

Land Management

Further Information for silver Eco Diocese award criteria

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	Criteria	Notes
Silver Eco Diocese award	An environmental policy which includes a land management strategy with an explicit reference to enhancing and promoting biodiversity and managing the land for carbon reduction across the diocese	<p>A holistic environmental policy needs to extend across the diocese as a whole and critically needs to include land and biodiversity as well as buildings. A survey to audit and map the land is an important benchmark to be completed at this stage.</p> <p>Where a diocese has farming tenants, a diocesan policy on managing land assets should include clear social and environmental aspects, reflecting the fourth and fifth Anglican Marks of Mission.</p>

What are we asking for at the Silver Eco Diocese award level?

An **environmental policy** which includes a **land management plan/strategy** with an explicit reference to **enhancing and promoting biodiversity** and **managing the land for carbon reduction** across the diocese.

In other words, we require the diocese to present its Environmental Policy *and* a strategy for the management of diocesan land (this does *not* include land owned by individual parishes or churches). Please note, this guidance relates specifically to land, for guidance about Environmental Policy see [Further Information about Environmental Policy](#).

Why are we asking for a strategy for diocese land?

In the face of accelerating climate change and loss of biodiversity, 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 we steward can make a difference and help protect and restore nature all around us, understanding that *‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it’* (Psalm 24:1). We recognise the church has a significant contribution to make to the UK Government’s target of 30% of land protected for nature by 2030 ([Delivering 30 by 30 on land in England](#)).

The effects of climate change are already impacting the UK and are on track to have even greater consequences. With temperatures at the current level, we are already seeing an increased frequency of extreme weather events, such as flooding and heat waves. Furthermore, [poor soil health](#) not only impacts

agricultural productivity and local ecology, but it also has an impact on climate resilience. The [poor state of UK rivers](#) is having a detrimental effect on species and humans.

What evidence is required for a silver Eco Diocese?

For a diocese to gain a silver Eco Diocese award it will need to submit a **Land Management Strategy that includes an action plan with time scales**. This document is designed to provide more information about what factors will need to be considered, what might be involved and offer some further links to resources. The [Land Strategy Template](#) (please save a copy to your own Google drive or download as a Word document to be able to edit) provides a suggested simple structure that each diocese will need to develop for its context. For a silver Eco Diocese award, the strategy needs to focus on the use of land specifically around biodiversity and climate resilience. A diocese will probably have a broader overarching strategy for glebe land including housing, income generation, etc.

How much do we need to have done to 'get' to silver?

There is wide variation in the glebe portfolio held by the different dioceses. There will be variations in the type of land (e.g. agricultural land, carparks, village greens, urban, rural etc.), size and number of land parcels as well as overall acreage, ranging from a few acres to several thousand acres in total.

In addition, dioceses vary in the resources at their disposal. The capacity and expertise of a team will impact how readily a land strategy can be developed internally, or whether external consultants will be needed. Furthermore, financial resources and the overall condition of a diocese's finances will influence the strategy.

Please note, that it is *not* expected that a diocese will be demonstrating the difference they have made on their land for a silver Eco Diocese award, but rather they will be explaining their *intention* through their plan of action.

What is the purpose of the land criteria in the Eco Diocese award?

- To identify the land owned by the diocese.
- To develop a plan to manage the land to enhance and promote biodiversity.
- To develop a plan to manage the land for climate resilience (including improved carbon sequestration).

What is meant by 'improved for nature'?

These are *examples* of improvements that may be demonstrated on specific portions of land, as identified in the Land Strategy:

- Over time be able to demonstrate an improvement in the **quality and extent of priority habitats**.
- Over time be able to demonstrate an **increase in the range of species and species groups** using the land for breeding, feeding or wintering.
- Ensure the immediate **protection measures are in place** for any species covered by EU or UK legislation.

Please note, [Target 25](#) is A Rocha UK's project to help a range of declining species, taxonomic groups, and threatened habitats. We encourage you to identify Target 25, or other at-risk species, groups or habitats, in your plan.

What is climate resilience?

Resilience is the capacity of a community, business, or natural environment to prevent, withstand, respond to, and recover from a disruption. To respond to the risks posed by climate change, we need to build resilience. Climate change adaptation is the change in practices, methods and processes to mitigate the effects of climate change.

These are the **high priority risk** consequences of climate change in the UK, along with *examples* of aims and action to address them for inclusion in a diocesan land management strategy:

Inland flooding	More frequent droughts	Risks to soil health	Risks to species and habitats	Risks to natural carbon stores
Develop systems to cope with extreme rainfall as the UK gets wetter	Strengthen the UK's resilience to droughts as summers get drier and extreme droughts become more likely	Reduce the risks to soil health from increased flooding and drought	Reduce the risks to the viability and diversity of terrestrial and freshwater habitats and species from multiple hazards	Reduce the risks of increased emissions from natural carbon stores from multiple hazards
<p>Creating canopies to reduce the impact of heavy rain.</p> <p>Planting trees and restoring peatlands as a natural barrier to flooding.</p>	<p>Creation of shade areas to help nature and people during times of heat.</p> <p>Increasing water supply and reducing domestic and commercial demand.</p> <p>Reforming agriculture so that it is able to cope with changing climatic conditions.</p>	<p>Increasing the use of soil-friendly farming practices, including no-till and precision farming.</p> <p>Improving water management on agricultural land to keep soil moisture in balance e.g. mulched beds to avoid base soil nutrient loss and retain moisture and nutrients.</p>	<p>Nature friendly farming</p>	<p>Zero till and maintaining maximum soil coverage in winter through vegetation.</p>

Reference: [Climate and change and adaptation.](#)

What is meant by 'managing the land for carbon reduction'?

Carbon sinks are places that absorb more carbon from the atmosphere than they release. Examples of carbon sinks can include oceans, forests, grasslands, and soil. **Carbon sequestration** is the process of capturing and storing carbon dioxide.

Trees aren't the only way to store carbon; in fact, soil is a critical carbon store as well. Improving the health of soils, particularly on agricultural land, enables them to be more productive, host more lifeforms and [sequester more carbon](#), making soil health a critical factor in our response to climate change and biodiversity loss.

UK [soils store over 10 billion tonnes of carbon](#) in the form of organic matter, which is roughly equal to 80 years of annual UK greenhouse gas emissions. Intensive agriculture has caused arable soils to lose 40 to

60% of their organic carbon, and the impacts of climate change pose further risks. Restoring natural systems can start to reverse this damage whilst also supporting and enhancing biodiversity, alongside delivering co-benefits for climate change adaptation, soil health, water management and society. Crucially, land needs to be managed to protect and enhance the carbon reserves *already* in our soils and vegetation. Soil carbon is much harder to "create" and therefore maintaining what is above ground as protection for what is underground is vital. Methods to achieve this include zero till and maintaining maximum soil coverage in winter through vegetation.

Any carbon management strategy on land must take into consideration the qualities of the land, and the context and not be at the detriment of nature. Most sequestration in conservation projects takes place in the vegetation cover - where the greater the all-year-round cover of perennial species the more the carbon will be held by the plants. The area of carbon measurement tools is fast moving and we do not currently suggest a specific carbon measurement or off-setting tool. There will be further work done in the area by the CofE Net Zero Carbon team in due course.

What sort of targets can we set?

When setting targets or objectives, it is helpful to identify percentage improvements, you may refer to [Delivering 30by30 on land in England](#) for example. Here are **examples** of the types of targets/objectives we expect to see for diocesan land:

- o To improve the quality and extent of [priority habitats](#) on current land holding.
- o To increase the range of species and species groups using the land for breeding, feeding, or overwintering.
- o To ensure immediate protection measures are in place for any species covered by EU or UK legislation where they have been identified on *any* diocesan land.
- o To improve soil health.
- o To implement natural flood management techniques.
- o To adopt nature friendly farming practices.
- o To implement soil-friendly farming practices, including no-till and precision farming.
- o To manage the land for carbon sequestration (e.g. through the increase in *above* ground soil carbon sequestration or maximise carbon retained *below* ground by preventing loss/damage to soil).

What about Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)?

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development (e.g. housing and building projects), whereby there is a mandatory requirement to increase biodiversity by a minimum of 10% compared to the baseline (what existed before the development). Biodiversity is measured in **standardised biodiversity units**. A habitat will contain a number of biodiversity units, depending on things like its size, quality, location and land type. There is potential for landowners to sell those units to developers as a source of additional revenue.

Read more about UK Government guidance on BNG [here](#).

How do we go about creating a Land Management Strategy?

- **Think about the issues** (see question prompts below).
- **Commit** to include your land within your diocesan climate and biodiversity goals.
- **Understand what land you've got** plus the tenancies and agreements associated with it.
- **Engage your managing agents** about your plan, read more about working with tenants [here](#).
- **Take a collaborative approach** with tenants when negotiating or renegotiating tenancy or licence terms.
- **Influence all tenancies** through highlighting good practice and no-agenda meetings.

- **Seek expertise and ensure you have the right skills.**

Reference: [Managing Glebe Land for Biodiversity and Climate](#)

What questions do we need to think about?

It is really helpful, as a team managing your diocesan holdings, to think through the demands upon your land. Before you can develop a strategy it might be useful to sit around a table and have open discussions about your overall approach to land and gain an understanding of the current issues. These questions may be helpful in your discussions:

- What is our vision/missional view?
- What is the purpose of our land? (see below for more suggestions of the demands on your land)
- What are the priorities for our land, in our context?
- How can we improve biodiversity?
- How can we increase climate resilience including good soil management for carbon retention?
- Who are our land neighbours?
- Who can we collaborate with?
- Who are the other stakeholders (not at this table)? e.g. tenants, local community
- What skills/expertise do we need to fulfil a land strategy?

What about other demands on our land?

This statement, from the Church of England summarises the broader demands a diocese may be grappling with when seeking to manage its land:

The management of Church land is both of great importance and also highly complex, due to the need to balance financial returns, affordable housing, food production, community use, biodiversity, and carbon sequestration. These objectives are not all mutually exclusive and long term asset value can be protected where management leads to multiple benefits, such as improving soils and carbon sequestration.

Reference: [Managing Glebe Land for Biodiversity and Climate](#)

However, we encourage that consideration is given to the nature and climate crises regardless of whatever decisions are taken, for example: growing food (organic, sustainable farming), energy production (PV, wind turbine), housing (affordable, sustainable), social opportunities (awareness raising, tourism, community engagement, fostering partnerships, collaboration).

What do we include in our land management strategy?

- Overall approach to land and a strategic vision
- Mapping* and assessment of results
- Data collection proposals
- Objectives
- An action plan
- Appendices

*Conducting the mapping exercise is largely a desktop exercise, and will require tools such as [The Land App](#) to map the land, overlaying the priority habitat information using [MAGIC](#) and tabulating the results. For more guidance about this process see [Managing Glebe Land for Biodiversity and Climate](#).

You may choose to use [this template](#) to create your Land Management Strategy document (please save a copy to your own Google drive or download as a Word document to be able to edit).

What and why do we need to measure?

Although you may not have *carried out* specific measurements (e.g. species types and numbers, carbon storage and sequestration rates) for a silver Eco Diocese award, we expect you to have identified in your plan *what* you will measure. Measurements are needed in order to establish baselines from which progress can be measured. This in turn will help inform diocesan policy.

The purpose of surveying biodiversity is not to fulfil statutory requirements but rather to understand the current condition of the land and what exists, which in turn will inform future management decisions. Without knowing the ecological value of individual sites, it makes it harder to determine whether it could be improved significantly for nature or indeed whether it already has species/habitats that need protecting and enhancing.

Further resources and information

[Biodiversity Net Gain Briefing](#) from Wildlife Trusts

[Biodiversity Net Gain guidance](#) from UK Government

[Carbon Storage and Sequestration by Habitat 2021](#) from Natural England

[Climate Change adaptation: the government's role and progress briefing](#)

[Climate-friendly farming, building business resilience](#) from NFU

[Delivering 30by30 on land in England](#) DEFRA

[Farm Carbon Calculator](#) from Farm Carbon Toolkit

[Growing Trees resources](#) from Operation Noah

[Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change](#) from Committee on Climate Change

[Managing Glebe Land for Biodiversity and Climate](#) from Church of England

[Monitoring soil carbon a practical field farm and lab guide](#) from The Soil Carbon Project

[Nature Friendly Farming blog](#) from RSPB

[Priority Habitats Inventory](#) by UK Government

[People's Plan for Nature](#) and [People's Plan for Nature summary document](#)

[Protecting Peatland](#) from Operation Noah

[Regenerative Food and Farming](#)

[Sustain](#)

[Sustainable Food Trust](#)

[UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology](#)

[Water Framework Directive](#) from EU

[Woodland Carbon Code](#)

There are a range of [A Rocha UK resources and leaflets](#) about land, including [Managing Closed Churchyards](#) and [Creating a Land Management Plan](#). They are aimed at individual churches and their land (churchyards), rather than at diocese level.