

Burnside Blairbeth Church

Creation Care & Environmental Stewardship Annual Report to the Kirk Session, November 2017

1. Summary

This report summarises work we have carried out over the last year and outlines our plans for the coming year. Following the creation of the [Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator](#) (OSCR) it is one of the reports that we (former Congregational Board) decided to introduce as part of our objective to exercise a higher standard of governance and good practice.

The Kirk Session is asked to:

- (a) Review and approve the report;
- (b) Consider and respond to the recommendations in the report; and
- (c) Give prayerful thought to their contribution to this area of church work.

2. Remit

Burnside Blairbeth Church is committed to caring for the environment and to promoting environmental improvement and sustainable development.

We conduct this work in association with the [Eco-Congregation Scotland](#) (ECS) framework which encourages churches to focus on related issues in their work, viz:

- To link environmental issues and Christian faith;
- To take practical action in the church; and
- To influence attitudes and take action in the local or global community.

We recognise that practical action and community outreach flow from spiritual growth and that these form an essential part of our worship and witness.

3. Linking environmental issues and Christian faith

Stewardship is one of our church's stated aims (see Appendix 1). We recognise that creation care and environmental stewardship are important parts of our service to God (Gen 2: 15).

Creation care and environmental stewardship form a strong and regular component of our worship and practical action. This is illustrated nicely by our minister's sermon *Hope for Creation* on 1/10/17, that we subsequently shared with Eco-Congregation Scotland and they posted on their social media page. We will continue to build on the strands of church life and work that connect with creation care and the environment and strive to do justice to them. The environment is an integral part of our mission and we will continue to consider it in all that we do.

Recommendation 1: We should review our stated aim of stewardship and, subject to any necessary amendments, re-affirm our commitment to it. We should consider whether we

need a dedicated Environmental Stewardship Team to lead this work or whether it should be delivered in a dispersed way through existing groups such as the Property Team and under the auspices of the Remit Team Leader for Social and Community Concerns, Jim Neil. The latter option is recommended.

4. Practical action in the church

Energy consumption & carbon footprint

The General Assembly agreed in 2009 to instruct Presbyteries (in association with the Church and Society Council) to produce a plan for each congregation in their bounds, setting out how they will (a) measure energy consumption in their church buildings, (b) ascertain their carbon footprint and (c) achieve a year-on-year reduction of 5% in their carbon footprint. Furthermore, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 places a duty on public bodies to play their part in contributing to Scotland's ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

We have estimated our church annual "carbon footprint" (CO₂ emission) for each year from 2004-05 to 2016-17 using data for gas and electricity consumption at our Rodger Memorial (RM) and Burnside buildings.

Our carbon footprint for 2016-17 is estimated at 114 tonnes CO₂, a decrease of 3% on the previous year and equivalent to 91% of the average for the last 13 years. Whilst this is encouraging, we should not read too much into this specific change but rather look at longer term trends in assessing energy use and associated CO₂ emissions (see Appendix 2).

Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate that our annual use of gas and electricity at our Burnside and Rodger Memorial buildings increased steadily between 2004-05 and 2009-10 and decreased since then; albeit with some notable fluctuations (e.g. 2013-14 was particularly low). Gas use at Burnside (as expected) represents the vast majority of our total energy consumption and CO₂ emission and it is encouraging to see that this was lower during 2016-17 than in most of the preceding nine years (See Figures 3 and 4; thanks to Jim Suttie for information).

This decreasing trend in our overall energy consumption and CO₂ emission may reflect our installation of more efficient boilers at Burnside and better zonal control of temperature within the building. Fluctuations in outdoor temperature and the extent to which and how we use our church buildings (e.g. Messy Church) will also affect our energy use so need to be borne in mind.

The Property Team and others have continued to work hard to rectify an imbalance and inefficiency in the heating of different parts of our buildings (particularly Burnside), both for the comfort of users and for the responsible stewardship of our resources.

Recommendation 2: Given our significant financial deficit position and our commitment to being good stewards of all our resources, in this case money and energy, it is important that we understand the reasons for these fluctuations in energy consumption and take appropriate action to control them. We should all do what we can to conserve fuel both within our church and in our homes. There are many things we can do to achieve this from simply switching off unwanted lights to turning down our thermostats by 1 or 2 °C.

Waste minimisation: “reduce, re-use, recycle”

We use a lot of resources in the church and in our daily lives. Whilst some of us try to reduce the amount of paper and materials we use (e.g. through photocopying and arts and crafts work) and recycle waste materials where possible, there is scope for us to do better. There may also be merit in us reviewing the environmental performance of our suppliers/contractors, monitoring and reporting on our use of materials, and seeking to reduce our impact on the environment.

We have stopped using polystyrene cups for tea and coffee and have replaced them with china cups that are washed after use. This practice is working well and Kay Dalby is to be commended for her perseverance in campaigning for us to make the change. We need to support such initiatives where they make good environmental sense, particularly but not solely where there is an economic or social case for doing so.

Recommendation 3: We should seek to identify and support practical everyday initiatives to reduce our environmental impact, particularly but not solely where there is an economic or social case for doing so.

Church website

We have created an eco-congregation page on our church website (see <https://www.burnsideblairbeth.church/about-us/eco-congregation.php>). We welcome contributions from all members of our congregation and will seek to maintain and develop the information on this page as a useful resource for future reference.

5. Action in the community

Burnside Community Council

We continue to work closely with Burnside Community Council, particularly in relation to the “Burnside in Bloom” initiative. Our special elder for Social and Community Concerns, Jim Neil, provides periodic progress reports on this work.

Recommendation 4: We should continue to support Burnside Community Council and Burnside in Bloom. This provides us with an excellent means of connecting with our community and demonstrating Christian outreach and witness through service.

6. Contributing to Eco-Congregation Scotland activities

Recent developments within Eco-Congregation Scotland (ECS)

ECS continues to grow. There are now (at the time of writing) 407 eco-congregations in Scotland and 136 of these hold an Eco-Congregation Award. There are many opportunities for eco-congregations to come together for worship and to share their experience and help one another. ECS has an excellent website and produces regular e-news updates. John Redshaw aims to share these with church members who have access to e-mail.

The ECS Annual Gathering was held in our Burnside building on Saturday 22nd April 2017. The theme of the event was *Caring for Creation in Times of Change* and there was a lot of focus on the importance of pilgrimage. The event was very well attended and provided an

excellent opportunity for us to act as the host to representatives from many churches across Scotland and to find out more about the eco-congregation movement in Scotland. The 2018 Annual Gathering will be held at the Augustine United Church in Edinburgh on Saturday 28th April 2018 so you may wish to put this date in your diaries (see [ECS Annual Gathering 2018](#)).

We are an eco-congregation and have previously received two awards for our work on creation care and environmental stewardship. Awards are valid for a period of 3 years and our awards expired in 2012. We have previously considered whether to apply for a third award and decided not to given the increased demand this would place on our resources.

ECS has since reviewed the award scheme (it is now based on bronze, silver and gold awards) and has approached us to see if we would like to apply for an award under the new scheme. We convened a meeting (on 13/9/17) to consider this issue and decided not to apply for an award on the grounds that we were generally uncomfortable with the concept. We do however support the work of ECS, think their resources and self-assessment checklist are very helpful, and we will continue to pay the annual subscription fee (currently set at £100) to support the work of the ECS programme. We have notified ECS of this decision.

Recommendation 5: We should continue to support and engage in the work of Eco-Congregation Scotland where we can. We should not, however, apply for an eco-congregation award given our concerns about the objectivity and value of an award scheme. We should review this commitment each year and pray for increased engagement and action in this important area of mission.

References: We are grateful to Alan Robertson for providing information on our gas and electricity use and associated CO₂ emissions. We are also grateful to Jim Suttie for summarising this information in a series of graphs (Figures 1 to 4).

Report by John Redshaw, November 2017. Particular thanks are extended to our Minister William Wilson, Jim Neil, Malcolm Piggot, Joan Macnab, Alan Robertson, Kay Dalby, Alan Hudson, Jim Suttie, Kenny Keys, and Rebecca Campbell.

Appendix 1

Stated Aims: Stewardship

See church website <https://www.burnsideblairbeth.church/about-us/aims.php>

To be good stewards of God's creation and all material resources entrusted to our care:

- **To care for the environment**

As stewards of God's creation, we recognize that concern for all components of the environment is the responsibility of all Christian people. We seek to carry out all our functions and activities in a way which minimizes their negative impact on the environment.

- **To be sacrificial in giving**

Recognizing that God is Lord and owner of all things, we aim to be worthy and faithful stewards of all material resources, including money, entrusted to our care. We seek to encourage generous and sacrificial giving as a fitting response to God's sacrificial gift to us of His son, Jesus Christ.

Appendix 2

Gas and electricity usage at Burnside and Rodger Memorial buildings, 2004 to 2017

Figure 1: Annual energy consumption (kWh) from use of gas & electricity at Burnside and Rodger Memorial buildings, 2004-2017. (Burnside use is more than 85% of the total).

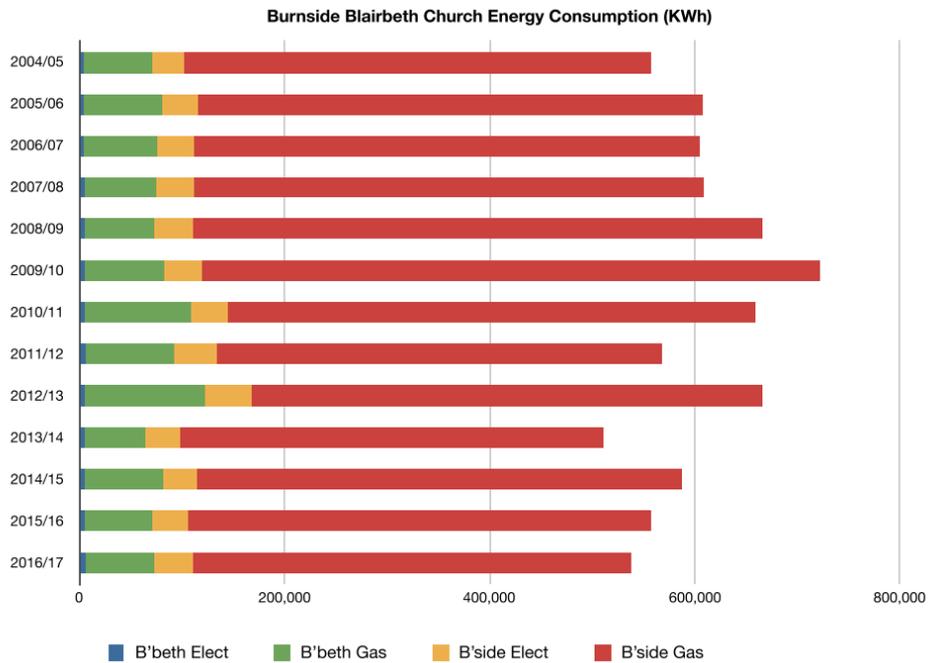


Figure 2: Estimated annual CO₂ emissions (in kg) from use of gas & electricity at Burnside and Rodger Memorial buildings, 2004-2017. (Burnside use is more than 85% of the total).

