



DIOCESE OF BRISTOL

TRANSFORMING CHURCH. TOGETHER.

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CNZ / Environment Update – March Diocesan Synod

The Diocese of Bristol’s commitment to environmental action arises not simply from contemporary concern but from the heart of Christian faith: ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it’ (Psalm 24:1). The Diocese of Bristol believes that Creation is not a resource to be exploited but a gift entrusted to humanity’s care. We are called to ‘till and keep the garden’ (Genesis 2:15), a vocation of stewardship marked by responsibility and restraint, love and compassion. The Diocese of Bristol’s work towards net zero carbon and biodiversity restoration is a contemporary expression of this ancient calling.

Climate science shows that the world is [now close to the 1.5°C limit set out in the Paris Agreement](#), with recent years already temporarily exceeding this threshold. Continued emissions at current levels mean the remaining carbon budget to stay below 1.5°C is rapidly shrinking, increasing the risk of crossing irreversible climate tipping points in the coming years. At the same time, biodiversity loss is accelerating at an unprecedented rate: the World Wildlife Fund’s Living Planet Report shows that the average size of global wildlife populations [has declined by approximately 73%](#) over the past 50 years. Together, these trends highlight the urgency of coordinated action to address the interconnected climate and nature crises.

Climate change and ecological degradation disproportionately affect the poorest and most vulnerable, both globally and locally. Jesus’ command to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ (Mark 12:31) compels us to act in ways that reduce harm, build resilience, and promote justice for all.

Progress so far in the Diocese of Bristol

We have made significant progress towards our net zero ambition. Change is happening across the diocese, from individual buildings to landscape-scale planning, and it is worth recognising how far we have come in a short period of time. Through practical action, advice, and shared learning, the diocese is caring for creation in ways that help both the environment and local communities.

Alongside reducing carbon emissions, we are actively working to increase biodiversity across our churchyards and glebe land. We are also supporting parishes to engage in and progress with the Eco Church programme. We recognise that Net Zero and biodiversity are closely linked: reducing emissions helps limit the impacts of a changing climate on the ecosystems upon which life depends, while restoring nature strengthens resilience to climate impacts and deepens our care for God's creation. The focus for 2026-29 is on building on this progress and sustaining momentum. Over the next triennium, our approach will be to continue strengthening what is already working well, embedding good practice, and supporting churches and communities at different stages of their environmental journeys.

The initial £2 million allocated by Synod from our reserves in 2023 to support our journey to carbon net zero has now been fully invested in projects across the diocese, including:

- Decarbonisation plans for 190 of our 209 churches – over 90% of our churches.
- Supporting 56 churches financially with energy efficiency /decarbonisation measures.
- 80 solar installations on clergy homes, saving a combined estimate of £38,000 - £62,000 per year off electricity bills for our clergy.
- 17 heat pump installations in clergy homes.
- 35 fabric upgrades to clergy homes, including loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, and double glazing.

With the initial £2 million now fully invested in such improvements, due to financial constraints the Diocesan Synod of November 2025 adopted a budget for 2026 that paused funding for net zero from our reserves, with the commitment to seek alternative sources of funding to enable the programme to continue. The diocese is taking a strategic, forward-looking approach to resourcing its environmental programme. Alongside careful consideration of how we can care for and maximise the benefit derived from our property assets, we are cultivating partnerships, strengthening fundraising efforts, and developing a broader long-term funding plan to ensure lasting impact. The diocesan environment programme is also already supported by ongoing National Church investment, which contributes to the team's salaries as well as providing tools and guidance that the diocese draws on to deliver local training and development opportunities.

New strategy being developed and will be presented at Synod in June

The 2026–29 environment programme will support the diocese in contributing to the Church of England's shared goal of reaching operational net zero carbon by 2030. Full details will be presented to Diocesan Synod in June 2026. The workstreams set out

below demonstrate how national and diocesan support will enable churches, schools, and other diocesan buildings to reduce carbon emissions and improve biodiversity, make informed decisions, and move forward at a pace that is realistic. They also help ensure that progress is coordinated, equitable, and sustainable across the diocese. The six workstreams of the environment programme comprise:

- **Embedding Creation Care**
Embedding care for creation into the diocesan mission and ministry.
- **Decarbonisation of Churches and Halls**
Supporting parishes in the diocese make their buildings more efficient and decarbonise.
- **Decarbonisation of Clergy Homes**
Providing low-carbon, energy-efficient homes that enable clergy across the diocese to flourish in ministry.
- **Decarbonisation of Schools**
Helping diocesan schools lead the way in energy efficiency, carbon reduction, and climate education.
- **Land Management and Biodiversity**
Stewarding diocesan land and churchyards to restore nature, enhance biodiversity and sequester carbon.
- **Partnerships and Fundraising**
Mobilising diocesan partnerships and funding to accelerate climate action across our churches and communities.

Diocesan £10k Net Zero grant update

Following the Diocesan Synod of November 2025, the 2026 budget was approved, including a pause on net zero funding from our reserves. This was a difficult but essential step necessary to steward our resources responsibly and safeguard the future of the diocese amid significant financial pressures now and in the future. At this time, it was also stated that the remaining funds available to churches for such work would be allocated as fairly as possible, and as such, parishes with live Net Zero projects were grouped into four categories:

- Group 1: churches actively engaging with the church buildings and environment teams and in the process of obtaining supplier quotes.
- Group 2: churches currently within the faculty process.
- Group 3: Churches with faculty approval.
- Group 4: churches that have already completed their net zero works.

At Bishop's Council in December 2025, it was agreed that priority should be given to Group 4 (completed net zero projects) and Group 3 (faculty-approved projects). There was a shared sense of responsibility to meet the existing financial commitment to

churches in these groups. The cut-off date for faculty approval was set as the meeting date (3rd December 2025), and current Parish Share levels were accounted for in these considerations. In addition, four Group 4 parishes were identified as having sufficient reserves to fund their own projects. They were approached to explore this possibility. One parish agreed to donate their funds to support another parish; two parishes agreed to reduce their claims; and one parish provided financial analyses demonstrating that they still require the full £10k of diocesan support. After discussions with these four parishes, the total required for Group 4 came to £62,500. Subsequent to these discussions, the diocese identified that £60k could be drawn from the 2026 diocesan property budget, reducing contingency for unexpected vacancies and vicarage improvements to free up funding for these projects. The next priority group, those in Group 3 (faculty-approved projects), require approximately £95k in total. The diocese is (as of February 2026), in the process of reviewing whether any financial surplus available at the end of 2025 can be used to support these Group 3 churches. The diocese can therefore confirm that:

- Group 4 churches have been assured that they will receive payment, with their applications approved and processed.
- Group 3 churches have been informed that we are currently unable to provide guarantees for all existing net zero funding requests at this stage.
- Group 1 and 2 churches have been informed that we will not be able to provide financial support for their projects at this stage.

The diocesan Environment and Sustainability Team continue to support churches in Groups 1, 2, and 3 with ongoing external grant applications, including the National Church boiler upgrade scheme, Chippenham Town Council grants, and Wiltshire Historic Churches funding. As noted above, the diocese remains deeply committed to its environmental objectives on net zero carbon and biodiversity. We are working hard to identify and secure alternative funding streams for this vital work – for example, a regional fundraiser for the south-west is in the process of being recruited, with interview scheduled for early February and the role expected to be filled by late March or early April. Further updates to Diocesan Synod will follow in the coming months, including on our diocesan Environmental Strategy for 2026-29.