

A Rocha UK 10 Years of Eco Church



An Eido Research Report for A Rocha UK

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Caring for God's Earth

Contents

Foreword from Andy Atkins, CEO, A Rocha UK	1
At a glance	3
Introduction	5
Timeline	7
Impact	11
What helps churches succeed?	25
What hinders churches?	31
Conclusion	39
Financial transparency	39
Partners	40
Looking forward	41
Ways to get involved	41

Photos (Left to right): Bradford Cathedral (Philip Lickley); Llanishen Methodist Church; Holy Redeemer, Lamorbey; Stratford Upon Avon Methodist Church (Stratford Herald); Bradford Cathedral (x2), Melbourne Parish Church, Derbyshire (Andrew Fox); St James Church, Alveston (Sarah Coton)



Foreword from Andy Atkins, CEO, A Rocha UK

Eco Church is 10 years old. I am delighted to introduce this report which A Rocha UK has commissioned from Eido Research. Its purpose is to celebrate what our Eco Church programme has achieved so far, and to identify improvements we can make to increase its impact in the years ahead.

A Rocha UK's mission is to equip Christians and churches to care for the environment. Eco Church is a crucial part of this.

The growth of Eco Church has been phenomenal, reaching more than 9,000 registered congregations in England and Wales as of May 2026, of which more than 4,500 have achieved a Bronze award or higher. We thank God for that growth, and celebrate it as a manifestation of an ongoing rediscovery of the Christian obligation, and joy, to care for creation.

There are so many people to thank for making Eco Church possible: the evolving group of staff and volunteers who conceived and launched the scheme and colleagues who have stewarded and developed it since; all the A Rocha UK supporters, churches, trusts and denominations who have funded it; and the thousands of unsung heroes who advocate for creation in their local churches. Thank you all. This report presents fascinating data showing the impact we have had together. Enjoy it!

Nevertheless, the scientific data on trends – whether biodiversity loss, pollution, or climate change – tell us how urgent it is that all sectors of society use what power they have to protect and restore the environment. And while 23 per cent of churches in England and Wales are now registered for the Eco Church programme – more than double our original target of 10 per cent by 2026 – three-quarters are not. Of course, some churches will be reducing their environmental impact without any help from Eco Church, but our experience tells us that most benefit from a framework to help them. Neither do all churches who start their Eco Church journey attain an award. So this report also identifies common impediments to churches stepping up their environmental action, and ways in which we can improve.

We publish this research to celebrate and, in a spirit of transparency, to share where it suggests we could do better. We are committed to making our Eco Church programme even more useful to the service of God and care of His creation. Our aim is now to see 40 per cent of churches in England and Wales committing to ongoing action on the environment through Eco Church by 2030. Thank you for your part in Eco Church's story so far. We welcome all feedback on this 10th anniversary report.

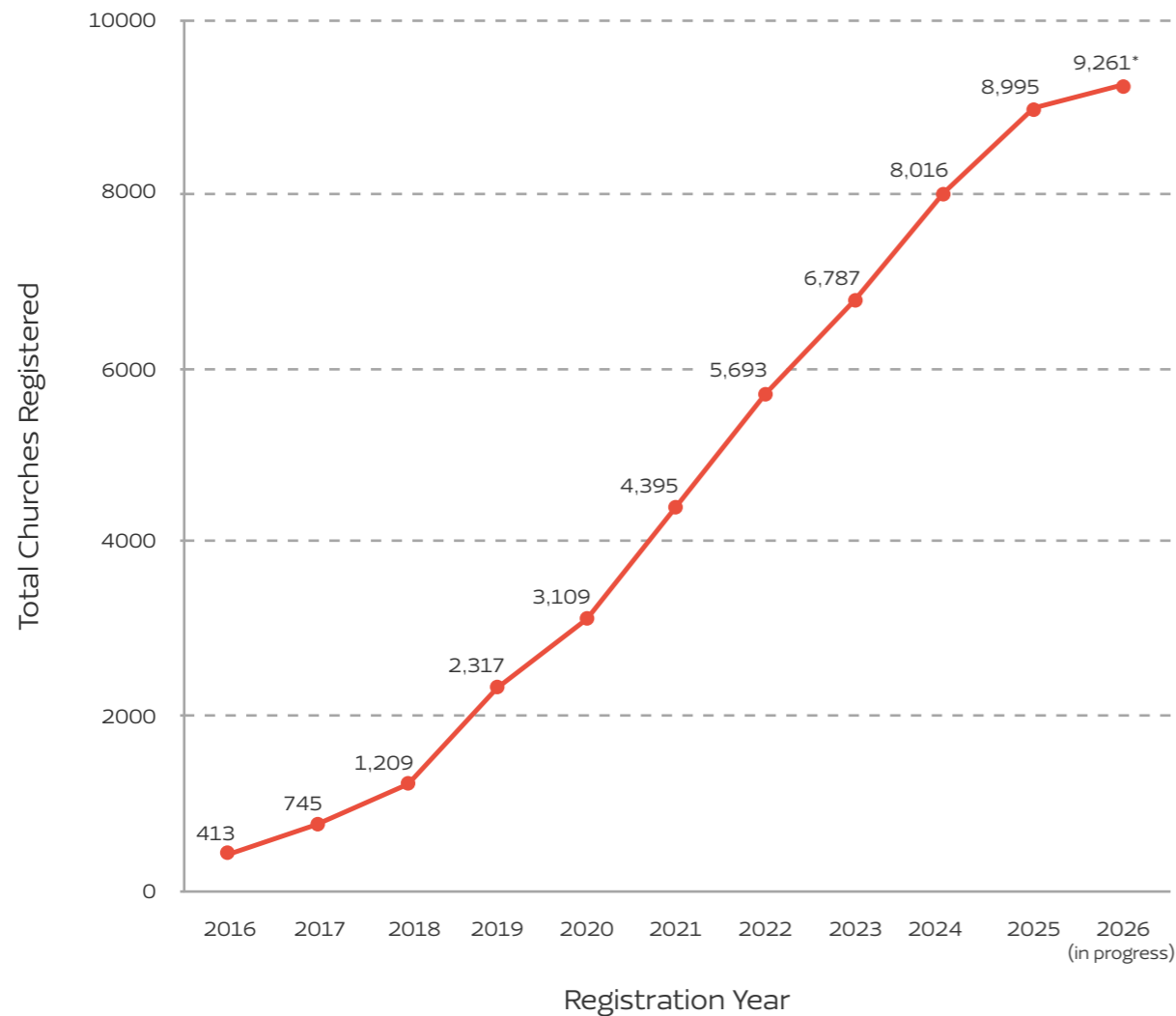


Andy Atkins
CEO A Rocha UK
Brentford, April 2026

At a glance



Cumulative Registrations on A Rocha UK's Eco Church Platform



Source: A Rocha UK Eco Church Platform, 2026
 *As of May 2026: the graph shows a smaller increase because 2026 is still in progress



Eco Church has grown from 413 registered churches in 2016 to **9,261** in 2026; **4,778** churches have achieved Eco Church awards, including 3,137 churches which have received Bronze awards, 1,521 which have achieved Silver, and 120 which have achieved Gold



Over 4,000 churches (97%) have made a formal commitment to improving their environmental credentials through pursuing an Eco Church award¹



Over 3,000 churches (88%) manage their land so as to encourage native wildlife



More than 2,500 churches (78%) have made a decision to invest their funds ethically (1,062 have invested all their funds ethically; 1,522 have invested some of their funds ethically)



More than 2,500 churches (67%) have encouraged their members to reduce the use of cars



More than 2,000 churches (54%) have measured the carbon footprint of their church building

Eco Church inspired churches to take actions they would not otherwise have taken. As one church reflected:

To achieve Gold was our ambition and this motivated us to fill in the gaps in our practice and review everything that we did through a creation care lens.

¹ In this and the following bullet points, the percentage represents the proportion of churches that meet a specific criterion, out of the total number of churches that (a) have achieved a Bronze, Silver, or Gold award and (b) for which Eco Church survey data is available.

Introduction

2

What is Eco Church?

A Rocha UK launched the Eco Church scheme in January 2016 to equip churches to care for creation across every aspect of church life. Churches are encouraged to work towards awards, not as an end in itself, but in order to change the culture of the church so that caring for the earth is incorporated as a key part of mission.

How does Eco Church create change?

Eco Church helps Christians and churches – who may be unaware of the biblical mandate to care for creation or unsure of what they can practically do – to understand God's call to care for the created world and begin to take action as part of their mission and discipleship. Eco Church aims to mobilise churches to use the resources God has given them to protect and restore the environment.

As they do so, churches witness to the Creator God and His love of creation, inspire their communities to care for the environment, and help to create and contribute to the public support necessary for wider political change.

Specifically, Eco Church helps churches make progress in five categories:

1. Worship and teaching
2. Buildings and energy
3. Land and nature
4. Community and global engagement
5. Lifestyle

Churches register on the Eco Church platform and work through a survey, gaining points in each category as they do so. To achieve Eco Church awards, churches need to score at award-level (Bronze, Silver, or Gold) in all five categories of the survey.

While the survey encourages churches to change what they can, A Rocha UK understands that not every church can do everything. Creation care can also look different depending on church and individual circumstances. The survey therefore aims to be as sensitive to the circumstances of churches and individual Christians as possible.

Who is it for?

Eco Church is for everyone. Eco Churches can be found all over England and Wales, in many different denominations, and in every context: urban and rural, large and small, wealthy and struggling. A sister scheme, Eco Congregation, runs in Scotland and Ireland.

To showcase what God has done through churches on the programme, we share some stories from Eco Churches below. As well as providing an opportunity for thanksgiving, we hope that these stories will encourage churches which are considering Eco Church to sign up and churches which have been part of Eco Church for a long time to push forward in caring for creation.

This report

This report is designed to celebrate Eco Church and help A Rocha UK, its partners, and churches themselves learn from the first 10 years of the programme.

This report is co-written by A Rocha UK and Eido, drawing on in-depth research A Rocha UK commissioned from Eido, an independent specialist research agency. There are also specific times where A Rocha UK comments on the data and what it will do in response. We have marked these sections as "Hear from A Rocha UK" – keep an eye out for them in the report!

Our findings draw on:

1. Data from churches which have registered on the Eco Church platform
2. Data from Eco Churches that have successfully completed surveys and achieved Bronze, Silver, or Gold awards²
3. An open-answer pro forma that churches fill in when they apply for Gold awards
4. Interviews with registered, Bronze, Silver, and Gold awarded churches and some denominational leaders

Nearly all of the data cited in this report is from churches which have received at least one Eco Church award. Therefore, in an important sense, the figures mentioned below are a **minimum**: some churches which have registered for Eco Church will have (for example) already changed to a green electricity supplier or developed a plan to manage their land for nature even if they have not yet received an award in recognition of their achievement.

² This report specifically draws on pro formas from churches which have successfully applied for a Gold award as A Rocha UK wanted to understand what had helped these churches achieve their awards.

Timeline

3

Eco Church was launched in partnership with several major denominations, with support from Tearfund, Christian Aid, and the Environmental Issues Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. It was preceded by Eco Congregation, a scheme which still runs in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland. While A Rocha UK sees itself as the custodian of this programme, Eco Church relies on the work of many other organisations. You can find out more about them in our **Partners** section below.



2001:
Creation of A Rocha UK
a. 2006/2007: ARUK took on running Eco Congregation England and Wales



January 2016:
Launch of Eco Church at St Paul's Cathedral



2018:
External event: Publication of IPCC's (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) climate report, outlining 12 years to maintain average temperature increase at or below 1.5 degrees Celsius



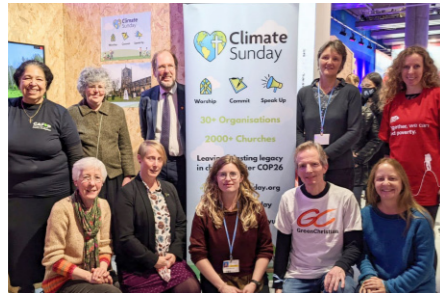
July 2018:
1,000 registered Eco Churches



June 2020:
Eco Church has left the building; churches continue to care for creation over lockdown



2021:
5th Eco Church Anniversary –
online service (still affected by
the pandemic)



Oct/Nov 2021:
Climate Sunday coalition campaign
by the Environmental Issues Network,
and chaired by A Rocha UK, in the
approach to COP26 in Glasgow



September 2021:
4,000 registered Eco Churches
(which is 10% of churches across
England and Wales – our 10-year
goal of reaching 10% of churches
achieved four years early!)



August 2023:
First Gold church in Wales



December 2023:
Registered Eco Churches now
represent 25 denominations



April 2024:
1,000 Silver-awarded Eco Churches!



June 2025:
100 Gold-awarded Eco Churches



November 2025:
40 per cent of churches across
England and Wales engaging with
caring for creation by 2030



February 2026:
9,000 Eco Churches registered



May 2026:
4,778 awarded Eco Churches

Worship and teaching

Why it matters

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.

God created and loves the world, and human beings are called to care for it as an expression of our worship and witness. Humanity is part of creation, not separate from it, and this theological underpinning is pivotal in helping church members engage with creation care.

As such, worship and teaching are foundational to Eco Church. They provide an opportunity to express our sorrow and repentance for the current state of the world, remind us of our vocation to care for the earth, and assure us that God will one day restore all things.

St James' story

St James's Piccadilly, an Eco Church in the heart of London, and one of the earliest Gold-awarded churches, offers a monthly contemplative service in its garden grounds and online. Everyone is invited to go outside for a time of quiet contemplation during the spoken liturgy or be near a window, houseplant, or other link to the natural world. A different person prepares and leads the liturgy each month. The session begins with a time of arrival and settling into the space. Then there are some readings on a theme and 15 minutes of silent time when participants may choose to move about and engage with particular features of the space that engage their attention. This is followed by a time of sharing responses and thoughts, concluding with readings and prayers.

Photos: St Mary's Church, East Grinstead, Tring Baptist Church

What evidence are we seeing of impact?

Eco Church encourages churches to make a formal commitment to creation care, to preach on care for God's earth, and to pray for the environment:

- **Over 4,000 churches** have made a formal commitment to improving their environmental credentials through pursuing an Eco Church award
- **Over 3,500 churches** preach on caring for God's earth at least once a year
- **Over 2,500 churches** pray for environmental issues at least once a month
- **Over 900 churches** pray for the environment every week

Respondents emphasised that, due to Eco Church, **it has become "more accepted that [creation care] is part of our discipleship, not an extra"**. As another church explained, "it takes time and patience to open hearts and minds to the responsibilities entrusted to us by God. **Eco Church is helping us all to grow in awareness, understanding, and faith.**"

A third church recalled how a worship and teaching series they had done on creation had encouraged people who had recently joined their church to volunteer: "we had two new people who got really excited to be involved and were surprised to hear we were interested in this."

As suggested by the quotation above, while Eco Church was rarely a reason that people came to church, **it was often one reason they stayed**. We heard from interviewees that:

[People are not] coming because of it, but they might stay [because of Eco Church].

We had new people come, and they spend a lot of time thinking about [Eco Church]... They didn't come because of it, but it helps.



What's next? Hear from A Rocha UK

It is wonderful that churches are incorporating creation care in their worship and teaching (something we have seen consistently across much of Eco Church's history). However, we know too that there is work to do to deepen churches' understanding of how creation care is integral to mission and a core part of growing in our understanding of who God is. We want to do this by:

- **Forming leaders who prioritise creation care:** Later this year, we are launching **Eco College**, a new award for **theological colleges**. While some training colleges already teach on creation care, it is still often not a core part of curricula. We hope that this award will help colleges further equip the next generation of church and Christian leaders to care for God's earth
- **Equipping Christians to mobilise others:** A Rocha UK will launch a Christian Environmental Mobilisers course, this year. This is a course, grounded in biblical teaching, for **grassroots Christians** who want to influence those around them (at church, in the community, in the workplace etc) to protect and restore the environment

Prayer points

- Christians working out a deepening connection to God as Creator as part of their discipleship
- Colleges embedding creation care in theological training and church ministry as an integral part of the church's mission
- For A Rocha UK to equip 500 of the next generation of Christian environmental leaders by 2030

Buildings and energy

Why it matters

1 Chronicles 29:1-2 (NIV) The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the Lord God. With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God.

While church is not the building, nonetheless, where and how worshipping communities meet can have a significant impact on the environment. The Church of England has estimated that its churches and cathedrals alone account for 103,000 tonnes of CO₂ (CO2) – as much as 50,000 cars emit in a year.³ This matters because the world has already almost exceeded the 1.5-degree limit on warming set in Paris in 2015, beyond which the heatwaves, flooding, droughts, melting glaciers, and ocean acidification that we are already experiencing will intensify, resulting in millions more lives at risk.

Many of the major denominations have made commitments to reaching net zero carbon emissions by or around 2030. Local churches can help by better insulating their buildings; switching to LED lighting; reducing their energy consumption; changing to renewable energy tariffs; and, where feasible, generating renewable energy onsite.

St Denys' story

St Denys' Church in Southampton has reduced its carbon emissions and saved thousands of pounds on energy bills by making several small changes. These have included replacing kettles with triple-insulated urns, insulating pipes, monitoring electricity use through smart meters, buying seat heaters for office chairs, and installing automatic timers for lights and electric heaters.

St Denys is active in its community, with seven fridges and freezers onsite to facilitate catering for its memory cafe and the free Sunday dinners it provides for people in the area. Faced with rising electricity prices, these changes have allowed it both to care for the environment and continue its outreach to the community. St Denys is a great example of how looking after the environment so often also benefits people, highlighting the interconnectedness of social justice and creation care.

What evidence are we seeing of impact?

Buildings and energy is one of the more stretching categories of the Eco Church survey. Nonetheless, we saw considerable evidence that Eco Church is helping churches improve.

- **More than 2,000 churches** have measured the carbon footprint of their church building
- **More than 2,000** are on a renewable energy tariff
- **More than 1,400** have set targets to reduce the carbon footprint of their premises

Naturally, this raises the question of whether churches would have done these things were it not for Eco Church. Interviews and Gold pro formas suggested that Eco Church both helps churches **take action more quickly** and **do things that they would not have done otherwise**. As respondents noted:

³ Church of England, [Carbon Emissions Report 2023](#). This total of 103,000 tonnes of CO2 accounts only for church and cathedral buildings, and does not include emissions from clergy housing or church halls. Estimates of the amount of CO2 emitted by the average car on the road in the UK vary, but most are around 1.5–2 tonnes of CO2 per car per year. We have used a conservative estimate of two tonnes of CO2 per car to calculate the figure above.

*We have pushed forward to change our heating.... This might have happened eventually, but has happened **now** because of Eco Church.*

*To achieve Gold was our ambition and **this motivated us to fill in the gaps in our practice and review everything that we did through a creation care lens.***

In 2024 we renewed our Creation Care Policy... and agreed a carbon Net Zero 2030 plan for the church.

In fact, we found evidence across survey categories that churches were using the Eco Church survey as a framework for action to motivate and inform their creation care efforts:

The awards helped us push [on] and hold ourselves to account.

*We insulated pipes in our boiler room because of an idea from [the survey]. Just going through the Eco Church checklist helps to create ideas. **If it were not for the Eco Church awards, we would not have done it.***

In addition to the examples above, respondents mentioned that Eco Church had also motivated them to change to a renewable electricity provider, replace old boilers with more energy-efficient solutions, double glaze their windows, and install infrared heating systems.

What's next? Hear from A Rocha UK

We recognise that reducing churches' carbon emissions and adapting church buildings for a changing climate can be challenging. However, there is now a growing number of resources to help. These resources are designed for churches of all shapes and sizes and include case studies of how churches have switched to clean energy, reduced emissions, and modified their buildings to protect climate and nature. More information can be found on the [Eco Church website](#).

The Church of England, The Methodist Church, and the Church in Wales, to name a few, are making strides in this area through their Net Zero programmes. Encouragingly, these and other denominations are also working closely together to share what they are learning about managing buildings for climate and nature. Importantly, churches are also well-placed to help communities **adapt** to our changing climate. This growing area of work around climate resilience (wider than building management alone) is a key cross-programmatic theme of ARUK's work.

In this context, A Rocha UK will:

- Support churches with resources and examples of climate resilient actions
- Share the findings of this report with church denominations, including some of the main barriers to progress on buildings (whether finances, people capacity, skills and knowledge) to begin conversations on what church denominations and A Rocha UK might do to mitigate these barriers

Prayer points

- Progress in cutting carbon across the church (towards net zero) reducing our impact on the climate
- A deeper shift toward sourcing and generating renewable energy by churches
- Churches playing a pivotal role in climate resilience in their communities

Land and nature

Why it matters

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.

God created an abundant earth, full of all kinds of life. This biodiversity glorifies its Creator. Biodiversity is also essential to the survival of human beings, providing food, cleaning the air and water, and contributing to mental wellbeing.

Faced with accelerating climate change and species and habitat loss, we need to take action to protect and care for nature. Churches may have only a small patch of land, or none at all, but there is a role for all churches in managing land for nature. Whether by caring for their own land or looking after land in the local community, churches have the opportunity to protect and restore God's creation.

Caring for land reinforces the whole mission of the Church: protecting nature, serving the community, and pointing people towards our Creator God.

Newport Methodist Church's story

Newport Methodist Church in the Isle of Wight reflects that:

"The Land and Nature criteria were challenging in our urban concrete and gravel site! We asked for suggestions via a display set up for several Sundays. [As a result] a management plan [called] "People for nature, nature for people" was developed. Windowsill growing kits allowed anyone to join in. Donations of plants and planters and offers of practical help followed, and there has been a display of all-round colour this year. Messy Church's vegetable growing has added to the effort. A bring and share of seasonal produce from our gardens has been a great success."

What evidence are we seeing of impact?

Eco Church encourages all churches to look after nature – even when churches have little or no land to work with.

- **Over 3,000 churches** manage their land so as to encourage native wildlife
- **More than 2,000** have established a specific management plan for their land

Perhaps most importantly, churches have **sought out land to care for**: either seeing the potential of small areas of land owned by their church or looking after community land when their church had no land at all. As interviewees reflected:

The Eco Church team challenged us to look at our space. We thought we didn't have land, just tarmac, but they challenged us to think creatively.

[We made] changes to our building and our tiny bit of land. We would not have done this if Eco Church didn't show us it was an opportunity.

Churches have also created **habitats for plants and wildlife...**

We have done a lot of things in our churchyard, almost making it a nature reserve with [a] bee hotel, etc.

Where the churchyard was [previously] sprayed by the Council, it now has flowers.

Our churchyard team is now [happy to] leave some areas without mowing. We had someone who buys our holly. This year, we asked him not to come so it can provide protection for nature.

...and **engaged children and young people** in caring for nature:

We were able to involve a small but close-knit Sunday School group, and we did activities together on this. We tried to use natural materials and we went for a walk and to the beach. We made an insect hotel in the same shape as our building... The family-focused activities were joyful.

Beyond their immediate context, churches have also **helped their congregations learn more about climate change and biodiversity loss**, including information about these topics in prayers and newsletters.

Stories from Gold Eco Churches show what is possible when congregations make the most of the land available to them:

We have found one of the greatest impacts we have had on the local community is through the work in our garden. People notice what the church is doing as they walk past.

The churchyard is a much loved and much used space and a number of people have been engaged in making bug hotels, ponds, bird boxes and the planting of wildflower areas.

What's next? Hear from A Rocha UK

We recognise that most churches do not have conservation expertise, nor think of themselves primarily as land managers. Nonetheless, how churches manage land is hugely significant for nature and people, especially in areas which are very nature deprived. A Rocha UK is encouraged to see the progress churches are making.

While, as this report discusses below, it is slightly easier for churches with more land to make progress, there is so much that can be done in smaller and urban spaces – and even a limited space can provide improved access to nature for the local community, with implications for community health and wellbeing. Access to nature and green space for all is an issue of social justice and another key cross-programmatic theme for A Rocha UK.

In recognition of this, there are now two different pathways that churches can take through this Eco Church survey category which better accommodate the different amounts of land that churches own or have influence over.

Furthermore, A Rocha UK will:

- Continue to promote and develop Target 25, our list of species (e.g. swifts) and habitats (e.g. hedgerows) which churches have an important role to play in protecting and restoring
- Develop more resources for a wider range of land contexts
- Continue to demonstrate existing land management techniques (e.g., dead hedge laying, coppicing, leaving grass long, and reducing fertility for wild flowers) and pilot new ones that can be shared with churches
- Continue to encourage people to get to know the nature on their doorsteps through initiatives such as Churches Count on Nature: a partnership between Caring for God's Acre, the Church of England, the Church in Wales, and A Rocha UK

Prayer points

- For threatened habitats (such as hedgerows) and declining species (such as swifts) to be restored and protected by churches
- For churches to create more opportunities for people to engage with nature: that this would result in more people caring for creation and greater wellbeing for people
- Collaboration between churches and the wider community, resulting in new green spaces and protection of existing green spaces

Community and global engagement

Why it matters

Mark 12:30-31 (NIV) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. There is no commandment greater than these."

The climate and nature crises are profoundly unjust, with their worst effects experienced by the poor and vulnerable. Whether in the UK or globally, the people who are most exposed to the consequences of environmental degradation are nearly always those who have done the least to contribute to it.

Where we have experienced injustice, we know that God is our powerful defender (Psalm 140:12). And where we see others experiencing it, we have a responsibility to advocate for and with them (Isaiah 58:6).

Churches can do this more powerfully when they act together: looking after their communities, engaging in small prophetic actions, or campaigning for change. This can be at a very small scale. The important thing is to notice what is going on in our communities and the world and to be open to what God might be asking us to do about it.

St Sadwrn's story

St Sadwrn's Church in Denbighshire, Wales found an opportunity to care for the environment and benefit its community at the same time. Noticing that supermarkets were disposing of food which was nearing its best before date, the church asked permission to bring that food to its warm space.⁴ St Sadwrn's used some of this food to prepare a meal for guests, and it made the rest available for guests to take home. As well as reducing food waste, this created a new sense of community: "I enjoy the company, I met people in the village I've never seen before, and I made new friends," one visitor said.

What evidence are we seeing of impact?

Survey data shows that:

- **More than 2,500 churches** have made a decision to invest their funds ethically (1,062 have invested all their funds ethically; 1,522 have invested some of their funds ethically)
- **More than 2,500 churches** are taking steps to reduce food waste
- **More than 2,500 churches** have participated in a community clean-up project
- **More than 1,250 churches** are engaging with the government on environmental issues (by getting in touch with their MP, AM (Assembly Member), local council, or Public Service Board)
- **More than 1,000** have campaigned on global environmental issues

While not all of this change was due to Eco Church, we found evidence that Eco Church gave churches new ideas and inspired them to take action.

Interviewees shared that Eco Church had encouraged them to **become more involved in their communities**. As respondents noted:

*There are [other] eco groups [in our area], and the church is now very much a part of that conversation. **Eco Church is an enabler of relationships:** we reached the town council.*

⁴ You can find out more about warm spaces and the Warm Welcome Campaign [here](#).

Through churchyard management and involving the wider community, we now have a grassroots group... looking into sustainable energy for our village. **The survey asked us to look outwards: linking with others is a big victory, and [the church] was encouraged by this process.**

Eco Church and eco outreach have changed the way we interact with our community, and **our sense is that we feel more "relevant" to people living nearby because of the eco work we do.**

Eco Church also **improved churches' understanding of climate change and biodiversity loss**, and, particularly at higher award levels, **inspired churches to work towards justice globally:**

Eco Church groups in church tend to grow the awareness of the wider congregation, opening people's eyes. The link with Tearfund, for instance, makes them realise how this... joins up [with global injustice].

Taking part in the Eco Church journey has highlighted that we need to do more in engaging with local leaders and our MP on sustainability and environmental issues.... **We have encouraged members to write to our local MP re Fairtrade and the current Climate and Nature (CAN) Bill using the [A Rocha UK] link.**

This year we intend to carbon offset based on our Carbon 360 energy audit [done as part of the process of achieving a Gold award]. This will support community forestry, water filter and cookstove projects in Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, Peru, Tanzania and Uganda.

Finally, **more than 2,000 churches** have promoted Eco Church to other congregations across England and Wales – extending the call to take practical action to care for God's earth to others.

What's next? Hear from A Rocha UK

This is such an important part of Eco Church, recognising that we are a community of people in our church congregations, as well as part of wider communities in our local and global contexts. Whereas historically people might have expected to see the church engage in its community and lead on issues such as combatting poverty, many churches will have only recently become more committed to creation care. (Of course, others will have been involved in creation care for a long time!)

We are so encouraged, in addition to the data findings above, to hear of churches holding annual eco-themed fairs, partnering with council groups to create green spines through otherwise urban neighbourhoods, and much else besides.

There is also an emerging and growing role for churches to play as we face a changing climate and all the challenges this brings. So A Rocha UK will:

- Equip Christians to develop vision and leadership towards a more just and sustainable world through the launch of our Christian Environmental Mobilisers course (mentioned above)
- Develop a new resource on the role of churches in climate resilience
- Continue to partner with other organisations that champion caring for creation

Prayer points

- For churches to increase their awareness of climate justice and global challenges
- For churches to use their voice to speak up for creation and for the environment to be prioritised across all sectors of society
- For churches to collaborate with other groups and agencies to bring about deeper and faster transformation to a more equitable and sustainable world

Lifestyle

Why it matters

Micah 6:8 (NIV) "And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

While it is important to work together as a church, we also have an individual responsibility to look after the earth. This category is about churches encouraging people to **act as individuals and households**: How might we integrate creation care into our daily lives as part of our discipleship and as an act of worship and obedience to God?

Churches can help to answer this question by educating their members on practical ways they can care for the earth and encouraging them to consider which of these actions God might be calling them to adopt.

St Nicholas Church, Montgomery's story

St Nicholas Church, Montgomery hosts a well-attended bring and share lunch on the fourth Sunday of each month. The Eco Church Group saw this lunch as a great opportunity to encourage the congregation to think about "food miles" (how far the ingredients of a meal have travelled to get to our plates). It invited church members to compete to see who could bring a recipe with the lowest food miles.

Contestants brought savoury recipes using homegrown herbs, local eggs, and local vegetables. Slightly more food miles were required for the puddings since the sugar, made with British sugar beet, had to come all the way from Bury St Edmunds. But the only other option was sugar cane, which comes from much further afield!

The winning savoury frittata had ingredients which travelled just a single mile, and the joint sweet winners (rhubarb meringue with cream and an apple crumble) had mile counts of 207 and 245, respectively.

What evidence are we seeing of impact?

Analysis of Eco Church survey data shows that:

- **More than 3,500 churches** have encouraged their members to reduce, reuse, and recycle. **More than 1,500** do so regularly
- **Over 2,500 churches** have encouraged their members to reduce the use of cars
- **Over 900 churches** have encouraged their members to undertake personal carbon footprint audits

In interviews, we also found evidence that Eco Church had influenced church members' purchasing decisions:

A lot more of our church family get fruit and veg from the farm shop... glass bottles [from the milkman are] also being opted for by people.

Purchasing ethically is important now, our [Eco Church] survey is showing that. [As individuals] we consider how we spend, invest, and our energy supply... Our church family is more conscious of our lifestyle choices.

Lifestyle was the category which most differentiated Silver from Bronze awards – and we correspondingly saw much more evidence of impact at higher award levels. Congregations from Gold churches, in particular, had integrated creation care into their daily decision making. Engagement with this survey category looked different depending on church context, but to cite a few examples:

- A church in Northern England surveyed their church to understand its lifestyle habits: 90 per cent of respondents chose showers over baths (to minimise water use), 80 per cent turned off the tap when brushing their teeth, and 75 per cent recycled clothes at charity shops
- A church in the South created a car share Whatsapp group to help church members travelling from other villages offer lifts and reduce their carbon footprint
- A church in London found that 90 per cent of the congregation owned a cargo bike, while no one owned a car

As one Gold church member reflected:

I think the Eco Church and environmental concerns spoken about in [our parish] over the years have made people think and re-evaluate what they do and buy and how they view their lifestyle... I believe we [in our parish] now have a more global awareness and connection towards what we consume and those who provide it.

What's next? Hear from A Rocha UK

One of Eco Church's greatest strengths is that it works through the church: a community through which God changes lives by the Holy Spirit. If the UK is to achieve its environmental goals, part of what will be needed is lifestyle change. At its best, the church is both a place where people experience God's unconditional grace for them and where the Spirit helps them become more like Jesus.

Part of what Eco Church is designed to do is help churches realise that creation care is part of their discipleship. To provide some specific next steps, A Rocha UK runs the Wild Christian programme which offers ideas and inspiration to help individuals and families enjoy and learn about nature together, take practical action at home and in their local areas, and join with others to use their voices and actions for national impact. There are plans to expand on this offering through further developing **Creation Care**, an award scheme, modelled on Eco Church but specifically for individuals and households.

Prayer points

- For churches to respond to the environmental aspects of discipleship with wisdom, grace, and integrity
- For Christians to be encouraged to act for nature through their practical actions at home, in the community, and through using their voices

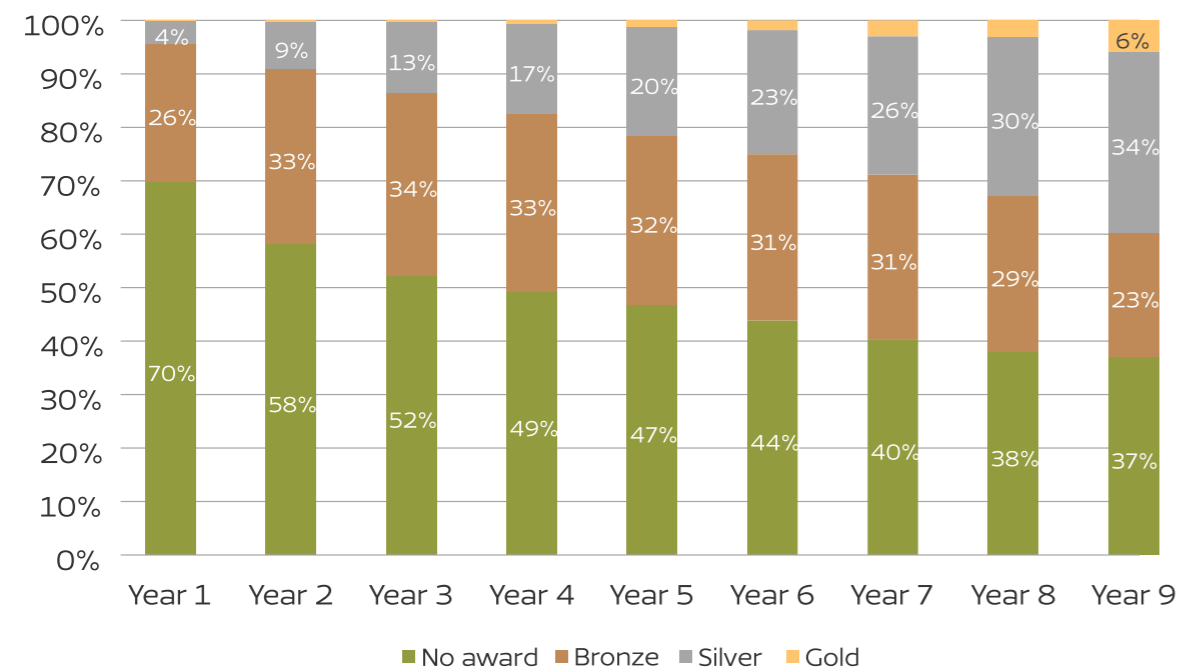
What helps churches succeed?

5

When we interviewed churches on the Eco Church database, respondents emphasised that their own **intrinsic motivation** had helped them achieve Eco Church awards. "We wanted to do it," they said.

The implications of this finding can be seen in the graph below. During their first year on the programme, only around 30 percent of churches earned awards – and of these awards, nearly all were Bronze. To earn Silver and Gold awards, **most churches need to persevere**. By their ninth year on the programme, **over 60 percent of churches had earned awards, of which the majority were Silver or Gold**.

Proportion of Churches at Each Award Level by Number of Years in the Programme



Nearly always, interest in Eco Church began with a **single church member** (or at most a small group) motivated to help their church care for the environment. "**It takes one person**, if they are captured by it and manage to enthuse others", interviewees explained.

However, to reach the higher award levels, responsibility for creation care needs to spread to a wider group and eventually to be embedded across the whole church. **Clergy support** was central to this:

It's so important because it means that it's constantly on the church leaders' agenda. It's funded, it's supported from the pulpits, it's taught on. So the church leadership team has a huge say in whether [Eco Church] succeed[s] or not.

Aware of the importance of clergy support, A Rocha UK will be launching the **Eco College** programme (discussed above) to encourage the next generation of church leaders to prioritise creation care.

Interviewees also stressed the importance of **easy wins** and **doing what they could**. As they reflected:

We went for the easy wins for the Bronze Award. It helped us feel like we were doing something.

Don't worry about what you can't do: Do what you can. You inspire the [wider] church by showing them what you are doing.

Photos: St Giles Church, Risby (Suffolk Diocese), Bradford Cathedral (Philip Lickley)



What helped churches get to Gold?

To further explore what helped churches care for the environment, we analysed data from churches which had earned a Gold award. Gold churches attributed their success to:

- **Passionate, dedicated working groups**, with strong support from clergy and churchwardens
- **Theological integration**: not treating creation care as an add-on, but incorporating it as part of church life
- **A patient, steady approach**: recognising that cultural change is slow
- **Visibility and storytelling**: sharing stories of progress with the wider congregation and helping church members understand why creation care is a priority
- **External partnerships and guidance**: Support from organisations such as the RSPB, Wildlife Trusts, and local councils to guide land management and biodiversity efforts
- **Creative problem-solving for buildings**: Pursuing external grants (including matched funding, local community grants, and denominational support, especially at regional or diocesan levels) and reducing carbon emissions by applying the principle of heating the person, not the building

What can A Rocha UK do to help?

What help did interviewees want?

When asked about what A Rocha UK might do to help, respondents expressed a desire for more community, specifically:

1. **Opportunities to learn from and be motivated by other churches.** They asked whether Gold Eco Churches might send representatives to their church to speak or hold open days so their church could visit.⁵ They also suggested that if A Rocha UK shared more case studies of what other churches had done, it might help to encourage and inspire their church
2. **People to coach them through the process:** "I stopped filling in the survey, but no one followed up," one respondent said. "Maybe they could prompt some support when people get stuck?" Others agreed, asking for "folk to walk with the parish team"

Still other churches were interested in **resources**, including specific ideas of what they might do to progress in each of the Eco Church categories above, support in answering political and theological scepticism about creation care ("people think God will destroy the earth, so what is the point?"), and tools to help smaller churches work together.

Finally, several churches wanted help in navigating denominational barriers to creation care. "Our mediaeval building is so complex", one said:

You need permission from the Diocese [to do anything]. We are trying to change the boiler to an eco-friendly one and are still waiting for permission. There are institutional obstacles.

While this was an Anglican-specific barrier, other denominations mentioned their own challenges, including issues sustaining momentum towards Eco Church awards due to the rotation of ministers in the Methodist Church. The Salvation Army is actively responding to bureaucratic issues relating to the fact their utility provision is managed centrally. Options to address this are being explored. Interviewees requested help in pursuing creation care in their denomination, specifically.

⁵ While respondents mentioned Gold Eco Churches, there may also be value in learning from Silver and Bronze Eco Churches as the changes made by these churches might be more accessible for churches who are just starting to work towards Eco Church awards.

Photo: St Saviour's Church, Brockenhurst (Camilla Pearse)



Hear from A Rocha UK

We recognise the key success factors cited above and the opportunities for future support. The network of Gold-awarded churches is now (as of May 2026) 120 strong across many regions of England and Wales, and A Rocha UK is developing this network in part with a view to enabling many more churches to progress through the awards and embed creation care for the longer term. Some Gold-awarded churches are taking the initiative to open their doors to others, and many others are happy to be approached. The Eco Church map of registered and awarded churches is a useful tool for finding these churches. A Rocha UK is looking at ways of making these connections happen more easily.

There is also a growing suite of 100+ resources on the Eco Church website, including **overview documents of every Eco Church category** to support churches in getting started. And there are great resources from other organisations which we signpost and share. We intend to share more of the wonderful stories and case studies that we hear from churches through different media and in more accessible ways.

Since A Rocha UK is a small organisation, it is challenging to provide support for every church that needs it, especially as Eco Church has grown. Nonetheless, we recognise that this is a key enabler of progress towards Eco Church awards. While A Rocha UK will continue to support churches, Gold-awarded churches are also playing a role here, as can Silver- and Bronze-awarded churches in supporting and mentoring other churches. A Rocha UK strongly encourages churches to make contact with other Eco Churches in their area and to work with organisations in the local community (such as Wildlife Trusts, councils, schools, Scouts and Guides, climate coalitions, and others). We will look at ways that we can gather churches at similar stages in their Eco Church journey to provide support relevant to their circumstances.

Where other barriers have been identified, some of which may be more influenced at a denominational level, Eco Church works with all the major denominations and will be exploring some of these findings with them. We are also about to launch the Eco Church survey in Welsh to make it more accessible for predominantly Welsh-speaking churches.



Photos: Bradford Cathedral (Philip Lickley); Peterborough Quaker Meeting House; Bradford Cathedral; Salvation Army at Denmark Hill; Hilfield Friary; St James Church, Alveston (Sarah Coton); Bradford Cathedral

What hinders churches?



Interviewees mentioned three primary barriers to achieving an Eco Church award:

- 1. Church buy-in:** Church members who were initially motivated to pursue an Eco Church award can struggle to engage the wider church. As interviewees explained, this becomes more important at the higher award levels: to achieve a Silver award, "You need buy-in: a small group is not enough". "The bigger steps require more people or different people to be on board," another interviewee reflected
- 2. A lack of resources,** including time, money, and congregation members: larger changes to church buildings and land often require funds and volunteers. This can be difficult when churches are financially stretched and have dwindling, busy, or ageing congregations
- 3. Feeling daunted by the Eco Church survey and website.** This seemed to be particularly an issue for churches which had registered but had not achieved a Bronze award

In addition to these barriers, interviewees also mentioned denominational barriers (discussed above) and the fact that churches could be too hard on themselves.

Did Gold churches encounter any additional barriers?

As well as the barriers mentioned above, Gold-awarded churches observed that:

- **Advocating for expensive "ethical" lifestyle choices (such as ethical investments or buying fairtrade products) can be inappropriate in areas of high deprivation.** A Rocha UK is aware of this: creation care needs to respond to churches' contexts, and high scores on the Eco Church surveys were achieved by churches in areas with significant deprivation. Specifically, Gold churches in deprived areas shifted their focus to practical, cost-saving interventions such as eating less meat, preventing food waste, and repairing broken items
- **Churches can encounter opposition to leaving unmown grass in churchyards.** While churches did this to create habitats for wildlife, community members sometimes thought that unmown grass was "untidy" or disrespectful to graves. Churches responded by mowing neat pathways through rows of graves, keeping front entrances and recently tended graves manicured, and erecting educational signage explaining the ecological benefits of wild areas

Gold Eco Churches overcame Anglican denominational barriers (specifically faculty applications) through persistence, acceptance of delays, training volunteers to submit these applications, and using positions of influence with the Diocese to advocate for their church.

Barriers from the quantitative data

We found further barriers in the survey data.

Rural and Anglican churches score higher on Land and Nature

Not surprisingly, rural churches tend to score higher than urban churches on the Land and Nature category of the survey: 66 per cent have a Silver-level score or above for land, as compared to 59 per cent of urban churches.⁶ Anglican churches also outscored non-Anglican churches on Land and Nature (67 per cent of Church of England churches and Church in Wales churches had a Silver-level score or above, as compared to 51 per cent of other churches).

We think this is because both rural and Anglican churches have more land to work with: rural churches are located in contexts where land is more plentiful, and Anglican churches often have land attached to their church buildings.

However, **urban churches and churches outside the Church of England can still achieve high scores on the Eco Church survey**, for four reasons:

- 1. Updates to the Eco Church survey.** This is the most significant reason. A Rocha UK has recently revised the Eco Church survey to create distinct pathways for churches depending on how much land they own (or whether they own land at all). This alone is expected to ensure that churches without much land can score just as highly on the Land and Nature category
- 2. This difference was limited to Land and Nature:** rural and Anglican churches did not score any higher on the other four dimensions of the survey
- 3. The difference between rural and urban churches was slight:** only seven percentage points. **Urban churches should be encouraged that nearly six in ten urban churches in the dataset had Silver-level scores on Land and Nature:** clearly it is not only rural churches that can achieve high scores in this category. At 16 percentage points, even the difference between Anglican churches and other denominations was not enormous: enough to give Anglican churches an advantage, but not enough to preclude other denominations from achieving the higher awards
- 4. The creativity of other churches:** As one example of this, while rural and Anglican churches scored higher on Land overall, both urban churches and churches outside the Church of England were more likely to grow fruit and vegetables on their land (including by taking advantage of spaces such as planters and windowboxes)⁷

⁶ These percentages, and all percentages in this section, only take into account churches which have at least a Bronze award.

⁷ Analysis on how frequently churches grew fruit and vegetables on their land was conducted as a comparison specifically between Church of England churches and other churches.

It helps to have a larger congregation

While the differences above were limited to the Land and Nature category, churches with more than 50 worshippers scored higher on Community and Global Engagement, Lifestyle, and Buildings and Energy. Two of these differences were relatively slight: larger congregations only outscored smaller ones on Buildings and Energy by eight percentage points and Lifestyle by nine percentage points. However, larger congregations were 12 percentage points more likely to achieve at least a Silver-level score on Community and Global Engagement (56 per cent versus 44 per cent).

Once again, we think the explanation is straightforward: **larger churches had more people, and presumably often more funds, to work with in pursuing Eco Church awards.** Having more people may also mean that churches are more likely to have access to specialist skills which are useful for creation care (either because these people are present in their congregations or because having more people in their congregations means that they are more likely to know people with these skills).

Interestingly, the reason that larger churches did not score higher on Land and Nature is likely that rural churches, which had high scores on this category, also tend to be small. This implies that Eco Church may be most difficult for small, non-Anglican urban churches.

However, **smaller churches can succeed:** once again the differences were not large enough to prevent small churches from achieving high scores on the Eco Church survey and achieving the higher award levels. Smaller churches were also more likely to **promote Eco Church to other local churches** (perhaps because they were part of multi-church circuits or parishes and could therefore more easily share Eco Church with other churches in their networks) and to score higher on other survey questions, such as using environmentally friendly cups and plates.

We did not see any differences by neighbourhood income brackets

When we compared churches in the wealthiest 50 per cent of postcodes to churches in the poorest 50 per cent, we did not see any significant differences. This suggests that churches in more deprived contexts can achieve higher scores on the Eco Church survey – although more detailed analysis (e.g., a regression, or additional analysis by income decile) would be required to be fully confident in this finding.

How do barriers differ by award level?

Getting to Bronze

Unfortunately we do not have quantitative data on barriers to achieving a Bronze award, as our survey data is limited to churches which have successfully achieved at least one Eco Church award. However, interviews suggest that registered churches are often daunted by the requirements of achieving even a Bronze award – so success at this level may depend on persistence, looking for easy wins, and doing what is possible in a given church context.

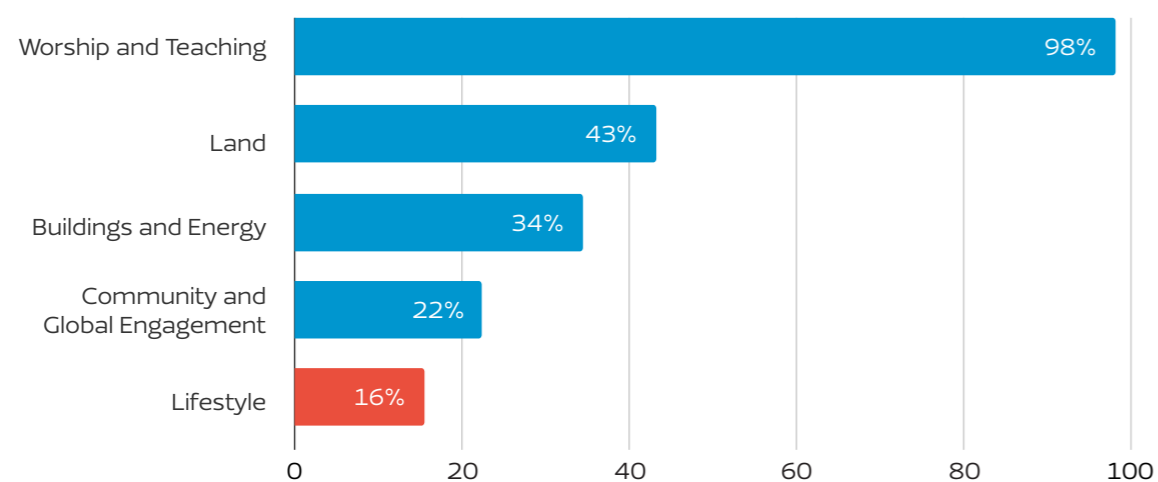
A Rocha UK's encouragement here is for churches to get started, use the Eco Church resources, and tap into whatever networks they can access. A Rocha UK will also look into providing tailored guidance and facilitating sessions for churches just getting started with Eco Church.

Getting to Silver

To get from Bronze to Silver, churches primarily need to focus on the **Lifestyle** category, although significant progress is also needed in Land, Buildings and Energy, and Community and Global Engagement. As discussed above, **this is the point at which motivating the wider church becomes essential**: progress in these areas is impossible without significant commitment from the congregation.

A Rocha UK's existing plans to provide more resources for individuals and households should help here, as churches will in time be able to offer these resources to their congregations to help them make progress in the lifestyle category.

How Close are Bronze Churches to Silver?



Source: A Rocha UK Eco Church Survey

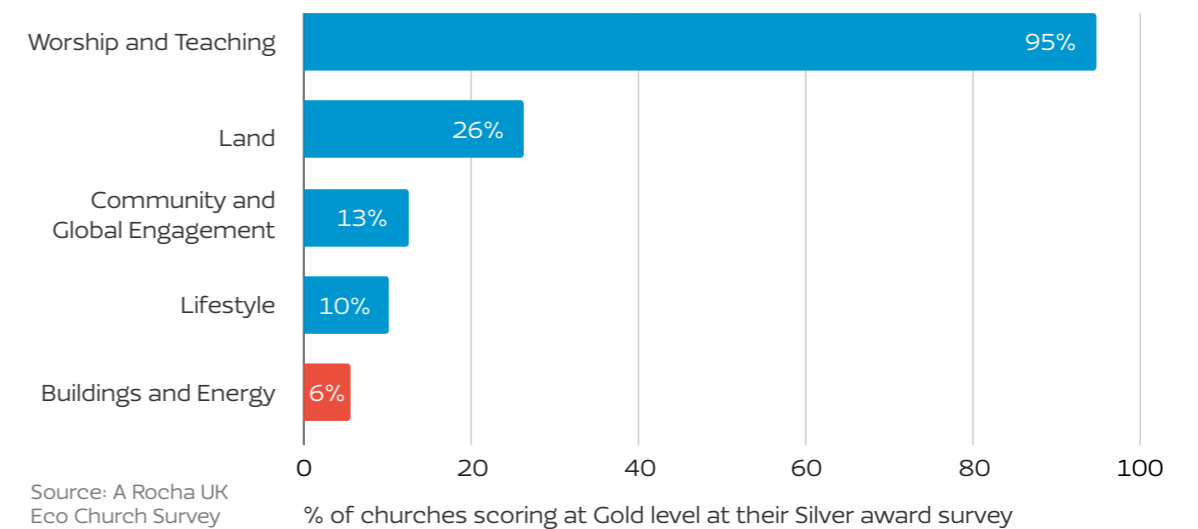
% of churches scoring at Silver level or above at their Bronze award survey

Getting to Gold

Buildings and Energy is the category which most separates Silver from Gold, although significant improvements are also required for **Lifestyle, Community and Global Engagement**, and (to a lesser degree) Land and Nature.

In general, the gap between Silver and Gold is greater than the gap between Bronze and Silver. Achieving a Gold award requires **deeper engagement with the wider congregation**, as well as **creativity and persistence in finding the time and resources to make changes to buildings and land**.

How Close are Silver Churches to Gold?



Source: A Rocha UK Eco Church Survey

% of churches scoring at Gold level at their Silver award survey

Interestingly, **having a listed building is a significant hindrance to achieving a Gold award**. Churches without a listed building were considerably more likely to have a Gold-level score for Buildings and Energy than churches with one; in particular we found significant differences in the percentage of churches who had fully double-glazed their church building (**two per cent** of listed buildings, as compared to 31 per cent of non-listed), their church halls (40 per cent versus 57 per cent), and their church office (48 per cent versus 62 per cent).⁸ Listed buildings were also difficult to insulate, with just **one per cent** insulated in the way which would earn the greatest number of points on the Eco Church survey (as compared to 12 per cent of non-listed buildings). As one survey respondent reflected, "Our church is a listed building and therefore there are certain constraints."

⁸ Interestingly, however, listed churches were considerably more likely to have Gold-level scores on Land and Nature. We think this is because these were more likely to be Anglican churches (Anglican churches scored higher on Land and Nature).

How did Gold churches overcome this?

Gold churches succeeded in making changes to their buildings by:

- Focusing on heating the person, not the building
- Prioritising quick wins when major works were blocked
- Applying for external funding
- Perseverance

What is A Rocha UK doing to help?

We are grateful for the work that has been done to identify and explore the barriers that churches face. We receive feedback anecdotally from churches and others, and have a sense of what churches struggle with – and reassuringly there are few surprises in the data. However, it is helpful to see this presented clearly and concisely and for us to identify actions we have already taken (since these actions have been taken recently, their results are not yet apparent in the data) as well as to prioritise what more we can do, some of which has already been referenced in this report.

A lack of church buy-in was identified as a hindrance to making progress with Eco Church. We recognise this and ultimately advocate for creation care to be embedded across all aspects of church life for the long term. This takes commitment from church leaders and the whole congregation and takes time to build. The launch of the **Christian Environmental Mobilisers** course in 2026 is aimed at giving more people the skills to mobilise others and helping them understand the interconnectedness of the challenges that churches face. Also a new resource, [Being an Eco Champion](#), is full of practical ideas of how to build a team and find further support.

We recognise that a lack of resources (people and funds especially) can affect many aspects of church life. Initiatives such as **Churches Count on Nature** are a great way of encouraging people to join in with caring for church land. Funding can also be a challenge for some of the bigger steps, though funds are available from some denominations and grant funders. We are piloting a series of webinars on national and regionally available funding this year, on offer to Eco Churches and conservation partners.

As Eco Church has grown, it has become harder for us to offer individual support to churches getting started, though we recognise how significant this is. Newly registered churches already receive a series of email reminders and prompts of what to do next and where to find resources etc. However, we are also undertaking a **website review** and will include a "new to Eco Church page" as well to ensure that resources are more easily accessible. We will also explore offering drop-in sessions/surgeries for churches wanting help to get started. And, as has been referenced elsewhere in the report, we encourage churches to use the Eco Church map to identify and reach out to other Eco Churches in their area.

On the **specific barriers faced by churches of different sizes and with varying amounts of land** or no land at all, the Eco Church survey now offers different pathways through the Buildings and Energy and Land and Nature categories in recognition of the diversity of church contexts. These pathways were introduced in 2025, and so it is too soon to see their impact, but we will keep this under review.

Finally, A Rocha UK has an important role as a convenor: bringing together denominations, churches, charities, and environmental experts to share ideas, develop thinking, and pool resources (for example on church and land and climate resilience). We look forward to expanding this in future.

Photo: Forest Church at Five Alive Mission Community, Devon.



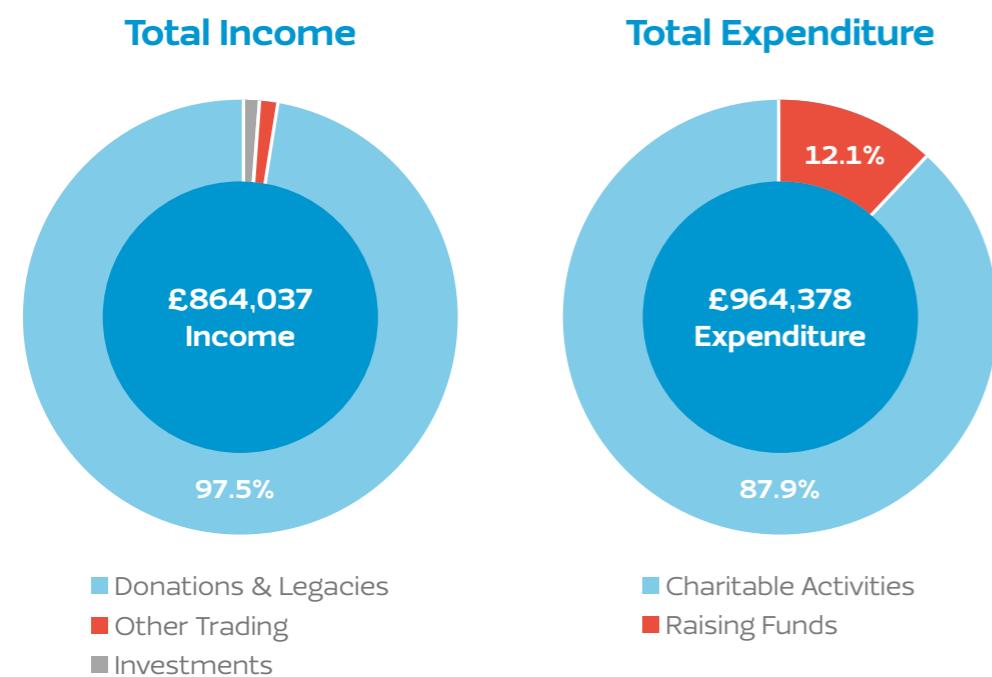
Conclusion



Financial transparency

A Rocha UK's most recent accounts show £864,037 in income, of which £842,270 derived from donations and legacies, £9,621 from investment income, and £12,146 from other trading activities.⁹ Of A Rocha UK's £964,378 in expenditure, £847,518 (87.9 per cent) was spent on charitable activities and £116,860 (12.1 per cent) on raising funds.

Between 2021 and 2024, A Rocha UK ran a planned deficit, drawing on high reserves in order to invest in its programmes and fundraising, before returning to a balanced budget with a small surplus in 2025. This is expected to be reflected in A Rocha UK's 2025 financial figures once these are finalised.



⁹ These figures, and those for expenditure, are from 2024 since A Rocha UK's 2025 accounts are still being finalised. Source: A Rocha UK accounts, 2024



A Rocha UK values transparency. For our full audited accounts and statutory filings, see our Charity Commission profile (linked [here](#) and in the QR code).

Partners



The work of Eco Church is also supported by a grant from the Net Zero Carbon Programme as part of the Church of England's wider Environment Programme.

A Rocha UK is grateful to all those who support our work, as well as the many organisations that partner with us.

Conclusion

There is so much to celebrate about the first 10 years of Eco Church: this report provides evidence that Eco Church is causing churches to commit to creation care as part of their discipleship, reduce their carbon emissions, manage their land for nature, seek justice in their communities and the world, and make individual lifestyle changes.

Thank you for being part of Eco Church's story so far. We look forward to seeing what God has for Eco Church and the wider work of churches caring for creation in the decade to come. It will be a crucial decade and all of us need to respond.

Looking forward

In this 10th anniversary year of Eco Church, A Rocha UK's goal is to continue to broaden and deepen the reach and engagement of Eco Church, encouraging more churches to register and existing churches to work towards higher award levels.

Specifically, A Rocha UK wants to equip local churches and denominations such that:

1. By the end of 2028, at least 33 per cent of churches across multiple denominations in England and Wales will have registered to begin their Eco Church journey
2. By the end of 2030, 40 per cent of churches in England and Wales will have registered to begin their Eco Church journey
3. By the end of 2028 at least 15 per cent of Churches in England and Wales will have gained at least a Bronze award, indicating deliberate and ongoing action to care for nature practically, on church premises, in the community, and by using their voice

Ways to get involved

A Rocha UK celebrates 25 years in 2026. It will continue its work to equip Christians and churches to protect and restore the environment – for God, nature, and all people.

There is a unique role for the church in caring for creation, and Eco Church provides a tried and tested way to equip and support churches in taking action. You can support this work in the following ways:

- **Pray** for A Rocha UK's work and for the renewal and restoration of the earth
- **Give** to help support and expand the growing network of Eco Churches
- Commit your church to **register for Eco Church** or **progress to the next award level**
- **Invite another church** to join the movement to protect and restore nature

Photos: St Albans Salvation Army; St Paul's Church, Marylebone; Churches Together in Porthcawl; Chelmsford Cathedral; Beulah URC; St Albans Salvation Army





St Mary's Church, Watford

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ECO CHURCH WEBSITE

A ROCHA UK WEBSITE



For a PDF version and more information, go to: arochoa.org.uk/EC10years or scan the QR code

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