

## Overview

### Biblical references

#### **Psalm 84:3 (NIV)**

Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young – a place near your altar, Lord Almighty, my King and my God.

#### **Psalm 24:1–2 (NIV)**

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

### Introduction

Through the Land and Nature category of the Eco Church survey, it is recognised that churches have a significant contribution to make to the UK government's target of 30% of the land protected for nature by 2030. You can read more about these commitments via these links: [Delivering 30by30 on land in England](#) and [Delivering 30by30 on land in Wales](#).

In the face of accelerating climate change and species loss, we need more than ever to take action to protect and care for nature today. We all have a part to play in how the land around our churches, or in our communities and nationally, can make a difference and help protect and restore nature all around us. The purpose of this category is to guide you through practical actions to care for God's Earth.

Be it land owned by the church, even if only around the church building itself, or land in the local community, churches need to manage land for nature. Caring for land reinforces the whole mission of the church, not only by protecting nature but also serving the community: increasing access to nature for human wellbeing; action for land-based climate resilience; and pointing people toward our Creator God.

### Terminology

For consistency, the survey uses two main ways to refer to concern and care for the Earth. Reference to 'creation' and 'creation care' points to our interdependence on, and responsibility for, our God-given common home. Reference to the climate and nature crises signifies our recognition that urgent action is required. In addition, the term 'environmental issues' is used to refer to the wide spectrum of problems we face locally and globally.

## Commitment and link to your Environmental Policy

At the outset of every category the Eco Church survey asks your church to acknowledge the climate and nature crisis and demonstrate a commitment. A vision or mission statement can be a great place to acknowledge our role as Christians to care for and protect the Earth. An Environmental Policy is an excellent way for your church to present your recognition and outline the commitments you are making.

Question 2 of the Land and Nature category Pathway 1 states: *'Our church recognises the significant contribution churches can make to the UK's target of 30% of the land protected for nature by 2030. We have established a plan to manage our land for nature to help us do this in the most impactful way.'*

Question 2 of the Land and Nature category Pathway 2 states: *'Our church recognises the significant contribution churches can make to the UK's target of 30% of the land protected for nature by 2030. We manage our own land and/or work in partnerships with other organisations or community groups to manage their land for nature.'*

See **our corresponding information sheet** on Creating an Environmental Policy and Net Zero Action plan, and **editable example policies** that you can adapt for your church. You can find these documents in the [Buildings and Energy category](#).

### There are two pathways through this survey:

**Pathway 1** – for churches that own or manage land such as a garden, churchyard or burial ground.

**Pathway 2** – for churches with very *limited* land such as a paved car park, a perimeter strip of land, or other hard-standing areas, and for churches that do not own or manage *any* land. This pathway asks you to consider your own small amount of land, if you have any, *and* also how you can influence land managed by others.

### How do I choose a pathway?

Choose the pathway that best suits your setting. For most churches this will be straightforward. In a few cases, it might be worth exploring both pathways before settling on which one is the best to complete for your situation.

### **Further guidance for churches with closed churchyards – choose which pathway best fits your context.**

If your churchyard is closed and responsibility for the maintenance has transferred over to the district council or local parish, we still encourage Eco Churches to have influence where they can.

We recognise there are varying levels of influence churches with closed churchyards may have over how their churchyard is managed. Some churches may have built a relationship with their local council over time and found a good system to influence changes in their churchyards. If this has not been explored yet, we encourage you to pursue engaging in this way. This will allow you to have influence where you can in helping your churchyard be managed for the good of nature. However, if you attempt questions on pathway 1 and realise that you do not have enough influence to affect the answers, then pathway 2 may be a better choice for your church.

See our resource on [managing closed churchyards](#) and [corresponding case studies](#).

## Themes in Land and Nature

Regardless of the pathway you choose, the survey includes the following themes:

### Theme 1: Biodiversity

Biodiversity refers to the variety of all living things on Earth and how they fit together in the web of life.

God created an abundant Earth, teeming with life, and creation itself responds to its Creator. Biodiversity is also essential to our survival – providing food crops, soil microbes for good soil health and fertility, cleaning air and water, and countless other benefits including a positive connection between nature and mental wellbeing. Read [A Rocha UK's 'Root and Branch' article exploring the connection between nature and mental wellbeing](#).

Whatever the area of outside land a church has (even a car park or perimeter strip of land), it can be managed to improve biodiversity, as a space for nature and people. Pots, hanging baskets and window boxes not only look cheerful and welcoming, but can also contain flowers offering pollen, seed-bearing plants and small fruit-bearing plants (e.g. strawberries or tomatoes). Any outside space like this, however small, can become a habitat for wildlife. Maybe you can find a corner for a small composting area in which to put the dead flowers from inside the church, tea bags, coffee grounds and organic waste from the kitchen, if your church has one. Its contents can be used to refresh your pots, window boxes and hanging baskets each year.

If you do not have any land then you can explore how your building(s) can also be a habitat for nature – walls, fences and trees can offer vertical habitats and nesting places. For example, you could install bat and bird boxes, create solitary bee nest boxes, and grow climbing plants up walls or fences.

### Theme 2: Monitoring and citizen science

The Wildlife Trust explains that it's very hard to protect wildlife if you don't know much about it. Citizen science projects are a great way to learn more about our wonderful wildlife, at the same time as helping to protect it. Learn more about [why citizen science is important from The Wildlife Trust](#).

Caring for God's Acre states that recording species and sharing those records is the first step towards being able to protect them. This was in reference to 'Churches Count on Nature' (CCoN), an annual scheme where people visit churchyards and record the plant and animal species they encounter.

### Theme 3: People

We want to see as many people as possible accessing and enjoying nature. We suggest churches ask themselves: How can we encourage the space around our church to be a place where people can access and enjoy, nurture and protect God's beautiful Earth?

If you don't own land, then look for opportunities to engage the local community or work in partnerships with other organisations, community groups or local councils to help manage their land for nature. Groups are often looking for additional help – or maybe you can start something in your local area.

We also encourage you to provide opportunities for members of your congregation to get outside and spend time enjoying events and activities in nature, for example through church services or children's/youth groups outside, outdoor worship, nature/farming festivals, local walks or conservation volunteering.

## Additional comments

At the end of each survey category is an opportunity for you to add additional comments. Please make use of this space to expand on any of your answers, including where you have ticked 'other', and anything else related to this survey category.

## Target 25

A Rocha UK's [Target 25](#) project highlights vulnerable species across the UK and aims to help a range of declining species, taxonomic groups and threatened habitats such as hedgehogs, butterflies and hedgerows. We recommend that churches adopt some Target 25 species or habitats to build their knowledge about nature and focus their local action. Churches can help places and species that are struggling with the effects of climate change, habitat loss and pollution. Learn more from the UK's [2023 State of Nature report](#) and see how the land around our churches can make a difference and help protect and restore nature.

## Creating a 'plan for nature' or Land Management Plan

We encourage all churches to create a plan for nature or LMP, but it is an essential requirement for a gold Eco Church award. We are looking for good practice in the management of any land that you have influence over, no matter how small or large, green or not! A plan will help you prioritise and organise biodiversity management in your churchyard or on your church land, and manage your outside space to ensure wildlife flourishes. A plan helps to identify which areas are to be managed in a particular way for the best results and clarify who does the work, when and how frequently it is to be done, and how it can be monitored. The plan can also help with budgeting for works that may require approval, e.g. from a PCC. Follow the Eco Church guidelines for creating a land management plan which are available in the [Land and Nature](#) category on the Eco Church website, as well as on our [Eco Church Awards page](#).

## Resources and information

You can access all [Eco Church resources](#) via our website, as well as resources relating specifically to the [Land and Nature](#) category.

[Climate resilient Churches guidance and further resources](#) from the Church of England.

[Building a resilient garden for a changing climate](#) from Royal Horticultural Society.

## Case studies and resources from churches

- [A Rocha UK's webinar: What can church land do for nature?](#)
- [Engaging with Target 25: Bees at St Mildred's Church, Whippingham, Isle of Wight](#)
- [Why is biodiversity important? The importance of biodiversity](#)

## Pathway 1: Case studies and examples

- Creating a Land Management Plan/plan for nature for your church  
Here are some helpful and best-practice examples of Land Management Plans from [Mortimer Methodist Church](#) and [St Mary's Church, Eaton Socon](#), [St Mary's Church, Haughley](#) and [All Saints Church, Kettering](#).
- Creating a community orchard on church land: [St Paul's Church, Sketty, Swansea](#)
- Encouraging wildlife: [St Cuthbert's Church, Lorton](#)
- Citizen science examples: [Churches Count on Nature](#)
- Other general guidelines from the Church of England: [Churchyard guidance](#) and [Caring for God's Acre: Managing Churchyards and Burial Grounds](#)

## Pathway 2: Case studies and examples

- Transforming a paved space into a haven for wildlife: [St John's Methodist Church, Settle](#)
- Creating a community garden – a partnership between local church and school: [Llangors Church](#)
- Tree planting with a local school: [St Lawrence Church, Hungerford](#)
- Watford Salvation Army: [Community Allotment](#)
- Other general guidelines from the Methodist Church: [Net Zero Outdoors](#)