

Salisbury Cathedral is the first Cathedral to achieve an Eco-Church Gold Award

Yesterday (Wednesday 16 June) Salisbury Cathedral is the first cathedral in the UK to achieve a Gold Eco-Church Award, becoming a beacon of good environmental practice for churches addressing the climate crisis.

The award, given by the Christian nature conservation charity, A Rocha UK was received by Canon Robert Tittley, Salisbury Cathedral's Canon Chancellor, on behalf of the Cathedral's Dean and Chapter on Wednesday 16 June 2021, in the presence of The Bishop of Salisbury, The Right Reverend Nicholas Holtham, the Church of England's lead bishop on the environment. Bishop Nicholas is due to retire next month after ten years of service in a largely rural diocese that knows at first hand the effects of climate change. A Rocha UK aims to equip churches and individuals to create a movement to help restore biodiversity at a local level in this critical year for climate ahead of COP26 climate negotiations in November.

To get to achieve the Gold Award, the cathedral team have installed solar panels on the cathedral cloisters, carried out an Eco Survey to care for nature by improving personal lifestyles, created a nesting site for endangered Peregrine Falcons at the base of the spires and committed to be carbon neutral by 2030. They have carried out ecology mapping of the Cathedral Close which is a haven for birds and wildlife where they have discovered a patch of *rare* Fiddle Dock which may date back to the presence of cattle in the Close in the 19th century.

Now in its sixth year, the 'Eco Church' award scheme brings together a national community of churches addressing the environmental crisis, using a common framework, an online toolkit, learning and speaking up together. There are now 3,500 Eco Churches in England and Wales - more than 5% of churches - which are already part of the Eco Church community. A Rocha UK is aiming, by 2025, to engage at least 15% of churches in on-going action to protect nature and address climate change through the free scheme.

Helen Stephens, Head of the Eco Church initiative, presented Bishop Nicholas with a plaque to mark their Gold Award achievement. She explains, "*With five months to go until COP26, this is*

an exciting milestone to be reached by one of the most important cathedrals in the UK. Without the team at Salisbury Cathedral's determination and dedication during the last three challenging years this wouldn't have been possible. Securing a Gold Award shows that even large cathedrals can help restore the environment and also how caring for the environment can enhance cathedral life in so many ways. Everything from how the Cathedral worships and the food it serves, to the energy it uses, the wildlife that lives in and around the Close, and even the water that flushes from the loos has been taken into consideration to put conservation at the heart of the cathedral's community."

The team at Salisbury Cathedral took up the challenge on the 800 year old, Grade 1 listed building. Winning the award has allowed the team to continue to be committed to assessing innovation, new technology, and careful design to add to the beauty of the Cathedral and its grounds. One remarkable discovery was that the *embedded carbon* in its 60,000 tonnes is low because of the labour-intensive construction methods used by its 13th- and 14th-century builders, who were also imaginative *recyclers*. For example, the masons often filled the gaps between stones with oyster shells, the fast-food packaging of their day.

The Bishop of Salisbury, Right Reverend Nicholas Holtam said, *'I am thrilled that the Cathedral has got this Gold Eco Church award particularly because it comes just before I leave and because I hope it will be an encouragement to other churches, cathedrals and dioceses. It is really clear as we prepare for the climate talks at COP26 in Glasgow later this year, that the environment needs to play a central part in all of our lives and that it matters hugely from a faith perspective.'*

The Cathedral's Canon Treasurer, Robert Titley, said,

"The Eco Church Award scheme channels concern for our planet into positive action rooted in joy at God's creation. Going for Gold has mobilised the Cathedral's worshippers, volunteers, staff and local residents, and it has drawn in the energies of many partners, like Salisbury Cathedral School, our Friends organisation, and the Harnham Water Meadow Trust, They all have a stake in the award."

The cathedral encourages native wildlife on their land through provision of bird boxes, bat boxes, a bug hotel and hedgehog boxes. There is a pond and wetland areas and plants are grown favoured by birds, bees and butterflies. A family of endangered Peregrine Falcons have nested again this year at the base of the spire. The chicks have recently flown the nest and

people from 88 different countries watch the birds through livestream. The endangered Peregrine Falcon is considered the world's fastest bird of prey. Since the Peregrine Falcons have returned to the spires of the cathedral, the team, in partnership with RSPB, have taken detailed notes, photographs, video footage and sound-recordings to learn more about the ecology, biology and behaviour of the species. The team's next steps are to help develop a conservation action plan to identify the most effective way to preserve this flagship species of bird of prey.

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Notes to Editors:

1)The Bishop of Salisbury, Right Reverend Nicholas Holtam - Nationally, since 2014 Bishop Nicholas has been the Church of England's lead bishop on the environment and chairs the Environmental Working Group. He has contributed to the Anglican Communion's Environmental Network and the European Churches Environmental Network.

Salisbury cathedral is a major attraction, welcoming over 300,000 visitors a year - or it was, at least until Novichok and pandemic.

2) A Rocha UK is a Christian charity undertaking practical nature conservation and education with local communities and equipping others to care for the environment. Their main mission is to mobilise UK Christians and Churches to care for the environment.

www.arocha.org.uk

A Rocha is part of a worldwide family of A Rocha organisations and we work collaboratively with others who share the passion for the planet and our desire for its flourishing. The name 'A Rocha', is Portuguese for 'The Rock'. The very first A Rocha project was the establishment of a field study centre on the Alvor estuary in Portugal.

3) Eco Church is a free online award scheme and is an A Rocha UK project. It is an award scheme in England and Wales for churches. At a practical level the Eco Church scheme encourages churches to reduce energy use; protect open space and valuable natural habitats; reduce our churches' contributions to global warming; keep our churches safe and healthy; lessen pressure on the local water supply and reduce run-off into local waterways.

The Eco Church initiative is an ecumenical scheme helping churches to make the link between environmental issues and the Christian faith, and to respond in practical action in the church, in people's lives, and in the local and global community. It has awards at three levels, Bronze, Silver and Gold, and considers how the environment is addressed within worship and teaching, buildings and land, community and global engagement and lifestyle.

<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk>