

## Report of key learnings from the MK Eco Church Network meeting held at St James, New Bradwell, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2024

**In attendance:** Wendy Arden, Steve Barnes, Felicity Beaton, Derek Beaumont, Mary Borrett, Margaret Broadhurst, Terry Collier, Jane Entwistle, Irene Farr, Janet Galsworthy, John Giles, Neil Harris, Ken Hawes, Jane Jeavons, Stuart Kean, Mary Kennedy, Hilda Kirkwood, Barry Lotz, Paul Lund, Jenny Mercer, Peter Musk, Jean Peck, Steve Peck, Helen Rouse, Margaret Rist, Anne Slee, Nancy Warner.

### Summary

This was the third meeting of the Milton Keynes Eco Church Network and was kindly hosted by members of St James New Bradwell. The aim of the meeting was to learn about and discuss St James' experiences with implementing the A Rocha Eco Church framework. Following presentations by members of St James' eco church group there was a Q&A session and then a tour of the church and churchyard. The meeting concluded with announcements about several opportunities and events related to Eco Church. Encouragingly there were 27 participants representing 13 churches at this meeting, compared with 21 participants from 9 churches who attended the first meeting in June 2023.

### Background information about Eco Church at St James, New Bradwell

- St James started work on Eco Church in 2021 and achieved a Bronze award in October 2022. This has been achieved with the support of the Church Council and the commitment of a small group of 'green champions', particularly Mary Borrett. They were motivated to start working on 'green issues' having watched some Green Christian webinars and initially focused on encouraging people to correctly recycle items.
- **Worship and Teaching:**
  - Achieved gold in this area: care for creation is often mentioned in prayers, services are sometimes held outside, special services are organised e.g. for Creationtide. Green Tips are included each month in the LEP Newsletter. They used to support a toddlers group called 'Tiddlers' that used natural materials whenever possible e.g. draw on used plastic bottles and cups and use what's available e.g. lentils and rice to make musical instruments, damp sand, home-made play dough and cotton wipes to replace disposable wipes. As there are no regular young families currently attending church, the churches' activities for children and young people are open to the wider community such as 'Glow in the Dark' which is an alternative to Halloween and an Easter Workshop that encouraged young people to make items with natural materials.
- **Buildings:**
  - Achieved silver. St James is a listed grade 2 building and no double glazing is allowed. Large scale energy savings have been made at St James because of installing attractive LED lighting at a cost of around £40,000. They have a 2 year old boiler and their electricity is from a "green supplier". St James has made other environmentally friendly changes in other areas of church life, including: oil-filled candles instead of traditional wax ones, chicken wire and pin holders instead of oasis for flower arrangements and craft work with children using natural materials. They have encouraged people to cut down on their use of plastics by a display of environmentally friendly, plastic free products.

- **Land:**
  - Achieved silver: They have made the churchyard more environmentally friendly including encouraging a variety of wild flowers and areas left to grow wild. Signs have been erected on the church porch noticeboard and on the edge of the churchyard explaining why these changes, which some consider to look 'untidy and unkempt', have been made. Swift bird boxes are being installed in the bell tower at St James. Support can be given to those interested by contacting: Swifts and Martins groups in Stony Stratford, Newport Pagnell and New Bradwell, local community groups which install artificial nest boxes and survey for natural sites<sup>1</sup>.



- **Local and global engagement**
  - Achieved Bronze: They have invited speakers from Christian Aid, Tearfund, Food Cupboard and Foodbank to talk about climate change and other social concerns and they have supported several charities through Christmas appeals, such as Water Aid and the DEC. St James' toilets are twinned and it is a Fair Trade church. They have encouraged people to follow the LOAF principles: buy local, organic, seasonally available and Fair Trade products.
- **Lifestyle**
  - Achieved Bronze: This has been the hardest area because it is challenging to change individual behaviour.

#### **General lessons from discussions:**

- A common feature across the network has been the critical role played by individuals who are passionate about environmental issues and Eco Church and are willing to champion them. The approval and support of Church Councils has also been essential for making progress.
- Eco church activities progress more easily if there's a core team of people actively engaged in the church, even if it's just 2 or 3 people.
- Start with activities that church members are interested in, such as recycling or gardening.
- St James took a year to complete their Eco Church Survey. Stuart explained that different churches have used different approaches to fill-in the survey. Some churches the survey has been completed by 1 or 2 people, others such as Cornerstone used a core group with 5 people with responsibility for each of the 5 Eco Church areas and then presented the draft survey to the congregation for comments. Other churches have used a fully participative

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbwt.org.uk/volunteering-opportunities/external-community-groups-bucks>

approach and organised a morning workshop to which all church members were invited and they split into 5 groups to complete the survey and identify areas they could work on in future. The participative approach has the potential benefit that many more people are aware of what Eco Church is about and may be willing to participate in future activities.

- If church is part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership with other local churches, form a group of like-minded people, e.g. St James is part of a 6-church “Green Huddle” involving 6 churches across the Stantonbury LEP which provides mutual support, encouragement, and some coordinated activities.
- Encouraging wildlife in churchyards and leaving areas to grow wild is a good way to encourage wildlife and increase biodiversity but it is important to have good signage explaining why areas are being left to grow wild. This is a photo taken by Steve Barnes of a sign he saw at St Michael’s the Archangel, Chagford.



- It is not always just those who attend church who are interested in working in the churchyard but sometimes other community members are eager to make church land more wildlife friendly, as was reported by Willen Church.
- Work in the churchyard has in some cases been supported by other community groups interested in encouraging wildlife and biodiversity e.g. Wildlife Trusts. It sometimes can provide an opportunity for church outreach activities.
- Some churches have worked with local schools to encourage children to learn about nature in churchyards and some have worked collaboratively with schools growing vegetables in raised beds. This has included undertaking surveys of flowers and insects in churchyards. There are some very useful resources about caring for churchyards produced by ‘Caring for God’s Acre’ and these include an Education Pack: <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

## Announcements

Stuart Kean from Christ the Cornerstone, who is Environmental Lead for the MK Deanery and Eco Champion for the MK Methodist Circuit, provided information about several issues:

1. **A Rocha Eco Church Survey:** The survey is being revised and it is expected that the new survey is scheduled to be released in June 2024. This means that if you are close to submitting a survey either for the first time or if you are resubmitting to see if your churches award level has increased you should make your submission asap otherwise you will have to redo your survey with the revised document.

2. **Subsidised Energy Audits:** The Oxford Diocese supports Anglican churches, halls and manse to have professional energy audits at subsidised rates. Stuart highly recommends churches to have energy audits because it provides short, medium and long-term recommendations for improvements in energy usage that will reduce churches' carbon footprints often in ways that people would not otherwise have considered. A small amount of funds will also be available from the Diocese to implement the 'Quick Wins' in the recommendations. Churches interested in having an energy audit should contact Alison Riggs, Environment Action Delivery Coordinator, Oxford Diocese: Email: [Alison.Riggs@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:Alison.Riggs@oxford.anglican.org)
3. **EV Charging Points in church car parks:** Following a pilot phase, Parish Buying is encouraging churches, that own their car parks, to consider installing EV Charging Points at no cost to the church and with the potential to earn income. Parish Buying recently organised a webinar about the scheme and requesting Expressions of Interest. To watch the webinar recording, please click [here](#). Here is a link to their website: <https://parishbuying.org.uk/45-categories/net-zero-2030/358-ev-charging?highlight=WyJldilslmV2cyJd>
4. **Messy Adventures:** New materials have recently been produced for those organising "messy church" activities for children and young people. Messy Adventures is a book of 12 sessions with activities to help families explore creation and encounter God. <https://www.messychurch.brf.org.uk/latest/projects/messy-church-goes-wild/>
5. **"God Saw That It Was Good":** Four new 20 minute films have been produced to raise awareness of environmental issues in churches and God's call to share in mission to the whole of creation. They have been produced by Rev Dr Dave Gregory for the Baptist Union Environment Network – and Fuelcast Media. The films can be viewed by clicking on this link: <http://www.gstiwg.co.uk/>
6. **Community Energy – Solar panels:** For churches that are considering installing solar panels, it may be worth exploring potential collaboration with Wolverton Community Energy who are looking for institutional rooftops to invest in and install solar panels: <https://wolvertoncommunityenergy.uk/get-involved/>

#### **Future events related to Climate Change**

1. The MK Eco Church Network will have a stall at the Climate World Café being organised by **MK Climate Action Network on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May between 2-5pm at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone**. The meeting is an opportunity to learn and share ideas between a wide range of groups working to create a more sustainable future. Groups attending will include: MK Eco Church Network, MK Biodiversity, MK Letnet, MK Transition Town, Wolverton Community Energy, Extinction Rebellion, Climate Café MK, and The Parks Trust.
2. **World Environment Day Prayer Vigil**, Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> June 5.30 – 6.00 at the MK Rose pillar for World Environment Day. N.B. 5<sup>th</sup> June is WE Day.
3. **Green hustings for General Election:** MK Can is planning to organise a Green Hustings in the run up to the General Election, which will provide an opportunity to ask prospective parliamentary candidates about their views on a range of environmental and climate change issues.

#### **Next Steps**

1. There was a positive discussion about forming a pool of volunteers drawn from across the MK Eco Church Network, who would be willing to take it in turn to write monthly tips about creation care to be included in the newsletters, magazines or Notice Sheets that could be used by all churches in the Network. It was agreed that this is a good idea. Please will people who are interested on forming a group to write these messages please let Stuart Kean know by email, given at the end of this report.

2. There was overwhelming interest amongst network members about the possibility of organising a group visit to the MK Waste Recovery Centre in Old Wolverton, about which Stuart has made an inquiry, but has not had a reply.
3. It was agreed that the MK Eco Church Network should meet 3 times a year, with two visits to churches and one meeting on Zoom in January or February.
4. Jenny Mercer kindly agreed to explore the possibility that the next Network meeting in October could be held at either St Georges or Holy Trinity in the Wolverton Benefice.
5. Stuart asked anyone who is interested in helping him to convene the MK Eco Church Network to contact him on the email given at the end of this report.

If anyone would like more information about any of the items in this report or would like to be added to the MK Eco Church Network mailing list please contact Stuart whose email is:  
stuart.kean@gmail.com