

Burnside Blairbeth Church

Creation Care & Environmental Stewardship Annual Report to the Kirk Session, November 2018

This report is dedicated to the late Jim Neil who led our church's work on social and community concerns, under which our eco-church work sits. Jim chaired Burnside Community Council and was an active contributor to Burnside in Bloom, both excellent examples of his faith in action in the local community.

This report was considered by the Kirk Session at their meeting on 5th December 2018. Feedback is provided in Appendix 3.

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 part of our worship and practical action. 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.

Our Minister, William Wilson, and John Redshaw worked with the Minister of neighbouring Stonelaw Church, Alistair May, to deliver a service on creation care and environmental stewardship at the start of Christian Aid week in May. This was particularly poignant given the enormous inequity there is in the distribution and use of the world's resources by people across the planet and the further injustice arising from the consequences of a rapidly changing and more variable climate. Charities like Christian Aid and Tearfund work tirelessly to tackle this issue and all Christians are called (by the scriptures) to play their part.

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 through our work on social and community concerns. 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 2017-18 using data for gas and electricity consumption at our Burnside and Blairbeth buildings (see Articles 1 and 2; thanks to Alan Robertson for information).

Our carbon footprint for 2017-18 is estimated at 125 tonnes CO₂, an increase of 9% on the previous year and equivalent to the average for the last 14 years. Whilst this increase is disappointing, 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 total annual use of gas and electricity at our Burnside and Blairbeth buildings increased steadily between 2004-05 and 2009-10 and has 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 (See Figures 3 and 4; thanks to Jim Suttie for information).

The Property Team and others have continued to work hard to manage the temperature in our buildings for the comfort of users and for the responsible stewardship of our resources.

As well as working to reduce our energy consumption (and CO₂ emissions) it is proposed that we explore and advise on the scope for obtaining our electricity and gas from more sustainable sources. "bulb" (<https://bulb.co.uk/>) is one such supplier of many and their rates (tariffs) are generally very competitive.

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 energy 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. We should also explore and advise on the cost-benefits of obtaining our electricity and gas from a more sustainable source (supplier).

Walk to Church challenge

As an eco-congregation we are committed to protecting God's creation through practical action to reduce our impact on the environment. Pollution from the use of private motor vehicles in Scotland has been increasing for a number of years and many journeys are of a short distance (less than 2 miles) with only one person. With this in mind, we launched the 'Walk to Church Challenge'. For four Sundays across April and May 2018, 65 people/households signed up for the challenge to walk to church, 23 of whom would usually drive. A wide range of people, young and not so young, got involved and it was encouraging to see people walking and meeting up with one another on the way to church. Overall, we saved a total of 71.8kg of carbon emissions in not driving to and from church (this is equivalent to the emissions from driving an average car non-stop for almost three hours). Some of those who took part commented that, although they needed to get up a bit earlier, this helped them take time to look around and count their blessings and arrive more awake and attentive for morning worship. We are thinking of repeating this exercise in spring 2019 and hope this activity helps to re-enforce this mode of active and more sustainable travel.

Waste minimisation: "reduce, re-use, recycle"

We use a lot of materials in the church and in our daily lives. Whilst some progress has been made to reduce our use of materials (e.g. our church magazine and Weekly Notes are available on the church website), we could all do more. There is also scope to do more in 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. It is proposed that we work with all relevant groups to identify and implement practical everyday measures to reduce the cost and environmental impact of the materials we use; examples include:

- Reduce our use of materials and increase the proportion that is obtained from sustainable sources and the proportion of used material that is recycled. Whilst materials, such as paper, from recycled sources may not look as nice (e.g. paper is often less white) this should not matter if our priority is to care for our environment.
- Switch to using recycled toilet paper, there are various options. Whilst this may be more expensive the cost-benefits for the environment should be investigated.
- Review the nature and quantity of materials we use and recycle at Messy Church (e.g. plastic cups, polystyrene balls etc.) to see if we can reduce our environmental impact. There is increasing concern about plastic pollution and we need to consider this and other related issues in determining what materials we use and what we do with them. (see <https://lessplastic.co.uk/>).
- Replace once-use handwash bottles with bottles that are refilled as and when required (Rebecca Campbell has offered to provide this service). This service could be extended in time to include refillable bottles of washing up liquid.

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 an [eco-congregation page](#) on our church website and welcome contributions from all members of our congregation. We will seek to maintain and develop this resource.

5. Action in the community

Burnside Community Council

We have continued to work closely with Burnside Community Council, particularly in relation to the “Burnside in Bloom” initiative, and wish to thank the late Jim Neil and Malcolm Piggot for their strong leadership of this work over many years.

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) over 430 eco-congregations in Scotland, 139 of which have obtained an Eco-Congregation Award for environmental excellence. There are many opportunities for eco-congregations to come together for worship and to share their experience and help one another (there are 22 local networks). 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.

Kenny Keys and John Redshaw attended the ECS Annual Gathering held at Augustine United Church in Edinburgh on 28th April 2018. The event “[Pass the Planet](#)” focused on caring for creation and passing on the planet in a fit and proper state to future generations. One of the themes was about everyone making small changes to help care for our environment. It is encouraging that the Scottish Government has increased its financial support for Eco-Congregation Scotland (ECS) from £50K to £61K per annum, enabling ECS to appoint a second national coordinator. The [ECS Annual Gathering 2019](#), with a theme of energy, will be held at Gate Church International in Dundee on Saturday 30th March 2019 so you may like to put this date in your diaries. It is perhaps worth noting that a number of our church members (e.g. Kenny Keys, Rebecca Campbell and John Redshaw) are employed in a professional capacity to care for the environment. This helps them to demonstrate the links between their faith and work within the community and across society.

We are an eco-congregation and have previously received two awards for our work on creation care and environmental stewardship. These awards (valid for 3 years) have expired and we have previously considered and agreed not to apply for a new award on the grounds that we were 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 of £100 to support the work of the ECS programme.

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 (see Articles 1 and 2). 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 2018. Particular thanks are extended to our Minister William Wilson, the late 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 use at Burnside and Blairbeth buildings, 2004 to 2018

Figure 1: Annual energy consumption (kWh) (Burnside is circa 85% of total).

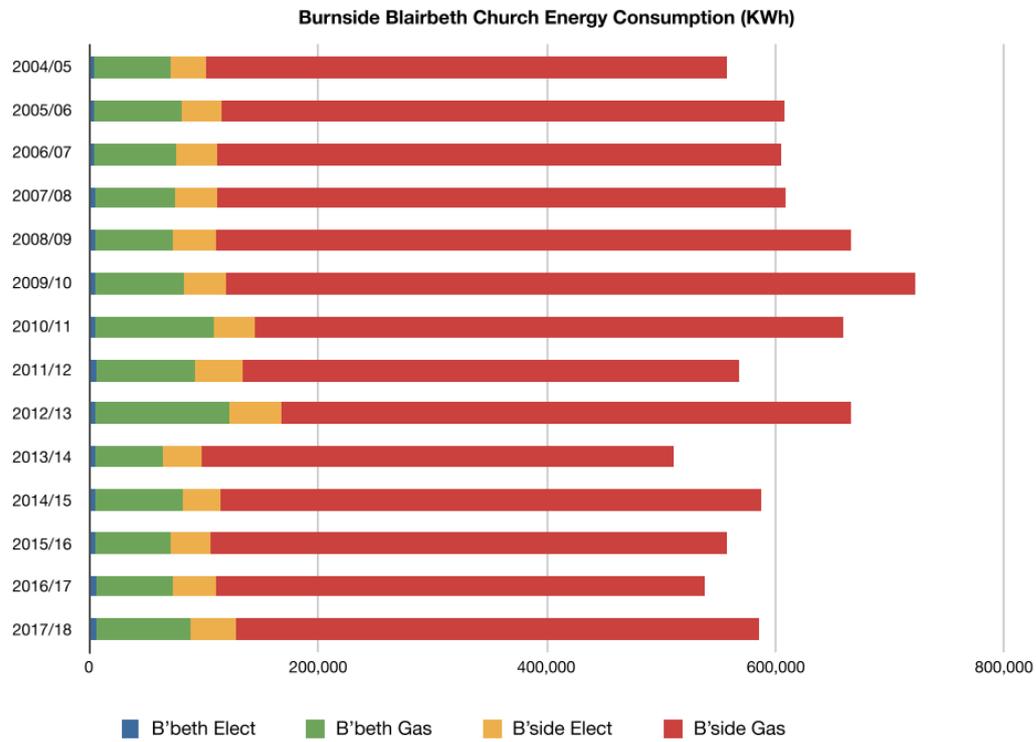


Figure 2: Estimated annual CO₂ emissions (in kg) (Burnside is circa 85% of total).

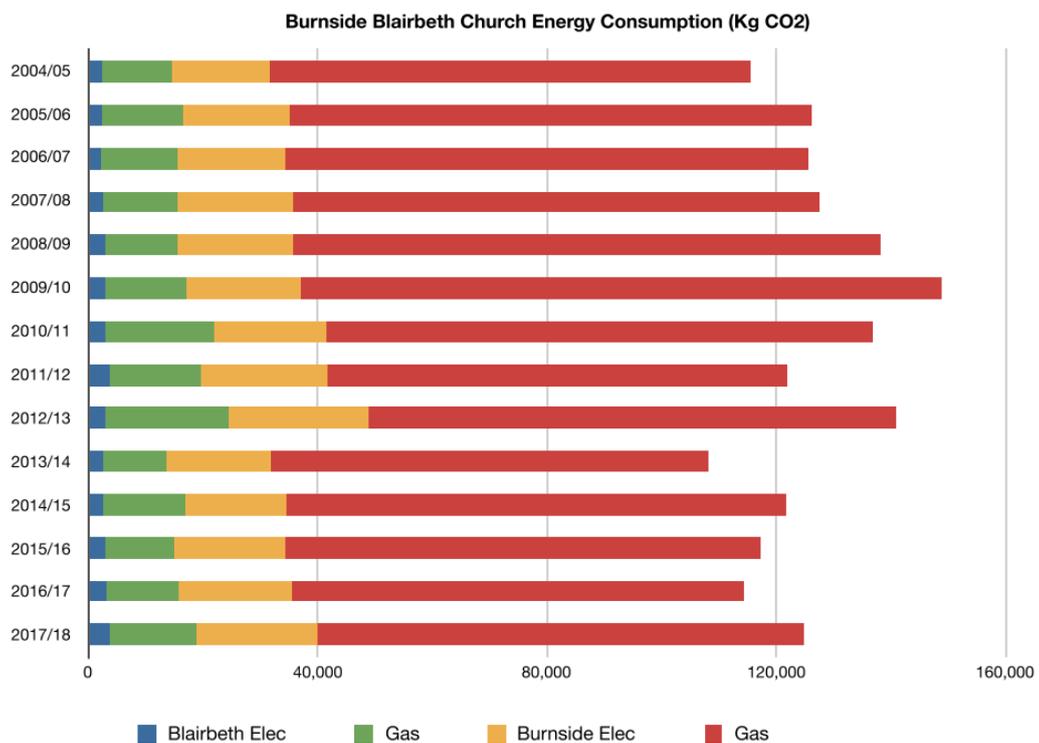


Figure 3: Cumulative annual gas use (in kWh) at Burnside building for 2017-18 compared with that in each of the preceding ten years.

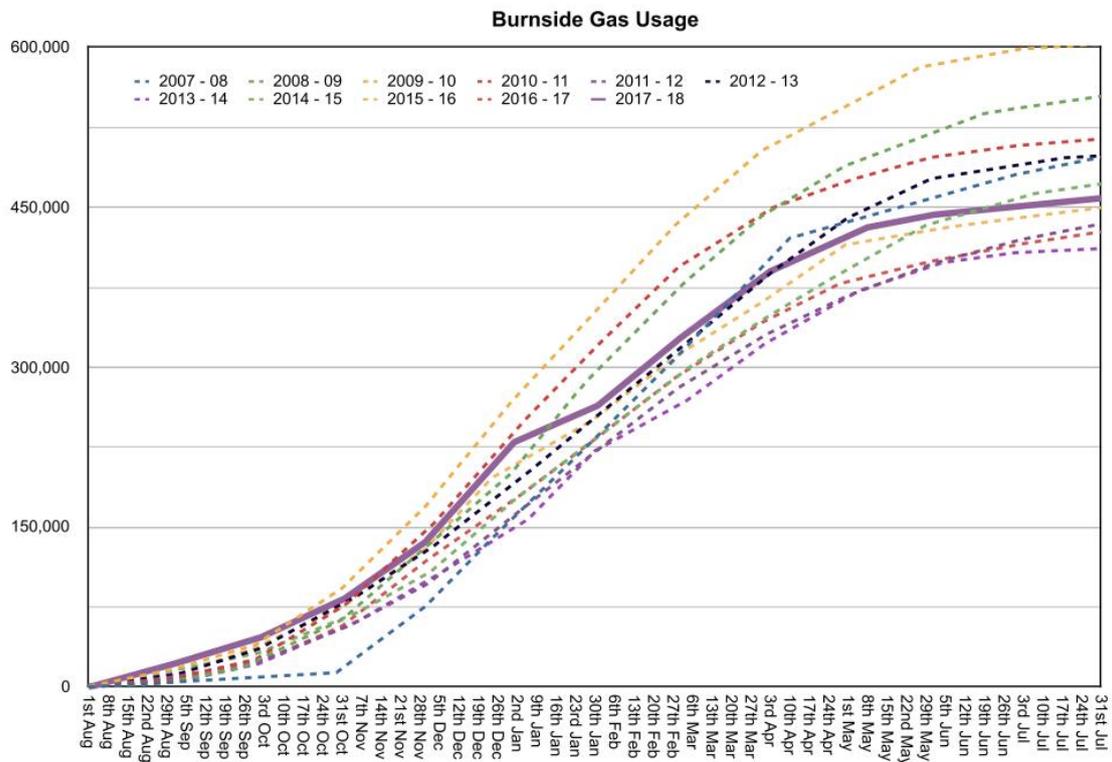
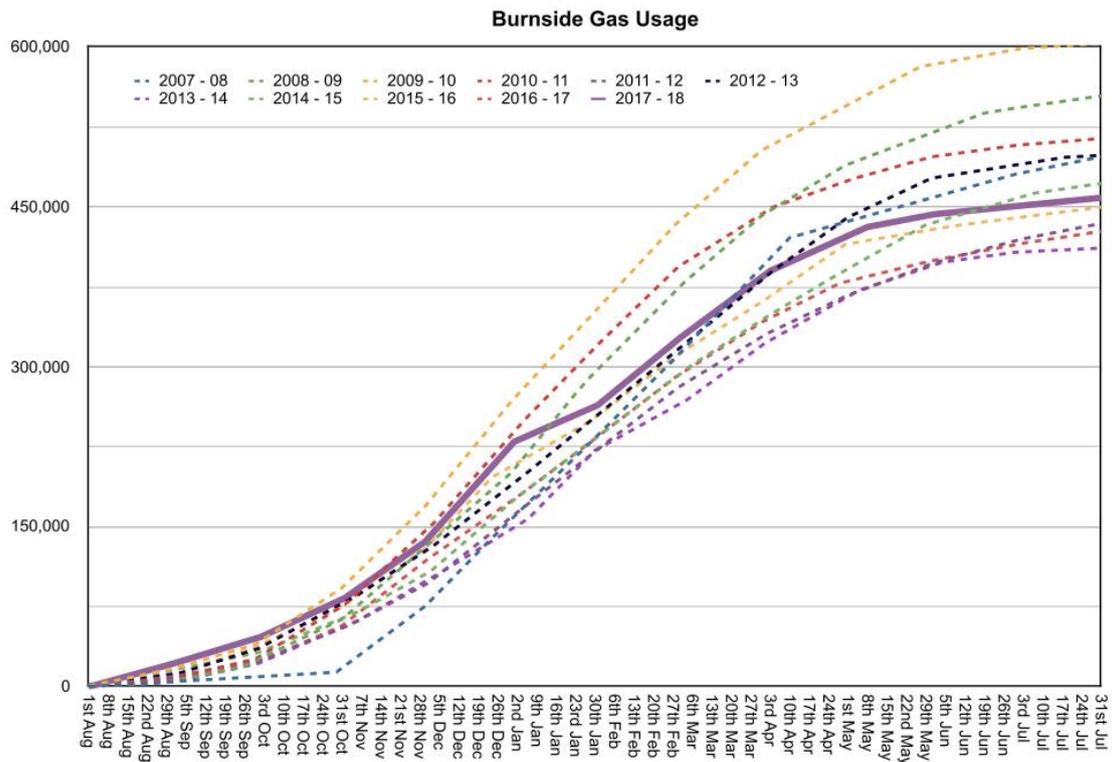


Figure 4: Cumulative annual gas use (in kWh) at Burnside building for 2017-18 compared with that for the average for the preceding ten years.



Appendix 3

Feedback from Kirk Session Meeting 5/12/18

The following comments are very helpful and illustrate the benefit of consulting church members more widely in producing reports in future.

Messy Church: use of materials

1. Jen Robertson (who leads our Messy Church programme) said it would have been nice to have been consulted on the use of materials at Messy Church before the report was issued. She said we no longer used glitter (a major source of plastic) because it was difficult to recycle and ends up in general waste; however, this meant we have a large supply of it and are not sure what to do with it; we could hand it on to local schools, who still use it, but that would seem slightly ironic (i.e. simply passing the problem from one source to another). Jen said we no longer used plastic cups, we use paper straws, and much of our craft materials are sourced from the Glasgow Playscheme association which has a scrap store where all materials are recycled (we have been members here for many years). We haven't used polystyrene for many months but again we have a supply of it, so would welcome ideas for how to deal with this material. Jen added, with some of the above items we may sometimes not hit the target, but we are trying.

Gas and electricity supplier

2. Regarding switching our electricity supply to renewable only, Alan Robertson advised that the Church of Scotland negotiates a gas and electricity tariff with a supplier and then requires CoS churches (like us) to use it. We do not therefore have much (if any) influence over this. John Redshaw has since asked the Church of Scotland for advice on this matter and received the following response from Alan Kennedy on 10/12/18.
3. Alan Kennedy said "As one of the CofS General Trustees, I am currently involved with the tendering process for the renewal of the supply of electricity from 1st April 2019. While many CofS congregations participate in the current scheme for the non-domestic supply of electricity and gas, we do NOT require churches to join the scheme. When we took the tendering process in-house some years ago, we asked the churches then participating to give us authority to negotiate on their behalf. Even then, they always have the right to withdraw from the scheme if they do not like the terms of any renewal so long as they give the current supplier sufficient notice. We are about to enter the second round of the tendering process but we are concerned at the level of market turbulence caused in part by Brexit - now waiting for the PM's statement this afternoon. All churches will be kept informed of developments and, indeed, all treasurers (whether in the scheme or not) have recently been advised of the slight delay due the current uncertainties. The General Assembly of 2018 asked us to offer green energy tariffs for electricity and so we required all firms tendering to agree to offer participating congregations a choice between a green tariff and a "brown" one. However, we remain hopeful that we can negotiate a sufficiently competitive green tariff that most or all churches will go green. I do not intend to comment here on how green a green tariff actually is as I'm sure you are aware of the issues. CofS congregations wishing to join the scheme or asking for more information are welcome to contact Sara Deeks at 121".

Use of recycled materials

4. Regarding paper for printing, we should check with the office (Eleanor Crawford) about this. We should speak to Alan Hudson about buying recycled toilet paper (Jen Robertson said she uses the following supplier for domestic use <https://uk.whogivesacrap.org/>) and also about refillable hand soap. Alan Hudson said he has more bins for recycling materials and will make these available.