

Eco Church updates for Deanery Synod meeting at St Felix, Rendlesham 26 February 2025

The **first update** is that Revd Canon Alison Alder, Associate Priest, Blyth Valley Churches has been appointed as Diocesan Environment Officer for St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. Alison is working to establish an active network of Deanery Eco Champions across the Diocese and on Monday 24 February set up a zoom meeting for us to share our stories.

We were encouraged by two of the zoom attendees - Revd Diane Ekins Powell from Risby near Bury St Edmunds and Jackie Orbell from Mendham, near Harleston, who have recently been awarded Gold. In fact there are three churches in our Diocese with Gold, the third being Haughley near Stowmarket.

The Diocesan Environment Policy, is based on the Fifth Mark of Mission of the Anglican Communion -

“To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth”

and every church is being invited to take part in the Eco Church scheme as a way of living out that mark of mission.

The **second update** is the development of a **new** survey for the Eco Church award scheme, launched earlier this month. The new survey gives greater emphasis on Worship and Teaching and is designed to motivate and resource churches in establishing caring for God’s earth as an integral part of their everyday work and witness. It wants us to create a network of churches as local centres of creation care in the community – beacons of hope for a brighter environmental future.

The scheme is based on an online survey that enables churches to both record what they are already doing to care for God’s earth, and to reflect on what further steps they can take to that end and then act accordingly.

By completing the Eco Survey, we can gauge what our church is already doing to care for God’s creation and this will help us to decide on our next steps. The actions we take count towards an Eco Church Award at Bronze, Silver or Gold level.

The practicalities of the new Eco Church survey -

Although the application has to be done online, and that’s the only way you’ll be able to check whether you’ve done enough to achieve a Bronze, Silver or Gold award, the survey questions are also available as printer friendly documents to download so it’s easy to access the questions and create a checklist for ticking off the things you’re already doing . . . and those you could easily start to include in your regular activities.

The survey questions encourage us to consider everything we do in the context of our love for God's creation -

- Our worship and teaching
- The way we look after and use our buildings and land
- Engaging with global and community environmental issues and campaigns
- Encouraging our church members and others to do likewise

Helpful improvements in the new survey include separate question pathways to answer depending on whether your church is a frequently used town church or a rural church or a church with no building of your own at all. Likewise there are separate questions for those churches that own land and those that don't.

There are five sections of questions in the survey and to qualify for a Bronze, Silver or Gold award there must be enough points gained in *each* section.

Signing up to the Eco Church scheme is easy - simply register yourself and your church on the website and this will give you access to the free online survey and supporting resources to help you on your journey.

N.B. Those who are already registered but haven't yet applied for an award - if you've already started filling in the information on a survey - that's now classified as archived information - you can continue to access and refer to it but it can no longer become an application - you'll have to start a new survey using the new online forms.

Getting started - our Diocesan website has a helpful guide -

- 1) Look at the Eco Church website to find out what's involved
- 2) Talk to your church leader and churchwardens - it is essential for them to be on board
- 3) Get formal commitment from church leaders and PCC that creation care is part of the church's ministry and that they are happy to join the Eco Church scheme
- 4) Ask the PCC to nominate a lead person who can head up this ministry
The lead person should then find others to help them - more ideas will come if more people are involved
- 5) Register the team and the church on the Eco Church website
- 6) Carry out a baseline survey to find out what's already going on, where improvements are needed and what can be done.
- 7) Produce an action plan
- 8) Report back to the PCC on the survey and action plan
- 9) Carry out actions, update the survey and see what progress you have made
- 10) Repeat the last two steps.....

Eco Church information available on our deanery website

Go to www.woodbridgedeanery.org and click on EcoChurchInformation in the top menu. On the EcoChurch webpage you can read and download all the survey question documents from the new survey to get yourself started.

I've been in this role as Woodbridge Deanery Eco Champion since sometime in 2021 and some of you may remember a presentation I gave here in 2023 - the date was 2 February so over two years ago. In that time one church has completed a survey and achieved a Bronze Award - St John's, Woodbridge. This brings our Deanery total to six Eco Churches - three Silver and three Bronze

St Mary's Bawdsey, Boyton with Capel St Andrew, All Saints Hollesley have Silver,

All Saints Ramsholt, St Mary's Woodbridge and St John's Woodbridge have Bronze

But it's really not a chore to do - it's wonderfully uplifting and leads to many ways of engaging with our local communities as well as the global community - an example is how we use the Lent Appeal to help our link Diocese in Kagera.

So what's holding you back? How can I encourage you to start the process of becoming an Eco Church? How can I help?

My suggestion is perhaps we could plan some small workshops and there are two groups that come to mind - churches that are already registered on the Eco Church map but haven't yet made an application for an award -

these are Alderton, Shottisham, Sutton, Bredfield, Melton, Great Bealings.

and the second group is the Mothers Union who I understand want to get involved with Eco Church planning.

I'll end with a quote from one of the churchwardens at Gold Award, Haughley St Mary's:

"Our Eco Church Group, which includes some key members of the wider community as well as members of our immediate congregation, the church's own PCC, and members of the village, have worked very hard towards this shared and incredibly important goal. We cannot do enough to protect creation, to adapt our own lifestyles to be as eco-friendly as possible, and to celebrate and conserve biodiversity. We do not see this prestigious award as an end in itself, but instead as a springboard to further effort and development, as part of our church's identity and a critical part of Christian worship, and as part of the wider ecology of the parish."

Rita James Email: ritajamesstmarys@gmail.com