



My Role in Tackling Climate Change

The professionals in energy management, sustainability and environmental roles play a key part in their organisational delivery of energy efficiency and Net Zero targets. By performing their everyday roles, investing in professional development and exchanging of ideas and experiences with others, they are contributing to tackling the risks of climate change on organisational as well as national level.

With all the varied roles and tasks, we are keen to showcase our members' skills and day-to-day tasks. In this issue, we have asked Sara Emmett about her role of Assistant Diocesan Environment Officer at Diocese of Bath and Wells in tackling climate change.



What attracted you into the industry?

I have been a naturalist since I was about 7 years old, first taking an interest in hedgehogs and then birds. By my teenage years I was studying seabirds and waders and as an adult authored my undergraduate thesis on breeding failure in Little Terns in Dorset. I am currently studying mycology in South Somerset and Dorset. As I am immersed in the natural world, I am very aware of the danger that climate change poses to creation and dedicated myself to work towards raising awareness to the problem and

finding novel solutions to the (often complicated) webs we have woven that trap us into patterns of behaviour.

How have you started and progressed through the industry?

After being a dedicated homemaker for my family and carer for my disabled son for 10 years, I decided to return to study to update my skills and improve my impact in climate change awareness and mitigation. I studied MSc Green Economy at Bournemouth University and as part of this undertook a year-long placement with the Environment Team at the Diocese of Bath and Wells, initially undertaking a project introducing a pilot energy audit scheme to churches and church buildings across the Diocese. The aim of this work is to provide bespoke assistance to our churches in reaching net zero carbon but also to assist in planning by the Diocese. This project is ongoing and contributed to the formulation of the Diocese Environment Policy and Net Zero 2030 Action Plan.

I also worked for the National Church of England analysing 180 energy audits from 3 different companies to extract learnings that would contribute to the CofE Practical Pathway to Net Zero for Churches.

I am now doing some follow up work on this project for the Diocese of Oxford and I am part of the National Diocesan Environment Network and sit on the Church of England Energy Working Group. I am also studying my PhD in Change Management at Bournemouth University with a focus on transitions toward net zero carbon and the contribution of worldviews to achieving this goal in complex organisations which is so necessary to minimising climate change and its detrimental impacts.

I was very delighted to become Assistant Environment Officer- it is the most rewarding job. I am lucky to be daily working with dedicated and inspirational people within the Diocese and with partner organisations and the wider community.

What does your current role entail?

In early 2020, the Diocese declared a climate emergency and responded by making a commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions across in-scope activities by 2030. During the pandemic, we were engaged in planning for this achievement and produced an updated 10-Year Environment Action Plan and Environment Policy.

These have been formulated with collaboration stakeholders and experts from across the Diocese, including both lay and ordained professionals and working cross-departmentally especially with our school's team as schools play a significant role in our emissions scope.

Our key priorities are to establish a more accurate baseline carbon emissions figure, engage, educate, and support communities, schools, and parishes to reach net zero and encourage a faith-based commitment to change across the Diocese.

My main roles on a day-to-day basis are to continue the Green

Journey audit process and support and guide churches and communities to plan and take action to reach net zero. I work closely with the school's team and am supporting churches to achieve Ecochurch status through Christian charity A Rocha.

I am also deeply engaged with a partnership project working with Somerset Wildlife Trust called 'Wilder Churches' which is currently supporting over 100 of our churches to rewild their church land in community-sensitive and collaborative ways to form a network of biodiversity across the lands which we are blessed to steward.

In your opinion, what role do you play in tackling climate change?

I am blessed to be at the forefront of both practical action and education (in my Diocesan role) but also innovative solutions through my PhD researcher role with both roles mutually benefiting the other. I am committed to using these two opportunities to

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support real change across the Diocese and the wider world.

What are the main challenges in tackling climate change/ delivering Net Zero targets at your organisation?

The Church of England and its constituent parts have a historic complexity and distributed governance that means that climate solutions need to be adaptable to meet the varying needs of communities and the restrictions that adaptation of historic buildings often encounter.

As in many large organisations, there are also competing priorities whose needs must be balanced carefully with the urgency of climate change. Finance for adaptation is also a significant concern in many parishes.



In your opinion, what is the order of importance for the three key aspects of tackling climate change – finance, skills, technologies?

I believe that in tackling climate change, we must begin with finding relevance in people's lives and work. Whilst climate change issues are becoming higher on both individual and organisations agendas, there is still a great amount of work to do in finding significance in our lives that supports effective change. For many this will be a moral, ethical or faith-based commitment but there is a significant research gap concerning how to translate commitment to sustained change which I am trying to bridge with my work. Technology also has advances to make that will enable affordable and effective long-term solutions to work across complex situations like historic buildings.

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What is your biggest achievement to date that has contributed to tackling climate change?

I'm so proud to be part of the Environment Team at Bath and Wells and a part of the Diocese. So much work has gone into the Net Zero target in the last few years. There is a real sense of joint commitment towards this goal, and it is so encouraging.

What particular knowledge and skills do you see vital in reaching the national and organisational climate change targets?

Through my experiences in different roles, I have come to acknowledge



that both social and organisation complexity are major barriers to change. It will be vital for any group or organisation to establish pathways of relevance to climate action, particular to its component parts. This will require leaders and stakeholders to collaborate more, giving support and providing bespoke assistance for a range of unique journeys towards these urgent shared goals. Flexibility and a creative solutions-based approach will be key for leaders.

Thinking about current Government policies and incentives in delivering on the UK's climate change promises and Net Zero target where would you like to see more developments and guidance?

Whilst I accept that change takes time, it will be very hard to create urgent and sustainable change unless the priorities of our country move away from (financial) progress at any cost and embrace the solidity of a resilient, diverse and community-centred approach that favours wellbeing and equality above traditional economic models and that by design, ensures a circular, green economy.

This shift in thinking must centre

around how we raise our young people so that it becomes an engrained way of living and thinking. Much is already being done for the youngest in our schools, but older children must be encouraged to continue to nurture and value the connection with the wider world they are introduced to in early school life.

Technological advances can be our friend in this matter but must not come at a detrimental cost to our planet and our neighbours both near and far. Policy that realigns us with valuing our roots in nature and community will be vital to this shift.

Where do you see your future within the industry?

My future is very much aligned and guided by my faith. I am dedicated to serving others and climate action is very much a part of this service. I hope my PhD work will provide some novel pathways for tackling socio-organisational complexities barriers to change and I have no doubt it will expose other lines of enquiry as I progress through it. My role in the Diocese continues to be a blessing and I will continue to serve there as long as I am needed.