

Vision & Strategy Update November 2025

1. Introduction

The Diocese of Newcastle is currently engaged in a sustained season of discernment shaped by our diocesan framework *Seeking, Sharing, Sending* which has helped refine our vision for the diocese of ***becoming confident Christians turning outwards in mission, enabling more and different people to experience the love of God***. In turn this is providing greater clarity to our diocesan priorities which coincides with a more intentional effort to prepare for long-term engagement with the National Church through the Diocesan Investment Programme (DIP) which is overseen by Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB).

2. Seeking, Sharing, Sending: A Framework for Diocesan Identity and Mission

Seeking, Sharing, Sending was developed as an invitational response to our diocesan priorities discerned during the Episcopal vacancy (2022–23). It aims to help empower us all to become confident Christians turning outward in mission. This framework is not programme-driven but spiritually rooted:

- *Seeking* asks where we notice God at work.
- *Sharing* equips people to articulate faith and build community.
- *Sending* anticipates outward growth in mission and partnership.

The three themes now help to shape deanery planning, governance conversations, and our engagement with national funding bodies.

3. Developing Strategy and Engagement

Over the past five months the Bishop's Council has looked at some of the key steps in the process of partnering with the National Church, via SMMIB, through the Diocesan Investment Program and has outlined what would be needed in the first phase (c3 years in duration):

- Support to develop our diocesan strategy;
- Support to gather data that can support the discernment of projects and their design;
- Identification of pilot projects in key areas of mission and ministry, potentially including: New Worshipping Communities, Formation and Discipleship (including Intergenerational and CYP work), and Buildings for Mission;
- The positioning of Deanery Development Planning as an early chapter in a wider Newcastle narrative to build on locally discerned priorities alongside our strategic diocesan objectives and potential national partnerships.

This has been informed with insights from recent successful applications for DIP funding by our neighboring dioceses of Durham and Carlisle and specifically on how finance and mission partnerships can be aligned effectively. Furthermore, the Council has reflected on the relationship between vision, strategy and how to broaden diocesan participation to foster innovation, transparency and sustain deeper engagement with vision and strategy.

Throughout this preliminary stage, the Council affirmed the importance of ensuring that the development of a diocesan strategic plan should be authentically “Newcastle-shaped,” while recognising the potential tensions between this aspiration and the requirements of applying for National funding through SMMIB.

4. How do we get started?

The immediate need is to strengthen our local capacity for vision and strategy by submitting an initial capacity funding application to SMMIB that will help enable development of the priorities detailed above in section 3. This requires the appointment of a Head of Strategy Development, initially for a period of around six months, to develop and submit this funding application. The cost of this is estimated at £30k and will be funded by the Diocese using the income generated from the Bishop Alec legacy. Assuming the funding application is successful, the role would then continue with funding from the DIP.

5. Other Partnerships

Early preparatory work is underway to build on the successful *Rural Churches for Everyone* (RCfE) project that was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This project worked with 30 rural parishes, grouped into four clusters to develop individual, bespoke actions plans to help ensure our church buildings remain both ‘Open’ and ‘Sustainable’. Resources were developed to enable PCCs to generate plans for the care of our valued buildings that demonstrated the growing roles they play within the communities we serve, and identifying ways in which mission and ministry might be collectively shaped to meet the needs of parishioners. The next phase is to submit a grant application valued around £235k within the next three months to fund a team to:

- Engage with all parishes (who want to) using the RCfE Open & Sustainable criteria to identify individual local needs;
- Analyse the individual plans to discern the overall core priorities that could be addressed collectively;
- Develop proposals on how to meet those core needs which will include engaging with partner organisations;
- Develop a larger diocesan wide delivery proposal to the NLHF in 2027.

Other existing partnerships which help provide a foundation include *Beyond Youth* (schools, chaplaincy and community in SE Northumberland) and community mission roles in Denton, Longbenton, Seaton Hirst, and Missional Accompaniment for Incumbent colleagues across all 12 Deaneries.

6. Conclusion

In this season the diocese is discerning a more intentional need to prepare for renewal—spiritually, structurally, and strategically. **Seeking, Sharing, Sending** is to help shape a culture grounded in prayer, confident formation, and outward-facing mission. This is likely to require a review of our governance structures to ensure they are aligned around wider participation and clarity of purpose. With a growing focus on external partnerships, the diocese is now positioning itself to access national investment that can help support implementation of our discerned priorities as part of our ongoing transformation of *becoming confident Christians turning outwards in mission, enabling more and different people to experience the love of God.*