

## Environmental Policy and Net Zero Carbon Action Plan information sheet

### What is an Environmental Policy?

Although an Environmental Policy is not referenced explicitly in the Eco Church survey, it is somewhere that you can bring together church policies and procedures in one document. An environmental policy outlines your church's **commitment** to care for the environment and provides a **framework for setting objectives and targets** to improve your environmental performance.

A church's environmental, or sustainability, policy seeks to translate its mission to care for God's earth into action. Such a policy should relate to *all* relevant areas of the church's life and therefore will be tailored to the individual church building, activity and setting.

The first question of *every* category of the Eco Church survey asks your church to acknowledge the climate and nature crises and demonstrate a commitment to taking action. An Environmental Policy is an excellent way for your church to present your recognition and outline the commitments you are making.

You will need to think about your context and your priorities for action and engagement. Creating a strategy or simple plan will help your church:

- have the conversations necessary to kick-start action
- clarify your commitment to act for justice for the climate and nature
- identify ways to turn this commitment into action
- identify ways in which impact can be measured

### What is Net Zero Carbon (NZC)?

Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is one of the greenhouse gases (along with methane, nitrous oxide and fluorinated greenhouse gases, or F-gases) that contribute to the greenhouse effect. The greenhouse effect means that heat from the sun is trapped within our atmosphere, creating an insulating blanket around the Earth which prevents heat from being lost into space. While there is a natural amount of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, human activity has disproportionately increased the amount and disturbed the equilibrium. Carbon dioxide is the biggest greenhouse gas contributor and is released into the atmosphere primarily from burning fossil fuels for energy production. While carbon dioxide is produced naturally (e.g. from volcanoes and plant decay) the emissions from human activity such as energy production, transport and burning forests for food production are having catastrophic effects.

Net Zero is a state in which the greenhouse gases going *into* the atmosphere are balanced by their removal *out of* the atmosphere, thus preventing further global warming. **The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** (IPCC) concluded that net zero carbon needed to be achieved by 2050 to remain consistent with a global average 1.5°C temperature rise from pre-industrial temperatures.

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The **UK government** has targets of a 77% reduction on 1990 emissions by 2035 and net zero carbon by 2050. As most church denominations have now also set targets, with more ambitious dates for achieving net zero carbon emissions, we are encouraging churches to respond with their own NZC Action Plans.

Read more about [A Rocha UK helping the church reach net zero](#) and [Climate Stewards guide to net zero](#).

### What is a Net Zero Carbon Action Plan?

A NZC or Climate Action Plan is a framework document for measuring, tracking and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adopting climate adaptation measures. It is the plan that demonstrates the church's commitment to net zero emissions.

A church starting with Eco Church will need to first acknowledge the climate and nature crises and commit to taking action, and a simple environmental policy can help them to do that. See an example of a [simple Environmental Policy](#) that you can adapt for your church's context. This could be suitable at the bronze award level.

The next step will be to create a more detailed Environmental Policy and Action Plan. See an example of a more [detailed Environmental Policy and Net Zero Carbon Action Plan](#) that you can adapt for your church's context. Depending on various factors, such as the size and level of activity, your church may choose to create a combined Environmental Policy *and* Action Plan OR separate documents. This could be suitable for going beyond a bronze award level.

### How does the Environment Policy and NZC Action Plan relate to the Eco Church survey?

The NZC Action Plan largely relates to the **Buildings and Energy** category of the Eco Church survey. Regardless of the Building and Energy pathway you choose, your church will need to make a commitment (question 1 of the Buildings and Energy category) to respond to the climate and nature crises and start to take action. **The Environment Policy is how you can provide evidence of this commitment and it is a broader document spanning all the categories of the Eco Church survey. Taking ownership and adopting the policy demonstrates your commitment.**

If you are a large church or cathedral, you may choose to **separate your NZC Action Plan and Environmental Policy**. Indeed, you may even need to have additional policies that flesh out some of the aspects of your Environmental Policy. If you are a small church, or just starting with Eco Church, you are likely to choose to **combine your Environmental Policy and NZC Action Plan**.

### Example policies

We have developed two *examples* of Environmental Policies that can be adapted for your setting, and there are further examples and resources at the end of this document:

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#### Environmental policy examples

This is a **simple Environmental Policy** including a commitment to take action in response to the climate and nature crisis. This could be suitable at the bronze award level and/or for smaller churches.

This is a more detailed **Environmental policy and Net Zero Carbon Action Plan** suitable for a larger church, or one progressing beyond bronze.

#### What does an Environmental Policy and NZC Action Plan include?

The following provides some areas to think about as you create your Environmental Policy and NZC Action Plan. There are suggested questions to think about, headings for your policy and links to further resources and example policies.

As already highlighted, you may choose to create *one* Environmental Policy encompassing carbon reduction measures, or separate documents. The factors affecting your decision may be influenced by your overall approach to creation care, the size and scale of your church activity, the 'audience' and practical use of the documents.

#### Policy statements (or introduction)

A statement or introduction is an important aspect of framing your policy. This sets the scene by helping your church think and act clearly and effectively. You will need to spend time agreeing the statement(s) among your church leadership as it will guide your policy and action planning.

Here is an example:

*As a local church, we will take the practical steps necessary to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain the life of the Earth. We will reduce our carbon footprint year-on-year to achieve net zero.*

#### Denominational commitment

Many church denominations have set net zero carbon targets of their own. There are links to some of these at the end of this document. It may be helpful to understand what ambitions have been set and frame your own policy and objectives in this context.

#### Principles and values

This is a statement giving some more detail about the guiding principles and values that influence your policy. This may be drawn from Bible references, your church mission or vision and we encourage you to refer to your denominational commitments too.

Here is an example:

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*We affirm our commitment to care for creation through these elements of our faith:*

- *Through Christ, God has created a breathtaking and majestic cosmos to bring him praise and we are but one part of his created order.*
- *Jesus has redeemed the whole earth through his death and*
- *We recognise that we have a special responsibility to care for the Earth so that human life and all God's creatures may be sustained in harmony.*

### Commitments

Your policy commitments refer to your responsibilities and will influence your action plan – and may result in links to additional or supplementary policies (see further notes below). It might be helpful to group these thematically into the areas your policy will cover, such as the Eco Church categories.

Here is an example of a commitment:

*We will work toward net zero carbon.*

### Application (Objectives)

For a policy to be practical and useful, clear objectives need to be stated. These are the things you intend to achieve. They are the measurements for you to assess if you are being effective in implementing your policy.

Here is an example of an objective:

*We will reduce our carbon footprint by 5% each year, from 20XX to 20XX, with the goal of achieving a 20% reduction by 20XX.*

### What is a carbon footprint?

The calculation of the carbon emissions you produce, as a church or individual, is known as your carbon 'footprint'. It is necessary to understand your carbon footprint in order to set targets toward net zero.

Some denominations are required to submit annual carbon emission measurements (e.g. via the CofE Energy Footprint Tool). Where this is not a requirement we recommend using the [Climate Stewards](#) 360° carbon tool each year. This will form an important baseline measure the first time you complete it, with annual results that will enable you to make comparisons and see progress on your carbon reduction.

Please note that we ask to see your 360° carbon footprint report when you apply for a gold Eco Church award. We expect you to be including all aspects of the tool and setting related targets.

As a church, you will need to choose the 'scope' of your carbon measurement. Remember, even if you don't own a building you will still have a carbon footprint.

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#### What does 'scope' mean?

**Scope 1:** Refers to all **direct emissions** from owned or directly controlled sources (i.e. fuel being burned on the premises, such as gas, as well as vehicles *owned* by the church).

**Scope 2:** Refers to all **indirect emissions** from the generation of **purchased** energy (i.e. purchased electricity).

**Scope 3:** Refers to **all other indirect emissions** that occur in producing and transporting goods and services, including the full supply chain.

**Climate Stewards 360° carbon footprint** is a holistic tool that encompasses scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions – in other words measuring carbon in food, other purchases and waste as well as building and travel. Note, you can still use the 360° carbon footprint tool even if you are following Pathway 3 (a church without a building) as you can select from the 6 activity areas: energy, travel, food, waste, water and other expenditure.

**The Energy Footprint Tool (EFT)**, required by the CofE churches, measures carbon emissions in scope 1 and 2 and transport emissions in business travel in non-owned transport from scope 3.

When you fill in the EFT, you get a gross and a net figure. **Please use the net figure**, as this takes into account whether you are using a green tariff.

#### What is a green tariff?

Assessing what is 'green energy' can be complex, not only taking into consideration what is genuinely low carbon, but also bringing in wider social and ethical considerations. Further guidance about what 'green' tariff means is being developed. In the meantime, please refer to our [Buying greener energy](#) guidelines, and this [Which article about Differences between green energy suppliers](#).

#### What does 'offsetting' mean?

Carbon offsetting is a way to **compensate for carbon emissions** by funding projects that reduce or remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Carbon offsetting **does *not* reduce emissions** and should be a last resort, after other measures to reduce or avoid emissions have been explored.

Until you have reached net zero you will be contributing to global carbon emissions. Once you have calculated your footprint, and reduced what you can, you may wish to mitigate the environmental impact of these emissions by purchasing offsets.

Read more about your [carbon footprint and offsetting](#).

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### How do we present our action plan?

Once you have a clear Environmental Policy you will develop an Action Plan (Question 3 of Pathways 1 and 2) – the practical steps required to enable you to reach the commitments in your Environmental Policy. You may choose to create a *separate* Net Zero Action Plan or incorporate your carbon-cutting steps within an overall Environmental Action Plan.

You might set goals for the year ahead or create a plan spanning several years. The plan may be presented at the end of your Environmental Policy or in a separate document and might include a timeline or table. Your plan will depend on a number of factors: the priorities you have set; your resources (financial or personnel); other church projects; and denominational targets.

Remember, your Environmental and NZC Action Plan will be specific to your church. Think about how best to present your plan so it can be easily reviewed and monitored by the team.

Here is an example of a summary table (so you can see your data at a glance):

	Year 1 (baseline)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
KwH of electricity used				
KwH of gas used				
Annual staff mileage/fuel paid for or used				
Annual carbon footprint (result of 360° carbon)	Energy: Other: Total:	Energy: Other: Total:	Energy: Other: Total:	Energy: Other: Total:
Annual recycling rate (as a percentage from amount of un-recycled + recycled waste produced)				
Annual amount of non-recycled waste				
Water usage				

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Here is an example of a table structure for an Action Plan

Commitment	Objective	Tasks	Person(s) responsible	Date to achieve
Seeking Net Zero	Switch to a 'green' electricity energy supplier	<p>Check when our contract can be renewed</p> <p>Research the electricity supplier options</p>		

### Do we need additional policies?

There are a number of areas identified in the Eco Church survey that you may want to include in your Environmental Policy or create separate documentation or policies for. Again, this will depend on your individual church circumstances.

The following policy areas are specifically mentioned in the Eco Church survey and you may wish to explore each one.

### Procurement Policy/Ethical Purchasing Policy

All the pathways in the Buildings and Energy category ask about a policy in the area of purchasing and procurement. (Pathways 1 and 2 question 28, Pathway 3 question 5). The question states: *Our church has a procurement policy and/or practice that prioritises products and services with low environmental impact. This could include low-energy products and supply chains, and cradle-to-cradle or circular production methods that consider all the impacts of products and services.*

Try to consider all areas, from 'big spend' goods to everyday items and consumables such as paper and printer ink, toilet paper and cleaning products, and worship materials such as candles, bread/wine and flowers.

Read more on our [Quick Wins and Consumables](#) resource, Just Money's [Ethical Buying for Churches](#) and [Sustainable Church Flowers](#).

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The following additional policies are identified in **Building and Energy Pathways 1 and 2**; there are links to further resources about these areas at the end of this document.

- **Building/Church Operations Plan** (Question 26)
- **Climate Resilience and 'Safe Spaces' Policy and Action Plan** (Question 27)
- **Waste and Recycling Policy or practice** (Question 29)
- **Lettings Policy** (Question 30)

Please note, that we ask to see your **Managing our land for nature/Land Management Plan** as part of a gold award application.

### Resources and information

You can access all **Eco Church resources** via our website, as well as resources relating specifically to the **Buildings and Energy category**.

#### Denominational net zero ambitions

[The environment | The Salvation Army](#)

The United Reformed Church has committed to reducing carbon emissions across the whole of church life, see their **Greener Church** resources.

The Church of England have produced a comprehensive **Routemap to Net Zero Carbon 2030** and an **introduction to Next Zero for churches**

[Church in Wales Toward Net Zero](#)

The Methodist Church provide guidance and resources to help churches produce **a Net Zero Carbon Pathway**

#### Net zero and carbon reduction tools and resources

The Church of England document '**A practical path to net zero carbon for our churches**' sets out a helpful framework that is applicable to churches of all denominations. This category broadly mirrors that framework.

[Guidance and resources to reduce the impact of our buildings, money and travel](#) from the Methodist Church.

[Church in Wales](#) resources

Sheffield Diocese have some excellent guidance and templates to **guide maintenance** of your building

**Climate Stewards** provide free tools to measure, reduce and offset carbon for individuals, churches and other organisations.



### Environmental Policy

#### Examples of Environmental Policies

[Parish Environmental Policy model template for Churches in the Diocese of Newcastle](#)

[St Mark's Methodist Church Environmental Policy](#)

[St Andrew's Ealing URC Environmental Policy](#)

#### Other subjects mentioned in the Buildings and Energy survey category

[Climate resilient churches guidance](#) and [further resources](#) from Church of England

[Warm Welcome](#) is a campaign supporting spaces that offer a 'warm welcome and a cuppa'.

[Warm spaces in England: an evidence review and toolkit for local organisations](#) is a guide for local organisations offering warm/cool spaces for the local community.

Just Money's [Ethical Purchasing Guide for Churches](#)

#### Further reading

Berners-Lee, Mike, *There Is No Planet B: A Handbook for the Make or Break Years* (2021). Cambridge University Press.

Berners-Lee, Mike, *How Bad are Bananas?: The Carbon Footprint of Everything* (2010). Profile Book Ltd.

Hayhoe, Katharine, *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World* (2022). Atria/One Signal Publishers.

Hodson, Martin and Hodson, Margot, *A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues* (2021). The Bible Reading Fellowship.