

Report of MK Eco Church Network meeting held on 9th October 2023

In attendance: Steve Barnes, Mary Borrett, Margaret Broadhurst, Elaine Brown, David Chapman, Jane Entwistle, Irene Farr, Cathy Hampton, Ken Harris, Ken Hawes, Stuart Kean, Paul Lund, Peter Musk, Richard Page, Jean Peck, Steve Peck, Peter Steeds, and Angela Vincent

Apologies: Mubina Chakera, Barry Lotz, Cheryl Montgomery, and Anne Slee

1. Updates from churches

Christ Church, Stantonbury – Margaret Broadhurst

- Christ Church has now achieved Bronze award status and some of the 5 areas of the Eco Church framework are already at Silver.
- They have made more use of their noticeboard which they are updating every month with new information (“Top Tips”) aimed at encouraging members of the congregation to take action especially on “Lifestyle” issues.
- At the next congregational meeting they will talk about the noticeboard and encourage people to take part and make more use of the information provided.
- Christ Church is also working with other churches in the Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership (SEP) promoting the “Environmental Top Tips” and, together with St James, has been invited to lead some SEP “Open meetings” at which they are introducing the concept of Eco Church to other churches in the Partnership.

Church of Christ the Cornerstone – Stuart Kean and Peter Steeds

- Work has started renovating the 4 cloister gardens which had become quite overgrown. Plans have been agreed for what to do in the gardens and a task team has started work on 2 of them. This has encouraged more people interested in gardening to get involved in Eco Church activities.
- All of the light fittings and bulbs throughout the church have been replaced with LED bulbs and fittings which will use less energy, reduce fossil fuel use and save money.
- An energy audit is currently being conducted with the support of the Oxford Diocese and which will produce a roadmap with suggestions for future actions.
- The Season of Creation was celebrated as an opportunity for personal reflection by members of the congregation.
- A letter was sent by the church ministers and chair of the Ecumenical Council to Ben Everitt, MP for Milton Keynes North to express concern about the Prime Minister’s rolling back on key net zero policies.
- A guided walk in Campbell Park followed by a picnic, aimed at appreciating creation, had to be cancelled due to extreme weather conditions.
- A series of monthly talks about a range of different environmental issues will be held during coffee after Sunday services.
- Climate Sunday will be celebrated as part of Harvest Festival when members will be encouraged to make pledges to take action on some “Lifestyle” issues.

St James, New Bradwell – Mary Borrett and Irene Farr

- Church members have been kept aware about climate issues by having Eco Church as a standing item on the church council meetings.
- St James has already installed LED lighting but there have been problems with the nave lights which have failed and it is proving difficult to find out the reason.

- People were made aware of the importance of valuing creation through an “Open Door” Sunday service that was held outdoors in the churchyard.
- A lot of work has gone into organising a “Green Champions” meeting to be held on 2nd November for people from across the 6 churches in the Stantonbury Ecumenical Partnership to encourage more people to get involved in Eco Church activities.
- For several years the church has been running a “Glow in the Dark party” as an annual event open to local children and children from the LEP churches. It’s an alternative to Halloween, which shows young people how to make things with natural materials such as bird feeders made from fir cones.
- Environmental Tips about what people can do have been included in the SEP Newsletter.
- Some people are looking into the possibility of having Swift boxes installed in the churchyard.

St Lawrence, Bradwell – Paul Lund and Angela Vincent

- After lead was stolen off the roof the church used the opportunity to improve the roof insulation.
- A green garden has been created on the Northern boundary of the churchyard. The fact that there are not enough people to look after the garden, has meant that some of the land has been left wild which has encouraged a greater diversity of plant life and in addition fruit trees have been planted for the community to benefit from.
- Bat boxes have been placed on the fruit trees.
- Draughts around the church have been minimised with better insulation.
- The church has stopped using disposable plates and they are no longer using single use plastics e.g. instead they are using paper straws.

St Leonards, Heath & Reach – Richard Page

- The vicar frequently delivers sermons about care of creation.
- A Justice Group was recently established, which focuses on care for creation e.g. recycling as well as dealing with other justice issues.
- Someone has expressed interest in looking after bees in the orchard.
- LED bulbs and fittings have been installed in the church and church hall
- The church needs a new boiler to replace the existing one which is 15 years old, which could be around £16,500 and the church must decide if this will be cost effective. Stuart said he would send information about boiler replacement, including information on alternatives – Click on this link: Diocese of Oxford [emergency heating guidance](#) – which is also applicable to any heating project.
- There are bats in the belfry!
- Richard has set up a bug hotel, added bird baths and created a hope garden to encourage wildlife, as well as planting some shrubs.

Queensway Methodist, Bletchley – Elaine Brown, Peter Musk, Ken Hawes and Steve Peck

- The church has built some raised beds for growing vegetables and they have involved children from a nearby primary school who have helped to plant and look after vegetables including harvesting them before the holiday break and taking the vegetables to their families. The church is thinking of adding some more raised beds.
- They plan to put in bird boxes at the back of the church.
- Light fittings in the church hall have been changed to install LED fittings and bulbs which will pay for themselves within 3 years and they are getting more light from them compared to the previous fluorescent tubes.

- The church is having problems with its conventional boiler which is about 15 years, but the building as it is only being used twice in the week they are thinking of replacing the boiler with infra-red heating system instead as it heats-up the building much quicker than the boiler i.e. about 30 minutes before the service compared with 3 hours with the boiler
- They are looking at ways to reduce their carbon footprint and have looked into installing solar panels as the building is South facing but it appears it would only recover the installation costs in 14 years' time.

Whaddon Way Church, Bletchley – Jane Entwistle

- The church had an excellent speaker, Laura Lee Lovering, from the Baptist Missionary Society who is working in Peru and who is also Creation Stewardship Coordinator for the BMS. Laura's talk provoked a lot of discussion, including in house groups, and has resulted in the church meeting committing to getting a Bronze award. Different people and groups in the church are currently completing the A Rocha Eco Church assessment survey.
- Critically the leader of the Maintenance and Buildings Group is very supportive and he is leading work on gardening and next Saturday there will be a gardening morning and improvements are already being seen.
- Laura's visit also challenged the church to think about what the church could do to have a big impact and many people mentioned the possibility of installing solar panels and the church will look into this in more detail.
- There will be another service in November will have David Gregory from the Baptist Union Environmental Network who hopefully will provide inspiration and new suggested actions.

2. Common Issues from the updates

1. Several churches have installed LED fittings and bulbs:
 - a. Richard: the LED panels have created a more even and brighter light
 - b. Peter: the cost of replacing LED fittings and bulbs pays for itself over 3 years as well as using less energy and fossil fuel.
2. How to publicise what is going on and generating interest and awareness about what we're doing:
 - a. Peter: Put up signage outside the church drawing attention to the fact that the church is an Eco Church.
 - b. Peter: Use noticeboards inside the church publicising information about care for creation and update the noticeboard with new information every month.
 - c. Mary: Use a Facebook page to create interest about climate change both amongst church members and within the wider community, e.g. explaining why the grass in the churchyard is being left to grow tall and might be looking untidy.
 - d. Richard: Have regular features in the parish magazine and encourage villagers to pop in to see what's going on. There's a bench for people to sit on.
3. Steve: There are a lot of swifts in several parts of Milton Keynes. In addition to swift boxes which are a temporary measure, there's the possibility of having "Swift bricks" fitted into buildings. Mary said she will send details from the person who contacted her about swifts. Here is some information about swift bricks:
https://www.barratthomes.co.uk/-/media/group/barratt-homes/campaigns/rspb/swift-nesting-bricks-ebrochure_bd.ashx

4. Mary: What options are there for making bat boxes and bird boxes?
 - a. Wooden bird boxes rot quite quickly but they shouldn't be made of treated wood as they would harm the birds. Concrete boxes are an option or just making them from old pallets and accept that they will have to be replaced every 2-3 years.
5. Involving young people:
 - a. Richard: involving scout groups can be a good opportunity to create awareness about nature and conservation.
 - b. Working with local schools and involving children with growing vegetables.
6. Recycling wax candles:
 - a. Mary asked whether it would be worth exploring the possibility of recycling wax candles and tea lights as she said there is a company in Exeter that recycles candles. Mary will send details of the company in Exeter.

3. Forthcoming local events

1. MK Climate Action Network are organising first networking and vision-planning event at Summerlin Centre on Saturday 14th October (2.30-5.30pm). <https://communityactionmk.org/mk-climate-change-network/>
2. Climate Café at the Old Bath House, Wolverton with a green fair Saturday 25th November at 2-4.30pm
3. Joy Chapman at Cornerstone can help people to source Fair Trade products and if you're interested, please contact: joy@dachapman.free-online.co.uk

4. Next meeting

It was agreed that for our next meeting we will visit a church with an award and Mary kindly agreed that she would be willing to host the next meeting in April at St James in New Bradwell which has a Bronze award.

5. AoB

- It was agreed that this group will in future be called the Milton Keynes Eco Church Network.
- Everyone agreed that they would be happy to receive emails about issues related to Eco Church and Care for Creation, so members are encouraged to share relevant information with members of the network.