WESTMINSTER ABBEY: ITS PRESENT ROLE AND FUTURE PLANS
For some years the Dean & Chapter have been working to a strategic plan which now has been refined and developed into what you read here. We hope it will help all staff and volunteers work with us on some exciting developments over the coming few years.

The Very Reverend Dr John Hall
Dean of Westminster

Introduction

This document provides a framework to guide the direction and content of the Abbey’s work over the next five years. It sets out what we do and what we want to do, bringing together both continuing commitments and future projects.

Westminster Abbey sees itself as a living symbol of ‘Faith at the Heart of the Nation’. Its primary purpose is to be a working inclusive church. We strive to achieve this through activities that reflect the Abbey’s four-fold mission:

• To serve Almighty God by offering divine Worship daily and publicly;
• To serve the Sovereign by daily prayer and by a ready response to requests made by or on behalf of Her Majesty;
• To serve the nation by celebrating the distinctive witness of the Christian faith; by upholding the place of religious faith within national life; and by active engagement with Parliament, Whitehall and others in positions of public service;
• To serve all pilgrims and visitors to the Abbey, and to maintain a tradition of hospitality.
We are committed to maintaining the reputation of the Abbey and its high quality of service in every aspect of its life. This has to be the basis of both our public activities and our internal organisation. It demands a high degree of commitment from all the Abbey staff, but without this commitment it would be impossible to achieve our aims. We intend that all the Abbey’s activities should be directed towards fulfilling either the specific objectives set out here or the aspirations that underlie them. By linking this document to the work of the Abbey’s different departments, our staff are able to understand the real contribution their work makes to the Abbey’s overall mission.

This document is informed both by the Abbey’s Ethical Policy and by our Values, which we have recently published. Our Ethical Policy offers guidelines to ensure the behaviour of the Abbey conforms properly with our ethical and legal obligations; and commits the Abbey to address, where we are able, issues of social and spiritual need.

Prayer and worship are at the heart of the Abbey’s daily life and underpin all its other activities. The Abbey stands alongside the Palace of Westminster and has major government departments and the Supreme Court among its close neighbours. Its spiritual life and influence therefore lie at the very heart of the United Kingdom. The Abbey offers a generous welcome to other Christian denominations and world faiths, thus making space for wider expressions of faith. The Abbey’s status as a Royal Peculiar, standing outside the governance structures of the Church of England, gives it a freedom and independence which can be placed at the wider service of national and church life. This document expresses our continued engagement with this unique ministry and the practical implementation of the Abbey’s commitment to ‘Faith at the Heart of the Nation’.

Westminster Abbey is also a major visitor attraction welcoming more than one million paying visitors each year. We strive to ensure that they understand the Abbey’s primary role as a working church. Many of them in fact choose to engage in this aspect of our life by attending worship. But we also acknowledge the vital financial support our visitors provide. Without it most of the Abbey’s activities (such as our international reputation for excellence in public worship) could not flourish, nor could we maintain the historic buildings entrusted to our care.
Our Values drive the way the Abbey works as an organisation whose national and Christian profile requires it to set a high standard of behaviour. These Values are: “As one we serve each other, our visitors and the wider world in all that we do with truthfulness, integrity, empathy and excellence.”

These values have a particularly strong resonance for Christians, but they are not exclusively Christian values. We believe that they can be shared by people of any faith, and none. Those who work for the Abbey represent a wide range of different beliefs and we do not seek to impose on them a particular set of beliefs. But every organisation should be able to ask of its staff that they respect its inherent values and contribute, using their individual gifts, to the development of the organisation’s mission as far as they are able.

This document describes our plans to further the Abbey’s four-fold mission. Some of our aims are to develop and continue existing roles and practices as part of the on-going routine of the Abbey’s life. Others represent plans for developmental change and specific projects. The projects we plan relate in different ways to enhancing and improving the visitor experience; to reflecting the place of the Abbey at the heart of Westminster; and to bringing the Abbey to the world.

We believe it important that the full range of our activities is widely understood and informs the work of everyone who serves the Abbey. We shall re-examine these plans every three years.
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The Planning document

I. Worship and public engagement

Daily Christian worship of God and special services are at the heart of the Abbey’s mission, with music playing a crucial part in maintaining the Abbey’s reputation for excellence in its liturgy. Another public-facing aspect of the Abbey’s work is its support for education, especially as represented by the Education Centre and by Westminster Abbey Choir School. The Westminster Abbey Institute plays a particularly important role in the Abbey’s wider engagement with public life.

Worship

1. To continue to deliver the daily and weekly round of Abbey services at the highest standard, and to exercise ministry to all those who worship regularly at the Abbey and St Margaret’s.

2. To continue to offer daily prayer for the Sovereign and the Royal Family, reflecting the Abbey’s unique and close link as a Royal Peculiar to the Monarch.

3. To continue to promote and maintain close links with the Sovereign, Members of the Royal Family and the Royal Households.

4. To continue to promote the Abbey, and particularly the Shrine of St Edward the Confessor, as a national and international place of pilgrimage.

5. To maintain the highest international standards of choral music, and to make this available to the widest audience both directly in services and through concerts, broadcasts, recordings, tours, and the commissioning of new music.

6. To continue to deliver the highest quality of special services marking occasions of national and international importance.

7. To continue to respond to requests for thanksgiving or memorial services in the Abbey and St Margaret’s for individuals who have made a significant contribution to the nation.

8. To implement over the next five years the recommendations of the 2015 review of the mission, ministry and facilities of St Margaret’s Church, within the context of the Abbey’s wider mission.
Education

9. To ensure that the Abbey’s website and different forms of guides convey effective information about the religious purposes of the Abbey and its worshipping life.

10. To maintain and develop the highest possible standard of music and general education in the Westminster Abbey Choir School.

11. To widen and deepen the Abbey’s work of public education through its Education Centre and St Margaret’s.

12. To maintain at all levels the Abbey’s special and historic ties to Westminster School, and to the Harris Westminster Sixth Form, and the schools of the Grey Coat Hospital and United Westminster Foundations.

National and International Involvement

13. To maintain close links to the institutions of the Church of England, the Anglican Communion and other major churches; and to develop further the Abbey’s ecumenical links and its relationships with other faith communities.

14. To maintain the Abbey’s close links to Parliament, Government departments and the judiciary, and to the public services in general.

15. To maintain and develop the close relationship between Parliament and the Abbey, and to develop the role of St Margaret’s as “the Church in Parliament Square”.

16. To maintain and develop the close links between the Abbey and the Commonwealth.

17. To strengthen and develop the work of the Westminster Abbey Institute as a respected centre for exploring the spiritual and moral underpinning of public service and policy.

18. To memorialise in the Abbey individuals of outstanding national or international importance as the Dean judges appropriate.

Social Engagement

19. To enhance the Abbey’s practical involvement in social issues and charitable work — including, for example, collaboration with charitable trusts, the promotion of apprenticeship schemes within the Abbey, the strengthening of the Abbey’s charitable giving, and the encouragement of charitable involvement by its staff.
2. Visitors and hospitality

More than 1.5 million people visit the Abbey each year as worshippers and/or paying visitors. We seek to welcome and care for them in the spirit of Benedictine hospitality inherited from the Abbey’s former existence as a monastery. Our aim is to enable our visitors both to appreciate the spiritual role and significance of the Abbey for the nation as a whole, and to understand something of the Abbey’s history.

1. To maintain the highest quality and standards of care towards all the Abbey’s visitors and worshippers each year, not only on the Abbey floor and at St Margaret’s, but also in the Cellarium and the Abbey Shop.

2. To build over the next five years an effective membership base of the Abbey Association in order to strengthen the Abbey’s links to its national and international visitors.

3. To enhance the visitor experience by opening the eastern Triforium to public access in early 2018, and to establish there The Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Galleries where a wider range of the Abbey’s treasures can be displayed to the highest standard.

4. To improve the experience of visiting the Abbey by finding the best means after 2018 to move visitor access to the Great West Door.

5. To install by 2019 permanent access to the Abbey through the Great West Door for those with disabilities.

6. To continue to grow corporate hospitality at the Abbey. To continue to look at innovative ways of providing corporate hospitality that does not conflict with the other aspects of the Abbey’s mission.

7. To continue to pursue a risk averse strategy with the incumbent caterer by negotiating a minimum guaranteed rent per annum yielding a year on year increase in income to the Abbey.
3. People and resources

The Abbey’s staff are a vital resource, without whom none of what the Abbey does could be achieved. The commitment and expertise of our staff underpin all our activities. Ensuring the Abbey’s long-term financial stability through fund-raising and improved marketing is an important priority not least to enable us to care properly for the Abbey’s buildings, precincts and historic collections. The elements of the plan outlined in this section can be seen as essential ‘enabling services’, which ensure the successful continuance of worship, education, engagement with public life and the welcoming of visitors.

Effective management

1. To continue to provide Christian leadership and care to all who serve the Abbey – both staff and volunteers – and to provide for employees career development and training and the best possible conditions of service.
2. To maintain the Abbey’s strong commitment to diversity in the recruitment and care of its staff, and to the enforcement of a rigorous policy of safeguarding.
3. To maintain a level of financial reserves equivalent at least to the annual running costs of the Abbey, with a longer-term aim of building a substantial endowment to safeguard on a permanent basis the Abbey’s ability to fulfil its mission.
4. To safeguard the security of the Abbey to enable it to carry out its mission long into the future by an effective system of security management, close links to the security authorities, and the use of suitable security technology.
5. To preserve carefully, through the quality and presentation of the Abbey’s work and the effectiveness of its links to the media, the public standing and reputation of the Abbey as a high-profile national institution.
6. To maintain up-to-date systems of financial and Information Technology management suitable for the needs of a complex organisation with a high public profile.
Marketing and Development

7. To protect and increase tourism-based income through enhanced marketing and promotion, primarily to those living in the UK, during the Abbey’s traditional ‘low-season’ (October–March).

8. To continue and increase fund-raising income streams (reducing the Abbey’s heavy reliance on paying visitors) so that the Abbey’s activities can be maintained and expanded to meet changing needs and priorities. This will be done through donor cultivation - including major individual donors, corporate business, trusts and foundations, general donations from visitors and worshippers - and through other suitable means, including legacies.

Care of Fabric and Collections

11. To maintain and secure the precious fabric of the Abbey’s buildings through the expertise of its Works Department, conservators and specialist advisers, and by a regular programme of Quinquennial Reviews.

12. To complete by 2019 the major part of fabric repairs required under the Surveyor of the Fabric’s 2014 Quinquennial Review, including repair of the Abbey’s south nave and cloister roofs.

13. To begin work after 2018 on restoring the fabric of the Great Cloister.

14. To agree in 2016 to a comprehensive new lighting strategy for the Abbey, with the aim of its implementation over the next four years.

15. To seek improved ways to care for, display, and make accessible, the Abbey’s historic collections of books, muniments and object collections.

16. To increase public awareness and access to the Abbey’s collections by on-line catalogues and digitisation.

17. To explore for the longer-term the options for expanding the space available for public access to the Library and Muniments and for improving their storage facilities by building on the South Cloister roof.