



**Christ Church
Higher Bebington**
Bringing People Together



PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday 1 November 2022

A beacon of hope: 30th gold Eco Church award

Christ Church, Higher Bebington, in the Wirral, has become the 30th church in England and Wales to achieve a gold Eco Church award. The award was given by A Rocha UK, a Christian conservation charity, and reflects Christ Church's commitment to put creation care at the heart of their activities. It is the first parish church in the Chester Diocese to receive a gold award and they have been congratulated by the Bishop of Norwich - the Church of England's lead bishop on the environment, and the Bishop of Chester. This milestone highlights how Eco Churches benefit biodiversity and reduce their carbon footprint.

To achieve the award, Christ Church developed a woodland walk and a memorial orchard, created two ponds, planted hundreds of trees, and transformed its churchyard into a space where wildlife can thrive. The planting scheme encourages bees, butterflies and birds, there are bird and bat boxes and bug and hedgehog hotels, and the hedges aren't cut when birds might be nesting. The land is used for outdoor services and learning about creation, and events such as Bonfire night, the Queen's jubilee, the scarecrow festival, and a recent autumn fayre selling locally grown produce. There is regular community litter picking and people are encouraged to walk, cycle or car share to attend church.

Christ Church began their eco-journey in 2018 and Eco Church lead, Pam Cheesley-Hollinshead, explains, *'Gold - we've got there! As a church family along with our local community we have grown and learnt so much during our Eco Church pilgrimage. What started as a saunter through bronze developed into a serious trek to silver. The assault on gold was hard work. We had grasped what being an Eco Church really meant at a personal and a*

community level. Schools are on board, the Co-op work in partnership with us, and we collect an enormous amount of tablet strips to recycle at Superdrug. Our next major project is church heating, looking at solar panels and air or ground source heating to replace our gas boiler. We also want to develop an accessible sensory garden for meditation and reflection. Gold is not the destination. It is the springboard for developing how we live, worship and work in this beautiful part of God's creation!

Now in its seventh year, the Eco Church award scheme has created a national community of churches addressing the environmental crisis, using a common framework, and learning and speaking up together. The first Eco Church award went to Hilfield Friary in Dorchester in June 2016. There are now over 5,000 Eco Churches in England and Wales - more than 10% of all of the UK's churches, and more than 2,000 have an award. By 2025, A Rocha UK aims to have engaged at least 25% of the UK's churches in the award scheme¹.

Helen Stephens, A Rocha UK's Church Relations Manager, also congratulated Christ Church, 'We're delighted that Christ Church, Higher Bebington, becomes our 30th gold awarded Eco Church four years on from beginning their eco journey. They are proof that every action matters. It and that change is possible, especially working alongside others in community as Christ Church are doing. On the cusp of COP27 on climate change and COP15 on biodiversity, there is a part for us all to play across every sector of society to transform our relationship with the environment. Eco Church is a way for churches to engage and respond both practically and spiritually, and a gold award, as well as being a fantastic achievement of itself, is also a mark of commitment that a church is in this transformation work for the long term. So our huge congratulations to Christ Church and our eager anticipation as to what they'll do next.

The vicar at Christ Church, Rev. Michael Loach, said, 'Working through the Eco Church award scheme has been an invaluable help on a number of levels. It has given us a framework for environmental activism, enabled us to communicate our efforts in new ways, and helped to attract partners to work with. It has motivated our congregation to explore what is required to achieve the next level and how this reflects our Christian identity. And it has had an extremely positive effect on our mission to the parish. The narrative of care for creation is one that transcends belief systems. People with no connection to the church have formed positive views of us as a church because of our well-publicised eco-journey. A gold award is not an end in itself

¹ In conjunction with Eco Congregation which runs in Scotland and N Ireland

- we are now looking ahead to how we might meet net-zero targets - but I am extremely proud of our eco-team. The award is a fantastic achievement.'

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

Tamsin Morris, Press Officer, A Rocha UK on 020 857 45935 ext: 2006 or tamsin.morris@arocha.org

Notes to Editors:

1) Christ Church, Higher Bebington is a welcoming church with very strong community networks. Their aim is to celebrate and share the Good News of God's love in Jesus Christ through worship, teaching, learning and practical action. www.christchurchbeb.org.uk

2) A Rocha UK is a Christian charity working for the protection and restoration of the natural world and committed to equipping Christians and churches in the UK to care for the environment. www.arocha.org.uk

3) 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. This month, the Eco Church appeal aims to increase the number of churches and denominations leading the way and caring for God's earth in partnership with others. www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk