



St John's Church, Waterloo is spearheading the drive towards carbon-neutrality

ALAMY

Church of England seeks to go carbon-neutral in a decade

NEW

Emma Yeomans

Wednesday February 12 2020, 5.00pm, The Times

Share



Save



Draughty churches will face their judgement day as the Church of England seeks to go carbon-neutral in a decade.

The Anglican church at its annual [General Synod](#) today pledged to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2030 — 15 years earlier than initially planned.

Measures could see warming pew cushions replace heating in some of the church's 40,000 buildings. Other ideas include discouraging senior staff and bishops from taking flights, replacing more lights with LEDs and planting orchards in churchyards.

The resolution places the church 20 years ahead of official UK climate targets. The Most Rev [Justin Welby](#), the Archbishop of Canterbury, said climate change was the greatest challenge faced by current and future generations.

“It’s our sacred duty to protect the natural world we’ve so generously been given, as well as our neighbours around the world who will be first and worst affected,” he said. “Without swift decisive action the consequences of climate change will be devastating.”

Earlier in the week, the church said it was considering planting new orchards on its urban churchyards to help capture carbon from the atmosphere. Several churches in Scotland have grown apple trees in their green spaces and the fruit will be distributed to local people once they are established.

The Church of England launched its own “energy rating tool” last month to help parishes calculate the carbon footprint of their buildings.

The Rev Nicholas Holtam, Bishop of Salisbury, who leads the church’s environmental response, brought the motion to the Synod but proposed a deadline of 2045. Martin Gainsborough, a chaplain and canon from Bristol, the Synod instead voted to bring the deadline forward by 15 years.

Bishop Holtam, who did not support the new 2030 target, said “greening” the church would be a challenge — especially given its large estate of historical buildings.

“Churches are not museums; they are living buildings which serve their communities every day of the week and being greener isn’t about doing less, it’s about equipping parishes to get smarter about energy consumption”, he said.

Each diocese and cathedral will be instructed to decrease its carbon emissions year on year and progress will be reviewed

centrally.

But some clergy raised concerns that they may be forced to scrap boilers and other furnishings before the end of their useful life in order to comply with the target.

Prudence Dailey, chairman of the Prayer Book Society, told the Synod that its target was “like taking water out of the oceans with a pipette”.

“The only realistic way to fix this problem is through scientific innovation that lowers the price of clean energy,” she said.

“I’m confident that scientific ingenuity will enable that to happen and I think we should all be encouraging that to happen but please don’t think that aiming for zero emissions in our churches is going to make any difference at all, because it won’t.”

Case Study

The Grade II* listed St John’s, Waterloo in London – first built in the 1820s – is spearheading the drive towards carbon-neutrality (Jonathan Morrison writes).

Having been largely destroyed by German bombing during the Second World War, it was originally reconstructed in time to become the Festival of Britain Church in 1951. Now it is about to undergo a further £4.5 million restoration to mark the 70th anniversary of the national exhibition, under the auspices of architect Eric Parry and will be fitted with a range of eco-friendly technologies.

Photovoltaic panels on the roof will power an air-source heating system that absorbs warmth from the outside and pumps it into the crypt, whilst any excess clean energy generated can be sold to the National Grid. New ceiling insulation, air-tight windows, repairs to the fabric of the church and a remodelled street entrance, meanwhile, will all help prevent heat escaping.





The nave will be transformed into a performance space for concerts and events

For now the nave, which will be transformed into a top-class performance space for concerts and events, will continue to use gas heating, but it has been prepared for a future upgrade to air-source heat pumps. In any case, all emissions will be offset through tree planting and other measures.

“We’ve been working on this for ten years and it shows what’s possible,” the Rev Canon Giles Goddard, vicar of St John’s, Waterloo, said. “We were determined right from the start that this project should set an example and be an investment in the future.

“It’s a Grade II* listed building so we can’t be completely experimental, but we’ve settled on a good mix of the old and the new, from preventing draughts to using the latest photovoltaic panels. We’re confident St John’s will meet the 2030 target but whether the whole Church of England will remain to be seen. It’s a huge challenge.”

Related articles

Welby says Church of England is ‘institutionally racist’

The Church of England is “deeply, institutionally” racist, the Archbishop of Canterbury said yesterday, as the church seeks...

February 12 2020, 6.30am

Emma Yeomans

Church withdraws from militant stance on civil partnerships

The Church of England has quietly conceded that it is “natural justice” for heterosexual couples to be allowed to convert a...

February 09 2020, 12.01am

Nicholas Hellen, Social Affairs Editor