

# Diocese of Lichfield

## Net Zero Carbon Program Update

*Report to Diocesan Synod*

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### 1. Executive Summary

The appointment of a Net Zero Carbon Manager alongside a dedicated Environmental Officer in 2025 has brought much needed stability and coordination to the program. This report summarises progress and highlights areas requiring further attention.

The central focus remains on how we power our buildings, while recognising overlaps with wider environmental initiatives such as Eco Church, rewilding, and Creation Care. Behaviour change: particularly small, local improvements, continues to be one of the most effective early actions.

Eco Church participation continues to grow beyond national averages. The immediate priority is encouraging already registered churches to progress to award level. This is to become an even higher priority as Eco Church registration will be required for access to the Quick Wins grant as of April 26.

On the other hand, completion rates for the Energy Footprint Tool (EFT) remain a major challenge. Only 41% of eligible churches submitted in 2025 - the lowest in three years. This was also despite some significant one-to-one support for many of those. With EFT completion now linked to eligibility for grant funding, improvement is essential.

Clergy housing assessments have progressed, with EPCs being rolled out across the diocese. Early findings have shown a conflict between carbon reduction and EPC scoring. Low carbon systems such as heat pumps reduce emissions but may fail to improve EPC ratings due to energy price assumptions, potentially impacting resale values. This requires further national and diocesan attention.

In the schools' sector, Heat Decarbonisation Plans have been completed for over 20 schools, with funding secured for the first major decarbonisation project. Further bids for solar and heating upgrades to other schools are in progress.

## 2. Progress Against Key Net Zero Carbon Milestones

Milestone	Target	Status	Summary
40% Eco Church registration	2026	<b>Complete</b>	207 registrations (~40% of eligible churches), far exceeding national rate.
30% Eco Church awards	2026	<b>In progress</b>	75 awarded so far (~15% of eligible churches). Continued encouragement needed.
EFT return rate 90%	2023	<b>Incomplete</b>	Highest return (2023) was 64%; 2025 fell to 41%.
All churches using green tariffs at renewal	2024	<b>Incomplete</b>	Low EFT returns limit visibility. Renewed push needed.
LED/efficient lighting in all churches	2025	<b>In progress</b>	Many may have already upgraded, but full data is still needed via revised EFT.
Top 20% energy users to create NZ action plans	2027	<b>Not complete</b>	Audits completed on top 20 highest emitters; plans to follow with top 100 once more complete EFT data available to identify them. Top 100 would almost = top 20%.

## 3. Key Achievements Since Last Synod

- ❖ Funding renewed for the Net Zero program to continue during the next triennium with Net Zero Manager and Environmental Officer set to remain in post.
- ❖ Funding has also been extended for the net zero quick wins grant, which has been used to help churches apply double glazed windows, LED lighting and other efficiency measures.
- ❖ Our top 20 highest emission churches have been provided with energy audits to give insight into how we can best reduce energy footprints within built environments such as these.
- ❖ St Mary's House is now a silver Eco-Church office, and the cathedral is also rated silver. The diocese has now reached bronze status within the Eco-Church program, with 2 gold awards, 21 silver awards and 52 bronze awards. Registration to the Eco-Church program has now reached 40% among churches in the diocese.
- ❖ A significant number of clergy homes are currently being assessed to ensure each has an EPC rating. This is due to be completed in the coming year.
- ❖ The diocese has now launched an environmental bulletin to aid in the communication of upcoming grant opportunities and to raise awareness of both successes and concerns related to the 5<sup>th</sup> mark of mission.
- ❖ The diocese has updated its previous environmental policy to give a more appropriate and modern perspective based on what the programs are trying to achieve.

- ❖ Talks on Eco-Church, Net Zero and the environment have been given at 18 different deanery synods in the last year to raise awareness of our ambitions and the opportunities to get involved.
- ❖ Heat Decarbonisation Plans (HDPs) have been completed on 25 VA schools since 2022, along with 3 Three Spires Trust schools. A further 9 have now been completed using funding from Salix.
- ❖ There has been a successful bid to decarbonize one school in Walsall, while applications are also in to have another school decarbonized. A bid has now also been put in for solar PV to be installed on yet another. We are awaiting the result of these proposals.

## 4. Challenges and Risks

### EFT Completion

The most immediate barrier is poor data. Without reliable EFT returns; targeted support, identifying high energy buildings, and allocating grants remain difficult. Linking EFT completion to grant eligibility should help improve return rates. Submission of EFT and registration to Eco Church will be essential for churches to access necessary funds for decarbonisation with minimal hassle.

### Funding Gaps

Some parishes cannot contribute match funding for new heating systems, occasionally resulting in temporary or stop gap solutions. Additional diocesan or national support may be required for less affluent churches.

### Clergy Housing and EPC Issues

Early findings show that:

- ❖ Heat pumps and electric systems reduce carbon
- ❖ Changes like this do not always improve EPC ratings due to electricity costs
- ❖ This electricity cost has the potential to lower property values despite lower emissions and more efficient practice.

This tension must be addressed strategically and nationally.

## 5. Financial Developments & Grants

- ❖ Quick Wins Grant extended, enabling further small-scale church improvements.
- ❖ Application submitted for new funding to improve clergy housing energy efficiency.
- ❖ Funding secured to fully decarbonise a Walsall school, additional solar PV and decarbonization funding bids underway for separate schools.

- ❖ Capacity Building Grant renewed until 2029, securing environmental staffing.
- ❖ Applications in progress for professional support to help churches plan Net Zero pathways.
- ❖ Further large-scale grant schemes are expected soon.

## 6. People and Engagement

- ❖ This year, talks have been delivered to 18 deanery synods across the diocese on the Eco Church and Net Zero programs. These talks are expected to continue during the next year and we encourage deaneries to get in touch and request a talk at future synods.
- ❖ Papers such as this one will be produced yearly in order to update synod on progress within the environmental initiatives.
- ❖ The environment team have also designed a new bulletin section which is released every 2 months known as the environmental bulletin. This may change in name but is designed to provide updates on the latest events and support available to encourage celebration and involvement with the natural world.

## 7. Priorities for the Next Reporting Period

- ❖ Increase EFT return rate.
- ❖ Increase take up of grants for sustainability within our church buildings.
- ❖ Promote efficient lighting and heating controls.
- ❖ Encourage churches to look for green tariffs at the point of renewal.
- ❖ Increase school involvement in sustainability and decarbonisation through the promotion of free software such as Let's Go Zero or other low-cost energy monitoring.
- ❖ Determine the best carbon saving methods for clergy homes after completing EPC ratings.
- ❖ Clarify land use strategy for glebe land.

## 8. Recommendations to Synod

- ❖ Encourage parishes to complete the EFT annually; consider smart meters where appropriate.
- ❖ Highlight the importance of green tariffs and efficient lighting as immediate actions.
- ❖ Encourage parishes to seek support when facing challenges in energy transition.
- ❖ Promote subscription to the Environmental Bulletin.

## Appendix – Statistics for Housing

To enable comparison between new heating systems in a sample clergy home, alternative EPCs were calculated for the following options:

Heating System	Carbon Emissions	EPC Rating	Notes
Electric boiler + electric water heater	1.8 TCO <sub>2</sub> e	D (65)	Low carbon but more expensive to run.
Oil condensing boiler	5.7 TCO <sub>2</sub> e	B (91)	Cheapest to install/run but highest emissions.
Heat pump + cylinder	0.8 TCO <sub>2</sub> e	B (86)	Lowest emissions; EPC score still limited by electricity prices.

### Summary:

Environmentally, heat pumps perform best — but EPC scoring still favours cheaper-to-run fossil fuel systems. This tension must be addressed to align Net Zero goals with housing regulation and asset management.