

## Parish Council Meeting 23<sup>rd</sup> May – Eco Church and the Eco Group

### Where did it all start?

Many of you will be familiar with the following words from Genesis "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" .....first came light, then water, sky and earth followed by plants, fish, animals and finally man....."God saw all that he had made and it was very good"

### What has happened since

No matter what your beliefs we are custodians of the world we live in and lately we don't seem to have been doing a very good job of it. As Archbishop Justin Welby said: "Reducing the causes of climate change is essential to the life of faith. It is a way to love our neighbour and to steward the gift of creation." And as David Attenborough once said: "It's surely our responsibility to do everything within our power to create a planet that provides a home not just for us, but for all life on Earth."

The Church of England believes that responding to the climate crisis is an essential part of its responsibility to safeguard God's creation and achieve a just world. Climate change hits hardest the poorest countries and poorest people of the world. We have all read the news reports and seen the awful pictures of flooding, fire and famine. Meanwhile, the widespread destruction of the natural world is a crisis for creation. The Church's environment programme exists to enable the whole Church to address this – in faith, practice and mission.

### The Church's Response

In Feb 2020 General Synod called for action by all parts of the Church of England to reach Net Zero Carbon. As part of a wider environmental programme, Eco-Church is a framework for action that has been developed to help combat climate change and demonstrate that the gospel is good news for God's Earth.

Eco Church is an A Rocha UK project which began in 2016 offering an environmental award scheme for churches in England and Wales. A Rocha is a global family of conservation organisations working together to live out God's calling to care for creation and equip others to do likewise.

At the heart of Eco Church is a unique online survey about how churches are caring for God's earth in different areas of their life and work. The survey covers all areas of church life:

- Worship and teaching
- Management of church buildings
- Management of church land
- Community and global engagement
- Lifestyle

Each section is made up of a series of questions about how much caring for the Environment is embedded in church thinking and teaching and what practical steps have been taken to reach certain goals.

There are 3 levels of award, Bronze, Silver and Gold. In the UK, the vision through Eco Church is to create a vast network of churches across England and Wales as local centers of creation care in the community – shining beacons of hope for a brighter environmental future. The scheme is now run in partnership with Christian Aid, The Church of England, The Methodist Church, Tearfund, The United Reformed Church and All Churches Trust Limited.

## Mickleham's Response

To help the parish of Mickleham achieve some of these objectives the Eco Group was set up in 2022 with a few simple aims as directed by the Priest and PCC, to whom they report:

- To raise awareness of environmental issues and promote creation care, Climate Sunday, and other relevant initiatives within the church.
- To work with the Priest to explore joint projects and sharing of expertise with other local groups.
- To register as an Eco Church and use the extensive online survey to evaluate the main areas of church life, to include the churchyard, building and social activities and recognise those which are helping the environment and those where development or improvement is needed and devise a plan of action to achieve change.
- To report progress back to PCC regularly and to liaise with other subgroups of PCC where necessary to effect change

The church is fortunate to be able to call on the considerable skills, experience and enthusiasm of the people who make up this group:

- David Kennington (chair) 35 year's experience with the National Trust as an Estate Manager, specialising in countryside. He has good practical knowledge of how our local countryside functions. As part of his role as an estate manager he ran an extensive team looking after 16,000 acres of open countryside plus farms, houses, cottages etc and several million visitors per annum.
- Mark Day ran his own environmental firm in London, specialising in advising clients about maximising environmental gains in their work and business.
- Eric Flint was a Parks and Countryside Manager for a London Borough and has extensive practical knowledge. He is very supportive of measures to improve wildlife and habitats and has been responsible, over a number of years, for managing the maintenance of the churchyard
- Tom Garwood is a local enthusiast who read about the eco group and was keen to help
- Lydia Staines is a local enthusiast who read about the eco group and was keen to help

The group have registered St Michael and All Angels as an Eco Church with the A Rocha Award Scheme with the initial aim of working towards gaining the Eco Bronze Award.

Caring for the Land is where we have been able to start making gains this winter - planting a hedgerow for wildlife (see picture 1), using our compost on-site (see picture 2), planting an orchard for fruit and wildlife (see picture 3) and devising a plan for grassland management. Leaving the new graveyard to grow on for the whole growing season, allowing plants to flower and set seed and creating a meadow where small mammals and insects can live will all help in the natural chain of life - not to mention a saving on endless mowing and use of oil-based fuels to do so (see picture 4). There is an agreed mowing regime which has been agreed by the PCC and information boards will soon be placed at strategic points around the churchyard to explain what is happening and why. The new hedge round the Garden of Remembrance will be bee and insect friendly. We will be working towards a no herbicide policy from this year.

Buildings is another area where considerable practical gains can be made in the future once we have a plan of action. The Churchwardens have completed the section on Buildings, aimed at reviewing how effective

our energy usage is within the confines of a Grade II\* listed building. A request to cover the cost of a professional Energy Audit has been put before the PCC and it is hoped that this will help considerably in planning to make improvements. This plan may have to be quite long-term in its aims. Using energy firms with good green credentials, securing carbon-free (or offset) electricity and gas will be a vital goal. There will be other pointers that will come from the Energy Audit.

Worship and Teaching will be aimed at including Caring for God's Earth as a fundamental part of church ethos and style of evangelism. This links in with Lifestyle and taking practical measures like obtaining materials such as tea and coffee from sustainable sources – (Fairtrade etc) and doing away with plastic "Oasis" materials in the arrangement of church flowers and using chicken wire instead, and indeed sourcing those flowers as far as possible from local nurseries and growers.

Community and Global Engagement asks people to think about how the community can come together for eco gains - for example our Eco and Church Volunteer work groups have brought people together for a common environmental aim. The Church also has a PCC group already set up for Community Engagement and the survey asks a number of questions as to how this group can aid our care and concern for the environment - there are lots of questions leading towards practical steps that can be encouraged.

The most important element of this whole initiative is to initiate change and take action to improve our environmental footprint and to care for our natural world.



Picture 1 - part of the new hedgerow



Picture 2 – compost bins



Picture 3 – orchard trees



Picture 4 – longer grass with graves of particular historic interest marked out