



Report of Milton Keynes Eco Church Network Meeting
Held on Saturday 11th October 2025
at St Mary's Bletchley, MK3 6BJ



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In attendance: Annwen Adams, Kofi Tekyi Ansah, Karen Atkins, Steve Barnes, Andrew Barton, Mary Borrett, Margaret Broadhurst, Felicity Cockbane, Gladys Deleuse, Jane Entwistle, Rob Grindley, Ken Hawes, Stuart Kean, Benjamin Kent, Hilda Kirkwood, Arthur Mist, Jean Peck, Steve Peck, Lisa Pye, Anne Slee, Liz Sharp, Angela Vincent, Nancy Warner.

Apologies: Jenny Mercer

Summary

This meeting of the Milton Keynes Eco Church Network and was kindly hosted by members of the Eco Church Group at St Mary's Church in Bletchley. The first part of the meeting included a presentation by the Eco Church Group about St Mary's Eco Church journey to achieving a Bronze level award, which was followed by a discussion about the lessons they have learned. There was a brief presentation given by Annwen Adams from 1Energy Uk about Milton Keynes' District Heating Network, which was followed by lively discussion. The bulk of the rest of the meeting included 3 talks and discussion on the theme of: 'From Energy Audits to Action Plans' with talks given by Stuart Kean about the Church of Christ the Cornerstone, Andrew Barton about the experience at St Mary's and Rob Grindley spoke about the lessons learned at St Frideswide's Church. There was a short session about forthcoming events.

St Mary's Bletchley journey to Eco Church Bronze and beyond

Lisa Pye gave a presentation about St Mary's journey to achieving a Bronze Eco Church award, in which she talked about the team, the journey, the obstacles encountered and their future plans.

- An important aspect of St Mary's Eco Church activities is that the current activities represent the fourth iteration of eco church over a 15-year period and the Bronze award was only achieved this year. This highlights that the journey of an Eco Church can be a long one which is likely to require persistence, especially to overcome challenges when people committed to the scheme move on or their interests and capacities may alter as well as changes that may occur in a churches' mission priorities. This experience should be a source of encouragement to those in churches where eco church may not currently be a high priority.
- St Mary's is responsible for 3 buildings each with different energy needs and challenges: a Norman Church, a 1940's office building with poor insulation and a community centre with a high ceiling.
- The current Eco Church team comprises 4 people each with different skills and areas of interest within St Mary's. They bring different ideas and approaches to Eco Church and have connections and influence with different groups within and outside the church, which results in the Team being able to "get the job done!"
- The Eco Church Team importantly has "allies" in different areas of the church, which means that they are able to operate at "curators" of activities as well as being agents

in their own right. This means that there are many more people involved in supporting the Eco Church activities than the 4 people with the Eco Church Team.

- The Team found that a priority-setting matrix with 4 quadrants was very helpful in deciding where to focus their efforts. The 4 quadrants of the matrix are: i) Quick Wins (low effort, high impact), ii) Major Projects (High effort, high impact), iii) Fill-ins (low effort, low impact), and iv) Thankless tasks (High effort, low impact).
- The current phase of Eco Church began with the Eco Church Team writing to the PCC to get agreement to go ahead with their activities. The PCC's agreement gave legitimacy to the Eco Church Team and its activities and made them more central to many in the church especially the ministry team leaders.
- The Eco Church Team took responsibility for reviewing different section of the Eco Church survey and involved other people which has helped to embed Eco Church into St Marys' activities.
- Some of the key activities have included: installed recycling bins in the church and community centre, changed to eco-friendly cleaning products, created wildlife areas with native species in the churchyard to encourage pollinators, "citizen science" activities to monitor biodiversity in the churchyard , organised a garden tool and plant swop, installed a bath for growing potatoes at the community centre, installed a water butt, organised community litter picks, included monthly eco tips in the churches' monthly newsletter, organised teaching series about why care for creation matters which included producing resources for home groups (which are available if anyone is interested to use them). In addition to these "visible" activities, the Team has undertaken a range of activities that have been "less visible" such as changed the churches' electricity to a green tariff, installing LED bulbs, placed reflector foil behind radiators and erected curtains as draught excluders around doors. St Mary's has also made connections with Whaddon Way Church to share ideas.
- Data gathering has been an important activity to provide the Team with evidence to justify specific actions to be undertaken. A good example was an Energy Audit which was very helpful in persuading the PCC to implement some short-term measures, as well as highlighting longer-term measures that would need action.
- The Team outlined several obstacles encountered including:
 - Their limited time and capacity, set against numerous other priorities
 - Progress on some activities takes a lot of time which can be frustrating e.g. installing cycle racks
 - Persuading some people in the church that care for creation is a central aspect of Christian discipleship and church mission. This has improved as the number and visibility of eco church activities has increased and since the church got its Bronze award.
- Being in a busy, active church is both a blessing and a challenge. While there is plenty of opportunity, there is also a lot of 'competition' for the church and the congregation's time, attention and energy.
- The Team acknowledges that whilst many activities have been undertaken, there is still a way to go to get the principles of eco church and creation care embedded in all church activities.

- The next steps are to continue with teaching and worship activities, work on heating and insulation for the 3 buildings and install cycle racks. The weakest of the 5 Eco Church activities for St Mary's are: First, community and global engagement and they plan to expand the "citizen science" activities, organise more swop events, build links with other churches and groups and organise an eco themed art exhibition. Second, work on Lifestyle issues needs to be increased which will be achieved through regular Eco Tips, Blogs and information on the website as well as engaging with different church ministries.

Discussion about St Mary's Eco Church journey

- There was a request for St Mary's to share their Eco Tips, which was agreed. Stuart offered to circulate Eco Tips produced by any members of the MK Eco Church Network and requested members to send them to him.
- Andrew Barton offered to share the materials that he had prepared for a 4 week series of home group discussions about care for creation, which include a Biblical focus.
- During a discussion about funding opportunities, Stuart recommended participants to look at the monthly MK Eco Church Updates, which quite often include information about funding opportunities.

Presentation about Milton Keynes' District Heating Network – Annwen Adams, 1Energy UK

Annwen Adams, who works for Energy1 UK and is responsible for their work in Milton Keynes, gave a fascinating presentation about the plans to construct a District Heating Network in Milton Keynes. Milton Keynes City Council recently produced a plan to construct a Heating Network in Milton Keynes.¹ This is to address the challenge that domestic/residential heating is one of the biggest sources of UK Emissions accounting for 37% of UK emissions - higher than any other sector. Local District Heating Schemes are systems that typically use a singular central heat source to distribute hot water through a network of insulated pipes to multiple dwellings. For buildings connected to District Heating Networks there is a 75% reduction in carbon emissions. The UK has been slow to construct District Heating Networks which can be found in many European cities e.g. Copenhagen has 91% of its heating needs provided in this way. District Heating Networks are a proven and adaptable technology capable of significantly decarbonising the UK's heating system.

1Energy is one of the UK's largest developer and operator of district heating networks in the UK. Phase 1 of the scheme is scheduled to start officially in January 2026 and will involve building a dedicated heat network with 20km of pipework. Phase 1 customers currently include MK City Council, University Hospital, the Open University and some new build residential developments including Milton Keynes East. The intention is to use waste heat recovered from the existing Pulsant data centre and a new data centre under development with potentially future energy coming from waste energy from the Waste Recovery Park in

¹ <https://milton-keynes.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s23932/Heat+Networks+-+Pathway+To+Net+Zero+Annex+A+Programme+Plan.pdf>

Wolverton. Central government has provided £17 million to the scheme. The cost of heating is more expensive than gas but is cheaper than air source heat pumps.

Discussion Theme: 'From Energy audit to action'

1. Church of Christ the Cornerstone - Stuart Kean

Stuart outlined several benefits of conducting an energy audit. it can:

- Identify areas of inefficiency, highlight areas for improvements e.g. draughts and poor ventilation
- Help churches save money
- Creates warmer and more comfortable places
- Significantly reduce carbon emissions and contribute 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 make wasteful uninformed decisions.

Churches in the Oxford Diocese can apply to the Environmental Programme and request an energy audit for the subsidised cost of £150². Methodist Churches in Northampton District can apply for a £500 grant to conduct an energy audit³.

The Church of Christ the Cornerstone had an energy audit conducted in November 2023 by Inspired Efficiency who identified that, like many churches, heating is the largest user of energy (81%). The energy audit was very helpful as it identified short, medium and long-term recommendations to guide decision making so save costs and energy usage. It was surprising to see areas where small changes could be made that did not cost much but which were able to save a lot of energy e.g. by switching to a supplier providing 100% renewable electricity, insulating exposed pipework and fittings in plantrooms and installing a touch-activated double door system at the church entrance.'

2. St Mary's Bletchley - Andrew Barton

St Mary's Church is responsible for 3 buildings each with different energy needs and challenges: a Norman Church, a 1940's office building with poor insulation and a community centre with a high ceiling. Heating the buildings makes up 80% of the churches' energy usage. St Mary's successfully applied for a grant from the Oxford Diocese Net Zero Preparation Fund with a view to eventually installing a heat pump. Andrew Smith from Zap Carbon was selected to conduct the energy audit as he is very knowledgeable and gives useful practical advice. The audit looked at current energy consumption, energy losses and evaluated different options, particularly heat pumps. A thermal camera was used and identified the considerable loss of heat through the walls of the Church Office building. St Mary's had an underfloor heating system installed in the main church building which will significantly reduce the cost of installing a heat pump.

The audit identified several "quick-win" recommendation for the buildings including: i) installing reflective materials behind the radiators, ii) putting up curtains over doors to

² <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/environment-and-social-justice/environmental-action/energy-audits/>

³ <https://www.northamptonmethodistdistrict.org.uk/resources/finance-grants.html>

reduce draughts, and iii) hang acetate sheets to cover the stained glass windows which can be relatively inexpensive (£1500) and can make a significant difference to reducing heat loss and can hardly be noticed.

Andrew Barton mentioned 3 practical learnings for churches considering energy audits:

- Important when using the thermal imaging camera to do it on a cold day in winter
- Important to have as much detailed information about energy usage as possible i.e. daily usage not monthly
- The recommendations should consider the ease of making changes as well as the cost and the impact.

3. St Frideswide's – Rob Grindley

Rob Grindley is the architect who was asked initially to sort out the problem that Water Eaton Church Centre had with a lot of flat roofs including seriously eroded timber and peeling membrane. Water Eaton Church Centre is home to St Frideswide's Church CofE and Spurgeon Baptist Church. His brief included 4 components: i) to put everything under one pitched roof; ii) improve accessibility to improve how people move around the building; iii) increasing sustainability by improving insulation and planning for a fossil free future by installing solar panels and iv) increasing connections particularly opening up to the garden. The original plans changed when the church decided to apply for a Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Energy Efficiency Scheme grant to cover air source heat pump and solar panels with batteries. The application required the church to have an Independent Energy Assessment, using a Government assessor, which was free, but took a long time to get the report. The planning and grant approval processes were complex in part because it required both approval of both DAC and Building Control Planning Permission and it was difficult to meet all the criteria. 3 quotes were required for the solar panels and air source heat pump and an acoustic assessment was required to find a sufficiently quiet air source heat pump, to meet the needs of nearby neighbours. The building has 3-phase power supply which required 3 batteries for each phase to store the energy from the solar panels. The church applied for £83,000 and was pleased when they were awarded £94,000. However, they faced a very tight turnaround because although they applied for the grant on 5th August 2024, approval was only given on 11th November, and the work had to be completed by 14th February 2025! Due to a poorly insulated building a hybrid energy system was required with a small back-up gas boiler in case the outside temperature drops to -8 degrees. The church system is now exporting energy from its solar panels. The lessons learned were:

- Good organisational skills are important
- The power of paperwork to meet the criteria
- It's not about the money but about reducing the fossil fuel usage.

Forthcoming events and activities – Stuart Kean

1. **Climate Café MK Green Fair on Saturday 15th November 1:30-4pm, The Old Bathhouse**, 205 Stratford Road, Wolverton, MK12 5RL. The Climate Café will be holding a Green Fair with green stalls, eco-friendly gifts for sale, eco and climate information stalls, networking and refreshments.
2. **Milton Keynes Parks Trust Community Litter Pick: Monday 10th November at 10.30 am** at the MK Rose. For details see: <https://www.theparkstrust.com/events/?Event+Category=Volunteering>
3. **A Milton Keynes Nature Evening will be held on Tuesday 25th November 2025 between 6.30pm - 8.30pm at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone**, organised by the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wild Trust (BBOWT). The event will be evening of community joy, learning and networking!
4. **Happy Eco News** is here to promote hope that inspires action on the climate and the environment. Without hope there is no action. <https://happyeconews.com/>
5. **Herschel Halo Infrared Heating:** Here is some information about the potential use of Infrared heating in churches which could be an alternative for churches, especially historic ones: <https://www.herschel-infrared.co.uk/heritage/> .Here is a video of a very positive example of installing Herschel Halo Infrared Heater at St Michael's Church in Aynho, Northamptonshire: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-ZI0IDcWro>