

**25th Gold Eco Church Award Milestone Achieved
by Chelmsford Parish Church**

On the edge of Chelmsford, St John the Evangelist Church in Moulsham has become the 25th Gold Eco Church in England and Wales. The award was given by the Christian conservation charity A Rocha UK, and reflects St John's commitment to walk in step with nature and put creation care at the heart of what they do. It is the first parish church in Essex, the Diocese of Chelmsford to receive a Gold award and is the 17th Church of England Eco Church.

To achieve a gold award, one of the things St John's church has done is develop its churchyard to transform it into a welcoming green space to support wildlife and biodiversity. They encourage native wildlife by providing bird boxes, a bug hotel, and a hedgehog house. Bat boxes have been established in the vicarage garden. Planting has been established to attract birds, bees, and butterflies, and no hedges are cut during the nesting season. The local community uses the churchyard for Wild Worship, learning about creation, as well as coming to the church's eco café, JubiLatte, and events such as our autumn fayre where locally grown produce is sold.

St John's Eco Group chair, Linda Percival, added: "It has been an exciting journey. We are entering into an exciting phase to develop the churchyard and building; to expand the use of St John's as a community hub where all are welcome. We've started the design process for the churchyard which we hope will include a wildflower area, heritage and prayer trail, quiet garden with community mosaic, and welcoming, open space on Moulsham Street with seating."

A Rocha UK aims to equip churches and individuals to create a movement to help restore biodiversity at a local level in this critical decade for the climate. 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. The first Eco Church award was given to Hilfield Friary, Dorchester back in June 2016. There are now nearly 5,000 Eco Churches in England and Wales - nearly 10% 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 ongoing action to protect nature and address climate change through the free scheme.

Helen Stephens, Head of the Eco Church initiative, explained “Our huge congratulations to St John's Moulsham on their well deserved Gold Eco Church award. Everything about their approach sets them out as an exemplar of what it means to be a gold awarded church, from starting simply with smaller actions to working with their whole community including the City Council. It's so encouraging to hear that they have been blessed as a church community through developing a deeper understanding of what it means to love God's creation and for this to become truly integrated into who they are as a church. There is still so much for us all to do, as they recognize but in the meantime, we hope they enjoy celebrating this award and seeing others inspired to join them in taking action to care for this amazing world.”

Priest in Charge of St John's, Revd Gemma Fraser said “I am so proud of our community and our progress together. The Eco Church journey has been transformational for St John's; it's enabled us to reconnect with our vision to love God and His world. When you work in harmony with God, blessings flow, and St John's has grown and flourished, despite the challenges of the last two years. We started so simply with recycling, using eco-friendly materials, and the removal of single-use products. Now creation care permeates every aspect of our life together; regular services with teaching on environmental and ethical issues, care of the building and financial decisions, our children's work, community outreach, management of the churchyard, and plans for the future. An integrated approach has been key to our success”

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani said “My warm congratulations to St John the Evangelist Church, Moulsham, on being the first parish church in Chelmsford Diocese to be awarded the A Rocha UK Gold Eco Church award. It's wonderful to be able to celebrate this significant achievement. Many churches across our diocese are working towards or have achieved Eco Church awards, having taken practical steps towards becoming more environmentally friendly, and this award will be an encouragement for them too. Caring for God's creation is integral to our mission and ministry. As Christians, we believe God has entrusted the earth to humanity and it is our role to steward it with care.”

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For further information, images and to arrange interviews, please contact:

Linda Percival, St John's Eco Group, St John's Moulsham on 07736 060352 or lindapercival7@gmail.com
Tamsin Morris, Press Officer, A Rocha UK on 020 857 45935 ext: 2006 or: tamsin.morris@arocha.org

Notes to Editors:

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

www.arochoa.org.uk

2) Eco Church is a free online award scheme for churches in England and Wales launched by A Rocha UK in 2016. 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 link environmental issues and their Christian faith and respond in practical action in the church, people's lives, and 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.arochoa.org.uk>

3) St John's Church is an inner-city Victorian Church of England parish church on Moulsham Street in the Diocese of Chelmsford. The attached link takes you to the Eco Church part of their website where you can find a video made when they reached their silver award, together with a copy of the report submitted ahead of their gold award assessment. www.achurchnearyou.com/church/6497/page/60594/view/