



Launde Abbey's

2024 ANNUAL SUMMARY REPORT

Registered Company Number: 07469311

Registered Charity Number: 1140918

CONTRIBUTORS

Chair of Trustees

Jennie Page CBE

Warden

Revd Alison Myers

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

Jennie Page CBE

It will be many years before the world in general fully comes to terms with the consequences of the global pandemic of 2020-21, which radically changed many aspects of understanding as well as of day-to-day life and economics as it swept the world with danger, death and uncertainty.

At Launde Abbey, we are fortunate that the disaster did not destroy the Trust and community. 2024 was the first year in which we could build with some confidence on what has been maintained from pre-COVID years and introduce new approaches and thinking to take us forward. As a result, we were able to more than double our 2023 surplus on ordinary activities with visitor income up by 7% and cost increases held to 4%, and to deliver a total surplus of £80,729 (2023, £40,340).

Throughout, we have protected the mediaeval monastic quality of *stabilitas*, or holding life steady in one place, which is sustained by the praying life of the community. This *stabilitas* is a large part of the appeal of the Abbey to those who come here: the world in general, not just those of Christian faith, continues to need such places of refuge and spiritual calm, as is shown by the variety of groups which chose in 2024 to spend time with us.

2023 had been dominated by the difficult process of introducing new technological systems: 2024 saw the benefits of a better automated booking process and procedures and the greater analytical capacity which resulted when installation problems were overcome. Trustees have gained deeper insights into the workings of the retreat house business and hence a greater confidence in the robustness of data. It is now possible to track costs in greater detail and to react to unexpected changes in e.g., fuel or food pricing more quickly.

Together with the market indications that Launde Abbey can attract groups and individuals, this leads trustees to believe that the Abbey can continue to operate profitably, subject of course to dramatic adverse external changes. However, profitability does not automatically ensure sustainability and in due course, Launde Abbey will need to find ways other than earned income to meet any large costs, such as those associated with the historic buildings and estate. At present, such costs do not appear to be likely to occur in the short term.

In 2024, the Trust's business benefited from the existence of a full complement of strong senior managers, ably assisted by skilled and enthusiastic staff and volunteers, many of whom are long-term members of the Launde Abbey community. In addition, the College of Chaplains (created in 2023), whose six members change annually, allowed local clergy, active and retired, to participate in the Abbey's life. The College strengthened the capability of the in-house clergy to lead the 1,000 religious services and to provide pastoral support to all visitors as required. More remote but serious support was provided by those who became Companions of Launde Abbey and by the Stretchers Prayer Group, and The Friends of Launde Abbey continued to award very welcome grants. Trustees are profoundly grateful to all these people who shared in the life of the Abbey in these various ways.



As Chair, I am also grateful for the work of the trustees. The full board meets six times a year and is supported by its Finance and Personnel Committee and its Estate Committee, each of which also met six times. In addition to normal business, agenda time was given to increasing board members' understanding of the hospitality industry, of inter-cultural working and of the Church of England's national strategy for mission. Trustees were also kept informed about the effects of climate change, both economically and environmentally, and in 2024 sought in particular to understand better how national policies affect its stewardship of the surrounding estate. The aim is to 'tread lightly' wherever possible and economic, and to enhance the biodiversity of the land, in line with the Church's fifth mark of mission – to care for creation.

In the latter half of 2024, the board recruited two new trustees and one new committee member to fill vacancies. Together they brought experience of working inter-culturally, land management, corporate law, spirituality and the Church. The Trust also benefited

from the close working relationships with the two dioceses of Leicester and Peterborough and was very grateful for the support of diocesan staff and clergy and in particular for the personal support of Bishop Martyn Snow, Bishop Debbie Sellin, Bishop Saju Muthulaly and Bishop John Holbrook (who will be much missed after his retirement later this year).

In summary, trustees are pleased with the performance achieved in 2024 and consider that the Trust is well placed to continue to improve its business performance in future. The shocks to the world order of mid-2025, coming as they do on top of national economic malaise, do cast some doubts on how quickly it will be possible to build further on the 2024 business model. High food and utility costs and less disposable income in our core attendees would inevitably slow growth, but trustees believe the organisation is now competent to respond adequately to the problems of an unstable world, and to continue to hold steady in our one very precious place.



Jennie

Ms J A Page CBE
Chair of trustees

WARDEN'S REPORT ON 2024

Revd Alison Myers



2024's Strategy

2024 was a strong and encouraging year at the start of a new phase - 'Sustaining and Deepening' - as a place of prayer, hospitality, community and sanctuary. As such, we are committed to deepening and supporting the spiritual life and wellbeing, in particular the Christian spiritual life, of individuals, churches, charities and institutional bodies, both regionally and nationally. We are aware too of our responsibility as stewards of our historic buildings and their parkland landscape.

As the year began, we reviewed the objectives set in early 2022, reinstating the existing five objectives and adding a sixth - 'enriching our hospitality'. These objectives and some of the related outcomes achieved during 2024 are in the figure on page 6.

As the year closed, we heard Thomas Cromwell's words, written by Hilary Mantell, in the BBC production of *Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light*: ***'There is an Abbey... Launde, in the heart of England. The air is always sweet there and it's quiet. A little heaven here on earth.'*** As we continue the work of the Abbey in 2024 and into 2025, we are grateful for the stories of the past - both of the Augustinian canons and of the Cromwell family - that shape who we are today and give us a trajectory into the future.



Initiatives for 2024

Initiatives in 2024 continued to emphasise our character as a place of prayer, hospitality, community and sanctuary, our priority areas for development defined in early 2022. A number of planned actions were achieved in 2024 across six key areas as shown in the figure.

DEEPENING AS A HOUSE OF PRAYER

New residential chaplain

'School of Contemplative Life' added to Launde Programme

Night prayer books in bedrooms

ENRICHING OUR HOSPITALITY

Online booking implemented

Fire door upgrade work planned and ready

More food from walled garden served in the dining room

CONNECTING WITH OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

New land agent

Natural capital audit of grounds and surrounding land

East wall borders fully replanted - garden development

GROWING THE ABBEY'S COMMUNITIES

College of Chaplains first full year; increasing 1-1 work

'Life at Launde Abbey' newsletter launched

Image rich website developed for early 2025 launch

BETTER SERVING MINISTERS CHURCHES AND SENIOR LEADERS

Holy Listening Course first full year

Rooted and Grounded spiritual practice retreats expanded

Abbey Community at Peterborough Diocesan conference

SUSTAINING A THRIVING BUSINESS & A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

Better data collection enabled by new software

Increased automation of financial processes

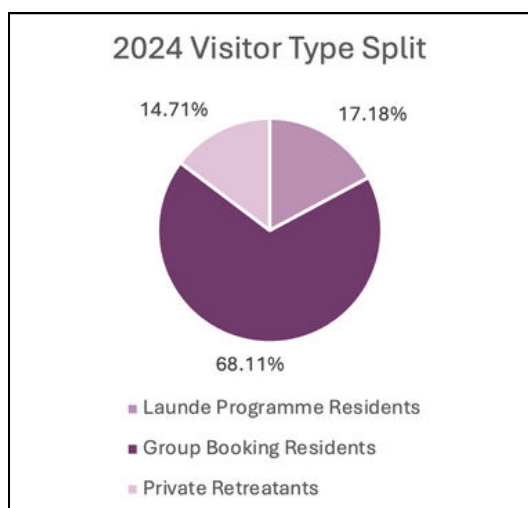
Increasing financial stability

Ministry and prayer

The daily rhythm of prayer continues in the chapel, led by the resident community and the new College of Chaplains, and is open to all guests and staff as well as members of the public. We held just under 1000 services in the chapel in 2024 in total, starting each day in the Abbey with a Eucharist. This grounds our ministry and our hospitality in a life of prayer.



Our own Launde Programme of residential and day retreats is a significant part of our ministry and our income. It is carefully curated to offer a wide variety of stimulating and challenging content, leaning in more this year to spiritual formation and discipleship. During 2024 we ran a total of 26 residential retreats (not including our Quiet Days and Mission Hubs or other ministry formation-style events such as our Holy Listening Course). 84% of places available were taken and the feedback from individuals was overwhelmingly positive. We experimented with adding one or two longer and therefore more expensive retreats into the mix, finding that with the right focus people were prepared to pay more and stay for longer. This has given us the impetus to increase further our Launde Programme offering during 2025 to a total of 35 retreats.



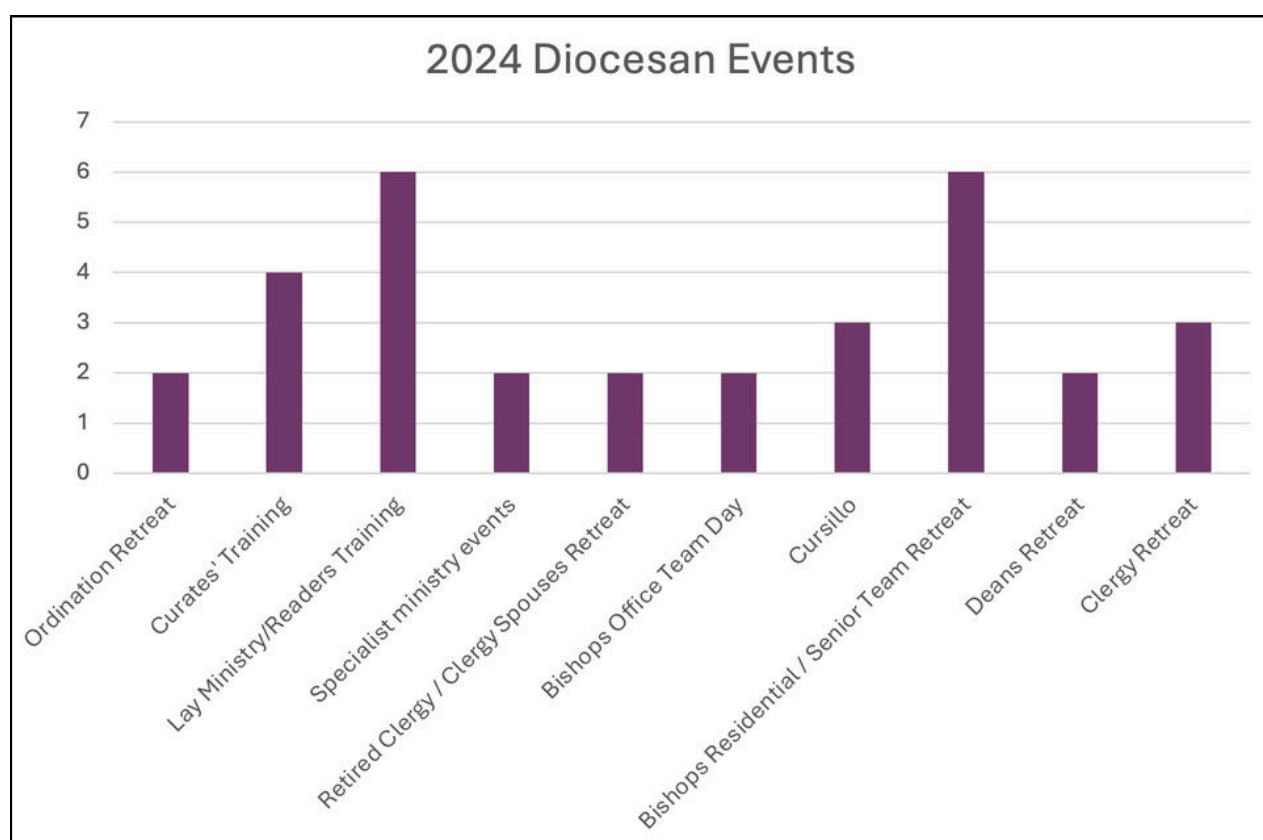
Other forms of ministry are increasing along with our capacity to resource them through the College of Chaplains. This includes one-off reflections to contribute to a group's stay and 1-1 conversations, including spiritual direction. We are consciously using our Quiet Day programme to discover and develop new retreat leaders.

In January, the Abbey's re-designed 2-year Holy Listening Course to train spiritual directors began with a strong cohort of 10 students. In the autumn we successfully

recruited a further cohort of 10 students to start in Jan 2025 running concurrently with those in their second year. This course is run independently by the Abbey and students are drawn from across the denominations and from across the region, and are either self-funded or draw on funding from church bodies.

Hospitality to groups

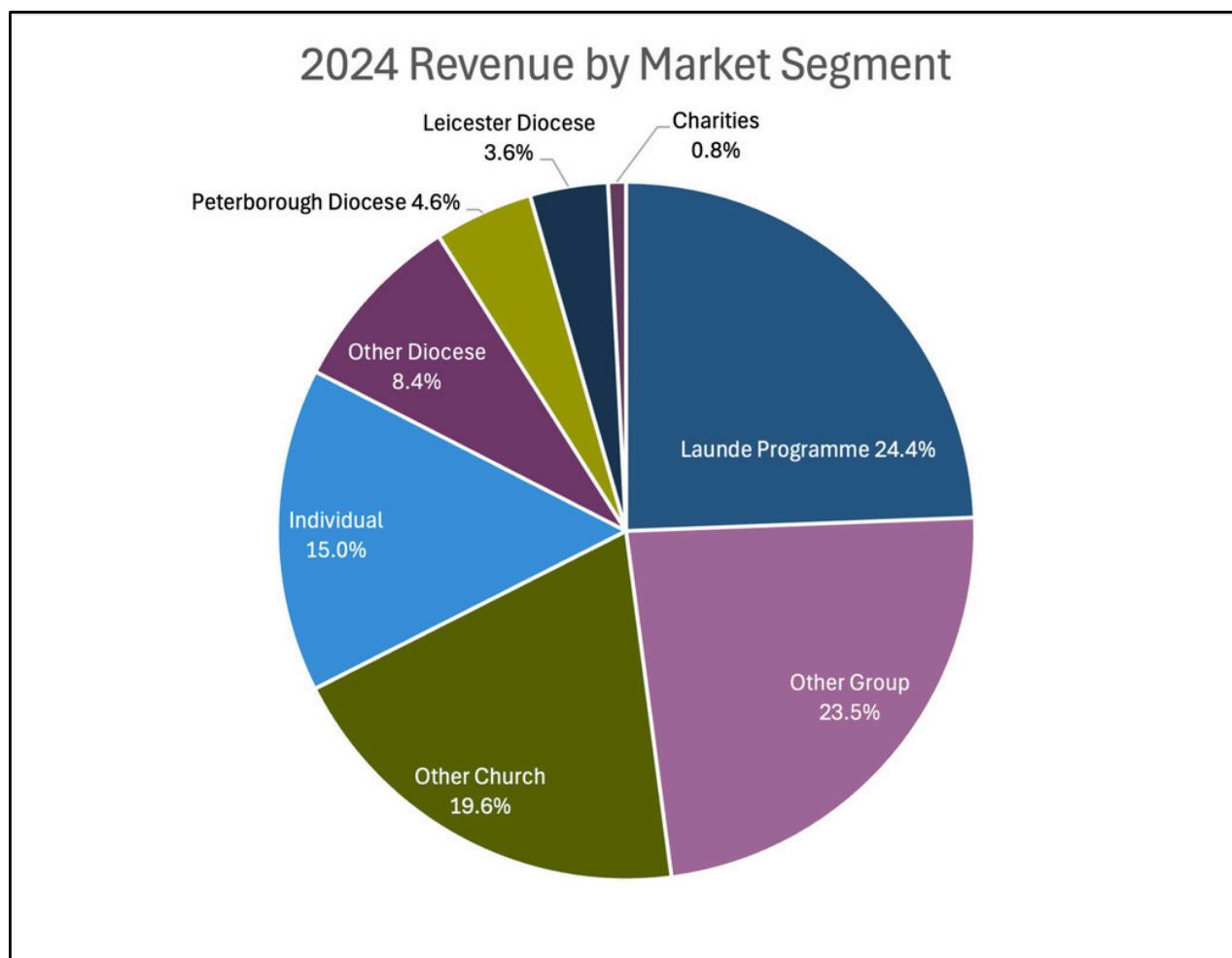
We play a significant part in the life of the Church of England both in this region and beyond. As well as being the named retreat house for Leicester and Peterborough Dioceses, six other dioceses came to us for specific events, such as ordination retreats, ministers' group retreats, curate and lay minister training, and senior leadership team residentials.



As part of our partnership with Peterborough Diocese, the Warden and Deputy Warden were delighted to attend their three day Ministers Conference in November as a 'praying presence'. Many of our individual guests are Anglican clergy, including bishops, seeking time out to pray or sometimes to plan or write. In 2024, National Church of England residential events included two Discernment Conferences and the Clergy Chairs Forum.

We are conscious, however, of the further tightening of diocesan belts and so for this and other reasons we are glad to also work with a number of other denominations and networks of churches (Quaker, Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed Church (URC),

Federation of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC), Vineyard, and Salvation Army in 2024) and with para-church organisations (eg, Third Order of the Society of St Francis, Rural Ministries, the Association for Promoting Retreats, the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity). Our hospitality extends also to non-church groups - we have regular singing, yoga, mindfulness, writing, and therapy training groups - who appreciate the sanctuary and peace that the Abbey offers and are often intrigued by the life of prayer at our heart.



Staffing

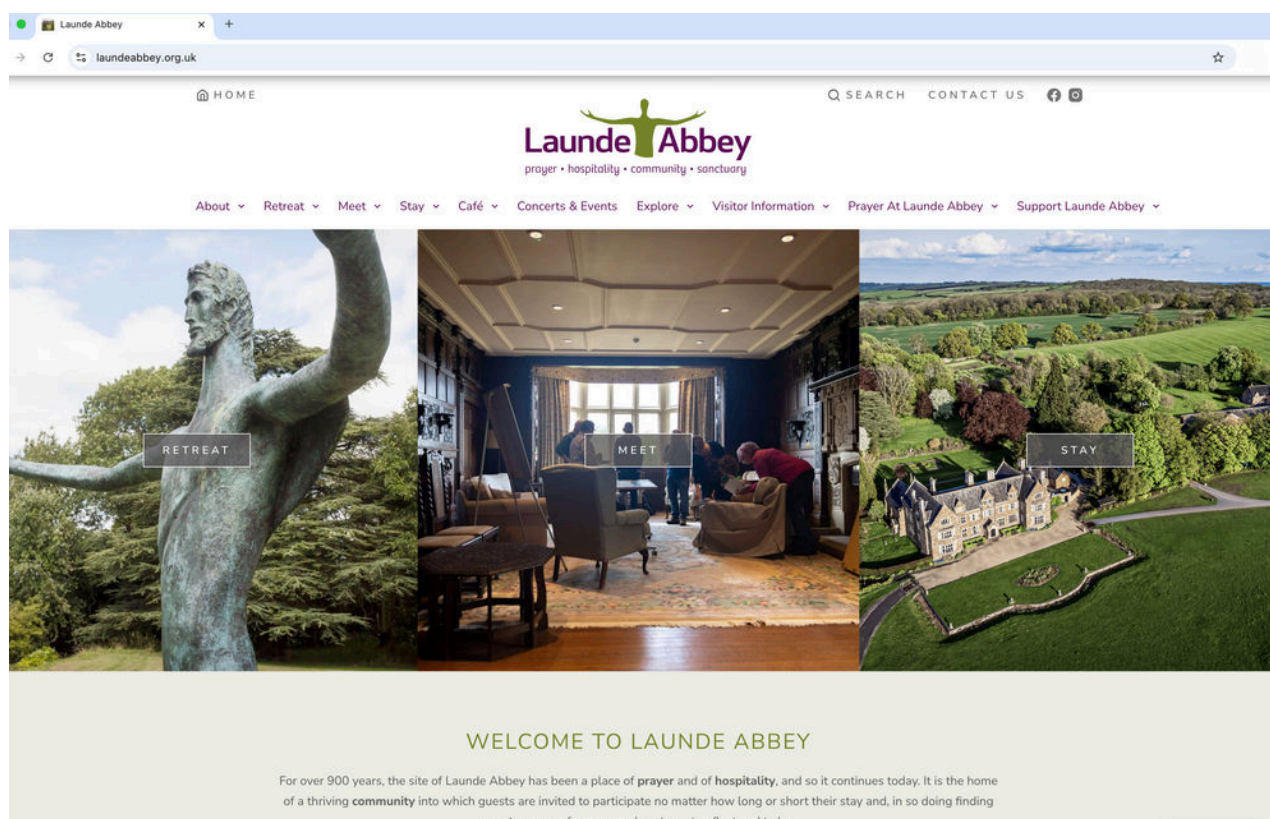
At the end of the year, we had a total of 39 full time and part time staff mostly across the Operations and Development Teams, and nearly 30 volunteers, primarily in the gardens but also in some ministry and administrative roles. Recruitment and retention for hospitality roles was challenging industry wide in 2024, and the Abbey was not exempt, but we are proud that many of our staff have been with us for more than 5 years, and some considerably longer.

The permanent Ministry Team was bolstered by the arrival of Revd Fran Grasham as a part time chaplain in the summer, bringing the Ministry Team to four (3 FTE). Fran and her husband live in one of our residential properties. The new College of Chaplains became fully operational in 2024 and now has a membership of six, supporting the permanent team. Membership of the College is time limited and is another way for the Abbey to encourage the development of new ministries. We also released Deputy Warden, Revd Chris Webb, with a three month sabbatical during 2024.

Organisational operation

This year we started to reap the rewards of the new hospitality industry software installed over some months in 2023, including more comprehensive data collection and reporting across the organization. Further work in 2024, in collaboration with the software provider, has increased automation at the financial 'back end' despite the complexity of our business compared with that of other hospitality organisations.

The new software has also enabled the launch of online booking for both individual guests and for the Launde Programme and we are seeing considerable uptake of this option. Alongside this, the work to create a completely new and image rich website took place in 2024 ready for launch in early 2025. Both of these moves are improving the pre-booking and pre-arrival experience for guests and bringing the Abbey in line with contemporary expectations of the way that events and hospitality should be booked.



Land, grounds and buildings

During the course of the year, the stonework around the flat roof at the back of the manor house was repaired to prevent rainwater ingress, and a roof gulley on the Stables similarly. It took much of the year to prepare for upgrading more of our historic doors to current regulation fire doors, scheduling the work to take place in the quiet of January 2025. Minor room refurbishments took place when possible throughout the year.

Wet winter weather caused several problems at Launde Abbey. For the most part, water from the parkland pooled then flowed through the gardens and around the buildings into the river Chater below the Abbey. However, the cellar and the Augustine Chapel flooded twice and had to be dried out once the water had receded. Flooding across local roads in heavy rain, including the brook in Loddington and the Chater, made it hard to access or leave the site a number of times, though usually patience was rewarded as most water levels receded fairly quickly.

In the garden, coping stones were repaired on the walls of the listed walled garden and work progressed to re-roof the middle glasshouse. In the early spring a specially commissioned, curved oak bench was donated as part of the Quiet Garden's redevelopment. During the spring and summer, the experimental meadows gave us wild flowers and grasses in abundance including the elusive bee and pyramid orchids, and our breeding pair of threatened spotted flycatchers enjoyed the increased insect life.



During the autumn, tree surgeons trimmed the copper beech after the fall of large branches and, separately, a tree survey was undertaken around all rights of way and paths. In October, the 2-year project to develop the east wall borders reached the important stage of planting with the 1,250 plants propagated onsite.

On a larger scale, the ongoing project to understand our land and develop a land strategy moved forward with the commissioning of a Natural Capital Audit and the appointment of our own land agent (previously shared with the Diocese of Leicester).

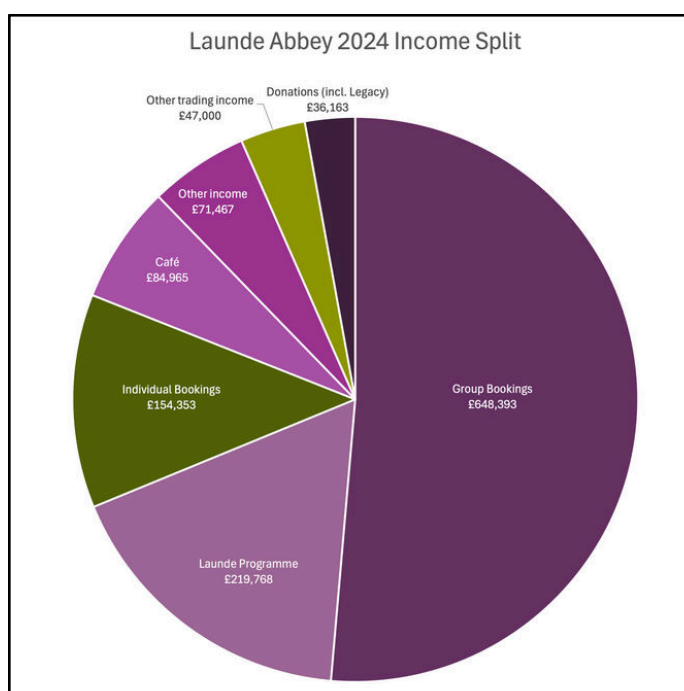
Grants from the Friends of Launde paid for new tables for the café courtyard and solar lighting pillars along the main path between the buildings.



Finance

2024 was our strongest year financially since the Covid lockdowns. Our net surplus from 'ordinary activities' rose to £46k and after 'exceptional items' such as grants came to £81k.

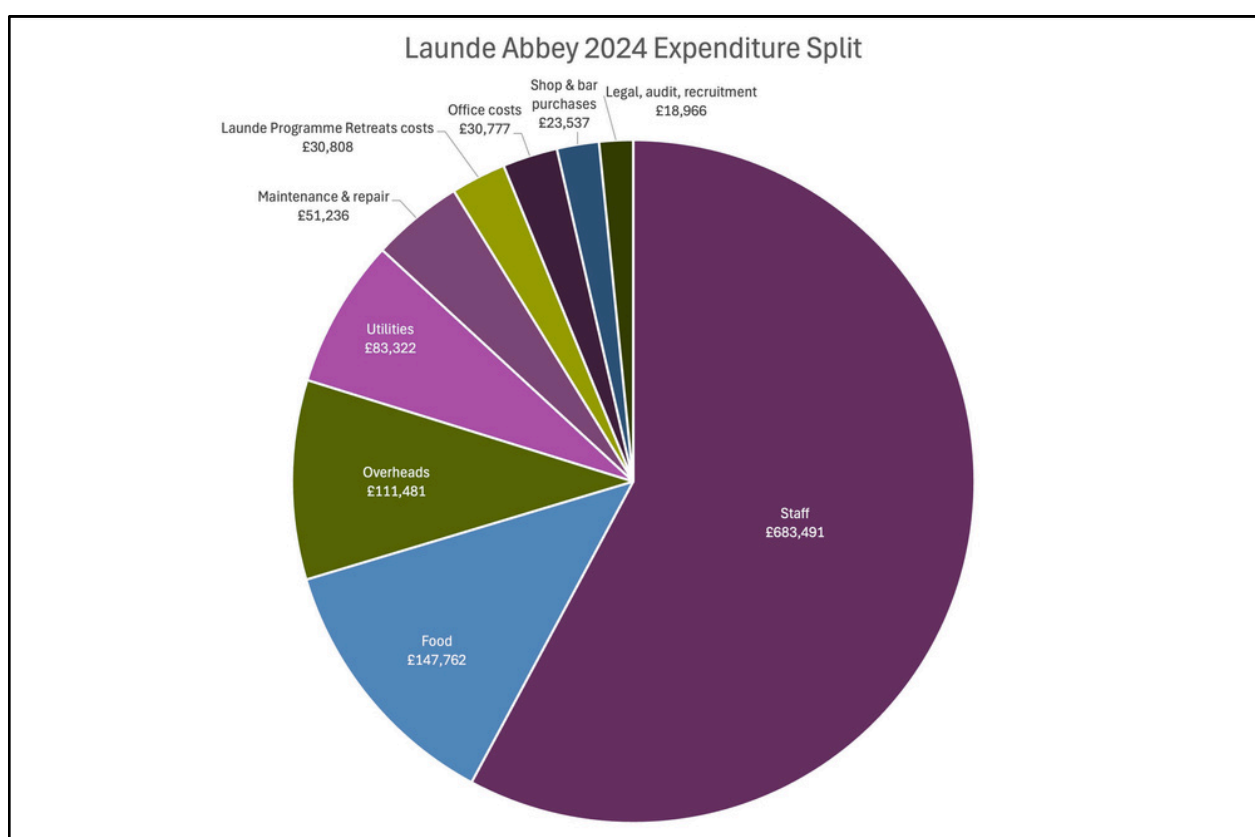
Our revenue in 2024 was a total of £1.26m, the largest part of which continues to come from our groups business. Our own curated Launde Programme is now a substantial driver of our income and exceeds income from individual private retreatants. Overall, the vast majority of our income is derived from our own work and our operation is not subsidized by any diocesan or other body. However, as noted earlier, we are reliant on group booking spend from dioceses and the national church continuing to come to us rather than to hotels, and we continue to be grateful for other kinds of support from our partner dioceses.



As expected, staffing continues to be our largest category of expenditure. We carry the extra staffing costs of ministry, over and above the staff required for a business purely focused on hospitality, and 2024 was the first year since Covid in which the re-shaped Senior Management Team was fully staffed for the whole year. External factors such as substantial increases in the Real Living Wage and in the cost of food in 2024 are also exerting upward pressure on to our costs, though we have mitigated this with

careful and flexible planning of staffing, and food cost control measures.

Despite this we ended the year with a healthy surplus giving us a good start to 2025.



Starting 2025

Our environment continues to be challenging. Internally, our spend on refurbishment will be greater in the coming year as we complete projects already lined up as well as scope out and deliver others that are on the horizon. We are also investing more in administrative staff to help cover long term illness as well as to support more work on data analysis, regulation related admin, and pro-active sales. All of this is necessary investment for our sustainability.

To respond, we are increasing the visibility of the Abbey and what it can offer via networking opportunities and external invitations for the senior staff, (as well as featuring on BBC Songs of Praise). We are undertaking targeted communication to broaden our diocesan business, and this has already born some fruit with the return of a third diocese for 2025 for a flag-ship summer pre-ordination retreat and the addition of a fourth diocese in 2026. There will be some impact on income in 2025 but the longer impact will be in 2026 and beyond.

The Launde Programme has been increased for 2025 and we will continue to focus a range of retreats on those areas for which there is strong demand – spiritual practice, contemplation, art/craft and speakers with a significant reputation – as well as those important for ministry such as ‘Living with Loss’.

The Friends of Launde, a separate organization, remain our primary fundraiser for specific projects, via subscriptions, events and grants. And beyond this, we will be exploring the opportunities for the development of a donor network to support our ongoing work of hospitality and ministry.

We know that we cannot be complacent but we have started 2025 with a sense of confidence in who we are and what we offer to the Church and beyond, and that is a good place to be.

If you would like to support the life and ministry of Launde Abbey, we warmly invite you to consider joining the Launde Abbey Companions – a community of prayerful supporters committed to walking alongside the Abbey in its mission. Alternatively, you may wish to make a one-off or regular donation. For more information about the Companions or to give online, please visit our website at www.laundeabbey.org.uk/support or contact us directly at info@launde.org.uk.



Alison

Revd Alison Myers
Warden

