



the world

Geoff Crawford / Church of England

The General Synod has backed a series of measures to promote biodiversity on Church of England land from churchyards as havens of wildlife and plants to the stewardship of agricultural and forestry land.

Members of the Synod welcomed progress already made by the Church Commissioners, the National Church Institutions, dioceses, parishes, cathedrals and schools to manage their land for climate and nature.

The Synod approved further action to increase biodiversity including work towards drawing up environmental policy and land management plans for Dioceses and the recording of biodiversity in church green spaces.

The Synod also backed a request for the Church Commissioners to report back to the General Synod within three years on their progress in enhancing and supporting biodiversity across their agricultural and forestry land.

Introducing the debate at the Synod, the Church of England's lead Bishop for the Environment, Graham Usher, said there was a need for immediate action to promote biodiversity. He warned that the UK is now one of the most 'nature-depleted' countries in the world.



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“We are all too aware that this single island planet home of ours faces the twin interrelated crises of climate change and biodiversity loss,” he said.

He added: “We are one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world - 2% of species are already extinct - 41% of species have declined since 1970, 26% of our mammals are at risk of extinction and 97% of UK’s wildflower meadows have been lost since the 1930s.

“We need to act now to help the diversity of life on this single island planet home we share.”

Bishop Graham told the Synod that churchyards are home to a range of wildlife. In many parishes the churchyard is the only remaining ‘species-rich’ grassland untouched by post Second World War cultivation and development, he said. He added that in urban areas, churchyards are often the only green space.

When managed well, with a plan, good local consultation, sensitivity to mourners, and clear interpretation, nature can thrive in churchyards, he said.

“Our churchyards should be places of the living not just the dead,” he added.

Many Glebe (Diocesan land) committees are already considering how they could support their tenants to maximise biodiversity and soil health, he said.

He added that much work has already been begun on enhancing the biodiversity stewardship of Church Commissioners’ land.

The motion passed was as follows:

That this Synod, recognising the need to respond urgently to the ecological crisis, in line with the global scientific consensus that the climate change and biodiversity loss crises are intricately linked:

- a. *welcome the work being done by the Church Commissioners, the NCIs, and many dioceses, parishes, cathedrals, and schools to manage all or part of their land for climate and nature, in urban and rural communities alike*
- b. *request Diocesan Secretaries to task a named person / committee in their dioceses to create an action plan to achieve the 'Land' section of Eco Diocese at Silver level by 2026 at the latest.*
- c. *request Chairs and Secretaries of all diocesan property/finance committees to incorporate nature-positive objectives into their asset management policies within the next 6 months.*
- d. *call on all parishes, cathedrals, TElS, NCIs offices with land they manage or influence to:*
 - i. *create a simple land management plan, with reference to the guidance and examples from Caring for Gods Acre,*
 - ii. *work towards an increasing level of Eco Church, including the actions in the 'Land' section, and*
 - iii. *record the biodiversity of their green spaces, through taking part in Churches Count On Nature each year.*
- e. *call on all Diocesan Boards of Education to work in accordance with the Department for Education Sustainability Strategy.*
- f. *request the Church Commissioners to report back to General Synod within three years about their progress with:*
 - i. *enhancing and supporting biodiversity across their agricultural and forestry land,*
 - ii. *engagement and collaboration with tenants about sustainable farming, and*
 - iii. *their leadership amongst landowners in a way that recognises the importance of shared learning, support and respect in achieving these objectives.'*

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