

At Diocesan Synod on 11 November, Colin Butler raised the following question under Standing Order 71:

“In the judgement given earlier this year concerning the installation of a gas heating system in Top Church, Dudley, the Chancellor indicated a preference for sustainable heating systems and that a case would need to be made before carbon systems would gain approval. Given that the cost of installing ground source and air source heat pump systems is likely to be prohibitive for many parishes, what alternatives are available, acceptable and affordable?”

Response given by the Archdeacon of Worcester, Robert Jones:

The Chancellor’s judgment on Top Church in May granted a Faculty for a replacement gas heating system on the basis that it had been developed and funded before the General Synod’s commitment to the Church of England becoming Net Zero by 2030 had been made. The pandemic had caused the delay in obtaining permission and undertaking the work. Whilst the proposals improve the efficiency and carbon footprint of the church, the judgment stressed that future applications for replacement heating systems in this diocese will need to fully consider the available alternative and renewable technologies: even if the conclusion is that a fossil fuel-led system is – for now – the only viable option.

Alternative technologies remain either in development or require significant capital investment. They may also require a significant intervention to a listed building and considerable consultation with the DAC, local planning authority and Historic England to discern their suitability. Hitherto the reliance on one volunteer as the DAC heating adviser to support parishes has been admirable but we will need to develop how we support parishes and the DAC better to meet the challenge set by General Synod.

Bishop’s Council are therefore considering how further support could be made available – necessarily directed in a strategic way to concentrate on making the greatest inroads into emissions – to support options appraisals, create fundraising strategies and developing design proposals to permission-stage through the deployment of professional resources. More details on this will be announced in due course.