

# St. Andrew's Eco-Committee

## Updated Discussion Paper

Spring 2023

### 1. Aim of this paper

In November 2022, Vestry agreed '*to aspire to work towards Net Zero, as and when achievable*', in reference to General Synod's decision in 2020 to reach 'Net Zero' by 2030. Already we are over a quarter of the way through that period.

Your Eco-Committee needs to lead the way and others will look to us for guidance on

- a. what we need to know,
- b. where to find that information and
- c. how we use it to construct a regularly evolving strategy for the coming 7 years,
- d. so that decisions can be made at appropriate stages, in our democratic fashion,
- e. and to minimise pre-judging or division.

We have a very wide range of options and opportunities; we also have a wide range of concerns. For both, greater understanding lies at the heart of our way forward.

### WORLDWIDE

#### 2. What appears relatively widely understood:

- a. Attitudes to Climate Change are rapidly changing (in the direction of increased understanding).
- b. Greenhouse gases are causing a rise in the earth's average temperature.
- c. Burning fossil fuels releases more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.
- d. Rising temperatures will cause sea levels to rise as ice caps melt.
- e. Weather patterns will become more volatile and extreme.
- f. Many countries and organisations are targeting dates by when they will stop making the situation worse, (known as 'Net Zero', the point at which we cease contributing to the problem more than we contribute to the solution)
- g. The peoples and eco-systems most at risk of suffering now are the poorer nations.

#### 3. What may be less widely understood, thus far:

- a. The rate at which greenhouse gases are currently being emitted is not reducing fast enough yet to meet the targeted tolerable rise in temperature of 1.5°C.
- b. Rising sea levels and more extreme weather patterns risk causing mass migrations from tropical and coastal regions, running into billions of humans and animals.
- c. The capacity to grow crops in those regions risks being decimated, exacerbating starvation and drought.
- d. The peoples and eco-systems most at risk of suffering **now** are the poorer nations.
- e. The people responsible for most of the greenhouse gas emissions are the wealthier nations.

### ST ANDREW'S

- St Andrew's Constitution (paragraph 5) states that 'the Rector & congregation shall conform to resolutions of the General Synod'.

- Our understanding is that Canon Law came into being after initially being passed as Synod resolutions; that Synod resolutions are of different types and generally cannot compel action that is inappropriate, conflicting or not possible.
- In aspiring to work towards Net Zero, St Andrew's is encouraged to consider both the letter and the spirit of Synod's resolutions.

#### 4. Risks:

- Certain actions in targeting **Net Zero** by 2030 are thought to risk dissent among us or division between us. We risk our congregation losing its cohesion. We risk becoming 'dichotomised' or split into two opposing sides: a 'green' camp versus those voicing sentiments such as 'too soon'/too expensive'/'too impractical'/'simply not possible'/'done enough already'.
- We risk failing to conform with Synod's decisions.
- At the other end of the spectrum, we risk suffering increasingly from 'Eco-Anxiety' or 'Climate Anxiety' in a variety of ways. Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eco-anxiety> suggests this is a rapidly growing phenomenon. For a faith-based organisation,
  - we may be anxious about how climate change could harm the poor,
  - we may be anxious about how we ourselves could be harmed,
  - we may be anxious about feelings of guilt at having contributed to the problem,
  - we may be anxious about not doing enough, soon enough, to rectify any damage to which we are contributing.

We may also be anxious about deluding ourselves over the whole issue, as many people acknowledge that the biggest mistakes we make in life are the ones we're not aware of committing.
- We risk the charge of hypocrisy if preaching altruistic love whilst contributing more to the problem than to the solution.
- Overall, the nature of these opposing risks is that, as we get nearer and nearer to 2030, each of them may increase in parallel.
- Fortunately, however, it could well be that the same remedies can mitigate all risks simultaneously ...**

#### 5. Responses to Risks:

- First, it is worthwhile contrasting dissent over our approach to Climate Change with the dissent that arose within many churches over same-sex marriage and women priests.
  - Each of the latter two debates has been far more prone to a binary 'are you for or against?' with limited scope for middle ground compromises, although some admirable examples were formed.
  - Dealing with Climate Change **is** quite different, manifesting a very wide spectrum of viewpoints, all admissible.
  - It is probably fair to say that every single member of St Andrew's currently holds a subtly different opinion.
  - We have also already recognised that those opinions are in constant flux.
- While we remind ourselves that each of us is **entitled** to hold a unique opinion then, equally, we also all have a **responsibility** to form those opinions, if shared with others, with as much considered understanding and as little pre-judgement and emotive language as possible.
- Thus, we recognise that this is not a 'them' versus 'us' debate, it is a question of deliberating where our democratic middle ground lies across a very wide range of opinions, which are themselves changing constantly.
- It is not a question of 'yes' versus 'no' over targeting 'Net Zero' by 2030. It is a question to what degree and at what pace.

- e. It is an opportunity to ask, *‘please help us assemble the best available professional guidance on what solutions are available, how they can be financed and what benefits they bring in terms of reduced greenhouse gas emissions amongst other things and, as a consequence, greater peace of mind’*.
- f. It would be hard to argue that acting to promote peace of mind is not common to each of us.
- g. In this respect, work undertaken in targeting ‘Net Zero’ can be compared with our Insurance policies: over the past ten years, we have invested over £30,000 in insurance premiums, yet have made claims of only one tenth of that expenditure. However, that simplistic analysis of cost investment and return completely overlooks the peace of mind we have all enjoyed over the security of our buildings, not to mention the aspect of our duties to maintain them.
- h. We may view our understanding of - and action taken on - Climate Change
  - i. as similarly beneficial in terms of peace of mind,
  - ii. as conforming with both the spirit and the letter of Synod resolutions and
  - iii. as the best antidote to Climate Anxiety in all its forms.
- i. As an Eco Committee, we have already agreed that this requires Strategic Thinking. If we are to help guide our Vestry and our colleagues with such long-term planning, we need to set out a framework for developing a Strategy.
- j. Taking 2030 as the Synod target, we therefore need to consider broad plans for the next seven years. Such a Strategy will be:
  - i. detailed in the near term, more broad brush in the long term,
  - ii. flexible and open to appraisal and adjustment at regular intervals.
  - iii. its quality & efficacy will be directly proportional to our levels of understanding – of our church’s needs, challenges and resources, both internal and external.
  - iv. it will accommodate the pace at which we are able to operate, whilst avoiding the pace of ‘the slowest common denominator’.

## 6. “Love Thy Neighbour... Tomorrow as well as Today”.

These have been our watchwords. They beg the question ‘who is my neighbour, at either time?’. When we read the parable, we see there are six characters: the traveller victim, the robbers, the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan and the innkeeper. Instinctively, we relate to each in varying ways:

- a. In helping with this committee, we hope we are acting like the Samaritan
- b. In making changes to our home and lifestyle, we hope we are acting like the innkeeper
- c. If apathy or fear of upsetting people causes us to bite our tongues, are we behaving like the priest or the Levite?
- d. When our collective lives are visibly impacted by heatwaves and exceptional storms, are we not all suffering like the victim on his journey?
- e. And when, as charity trustee or as homeowner, we pay for fossil fuels, do we feel the guilt of realising we’re playing the role of the robbers... especially when we learn that our Environmental Footprint Analyser puts us 40% worse than the SEC average?

Is our thinking misguided? Is it inappropriate to feel that guilt? If so, how should we amend our thinking? Should we refrain from sharing that conclusion and risk the guilt of ‘passing by on the other side’? Is there a risk that more of us will increasingly have these fears?

Surely, we can ALL help each other address such concerns, through sharing greater understanding and using that to plan an orderly, democratically agreed journey to 2030 and beyond?

## 7. Opportunities for agreeing our way forward:

If you have half an hour, PLEASE watch the presentation at this past year’s Synod by PEG member Robert Woodford (SEC’s Provincial Environmental Group); it is at the bottom of our Diocesan Environmental

Group's webpage: <https://edinburgh.anglican.org/environment/> . Our Eco Committee have found it so succinct and useful that some have watched parts more than once. It has helped us enormously in our understanding of the challenges and of how we are one part of a concerted effort across many churches.

We commend it to you, along with the many other resources on that DEG page and also on the Province's website.

[The Provincial Environment Group \(PEG\) - The Scottish Episcopal Church \(anglican.org\)](#)

Thank you for reading this paper and following the links to more information at Diocesan & Provincial levels. We welcome all thoughts, suggestions, counterproposals and constructive criticism and guidance. We will all benefit from a cooperative discussion.

Your Eco-Committee

April 2023