

GENERAL SYNOD

Responding to the Climate Emergency

Summary

This paper sets out how the Oxford Diocese motion can support the determination of all parts of the Church of England to respond well to the climate and ecological crises we face, through taking forward the process of embedding policy, procedural, practical and cultural changes at every level.

It explores the context of both the challenge and the Gospel imperative for meeting it and notes progress since 2020. It calls for further actions within the Church to enable achievement of the principles and milestones identified in the National Routemap to Net Zero Carbon, and suggests engagement with Government in order to assess and address planning questions relating to efficiency measures in listed buildings. In addition, it urges the Church of England to adequately resource this work centrally in order to more quickly and effectively enable meaningful change.

The climate and ecological crises and our Christian response

The context for the Oxford Diocese motion

5. Oxford Diocese unanimously passed a climate emergency motion which three of its deaneries brought to its Synod in March 2020.^x It committed at that time to an integrated response across the diocese, reflecting the calls to wider church seen in sections a to e of the current motion. It was accompanied by a detailed paper pointing out the financial and other implications of passing the motion.^{xi} Since then, the Diocese has fully divested from fossil fuels (April 2021)^{xii}. set up an Environmental Task Group to oversee a programme of change and an Environment Action Team to implement it (2020), and endorsed a diocesan Net Zero Carbon Action Plan (March 2023) to give a pathway towards our 2035 Net Zero target.^{xiii} It has audited 85% of its vicarages, all its schools, and over a quarter of its churches – a task which has clarified the scale and scope of work needed to meet our Net Zero target. As a first step towards decarbonisation, it has committed £10 million expenditure (June 2022) on environmental works to improve the carbon footprint of vicarages and better care for its clergy.
6. More broadly, the Diocese is committed to all aspects of caring for creation. It became a Bronze Eco Diocese in July 2022, and is working towards Silver Eco Diocese status. It has set up a collaboration with the local Wildlife Trust as part of efforts to promote and nurture biodiversity and has revised the liturgy of confirmation and baptism services, to include a new question inviting the whole congregation to promise to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.
7. We recognise our relative wealth which has enabled us to move fast and quite far, although even we will only be able to resource from diocesan funds the minority of the work that will be required. We are acutely aware that most dioceses have fewer funds per capita and external support and resource (including in Government grants) for us all is crucial.

Changes in context since March 2020

8. Much has progressed since March 2020, and we affirm this progress.

- a) We are encouraged that the National Investment Bodies (NIBs) of the Church of England continue their work on investment in renewable energy and sustainable technologies.
 - b) We note the review of, and changes to, some policies and procedures by the Church of England, such as the recent changes to the faculty jurisdiction rules, which seek to more easily enable fabric changes that align with net zero.
 - c) We also note the commitments made to review and change policy and procedure by the Church of England via the endorsement of the National Routemap to Net Zero Carbon by General Synod in July 2022 (GS 2258). The Diocese of Oxford appreciated the consultation process around the Routemap to Net Zero Carbon and supports the principles it sets out.
 - d) We welcome the resources and support offered by the NCIs, particularly the National Church of England Environment Programme, as well as the recently announced Triennium funding commitment.
9. Nonetheless, the urgency of the climate emergency, and the speed at which we need to respond mean that there is much more to be done, to ensure ambition is matched with action, and strategies become reality. The Oxford Diocese motion serves to highlight the barriers to be removed and levers to be pulled in order that we may collectively and effectively respond well to the climate and ecological crises.

Support for Renewable Energy Investment

10. Reducing reliance on fossil fuels is a vital aspect of climate action. In 2018, Oxford Diocese brought an amendment to General Synod urging the NIBs to “engage urgently and robustly with companies rated poorly by TPI and to divest from any fossil fuel company which is not on an unequivocal path by 2020 to aligning its business investment plan with the Paris Agreement.” The motion adopted, GS 1196, “urge[d] the NIBs to ensure that by 2023 they have disinvested from fossil fuel companies that they have assessed, drawing on TPI data, as not prepared to align with the goal of the Paris Agreement....”^[i] We have been heartened to see progress across the Church of England on divestment from fossil fuel investments in recent years, including the divestment decisions taken by nine dioceses, CCLA’s commitments, and decisions from the NIBs to divest or restrict investment in companies assessed as not Paris compliant. And we welcome the Church Commissioners announcement it would be voting against all directors at the upcoming annual meetings of ExxonMobil, Occidental Petroleum, Shell and Total, “in response to their failure to meet climate change objectives”. As the deadline in GS 1196 approaches, we reiterate the view that the Church of England must not continue to be the beneficiary of practices and companies which are not aligned with the Paris Agreement.
11. Investment in renewable energy infrastructure and sustainable technologies is similarly vital to a just transition. We are encouraged by the NIBs commitment to reduce the carbon intensity of their portfolio,^{xiv} their joining of the Net Zero Asset Owners Alliance, and their commitment to impact investment^{xv}, including some key investments in renewable infrastructure^{xvi}. We note that these remain a relatively small aspect of the overall portfolio^{xvii} and urge courage, speed and persistence in this area.

Policies and Procedures

12. The National Routemap to Net Zero Carbon (RNZC) has identified some key areas of policy and procedure that need to be reviewed in light of the Church of England net

zero carbon target of 2030 (GS 2258). These include proposed changes to APCM rules (*RNZC 4.2.8*) that would encourage carbon emissions reporting, and principles and policies to support the adoption of low-carbon travel options as well as overall reduction in travel (principle 6 of the Routemap, page 15, and 5.3, pages 49-51) We encourage all parts of the Church of England, including the NCIs and individual Dioceses to continue to review other policies and procedures – for example those around recruitment, procurement, banking and land management - not only to see that they have regard for creation care, but that they recognise the urgency of the climate and ecological crisis and therefore give priority to this issue.

Training

13. Clergy and lay leaders exercise a significant leadership role both within their congregations and the wider community, and all church members have an important role to play in creation care both at church and in daily life. It is therefore vital that we train and equip church leaders and members for a time of environmental crisis.
14. Formal ministerial training is one key avenue for this. A meeting of 21 theological educators who gathered in 2020 to discuss the place of environmental teaching and learning within UK TEIs concluded: a. If the environment and creation care are to be taken seriously by TEIs, then they need to be made formation criteria by denominations for ministry training and should be a learning outcome for all students. b. Specialist modules on environmental theology and related topics are highly desirable, and a key recommendation is to aim for integration of an environmental perspective across the whole curriculum. We are encouraged that, as a result, the Theological Colleges Environment Network (TCEN) was established which is working on “greening the curriculum” to include more environmental issues in theology for clergy students and then in curacy training roles. We encourage the NCIs to engage with its proposals to ensure environmental theology is a core learning theme for all students and not simply an option or an addition. We invite the NCIs to support colleges to engage with A Rocha’s Eco Church framework as a means to ensuring wider creation care issues are embedded within the thinking, planning and decision-making of these institutions.
15. Nurturing everyday faith, discipleship and creating clear leadership pathways outside formal training settings is also vital. This involves embedding creation care within our overall approach to Christian formation and discipleship and signposting or facilitating opportunities for training and capacity-building for all, as part of ‘Setting God’s people free’. We encourage all parts of the Church of England, through TEIs, dioceses, the NCIs and elsewhere, to accelerate the development of networks, resources and training pathways, which would attract, discern, train and continuously develop ordained and lay leaders in the field of creation care. This would enable them in turn to support their congregations, school communities and others. Oxford Diocese has engaged with the Winchester Diocese in a programme of training lay and clergy champions which has enabled the development of local ‘green’ networks at deanery level, participation in localised events and the sharing of ideas.

Responding as Christians through prayer, advocacy and action

16. We believe in a God of hope who hears and answers prayer – and recognise a commitment to care for creation as an essential part of our Christian profession of faith. For this reason we commend continued prayer around the climate and environmental crises, and also propose a change to the liturgy of confirmation (and

we have also encouraged this for adult baptism). In every service of baptism, confirmation and the renewal of baptismal promises there is a commission where the whole congregation promise to live out our everyday faith. The commission is a well used and familiar part our liturgy. However, it contains nothing about our care for the environment and the 5th Mark of Mission. In the Dioceses of Norwich and Oxford, the Bishops agreed to authorise (under Canon B5) a new final question in this commissioning, which we began to use in confirmations from the end of May 2022: Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth? **With the help of God I will.** We had the support of the Chair of the Liturgical Commission in promoting this change and committed to do what we can to commend it more widely across the Church.

17. A particular focus for prayer, advocacy and action is the need to stand alongside people who have done least to cause the climate crisis but are deeply affected by its impacts. The voice of faith communities played a significant role in bringing the issue of Loss and Damage to the COP27 climate talks, at which a new Loss and Damage Fund was established. In the Lambeth Calls and Anglican Consultative Council 18 resolutions, members of all provinces are encouraged to continue this work: engaging with Communion resources for prayer and reflection, participating actively in the Communion Forest project, advocating with national governments to end new fossil-fuel exploration, and using the Anglican Communion UNFCCC COP26 Policy Paper and the COP27 update to advocate for climate justice” especially with respect to Loss and Damage.

Practical preparations

18. In February 2020 the General Synod agreed a Motion to call upon all parts of the Church of England to work to achieve year-on-year reductions in emissions and urgently examine what would be required to reach net zero emissions by 2030. Since then, it has endorsed the Routemap to Net Zero Carbon (GS 2258), which provides a plan of action and key milestones to deliver.
19. We affirm the resource given to the NCIs by the Church Commissioners and external funders to provide a wide-ranging webinar series on different aspects of the net zero challenge, heat pump training, a net zero carbon resource hub for Diocesan Environment Officers, and new guidance notes such as those for DACs on heating, and for Buildings and Property Departments on land. We also welcome the release of £190 million over the next three triennia to support the NCIs and Dioceses as they build capacity and deliver net zero programmes.
20. The scale of the challenge, however, remains enormous. Historic church buildings, many of which are listed and/or in conservation areas, offer unique complexities that mean the transition from fossil fuels must be bespoke for each structure. Solutions will depend on the size of the building, usage patterns, existing facilities, the presence of conservation items, and available space in and around the church. Already in Oxford Diocese, while some of our parishes are finding quite clear pathways to net zero, others are finding it more complex to assess ways forward. It would be both helpful and efficient for the NCIs to be adequately resourced to provide parishes and diocesan bodies with a range of further advice and guidance notes that help parishes and diocesan bodies navigate the specific factors involved in particular buildings and make positive decisions in alignment with net zero ambitions.
21. The Church of England’s largest institutional source of carbon emissions are our schools (48%). The complexity of tackling school emissions is different, but no less

challenging, than for churches. Oxford Diocese's schools, following their audits, all have heat decarbonisation plans, which indicate the vast majority will need heat pumps. Education Departments will need guidance to support schools with the installation and long-term maintenance and management of these technologies. Our clergy housing, managed by buildings and property departments, account for about 18% of all emissions. Oxford Diocese surveys indicate that clergy houses are typically more carbon intensive than average houses, with a number of older properties that are going to require major changes to become net zero. Buildings and Property departments will need resource, guidance, training and advice to implement programmes of work.

22. The costs associated with delivering net zero carbon are significant. But the scale of the work at diocesan, regional and national level also offers opportunities for bulk procurement, which may provide a means of reducing costs where possible and helping to turn ambitious goals into reality. We commend the NCIs for work done to enable Parish Buying to be a mechanism for supporting the delivery of net zero and for providing a list of approved suppliers. We urge Parish Buying to bring forward plans to leverage the scale of the Church of England's net zero ambitions to assist parishes with the purchase of quality goods and services associated with net zero, such as an improved green energy basket, energy audits, heat pumps, solar panels, and EV charging points. The current provision of services via the Parish Buying scheme is not able to deliver on the ambitions of churches and dioceses, and it is a missed opportunity that we want to see grasped.

Lobbying HM government

23. What churches can do to alter their buildings, whether in pursuit of energy or environmental concerns or for other reasons, is governed by key pieces of legislation, which include both secular planning permission and the faculty jurisdiction. This legislation balances harm with public benefits (including environmental and heritage benefits). The key statutory provisions for listed buildings and conservation areas (in secular law) are ss.16, 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is supplementary guidance. The case law states that there is a strong statutory duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings, their settings and their features of special architectural and historic interest, and to preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of conservation areas. Based on the law as it currently stands, any proposal for renewable technologies, including solar panels, must respect that duty and demonstrate carefully that harm has been minimised and there is strong public benefit in favour of the proposal. The imperative of responding to the climate emergency increases the potential benefit – and may therefore alter the balance of the equation in some cases.
24. The motion calls on HM government for a review of the planning process, which would involve gathering evidence about how the law is being applied on the ground, to better understand whether the climate emergency is being given due weight in planning decisions involving renewable technologies and other sustainability measures. This is particularly pertinent for listed buildings and conservation areas, but equally applies to other buildings – including, for Dioceses, schools, clergy housing, and offices. The Bishop of Oxford has written to HM government in response to the Diocesan Synod motion relating to this matter, and this motion

invites the national Church of England to engage and lobby HM government, asking them for this much needed review.

25. There is need, of course, for much wider and deeper informed lobbying of national and local government, institutions and workplaces to urge a more rapid transition to net zero and protect and build biodiversity. Every Diocese, every local church and every Christian has a part to play in supporting change in the coming decade.

A collective effort

26. The task is both large and increasingly urgent. We are encouraged by the progress that has been made but there is much more still to do, and we must work together, united in purpose and conviction, to bring about change. We are pleased to bring this motion to Synod and are ready and willing to contribute what we can to the work ahead.

+Steven Croft, Bishop of Oxford

+Olivia Graham, Bishop of Reading

Hannah Mann, Oxford Diocese Environmental Action Programme Manager

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- ⁱ [WMO Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update \(Target... | E-Library](#)
- ⁱⁱ [The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC](#)
- ⁱⁱⁱ [Global Warming of 1.5 °C — \(ipcc.ch\)](#)
- ^{iv} [ENGLISH-FULL.pdf \(hubspotusercontent20.net\)](#)
- ^v [lpr_2022_full_report.pdf \(wwf.org.uk\)](#)
- ^{vi} [48398rspp-biodiversity-intactness-index-summary-report-v4.pdf](#)
- ^{vii} [What is Climate Justice? And what can we do achieve it? | UNICEF Office of Global Insight & Policy](#)
- ^{viii} [counting-the-cost-2022.pdf \(christianaid.org.uk\)](#)
- ^{ix} [State of the environment: health, people and the environment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- ^x [Diocese of Oxford declares a climate emergency - Diocese of Oxford \(anglican.org\)](#)
- ^{xi} [20211103-doc-governance-synod-papers-march-2020-v01.pdf \(d3hgriq6yacptf.cloudfront.net\)](#)
- ^{xii} [Diocese of Oxford divests from fossil fuels - Diocese of Oxford \(anglican.org\)](#)
- ^{xiii} [Diocesan Synod: working together for the renewal of the Earth - Diocese of Oxford \(anglican.org\)](#)
- ^l [Voting results - Item 11 \(July 2018\).pdf \(churchofengland.org\)](#)
- ^{xiv} [Church Commissioners to reduce carbon intensity of its portfolio by 2025 | The Church of England](#)
- ^{xv} At the end of 2020, £1.1bn, or roughly 12% of our fund was invested in social and environmental solutions. That was an increase of about £300m on 2019.
- ^{xvi} [Church Commissioners for England invest €30 million in sustainable infrastructure | The Church of England](#)
- ^{xvii} [CHURCH COMMISSIONERS FOR ENGLAND STEWARDSHIP REPORT 2021 \(churchofengland.org\)](#) which is what the above text is taken from.