

St Mary's Eaton Socon – Environmental Policy

1. Introduction

This document sets out St Mary's vision in response to the gift of God's creation and the current crises caused by mankind's behaviour. It is a high-level document which provides the rationale for the targets and actions which will be developed over time.

This document should enable St Mary's leaders and officers to communicate its reasons and aims to the congregation and to others including local community groups, users of church buildings and land, suppliers, grant-making bodies, diocesan and Council officers.

This policy is owned by the PCC, who expect it to be actively supported by the staff, leaders and officers of the Church.

The PCC has appointed a Creation Care Group (CCG) to advise it, to develop policy, objectives and actions, and to manage implementation as necessary.

This document will be reviewed by the PCC every year alongside other Church policies.

2. Motivation

2.1 Theology

We know from Scripture that:

- God created the earth, its flora and fauna, saw it was good and was pleased with it (Gen 1, Job 38-39)
- God gave man mastery of creation and commanded him to take care of it (Gen 1, 2)
- Mankind's rebellion against God at the Fall disrupted his relationship with God, his relationship with other people, and his relationship with creation (Gen 3)
- The Law commanded restraint so that creation could thrive (Sabbath, fallow years, years of jubilee, gleaning, eg Leviticus 23:22)
- God rejoices in and cares for his creation (eg Ps 104, Mt 10:29)
- God tells us to love our neighbours as ourselves (eg Luke 10:27)
- Jesus taught us to pray 'Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Mt 6:10)
- We look forward to a new creation in which all relationships will be renewed and restored through the work of Jesus Christ (eg Is 11:6-9, Ro 8:18-25, Col 1:16-20)

2.2 The current environment

We see evidence of the Fall in mankind's selfish and short-sighted treatment of creation. The scale of humanity's activities, with increasing population and the power of technology, has now led to acute crises, particularly of climate warming¹, pollution and loss of biodiversity.

These crises are already having an impact on human communities, and many are suffering from much more serious effects than we see locally. Many countries and communities that are threatened by the climate crisis are among the poorest in the world. This is therefore an issue of human compassion and justice as well as creation care. Jesus commanded that we love our neighbour as ourselves. We must answer the question, "who is our neighbour?".

¹ We accept the overwhelming scientific consensus that human activity, principally increased emission of carbon dioxide (CO₂) due to the extraction and burning of carbon-based fossil fuels for energy, is making a major contribution to the current warming of the earth's climate. Methane (CH₄) is also a significant contributor.

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There is now widespread concern, but also confusion due to the wide range of responses being suggested, the complexity of some of the issues, and the depth of the challenge to our lifestyles.

2.3 The wider church's response

St Mary's, along with much of the western church, has been slow to engage with these developing crises. Our witness to the world is impaired by our tardy response. We are being challenged to participate in a more meaningful way

Some Christian groups, including development agencies and the Anglican Church, are trying to catch up. In 1990 the Anglican Church adopted as its fifth 'mark of mission': 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth'. In 1998 the Lambeth Conference adopted four principles on the environment:

- The covenant of God's love embraces not only human beings but all of creation;
- Creation is everywhere filled with God's sacred presence;
- Human beings are the priests of creation, seeing God's presence in it, and offering creation's worship;
- The Sabbath principle of 'enoughness' is a challenge to us to rest from unnecessary consumption.

General Synod in February 2020, 'recognising that the global climate emergency is a crisis for God's creation, and a fundamental injustice', called upon all parts of the Church of England, including parishes, 'to work to achieve year-on-year reductions in emissions and urgently examine what would be required to reach net zero emissions by 2030 in order that a plan of action can be drawn up to achieve that target'. A plan of action, the 'Routemap to Net Zero Carbon', was approved by General Synod in July 2022².

St Albans Diocesan Synod in June 2022 approved an updated Environmental Policy³ recognising the Church's responsibility to care for creation and committing the Diocese to practical action.

2.4 Our response

We believe the Church's ministry is to preach and live out the restoration of man's relationship with God, with his fellow-men, and also with creation. It is:

- our privilege to use and enjoy creation
- our duty to care for it and ensure that our use is sustainable for the sake of future generations
- our responsibility to play our part as individuals, in our church, parish and town, and also as citizens of the world.

We therefore expect that St Mary's as an organisation, and its members as individuals, show love, care and respect for God's creation as an essential part of Christian discipleship. This should include taking active steps to remedy practices and behaviour that are harming our planet.

If we love God, we should love his creation.

3. Application to St Mary's

We accept General Synod's challenge to achieve net zero emissions by 2030. We will pay attention to the Church's advice as it develops, and follow it as far as we are able⁴.

² <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/net-zero-carbon-routemap>

³ <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Diocese-of-St-Albans-Environmental-Policy.pdf>

⁴ The application of current guidance to St Mary's is considered in more detail in a paper 'Aiming for Net Zero', approved by the PCC on 20 May 2021.

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We also note that the Diocesan Environmental Policy encourages parishes to include the principles and priorities of the Eco Church programme in their Mission Action Plans. It also expects parishes to produce their own plans, particularly in relation net zero carbon and biodiversity.

The church website includes a section on creation care, providing relevant teaching, practical advice and news bulletins, and acting as a reference point for formal documents. A regular newsletter will be advertised to all church members.

We have registered with the Eco Church programme, and will regularly use its survey to monitor our progress in developing environmental awareness and practice. We achieved the level of the Bronze Award in April 2021 and will maintain at least that level, while aiming for the Silver Award. The following policy statements are grouped under the Eco Church survey headings.

3.1 Worship & Teaching

We will regularly include teaching about God's creation and our role within it in our services, children's and young people's groups and other activities. Our Sunday services will focus on the environment at least once every year.

Our church newsletters will regularly include items about caring for God's creation.

3.2 Lifestyle

We encourage St Mary's members to enjoy creation and be good stewards of it within their own lives. The church will set an example in following sustainable practices.

The Creation Care website includes practical suggestions for following a more sustainable lifestyle. The regular newsletter includes practical advice and assistance.

3.2.1 Transport

We will encourage our congregation and staff wherever possible to use forms of transport which have minimum environmental impact – e.g. walk, cycle, public transport, car sharing and use of electric vehicles. We discourage unnecessary air travel.

3.2.2 Water use

We will avoid using water unnecessarily, encourage installation of water meters, and fit water minimising systems to taps and cisterns wherever practicable.

3.2.3 Procurement and investment

We will seek ways to reduce material consumption and the impact of our activities on the environment by, wherever possible:

- using email rather than sending hard copies
- using recycled paper (including toilet paper)
- reusing / repairing items
- avoiding disposable and plastic items
- using cleaning materials with low environmental impact
- buying the most energy-efficient equipment practicable
- minimising use of artificial fertilisers and pesticides
- using wood from sustainable sources.

We will seek to purchase and serve food and drink that meets the LOAF principles (Locally-sourced, Organically-grown, Animal-friendly, Fairly-traded), avoid over-catering, and use seasonal foods.

We will pay attention to environmental concerns in our banking and investment practice.

3.2.4 Waste management

Our staff will use the appropriate Council bins for waste, and segregate other types of waste (batteries, electronic waste, ink cartridges etc) to go to appropriate recycling centres. We will encourage other users of the buildings (particularly of the kitchen and office facilities) to do the same. We provide receptacles at points in the building so that this is convenient at the point of disposal.

3.3 Community & Global Engagement

We will work with others in our community who are concerned with local environmental issues, and encourage church members to join local and national environmental groups. We will encourage other churches in St Neots to care for God's creation.

We encourage church members to engage with their MP and local councillors on the application of Christian principles to relevant issues.

We alert church members to the global dimension of environmental issues, including accounts of specific Christian communities around the world.

We plan to register as a Fairtrade church. Our toilets are twinned under the Tearfund scheme.

3.4 Buildings

The Church and Church Hall are currently heated by gas, and lit by electricity. We will mitigate the effect of this use on CO2 emissions by:

- Continuing to purchase from a supplier whose sources are as 'green' as is practicable
- Using thermostats for temperature control, on as local an area as possible, and not heating above the temperature needed for comfort
- Fitting energy-efficient (eg LED) light bulbs. Incandescent bulbs will be replaced as soon as possible, while other fittings will be upgraded as the opportunity arises
- Improving insulation and draught-proofing wherever practicable, including secondary glazing
- Turning off lights and appliances when not in use, and encouraging all users of our church buildings to do the same
- Replacing inefficient equipment as the opportunity arises
- Investing in renewable energy generation such as solar panels
- Exploring renewable heating alternatives, such as electricity-driven heat pumps, as the technology develops
- As a last resort after taking other measures, we will consider carbon-offsetting through a reputable scheme.

We will undertake an energy audit annually, using the carbon footprint tools provided by the Diocese and Climate Stewards.

Architects and contractors will take environmental concerns into account in their work. In any building/refurbishment project we will insist on the application of the BREEAM⁵ 'very good' (or similar) standard to ensure best practice in sustainable building design, construction and operation.

3.5 Land

Since St Mary's churchyard was declared 'closed' the Town Council is responsible for its maintenance. The church is still entitled to bury ashes, to perform its own maintenance, and to propose changes. It is crossed by busy public footpaths, presenting an opportunity to engage with

⁵ Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method www.breeam.com/

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people as they pass through. It is home to a wide variety of plant species, and offers resources to many insects, birds and some mammals.

We will continue to constructively engage with the Council, and to maintain a jointly agreed management plan. The principles of this plan are that:

- All work should be done in a manner sensitive to the sacred nature of the area and to users of the space
- Whenever possible, new trees, shrubs and plants should be native species
- The “carbon footprint” of every activity should be minimised
- The use of chemicals should be avoided or minimised
- Management principles should be sympathetic to wildlife whenever possible
- Clear signage should be used to explain to the public what we are trying to achieve
- Consideration be given to the workload on current and future volunteers
- Involvement of more people, both within the congregation and also the wider community.

We will not encourage bats, as we don't want to attract them to the church building.

Acknowledgements

We have drawn from the work of several other groups and churches in developing this policy, and are grateful for inspiration from guides written by John Truscott (Church Consultant & Trainer)⁶, Diocese of Leeds⁷, Eco Church Southwest⁸ and Devon Churches Green Action⁹.

We also acknowledge the support and advice provided by Eco Church and A Rocha¹⁰, St Albans Diocese Environment Team¹¹ and the Church of England Environment Programme¹²

Approved by PCC – November 2022

⁶ <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index/Your-eco-church-check-up>

⁷ <https://www.leeds.anglican.org/sites/default/files/files/Model%20Environmental%20Policy%20for%20Churches%20in%20the%20Diocese%20Jan%202022.docx>

⁸ <https://ecochurchsouthwest.org.uk/actions/policy-development/>

⁹ https://ecochurchsouthwest.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/devon_church_policies_for_sustainability.pdf

¹⁰ <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>

¹¹ <https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/environment/>

¹² <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/church-england-environment-programme>