

The Diocesan Environmental Strategy

The Environmental Strategy was first developed and accepted by Diocesan Synod in 2008 and while it was in many ways ahead of its time much has happened in the past 16 years which requires its revision and renewal. Critically, this synod has adopted a policy (in 2021) to become carbon net-zero by 2030, and a statement of environmental policy (in 2023). Both respond to the decisions of General Synod for the Church of England to become net zero by 2030, and the Routemap to Net Zero Carbon that is designed to guide and support dioceses, cathedrals, churches and schools to achieve this (<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/RoutemapToNetZeroCarbonFinal.pdf>).

This strategy is founded in the conviction expressed by the national church that:

- "Responding to the climate crisis is an essential part of our responsibility to safeguard God's creation and achieve a just world.
- Climate change hits hardest on the poorest countries and poorest people of the world. Meanwhile, the widespread destruction of the natural world is a crisis for creation.
- Tackling climate change also supports our local mission. It witnesses to our communities that we are people who care about climate justice, now and for the future. Also, many of the steps needed to reduce energy use will make our buildings warmer and more welcoming, so they are suitable to be used more often by more people."

(<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/net-zero-carbon-routemap/reducing-emissions-dioceses>)

This is, therefore, a missional strategy which is part of the diocesan vision to grow as Kingdom People. We seek to realise this vision both through the priorities that enable numerical growth, and through commitments to worship God, share hope, make disciples and transform communities as a Church of love, compassion, justice and freedom. Alongside numerical growth in healthy churches, we also long for growth in the depth of our discipleship.

Our environmental strategy helps us realise our commitment to transforming our communities and churches to care better for our environment and to safeguard a sustainable future for our planet. We cannot credibly worship the creator God while allowing His creation to be abused; the Gospel cannot be credibly proclaimed if we ignore the destruction of our world; and we cannot be credible agents of God's rule if we do not put our own house in order and play our part in slowing, mitigating and preventing such destruction. How we live in this world, how we exercise our responsibilities to the natural world, how we act justly for the poorest and most vulnerable, are matters central to our missional calling to be Kingdom People. Only by careful, and sacrificial, attention to such matters can we truly share hope and the love of Jesus.

In 2023 the Diocesan Synod made these commitments:

1. Align our commitment with the - Route map to Net Zero Carbon by 2030 - Carbon Reduction Action Plan (GS2258) presented to the General Synod in July 2022.
2. Enable and give support to the CCTG (Climate Crisis Task Group) to lead on actions and policies to achieve Net Zero Carbon.
3. Encourage and support all churches to engage in the Eco Church award scheme, which addresses hearts and minds in change.
4. Embed Creation care in all functions of the Diocese and at every level.
5. Embed Creation care within our worship, teaching and discipleship work.
6. Embed Creation care in training and IME programmes.
7. Prioritise environmental issues in our financial decision-making including divesting from fossil fuel extraction.
8. Encourage biodiversity and using land sustainably, including Glebe land.
9. Engage and support schools in their targets to become NZC and environmentally sustainable.
10. Work with a range of communities and partners on environmental issues.
11. Proactively record, celebrate and champion environmental initiatives.
12. Proactively seek funding from the Church or other partners to enable change towards NZC in all our buildings and practice.

In order to focus these commitments and ensure their implementation our strategy groups them into three key areas. The first two reflect the explicit decisions of General Synod, and the third is implicit in them. They are:

1. The Diocese achieves the eco-diocese Gold award by 2030 (points 3-5, 10 above)
2. The Diocese pursues net-zero in carbon emissions by 2030 (points 1, 2, 9, 12 above)
3. The Diocese develops its role as leading public witness to the need for transformation in both church and society (points 6, 10, 11)

The Strategy: actions and milestones

1. The Diocese achieves the eco-diocese Gold award by 2030.

To achieve this impetus and energy will be given to the eco-church movement to support and enable the desire which exists in our churches to deepen their commitment to climate and nature justice. We will do this through a network of 'champions' in each deanery to encourage and support every church, especially small churches in becoming eco-churches, and to gain at least a Bronze award. The CCTG will support this group, and monitor progress with annual consideration of feedback to Archdeacons' visitation questions. The CCTG will also support and monitor the Diocese in its fulfilment of its responsibilities in achieving a gold award. The *goal* for the Diocese is a gold award: the *strategy* is to equip parishes to respond to their fullest potential to the missional imperative for churches to 'care for the earth'.

Milestones:

- By 2026 the Diocese will have gained a silver award. As a minimum this means 40% of local churches registered; 30% of local churches awarded, of which at least a third of these awards should be Silver or higher. The development of new worshipping communities will need to be taken into account as they change to be included in this strategy. The Diocese must also meet its requirements, of which the following are outstanding: developing an environmental policy and a land management plan which promotes biodiversity and managing the land for carbon reduction across the diocese; achieve silver award for Church House/Diocesan Office (once established) and promote an understanding amongst all staff of Eco Diocese goals.
- By 2027 80% of local churches will be registered, and 30% of churches will have a silver award and 20% a gold award.
- By 2030 parishes and the Diocese will have met the requirements for a gold award (criteria at present unpublished)

2. The Diocese pursues net-zero in carbon emissions by 2030.

"For the Church of England, being net zero carbon means that the carbon emissions of our buildings and travel will be reduced to less than 10 per cent of our baseline levels. The remaining emissions will be offset in verified schemes that reduce carbon. That means overall, our buildings and travel will not contribute to rising carbon emissions: their contribution will be 'net zero'."

For the Diocese to achieve a substantial reduction in carbon emissions the 2023 net zero carbon plan will be implemented and fulfilled. This is very challenging. Two years have been 'lost' since the target was first set because of the impact of Covid, and there has been unavoidable delay in recruiting and appointing specialist officers to scope and plan this work. This target is also challenging because there will be significant costs. Although the national church is releasing significant funding it is unlikely to be enough to do all that is required. When this funding is released, we will be able to plan for what can be done with this funding and how close it will take us to net zero, and what resources would be necessary to complete this task. This strategy encourages churches and schools to make net zero a core priority over the next 4 years and to be proactive in seeking/raising funds to support this, the diocesan team will do all it can to resource and support churches in this process. This strategy accepts the national churches definition that net zero can include offsetting up to 10% of the baseline of emissions, but our priority is to work for a just emissions strategy.

Milestones

The intention is that by the end of 2024 three regional officers funded by the national church will be appointed and in post. They will provide expert input to support implementation of the first two years of the practical pathway plan and lay the groundwork to secure phase two national funding to tackle the harder and costlier requirements of the plan.

Up to the end of 2025 we will implement a Practical Pathway Plan, that is based upon:

- Measurement, monitoring and reporting.
- Planning, and the prioritising of early wins.

- Communication, and engagement – and encouraging behaviour change.
- Good maintenance, energy efficiency and insulation.
- Targeted energy reduction opportunities – including heat decarbonisation.
- Switching to green tariffs / renewable energy.

Up to the end of 2026

- the top 20% of church building emitters will be identified and an action plan for decarbonisation completed
- pilot projects and an action plan will provide evidence for successful gaining of stage two funding from the Church Commissioners.
- 'Quick win' approaches will be sought to enable an immediate 10-15% emissions reduction, through efficiency savings, moving churches to green electric tariffs, and insulation works.
- The Diocesan Board of Finance will have completed a plan to identify what additional financial support can be provided from Diocesan resources to enable the transition and support churches and schools.

Up to the end of 2030

- We will reduce emissions by targeting top emitters and by enabling a larger number of smaller churches to make significant reductions.

Schools

The Diocese's schools are a critical part of the strategy to pursue net zero. Our first steps will be to raise the profile of climate change and Carbon Net Zero strategies with our family of schools through courses, briefings, and newsletters over the next year. A grant of nearly £100k has already been secured from SALIX, with support from Mantis Energy, to carry out seven heat decarbonisation plans (hdps) over the Autumn term for some of our schools, with the intention of rolling these out throughout MATs and Maintained schools over the next three years. Future funding will be sought to support our schools in their journey to CNZ, through changing heating systems, windows etc. We have already begun to create a database of our schools' heating systems, energy consumption and glazing. We also aim to host our annual Headteacher and Senior Leaders Conference in May 2025, based around the environment, climate change and reducing our carbon emission. DBE staff and consultants are already developing strategies to reduce their carbon footprint; for example, we now aim to visit two or more schools for their annual "Keep in Touch (KIT) Meeting on the same day in the same geographical region. Milestones for schools NZ targets will be developed and incorporated into this plan with the support of a regional officer (to be appointed by the end of 2024)

3. The Diocese develops its role as leading public witness to the need for transformation in both church and society.

This approach is implicit in the commitments already made by Synod - for example to "work with a range of communities and partners on environmental issues" and to "proactively record, celebrate and champion environmental initiatives". This strategy seeks to develop this to enable a more articulate and confident church in its public witness to God's call to all people to care for creation and to safeguard our world's future.

Actions

- ❖ To support and promote the work of the Cathedral as it seeks to be a catalyst for campaigning and awareness on the environment and social justice, encouraging others to follow their lead.
- ❖ To support and strengthen local leadership a group will be formed across the diocese to offer mutual encouragement, sharing of good practice and resources, and affirmation in the face of opposition and indifference.
- ❖ To support lay and ordained leadership by forming a theological and liturgical resource group to curate and produce high quality resources, including teaching materials and material for worship.
- ❖ To support and help organise several public events as acts of witness, celebration and lament.

Monitoring and reporting

The CCTG will monitor all aspects of this plan and update it according to new information (e.g. when eco-diocese criteria are published). It will report to Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod annually against the targets and milestones. It will issue regular updates through the diocesan website and other media.