

A call for action on the climate, from the national Environmental Working Group of the Church of England

The national Environmental Working Group (EWG) brings together experts and representatives to help oversee, advise and support the Church's environment programme to bring the good stewardship of God's creation to the heart of the Church of England.

Following its most recent meeting, the EWG resolved to issue a statement offering guidance to staff, clergy and synod members around the country on the climate crisis and the Church's current position.

Below is the informed view of the EWG, although this group cannot speak unilaterally for the whole Church of England. It is an assessment of the priority areas for the Church to address, conscious that the EWG cannot alone set the direction.

There is a climate crisis; indeed, a crisis for creation, and all parts of the Church of England should recognise this. The urgency and significance of climate change and the degradation of the environment cannot be over-estimated.

Everything we do must be seen through the lens of the environment. We are all called to exercise leadership in this area, prioritising the fifth mark of mission 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth', and without this being done wholeheartedly the other four marks lack credibility in today's context.

"It becomes ever clearer that climate change is the greatest challenge that we and future generations face. It's our sacred duty to protect the natural world we've so generously been given, as well as our neighbours around the world who will be first and worst affected. Without swift decisive action the consequences of climate change will be devastating."

Archbishop Justin Welby

In this light, the national Environmental Working Group is revising its plans, setting faster targets, preparing a General Synod motion, and updating the [Environment Programme](#). This statement is to give guidance to parishes and dioceses on the changing national picture, to support local action.

The EWG recommends for consideration across the Church – including by General Synod - a revised carbon reduction target of **net zero carbon by 2050**, in line with UK Government policy, and that **those parts of the Church that can move faster are strongly encouraged to do so**. Our interim target is a **57% reduction by 2030**, vs our baseline year 2006, in line with the UKCCC's recommended [carbon budget](#). These targets need to be debated, but once a direction is agreed it is vital that all parts of the Church of England move together towards being a net zero church by 2050, with ambition to move faster.

We acknowledge this target is slower than many hope, and faster than many believe possible. It would however commit to a pace that allows all parts of the Church to progress together, including parishes, dioceses, schools, chaplaincies, and the National Church Institutions. The Church is blessed with a rich heritage of many thousand historic buildings, many of them listed, run by local teams of volunteers with limited resources. We wish to keep our buildings open and vibrantly used, whilst also cutting their energy use; we are determined find solutions to these complex challenges and take concerted action.

A key first step will be to develop a measure of our carbon footprint across all parts of the Church, where this is not being done already. This needs to cover churches, housing, schools, farming, forestry, investment portfolios, and offices. While this is not without complexity, it is vital to developing a national carbon reduction plan. To this end, energy audits are already being piloted by Parish Buying (the Church of England's procurement collective), and a church energy-footprinting tool is being developed by the Church of England's Research and Statistics Team.

Beyond this, the Church will need a programme of action on our buildings, changing our heating away from oil and gas, focussing more on the comfort of church users rather than always aiming to heat the whole space, installing energy efficient lighting, switching to renewable energy, cutting heat loss, and – where appropriate – generating our own electricity from renewables.

In addition to carbon output, we must also protect and enhance biodiversity across our land and buildings, including churchyards, glebe land, and investment assets. The Church needs to build ecological awareness into everything we do. Caring for creation is part of our mission and ministry.

We are working on ways to help a wide base of Christians develop environmental stewardship as part of their personal witness. In 2020 this will include the Archbishop of Canterbury's [Lent Book](#) and Lent Campaign, both of which take the theme of care for the environment. We also plan to build on existing good work in parishes and dioceses, and promote schemes such as A Rocha's [Eco Church](#) / [Eco Diocese](#) framework, which helps provide a step-by-step approach to the change required.

The Church's national investing bodies have already divested from companies deriving more than 10% of their revenues from the mining of thermal coal or the production of oil from oil tar sands, as these are the most polluting carbon fossil fuels. We have made commitments to start to divest in 2020 from further companies that are not taking seriously their responsibilities to assist with the transition to a low carbon economy and to ensure that by 2023 the Church has divested from fossil fuel companies that they have assessed, drawing on [Transition Path Initiative](#) data, as not prepared to align with targets for an increase well below 2°C. In addition there is a commitment to increase their low carbon investments to the extent that such investments meet our investment risk/return criteria

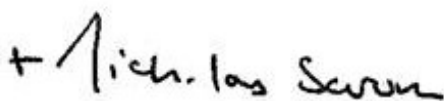
We recognise and acknowledge the many ways in which people are taking action to resist climate change. While we do not universally endorse the tactics of action groups, nonetheless we know that across the country many churches and individuals are increasingly concerned and are praying, talking and taking action.

As the impacts of climate breakdown start to accelerate and the impact of biodiversity loss is seen more clearly, we foresee an increasing need and opportunity for the churches to play a missional role in communities across the country. Local churches can act as a catalyst in their community for carbon reduction initiatives and climate resilience strategies, as well as preparing to provide sanctuary in extreme weather events and for climate refugees from within and outside of the UK. Churches can also champion the care of the rich variety of flora and fauna which make up God's creation.

We encourage Bishops and Dioceses to prioritise and raise awareness of these issues. A vital role in achieving all of this is to take up the call from General Synod to have a well-resourced and well-supported network of Diocesan Environmental Officers around the country, reporting to named lead members on their Bishop's staff team. The EWG is conscious that there are gaps in this network at present, and some DEOs are under-resourced and over-stretched volunteers. While mindful of the many pressures on diocesan budgets, the EWG can only encourage all dioceses to resource this vital environmental work to give it the focus it needs to bring about real change.

2020 will be a key year for gathering momentum on the climate and other ecological concerns. We are aiming for a motion at General Synod, as soon as can be accommodated, to debate and cement a revised carbon target, with additional focus during Lent, at the [Lambeth2020 conference](#), and around the COP26 climate talks in November. Christians across the country are encouraged to join in and take action.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicholas Holtam". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

The Rt Revd Nicholas Holtam, The Bishop of Salisbury,
Lead Bishop for the Environment, and Chair of the national Environmental Working Group