

# towards a zero carbon church

Buxton URC is on its way, says Charles Jolly

It all began for us when a planned visit to our partner church in Germany triggered questions over whether aircraft emissions were acceptable in a good cause (surface travel being impractical). A group of us with backgrounds spanning geology, engineering, chemistry and physics, decided to take a closer look at the findings of climate scientists.

Doing so made us feel much more acutely aware of our responsibility at local level to play a role in reversing the crisis we face as planet. Unless atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations are reduced, not just stabilised, disaster for many may be inevitable. Urgent cuts in emissions are needed if the world is to have a good chance of keeping the mean temperature rise to within 2°C, while at the same time developing countries need to industrialise further to overcome poverty. Many scientists believe countries like the UK need both to help those less developed and cut their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to zero within 20 years! The 60 per cent cut by 2050 proposed in the Climate Change bill seems challenging enough.

Clearly, we should have started decades ago. Stronger Government action is a moral imperative. But who will listen to Buxton URC unless we ourselves accept the imperative? Can we become carbon-neutral by 2030 – without cheating by offsetting?



There was no support in our group for the option of closing – nor can we afford demolition and a carbon-neutral rebuild.

Despite its altitude Buxton is not in a particularly strong

# acting on c

Howard Hutchings explains how his tackling environmental problems, in v

The town of Shrewsbury, situated as it is in a loop of the UK's longest river, the River Severn, is no stranger to flooding. And the same is true of Shrewsbury URC, which is set on the banks of the river.

Our car park has been flooded, and we've had to cancel a service because the church couldn't be accessed safely. As the



waters receded the caretaker found fish swimming happily in the church cellars - they were safely returned to the river.

Flooding in Shrewsbury is a result of heavy rain that falls miles away in the head waters of the Severn. We are fortunate that in recent years a new defence has been built and the Environment Agency has implemented a series of measures giving the town time to prepare for the flood waters. We also have insurance.

Influenced by these experiences, and motivated by our Christian faith, our church considered what we could do to care for the environment.

Starting around five years ago our house groups used the Eco-Congregation Bible studies, and suitably inspired we set about greening our church's life and mission. In 2005 we gained the Eco-Congregation Award. Since then the green team of

position to harness the power of the wind. We use little hot water, so solar panels have a low-ish priority and the option of photovoltaic cells currently have low cost-benefits.

But the old gas boiler made way for a condensing one (thanks to a number of generous donations!) – and first indications are that consumption is 30 per cent down. Green electricity tariffs? There are few genuinely green alternatives for church buildings. Can we afford Good Energy? Can we ethically not afford Good Energy!

We've draught-proofed, applied for grants to replace old windows with double glazed units and investigated the difficult task of insulating roofs (floors are even worse).

Looking ahead, we've discussed ground-source heat-pumps with manufacturers and are very impressed by what we've learned of the Christian Aid Climate Change March electric minibuses.

Any practical advice from any church further down the green road will be gratefully received!

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