

Ely Cathedral's vision for 2026 & beyond

Background

The purpose of our vision project

Ely Cathedral Chapter decided in 2025 to undertake a listening exercise to consider a 30-year vision and direction for the Cathedral. We did so from a position of strength and stability with a well-established Clergy team and leadership, a full calendar of services and events, and balanced finances.

Rather than becoming complacent with stability, we wanted to explore what more we could be doing to serve and support those around us. Are there distinctive abilities and assets which we are not using to their fullest? Are the buildings we have inherited the right ones to see us to 2050 and beyond?

Project outline

To ensure that the project delivered practical as well as visionary and directional outcomes, it had three key deliverables linked to future dates:

1. **30 Years:** A clear vision statement answering the question - *What is the big vision of the Cathedral we hand to our children?*
2. **3 years:** A three-year roadmap that answers the question - *What are the priority actions in the next three years that will help us deliver on the new vision?*
3. **10 Years:** A ten-year master planning brief that answers the question - *What are the areas of focus for the Cathedral that will guide a future Master planning process?*

The 10-month long project had five phases:

1. **Listening:** Conducting interviews with over 40 individuals who were either decision makers (e.g. Chapter, Cathedral Leadership, Acting Diocesan Bishop) or beneficiaries (e.g. parish clergy, diocesan officers, schools) and securing feedback via survey from over 110 members of staff and volunteers plus over 60 members of the congregation and over 60 visitors via short card-based surveys.
2. **Learning:** Undertaking desk-based research on eight English cathedrals and 12 institutions that could offer relevant good practice (e.g. arts venues, historic buildings or museums).
3. **Developing:** Facilitating a full away day with Chapter and other invited staff members to reflect on the initial findings and hypotheses alongside further meetings of Chapter and the regular cadence of the project working group.
4. **Testing:** Taking initial ideas for the three, 10 and 30 year elements to some key stakeholders (e.g. Acting Diocesan Bishop and leading local clergy) for their feedback.
5. **Approving:** The outputs were approved by Chapter following consultation with the Acting Diocesan Bishop.

Our 30-year vision

Our 30 year vision flows from our mission and sets out a series of statements by which we will be guided and determine our success in the coming decades. The four elements of the mission – worship, outreach, welcome and care – each have a vision statement.

Each of these vision statements has two parts, a short statement for use where brevity is essential and a second explanatory statement that unpacks and builds on the first shorter statement. Taken together they set out the direction for the Cathedral in these four foundational areas.

We have found our existing mission statement to be so well understood, ingrained and helpful that we decided to continue with it and expand on it.

Mission statement

Joyfully proclaiming the love of God in worship, outreach, welcome and care.

Vision statements:

Worship

Rooted in a thousand years of prayer

We deepen faith in Jesus Christ, through traditions of worship, music and devotion.

Outreach

Sharing the teachings and love of Christ

We connect with children and adults across our diocese, guiding them to grow in God's love.

Welcome

Providing a place for all

We welcome visitors and pilgrims from near and far, inviting them to experience the wonder, glory, and inspiration of our Cathedral.

Care

Caring for today and for the future

We provide a safe space for all who come to the Cathedral; and we are careful stewards of our buildings, resources, and planet.

A plan for the next three years

We are a vibrant place of Christian prayer, worship and social action. This means acting in ways that live out God's love in the world.

In the coming three years we will prioritise the action on the table below.

A more detailed version is available showing tasks, key milestones and owners.

Three year roadmap

Component	Activity	Degree of control	Vision Link	Description
Ongoing	Organ upgrade Project	High	Worship	Phased upgrade of Ely Cathedral's historic organ to preserve its musical heritage, enhance tonal quality, and ensure reliability for worship, concerts, and community events
	Maintain the choral tradition	High	Worship	Strengthen Ely Cathedral's choral tradition by supporting high-quality music education and engaging new audiences.
	Expand the reach of schools work	Moderate	Outreach	Grow Ely Cathedral's schools programme by building lasting partnerships with educators, and reaching more pupils from diverse communities across the region.
	Maintain Ely as a great place to work and volunteer	High	Welcome	Continue to make Ely Cathedral a place where staff and volunteers feel valued, supported, and inspired; offering meaningful opportunities, recognising contributions, and nurturing a strong sense of belonging.
	Invest in new toilets (linked to masterplan)	Low	Welcome	Install new toilet facilities that increase capacity and improve accessibility, meeting the needs of growing visitor numbers and Cathedral events.
Developing	Improve communication with parishes	Moderate	Outreach	Strengthen links with parishes by establishing clear, consistent communication channels and sharing timely information.
	Offer more for children and young people	Moderate	Worship	Expand activities and resources for children and young people, both in the Cathedral community and among visitors, by offering engaging programmes and events, and opportunities for participation in Cathedral life.
	Widen our styles of worship through special services	Moderate	Worship	Widen Ely Cathedral's worship by introducing more informal styles and special services that reflect different traditions, engaging a wider range of congregations and visitors.
	Social justice support and communication	Moderate	Outreach	Deepen Ely Cathedral's commitment to social justice by amplifying local and diocesan initiatives and facilitate meaningful conversations that inspire action within the Cathedral and beyond.
	Create a 10-20 year site masterplan	High	Care	Develop a comprehensive 10-20 year masterplan for Ely Cathedral's site, balancing heritage conservation with current and future needs
Enabling	A joint three-year partnership plan with the Diocese	Low	Outreach	Develop a three-year partnership plan with the Diocese to enrich education programmes, strengthen community engagement, and support shared mission priorities across Ely Cathedral and diocesan initiatives.
	Early engagement with local council and others on masterplan	High	Care	Initiate early and proactive engagement with the local council and key stakeholders to ensure Ely Cathedral's masterplan aligns with regional planning priorities.
	Twice yearly 'all Ely' visitor attraction meetings	High	Welcome	Host biannual 'All Ely' visitor attraction meetings to strengthen collaboration and share insights to enhance the overall visitor experience.
	Ongoing investment in communications	High	Outreach	Commit to continuous investment in communications infrastructure and strategies to improve outreach, enhance digital presence, and ensure timely, engaging engagement with diverse audiences.
	Fundraising campaign linked to masterplan	High	Care	Plan a targeted fundraising campaign aligned with the masterplan, engaging the Friends of Ely and Ely Cathedral Trust to secure vital support for key projects and long-term

Establishing a 10-20 Year Masterplan

One key risk to the Cathedral's mission and vision is the constraints of the current estate. As noted in the three-year plan, the creation of a 10-20 year masterplan is a priority area for development. It is envisaged that this master planning process will begin in 2026. We note that the creation of a neighbourhood plan that involved parties beyond York Minster has been important to the success of their multi-year masterplan.

The following have been identified as the key needs for the estate. Where ideas are offered, they are offered simply as a reflection of discussions at our vision planning day in July 2025 and are not intended to direct the thinking of the chosen partner in developing the masterplan.

Sitting above each of these needs are two principles which should be woven into any proposed solutions. These are **stewardship** and **accessibility**.

By stewardship we mean a deep commitment both to the heritage of the buildings and to the ecological sustainability of any plans.

Accessibility refers to the capacity for the widest possible range of people being able to enjoy and participate to the fullest extent in all that the Cathedral has to offer.

0. (TO NOTE) Heating: *It is noted that heating is an issue in the Cathedral and there are ongoing discussions, investigations and proposals regarding improved heat during the colder months. Masterplans should take note of this work and desire for more warmth but not be dominated by it as the cost and complexity could swamp all other ideas and plans.*

1. Retreat spaces for pilgrims and parishes: There is appetite among parishes to benefit more from their Cathedral. It is further noted that there is a rediscovery of the value of pilgrimages which is an exciting opportunity for the Cathedral. The role of the Cathedral is not to replicate the Diocese in its obligations and opportunities for supporting clergy and parishes. Instead the Cathedral wants to be more explicit about the welcome and opportunities to receive hospitality at Ely.

A new space would allow church groups and pilgrims a place of gathering, meeting, prayer and rest. It would not seek to duplicate the modern Diocesan offices and its facilities, which are also available for parishes, but offer something distinct which is rooted in the heritage of the Cathedral. The beneficiaries will be parish churches, clergy and pilgrims who gather at Ely.

The footprint of the old Chapter House was noted as somewhere with a rich history and story that could be interesting to explore for the development of a new building. This discussion also prompted conversations about parking and related requirements which would form part of future master planning discussions.

2. Space for education: There is a strong appetite to strengthen the mission and welcome to children and young people. Better space(s) for school groups and gatherings of young people will help connect people with the history of Ely but, even more importantly, allow the Cathedral to more powerfully proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to future generations.

It is envisaged that this space/spaces could also be used for gatherings related to social justice topics. The direct beneficiaries of this investment will be children and young people, but the long-term impact is vital for the future flourishing of the Cathedral.

- 3. Choir rehearsal space:** There is a desire to improve and modernise the quality of facilities for choristers and help enable improved safeguarding through proximity of lavatory facilities.

This may also give the Cathedral a space for visiting choirs and musicians to use and provide a facility onsite if King's Ely was ever unable to continue to provide choral support.

It is envisaged that this space's primary purpose will be as choir rehearsal space. It could be similar to the recently completed Song School at Norwich Cathedral or more flexible, so long as the choral function isn't overly compromised.

- 4. Visitor experience and storytelling:** Ely's majestic open interior is a great blessing for worship. For visitors, it presents a challenge. It leaves few spaces for exhibition space that do not compromise the Cathedral's dominant and primary purpose as a community of prayer and worship.

The ideal would be to create new spaces or repurpose existing ones to enhance the visitor experience, offering improved activities for children/schools, providing space to tell Ely's story and allowing flexibility for future technological innovation.

One space noted was the galleries which could be developed in a similar way to Westminster Abbey.

- 5. Welcome and flow:** Some cathedrals, such as Gloucester, have a single or primary point of entry to their precinct, which creates a natural flow.

Ely is a site with multiple entry points and its large doors and scale can create a barrier to feeling welcomed. We would like an improved sense of welcome to the Cathedral regardless of the side visitors approach from.

The aim is to feel warmly drawn into the buildings, enjoying a sense of awe and not feeling put off by the scale. Specific points noted by Chapter in July 2025 include the desire for improved signage and that Cross Green, while serving a practical purpose for events and film crews, does not match the splendour of the Cathedral.

- 6. Reimagining the surrounding areas:** Connected with improving the flow and welcome in the immediate vicinity of the Cathedral, but expanding beyond this, there is a desire to think about the totality of the spaces and neighbourhood around the Cathedral.

Can the Dean's Meadow, Cherry Hill Park, the Bishop's Garden, Bishop Wynn's Close, Steeple Row, the walk from the train station and other surrounding areas be reimagined and developed in such a way that local people and visitors are able to enjoy more of the natural environment? Can this space be planted/maintained in such a way to embody the desire to help creation (and biodiversity) flourish?

- 7. Additional WCs:** The most pressing challenge (noted in the three year plan) is the requirement for additional lavatory facilities. This need is greatest during major services and concerts when large numbers from congregations/audiences want to use the facilities at the same time. This will benefit all those worshipping and visiting the Cathedral.

- 8. Green room for artists:** Visiting artists currently lack the kind of facilities to prepare for performances that would be considered normal in most venues.

It is envisaged that this may be new space which has a different primary purpose but which is flexible enough to serve as a green room. While benefitting a relatively small number of individuals it would add to the hospitality of the Cathedral.