



Our Vision & Strategy: An Introduction from the Dean

Sunday 14 June 2026

There's a story, probably apocryphal but I like it anyway, about a newly appointed dean who, on his first day, asked his predecessor what the secret of cathedral leadership was. The old dean thought for a moment and said: "Meetings. Endless, beautiful, exhausting meetings."

I have never felt the truth of that story more keenly than in the past eighteen months.

But here we are. And it was worth every minute.

Today we launch our Vision and Strategy for Guildford Cathedral, Our Strategy 2026 to 2032, and I want to begin where this whole process began: with gratitude.

I want to thank, from the bottom of my heart, everyone who gave their time, their honesty, and their hopes to this process. You filled in questionnaires. You came to listening events. You told us, sometimes gently and sometimes with impressive directness, what you love about this place, what frustrates you, and what you believe we could become. This strategy is yours as much as mine. Probably more so.

Before I say anything else about the consultation, I want to acknowledge something that came before it, ran alongside it, and undergirded every part of it. This process has been surrounded by prayer. From the very beginning, a dedicated prayer group has held this work before God, week after week, and I want to say publicly and with real feeling: that has not been a peripheral thing. It has been the backbone of everything we have done. Strategies can be well-researched and carefully written and beautifully produced and still amount to nothing if they are not rooted in something deeper than human effort. We have tried to root this one in prayer, and I am profoundly grateful to everyone who has prayed this strategy into being.

In particular, I want to thank the Vision and Strategy Group who have carried so much of this work. They have been rigorous, creative, patient, and wise in equal measure. And I owe a very specific and very public debt of gratitude to Roddy Porter, our Senior Non-Executive Member of Chapter, without whom this document would still be a vague aspiration living in a folder on my laptop. Roddy, thank you. This Cathedral is in your debt.

But I want to say something clearly at the outset, and I want to say it before I describe a single objective or name a single theme.

This strategy is not mine to deliver. It is not the Dean and Chapter's to deliver. It is not even the staff team's to deliver, though all of us will give everything we have to it.

This strategy belongs to the people of God. To you. To every person in this building this morning, and to every person who has ever loved this place, served in it, prayed in it, or found something here they didn't know they were looking for.



The cathedral has always been built by the people of Surrey. Brick by brick, they built it. Generation by generation, they have sustained it. And it will be sustained and grown again, not by a Dean with a plan, but by a community with a calling.

So, when I say *we* in what follows, and I will say it a lot, I mean all of us. Every one of us. The people of God, doing what the people of God have always done: building something that points beyond themselves.

Before I go any further, a word about what you're holding in your hands, because we've actually produced three things, and I want you to know what they are and why.

The booklet you have been given this morning is the summary version of our strategy: the vision, the direction, the key themes. There are two versions, one in A5 and one in A4, and we'd love you to take one home, share one with a neighbour, leave one with a friend who might be curious about what's happening here. They are designed to be given away. Please do give them away.

If you want to go deeper, the full strategy document is on our website from today. It sets out in detail the thinking behind each of our six themes, the specific objectives for Phase I, and how we intend to make progress against each of them. It is, if I say so myself, a serious piece of work, and it deserves to be read seriously. The web address is on the back of your booklet.

And if you want to go deeper still, there is something else on the website that I'd particularly commend to you: the theological document that underpins this entire strategy. Because this strategy did not begin with a spreadsheet or a set of management objectives. It began with a question: what does God require of a cathedral in this place, at this time? The theology came first. The strategy flows from it. If you want to understand not just what we are planning to do but *why*, in the deepest sense, that document is where you'll find it. I'm proud of it, and I think you'll find it worth your time.

The booklets are the flavour. The website is the feast. Both matter.

So. What have we actually produced? And why does it matter?

Let me start with what this strategy is *not*. It is not a management exercise. It is not a box-ticking response to what cathedrals are supposed to do in the current climate. It is not a document designed to impress the diocese and then live peacefully on a shelf.

It is, we hope, a genuine act of faith. A statement about who we believe God is calling *us* to be, and how we intend, together and with God's help, to get there.

The title of our strategy, our vision, is three lines:



Worshipping God. Transforming Lives. Serving Community.

And our vision is simple and, honestly, quite demanding:

A place for everyone.

Not just a place for the already convinced. Not just a place for those who know the liturgy and can find their way around Common Worship without panicking. A place for *everyone*. For the person who hasn't been inside a church since their grandmother's funeral. For the student at the university up the road who's asking whether any of this means anything. For the family who wandered in on a Sunday afternoon and found something they didn't know they were looking for.

That's what we're for. That's what we've always been for, since the people of Surrey built this cathedral brick by brick and called it, right from the start, the People's Cathedral. We intend to earn that name. Together.

The strategy works in two phases.

Phase I runs from now until 2028. Its purpose, in one word: *foundations*.

We are not starting from zero. We start from genuine strength: extraordinary music, a sacred and beautiful building, a congregation that is faithful and generous, a history that matters. But we also face real challenges, and we name them honestly in the strategy document. We carry a structural deficit. We have staffing gaps. There are things about this building, including the acoustics (and those of you who've tried to hear a reading from the back will know all about that), that need addressing.

Phase I is about getting those foundations right. A well-led team. A clear path to financial health; we have a plan to reach a balanced budget by 2028, and we are already working on it. Strong governance. The systems and people in place to sustain everything we want to do.

But Phase I is *not* an inward-looking exercise. Even as we stabilise, we turn outward. Towards Guildford. Towards the diocese. Towards all who are searching.

And here is the thing I most want you to hear about Phase I: we cannot do it without you. Not as a polite thing to say. As a simple statement of fact. The foundations of this cathedral are not concrete and brick; they are people. People who pray, who give, who serve, who welcome, who show up week after week and make this place what it is. You are the foundations. You always have been.



Phase 2 runs from 2029 to 2032. This is where we grow, deepen, and expand. It culminates in our **70th Anniversary in 2031**, a year we fully intend to mark with celebration, thanksgiving, and renewed commitment to this cathedral's future.

That's the trajectory. Build together, then flourish together.

Everything we are doing is organised around six strategic themes. Before I say anything about each of them, let me simply name them, so you can hold them together as a whole.

They are **Worship. Community. Learning. Sustainability. Mission. And Growing Younger.**

Six themes. One direction. And as you'll hear in a moment, each of them has something to ask of all of us, not just the staff team or the Chapter.

Worship. We exist to worship God. In Phase I, we'll strengthen our pattern of services, rejoice in our choral tradition, and begin work on our acoustics. But worship is not a spectator sport. Every person in a seat is a participant, not an audience member. The quality of our common worship depends on all of us bringing ourselves, really bringing ourselves, to this holy work. Come prepared. Come expectant. Come ready to offer something, not just to receive.

Community. We want this cathedral present in the life of Guildford and connected to the diocese. We'll establish a Cathedral Forum so the wider community can speak and be heard. We want every person who walks through that door to feel genuinely welcomed, not just greeted but *welcomed*. And that welcome doesn't come from a policy or a leaflet. It comes from you. It comes from the conversation at the door, the smile across the aisle, the willingness to notice someone sitting alone. You are the welcome team, every one of you.

Learning. We'll launch discipleship pathways, public conversations, and partnerships with local schools and the university. But learning in community is richer than learning alone. Join a group. Come to a course. Bring someone with you. Ask the awkward question you've been sitting on for years. This is a community where faith can be explored honestly, and that only works if we all commit to the exploration.

Sustainability. We have a structural deficit, and we are tackling it. We have a plan, and we will be transparent about how it is progressing. But financial sustainability is not just a matter for the finance committee. It is a matter for all of us. Regular giving matters. Legacy giving matters. Volunteering, the extraordinary and irreplaceable gift of time and skill freely offered, matters beyond calculation. Every one of those things is an act of faith in this cathedral's future. If you're not already giving regularly, please consider it. If you give already, thank you from the bottom of my heart.



Mission. This is the theme I want to dwell on for a moment, because I think we sometimes undersell it.

We are not a heritage site that happens to say prayers. We are not a concert venue with a nice café. We are a community of people who have encountered the living God and who believe, with everything we have, that that encounter changes lives. And we exist in one of the most spiritually searching moments in recent memory. People are looking. They may not know what they are looking for, but they are looking. And this cathedral, if we are courageous and generous and genuinely open, has the capacity to be a place where the searching finds something real.

The cathedral will become more visible in the coming months: a new website, a clearer and more consistent social media presence, stronger partnerships across the borough and beyond. But here is what I really want to say about mission: the most powerful tool we have is not a strategy document or a new website. It is you. It is every conversation you have in the week about what this place means to you. It is every person you invite. It is every story you tell about what you've found here. You are our mission, every time you walk out of these doors. The question is whether we walk out with that sense of possibility, that quiet confidence that we carry something worth sharing.

I think we do. I think we can. And I think this strategy gives us the framework to do it with much greater intentionality and much greater reach.

Growing Younger. I want children and young people to walk into this cathedral and feel genuinely at home. We'll develop schools' engagement, deepen our Godly Play ministry, and create new events for families. But a cathedral that is genuinely intergenerational is one where the adults make room, real, joyful, generous room, for younger people and families to belong. That's a cultural thing, and culture is made by all of us, daily, in how we act and what we value. So, I'm asking you: make room. Welcome the noise. Celebrate the presence of children, not as a disruption to worship but as the very heart of it.

I said we listened before we wrote a single word, and I want to come back to that, because I think it matters.

We spent months listening to regular worshippers, to those who'd never crossed the threshold, to volunteers and staff, to clergy and civic leaders, to young families and long-serving Friends. What came back was humbling and energising in equal measure.

This cathedral is loved. People told us that with real feeling. But they also told us, with equal feeling, that we are capable of so much more. That we haven't yet fully become what we are called to be.

That challenge doesn't belong to me alone. It belongs to all of us who love this place. And the most exciting thing about today is that we are answering that challenge together.



Because there is a part for you to play. I am absolutely certain of that. Whether you can give an hour a week or a financial gift or a prayer said each morning for this place, there is a role for you in this strategy. It was built for you, and it needs you to make it real.

Take a booklet home. Read it. Pass it on. Look at the full document on the website, and if you have the appetite, read the theology behind it too. And then come and find one of us and say: here I am, here is what I can offer, here is where I'd like to play my part.

There is a verse at the end of our strategy document that I want to leave you with. Psalm 127:

"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain."

This is the Lord's house. We are not building it alone. We are not even the main architects. We are, all of us, stewards of something that was here before us and will, God willing, be here long after us.

But stewardship is not passive. It is active, committed, costly, and joyful. It is the work of every person who has ever loved this place.

The foundations are strong. The calling is clear. The people, you, all of you, are willing.

Come. Be part of what is ahead.

Thank you.

The Very Rev'd Bob Cooper
Dean of Guildford