

Action for Hope – Annual Update

MC/24/38

Date of meeting	13-15 April 2024
Contact name and details	Hamish Leese – Action for Hope Implementation Officer leeseh@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	Note
Resolutions	38/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	The paper summarises the progress made by Action for Hope in moving towards net zero 2030.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress towards the goal of net zero by 2030 has begun in earnest, with much of the groundwork now in place better to understand the journey. • Work is underway within the Connexional Team, as well as bringing together groups throughout the Connexion, partner organisations and ecumenical contacts. • There are a number of challenges to the goal, some of which are outwith our control.
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	<p>Action for Hope Faith Plan - a86495_72141a0e3a2a45eca2e2cd3b0e8eaedc.pdf (faithplans.org)</p> <p>Action for Hope Funding - counc_mc24-6-action-for-hope-funding-jb_jrh_jan_2024.pdf (methodist.org.uk)</p>
Consultations	Action for Hope Working Party Justice-Seeking Church Priority Collaboration Group

Summary of impact

Financial	No direct financial implications of this paper, although financial impacts of net zero are significant.
Wider connexional	The aspirational target of net zero 2030 requires everyone within the Church and thus the impacts of this journey will be felt across the Connexion.
External, including ecumenical	Ongoing co-operation with ecumenical partners and charity groups.
Risk	Challenges to reaching net zero include: government and structural inertia, property adaptation and engaging the whole Church.

- 1 Action for Hope is a connexional priority, which was created following the establishment by the Methodist Conference in 2021 of an aspirational target to become a net zero Church by 2030.
- 2 Following this decision, the Action for Hope Faith Plan was produced, which called for a focus on faith consistent use of assets; wisdom and lifestyle. Within these priority areas, eight specific aims were established, progress against which is outlined in this paper.
- 3 The work of Action for Hope was initially co-ordinated by the Mission Projects Officer, but it was decided that more specific oversight and co-ordination was required. In 2023 the Action for Hope Implementation Officer was recruited who, along with the Connexional Secretary who acts as project sponsor, has assumed responsibility for delivery against these aims. The Action for Hope Implementation Officer role was made possible by a grant from the Benefact Trust, which entirely finances the post.
- 4 Despite the creation of a co-ordinating role, it is clear that this priority needs to be delivered across the Connexional Team and beyond, and an Action for Hope Working Group was established in the latter part of 2023. This group seeks to ensure that the goals of Action for Hope are embedded in all strands of the Church's work.
- 5 Further ensuring that work in the connexional priorities areas is mutually reinforcing, close co-operation with other areas including Justice-Seeking Church and Justice, Dignity and Solidarity has allowed positive steps in moving the work forward together.

Aims

- 6 **Aim one: All travel directly funded by MCB to have net zero emissions by 2030. This will involve reducing travel, choosing forms of travel that have lower associated carbon emissions, and carbon offsetting travel.**
- 7 In the first quarter of this connexional year (ie September – November 2023), travel funded by the Connexional Central Services Budget was responsible for approximately 64 tonnes CO₂e¹. This is the first period for which it has been possible to measure emissions from travel so it is not yet possible to analyse reductions, but these will form the basis of future analysis. During the period, approximately 75% of emissions were created by Connexional Team travel and 25% through volunteer travel. The total and sources of emissions will be monitored to ensure appropriate mechanisms for reduction are planned.
- 8 In order to encourage initial reductions in this area the travel policy which covers Connexional Team travel and volunteer expenses has been updated to require a specific reason to be given for car travel which, for Connexional Team members, requires the agreement of their line manager. The travel booking system has also changed, with the new supplier being committed to net zero by 2030 and making it easier for the traveller to see the carbon impact of their journeys.
- 9 Within the Action for Hope grants package approved at the January 2024 Methodist Council meeting, in order to be eligible for funding a district must implement a plan to record the carbon emissions created by travel funded at the district level. Further consideration is currently being given as to the best way to capture this detail at circuit and church level.
- 10 **Aim two: All electricity and gas directly funded by MCB to have net zero emissions by 2030. This will involve reducing electricity and gas consumption, choosing electricity from renewable sources (eg wind, solar, tidal, etc), choosing 'green gas' (biomethane), and carbon-offsetting gas and electricity used.**

¹ This estimate is based on complete data for the beginning of the period and pro rata calculations for the end of the period as development of data gathering systems continues.

- 11 Throughout the refurbishment process, the building at 25 Tavistock Place has been assessed against BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) criteria, an established and respected sustainability rating method used within the building industry. Upon moving to the new building the carbon emissions from the energy used there will be net zero.
- 12 Work has begun in an effort to understand the carbon emissions of churches, circuits and districts in order that progress against this aim can be measured. Without access to direct data relating to the use and source of energy in all buildings throughout the Connexion, aggregate figures will be estimated by triangulating data from multiple sources. Questions have been included in the latest round of the annual returns, co-operation with Climate Stewards will allow access to anonymised data entered into 360Carbon.org, and some districts are able and willing to supply data from energy audits.
- 13 While initially begun as a measure to help churches encountering difficulties from high energy prices due to the cost of living crisis, a group energy buying scheme has also provided the opportunity to encourage churches to choose renewable energy. To the end of February 2024, 37 contracts have been created through the system, with over 50% switching to green energy and a further 20% like-for-like replacements for existing green tariffs.
- 14 **Aim three: The three largest connexional events (the Methodist Conference, the Superintendents Conferences, and the Methodist Children and Youth Assembly) to have net zero carbon emissions by 2030.**
- 15 This aim is a multifaceted process, requiring co-operation within the Connexional Team, the broader Connexion, and external suppliers and venues. Initial work has consisted of consolidating guidance within the planning process and seeking to establish baseline data for the carbon emissions of the events.
- 16 Working with the planning teams for these events will allow the identification of areas of high carbon emission, those areas where progress will be relatively rapid and more challenging areas, and allow appropriate targeting of effort and guidance. Reduction of emissions will be an iterative approach moving towards net zero 2030, and future years will offer more data to improve subsequent events.
- 17 **Aim four: Increase the positive environmental impact of MCB's investments.**
- 18 With the Central Finance Board (CFB)'s divestment from fossil fuels in 2021, following guidance from the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI), the Methodist Church has already taken positive steps in this regard. It is perhaps important to note, however, that this aim calls for positive impact and not simply a reduction of negative impact. Alongside direct investment in fossil fuels, it is also important to consider the heavy investment by banks in fossil fuels as we consider our ethical investment position.
- 19 This is a complex and legislatively dense area, and thus conversations are taking place with experts within the church, primarily CFB and JACEI, and this will be a long-term aim as we move towards 2030.
- 20 Alongside central investments, we are seeking to work with church, circuit and district treasurers to ensure that we are sharing good practice and information to be used within their roles. Organisations such as Just Money Movement are dedicated to analysing and sharing information of this nature, and we are working alongside partner organisations to ensure that information is timely, up-to-date and helpful.
- 21 **Aim five: The Methodist Council to appoint a Resource Group to review and update Hope in God's Future.**
- 22 The Methodist Council approved the nominations for the Hope in God's Future Review Group in January 2024. Each member of this group has extensive expertise in eco theology and its

application, and thus the group has been delegated the responsibility to assess the degree of updating required and therefore the timeline. The group will liaise with the Faith and Order Committee throughout its work, and hold discussions with ecumenical partners who were involved in the writing process for Hope in God's Future.

- 23 Hope in God's Future holds the status of a Statement of Conference, and so consent from the Conference will be required before an updated document is issued.
- 24 **Aim six: To have 50% of all Methodist churches registered with EcoChurch or EcoCongregation by 2026. To have 50% of the Methodist churches registered with EcoChurch or EcoCongregation having achieved a Bronze award by 2026. To have 20% of the Methodist churches registered with EcoChurch or EcoCongregation having achieved a silver award by 2026.**
- 25 There are currently 914 Methodist churches registered with EcoChurch²³, as well as some Scottish congregations registered with Eco Congregation Scotland⁴, which represents approximately 25% of all churches within the Methodist Church in Britain. This figure has increased from 523 in January 2022.
- 26 Of those churches registered, approximately 50% have reached at least a bronze award, and approximately 14% have reached at least a silver award. It should also be noted that eight churches have received a gold award, and these churches should be commended. These figures mark a pronounced increase over the years since the faith plan was adopted, but much work remains to be done to reach the figures set out in the aim.
- 27 While not examined in the faith plan, ten districts are now registered as Eco Districts (of the 28 eligible to register with Eco Church, Eco Congregation Scotland does not offer an equivalent award), with three receiving Eco District Bronze Awards.
- 28 Criteria for receiving grant money from the funding package approved by the Council in January 2024 included registering as an Eco District (where possible) and as an Eco Church or Eco Congregation, and it is anticipated that this will contribute to a continuing rise in registrations.
- 29 **Aim seven: For Methodist members/adherents to reduce their carbon footprints to one ton per year, particularly via the three key areas of energy, travel and diet (the biggest contributors to personal emissions).**
- 30 Once work on this aim began, it became clear that the assumptions which underpinned the initial goal were inaccurate, and that a footprint of one ton per year represented a significantly greater reduction than anticipated when the faith plan was produced.
- 31 The average figure quoted in the original report, 4.85 tons per year, accounted only for the emissions created within the UK and not those relating to goods or services outside the UK or the carbon required to bring them into the UK. The UN National Inventory report puts the current UK average at 9.4tCO₂e.
- 32 There remains a commitment to reduce the carbon footprints of Methodist members/adherents, but it is important that this is understood and measured in the correct context. This work is ongoing.
- 33 **Aim eight: To empower and equip advocates**
- 34 While it is difficult to quantify progress against this aim, positive indicators can be identified. Work is currently underway to identify those in existing roles with eco or carbon reduction elements in order better to resource them, and conversations have taken place with groups which might not have previously considered themselves advocates for this work.

² Figures from Eco Church correct 13/03/24

³ Eco Church covers all churches with MCB except those in Scotland.

⁴ We are waiting to hear up to date figures from Eco Congregation Scotland.

- 35 While key groups have been identified with which to work, such as District Property Secretaries, local preachers and ministers, all employees, volunteers, members and adherents can become advocates for our net zero and eco work, and consideration is being given to how we can empower and equip advocates all across the Connexion. More detail of this work can be found below.

Areas of Work

- 36 While there are many practical considerations within the journey towards net zero, it is critical that this remains anchored within God's mission and our discipleship as Methodists. Particularly within the early stages of this undertaking, it is critical that we reach the hearts and minds of all those within the Church, and not simply approach this from a technical perspective.

37 Communication

- 38 We are not starting from scratch in this effort, and many churches, circuits and districts have been passionate and engaged with environmental issues for a number of years. It is important that we learn from parts of the Connexion with experience and expertise in this area rather than attempting to create from new something that already exists.

- 39 Consultation with those in eco roles in districts is currently underway to ensure mutual learning and identify opportunities for co-operation and resource sharing. This effort will increase as more eco focussed individuals in districts are identified, and mechanisms are being sought to facilitate this learning.

- 40 In addition to sharing knowledge and experience, the progress made in local contexts can provide inspiration and examples to those at an earlier stage on the journey. The goal of net zero, and the issues of climate change and biodiversity loss which sit behind it, can appear insurmountable and intractable, and examples from similar communities, congregations and buildings can offer a valuable starting point and driver on the journey. Sharing of good news and inspiring stories has begun through channels within the remit of the Connexional Team, and this is intended to increase in the coming years.

- 41 While sharing stories through the Connexional Team is a helpful mechanism for inspiration and knowledge sharing, it is important that the Connexional Team do not become *de facto* gatekeepers of information, and models for building networks facilitating direct communication are being explored.

42 Prayer and Worship Resources

- 43 Critical to empowering and equipping advocates within the context of the Methodist Church is ensuring a solid theological underpinning to the work we are doing, and connecting these issues with faith for every Methodist. While many theological resources focussing on environmental matters exist, they are often disparate and presented in forms that are not easy for local preachers to access and evaluate.

- 44 Working with *Singing the Faith Plus* (which is already well used by local preachers and worship leaders), we are seeking to draw together quality resources that allow churches and groups to engage more easily with this material.

- 45 Current work focuses on identifying the quality material that already exists, whether produced within the Church or by partners, and making it easily accessible for interested parties. Once that work has progressed, thought will be turned towards identifying gaps in the offering and potentially creating resources to fill those gaps. As lines of communication and networks improve, resources created and used within circuits and districts will be shared, further demonstrating the connexional nature of this journey.

- 46 Discussion is also ongoing with those responsible for taking forward the development work associated with the Methodist Way of Life. While the 'Flourish' station within this framework perhaps

provides the most obvious link, it is important to connect our concern with the environment and God's creation with every part of the Methodist Way of Life.

47 Knowledge and Skills Development

48 Having noted the importance of the theological foundations to this work, it is also clear that there are a number of practical and logistical considerations which require knowledge and expertise to navigate. Another critical component of equipping and empowering advocates is ensuring that they have the agency to make changes in their particular context.

49 Working with the learning network, a series of webinars, workshops and training opportunities is being developed across a number of knowledge areas including: Eco Church/Eco Congregation; building adaptation; mission planning and carbon literacy. These are initially aimed at those in relevant paid or volunteer roles, but will be extended beyond this where possible in the future.

50 Alongside these training opportunities, written guidance is also being produced for digital distribution, primarily through the MCB website. Guidance produced at this point include: Getting your church building to net zero⁵; net zero carbon pathway⁶; net zero mission planning⁷ and becoming an Eco Church⁸. In areas where specialist guidance has been created by partner organisations we are signposting to external documents.

51 As part of encouraging knowledge and skills development throughout the Connexion, a process has begun to equip all those within the Connexional Team with the ability to engage on matters relating to net zero and climate change. A programme of Carbon Literacy Training⁹ is underway within the Connexional Team to ensure that the journey towards net zero is owned in all parts of the Team and that whoever within the Team someone contacts will be able to offer information and support relating to how their work impacts on the goal of net zero by 2030. This is crucial if we are to ensure that this becomes integral to the life of the Church and not simply a project undertaken by a few.

52 Other Connexional Priorities

53 With the development of the Justice-Seeking Church (JSC) strategy within this connexional year, there has been a renewed focus on climate justice, with this forming one of the priorities of the JSC strategy. Close co-operation between those focused on Action for Hope and the Climate Justice Priority Collaboration Group of JSC has ensured that work is mutually reinforcing rather than duplicating effort. The conversation with JSC has opened new networks and relationships and affords both Connexional priorities greater opportunities for impact.

54 It is now widely acknowledged that climate change and other environmental crises have a disproportionate impact on those who have done least to cause them and who have the least resource to ameliorate the consequences. This is true throughout the world, and remains true within the UK. Work alongside the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity specialists throughout the Connexion is helping to ensure that the impacts of both environmental destruction and our efforts to address it are understood across all communities and groups within the UK and that our efforts work for equality and inclusion rather than reinforcing existing division.

55 Partner Groups

56 While it is important to articulate a uniquely Methodist voice on issues of climate change, the Action for Hope Faith Plan also made clear our commitment to working with partner groups, organisations and denominations to maximise our impact and prevent duplication of effort.

57 The initial phase of this work has involved developing and nurturing relationships with a number of

⁵ [Net Zero Carbon \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://methodist.org.uk/net-zero-carbon)

⁶ [Net Zero Carbon Pathway \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://methodist.org.uk/net-zero-carbon-pathway)

⁷ [Six reasons why every church should consider net zero in mission planning \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://methodist.org.uk/six-reasons-why-every-church-should-consider-net-zero-in-mission-planning)

⁸ [Take action: become an Eco Church \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://methodist.org.uk/take-action-become-an-eco-church)

⁹ [Home - The Carbon Literacy Project](https://methodist.org.uk/home-the-carbon-literacy-project)

organisations with similar values and approaches, including: The Benefact Trust, Eco Church, Eco Congregation Scotland, Climate Stewards (including 360Carbon) and Just Money Movement.

58 Ecumenical working has also proved fruitful in this area, with links established into ecumenical networks and gatherings, and mutual learning and sharing relationships, particularly with the Church of England, URC, Baptist Union, Salvation Army and the Church in Wales. All of these denominations have been very generous with their time and resources, and we are engaging on a similar basis.

59 Grant Funding

60 As noted above, a £3 million grant funding stream was approved by the Council in January. Criteria for the application of the scheme were approved by SRC in February. These grants will be administered by districts to ensure local knowledge is available to identify the contexts and locations where this money will best be used.

61 It is acknowledged that this is a modest funding stream given the scale of the adaptations needed, but it is also noted that the majority of the Church's funds are held within individual churches, circuits and districts. It is hoped that the grant funds will provide a solid foundation for further money to be spent from other sources.

62 Within the same paper which set out the mechanism for grant funding it was agreed that a review of replacement project criteria would be beneficial to ensure these did not inhibit net zero projects. This review is currently ongoing.

63 Offsetting

64 Carbon offsetting is mentioned within the Faith Plan, and this is likely to be an important factor in reaching the goal of net zero by 2030. Despite this, it is critical that the Church engages with this process carefully and prayerfully, as many offsetting schemes have been shown to have no positive impact, or even to do further damage¹⁰.

65 Offsetting is a rapidly growing market, and it is critical that we understand the impact of any scheme we endorse to ensure that it aligns with Our Calling and empowers those groups affected rather than deepening inequality. We cannot pay to absolve ourselves of the problem without addressing the areas in which we are still contributing to climate change.

66 Work with Climate Stewards, an organisation in the A Rocha family, is helping to uncover the challenges of offsetting and ways in which we can ensure that the offsetting that will be required will be positive for all parties.

67 Further to the ethical and practical concerns of offsetting, the financial impact of attempting to offset emissions at their current level would be enormous. It is of vital importance that emissions are reduced as much as possible and that offsetting only be used to counteract the small proportion of emissions that remain.

Challenges

68 While the Methodist Church and individual Methodists can do a great deal to reduce our carbon emissions, climate change and other environmental crises are international, structural issues which have elements beyond our control. Self-sufficiency is not a realistic aspiration for churches, certainly within the given timeframe, and many important missional and discipleship activities have a relational and outward looking component. For this reason, external factors such as food production, energy generation and travel infrastructure will influence the Church's journey towards net zero.

69 The UK government has set a national net zero target of 2050, and this will mean that many of the

¹⁰ Report on Offsetting from Friends of the Earth - [A dangerous distraction | Friends of the Earth](#)

goods and services used by churches will have no short-term aspiration of carbon reduction. Recent changes in government policy, including moves to explore new fossil fuel reserves, present a clear challenge to an aspirational target of net zero by 2030 while paradoxically increasing the urgency of work in this area. Churches and individuals can have an impact on many of the organisations and companies with which they interact, and thus the effect of structural factors is not a one-way relationship, but it is important to note this challenge.

- 70 With six years until the 2030 target, it is also important to acknowledge the scale of the challenge in terms of the building stock owned by the Church. In addition to churches and manse throughout the country, circuits and districts own a significant rental property portfolio, as well as other buildings and land. It is important that work begins urgently to develop missional net zero plans for properties and understand those areas where elements of the property portfolio will not have a missional purpose in the years to come.
- 71 The cost of adapting all of the buildings currently held by the Church will be very high, as will offsetting emissions from those buildings if adaptations are not made. While it is for circuits and districts to manage their properties, it is crucial that these questions are engaged with, as the cost of adaptation to all existing buildings will prove a significant challenge.
- 72 While this is raised as a challenge in the context of net zero, this also provides opportunities both for a more missionally focused property portfolio and to make connections with local communities. There are many within local communities who are passionate about the issue of climate change, and offering an example and the opportunity for a net zero space provides missional and evangelistic opportunities.
- 73 One of the key elements of the net zero programme is the ability to connect the journey with Methodists throughout the Connexion and encouraging them to join in. Over the coming years, concern for caring for God's creation and climate justice, and the practical outworkings of this, need to become integral to all we do as a Church. Reaching the goal will be impossible if it is only owned by a small group of people, and therefore a key challenge is reaching the heart and mind of every Methodist. This process has begun, as outlined above, but this must become a truly transformative journey for the Church.

*****RESOLUTION**

38/1. The Council receives the report.