

We are a Gold Eco Church!

In December 2024, Christ Church was granted its Gold Eco Church award by A Rocha. This marks a point in our church life that can be traced back directly over the past 5 years to the start of the covid lockdowns. We were unable to meet for services or even in small groups, so the only activities church could offer was private prayer in the building (socially distanced, one morning a week) and later, meeting outdoors in small groups – which is when we began gardening together in earnest and commenced our Eco Church journey.

Little good came from covid, however it was for us, the start of a powerful time of gratitude and appreciation. Gratitude that we could do something positive together in such dark days, and an appreciation for the power of nature to bring us together, give us hope and purpose, provide much needed contact with God and creation, and be a cohesive activity to which all ages and abilities can contribute and all can enjoy.

We are still meeting to care for our gardens, which have gained biodiversity, native species, new trees and flowers, new habitats and features, a herb garden, rainwater collection, log and compost heaps, insect hotels, bird and bat boxes and a sculpture as a result of the prompts given by Eco Church.

Christ Church moved through the Bronze level award by meeting criteria in all the five areas of 'Buildings', 'Land', 'Worship and Teaching', 'Community and Global Outreach' and 'Personal Lifestyles'. Much of what the church already did became accredited, such as using Fair Trade tea and coffee, celebrating seasonal events and thanking God for our place in his Creation. Having double glazing and a relatively new building helped, along with shared car use, recycling facilities, and careful energy consumption. We had good community and global engagement through groups that use the church and our charity links.

Silver was harder as we needed to up our personal lifestyle commitments through carbon audits, weekly ideas for sustainability such as 'Just One Thing', and a wider understanding of the Church of England's Carbon Net Zero target for 2030. We introduced more recycled goods such as looroll and hand towels, planted native trees and used Essex Wildlife Trust's advisory services to guide our land management plans. Our children continued to learn about God and creation, and how we can all care for it. We cut paper use by increasing the quality of email communication and the use of screens in services. We invited speakers to help us understand more about the place of our faith in combating the rapidly escalating climate and nature crisis.

Going for Gold became suddenly a reality! Easter 2024 saw completion of a major building project, which vastly improved the insulation, energy efficiency, water and waste management in the church, as well as our facilities for access and community use. So many people were involved in designing, planning, fundraising, managing and fitting out the new kitchen and library that it became a whole church environmental project of the first order! We promote ethical purchasing and have re-committed to being a Fair-Trade church as part of our ongoing support for farmers and food producers worldwide.

Our Lifestyle surveys of 2023 and 2024 are now available to compare. They show where we have moved on (more of us volunteer, purchase Fair Trade goods, buy renewable energy) and where we can be more sustainable (diet, finance and transport are examples).

Our Energy Footprint Tool (EFT) for the last years helps us set carbon reduction targets for this year. Longer term we have to plan our move from gas heating to electrical.

Our future plans include the installation of a solar array with battery storage, for which we are now raising funds. We also have a cycle rack yet to install.

The biggest challenge now may be to maintain our personal attention to all forms of sustainability. Being Eco conscious in no way clashes, rather it underpins other church activities and messages we seek to share about the love of God for all people.

All the music we play, choices we make, items we eat, our every purchase, donation or saving; the prayers we say and activity we commit to can be part of our collective responsibility to care for God's creation. In maintaining that awareness, we are both stewarding creation as God asks us people to do in Genesis, and loving our neighbours as ourselves, as Jesus asks us to do.