

Eco-Chat

What is Eco-Chat?

It's an ecumenical partnership in Stratford-upon-Avon that promotes discussion and action about Eco-issues. We founded the group nearly two years ago and we meet monthly on the first Saturday morning in each month. Initially, this was on Zoom but now they are all 'in person' meetings. We meet from 10.30am till about 12 md. The subject of the meeting changes each month, and we frequently invite an outside speaker. The meeting always starts and ends with prayer. Before the final prayer we have a discussion session amongst those present. It involves most, but not all, the denominations that make up Stratford Churches Together (SCT). The Baptists, the Methodists, two church of England churches, the URC and the Roman Catholic Church have been involved. SCT have adopted the group as an associate member, and Eco-Chat appears as an item on the agenda of the two-monthly SCT Church Leaders Meeting.

Our meetings are advertised in all the churches in Stratford, and the meetings are open to the general public. We have attracted Extinction Rebellion members, Stratford Climate Action members and non-churchgoing members of the public.

There is a steering group of about six people, that decides on the subject for each meeting and works out the format of the meeting. We get together after each meeting to 'debrief'.

The subjects discussed include:

- *Introductory exploratory meeting*
- *Food issues*
- *Home heating and renewable energy*
- *Reforestation*
- *Local actions by local politicians*
- *Hope & Fear for Creation*
- *Greening the Church*
- *The Vision of Pope Francis – by his biographer*
- *District Council views of Climate Change*
- *Outcome of COP 26*
- *Heart of England Solar project*
- *Eco Church*
- *Climate Justice*
- *Net Zero*
- *Net Zero strategies*

Is Eco-Chat all talk?

No, the name might suggest that, but we are keen to promote Eco action. There are a number of actions that have followed from the group meetings. We have attempted to influence the various councils in the area of South Warwickshire. In fact, at the present, and over the next three months, we have invited the Town Council, the District Council and the County Council to come to tell us what their actions are going to be in promoting a 'Net Zero' Energy Policy. We are currently working out our questions for each of the three councils. We organised Prayer Vigils for both COP 26 and COP 27. We joined in with the 'Great Big Green Week' in Stratford last year and our emphasis then was on Climate Justice. We joined the 'Global Day of Action for the Climate' at the end of last year and demonstrated on the streets of Stratford. We have sent a petition to our local MP asking that he supports eco-issues in the House of Commons. Three of the Churches have attained Eco-Church status, in the time that the group has been active – others are working

towards it. We have produced leaflets for all the churches and for people outside the churches: there is a 'Sustainable Living' leaflet and an 'Eco Friendly Christmas' article.

What are the advantages of Eco-Chat?

It is a great vehicle for ecumenical partnership – we all have the same aims. We have got to know our partners in other denominations much better. It demonstrates to non-churchgoers that Christians DO have a strong interest in looking after creation. It has stimulated several churches interest in Eco Church. As mentioned above, three churches have attained Eco Church status. We have had interest from churches outside Stratford, who wish to do something similar – the word is spreading! It is sometimes hard work stimulating interest in eco matters in our own churches, but advertising Eco Chat helps to raise the profile. We now have a 'Green Corner' in our monthly magazine and a 'Green Space' noticeboard in church.

I can thoroughly recommend the concept to other Areas and Districts.

***Peter Horrocks
Elder in Local Leadership
Stratford-upon-Avon***