



**THE SPECIFIC POTENTIAL OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS
AND RELIGIOUS LAND FOR GREENING IN THE UK**

RESEARCH FOR LUND TRUST

Hugo Perrot-Barnaby

3 September 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary	3
Chapter one – introduction	4
Research plan: research questions and methodology	6
Chapter two – religious demographics and societal shifts in England	8
Relationships with religion.....	9
Secularisation	11
Conclusions.....	12
Chapter three– environmental theology and Christian motivation.....	13
Theology.....	13
Missions as a motivation to greening.....	15
Ending injustice and responding to human need	16
Stewardship	16
Mission regulation	17
Societal influences on the Mission	18
Conclusion	19
Chapter four – potential of the Church	21
Faith	21
Specific potential.....	21
Religious narratives	21
Community creation	22
Political influence	22
Economic influence	23
Wealth	23
Financial wealth	24
Clergy and resource	25
Land resource	28
Investment assets	28

Residential property	33
Sales.....	34
Diocesan land.....	34
Glebe land.....	35
Churchyards.....	36
Schools.....	36
Diocesan potential.....	37
Conclusion.....	38
Chapter five – A Church for sustainability	40
National impact	40
Internal influence	41
Economic influence	42
Political influence	42
Investment land.....	43
Forestry land.....	44
Agricultural land	44
Development land.....	46
Diocesan land.....	46
Churchyards.....	46
Glebe land.....	50
Schools.....	52
Conclusions.....	54
Chapter six – A churchyard investigation.....	56
Methodology	56
Findings.....	59
Conclusion	62
Chapter seven – conclusions and philanthropy	64
Reference list	67

Executive summary

This report explores the role of religion, specifically the Church of England (CofE), in supporting 'greening' efforts in the UK. Greening refers to a range of environmental actions aimed at improving green and blue infrastructure, promoting sustainability, and enhancing the connection between people and nature. These actions benefit the environment and improve public health, economic resilience, and social cohesion.

Religious institutions have long promoted missions aligned with welfare, charity, and environmental stewardship. They hold ideological influence and community reach that position them to support societal change. Although England is experiencing secularisation, the CofE remains the most influential religious institution, due to its large following and historical wealth. Religious motivations to enact greening are seen through their missions and the CofE's greening efforts occur through two primary mechanisms:

- Faith Influence – The CofE uses religious narratives to engage congregations, shape ideology, and promote environmental action nationally and locally.
- Wealth – The CofE owns significant financial resources and vast areas of land, categorised as investment land and diocesan land.

The CofE demonstrates action in environmental and greening efforts, however challenges remain. Most environmental work focuses on sustainability and is enacted by motivated individuals and through partnerships. Complex governance, research gaps and differences in motivation, priorities and capacity across institutions, dioceses and parishes limit work. The CofE case study identifies ways in which religious institutions and land are being used to green lives, and suggests that there are important roles for philanthropy in encouraging and increasing greening through religious organisations.

Chapter one – introduction

Improving welfare, helping those in need and protecting land in the name of a higher entity is a mission stated by most religions (Einolf, 2011). The movement known as ‘greening’, an environmental movement, is an indirect method of improving quality of life through access to local green and blue infrastructure.

Lund Trust defines greening as:

‘We define urban greening broadly to include urban rewilding and all types of green and blue space and infrastructure. This includes improving and creating green spaces, green infrastructure (e.g., sustainable urban drainage systems), self-sustaining ecosystems, rivers and wetlands, species reintroductions, and a range of work that connects people to nature and makes the way we live more sustainable. Urban areas include cities but also smaller towns and villages.’
(Lund Trust, 2025)

This highlights the importance of not only geographical proximity to green infrastructure but also the creation of environmental ideologies, and understanding that greening can make the way we live more sustainable. Green spaces are widely recognised in literature to ameliorate the ecological quality of an area and support people’s health and well-being. Specifically, they can improve air quality, alleviate urban heat island effects, reduce noise pollution, and ease climate change impacts through carbon sequestration (Nero et al., 2017). Green spaces are also associated with better mental and physical health, encourage physical activity and strengthen social ties (GOV.UK, 2025). Despite these benefits, only 33% of households in England were considered as having accessible green spaces of at least 10 ha within 1 km (15 minutes’ walk from home) (GOV.UK, 2024).

Action to enact greening is becoming more frequent, seen through the creation of infrastructure guidance. Natural England has released guidelines on access to green space, known as the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (Green Infrastructure Framework, 2025). It states all households should be located within a 5-minute walk of a green space (of at least 2 hectares in size), within two kilometres of a 20-hectare site, and should have one accessible 100-hectare site within 5 kilometres. Similarly, the green infrastructure chapter in the Mayor of London’s ‘London Plan’ recommends open spaces of less than 2 hectares in size

within 400m of all houses in London, and parks of 20 hectares within 1.2km of all houses (Mayor of London, 2021). Alongside this, research on how to improve access to nature is prevalent in community engaging organisations such as schools¹, universities ²and hospitals³, signifying increasing awareness and action around greening. Green infrastructure must be of a sufficient quantity, quality, be accessible and serve the local community in order to avoid underutilisation (Lund Trust, 2022).

Greening is also important for biodiversity in the UK, which continues to decline at worrying rates (State of Nature, 2025). Since monitoring began in 1970, a decline of 31 per cent in amphibians and reptiles, 43% in birds, and more than half of all plant species has been recorded (Church Times, 2025). A significant loss to biodiversity has occurred through turnover of natural landscapes to agriculture, degradation of agricultural land, so sustainable environmental improvements to farmed land must also be considered (Bluepatch, 2022).

Religious motivations to enact environmental action have changed over the past century, potentially as a response to financial, social and environmental contexts (Taylor et al., 2016). Societal concerns over environmental issues are currently rising in the UK and religion is positioned to respond to this (Purdam et al., 2010). In general, religions have become more environmentally conscious worldwide, however, the actual scale of impact is debated, especially at national levels.

In the UK, trends of generational secularisation are seen, however, religion still has a powerful influence, particularly Christian religions such as the Church of England (Census, 2021). The Anglican Church of England (CofE) has over a million regular attendees, the largest proportion of those identifying as religious in the UK (Church of England, 2025⁴). To investigate the greening potential of religious bodies in the UK, I have chosen the CofE as a case study. I will identify where there may be similarities with other religions in the conclusion of this report.

The CofE has the potential to green people's lives through different avenues and mechanisms. The CofE may be motivated by its religious motivations and missions. It holds influence through religious narratives and faith, which have the

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1618866721001229>

² <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.865422/full>

³ <https://www.brikbase.org/sites/default/files/Healing%20Gardens%20in%20Hospitals.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-england-attendance-rises-fourth-year>

potential to influence the ideologies of congregations, create communities, and engage these communities in action, as well as influence national policy and economics through religious organisations and peoples (Koehrsen & Huber, 2021). The CofE also has a wealth of resources and land that increases its potential influence in enacting greening. Land owned by the CofE is substantial and is categorised as either investment or diocesan land in this report (Wildcard, 2025). The focus of my investigation of greening potential will rest largely within England due to available data and potential impact. Land and influence held across the UK will, however, be referenced.

Academics within environmental studies and climate change research have started to regard religions as an asset for addressing environmental challenges⁵. Considering the potential of religion to improve greening within England, a biodiversity poor country, with areas deprived of green areas, is therefore essential.

Research plan: research questions and methodology

The main aim of this research was to produce a written report investigating the specific potential of religious groups and land owned by religious institutions in the UK for greening people's lives. Recommendations for possible future work to increase greening through religious groups and land through philanthropy were also considered.

The Church of England is used as a case study, as it is the dominant religion in England and has considerable influence.

Research questions

To achieve the overarching goal, the following objectives were developed:

1. How has environmental theology developed and what motivations exist for the Church of England to enact greening action?
2. What are the potential routes for the Church of England to enact greening, and how do these relate to its position as a religious organisation?
3. Is the Church of England already using its potential greening avenues and what are their strengths and limitations?

⁵ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41682-021-00070-4#ref-CR82>

4. How can the Church of England's limitations to greening be reduced and how could greening work be improved upon or encouraged through philanthropy?

Methodology

This research combines a desk-based review of relevant literature, policies, and guidelines with a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with relevant groups, including the Interfaith Forum and Real Farming Forum – with (1) people directly involved in management of land owned by the CofE and (2) those engaging communities in environmental ideas through interfaith approaches. The interviews provided insights that are practical and sensitive to local specifics but that are not included in the body of literature.

An on-site analysis of select wards in Islington, London, was additionally undertaken to develop an understanding of the greening action undertaken by local churches in an area deprived of green infrastructure, and to understand the geography surrounding churches in cities.

Chapter two – religious demographics and societal shifts in England

The religious makeup of England is changing. General trends show that Christianity is in decline and secularisation is growing in prominence. To understand the greening potential of the Church of England (CofE), this chapter will outline the current influence of religion in England, the different relationships people can have with faith, and the potential threat of secularisation to CofE-led greening work.

Religious influence in the UK

Following its introduction to the UK in the Middle Ages, Christianity in varying forms has radically influenced the ideologies, values and organisation of society of the UK. The Catholic Church and leadership of the pope was all-powerful in England until Henry VIII's creation of the CofE. The shift from Catholic to Protestant beliefs and supreme leadership of pope to monarch caused major alterations in land ownership, governance and ideologies within England.

Religion is still a prominent force within twenty-first-century England. England is a multi-faith society with churches of various Christian denominations, as well as other widely practised minority religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism, and Buddhism (British Council, 2025). The establishment of minority religions in the UK is a more recent phenomenon. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and other minority religions have had communities present for hundreds of years but the number of believers has grown more rapidly in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Religious composition is going through significant changes in England (Office for National Statistics, 2021). From the second half of the twentieth century, the UK has been regularly referred to as a secular rather than a Christian country. However, the CofE still remains the established church, and a large majority of the population still identify as 'Christian'. While Christianity remained the most common response in the 2021 England and Wales census, a decline of 13.1% from the 2011 census was attributed to an ageing population identifying as 'Christian' and a younger generation identifying otherwise. The decline was so significant that for the first time in an England and Wales census less than half of the population (46.2%, 27.5 million people) described themselves as 'Christian'. 'No religion' was the second most common recorded response (37.2%).

The CofE was stated as making up 12% of the British population in 2018, down from 40% in 1983 (British ⁶Social Values, 2019). Difficulty understanding the true decline of religion and the CofE church arises due to differences in census and survey methodology, terminologies and geographies used in questions.

Surveys suggest that religion in the UK has also become less important to individuals and has diminished in significance within society (Religion Media Centre, 2016). In 1983, two-thirds of the British public identified as Christian, whereas in 2018 only 38% identified as Christian (British Social Values, 2019). Furthermore, those who do not regard themselves as belonging to a religion are also increasingly secular and likely to say they are 'very' or 'extremely' unreligious.

De-secularisation, however, has seen religion stage a revival and a public comeback in alternative ways. In the UK, the fastest-growing forms of religion are those composed of minority groups, including Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. 'Muslim' was the second largest religious identity recorded in the 2021 census (6.5%) and represented the youngest average median age for respondents (27 years old), with 84.5% aged under 50 years. Growth in minority faiths is not driven by conversion to new religions but rather by migration from traditionally religious cultures in South Asia and West Africa.

Despite general trends of secularisation from 2011 to 2021, the Church of England has also seen an increase in attendance of regular worshipers of local congregations from 2021 to 2025 according to CofE surveys, although the figures have not returned to pre-pandemic levels (The Church of England, 2025). The Church of England has identified 1.02 million regular worshipers (attending the Church at least once a month) and 582,000 people attending in-person across the week in 2024.

I have chosen to focus this investigation and report on the Church of England due to its establishment, membership and large potential influence on a national and local scale.

Relationships with religion

There are a range of relationships that individuals can have with religion, which may also limit our understanding of the potential impact of religious institutions.

⁶ <https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/british-social-attitudes-36>

There are multiple measures used to understand the way individuals interact with religion, including: affiliation, belonging, belief and practice (Census 2021, 2021)

Religious affiliation is a connection or identification with a religion irrespective of actual practice or belief. In England, this may be higher than other measures as the CofE is ingrained within culture, place and tradition (Religion Media Centre, 2016). Religious belonging can be interpreted as active or formal belonging to a religious group and religious belief includes beliefs typically expected to be held by followers of a religion and how important those beliefs are to a person's life. Both impact individuals more deeply and create a higher value for religion. Finally, practice includes specific religious activities expected of believers. Practice engrains religion into people's lives and enforces the other aspects of religious interactions, creating a more meaningful relationship with religion.

Evidence suggests that belief has in fact eroded in Britain at the same rate as two key aspects of belonging: religious affiliation and attendance (Voas & Crockett, 2005). The 2021 Wales and England census measured affiliation and we can expect, practice, belief and belonging to be lower than recorded in the census. In fact, less than half of white Anglicans feel religion is important to how they live their lives whereas those from minority populations were more likely to view religious affiliation as a crucial part of their identity (Modood et al., 1994).

Further complexities arise for those that consider themselves non-religious. British think tank Theos explains that 'nones are a complex group ticking non-religious does not mean you are anti-religious, or even that you lack 'religious style' beliefs.' They reported that 'Nones' can be equally divided into three categories and that only half of those who identified as 'Nones' stated that they do not believe in God. Instead, 14% believe in a higher power and 9% believe in God firmly. Nones were more likely to believe in aspects of New Age Spirituality rather than classically religious beliefs. (EARS, 2022). Faith is still prominent in the UK, although it is less monopolised by traditional religion.

Changing relationships with religion may limit the greening potential of the CofE. Greening however, may be driven by practice over belief and churches may remain a place for materialisation of change. They have long acted as community centres in which practice of faith occurs through social action, even while actual belief has declined. Religious spaces are important community spaces that may provide land to enact greening.

The differences in surveys and censuses and lack of clear data on religious denomination and strength of affiliation across geographies also highlights a decline of religious studies. Only 21 British universities now offer theology and religious studies degrees, as departments shut or merge (The British Academy, 2019; Religious Media Centre, 2025). The value of religion as a tool to enact social change may currently be under-studied, underutilised and disregarded in the UK.

Secularisation

A hypothesised driver of secularisation is the post-war formation of the welfare state. The welfare state became a symbol of national hope in Britain, and a concept that people could have faith in. Durkheim theorises that religion serves many functions within society, regardless of how it is practised and what specific religious beliefs a society favours (PressBooks, 2016). It gives meaning and purpose to life, reinforces social unity and stability, serves as an agent of social control, promotes psychological and physical well-being, and may motivate people to work for positive social change.

The welfare state may have offered the British public an alternative to religion, meeting many of the societal functions Durkheim's theorises. The public could rally their faith in an alternative social movement that provided the populace with welfare the church would have originally had a part in providing. In England, Christian organisations generally operate as charitable organisations, aiming to help the poor and remedy societal injustices (GOV.UK, 2014). However, Durkheim also theorises that religion promotes and reinforces social inequality and conflict and convinces the poor to accept their lives (Mirola et al., 2011). The welfare state may have been seen as a long-awaited alternative to Christians disenfranchised by societal issues, reducing the influence of traditional religion. The majority (63%) of people in Britain are said to agree with the idea that 'looking around the world, religions bring more conflict than peace.' Furthermore, under half (46%) have some or more confidence in churches and religious organisations, with 21% expressing 'no confidence at all' (British Social Attitudes, 2019).

While most people show little enthusiasm for institutionalised religion, the majority of people do have a positive, or at least tolerant, view of members of other religious groups, with more reservations about extremism. Religion, particularly locally, is still respected, and while attendance has declined, many faith spaces are still important historical and social centres within their communities.

Conclusions

Christianity and religion is still significant in society through membership, attendance and prominence within communities, but generational secularisation threatens this. Individuals have complex relationships with religion which complicate understanding of its impact on individuals' lives. A lack of data also highlights a potential disregard of religion as a serious tool in creating change at a national level by researchers and enactors.

General secularisation trends within the UK suggest a reduced influence of religious organisations on individuals' belief systems and ideologies due to decreased attendance and affiliation, which may limit the potential for any greening work. Overall, institutions such as the CofE maintain a large capacity for influence on individuals and society within the UK and have multiple avenues to enact greening, which will be discussed in this report.

Chapter three– environmental theology and Christian motivation

This chapter will investigate the theology of environmental and greening work and motivations for the CofE to enact change. A brief background of environmental theology and global trends will be outlined to broaden understanding of how religion and environmentalism have previously interacted, before focusing directly on the CofE.

Theology

‘And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature’⁷

In 1967, Lynn White published ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis’, arguing that religion, particularly Christianity, initiated a cultural revolution that enforces perpetual progress and in turn, anthropogenic activity. He theorised that the idea of people being separate from and above nature, established through Judeo-Christian theology, moulded the mentality that the Church of England and the King used to exploit non-religious peoples and nature under colonisation. Supporters of White suggest that England’s colonial activity spread these exploitative ideologies across the world and integrated them into global agricultural and industrial systems, so much so that the colonisation of the Americas has been suggested as a potential start date for the Anthropocene (Davis & Todd, 2017). The Anthropocene is a term used to describe a period in which human activity has created an impact equivalent to that of natural geophysical forces of the earth.

Other academics have argued that White’s view is too simplistic and that exploitative practices predate Judeo-Christian domination and are present in Eastern religions (Moncrief, 1970; Whitney 1993). Furthermore, although they will be influenced in character by Judeo-Christian ideology, especially in countries such as the UK, other societal movements such as democratisation, urbanisation, technological development and increasing individualism are proposed as greater causal factors for our environmental crisis. These processes have occurred worldwide, including where Judeo-Christian belief has not been adopted.

⁷ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1720120>

Although White's argument is contested, academics and religious scholars have dissected, uncovered and invented pro-environmental interpretations of religious writings and traditions in response. A trend of religions showing signs of moving towards environmental action prompted Taylor's (2011) 'The Greening of Religion Hypothesis'.

Taylor hypothesised this 'greening' to be prevalent in the activities of local religious communities and was seen through public statements of religious leaders which drew attention to ecological problems and conveyed support for pro-environmental policies. A prominent example was Pope Francis' *Laudato Si' in 2015*, which stressed the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans and non-human nature. Ideas of religious 'stewardship' or 'trusteeship' of nature appealing to human accountability to a higher spiritual authority, are also prominent across religious statements ([Chaplin, 2016](#)). Many faith communities have produced recent statements urging stewardship and human ecological responsibility, such as the *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change* (International Islamic Climate Change Symposium, [2015](#)). Interfaith organisations, similarly, are making statements such as '[The Statement – Interfaith Climate](#)' in 2025.

To analyse the greening of religion, a review of 700 articles by Taylor et al. (2016) suggests the greening of religion is largely discussion-focused and that action is limited due to inter- and intra-religious tensions on beliefs, priorities, understanding of traditions⁸ and motivation (Koehrsen & Blanc, 2021). Local religious organisations implement the ideologies of umbrella organisations to different degrees. While some support environmental action, others do not implement the transition projects of their head organisations on the local level (Koehrsen & Huber, 2021).

Gottlieb suggested in 2006 that 'if humanity can somehow learn to live without destroying other species and poisoning itself, religion will have been one of the forces teaching us how to do it and encouraging us to do so' ([Gottlieb, 2006](#)). Religion has a significant opportunity to influence wider cultural and political movements addressing ecological crises. The Church of England may not recognise or prioritise the moral obligation to enact environmental change that White suggests, but it may be motivated to enact environmental action by

⁸ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41682-021-00070-4>

shifting social priorities and values or through environmental stewardship or solidarity with the poor.

Missions as a motivation to greening

The Five Marks of Mission express the Anglican Communion's common commitment to God's holistic and integral mission. The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ (Church of England, 2017).

The Vision for the Church in the 2020s is to become a Church that is centred on and shaped by Jesus Christ through the five marks of mission:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

The CofE has a strong governance structure that allows it to act on these missions nationally. The CofE is episcopally led (led by its 108 bishops, assistant bishops and suffragan bishops) and governed by the General Synod. The General Synod and bishops are supported by the seven National Church Institutions (NCIs), which are the CofE's national administrative bodies, and by the three National Investment Bodies (NIBs), which provide financial support. The Archbishops ensure the missions of the CofE govern its direction, which is delivered through a threefold order of ministry: bishops, priests and deacons. Bishops control dioceses, and priests and deacons control parishes and deaneries within dioceses.

The Archbishops are the leaders of the direction of the Church and create shorter term objectives. A major objective is increasing practising communities, particularly young people. Targets relevant to greening and environmentalism are:

1. **Revitalise Parishes:** A parish system revitalised for mission
2. **Missionary Disciples:** All Anglicans envisioned, resourced, and released to live out the five marks of mission in the whole of life, becoming communities and hubs for initial and ongoing formation.

3. **Sustainability:** A Church that cherishes God's creation and promotes sustainability.⁹

Both the Missions of the CofE and the Archbishops Council's targets motivate environmental work. The capacity for the CofE to increase environmental ideologies and greening within the UK is vast due to its potential to reach individuals and to create or facilitate national projects.

Ending injustice and responding to human need

The third Mark of Mission 'To respond to human need by loving service' and fourth Mark of Mission 'To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation' could encourage CofE environmental action. The impacts of climate change, lack of access to green spaces and disconnectedness from nature are seen disproportionately in marginalised and deprived communities¹⁰. Green infrastructure has often been disregarded in the construction of social housing and in less affluent areas and has resulted in unjust and unhealthy environments¹¹.

Successful greening in deprived areas can reduce suffering through climate change mitigation, and can reduce anxiety, and improve health and fitness (GOV.UK, 2025). There are more direct ways to help those in need and end injustice, however. Work such as foodbanks and aid for the homeless are already prominent positive actions that the CofE and churches enact and therefore the CofE may be less inclined to pursue greening projects to achieve the third and fourth Marks of Mission.

Stewardship

Religion encompasses many beliefs and notions that may promote pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours and many Abrahamic religions,¹²including Christianity, Islam and Judaism, have developed eco-theologies. Among the religious factors that may encourage pro-environmental tendencies is stewardship belief: the belief that humans have a responsibility to take care of

⁹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/national-church-institutions/archbishops-council>

¹⁰ <https://lundtrust.org.uk/resources/green-space-assessment-framework>

¹¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275123004286>

¹² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210422421000630>

the world that God created and has entrusted to humankind¹³. The fifth Mark of Mission of the CofE speaks directly to stewardship: 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth'¹⁴¹⁵.

Stewardship is used by many Christians as a way of explaining how humans should understand their purpose and place in creation (Berry, 2006) in a period when humans were becoming more exploitative of nature (Bauckham, 2010). Stewardship implies that humans are accountable to God for what they do to God's creation, and that the relationship with creation is one of guardianship. Christians are instructed to 'till and keep' the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15), where such a 'garden' stands for the whole earth (Halpert, 2012). Research has consistently shown that religious stewardship belief is positively associated with environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviours¹⁶ and in some cases individuals were seen to be more willing to take personal and political environmental action based on such belief.¹⁷

Mission regulation

The CofE and its branches are registered charities. This means they are regulated by the Charity Commission. The work done therefore must be done for the public benefit and fit within the legal description of charitable purposes in England and Wales, which encompasses the advancement of religion, prevention or relief of poverty and advancement of education¹⁸. This is important as the Charity Commission will regulate the investments and actions of a charity and ensure that these are in the best interests of the charity, including furthering its purpose – in the case of the CofE, its Marks of Mission. This can limit greening work done by the Church. Greening is not always the most profitable use of land or resource,

¹³ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/tops.12641>

¹⁴ <https://www.scribd.com/document/750694305/The-Mission-and-Ministry-of-the-Whole-Church>

¹⁵

<https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgicfindmkaj/https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/mtag-the-5-marks-of-mission.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12197901>

¹⁷ <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146715626219>.

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charitable-purposes/charitable-purposes>

and the best interests of the charity start with the view of aiming for the best financial return within the level of risk appropriate for your charity.

However, 'avoiding or making investments in companies because of their practice on environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors such as climate, human rights, sustainability, community impact and board accountability' is considered acceptable practice. Additionally, a change to the phrasing from 'maximise returns' has allowed for greater flexibility of approach, but the issue of regulation is a complicated issue that may put off clergy aiming to enact change¹⁹.

For example, a proposal to convert a former CofE school in Arkengarthdale in the Yorkshire Dales into affordable housing was blocked last year when the diocese of Leeds and the local parish said it was legally obliged to accept the highest offer for the property, demonstrating the need for awareness and regulatory literacy if the CofE aims to enact social change, such as greening.

Societal influences on the Mission

Christianity has contributed to the development of moral frameworks in many societies, promoting values such as compassion, forgiveness, and charity and shaping laws and social norms and influencing how individuals interact with one another.²⁰

But, religion is also fluid as a social construct and has to adapt to maintain membership amid changing social and cultural movements.²¹ In the UK, environmental concerns are increasing²², with 92% of the public considering themselves 'somewhat' to 'very' concerned about environmental sustainability. While some religious traditions have a long history of promoting environmental protection, others have been criticised for their indifference or even negative

¹⁹ [https://www.cafonline.org/services-for-charities/resources/charity-commission-issues-new-investment-guidance-for-trustees-\(cc14\)](https://www.cafonline.org/services-for-charities/resources/charity-commission-issues-new-investment-guidance-for-trustees-(cc14))

²⁰

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiY6O-Z6LmPAXWjU0EAHbcXJCMQFnoECBUQAw&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.voteforthepig.tennessee.edu%2Fvirtual-library%2F3P8029%2Findex.jsp%2FHowDoesChristianityAffectSociety.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3lwlvdVplw6KcfVzgfHFJg&opi=89978449>

²¹ <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2023.101357>

²² <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13537900701331023>

impact on the environment. The greening of religion is the result of religion responding to a rise of environmentalism, including greening.

Secularisation dynamics also put pressure on institutions such as the CofE. Religions aim to maintain their public recognition by diversifying their portfolio, engaging in social welfare services and addressing important public issues.²³ The Church of England has more recently publicised its desire to act, addressing important public issues²⁴ such as housing, migration and environmentalism. To do this, the CofE can draw upon its historical advantages. A field perspective on religious organisations' sustainable transitions has identified these as: legal recognition by the state, investments in financial markets and real estate, religious school teaching to shape the religious socialisation of future believers, political influence, and public visibility in the mass media. The CofE may also capitalise on its networks and infrastructure to collaborate with prominent civil society actors²⁵.

For example, a trial programme was run by The Centre for Theology & Community aiming to co-design church organisation, discipleship and leadership with local communities in London. The parishes grew by over 200 members, with increases in attendance. This highlights the desire of the CofE to respond to societal issues and adapt its narrative to local communities to maintain membership. The CofE is also, therefore, more likely to respond to environmental and sustainability concerns if they are a significant concern for the public.

Conclusion

The greening of religion hypothesis theorises that while religions are seemingly becoming more environmentally conscious, this work is largely surface-level and environmental action is not a united movement across the religions' local bodies. In the past 20 years, the CofE has seemingly started to become a more environmentally conscious organisation, driven by its Marks of Missions and potentially through targets to respond to societal concerns to increase membership. Inter- and intra- religious tensions limiting local impact, regulation and prioritisation of other missions and objectives have been identified as

²³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210422421000630>

²⁴ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374665840_The_Social-Political_Consequences_of_the_Organization_and_Dissemination_of_Knowledge

²⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210422421000630>

potential limitations to CofE greening action. However, a broad governance framework, regulatory workarounds and multiple avenues to enact greening position the CofE well as a potential enactor of environmental and greening progress. If CofE environmental action is following the trend of 'the greening of religion' hypothesis or if it is creating meaningful changes at national and local levels will be discussed in chapters four and five.

Chapter four – potential of the Church

Faith

Specific potential

The CofE has started to become a more environmentally conscious organisation, motivated by principles of stewardship and societal demand for environmental action. To achieve their missions, established religions such as the CofE can influence the ideologies and actions of individuals, communities and nations through faith, and have used this influence to enact societal change (Koehrsen & Huber, 2021). Faith is used to strengthen religious narratives that impact believers' worldviews and actions. Faith can also be a tool used to engage congregation members in greening work, as well as clergy with wider political and economic influence. Shared faith can create communities and increase community cohesion.

Religious narratives

Scholars have highlighted the importance of religious influence in creating environmentally sustainable ²⁶societies. Religion can evoke and reinforce perceptions, emotions, and behaviours, can justify authority, and can provide meaning and community in ways that enhance wellbeing and help people cope with life. Through ethical teachings, religion can shape the lifestyles and worldviews of worshipers, and so their relationship to their natural environment.

Religious narratives have extensive histories of being used to rationalise societal composition and function and to motivate conservation or change. The role of religion within societies and on people's values, traditions, and practices is significant. The discrimination of women in society, as well as the exploitation of foreign ethnicities and cultures during the European slave trade, were upheld in part by reference to Holy Scriptures, constructing a narrative justifying these systems and motivating people within them to maintain them.

Religion can be used to maintain the status quo or to benefit an elite but can also act as a powerful motivator and call to action. Faith has historically played an important role in social and civil movements²⁷. For strong believers, religion can

²⁶ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41682-021-00070-4>

²⁷ <https://www.geneva.edu/blog/uncategorized/mlk-dream-in-2019>

fulfil many fundamental needs, such as belonging, self-actualisation and security²⁸. In return for this fulfilment, as well as the promise of heaven in the case of the CofE, religion demands practice and participation in tradition, such as community prayer and charitable actions²⁹³⁰ or donations. These practices in turn, reinforce and fortify belief systems. The religious motivation to act to fulfil God's missions can be stronger than that of intellectual motivation.

Community creation

Religious identity can also bring people together into communities, based on assumptions of shared values and worldviews. Faith-created communities can act as spaces of mobilisation for potential environmental action³¹³².

Lack of specific studies on the strength of British Anglican protestants' religious belief and ideologies and how these vary between churches, cities, and dioceses limits our understanding of how individuals can be mobilised to enact change according to the mission, however.

Political influence

Religious leaders and umbrella organisations often enjoy a high public credibility and sometimes have close relationships with influential societal decision-makers³³. They can use their networks and prominence to influence public debates, create awareness of environmental problems and disseminate a pro-environmental worldview³⁴, and they can influence decision-making processes. Christian interest groups are active on a wide range of policy issues, covering

²⁸ <https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgicfindmkaj/https://www.dialoguestudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Journal-of-Dialogue-Society-VOL-10.pdf>

²⁹

<https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgicfindmkaj/https://www.morepartnership.com/library/ca-f-ukgiving2014.pdf>

³⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0148296319300839>

³¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20089848/>

³² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5665144/>

³³ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41682-021-00070-4>

³⁴ <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap-oa/book/9781839100673/book-part-9781839100673-28.xml>

moral ³⁵ issues as well as mainstream policy concerns (such as welfare, immigration, and international development). ³⁶

Twenty-six bishops (including the two Archbishops) sit in the House of Lords and are known as the Lords Spiritual. Their presence in the House of Lords permits the expression of the Church's morality on important political issues. In the UK, where Anglican ideologies formed many of the worldviews and ideologies we still hold today, the potential political influence of these bishops could be large ³⁷. The actual capacity to introduce a political religious influence is relatively low, however, as the bishops only make up around 3% of all House of Lords attendees.

In an increasingly multi-cultural and secular society, questions are being asked as to whether that role needs to be specifically fulfilled by CofE Bishops, or if their presence is required at all. Future reform of the House of Lords could see the Lords Spiritual made up of a variety of Christian denominations and other faiths to reflect the religious makeup of Britain.

Economic influence

The CofE has significant finances that create opportunities for greening that will be discussed under 'Wealth'. Wider economic influence is created through the CofE's investments. Its investment body, the Church Commissioners, holds cash and investments of £10.4 billion³⁸, and the diocese and Cathedrals hold more than £ 2 billion. The CofE can influence companies and industry in the UK through investment and divestment and shareholder action

Wealth

The historical influence and scale of the Church of England's governance and investment portfolio create opportunities for environmental development and greening in the UK. This chapter will discuss the ways that the ideology, size,

³⁵ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/politics-and-religion/article/christian-interest-groups-in-a-religiously-changing-united-kingdom-issues-strategies-influence/959784482002C4EFF74DE240E2E89B80>

³⁶ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/politics-and-religion/article/christian-interest-groups-in-a-religiously-changing-united-kingdom-issues-strategies-influence/959784482002C4EFF74DE240E2E89B80>

³⁷ <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/lords-spiritual-in-the-house-of-lords-explained/>

³⁸ <https://www.savetheparish.com/church-of-england-finances/>

finances and authority of the CofE may specifically position it as an actor for environmental and greening stewardship.

The historical significance of the CofE's land and wealth transferred from the Catholic church and its intertwining with the Crown has resulted in a legacy of wealth and land ownership.

Financial wealth

The CofE has the largest income of all 'charities with exclusively religious charitable objects' in England and Wales. Cathedrals hold cash and investments of £574m, the dioceses £1.8 billion and the Church Commissioners, one of the CofE's investment bodies, hold £7.6 billion. They have also received approximately £750m of public money in the last five years, through Gift Aid, Listed Place of Worship grants, National Lottery Heritage Funding and Culture Recovery Grants³⁹. Much of this goes towards heritage site maintenance and upkeep, however, for a wealthy organisation the use of public spending has been suggested as needing larger scrutiny.

The 42 dioceses are governed by their own bishops and synods and diocesan boards of finance and are completely independent with their own historic resources. Some dioceses are less well-off than others, with Lincoln Diocese being the wealthiest and Liverpool the poorest. The CofE aims to support less wealthy dioceses and parishes⁴⁰ through its investments.

For greening, this funding creates an opportunity to create grants for national environmental projects or local projects implemented by local congregations or other CofE institutions. For example, the CofE can create grants that aim to maintain CofE green spaces as heritage sites, improve biodiversity or increase carbon capture on land, improve access or safety of CofE green spaces, and encourage people's use of CofE green spaces. These funding opportunities could be created with the aim of furthering the Marks of Mission of the Church and engaging societal concerns about climate change and environmental issues, potentially creating an opportunity to increase membership.

³⁹ <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2021/11/cofe-received-750m-of-public-money-in-last-five-years>

⁴⁰ <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/7832/news/115461/why-is-the-church-always-asking-for-money/>

The wealth of the CofE also positions it to move towards Net Zero goals and support its institutions in doing so by providing grants and funding.

Clergy and resource

The CofE has 6,715 full-time clergy. The decisions of the General Synod and Archbishops' Council are enacted by seven National Church Institutions (NCIs), which are the CofE's national administrative bodies. Their roles and specific potential to enact greening are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Roles of the national church institutions and their potential to support greening

NCI	Role	Specific Greening Potential
The Archbishops' Council*	Co-ordinate, promote, aid and further the work and mission of the Church of England by providing national support to the Church in dioceses and locally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute money. • Legislate, regulate and deregulate matters . • Provide national services to dioceses, parishes, cathedrals, schools etc. • Provide consultancy services. • Campaign and engage publicly with social justice and environmental issues.
Lambeth Palace*	Official residence and office of the Archbishop of Canterbury.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the Garden Museum, which is on the grounds. • Maintain and improve biodiversity in palace gardens. • Encourage public use of gardens.
Bishopthorpe Palace*	Official residence and office of the Archbishop of York.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and improve biodiversity in palace gardens. • Encourage public use of gardens.
The Church of England Central Services*	Provide support services for the NCIs, diocese and other charities with CofE ethos. This includes legal, financial, HR, IT,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support for NCIs creating environmental projects, initiatives and frameworks. • Internal communication to champion projects and highlight environmental

	payroll, office services, communications management and project management.	mission importance and guidelines to appropriate levels of CofE.
National Society for Promoting Religious Education	Oversees church schools and Christian education. The NCI provides support and guidance to Diocesan teams and RE advisors on religious education, collective worship and school ethos. Additionally, the NCI manages the development of resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create initiatives, funds and projects for CofE. • Promote teaching and resource development to spread environmental ideas within schools. • Champion work done in schools to influence others.
The Church of England Pensions Board	Provide retirement services for those serving or working for the Church, amassing almost 44,000 people across 700 Church organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divestment – ethical investment.
The Church Commissioners	Manage the Church's endowment portfolio. The Church Commissioners missions are promoting the mission and ministry of the Church of England by supporting poorer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of its infrastructure investments fall within the Real Assets portfolio, which includes land used for agriculture, forestry, delivering housing and commercial spaces(development land), and renewable energy production. • Manage Real Assets portfolio sustainably.

	⁴¹ dioceses with ministry costs, providing funds to support mission activities, paying for bishops' ministry and some cathedral costs, administering the legal framework for pastoral reorganisation and closed church buildings, paying clergy pensions for service prior to 1998 and running the clergy payroll.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage tenants' sustainable practice. • Create guidelines for land management. • Divestment.
--	---	---

*proposed merger of these four into a single NCI: the Church of England National Services.

The three National Investment Bodies (NIBs) of the CofE provide financial support through investment returns. The three NIBs are the Church Commissioners, the Church of England Pensions Board and the CBF Church of England Funds, which pool the investment assets of dioceses, cathedrals, and parish churches. Their key role is to steward and manage the Church's endowment portfolio to provide sustainable financial support in perpetuity to support the mission and ministry of the Church of England⁴².

Investment managers oversee the service delivery on the client's rural, strategic land, minerals and bishoprics portfolios respectively, with support from teams located around the UK. CCLA is the investment manager for the fund and acts on behalf of Diocesan boards of finance. Savills has managed the northern portion of the Church Commissioners' rural portfolio.

The church's Ethical Investment Advisory Group provides advice to the NIBs to enable them to invest according to Anglican traditions and values, including

⁴² <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/national-church-institutions/ethical-investment-advisory-group>

investing in ways that create opportunities of ‘standing with the marginalised’, ‘caring for creation’ and ‘serving the common good’.

Land resource

The Church of England is one of the largest landowners in the UK. It states it has about 200,000 acres of land, owned by the church commissioners, 42 dioceses and 12,500 parishes, an area more ⁴³than half the size of Greater London. The precise amount of land owned by the CofE, especially glebe or parish land, is unclear, as much of it is unregistered, as it has not changed hands since the introduction of compulsory registration for land sale in 1990. The church has encouraged internal investigation into documenting land owned, but this information is not publicly accessible.

I will be defining the land the Church has responsibility for in two categories: investment land and diocesan land. Investment land is land owned by the National Investing Bodies (NIBs) as assets. Diocesan land is land managed by diocesan synods and boards of finance, not pooled into the CBF Church of England Funds, such as cathedrals, CofE schools, churchyards, cemeteries and glebe land.

Investment assets

The Church of England Pension Board has £2.8 billion of assets, but few developable land holdings. The Church Commissioners manage £8.7 billion of assets, with roughly 15% in various land holdings⁴⁴, and 3% of the portfolio (6,000 acres) held as ‘strategic land’ suitable for housing.

The Commissioners are accountable to Parliament, General Synod, and, as a registered charity, the Charity Commission. They must make sure that the way they invest, and what is invested in, brings benefits to the wider world in a way that consistently shows positive outcomes in its contributions to the common good.

⁴³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/21/church-of-england-land-should-be-used-to-help-tackle-housing-crisis-says-report>

⁴⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-commissioners-england-and-church-england-pensions-board-support>

The organisation 'Operation Noah', estimates that the Church Commissioners own 98,000 acres of rural ⁴⁵and strategic land and 31,000 acres in Church Commissioners' UK forestry investments. WILDCARD is pressuring the CofE to increase transparency and accountability and register all of its land, ⁴⁶as well as increase rewilding and biodiversity on forestry land. It argues that the specific potential of all the CofE land cannot be truly valued without accurate data and an estimate of 3,500 acres of potential missing land has been proposed⁴⁷. Differences in estimations of land owned by the Church by groups such as Operation Noah and even the CofE reflect the need for transparency and accountability.

CASE STUDY: Pressure group – Wildcard

The position of the Church Commissioners' 108,000 acres is unclear as the Commissioners have repeatedly declined to release a map of the land they own, and the Church is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

Wildcard has a Rewild the Church campaign, which encourages the Commissioners to make a map of their land publicly available. By making this information accessible, Wildcard states that the Commissioners will demonstrate their willingness to be transparent and accountable for the way their land is managed.

Wildcard is also calling on the Church to rewild 30% of its land by 2030 where appropriate to do so, improve forestry biodiversity and to support farmers with land management.

Further Land knowledge

Knight Frank, a global property consultancy, was commissioned in 2020 to carry out a geospatial mapping exercise of church owned land and buildings in England. The methodology was made available for all dioceses wishing to map land and buildings, including that which may be unregistered.

Recommendations were given by the CofE to each diocese to map land in order

⁴⁵ <https://www.operationnoah.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Church-Land-and-the-Climate-Crisis-report.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://wildcard.land/campaigns/rewild-the-church>

⁴⁷ <https://whoownsengland.org/2019/11/04/gods-acres-the-land-owned-by-the-church-commissioners/>

to understand the potential land available, predominantly as an exercise for housing⁴⁸.

The agricultural land owned by ⁴⁹the Church Commissioners includes 35,000 acres of high-quality farmland, approximately 50,000 acres of mid-quality farmland, and 4,000 acres of woodland. Over 90% of the farmland is Grade I-III (productive to highly productive), with the rest a mixture of urban, non-agricultural land or poorer soils. Some tenancies are on peatland, which can act as an important carbon store if managed properly. They have over 500 farming tenants and 1,500 tenancy agreements. Through this land, the CofE could respond to environmental issues. The UK currently imports 46% of its food⁵⁰ and climate projections suggest the proportion of UK land classified as grade 1-3 could fall from 38% today to just 9% by 2050⁵¹. Sustainable management of agricultural land is vital. Furthermore, lack of access to green spaces and small-scale food production also means many children increasingly do not know where their food come from⁵².

Of development land, 6,000 acres has been identified as strategic for housing and 10,000 acres of land has been designated for nature⁵³. There are also 34 mineral sites, as well as renewable energy sites, including a wind turbine and two solar farms. As much as 92% of renewable energy sites are on enclosed farmland, with other sites including native woodland, coastal margins and recreational space. The Commissioners state their development land portfolio is suitable for the delivery of around 30,000 new homes, of which they anticipate roughly 9,000 will be affordable.

⁴⁸ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/26-february/news/uk/map-identifies-church-land-ripe-for-better-use>

⁴⁹ www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/j60808_ccfe_end_of_year_roundup_a4_4pp_proof3.pdf

⁵⁰ <https://fischerfarms.co.uk/did-you-knowwe-import-almost-half-of-our-food-adding-20-million-tonnes-of-c02-to-the-uks-footprint-every-year/>

⁵¹ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/CCRA-Ch3-Natural-environment-and-natural-assets-infographic.pdf>

⁵² chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.operationnoah.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Church-Land-and-the-Climate-Crisis-report.pdf

Demand for land for agriculture, housing, renewable energies and forestry creates an economic and ethical tension for the CofE between the Charity Commission regulations and the pursuit of its Marks of Mission. Often, productive agricultural land is sacrificed for housing or development and, although this can create greening opportunities, it creates further pressure on the UK to import food and intensify agricultural systems unsustainably.

Christian organisations such as Operation Noah aim to inspire and encourage the Church to create environmental action on investment and diocesan land.

CASE STUDY: Pressure group – Operation Noah

Operation Noah is a Christian organisation working with the Church to inspire action on the climate crisis. It states that the Church can play a significant role in addressing environmental challenges, especially the Church of England. In its report, Church Land and the Climate Crisis, it outlines that the three key recommendations to Church landowners in addressing the climate and nature crises are:

- grow more trees
- protect and restore peatland
- support tenant farmers to reduce emissions.

Specifically for land management, its Church Land Use Vision sets out seven target areas for 2030 for dioceses:

- Transparency – creating and publishing land management plans, including transparency over land owned.
- Mapping – maps of land use and protected areas should be available upon request.
- Emissions – publicly available plans to reach net zero on church land.
- Biodiversity – over 30% of diocesan-owned land should be protected for nature.
- Growing trees – 10% of land should be planted with suitable trees (unless other habitats demonstrate equal value).
- Protecting Peatland – restoring and rewetting 100% of degraded peatland.
- Supporting Farm Net Zero – actively support tenants to reach farm net zero through carbon audits on agricultural land.

Table 2 below considers the potential avenues to increase greening and environmental practice on each land type. Three goals are defined: direct greening, environmental stewardship and environmental education. These goals engage ideas of greening through proximity and access, improving national sustainability and greening of people's mentalities.

Table 2: Potential avenues to increase greening and environmental practice across investment land types

Investment Land	Potential
Agricultural Land	<p>Direct Greening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear provision of right of way on farms for walkers. <p>Environmental stewardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rewilding land. - Reaching net zero. - Increasing habitats for wildlife, e.g. planting trees and hedges/ providing natural spaces. - Introducing and encouraging agroecological and sustainable practices. - Introducing soil and biodiversity surveys. - Restoring peatland for carbon capture. - Introduce sustainable land management plan. <p>Environmental education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connecting local communities to farms and food systems. - Connecting farmers for knowledge sharing.
Forestry Land	<p>Direct Greening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilising the spaces for recreational uses e.g. walking, mountain biking. <p>Environmental Stewardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meet and surpass guidelines for sustainable forestry.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create biodiversity havens by using biodiverse tree species. - Incorporate renewable energy sources on land if appropriate. - Introduce local sustainable land management plans. <p>Environmental Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forestry schools. - Put up information boards where there are recreational grounds, encouraging people to learn about forestry and biodiversity.
Development Land	<p>Direct Greening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building affordable housing with green infrastructure designed into the community. - Pension housing with green infrastructure. - Construction of allotments. <p>Environmental Stewardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilising land for renewable energy sources. - Leaving land for nature. - Working with partners aiming for Net Zero. carbon emissions in development projects. <p>Environmental Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build a community hub in any housing development for community project development.

Residential property

The Church Commissioners also own residential property and run a Green Estate initiative. Residential property is a small portion of the Church Commissioners portfolio in comparison and so has not been included in depth in this report.

However, greening work is being enacted. Most of their residential property, by value, is in the Hyde Park Estate, which stretches across 90 acres of Central

London. The Estate consists of eight gardens, other green space and around 1,700 residential and commercial properties, next to Hyde Park. Three of the gardens⁵⁴ are under direct management of the Church Commissioners. The Church Commissioners have a Green Estate initiative and have commissioned bird, bat and insect homes for the gardens, planted for wildlife and minimised chemical use. They have also introduced greenhouses, dedicated growing spaces and wildlife signs.

The Estate has become a wildlife oasis in Central London, with sightings in 2021 including a cormorant, a heron, a pheasant, and a fox with its cubs. Sixty-four new trees were also planted across the Estate in six different areas, and a new garden was created in 2021. Finally, 840m² of new, specialist perennial and annual wildflower planting was undertaken in eight gardens across the Estate.

This increases access, recreational opportunity and quality of these spaces, creating green spaces of impact in Central London. These are, however, resident-only and not publicly accessible.

Sales

The Church Commissioners also own affordable housing, however, there are instances where this has been sold too, in order to create⁵⁵ profit. In one well-known case, the Church Commissioners faced protests from MPs, residents – and members of the clergy – over their decision to sell 1,630 affordable homes in south London. This happens on glebe land at smaller scales too. This demonstrates how diocese, investment managers and investment bodies can prioritise financial growth.

Diocesan land

Land and institutions that the CofE can utilise to enact greening that are managed by Diocesan Synods and boards are CofE schools, glebe Land and local parish churchyards and cemeteries. Many local parish churches also hold land in their own right, which sits outside of this research.

⁵⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/hyde-park-estate/green-estate>

⁵⁵ <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/renewed-anger-over-church-commissioners--housing-sale.html>

Glebe land

Most diocesan land is 'Glebe land', currently required by law to be held to fund clergy stipends. There are 70,000 acres of glebe ⁵⁶land. Glebe land originally belonged to and supported the parish leader, however, since 1976, the income raised goes to the Diocesan boards of finance, which manage the land, and is used to pay clergy stipends⁵⁷.

Glebe land can consist of agricultural, commercial and residential land and property, and can also include recreational ⁵⁸land. Land which has not been developed for community or commercial use is often let on agricultural tenancies to neighbouring farms. The land provides an income stream, but this is often low. If the land is not providing a significant benefit, then the option to sell the land provides an opportunity for some capital income. Due to its original purpose, glebe land is usually situated within a settlement or on the outskirts of a settlement, with a high chance of it being zoned for development, which can make the land very valuable. Disposal of these sites is often encouraged to allow the proceeds of a sale to be invested.⁵⁹

The current funding model for dioceses is complex and many dioceses are facing financial difficulties, constraining their ability to deliver their mission and ministry plans. The number of dioceses in deficit is increasing, with 18 in deficit in 2019 and at least 35 expecting to be in deficit in 2024⁶⁰. It has been reported that the CofE is making most of its land-based income not from agriculture but rather by the sale of its land to urban enterprises such as shopping malls, infrastructure and housing ⁶¹estates.

⁵⁶ <https://unherd.com/2019/05/what-has-the-church-done-with-its-land/>

⁵⁷ <https://trurodiocese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/What-is-Glebe-extended-version-June-2023.pdf>

⁵⁸ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Glebe_Land_Guidance.pdf

⁵⁹ <https://www.savills.co.uk/blog/article/223664/residential-property/in-plain-english-glebe-land.aspx>

⁶⁰ <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/7832/news/115461/why-is-the-church-always-asking-for-money/>

⁶¹ <https://www.thelandmagazine.org.uk/articles/adios-landed-clergy#:~:text=At%20present%20no%20Done%20can,don't%20stand%20a%20chance.>

Churchyards

Churchyards are important environmental spaces⁶² as they are land which has often never been agriculturally improved. The CofE owns around 16,000 churches, of which 12,500 are listed buildings. There are 42 mainland cathedrals with associated buildings, such as church halls, and estates. Each church is managed by its own Parish Church Council (PCC). There are also 19,000 Anglican burial grounds in England⁶³.

Schools

The CofE manages more than 4,700 schools⁶⁴. Diocesan Boards of Education manage schools within their jurisdiction and regulate religious education within those schools. The National Society for Promoting Religious Education⁶⁵ also works in primary and secondary schools as well as universities in order to promote religious education. A quarter of all primary schools are CofE⁶⁶, illustrating the potential impact of greening on school land and its influence.

The Church of England's educational ethos, as outlined in its vision document,^{67,68} promotes key principles that support ecological responsibility. Among these aims are the aims of educating for hope and aspiration, which focus on healing, renewal, and building a better future, and educating for community and living well together, which encourage strong relationships and shared responsibility for the world we inhabit. These aims could form a moral and spiritual basis for environmental action within schools.

⁶² <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/our-churches>

⁶³ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/nationwide-digital-churchyard-mapping-project-begins>

⁶⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/how-you-can-act/sustainable-schools>

⁶⁵ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools>

⁶⁶

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEWjK_JCToLqPAXUIVEEAHQFjLVaAQFnoECEwQAw&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.longmarston.herts.sch.uk%2F_site%2Fdata%2Ffiles%2Fusers%2Fparents%2F042D5F6D046270FD63BC8E90DA36FC66.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1eJV4fP5p73CzTtRQ2qXZ4&opi=89978449

⁶⁷ <https://www.churchofengland.org/search-results?keys=more%20education%20schools%20vision>

⁶⁸ [head-version-deeply-christian-serving-the-common-good.354759487.pdf](#)

Diocesan potential

Table 3 below discusses the potential avenues to increase greening and environmental practice on each land type.

Table 3: Potential avenues to increase greening and environmental practice across diocesan land types

Diocesan Land	Potential
Churchyards	<p>Direct Greening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving accessibility of green space, e.g. information boards, visible and clear entrances, introducing measures to make the space safe - Increasing and improving green spaces and green infrastructure - Encouraging the use of available green spaces for community projects <p>Environmental Stewardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveying and increasing biodiversity in churchyards through habitat creation/ maintenance - Rewilding churchyards - Planting trees for carbon capture <p>Environmental Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introducing a community garden/ allotment - Utilising green spaces for sermons and church activities - Encouraging stewardship ideas
Cemeteries	<p>Direct Greening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving accessibility of green space, e.g. information boards, visible and clear entrances, introducing measures to make the space safe <p>Environmental Stewardship</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveying⁶⁹ and increasing biodiversity through habitat creation/ maintenance - Rewilding - Planting trees for carbon capture
Schools	<p>Direct Greening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Green infrastructure introduction/improvement - Encouraging kids to engage in green spaces outside of school <p>Environmental Stewardship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Habitat creation - Planting trees - Net zero schools <p>Environmental Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lesson plans on environmental topics - Teaching gardening - Teaching stewardship ideas
Glebe land	Like that of investment lands but dependent on tenants or local leadership and Glebe land is more publicly prominent and so tenancies are more scrutinised.

Conclusion

The Church has significant potential to drive national environmental change through its influence on faith, Synod decisions, politics, and economics, supporting broader ideological shifts toward sustainability across the UK. Its financial resources provide the capacity to fund impactful environmental initiatives.

The Church also owns substantial land, encompassing a variety of types and avenues for greening. This diversity offers opportunities to implement greening initiatives and environmental action in ways that can have both local and

national impact. However, effective land management requires accountability and transparency, including clear reporting of land acreage.

Land management can be complex and different priorities for land and regulation by bodies like the Charity Commission can conflict with greening goals. Community engagement, particularly initiatives supported or led by faith, can encourage sustainable land use and greening projects and align with the Church's Marks of Mission. The huge acreage of land available provides greening capacity for local environmental projects with direct ideological and practical impact on people's daily lives, and for national or asset-driven initiatives that can enhance long-term environmental sustainability, promoting greener rural environments across England. Avenues to address wider environmental issues and unsustainable ideologies also have the potential to be addressed.

Chapter five – A Church for sustainability

This chapter will investigate the work being done by the Church of England (CofE) to enact greening. Case studies will be used to investigate how faith and wealth have been used to create change. Strengths of the CofE in enacting greening and limitations hindering development will be identified. Greening tends to occur at more local and diocesan levels, with some examples at investment land level, and is largely led by motivated individuals and partner organisations, often with Christian ties.

The environmental action taken by the CofE will be grouped into: national impact, investment land, and diocesan property. National impact will include the influence of faith on internal action and CofE organisations and implications for political and economic influence.

National impact

A motivation to enact environmental change exists in the CofE. Theological aims and explanations for sustainable and environmental work are seen in the 'CofEs Route map to Net Zero Carbon'⁷⁰:

- 'Treasuring God's creation
- We recognise that the global climate emergency is a crisis for God's creation, and unjust to the poor and future generations. It is the context into which we are called to live and preach the Gospel.
- We will link all our actions on net zero carbon to our Christian mission, as expressed in the Five Marks of Mission.
- We will grow the Church while reducing our environmental footprint; Christ's Gospel message will reach and engage new people, particularly the young.'

These narratives have influenced internal CofE organisation and how the CofE and associated bodies interact externally through politics and investments.

⁷⁰ <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/net-zero-carbon-routemap>

Internal influence

The CofE has created an environmental ⁷¹⁷² working group, which includes the Church Commissioners' Head of Responsible Investment. This working group will work on Net Zero strategy and engagement with climate policy makers.

The General Synod voted for the whole of the CofE to achieve net zero carbon by 2030. The vote recognised that the global climate emergency is a crisis for God's ⁷³creation and a fundamental injustice to the poor and future generations. The church has, in 2021, also appointed a Lead Bishop for the Environment, who will lead the CofE Environment Program. In Synod, the Bishop for the Environment acts as a voice for the environment⁷⁴.

To reach net zero, the General Synod called upon its National Church Institutions, cathedrals, dioceses, educational institutions and parishes to reduce their emissions, to assess their investment portfolios, and to draw up plans of action to achieve the target. The impact of net zero created through the church's available resources and institutions would be significant. The CofE organisations have created reports, guidelines and route maps for reaching net zero and increasing biodiversity.

Under the Net Zero route to 2030, work focuses on Diocesan land as the aim for Net Zero for the CofE investment portfolio is 2050. Within the roadmap, environmental aims have been included, and dioceses have been tasked with incorporating nature-positive objectives into Glebe management policies, recording biodiversity in churchyards and calling on CofE schools to act in accordance with the Department for Education Sustainability Strategy. Impact is limited by diocese control over its landholdings and is dependent on motivations of the diocesan office and clergy to enact this roadmap.

The General Synod has also promoted a series of measures to improve biodiversity in churchyards and cemeteries and aims to improve stewardship of

⁷¹ <https://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/mission-and-ministry/environment/bishop-of-environment/>

⁷² <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-englands-environment-group-calls-greater-action-climate-change-across>

⁷³ <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/RoutemapToNetZeroCarbonFinal.pdf>

⁷⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/environment-prayer-worship-and-teaching>

agricultural and forestry land by collaborating with tenants and partners. More than £20 million in funds have been allocated to help dioceses support parishes and schools in reducing their carbon emissions. For example, a £2.4 million 'Quick Wins' fund has been launched for dioceses to help parishes with small-scale projects such as LED installations, pew heaters or double glazing.

These reports require a detailed analysis of the feasibility of the route maps, to avoid a 'greening of religion hypothesis' trend. Land owned by the Church's National Investing Bodies (NIBs) is considered outside the scope of the report. Operation Noah⁷⁵ calls this unfortunate, given that the agricultural land owned by the Church of England is likely to create more greenhouse gas emissions than all Church of England buildings combined. The route map does however ask for targets and updates from the church commissioners on biodiversity across investment land, engagement with tenants on sustainable farming and leadership among landowners.

Economic influence

In part motivated by the Net Zero road map, the National Investing Bodies (NIBs) have divested from environmentally damaging sectors such as oil and gas. Many dioceses have also divested⁷⁶⁷⁷. NIBs have also created their own guidelines for investment managers and for collaboration with external partners, aiming for environmentally friendly land management and ethically conscious investments⁷⁸⁷⁹ through use of the CofE's influence, wealth and size.

Political influence

The Bishop for the Environment also took part in the mass climate lobby of parliament in 2025, asking MPs to take action to help those facing climate

⁷⁵ <https://www.operationnoah.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Church-Land-and-the-Climate-Crisis-report.pdf>

⁷⁶ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-commissioners-exclude-oil-and-gas-companies-over-failure-align-climate>

⁷⁷ <https://www.operationnoah.org/four-dioceses-including-london-divest-from-fossil-fuel-companies/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/finance-news/church-england-pensions-board-publishes-2024-annual-review>

⁷⁹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/national-church-institutions/church-commissioners-england/how-we-invest/responsible-investment>

disaster⁸⁰. The mass lobby brought different faith groups together and called for the government to ensure those responsible for climate breakdown pay towards the international loss and damage fund. Furthermore, as a member of the House of Lords, the Bishop for the Environment debated the damage done by sewage pollution⁸¹ in the UK. This reinforces narratives that environmentalism and stewardship are integral to the CofE mission to the wider public. This particularly impacts those sharing the faith, including individuals within the House of Lords.

Investment land

The Church Commissioners are the major landowners of the three NIBs and I will focus on their investments here.

The Church Commissioners are undertaking work to become more sustainable and environmentally friendly. They are signatories on the Finance for Biodiversity Pledge⁸², committing to protect and restore biodiversity through their finance activities and investments. This includes commitments to divest from deforestation and to achieve Net Zero by 2050 across investment targets. They have also created an Environment Policy that sits under their Responsible and Ethical Investment Policy. In the Church Commissioners report on real asset sustainability, opportunities for greening have been acted on and ways for investment land to responsibly tackle climate change have also been identified, including creating more woodland, reconnecting rivers, and preventing flooding, as well as the management of soil and restoration of marshland habitat. In November 2022, the Commissioners joined an initiative led by the National Trust to bring together large landowners⁸³ and managers to sign up to a range of commitments to help the Government meet its net zero ambitions and reverse environmental damage. Others involved included the Duchy of Cornwall, Soil Association and Woodland Trust.

⁸⁰ <https://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/bishop-in-mass-climate-lobby-of-parliament/>

⁸¹ <https://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/the-bishop-of-norwich-speaks-in-house-of-lords-debates-on-the-damage-done-by-sewage-pollution-and-also-on-the-value-of-life-long-learning/>

⁸² <https://www.financeforbiodiversity.org/about-us/signatories-and-repository/>

⁸³ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/3-december/news/uk/church-commissioners-sign-national-trust-s-net-zero-pledge>

Sixty per cent of the Commissioner investment⁸⁴ portfolio is land. This is either farmland, sustainable forestry, or land for housing and community infrastructure development. Forty per cent is built environment and infrastructure, which is outside the scope of this research due to the breadth of infrastructure and limitations on Church Commissioner influence on this land. Real Asset investment land greening action is discussed below.

Forestry land

Commission forests meet sustainable guidelines and provide recreational access to the public.

The forestry portfolio is fully certified as sustainable according to the ⁸⁵⁸⁶⁸⁷UK Forestry Standard. The creation and conservation of habitats is also considered and work to restore all⁸⁸⁸⁹ ancient woodland areas (plantations on ancient woodland sites) to native woodland across land holdings in Scotland is developing.

UK forest land provides significant recreational benefits to the public. All Commissioner forests in the UK are open for recreational access. More than 250,000 people visit Llandegla, forestry land owned by the Commissioners⁹⁰, each year to cycle, walk or run. The management of Llandegla was recognised as best-in-class at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society Woodlands Competition in 2021.

Agricultural land

The Sustainability for Real Assets report highlights the main avenues being taken towards sustainable agricultural development: changes to tenancy agreements,

⁸⁴ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/6346_1_cc_rasr_full_300623_lr2.pdf

⁸⁵ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/archbishops-commissions/housing-church-and-community/about-coming-home>

⁸⁶ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/6346_1_cc_rasr_full_300623_lr2.pdf

⁸⁷ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/j60808_ccfe_end_of_year_roundup_a4_4pp_proof3.pdf

⁸⁸ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/archbishops-commissions/housing-church-and-community/about-coming-home>

⁸⁹ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/6346_1_cc_rasr_full_300623_lr2.pdf

⁹⁰ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/6346_1_cc_rasr_full_300623_lr2.pdf

supporting and championing farmers, sustainable land management focus and carbon audits. The impact on agricultural land is more difficult to measure than for forestry as, when rented, full operational oversight is provided to the tenant. The Commissioners aim to ensure that sustainable and nature-friendly farming principles are adopted and reflected in lease provisions, and partnered with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Board to carry out farm letting environmental assessments across new tenancies.

Aims to collaborate with tenants who are driven by sustainable practice are being introduced. Pre-letting environmental assessment (PLEA) are being introduced to tenant agreements to ensure tenants identify the best ways to increase biodiversity. Other agreements and requirements can also be introduced depending on land type. For example, a requirement for a collaborative approach between tenant and landlord⁹¹ was included, with the landlord 'seeking nature-based solutions, opportunity for biodiversity improvement and enhancement of soil health' when a 153 acre former dairy farm located near Carlisle was recently marketed to let for ten years on a modern Farm Business Tenancy.

Commissioners have also outlined sustainable objectives for investment managers, including incorporating agroecological farming techniques, such as improving biodiversity, managing bio-waste and improving soil health. More specific recommendations by the Commissioners include reducing the use of pesticides and chemical fertiliser, the use of cover crops, reduced tillage and growing a more diverse range of crops.

Another lease agreement promoted biodiversity with Hereford Wildlife Trust as tenants at Bartonsham Meadows, Hereford⁹². Plans were put in place to plant grass and wildflowers, restore ancient hedgerows, reintroduce cattle grazing, and allow for seasonal flooding. In 2023, the Church Commissioners also signed a tenancy agreement with Natural England to allow for improved management and enhancement of biodiversity across two fields of additional land at Wybunbury Moss, a National Nature Reserve near Crewe, Cheshire⁹³. The Church Commissioners are also involved with Fenland SOIL and hosted a workshop for

⁹¹ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/6346_1_cc_rasr_full_300623_lr2.pdf

⁹² <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-commissioners-create-new-nature-reserve-edge-hereford>

⁹³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvg3n2l8v0qo>

tenants to discuss current challenges and opportunities for farming on lowland peat. Partnerships and consultancy on investment land are utilised frequently.

Development land

The CofE 'Coming Home' report stresses the need for new affordable housing⁹⁴. The Commissioners work with developers to locate land appropriate for housing and aim to maximise sustainable commitments as part of the sale process to land developers. The Commissioners have created a Best Practice Sustainability and an Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) framework for strategic housing development to help professional advisors embed the Commissioners' own ESGs. Commissioner analysis of ESG risk and opportunity has allowed further optimisation of ESG work⁹⁵, demonstrating an ambition to enact real change.

Green infrastructure is targeted as an important part of housing developments by the Commissioners for communities and to meet sustainability targets.

Infrastructure inclusion is not consistent across development lands, as often Commissioners have limited control over the development if land is being sold. However, there are cases where development land has been used to improve green infrastructure.

As a positive example, as well as providing 2,200 homes and infrastructure, a proposed development from the Commissioners and Landlink estates will deliver a range of new public amenity benefits for new and existing residents in Bersted, West Sussex. These include substantial levels of new public open space that exceed Arun District Council's planning policy requirements. The development has been designed around a continuous green open parkland that will provide 61 acres of publicly accessible space.

Diocesan land

Churchyards

Churches and churchyards have long been a space for community action. In the Church in Action survey, 2017⁹⁶, 70% of churches ran three or more organised

⁹⁴ <https://www.operationnoah.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Church-Land-and-the-Climate-Crisis-report.pdf>

⁹⁵ https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/6346_1_cc_rasr_full_300623_lr2.pdf

⁹⁶ https://cuf.org.uk/uploads/resources/Church_in_Action_Report_2017.pdf

activities for the benefit of their local communities, such as parent/carer and toddler groups, community cafes, lunch clubs for older people, debt centres and youth work⁹⁷. The same report found that 93% of local churches are involved in running or supporting a food bank.

The CofE has also provided ways for congregations and vicars to manage their churchyards for wildlife, trees and preservation of important meadows⁹⁸. Action on this has not been measured, however, greening action motivated by vicars and congregations is seen nationally, with a host of creative projects and events held in churchyards. Examples include creation of vegetable allotments, livestock rearing, creation of wildlife havens and flora and fauna biodiversity projects, tree planting projects, interactive church trails, outdoor prayer meetings and biodiversity days.

CASE STUDY: Congregation –⁹⁹ allotments and feeding the community¹⁰⁰

In the diocese of Truro, volunteers have been transforming their local churchyards into vegetable gardens to provide local people with natural healthy food. St Michael's Church, Landrake's churchyard has been transformed by a group made up from the church's congregation, motivated by the cost-of-living crisis. The group have grown salads, fruits, berries and root vegetables that have been distributed by the church's unofficial foodbank and used for a monthly community lunch to raise money for local charities. The team also collaborated with local farmers to support the introduction of more environmentally friendly agricultural practices and encourage local people to produce their own natural fertilisers.

The vegetable patch is one of several ways that the church has helped to provide food for its community. For years, they had also been given permission to glean unwanted potatoes and cauliflowers from nearby farms to distribute them to families.

⁹⁷ https://cuf.org.uk/uploads/resources/Church_in_Action_Report_2017.pdf

⁹⁸ <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/churchyard-wildlife#:~:text=Put%20up%20explanatory%20notices%20%2D%20Let,the%20churchyard's%20wildlife%20records%20accumulate.>

⁹⁹ <https://trurodiocese.org.uk/2023/04/the-green-shoots-of-growth/>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/stories-and-features/cornish-churchyard-feed-local-community>

‘What better way is there to show Christ’s love than by reaching out to people and trying to give them what they need?’ asks Carolyn Whittaker, a churchwarden at St Michael’s.

The churchyard’s biodiversity has increased, with greater numbers of reptiles, birds, insects and bats. The work came with huge positivity from the local community, and the project received donations of plant pots, seeds and greenhouses to help further its goals.

Over five years, the project has completely transformed the churchyard and the view of the Church within the community, driven by an individual’s motivation

Local greening action is frequently enacted in collaboration with Christian organisations, which requires further research to understand why this is the case and whether it is the CofE or secondary organisations that are limiting other local collaboration. Two Christian groups, A Rocha and Caring for God’s Acre, have been influential in greening local communities through frameworks, guidelines and projects. The CofE has collaborated with these organisations to create more environmentally friendly, quality churchyards, promoting the work of these organisations at a national level. As part of its Net Zero goals, dioceses, schools and churches are encouraged to sign on to the A Rocha scheme and meet defined criteria for ecological work.

CASE STUDY: A Rocha UK – Caring for Creation¹⁰¹

A Rocha UK is a Christian charity working to equip Christians and churches to protect and restore the environment – for God, nature and all people. It aims to inspire individuals and families, equip churches and church leaders, build partnerships and manage land for nature and people.

A Rocha provides frameworks for religious diocese and churches to support caring for God’s Earth. Specifically for Churches, the Eco Church survey awards bronze, silver and gold awards to churches showing appropriate evidence they are going green across five areas :

- Worship and Teaching

¹⁰¹ <https://arocha.org.uk/>

- Buildings and Energy
- Land and Nature
- Community and Global Engagement
- Lifestyle

Within the CofE there are 1870 Bronze, 899 Silver, and 40 Gold Church of England Eco Churches, and we have 12 Bronze, 23 Silver, and 4 Gold Eco Cathedrals. There are also 32 Bronze Church of England Eco Dioceses.

Parish churches have the potential to become the locus of community mobilisation as well as places of hopeful resistance. Work on cemeteries and churchyards is often undertaken by Caring for God's Acre. In partnership with A Rocha and the CofE, Caring for God's Acre has mobilised church communities to conduct citizen science in their churchyards, as part of its larger biodiversity improvement goals.

CASE STUDY: Churches Count on Nature

The [Churches Count on Nature](#) annual wildlife audit event takes place each June and contributes to the National Biodiversity Network database. It takes place as part of 'Love Your Burial Ground Week', which is run by Caring for God's Acre. Churches Count on Nature is an initiative organised in collaboration between the Church of England, Caring for God's Acre and A Rocha to support local churches' engagement in biodiversity and ecology.

In 2024 there were 6,354 records of nature submitted by nearly 6,000 participants.

The work aims to increase species diversity and raise awareness and care for biodiversity and churchyard wildlife. Berwick Parish Church has participated in the count every year since 2022 and has seen an increase in species diversity because of their work to make space in their churchyard for wilding.

The work inspires some Churches to go even further.

- As part of the event at Ely Cathedral, the Cathedral teamed up with Ely Wildlife Watch to run an all-ages Discovery Morning on bugs and bees, which included counting, crafting and hearing from experts on our impact on local wildlife.

- In St Giles Church, Hartington, a Sunday service was performed outdoors as part of the Count on Nature, and the congregation was invited to explore what wildflowers and trees could be found in their churchyard, identifying 29 different species of wildflower.

This has mobilised congregations; however, out of all regular worshipers, the number of participants is relatively low. This may be due to the motivation of vicars or dioceses, lack of awareness, elderly congregations, lack of churchyards or a potential overexaggeration of potential for community mobilisation. Investigating into how the programme was publicised and dioceses participation could reveal if awareness or personal motivations influenced uptake.

Glebe land

Ways in which glebe land can be used is similar to investment land, and glebe land guidance created by the CofE has similar goals. Guidance for Net Zero through farming carbon audits, collaboration with farmers and introduction of PLEAs are encouraged. However, glebe land is owned and managed at a diocesan level by Diocesan Boards of Finance and governed by Diocesan Synods¹⁰². This means that differences occur between dioceses depending on their motivations and priorities. Certain dioceses, such as Exeter and Truro, are more environmentally engaged and have sought out tenants who connect communities to agriculture and farm sustainably. Projects include collaboration with The Apricot Centre in Exeter and Loveland in Truro.

CASE STUDY: The Apricot¹⁰³ Centre – Diocese of Exeter

Under a five-year trial tenancy period, the Diocese of Exeter created an agreement with the Apricot Centre to take on a five-year Farm Business Tenancy over 25 acres of adjoining diocesan land. The Apricot Centre is a centre for regenerating land, lives and [livelihoods](https://www.apricotcentre.co.uk/). It works with the Real Farming

¹⁰² https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Glebe_Land_Guidance.pdf

¹⁰³ <https://www.apricotcentre.co.uk/>

Trust and is a sustainable farm education centre for agroecology and wellbeing service for children and families.

Under the agreement, the Diocese of Exeter was looking to work with sustainable tenants. The aim of the project was to increase biodiversity and improve soil conditions, largely through increasing organic soil content. Improving organic soil content locks up carbon and can be used as a form of carbon credit. In this tenancy, the Diocese of Exeter let to the Apricot Centre with the condition that, alongside market rent, carbon sequestered in the soil would be shared equally between the centre and the diocese, providing strong financial incentive for this agreement.

The agreement was somewhat limited as the tenancy was only five years long and improvements to soil are seen over longer periods. Introducing sustainable agriculture tends to take longer periods and tenancies must reflect this

Glebe land is frequently found close to established communities and working with communities is essential practice, especially where land use may be changed. Recommendations to include communities in work have been outlined, however, in certain dioceses the CofE appears to have prioritised housing development over green infrastructure. This is not to say houses should not be built on glebe land, but that attentiveness to local voices is essential to ensure church action aligns with recommendations and Marks of Mission. The example also highlights the financial pressure some dioceses find themselves in and the need for clearer sustainable alternatives.

CASE STUDY: Loveland – Diocese of Truro

The Diocese of Truro were early advocates of considering environmental credentials¹⁰⁴ alongside other factors in considering new tenancies. In an area of land intensively farmed for potato cropping with high levels of runoff, the diocese was looking to let in sustainable farmers. As well as requiring applicants to explain their soil health, cropping methods and nature plans, the Diocese has to balance against the Church Property Measure 'best value' requirements.

It is now let to the Falmouth Food Co-op who, through their group 'Loveland' and with the consent of the diocese, have implemented a range of organic, low food-mileage, sustainable vegetable crop growing.

The Loveland project is inspired and run by young people alongside a grocery hub and food kitchen¹⁰⁵. This connects local communities and young people to their food systems, increasing environmental ideologies.

A planning application was made on behalf of the Peterborough Diocesan Board of Finance to sell a ten-year development option on agricultural glebe land next to a parish church in Titchmarsh and Thrapston. Local residents were displeased with the plan and stated it would create a socially and visually intrusive development where the council had stated it did not need more land for this purpose. The land also sat alongside a nature reserve of special scientific interest. The diocese rationalised this action through financial difficulties, exacerbated by the pandemic.

Schools

With over 4,600, CofE schools play a significant¹⁰⁶ role in the education sector. These schools are uniquely positioned to support environmental action predominantly through land use. The Church's educational institutions are responding to CofE environmental action by aligning their practices with national sustainability goals and Marks of Mission values.

¹⁰⁴

https://www.rase.org.uk/content/large/documents/reports/fotf_farmers_guide_update_apr_25_digital_final.pdf

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.operationnoah.org/growing-hope-church-action-for-sustainable-land-use-inspiring-webinar-available-to-view/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools>

Schools are governed by dioceses and supported by Diocesan Boards of Education. Diocesan Boards of Education are encouraged to work in accordance with the Department for Education's Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy¹⁰⁷, and to develop land management plans that promote biodiversity and carbon reduction. However, distributed decision-making structures mean that progress on environmental goals can vary between dioceses.

As part of the CofE's Net Zero aims, travel and carbon reduction¹⁰⁸ are also a key environmental action performed by schools. Schools are encouraged to promote active travel through initiatives like walking buses and by working with local authorities to develop safe travel plans. Where possible, schools are also advised to install smart meters.

School grounds often include churchyards, green spaces, or adjacent land, offering opportunities for environmental projects. The creation of funds through the CofE enables local action, where finances may otherwise limit work. Specifically for young people, the Spark¹⁰⁹ Fund provides financial support for environmental projects, enabling schools to create outdoor learning spaces and implement sustainable practices. Evidence for successful projects is scarce, however, and raises potential limitations of awareness, promotion and accessibility of funds provided by the CoE. Many CofE schools also engage in tree planting and biodiversity initiatives¹¹⁰.

Increasingly, CofE schools are including Forest Schools¹¹¹, offering children the chance to learn outdoors and appreciate nature, however this is limited by school land ownership. Schools also often align with the Eco- Schools¹¹² initiative, which involves setting up an eco-committee and carrying out an environmental review. Under the Eco- Schools initiative students are also encouraged to lead community initiatives, such as recycling campaigns, educational posters, or local

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy/sustainability-and-climate-change-a-strategy-for-the-education-and-childrens-services-systems>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools/net-zero-carbon-schools>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.london.anglican.org/church-and-parish-support/children-and-youth-ministry/the-spark-fund/>

¹¹⁰ <https://st-peters.kent.sch.uk/News/Tree-Planting/>

¹¹¹ <https://www.levertonacademy.co.uk/forest-schools/>

¹¹² <https://www.eco-schools.org.uk/>

conservation projects. These engage students in environmental practices and ideas and encourage them to have environmental ideologies as well as appreciate nature and wildlife around them. Motivation, priorities and resources of schools vary greatly, however, and so the roll-out of these programmes is not always feasible.

On a more national level, resources are produced by partnering Christian environmental organisations, such as A Rocha, who offer schools theological education plans and practical guidance on how to approach climate action as a moral and spiritual duty¹¹³.

Conclusions

Across all types of land and institutions, impactful greening tends to rely heavily on local leadership, individual motivation, and collaborative partnerships. Where these elements are aligned, the CofE has been successful in transforming spaces and communities, creating opportunities for environmental and greening action.

The CofE has made significant attempts to improve environmental work, particularly through its national commitments to Net Zero and sustainable land management. These efforts are grounded in theological motivations and reinforced by institutional frameworks such as the General Synod's environmental resolutions and the Route Map to Net Zero Carbon by 2030. The CofE's environmental focus, however, remains largely directed toward carbon reduction, ethical investment, and sustainable land use, rather than greening as a direct aim. While greening outcomes are present through various initiatives, they often emerge as secondary benefits or are not in urban areas where they are needed. Greening of lives can be seen in investment land, most clearly in its forestry portfolio through recreational access. Agricultural and development land is more dependent on tenants and developers, however, the CofE aims to change this and introduce more sustainability measures in agreements. Glebe land is similar but tends to be located close to communities and so may have more impact. Otherwise, churches are key players in creating local greening change. Schools have potential, but this is not yet acted on fully.

A key strength of the CofE's environmental action is its finances, breadth and influence. Substantial land ownership has given the CofE huge potential and,

¹¹³ <https://arocha.org.uk/education-plans/>

through guidelines and partnerships, it aims to utilise this to fulfil its mission. Furthermore, CofE embeddedness in local communities provides a powerful platform for localised actions that improve on green infrastructure and engage local communities in environmental ideologies. The involvement of motivated individuals, partner organisations, and access to financial resources, including targeted funds for schools and diocesan initiatives, also enhance its impact, although with varying success.

Several limitations hinder the consistency and scale of the CofE's greening efforts. The decentralised governance structure of the Church results in variation in environmental engagement across tenancies, dioceses and parishes. A strong emphasis on carbon in national policy frameworks can also unintentionally deprioritise biodiversity and greening work, although biodiversity aims are included in Net Zero roadmaps. Limited integration of land-based emissions and biodiversity loss in central planning, particularly for investment land, further illustrates this gap. Furthermore, while sustainability is considered, important change is needed to enable this work, such as the increase of tenancy lengths and support through funding or connection to other tenants. Financial pressures in some dioceses and competition for land use can also lead to tension between environmental values and economic necessity, as seen in contested development on Glebe land. Charity Commission influence can also reduce change, although, where prioritised, examples demonstrate that routes around Commission guidance exist.

The CofE plays a valuable role in contributing to environmental awareness, supporting local ecological initiatives, and enabling access to green spaces. Its potential to further green lives remains high, particularly if greater alignment is achieved between theological mission, environmental ambition, and operational delivery across all levels of the Church. Motivation may increase as environmental ideologies become more ingrained in the CofE ethos and narrative. Understanding how mobilising communities can create impact would be useful future research that could improve greening and environmental projects.

Chapter six – A churchyard investigation

This chapter outlines an investigation undertaken to understand the geography around religious institutions and land and to assess how and where greening occurs in these spaces. London remains the most religiously diverse region of England. For an investigation into the local impact and geographies of religion I wanted to incorporate a less influential religion to try and unpick ways religious organisations may differ in greening. I selected Islam as the second most dominant religion in the UK and a faith which has stewardship principles, such as *Khalifah* (guardianship of the earth). Additionally, Muslims are proportionally more likely to live in deprived areas, so understanding how greening can impact these communities is [important](#).

Methodology

I undertook an investigation of the current role and potential of CofE churchyards and Islamic spaces of worship as community spaces for greening. I chose Islington in London as the sample site for my investigation. Islington has the second lowest portion of green space in the country¹¹⁴, as the borough of London with the lowest green space per capita. London was selected due to ease of access and time constraints. Over half of Islington residents stated they identified as religious in the 2021 census, 34.7% identified as Christian (denomination breakdown unavailable), 11.9% Muslim and 40.8% as having no religious affiliation. This suggests that religious spaces in Islington still have a relevant place within communities, however, out of the 493,905 m² of publicly accessible green land in Islington, only 4.2% of that is owned by religious institutions.

The investigation occurred in two stages. Initial desk-based research was undertaken to investigate the number of places of worship and land considered publicly available green land on places owned by religious institutions. The second stage was fieldwork in selected areas of Islington, visually assessing the spaces of worship across three categories: green space quality, access and community use. This was also undergone to understand where there may be limitations to greening and to assess the quality of available online resources.

¹¹⁴ https://www.islington.gov.uk/~/_media/sharepoint-lists/public-records/publichealth/information/adviceandinformation/20242025/islington-climate-panel-report.pdf

I compiled a list of CofE and Islamic places of worship under two categories: those with and those without publicly accessible green space, broken down by ward. Within Islington, there were 26 CofE churches and 7 Islamic spaces of worship. Eleven of the CofE churches were participating in the A Rocha EcoChurch scheme: six bronze, three silver and two gold.

Only two Islamic spaces of worship were mosques, and the rest were rented spaces or multifaith prayer spaces. Across wards in Islington, ten green spaces were identified as religious, all of these were owned by a Christian denomination and the CofE accounted for eight in Islington. Seven of 17 wards had religious green space. All wards contained a CofE church.

Six wards were selected for fieldwork. Fieldwork was conducted to assess the quality, access and use of religious spaces to discuss the most significant routes for greening through religious institutions. Each point was assessed on a scale from 1–3. Explanations of the scale are shown in table 4 below, along with examples of identifiable characteristics.

Table 4: Assessment scale for quality, access and use of religious spaces for greening

	Quality of Green Space	Access to green space	Use of Green space
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visible land is either cemented or paved over No signs of managed vegetation or green space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entry point is difficult to locate No visible signs showing opening/closing hours and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No visible sign of engagement on available green space No signs or posters signifying environmental community engagement
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some visible green space and vegetation that seems maintained Multiple planters or potted plants alongside otherwise grey infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single entry point or unlocked gate Some visible signage showing opening/closing hours and events Some signs of additional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some visible sign of engagement on available green space (children's play space/ community vegetable patches/ art/ herb garden/ flower garden)

		accessibility (path/ bench/ bike lock)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Posters advertising community events
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well managed, diverse vegetation Trees on land, if space available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple/ Clear entry point and open gates in opening hours Visible signage showing opening/closing hours and events Additional infrastructure (path/ bike lock ups/ benches / spaces to relax 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visible sign of engagement on available green space (children's play space/ community vegetable patches/ art/ herb garden/ flower garden) Posters advertising community events

This was also undertaken to assess the surrounding areas to gain an understanding of the importance in relation to other green spaces. Three were selected from wards with identified CoFE green land and three without, with preference for those containing Islamic places of worship. The wards selected were:

Ward	CoFE churches	Islamic prayer space/ mosque
Hillrise	2 (1 bronze EcoChurch)	-
Junction	2	-
Holloway	1 (1 gold EcoChurch)	2
Barnsbury	3 (2 bronze EcoChurch)	-
Clerkenwell	3	-

St Marys & St James	3 (1 gold EcoChurch)	-
---------------------	----------------------	---

Findings

Islamic spaces of worship including mosques were found on high streets and main roads among shops and all ranked 1 across all categories. There was no visible available space for vegetation or green land.

	1	2	3
Quality	4	4	6
Access	4	5	5
Use	5	6	3

The number of churches ranked in each category across the wards are shown.

Quality

Most churches, even those achieving 3s, had a paved or lawned area and were not very biodiverse. Many churches did however have old large trees permitted by land size, or potted plants where land size was small, awarding them 2s. Churches with 3 ranking generally had trees, a variety of plants and flowers and were well-managed according to their size.



St James Church – St Marys & St James – sunflowers growing in pots

Interestingly, churches were generally located within proximity of a medium to large green space or park (<5minute walking distance). In some instances, churches were found directly alongside green land, generally managed by Islington Council but originally owned by the church. About half of churches with 1 for quality had adjacent green land.

Access

Most churches were gated, and gates were not clearly open in some instances. Most churches had opening times of the church publicly visible and had an appropriate number of access points according to their size. The most prominent additional infrastructure were benches, paths and bike lock ups (providing alternative sustainable ways of arriving to the church site). Signage ranged but most churches were well signposted with events and church information.

Use

Where land was used by communities, this tended to fall into nursery groups, vegetable or herb gardens and events such as church summer fairs and church open days. Vegetable patches and similar larger-scale projects also appeared to be organised by community groups not directly tied to the church. Individuals within these groups may however be part of the CofE.



St Mary's – Hornsey – community garden

A Rocha comments

All EcoChurches excluding one were awarded 2/3s in the investigation. Churches with existing infrastructure may be more inclined to take part in the programme as they have to make smaller changes, although some churches with sizeable, quality land were not signed onto the EcoChurch scheme.

One bronze EcoChurch did have 1s for all green space considerations. The church did not have any identified land to enact greening on however and A Rocha provides EcoChurch awards based on a variety of considerations including care for churchyards, so, although this church seemed non-green, it must have been taking reasonable action in other ways.



Church on the Corner- Barnsbury – Bronze EcoChurch with no Churchyard

The two gold EcoChurches also differed significantly in quality of green space. Where St Mary got 3s for all green space criteria, St Lukes got a 3 for access and quality, although it was largely lawn, and a 2 for use as the space did not have a clear usage or way for people to interact with the space, e.g. benches.



St Marys Church – St Marys & St James- one section of the Gold EcoChurch



St Luke's Church, Holloway – Gold EcoChurch

Conclusion

The Islington case study demonstrates that churchyards can play a significant role in urban greening, offering both ecological and social benefits in areas of need. However, their contribution depends on management practices, accessibility, and community engagement, which vary considerably across parishes. While not a replacement for large-scale green infrastructure, churchyards represent an important and underutilised resource, reinforcing the argument that local CofE spaces should be central to wider greening strategies. The potential of religious greening was also not seen to the same level in Islamic spaces of worship and might reflect how religious resources and societal

influence may differ. Religions are not equal in their potential to create change and even where religions have introduced narratives around environmental missions, limitations may hinder progress at a wide scale. Interfaith groups also warrant further research, especially in urban areas, in which religions can pool resources and faith and can provide opportunity for greening projects or political action, such as that seen in political lobbying by faith leaders.

This investigation found that utilising A Rocha's EcoChurch schemes as a way of assessing national churchyard quality is not viable, as churches receive awards based on reasonable action, which is limited where land is not available, as well as other criteria. It could however be used to understand the environmental stances of churches, but research would be required to understand the reasons many Churches have not signed.

Whether those outside of the CofE faith feel comfortable using CofE green spaces is uncertain. Lack of specific research on religious land for greening, religious views of greening in the UK and London limit our understanding of applicability. This demonstrates that religion and spirituality are not viewed as valuable routes to greening and community action by researchers and needs further research and investigation.

Chapter seven – conclusions and philanthropy

My research has suggested that the Church of England (CofE) holds extraordinary potential to contribute to the greening of society, despite secularisation and other religious priorities. Its position as the established church, with deep historical roots, extensive landholdings, and significant financial resources, places it in a unique position to act. Beyond its wealth, the CofE also has influence through faith, with the ability to create and mobilise congregations, shape values, and reach communities across England. The combination of spiritual authority and motivation, infrastructure, and resources creates opportunities to support environmental action.

The Church has already begun to act on this potential. At a national level, the General Synod's decision to commit the whole Church to Net Zero by 2030 signals a strong recognition that the ecological crisis is also a theological one. The appointment of a Lead Bishop for the Environment has reinforced this commitment and brought greater visibility to the cause. The CofE has also used its voice in politics and economics, divesting from fossil fuels and advocating for stronger climate action in Parliament. At the level of land management, the Church Commissioners and diocesan boards are beginning to incorporate sustainability into their agricultural and forestry portfolios, initiating sustainability-focused tenancies, woodland restoration, and strong partnerships with environmental agencies and consultants. While beneficial, these guidelines could be stricter and the CofE could use its authority and influence in a more aggressive manner to create environmental change. Meanwhile, local congregations across the country have transformed churchyards into allotments, wildlife havens, and community gardens. These projects, often led by dedicated clergy or volunteers, demonstrate the practical ways in which the Church can use its spaces to green people's lives.

Greening work remains uneven, however, and in many places the Church falls short of its potential. Governance fragmentation within the CofE, dioceses and parishes leads to significant variation in motivation and resources. While some dioceses are leading the way, others lack resources or motivation. CofE land is also not yet being managed transparently enough to demonstrate real progress towards biodiversity or carbon reduction, and so the role of pressure groups is important in holding the church accountable. Research gaps also hinder the development of effective strategies and beneficial research on how belief

translates into environmental action among Anglicans, religious identity and belief systems in the UK, how religions differ in their environmental potentials and where limitations are arising in national projects would improve understanding of religious greening potential. Moreover, as a registered charity, the CofE, like other religions, is bound to prioritise financial return, which can at times conflict with environmental goals. Additionally, development pressures and land use competition often outweigh environmental or ethical aims. This creates a reliance on individual initiative, meaning greening work is still dependent on particularly motivated clergy and congregations.

There are several ways that the CofE can improve its potential for greening action. Greater transparency around its landholdings and biodiversity outcomes would build accountability and public trust. Stronger biodiversity and sustainability targets with clear guidelines and targets for greening initiatives could be applied more consistently across dioceses and investment land, supported by clear frameworks and guidance for tenants and managers, including how to interact with bodies such as the Charity Commission. Clergy and congregations need more funding, training, and support to enable greening projects in churchyards and schools, reducing the reliance on individual initiative. Making awareness of initiatives and work done by Christian partner groups across all levels of the church more consistent could also increase involvement in projects and inform church leaders and NGOs on congregation motivations. Enforcing this work would create a host of its own limitations and be difficult, however. Finally, increased partnerships with environmental organisations could allow the Church to align its land use with national climate and biodiversity goals and create research-backed action.

Expanding past the CofE

Many other religions also have missions of stewardship and compassion for those in need. Faiths with significant landholdings, such as Christian denominations and other religious schools, have opportunities for greening. Others, such as Islam in the UK, may not hold large estates but are well placed to mobilise communities through practice, teaching, and charitable action. Minority faiths, while smaller in scale, often exhibit strong community cohesion and individuals identify strongly with the religion and ideologies, which can lead to more consistent local greening initiatives, potentially in interfaith groups.

Philanthropy has a crucial role to play in unlocking this potential. Funding could enable dioceses and parishes to scale up projects and reduce dependence on volunteers. Investment in research could also close knowledge gaps. Challenge funds and competitive grants could stimulate innovation and collaboration across dioceses. Philanthropy could also support transparency initiatives, such as mapping Church-owned land, and fund communications that frame ecological action as an expression of faith. Involvement in political action, such as that enforcing regulation on large land owners or involvement in altering Charity Commission guidelines, could also increase motivation to enact change. Funding groups to collaborate with the CofE, including its existing partner organisations but also other environmental NGOs, could also be beneficial.

Religious bodies are wrongly underexplored as actors in addressing ecological crises and if supported by philanthropy and strengthened in their capacity for action they could have an increasingly influential role in greening people's lives.

Reference list

Bauckham, Richard. 2010. *The Bible and Ecology. Rediscovering the Community of Creation*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

Berry, R. J. (2006) *Environmental Stewardship*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

British Council (2024). *Religion | British Council*. [online] study-uk.britishcouncil.org. Available at: <https://study-uk.britishcouncil.org/why-study/about-uk/religion>.

Chaplin, J. (2016). The global greening of religion. *Palgrave Communications*, 2(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2016.47>.

Clubley, A. (2022). *Biodiversity loss in the UK*. [online] Blue Patch. Available at: <https://www.bluepatch.org/biodiversity-loss-in-the-uk/>.

Curtice, J., Clery, E., Perry, J., Phillips, M. and Rahim, N. (2019). *British Social Attitudes*. [online] Available at: https://natcen.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-08/BSA_36.pdf.

Davis, H. and Todd, Z. (2017). *On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene | ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*. [online] Acme-journal.org. Available at: <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1539>.

Draper, H. (2025). *What land does the Church of England own? - Wild Card*. [online] Wild Card. Available at: <https://wildcard.land/2025/03/what-land-does-the-church-of-england-own> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

ears (2022). *Census 2021 results: Changing religious landscape in the UK*. [online] European Academy on Religion and Society. Available at: <https://europeanacademyofreligionandsociety.com/news/census-2021-results-changing-religious-landscape-in-the-uk/>.

Einolf, C.J. (2011). The Link Between Religion and Helping Others: The Role of Values, Ideas, and Language. *Sociology of Religion*, [online] 72(4), pp.435–455. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srr017>.

England, N. (2025). *Growing together - how community-led green infrastructure delivers health and climate benefits*. [online] Blog.gov.uk. Available at: <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2025/05/21/growing-together-how-community-led-green-infrastructure-delivers-health-and-climate-benefits/>.

Francis, P. (2015). *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*. [online] The Holy See. Available at:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Gottlieb, R.S. (2006). *Introduction*. *Oxford Handbooks Online*. Oxford University Press. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195178722.003.0001>.

Gov.uk (2024). *Access to green space in England*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/access-to-green-space-in-england/access-to-green-space-in-england>.

Halpery, J. (2012) 'Judaism and Climate Change [online] Available at: <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2012/02/judaism-and-climate-change/>

<https://stateofnature.org.uk/> (2025). *Not digging for victory: better land management by the Church*. [online] Churchtimes.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/8-december/features/features/not-digging-for-victory-better-land-management-by-the-church> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

Koehrsen, J., Blanc, J. and Huber, F. (2021). How 'green' can religions be? Tensions about religious environmentalism. *Zeitschrift für Religion, Gesellschaft und Politik*, 6. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41682-021-00070-4>.

Koehrsen, J. and Huber, F. (2021). A field perspective on sustainability transitions: The case of religious organizations. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 40, pp.408–420. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2021.09.005>.

Lund (2022). *2022 intern report – Green space assessment framework*. [online] Lund. Available at: <https://lundtrust.org.uk/resources/green-space-assessment-framework> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

Mirola, W.A., Emerson, M.O. and Monahan, S.C. (2016). *Religion Matters*. Routledge. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315662909>.

Modood, T., Beishon, S. and Virdee, S. (1994). *Changing Ethnic Identities*. Series: PSI research report (794). Policy Studies Institute: London.

Moncrief, L.W. (1970). The Cultural Basis for Our Environmental Crisis. *Science*, [online] 170(3957), pp.508–512. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1730388>.

Naturalengland.org.uk. (2022). *Accessible Greenspace Standard*. [online] Available at:

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/AccessibleGreenspaceStandard.aspx>.

Nero, B.F., Callo-Concha, D., Anning, A. and Denich, M. (2017). Urban Green Spaces Enhance Climate Change Mitigation in Cities of the Global South: The Case of Kumasi, Ghana. *Procedia Engineering*, 198, pp.69–83.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.proeng.2017.07.074>.

Office for National Statistics (2022). *Religion, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics*. [online] www.ons.gov.uk. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>.

Peacock, R. (2025). *Reframing theology and religious studies at British universities - Religion Media Centre*. [online] Religion Media Centre. Available at: <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/reframing-theology-and-religious-studies-at-british-universities/> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

Pressbooks (2016). Sociological Perspectives on Religion. *pressbooks.howardcc.edu*, [online] 17.1. Available at: <https://pressbooks.howardcc.edu/soci101/chapter/17-3-sociological-perspectives-on-religion/>.

Purdam, K., Afkhami, R., Crockett, A. and Olsen, W. (2007). Religion in the UK: An Overview of Equality Statistics and Evidence Gaps. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, [online] 22(2), pp.147–168. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/13537900701331023>.

Religion: Secularisation and fundamentalism. (n.d.). Available at: https://resource.download.wjec.co.uk/vtc/2022-23/ko22-23_5-1c/pdf/_eng/ko-secularisation-and-fundamentalism.pdf [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

Shabbar (2016). *Secularisation in Britain*. [online] Religion Media Centre. Available at: <https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/factsheets/secularisation-in-britain/>.

Taylor, B. (2016). The Greening of Religion Hypothesis (Part One): From Lynn White, Jr and Claims That Religions Can Promote Environmentally Destructive Attitudes and Behaviors to Assertions They Are Becoming Environmentally Friendly. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 10(3), pp.268–305. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1558/jsrnc.v10i3.29010>.

Taylor, B., Van Wieren, G. and Zaleha, B.D. (2016). Lynn White Jr. and the greening-of-religion hypothesis. *Conservation Biology*, 30(5), pp.1000–1009. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12735>.

The British Academy. (2019). *Theology and Religious Studies risk disappearing from our universities, says the British Academy*. [online] Available at: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/theology-and-religious-studies-risk-disappearing-our-universities-says-british-academy/> [Accessed 3 Sep. 2025].

The Church of England (n.d.). *History of the Church of England*. [online] The Church of England. Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/history-church-england>.

The Church of England. (2019). *Church of England attendance rises for fourth year / The Church of England*. [online] Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-england-attendance-rises-fourth-year>.

The Five Marks of Mission. (n.d.). Available at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/mtag-the-5-marks-of-mission.pdf>.

Voas, D. and Crockett, A. (2005). Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging. *Sociology*, 39(1), pp.11–28. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038505048998>.

White, L. (1967). The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis. *Science*, [online] 155(3767), pp.1203–1207. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1720120>.

Whitney, E. (1993). Lynn White, Ecotheology, and History. *Environmental Ethics*, 15(2), pp.151–169. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics199315229>.

www.london.gov.uk. (2021). *Chapter 8 Green Infrastructure / London City Hall*. [online] Available at: <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/planning/london-plan/the-london-plan-2021-online/chapter-8-green-infrastructure>.