experience has proved difficult. Another trustee with building experience is also sought.

9.2.2 PT suggested the Finance Committee be expanded. The Committee's membership is currently full as per the Terms of Reference. Chapter could, however, agree to amend the Terms to allow for additional members. Recruiting someone with legal experience would be particularly beneficial for the Finance Committee.

9.3 Nominations Committee

9.3.1 Chapter approved the appointment of Nick Major to the Nominations Committee.

9.3.2 Gavin Stone has stepped down from the Nominations Committee.

9.3.3 Action: JPH will speak with Edward Wilde about diversifying the membership of the Nominations Committee.

9.4 Risk, Audit and Review Committee

9.4.1 Justin Rabett resigned from the Risk, Audit and Review Committee (RARC). With recent pushback by those opposed to same-sex marriage, JR is no longer comfortable supporting the Church of England and has scaled back on his involvement and responsibilities. JR, within written correspondence to the JPH, emphasised this decision was not a reflection of the Cathedral which remains an inclusive community and beacon for Living in Love and Faith.

9.4.2 Chapter approved the appointment of NP as the second Chapter trustee to sit on the RARC. The Committee's Terms of Reference require a non-executive member of Chapter be present to achieve a quorum and appointing NP will relieve pressure on Jane Haviland Webster (JHW) who is currently the sole Chapter trustee on this Committee.

9.4.3 Chapter received the minutes from the RARC's 15 December 2025 meeting.

9.5 Risks for 2026

9.5.1 Chapter received the top risks for 2026 compiled by the Senior Management Team. The large, detailed Risk Register remains in place, however the key risks will be regularly observed and managed collectively.

9.5.2 KC and MV left the meeting at 17.20 pm

10. Minutes and Reports

10.1 Chapter Minutes

10.1.1 The Chapter and Confidential minutes from the 5 November 2025 meeting were amended and approved.

10.2 Chapter received minutes from the 19 November Health and Safety Committee meeting.

10.2.1 The Cathedral will not continue with EFire. The new fire safety provider will conduct new fire assessments.

10.3 Chapter received the Ancient Library Committee's 18 November meeting minutes, 2026 Development Plan and Budget Plan.

10.4 Chapter received the minutes from the 16 October Friends of the St Edmundsbury Cathedral council meeting.

10.5 Chapter received the minutes of the 19 January 2026 Enterprises Board meeting.

11. Any Other Business

- 11.1 Chapter will review the updated Master Plan in March. Bishop Joanne will provide an introductory statement and sign off the final version.

12. Confidential Items

13. Upcoming Chapter Meeting Dates

- 13.1 The next Chapter meeting will be held Thursday 12 March, 10.00 am.

14. Review of Meeting

- 14.1 NP remarked on a good Chapter meeting today and the sheer volume of papers to read. The Senior Management Team and wider committee structure eases fears of issues being overlooked. Positive dialogue and sensitivity were evident around the topics of love and faith, Open Table, hospitality and inclusive language. NP appreciated the Music Department's self-review and honest reflection. Risks re: the Abbey, Reborn are unsettling and while the project seems a leap of faith similar risks were overcome with the successful Millennium Tower project.
- 14.2 Chapter found value in these meeting reviews.

The Chapter meeting concluded with prayer at 5.29 pm.