

**Report of the Milton Keynes Eco Church Network meeting  
Held on 5th April 2025 at Queensway Methodist Church, Bletchley**



## **Report of key learnings from the MK Eco Church Network meeting**

**Held on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2025 at Queensway Methodist Church, Bletchley**

**In attendance:** Robert Arden, Marion Cole, Judy Dougall, Mary Borrett, Margaret Broadhurst, Terry Collier, Jane Entwistle, Alan Fawcett, Julie Gillam, Neil Harris, Ken Hawes, Stuart Kean, Hilda Kirkwood, Hilary McCoy, Peter Musk, Chinwe Osaghae, Jean Peck, Steve Peck, Lisa Pye, Margaret Rist, Kathy Scarborough, Liz Sharp, Michael Sheppard, Ruth Thomas, Philippa Tipper, Nancy Warner, Adrian Yardley.

**Apologies:** Steve Barnes, Jenny Mercer

### **Summary**

This was the fifth meeting of the Milton Keynes Eco Church Network and was kindly hosted by members of the Eco Church Group at Queensway Methodist Church in Bletchley. The first part of the meeting included a presentation by the Eco Church Group about Queensway Church's Eco Church journey to achieving a Bronze level award, which was followed by a discussion about the lessons they have learned. The second part of the meeting included a talk about the "Opportunities to Reduce, Reuse, Repair and Recycle in Milton Keynes", which was given by Marion Cole and Philippa Tipper, who lead the Repair Café movement in MK. The talk was followed by group discussions about churches' experiences with encouraging members to Reduce, Reuse, Repair and Recycle, the challenges they have faced and steps they can take to promote this movement. The meeting closed with feedback on the MK Climate Action Network's recent workshop on partnerships with councils and forthcoming events.

### **The Queensway journey to achieving an Eco Church Bronze Award – Lessons learned and discussion – Eco Church Group at Queensway.**

Peter Musk presented the activities that the Eco Church Group had undertaken, which resulted in Queensway Church achieving a Bronze level award. Queensway church started its Eco Church journey in 2021 when they were challenged by Lydia Barrett, Northampton District 'Green Champion', who was an invited speaker at Queensway's AGM. Lydia engaged members at the meeting using a 'Lifestyle Quiz' (see Appendix 1) and she spoke about the 5 areas of A Rocha Eco Church and left a leaflet for members to reflect on. Following the meeting, the issue was discussed at the next Church Council which agreed that Queensway should register with A Rocha as an Eco Church and the eco group was formed to plan and implement a series of activities. Since that time Queensway has undertaken a range of activities and has achieved a Bronze award. Some of the key activities undertaken include:

- i) **Reuse and Recycle through the Community Café** - Queensway organises a Community Café every Friday during which new and used bric-a-brac is brought in and for which donations are made to promote recycling. Recycling bins are also placed at the back of the church to collect batteries, shoes and handbags. Items are kept for a month and then if not sold are then donated to organisations such the Salvation Army.
- ii) **Eco Gardens** - The church has built some raised beds for growing vegetables and they have involved special needs 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 will be adding another raised bed. The children also planted flower bulbs in the grass at the front of the church. The eco group have planted some fruit trees, installed two compost bins and collected rainwater in two water butts. The Eco Gardens have created interest amongst community members some of whom have become actively engaged. With the recent demolition of a derelict building, there will be possibilities for creating more garden space, including a sensory garden. They have started an “Eco Challenge” to plant sunflowers along the wall at the front of the church grounds, which they will do with help from children at Knowles School.

- iii) **Communication and education** - The Eco Church Group publicises its activities and includes notices related to lifestyle issues in the fortnightly newsheet, using suggestions, such as the A Rocha ‘Monthly Tip’. They also use the church noticeboards for colourful displays about climate change and what actions people can take as well as publicising what activities the eco group have been undertaking. Visiting preachers are asked to mention environmental issues in their sermons and/or prayers. Queensway organised a successful and well attended Café Sunday Service (which are organised every month) as part of the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch which was a great opportunity for people to share the findings of what people had recorded. The group is thinking of making this an annual event for Queensway.
- iv) **Buildings** - The 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. They have switched their electricity provider to Octopus that provides 100% renewable electricity. Queensway has applied to have an energy audit undertaken



### Discussion about Queensway’s Eco Church Journey

- Stuart suggested that they consider installing an EV charger in the new car park space that is being constructed, as it is better to do this whilst work is being undertaken.
- Queensway’s Family Worker had built good relationships with the primary school opposite the church, which had resulted in children coming to work on the raised beds.
- Batteries collected are dropped off at B&Q

- It was reported that the Boots branch on MK Centre is accepting blister packs and the Eco Group will investigate the possibility of collecting these in future.
- A helpful website for identifying what can be recycled and where is the Recycle Now website: <https://www.recyclenow.com/>
- A key factor behind Queensway's success has been the formation of a team of people interested in environmental issues and care for creation.
- Stuart reminded participants that the Oxford Diocese already offers energy audits at a subsidised cost of £150 and the Northampton Methodist District is currently discussing the possibility of offering energy audits at a discounted cost. Stuart outlined the benefits of energy audits, which include:
  - Identifying areas of inefficiency, highlighting areas for improvements e.g. drafts and poor ventilation
  - Helping churches save money
  - Creating warmer and more comfortable places
  - Significantly reducing carbon emissions and contributing to a greener future including achieving churches' net zero targets and sustainability goals
  - By understanding how energy is used in the building, churches can optimize their energy consumption and not pursue wasteful uninformed decisions.

**Presentation on: "Opportunities to Reduce, Reuse, Repair and Recycle in Milton Keynes" by Marion Cole and Philippa Tripper, Repair Café Movement in MK**

Repair Cafés are free meeting places and they're all about repairing things (together). There are expert volunteers, with repair skills in all kinds of fields: clothes, furniture, electrical appliances, bicycles, crockery, appliances, toys, etc. Visitors bring their broken items from home and together with the specialists they start making their repairs in the Repair Café. Tea, coffee and cakes are available whilst people wait for their item to be repaired.

Repair Cafés started in Amsterdam in 2009 and were so successful that a worldwide movement was formed that strives to preserve repair skills in society and to promote more repairable products. Besides the Netherlands, there are Repair Cafés in Belgium, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States and in dozens of other countries around the world. Repair Café has even made its way to India and Japan! There are over 2,500 Repair Cafés worldwide. <https://www.repaircafe.org/en/about/>

Marion and Philippa explained that in Milton Keynes there are currently 3 Repair Cafes that meet monthly:

**Wolverton on 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday meeting** on the Old Bath House from 9.30am – 12.30pm

**Stony Stratford 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday meeting** alternately at Stony Stratford Library or at the Arts Gateway in Kiln Farm from 10.00am – 12.00pm

**Newport Pagnell meets on 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday** at the Mead Centre from 9.30am – 12.30pm.

In addition, in areas neighbouring Milton Keynes' there are Repair Cafes in Buckingham and Leighton Buzzard.

Marion and Philippa said they would be very interested if a location could be found for a Repair Café to be located in Bletchley. Peter Musk said that the Queensway Eco Church Group will discuss this suggestion.

Marion and Philippa made the following points during their presentation:

- The starting point for a Repair Café is to identify a group of repairers
- The most popular skills required are for sewing, electrical work, knife sharpening, watch and clock repairs, bike repairs, jewellery repairs, gardening machinery and upholstery. They don't repair phones.
- The first task is for the repairer to diagnose the problem working together with the customer. The customer then stays with the item whilst it is being repaired so they can learn how to make future repairs.
- In 2024 there were 517 repair jobs and only 94 couldn't be repaired.
- There are approximately 60 repairers, though they don't all come to every Repair Café. They are all volunteers and mostly men.
- In addition to repairers, the Repair Cafes need 'Meeters' and 'Greeters' to help coordinate the process, including organising refreshments.
- Expertise is shared between repairers, who exchange information and share tools when necessary.
- The credentials of repairers are not checked and the Repair operates Café on a system of trust in which customers sign a statement agreeing that the repairer will work on the item without them being legally liable.
- The repairs are done for free with most people making voluntary donations, which has always covered the costs of hiring the venue.
- There is always a café where refreshments are available for which people make donations.
- Publicity is by word of mouth and through Facebook.
- Another useful organisation supporting recycling is 'Rehome Your Electricals', currently funded by Places for People. It works on the principle that you bring an item that is not working, it gets fixed and you then donate it. The environmental charity Hubbub supported Wolverton Community Fridge and the Old Bath House and Community Centre to pilot #Rehome Your Electricals:  
<http://www.mkcommunityfridge.org/>
- For general information about Rehome Your Electricals check this website:  
<https://www.recycleyourelectricals.org.uk/>
- Another useful website about recycling with many helpful YouTube videos about how to repair items is: I Fix It: <https://www.ifixit.com/>

### **Group discussions about recycling experiences and challenges**

Participants were split into 3 groups and discussed 3 questions:

#### **Question 1: What have been your churches' experiences with encouraging members to Reduce, Reuse, Repair and Recycle (the 4 Rs)?**

- Some churches have included the 4 Rs in Eco Tips in monthly Newsletters
- Some have had short talks during services about the importance of members practising the 4 Rs, sometimes included in sermons and prayers.

#### **Question 2: What challenges have churches faced with doing this?**

- Recycling is “Everyone’s and Nobody’s responsibility” and so nothing happens
- People are not separating items correctly into the recycling bins
- Some church groups have members who come from contexts where the quality of tap water is not trusted and they have become familiar where it is sociable to hand out plastic water bottles
- Littering is a widespread problem

**Question 3: What steps could your church take to encourage more people to Reduce, Reuse, Repair and Recycle?**

- Set up clearly signed recycling bins in churches and church halls
- Organise a clothes swop, including for baby items, perhaps during the Big Green Week
- Eco Church groups can organise services that focus on the 4Rs, including holding services outdoors.
- Encourage churches to use refills
- Set targets for recycling to encourage members to achieve. This will help create a sense of community spirit for church members to work together on.
- Create banners about the 4 Rs to put up in churches and church halls
- Arrange local litter picks after church services and other events
- Install a bench and plant a tree
- Join in community activities related to the 4 Rs
- Promote ‘Cycling Saviours’ who repair and recycle bicycles:  
<https://mkchristianfoundation.co.uk/cycle-saviours/>

**Feedback from MKCAN workshop about partnerships with Councils**

Stuart provided feedback from the recent workshop organised by Milton Keynes Climate Action Network on the theme of “Working with Local Councils”. He gave feedback about some very useful tips for engaging and influencing town councils given by Delia Shephard who is the Town Clerk for Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council. The tips included:

- Access council **website** – councillors and meetings, policies, budget and strategic plans e.g. Neighbourhood Plan, Climate Action Plan, Biodiversity Policy, etc
- **Ask** for information – use Freedom of Information wisely
- Meetings not best for first engagement – identify key players and **talk first**
- Work with other **allies in the community**
- Start small and go with a **specific, realistic proposal**
- Be aware of the council’s **financial cycle**
- If the council is trying hard **encourage** with support or **help with expertise**
- Hold the council to account and **challenge** if necessary
- Adverse **publicity** – should be a last resort
- The **clerk** should be your friend

**Forthcoming events and activities**

1. **Our Net-Zero Journey So Far, Tuesday 6 May, 1-2pm, online.** Hear from several Diocese of Oxford churches that have made significant progress towards net zero carbon [Register to join](#).
2. **Climate Justice and Global Solidarity: Stories from around the world, 4th May 2025 - 6:30 - 8:00pm.** Hope for the Future will be organising this webinar in the second event of 'Keeping Faith in the Climate' series, which will highlight the disproportionate impacts of climate change on communities in the Global South, while fostering solidarity and awareness within the UK audience. Sign up [here](#).
3. **Starting Small: Creation Care for Beginners, 21 May at 3.30pm Visitor Centre at Christ Church Oxford,** hosted by Archdeacon Jonathan. This will be an event on for churches that aren't yet engaging with eco church but might be interested in getting started. centre, This will be followed by Evensong in the Cathedral for those that wish to join. [21 May creation care for beginners](#),
4. **Great Big Green Week 7-15<sup>th</sup> June** is a good time for events and is the same time as [Churches Count on Nature](#) which is also open for registrations.
5. **Christian Leadership in an Environmentally Challenging World, Wed 11<sup>th</sup> June:** An online event for church leaders from the Theological Colleges Environment Network: [Christian Leadership in an environmentally challenging world](#). Keynote speakers Bishop Graham Usher & Dr Martin Hodson.
6. **Creation Care Conversations: Saturday 21 June at St Edberg's, Bicester.** This event aims to offer space and time to chat with others on the journey, so you can share ideas, challenges and experiences. For more details: [21 June Climate Conversations in Bicester](#).
7. **Climate Café, Saturday 12th July, 2.00-4.30pm at Church of Christ the Cornerstone.** OU lecturer Dr. Charlotte Weatherill will give a talk about Rethinking Climate Vulnerability entitled "All in the Same Boat?"