

Property Information Sheet – ECO Church / Sustainability information for our churches

We are becoming more aware that Elders are looking for information and resources to help them not only with building projects, but with all manner of eco-friendly resources to help them. There are many avenues and ways in which we can help with this vast topic but sometimes it is knowing just where to begin without being totally overwhelmed and realising that little steps can still take us on important journeys.

The United Reformed Church is committed to caring for creation and adopted a new [Environmental Policy \(PDF\)](#) in 2016, which was updated in 2019. Additionally in 2010 the General Assembly adopted the '[Ethical investment principles for the use of the United Reformed Church](#)', with amendments made by The Mission Council in 2019, for the guidance of those responsible for making investment decisions. At the 2016 General Assembly, the United Reformed Church (URC) commended the Eco Church award scheme within the context of its new Environmental Policy, which was updated in 2019.

The URC has worked with A Rocha UK to develop Eco Synod as a tool by which Synods can encourage local churches to engage in wider creation care. We would encourage you to take part in the Eco Church Survey questionnaire as this acts as a useful Audit. Please would you send a copy to us in Property for our records.

At its Trust Meeting in Autumn 2021, the South Western Synod Trustees agreed new support for local churches to improve their premises in relation to environmental and ecological responsibility. This policy has therefore been developed working alongside our Green Apostles. The SW Synod has agreed Eco Grants for our churches, manse, halls, and church yards. Its prime purpose being to encourage churches in all manner of eco-friendly schemes, from bat boxes to LED lighting schemes, and shows their commitment to this topical and worth-while agenda.

Obviously for bigger schemes (such as boiler replacements, insulation, solar panels) the Synod encourages use of the Facelift Grants (50%) and the Property 10% grant (LEPs FLG 25% / Property 5% Grant).

The Eco-Grant will be useful in a variety of ways to help churches develop eco best practice via incremental steps a bit like the loaves and the fishes by starting in a small way and building up to make a huge difference.

The Eco-Grant will provide 50% or up to £3000 (25% or up to £1500 for an LEP) and can be applied for at any time for eco-related projects by completing the Property Form in the usual way. From time to time this policy will be reviewed and eco successes (no matter how great or small) will be reported in the e-newsletter from the Synod to celebrate and encourage our church communities to get involved showing our towns and villages that we the URC SW churches are serious about climate change and are committed to making a difference in our neighbourhoods, as custodians of this planet.

Examples where Eco-Grants could be used are listed below:

In our churches and church halls:

- calculating targets for reduction of carbon footprint and an energy efficiency management plan via consultancy
- exploring double glazing opportunities
- exploring secondary double glazing options
- replacing light bulbs with LED light bulbs
- making use of and installation of rainwater collection points including the use of grey water
- installation of dual flush systems (or similar water saving devices) on toilet cisterns
- providing cycle racks

- providing electricity car charging points; (see below as a useful link)

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/CCB_EV_Charging_Guidance.pdf)

- recycling facilities both inside and/or outside the buildings etc.

In our Manses:

- calculating targets for reduction of carbon footprint and an energy efficiency management plan via consultancy
- exploring double glazing opportunities
- exploring secondary double glazing options
- replacing light bulbs with LED light bulbs
- making use of and installation of rainwater collection points including the use of grey water
- installation of dual flush systems (or similar water saving devices) on toilet cisterns
- providing cycle racks
- providing electricity car charging points; (see below as a useful link)

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/CCB_EV_Charging_Guidance.pdf)

- recycling facilities both inside and/or outside the manses etc.
- encouragement for wildlife habitats in our land such as Bat boxes, hedgehog boxes, plant a wildflower garden or corner, bee keeping, bug boxes, bird boxes, bird feeder stations
- creating a pond or wetland in the garden
- composting facilities in the garden
- growing fruit and vegetables in suitable planters or into the soil in the garden
- going peat-free
- planting native trees and bushes
- Using alternatives to harmful chemicals in the management of the gardens
- Installing a water butt for watering plants

In our church yards:

- encouragement for wildlife habitats in our land such as Bat boxes, hedgehog boxes, plant a wildflower/meadow garden, bee keeping, bug boxes, bird boxes, bird feeder stations
- creating a pond or wetland
- composting facilities
- growing fruit and vegetables in suitable planters (going peat-free)
- creating a contemplative prayer garden
- planting native trees
- Using alternatives to harmful chemicals in the management of the land
- Installing a water butt for watering plants

In addition we are encouraging you to take part in our survey which relates to these buildings and land too. This information will provide an instant audit about our church property assets (churches, halls, manses and land (including churchyards) and any other property related interests in respect of how eco-friendly these assets are. The results of the survey will help us to see how even small steps can help with our eco-challenge and the results will be shared across the Synod. If you need help with filling out the survey please contact the Synod Property office / Green Apostles who should be able to assist / offer guidance. For assurance the vast majority of the questions can be answered by whoever is responsible for the building maintenance, with possibly a very few needing input from the treasurer (e.g. whether the energy supplier is on a green tariff).

We would hope that you will be looking at ways to reduce the carbon footprint such as exploration of supplier's green tariffs, the installation of SMART and water meters and by switching to recycled products such as toilet rolls, cleaning products, biodegradable products instead of plastics; recycled paper in admin church offices. We would also encourage you to support your local council's recycling schemes including as appropriate clothes recycling bins.

For larger schemes such as installation of insulation, solar panels, boiler replacements would usually form part of the normal property grants such as Facelift Grants / 10% Grants and identified under the 5 year Quintennial Survey as a requirement / update.

Thank you for your support in this very important and vital ministry.

Synod property office email: property@urcsouthwest.org.uk

Here are some links to the A Rocha Eco Church resources, starting with the Eco Synod award process:

<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/denominational-awards/eco-synod/>

The Eco Synod Award is a development of Eco Church whereby a URC Synod can register its interest in and work towards an award. The two awards are designed to complement each other, encouraging both Synod-level and local church-level engagement with Eco Church.

To register your intent to work towards Eco Synod status, please complete the [online registration form here](#). After completing the registration process, you will receive two copies of a letter outlining your commitment to work towards Eco Synod status. Both copies should be signed by your Synod Moderator and Synod Clerk, and then one copy returned to the Eco Church office and the other retained for display in the Synod office.

When your Synod has fulfilled these criteria ([check list here](#)), you can apply for your Eco Synod Award by completing the [application form here](#).

Churches complete the unique **online Eco Survey** about how they are caring for God's earth in different areas of their life and work. The answers a church provides will collect points towards an Eco Church Award – the more your church does, the more points you get! If your score doesn't gain you an Eco Church Award idea is to complete further actions to gain the points necessary for an Award e.g. you can switch to a green energy company or start using Fairtrade tea and coffee supplies to gain Eco Church Award points.

The survey takes you through five key areas of church life:

- Worship and teaching
- Management of church buildings
- Management of church land
- Community and global engagement
- Lifestyle

The survey takes into account whether or not your church has buildings or land, and you can save your survey responses at any point and return to update them as your church completes additional actions. Their free, [Eco Church resources](#) give lots of support and advice about how to make the changes your church needs to become an Eco Church.

There are three levels of Eco Church Award – **Bronze, Silver and Gold**. In order to qualify for an Award you must attain the required standard in each of the areas covered by the Eco Survey that apply to your church (some churches do not have buildings or land).

You can see when you have gained sufficient points in each Eco Survey category by looking at the coloured lines that appear on screen with the Eco Survey questions. The lines will change colour as your points accumulate to reflect the level of Award you have achieved in that category.

If all categories have turned bronze, you have reached the standard to qualify for a Bronze Award; if they all turn silver you have reached the standard to qualify for a Silver Award, and so on. However, if just some of your categories turn silver while the others turn bronze, for example, you have achieved a Bronze Award (rather than a Silver Award) because that is the level you have achieved in all the relevant areas.

Once all the categories on your Eco Survey indicate that you have enough points for an Award, you will be asked whether you want to apply for an award. For Bronze and Silver Awards they will require confirmation from your church leader that they have seen and approved the Eco Survey responses provided on behalf of your church. This will be done electronically, within the survey app. Additionally, for Gold Awards they will arrange for an Eco Church Assessor to visit your church to see and hear for themselves of all that you've been doing to care for God's earth across the areas covered by the Eco Survey.

Once your Award is confirmed, you will receive a certificate and (optional) plaque from A Rocha UK to mark your achievement.

A Rocha also has an online suite of resources.

These resources give guidance in five key areas of church life:

- Worship and Teaching,
- Building Management,
- Land Management,
- Community and Global Engagement,
- and Lifestyle.

Each area is broken down into an accessible format:

Think – a moment to reflect or a story to inspire

Do – a simple task to perform

Do more – a list of points for further study and action, with links to all sorts of helpful resources that are available online from a variety of different organisations. The resources support the five areas of the Eco Church survey and are designed to equip you and your church as you undertake the different actions, working towards gaining your award, whether at Bronze, Silver or Gold level. Often it is small changes which can start to make a difference.

Here is the link to the A Rocha resources page:

<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/resources/>

[https://3ak4be4522es3y5i4l2cwfkx-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Eco_Church - Everything You Need To Know.pptx](https://3ak4be4522es3y5i4l2cwfkx-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Eco_Church_-_Everything_You_Need_To_Know.pptx)

We would like to encourage more local churches to get involved.

The West Midlands URC Synod has also produced a YouTube tutorial which does a good job of showing the process for local churches and will give you a feel for the support available.

Working through the questionnaire might be a way of doing a first audit of your buildings. Don't forget this applies not just to churches and church halls but also to manse as well.

Our SW Synod Green Apostles are Rev. Rob Weston (Tavistock) & Rev. Chris Ballie (Bridgwater). They may also be able to encourage you, point you in the right direction and generally give you support too. Their respective email addresses are:

tavistockurcminister@gmail.com chris@westcan.co.uk

The Church of England:

Their website also has lots of useful information including webinars to help churches reach the goal of net zero carbon by 2030

Webinars on getting to net zero carbon | The Church of England

Slides with useful information:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/practical%20path%20to%20net%20zero%20for%20church%20buildings%20April%202020.pdf>

Learning from others <https://youtu.be/BSqXsl7DXv0>

Conservation pitfalls and how to avoid them - available after November 2021

Housekeeping and quick wins <https://youtu.be/1XIFuU27xY0>

Solar PV panels <https://youtu.be/1NoswkTtFA4>

LINKS TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS' WEBINARS

- Historic England "Technical Tuesdays" include climate adaptation
- The Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings offer a range of online learning
- All of the expert presentations to the UK Climate Assembly were videoed and shared online

Climate Assembly UK has more useful information:

[Resources - Climate Assembly UK](#)

This page has links to the videos and transcripts of all the presentations made to the assembly, with slides if they were used. The links are ordered by topic and the order in which the presentations were given.

[What climate change is](#) Professor Joanna Haigh, Imperial College London (*informant*)

[Impacts of climate change](#) Professor Ed Hawkins, University of Reading (*informant*)

[Q&A on what climate change is and impacts of climate change](#) Joanna Haigh and Ed Hawkins

[Why tackling climate change has proved difficult](#) Professor Rebecca Willis, University of Lancaster (*expert lead, informant*)

[What the assembly will consider](#) Chris Stark, Committee on Climate Change (*expert lead, informant*)

[Introduction to climate change](#): written briefing from Expert Leads

Manses:

In addition to all the above the government website also has useful information about making homes more energy efficient and thereby reducing bills too. This is important for manses. The links are below:

<https://www.gov.uk/improve-energy-efficiency>

The Simple Energy Advice website has [advice on ways to save energy](#), such as:

- insulating your loft and cavity walls
- draught-proofing windows and doors
- upgrading your boiler
- installing double glazing
- using alternative sources of energy, such as solar power

You can also find out if you're eligible for a [home energy grant](#) to help pay for things like loft and cavity wall insulation.

Use the [Energy Efficiency Calculator](#) for personalised advice on what you can do to cut your energy bills.

Other useful links are listed below:

- [Cold Weather Payment](#)
- [Green Deal: energy saving for your home](#)
- [Help from your energy supplier: the Affordable Warmth Obligation](#)
- [Warm Home Discount Scheme](#)
- [Winter Fuel Payment](#)
- [Household energy](#)
- [Energy efficiency](#)

<https://www.cse.org.uk/local-energy/funding-your-project>

Funding Sources:

There is also a plethora of possible funding sources available for sustainable energy projects. Look at the website for an up-to-date A-Z list of what grants are potentially available for you, remembering that the SW Synod might also need to be a party to any grants depending on the nature / size of the grant see communities@cse.org.uk