

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



Minutes of the Forum Meeting held on Tuesday 3 February 2026 at 6.30 p.m.

Present:

Canon Matthew Vernon, Very Rev'd Joseph Hawes, Canon Katy Cunliffe, Canon Mark Haworth, Fiona Knapp, Barbara Pycraft, Terry Stark, Sarah-Jane Powell, Tanya Dawson, Robert Lant, Sandra Lant, Penny Bentley, Sue Cockram, Kierstan Foreman, Liz Rowlands, Dan Soper, Liz Steele, Abbi Thorpe, Simon Waters, Canon Chris Andrews, Alan Bond, Margaret Bond, Jill Burrows, Rev Carole Jones, Pam Pitts, Hugh Stevenson, James Stark, Katie Robson.

1. Opening Prayer and Welcome

Canon Matthew welcomed everyone to the meeting and welcomed Carole Jones a curate on a part time placement with the Cathedral at the moment. He also welcomed Tanya Dawson, our new Safeguarding Officer, to the meeting.

MV opened the meeting with a reading from Philippians 2 and, being St Ansgar's Day, with an opening prayer by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from: Caroline Rouse, Alice Robertson, James Mansfield, Catherine Walsh, Doreen Young and Julie Broadway.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted with no comment.

The St Edmundsbury Primary School Governor update will be given at the May meeting.

4. Safeguarding

S-JP introduced Tanya Dawson our newly appointed Safeguarding Officer. Tanya has been a Senior Social Worker at Suffolk County Council working with those with disabilities from 0-25; children, children in care, care leavers, young adults, carers variously with a range of needs both severe and complex. She comes with a depth of knowledge and will be working three days a week (Mon, Wed, Thurs), although she is flexible to different hours and days where needed and where she can. Tanya lives in Bury with her husband and young family.

In answer to a question about TD delivering safeguarding training, this will happen, but first she has to go through the Church of England safeguarding training and accreditation process.

S-JP reported that the INEQE audit report should be delivered in February. We did get preliminary findings on the last day of their audit, one of which was for a stand-alone safeguarding officer, which we now have. Through the weeks, the weekly bulletin has contained bite-size safeguarding information for the congregation. When the report comes, it will be put into the public domain.

This Sunday 7 February is Safeguarding Sunday. Bishop Joanne will preside and preach – Bishop Joanne is the lead safeguarding bishop for the CofE. TD will be commissioned at the service.

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5. Dean's Report

Abbey of St Edmund Reborn Project update

MV and JH gave an update on the Abbey Reborn Project, outlined with a slide presentation containing the scope and detail of the Stage 2 application that will be made to the National Lottery Heritage Fund at the end of the month.

MV encouraged Forum members to think of questions from the Cathedral Community perspective.

The plan focuses on the Cathedral, the Abbey, the gardens and the surrounding areas and connecting the site.

- Conserving the Abbey ruins
- Creating a visitor centre for the Cathedral and the Abbey
- Improving the footpaths network through the site
- Connecting the site with the town and the Cathedral
- Increasing biodiversity in the Abbey area
- Providing year-round community engagement programmes

In the Cathedral, this would include:

- Improving access with a ramp to the choir via the top of the north aisle
- A ramp and glazed inner doors at the south door and the west door
- Conversion of the Anselm building with a single-floor extension into an integrated purpose-built visitor centre linked through to the Gallery and Cathedral shop (31-33 Angel Hill) and with an entrance from Angel Hill. This will also serve as a visitor entrance to the Cathedral.
- A West Cloister running along the existing medieval wall and joining the existing cloisters.
- This cloister will be wider than the existing cloisters, will be double glazed, enclosed with glass doors, have underfloor heating and will be a multi-purpose exhibition space as well as entrance to the Cathedral. The floor level is higher than the other cloisters but there will be steps down and the option of a self-operated lift for those who need it.
- There will also be an option to use a winding path down through the quadrangle/garth with stepped terraces to one side for use as a possible seating area for outdoor performances, with the path leading to a corner entrance into the cloister (NW corner).

On the wider site that includes the Abbey Gate, the gardens, the ruins, the riverside walk along the River Lark, crossing the bridge and the path down by Shire Hall to St Mary's Churchyard, the Norman tower and the Cathedral:

- A walk will be created through the above area.
- Conservation of the Abbey Gate entrance to the gardens will take place, along with conservation of the flint walls
- Conservation of the Abbey ruins
- Signage will be improved throughout the site
- Entrance to the Cathedral through the Herb Garden will be improved
- Access to the Abbey ruins will be improved with the current steps (by the model of the Abbey) replaced by a railed boardwalk to the lower level to allow access for all.
- The biodiversity will be improved along the Lark and Linett riverside walk – clearing overgrown banks here and upstream, increasing light and waterflow to encourage wildlife

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back and preserving the habitats for rarer species. Lead partners in this will be the Bury Water Meadow Group and the Lark Catchment Partnership.

- This will also apply to the path into the Shire Hall car park and on into St Mary's Churchyard.
- In the wooded area at the bottom of the Abbey Precincts' garden a dedicated wild area for use young people not suited to mainstream education.
- Pathways in St Mary's Churchyard will be improved.
- Access to the Norman Tower will be improved.

Question arising regarding increased visitor numbers and parking:

JH and West Suffolk Council are talking to Greene King about the possibility of increasing parking space for the town on part of their land when they move their main operations to a purpose-built site out of town. Discussions are ongoing.

JH Five main points of the benefits for the Cathedral as to why we doing this:

- West Cloister
- An increase in visitor numbers
- Activities for people who may not usually come to the Cathedral
- Building staff capacity in learning, volunteer management and event management
- Equal access

Looking at the activity plans and deliverables, we will introduce:

- Apprenticeships – stonemasons
- Internships – hospitality, visitor welcome, archaeology
- Create partnerships with health networks
- A new home for The Yard project at the bottom of the Abbey Precincts' garde. Jane Dow is already exploring possible uses.

Question regarding the ruins and people climbing on them:

- JH Something that needs to be addressed but it is difficult.
- West Suffolk Council is aware of this but they consider water ingress and weathering a bigger problem. The flint walls are being capped to try and stop water ingress.
- It is an ongoing challenge as we do not want to fence them off.

Question regarding the Visitor Centre and West Cloister:

JH The Commission for the Fabric of the Cathedrals of England and the Cathedral Fabric Advisory Committee have been involved throughout the planning of the West Cloister, tackling the challenges created by the drop in levels between cloisters, the abutting to the existing abbey precinct walls, and the purpose of the space. The air source heat pump and plant will be on the roof and under a sloping mansard roof.

JH In the planning process of the West Cloister and quadrangle site, the plans were drawn up with consideration of a possible North Cloister at a future date.

MV The visitor centre will include information on the Abbey, Edmund, life and travel in Edmund's time, pilgrimage, and much more. We will work with students from West Suffolk College to use augmented reality for digital recreation of the building as you look at it.

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JH the application and the business plan.

- Work on the Stage 2 application is nearing its final review before being submitted at the end of the month. There are 13 principal areas within the application. Feedback and suggestions have been constructive and we have amended and developed the proposal accordingly to reflect any concerns that have been raised.
- From a fundraising point of view, figures have increased a little. The grant application to the NLHF will be for £7 million and we will be required to match it by raising £2.6 million.
- Fundraising has been under way. With various monies pledged from local organisations, companies and individuals. JH has started a 1327 club (the year the town rose up against the Abbey) to work with local businesses.
- Members of the congregation have been approached, along with patrons and people in the county. Donors have been very generous.
- We are 60% of the way there.
- JH will approach 8 tourism initiative grant-making trusts in the East of England once we hear if our application to NLHF has been successful and once we have planning permission and the necessary listed building consent.

In answer to further questions:

- There will be a bicycle park
- There will be some disruption when building of the visitor centre and cloister takes place, but we have experience of work being done on site before and will endeavour to keep the disruption to a minimum.
- Talking of publicity and introducing the project locally and further afield, there was a well-attended public meeting in the Guildhall to explain what is happening. Further meetings are planned in Bury and will also take place across the county in places like Sutton Hoo and Gainsborough House.
- Bus parking was also a concern, as witnessed at the Christmas Fair.

Reflections on our new Bishop

JH reflected on the arrival in the diocese and enthronement of Bishop Joanne. Working with her, he had found her to be considerate, lacking in ego, unassuming, but with a core of steel. She is the lead Safeguarding bishop in the CofE, with interest in good process, with people properly involved and respected. She is open, humble, poised and was very moved by her enthronement.

KC who had worked with her leading up to the enthronement had found her to be open in giving and in receiving, kind, normal and open about her nerves. We are her Cathedral and, while not everyone was able to come to the enthronement, people are encouraged to come and welcome her this Sunday (7th) as she presides and preaches for our Safeguarding Sunday.

Sound system

JS Thanked people for their patience and understanding. The sound system has now been overhauled, sorting out the sound in the organ loft, upgrading to HDMI cabling to the screens, replacing 3 broken speakers, purchasing 4 new radio microphones and putting new ones in the clergy stalls in the chancel. The control box by the vestry will be reduced in size by the by.

Canon Pastor will be on a sabbatical from May to July 2026.

MV The purpose of the sabbatical is to rest, retreat and research. MV hoped to go on a walking pilgrimage. As a project, he hopes to explore resources for visitors around prayer and spirituality

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and the contemplative side of life, not presuming a visitor's knowledge of prayer. MH and MV have started looking at this and MV hopes to incorporate this into his research during this time.

6. Financial Report

S-JP gave a report in CR's absence.

The year 2025 ended with a small surplus. This was due to:

- some generous legacies – £83,000 – the income of which has been invested in the CCLA who manage the Church of England Investment Fund
- the Christmas market £29,000
- Christmas services and the Carol Service.

The properties have been externally RICS valued and with an uplift of £1.5 million are now valued at £8 million.

At the moment, 2026 looks a more challenging year with a forecast deficit of £58,000.

Some major maintenance items were undertaken at the end of 2025 (sound system, Precentor's House, various flat repairs).

Major maintenance items are being managed as tightly as we can.

As much spare cash as we can has been deposited at the CCLA for the time being.

Updates will be given through the year.

On a question regarding Slavery Reparations

JH said that research had been done but no links had been found to date.

7. Forum 2026 meeting dates: 13 May, 22 September and 24 November.

For information, the APCM is on 28 April.

8. AOB

Barbara Pycraft informed the Forum that Robert Gargiulo has been shadowing the Churchwardens in recent weeks with the intention that he become a new Deputy Warden. His proposed appointment will be brought to the next Chapter meeting (4 February).

Fiona Knapp reported from the First Tuesday Lunches.

As some people would rather not come out in the evening in the winter, there was a request to have the Forum meetings relayed via a Teams link for those who would like to join that way.

In discussion at the lunch, questions of palliative care and assisted dying had come up. There was a request to have an opportunity to discuss big matters such as these in a wider meeting.

Both ideas were welcomed by MV and JH.

The meeting closed at 7.59 p.m. with the Grace.