


Case studies of Eco Churches

ECO CHURCH

 These case studies from different Eco Churches across the Diocese of Newcastle are designed to inspire and encourage you on your own Eco Church journey.

 Eco Church is an award scheme run by A Rocha UK in partnership with the Church of England. Churches are celebrated for their mission and ministry in creation care and are awarded bronze, silver and gold level awards.

To find out more about Eco Church and to register your church visit

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

We welcome stories from our churches across the Diocese of Newcastle about your work caring for the environment, please get in touch with us so that we can celebrate all that you are doing to care for God's creation in your community.

St James' and St Basil's, Fenham

We were awarded the Bronze Eco Church Award in October 2019. The scheme has helped to encourage two significant areas of our church life and engagement with the community.

The Church Gardens

The Church is located in a densely populated area on the western edge of the city. The Church Gardens were originally laid out in the 1930s, by the late 1990s and early 2000s these had become neglected and were a target for vandalism. More recently planning applications were submitted to redevelop part of these for housing; the locals were furious. This prompted the establishment of a community of volunteers, (assisted by a professional



gardener paid for by the PCC) who set about reclaiming the space as a formal garden. This area is now a blossoming oasis in the midst of urban Fenham. Alongside the usual growth in biodiversity, regular visitors include Foxes, Bats and even this summer an Owl! The Gardens have been particularly valued by the community during the 2020 lockdown restrictions, and have developed into an outdoor concert venue too. As a church community, this has become a real 'open door' to connecting with local people.

Our Liturgy

Harvest is often an 'odd' thing in an urban context – we see no fields, and the fishing fleet is a long way away. A shift in our focus to a Season of Creation, rather than a stand-alone Harvest Festival has provided a much more contextually relevant way of unpacking what it means to be a Christian community who places a priority on the stewardship of creation.

Revd James McGowan, Vicar
St James' and St Basil's, Fenham

St Mary the Virgin, Ovingham

Several years ago, I was invited to attend a seminar on the Church and the Environment. Speakers were provided by various organisations ranging from the Tear Fund to A Rocha. It was some time later when I came across A Rocha's Eco Church scheme that the spark really took hold.

I was already writing a regular article with an environmental theme in the parish magazine and I had persuaded the Vicar to hold a themed Eucharist on Environment Sunday. We also invited the Reverend John Harrison who was then the Bishops Advisor on the Environment, to preach a sermon. When I took a close look at the Eco Church questionnaire the path we should take became obvious. I liked the idea of having a checklist to guide us through the process, the online dashboard keeping us informed of progress and at the end to achieve some sort of tangible award for the congregation to see.

St Marys church is an ancient Norman church with a Saxon tower built from Roman stone so it goes without saying that its listed status would present numerous challenges and the Ecochurch scheme does in fact allow some leeway for this. One thing became obvious, that the energy we used had to be bought from a renewable source. So, I set about finding a new energy supplier using a green energy comparison web site and managed to find a competitive supplier for renewable electricity. Once our contract ran out on our gas supply we swapped our supply and are now provided with 10% biogas and the remaining 90% is carbon offset.

The next step was to set up an Eco Church group and once lay led services became a regular event we held a creation tide service with an environmental theme and set up stalls showing environmental exhibits during coffee after the service. We recently installed a toilet in the church with water saving flush and it's now twinned through the Tearfund toilet twinning scheme.



World Environment Day Fair

In 2019 we decided to hold a World Environment Day fair in the church and invited members from a variety of charities to take stalls including Christian Aid, Green Christian and Tearfund together with a variety of local groups. The event concluded with speakers and music.

In 2020, we have been restricted by Covid but we did mark World Environment day by interpreting the theme "Making time for nature" and asking congregation members to paint a pebble with a favourite animal, plant or location and place it on the path around the church. We also set up a Facebook page to celebrate the day and added a couple of music videos to represent the theme.





As we completed more of the questionnaire we saw the dials on the online dashboard turn to bronze with some turning silver, so much so that we decided to postpone the submission of the questionnaire and wait until we reached Silver, which we did last month. We couldn't have got to this stage without the support of the Vicar, PCC and contributions from the congregation.

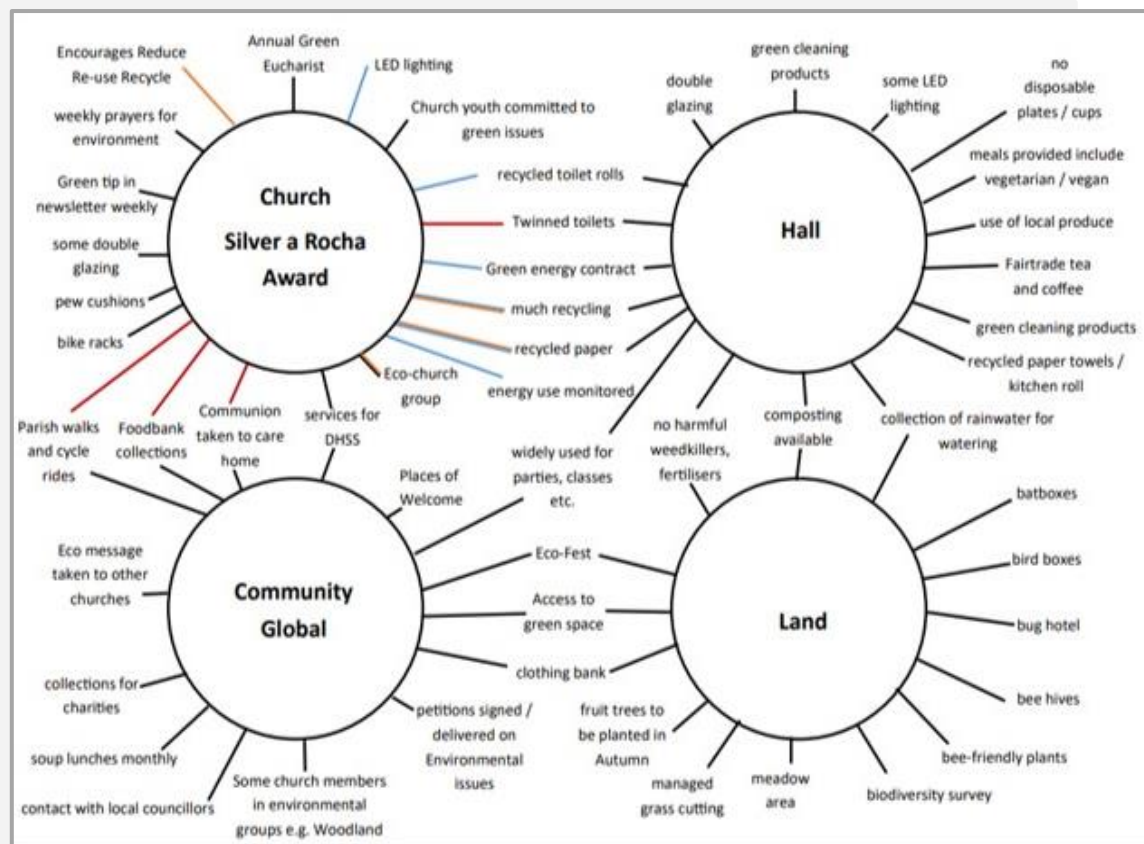
So what's next? We have started a programme of replacing the lighting with energy efficient L.E.D.s and will be embarking on a project to improve the draught proofing of the church with a high priority being the porch doors. Hopefully in 2021 we will be able to hold our World Environment Day fair again and eventually I would like to see our gas supply come from a 100% renewable source and once our boiler comes to the end of its effective life replaced by a heat pump.

Martin Davenport, Eco Church Group
St Mary the Virgin, Ovingham

St Francis, High Heaton

The Church quadrant of the diagram indicates what we have achieved in the Worship section, which, we have been operating at Gold level almost since the start of our journey, thanks to one of our Readers who started us all off with great enthusiasm during our last Vacancy, and then further developed by our Vicar.

Eco Church Diagram:



The Church and the Hall are the focus in the Buildings section (along with clergy housing), where we have addressed lighting, double glazing and energy usage, all of which require a lot of research and hard work. Many Churches are challenged in this area by the age and condition of their building and frequently a lot of expense is incurred in lowering the carbon footprint.



footprint.

Land is a further challenge but a lot of simple things can be done such as providing bird boxes, bug hotels and insect-friendly plants as well as careful management of grass cutting and garden waste disposal. During the COVID lockdowns in 2020, we have been able to carry out work on our land, which should lead to great things.

The Community/Global area is an area where churches are probably doing more than they realize, supporting local and global charities, contributing to foodbanks, running soup lunches, going into schools and supporting local care homes. We are blessed to have a good-sized hall and an open space which we can share with our local community.

We have become active in joining environmental groups like Greenpeace and signing and delivering petitions, as far as Westminster! We have recently also become a venue for a Place of Welcome project.

In the last area of focus, Lifestyle, we aim to promote a healthy one for ourselves and one which will help the environment. We installed cycle racks at church and encourage walking and cycling by having parish walks and bike rides. We also do all forms of recycling, including a clothes bank and using recycled and environmentally friendly products. A new Green Tip is published in our newsletter every week, sometimes simple, sometimes challenging.

Any Church thinking of embarking on the Eco-Award journey should start by writing down what they already do, and they will probably find they are well on the way to their first award!

Dr Jenny Germain, PCC Secretary
St Francis, High Heaton

If you are part of a church in the Diocese of Newcastle and would like to share your Eco Church story please do [get in touch](#).