St Augustine’s Church – Carbon Neutral by 2030?

St Augustine’s Church are requesting input from the Parish Council to support their bid (as a joint venture with other local churches) to the Rural Community Energy Fund for funds to pay for a feasibility study into the use of renewable energy to heat church buildings.

A summary of the background and questions for consideration are as follows:

Holy Trinity and St Augustine's have committed to joining other churches in a bid for funding for a feasibility study to see in what way our buildings may be made carbon-neutral. This is part of a commitment the whole church has made to become carbon-neutral by 2030. It's so important to realise that we really do have to do something to reduce carbon in the atmosphere, and therefore global warming, and the church would like to be a leader in this.

So how might this affect St Augustine's?

There are lots of ifs and buts

**If** we get the funding and the study is done, it will probably result in a recommendation for a scheme for each church which will create energy from a renewable source. For St Augustine.s, that might be solar panels on the roof, or a heat pump drawing heat from the air outside or, at a very long shot, drawing heat from the water in the beck, though that is very unlikely..

**If** the P C C (including representation from St Augustine's) decides to go ahead, then we start applying for planning permission and all necessary consents from the Diocese, and fundraising (the Diocese is very keen on this, and has plans to help the raising of the money).

Two questions for now.

How would you feel about all this, and how do you think the rest of the village might react? This is important, as I understand that there has already been a proposal for solar panels on the roof, which met with opposition, and we need to learn from this. It's important to realise that this is only a first consultation, and there are lots of hoops to jump through before anything might actually happen.

Also, as part of the bid the church has to produce a very short statement called "the church in context", meaning, very briefly, when the church was founded, is there anything particularly significant about it, and what would you say actually is its place in village life? Please would the Parish Council let me have thoughts about this.

Request for support from Parish Council

The Parish Council is asked to feed in any initial thoughts to inform the process of submitting the bid, and is also asked to provide support for a consultation exercise with the local community.

**Additional briefing notes:**

**Report from the Renewable Energy Group to St Mary’s Embsay with Eastby PCC and Holy Trinity Skipton PCC, November 2020**

**Introduction**Our Diocesan website gives some background to the issues in this report:
“In February 2020, the General Synod of the Church of England recognised that the global climate emergency is a crisis for God’s creation, and a fundamental injustice. They passed a motion calling on all parts of the Church of England to act swiftly to decarbonise and to aim to have net zero carbon emission by 2030.  While this is very challenging, it is an important prophetic ambition, which every church will need to respond to.”

Archbishop Justin Welby writes: ‘It becomes ever clearer that climate change is the greatest challenge that we and future generations face. It’s our sacred duty to protect the natural world we’ve so generously been given, as well as our neighbours around the world who will be first and worst affected. Without swift decisive action the consequences of climate change will be devastating.’

St Mary’s Embsay with Eastby has already committed to work towards being an Eco Church and the net carbon zero target for the Church was discussed at the previous PCC meeting (September 2020). As part of our research into the issue, a small group from St Mary’s Embsay with Eastby attended a webinar hosted by the Diocese on 30 September which gave information about the Renewable Community Energy Fund. We then set up a small group, the Renewable Energy Group, to discuss this issue. The group also includes the Rector of Holy Trinity Skipton and has already met several times.

**The Rural Community Energy Fund**The purpose of the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF) is to provide feasibility and project development grant funding to rural community groups who want to develop their own renewable energy projects. It is important to understand that it does not provide funding for the actual installation of energy systems. However, it does provide significant amounts of funding: Stage 1 funds of up to £40,000 and Stage 2 funds of up to £100,000, per project, to be shared between organisations in the project.

Stage 1 grants are intended to be used to secure the provision of professional services to undertake a feasibility study.  Where appropriate, funds can also be used for project management costs and community engagement activities. Stage 2 grants can be used to support planning applications and develop a robust business case to attract further investment.

The RCEF is being delivered by Local Energy Hubs on behalf of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). There are five Local Energy Hubs across England. Tees Valley Combined Authority manages the North East, Yorkshire and Humber Local Energy Hub. More information about the RECF is here: https://teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/business/key-sectors/energy-and-renewable/rural-community-energy-fund/

**Embsay and Skipton area possible bid**Since attending the webinar, Peter Edwards (St Mary’s Churchwarden), Lesley Higson (St Mary’s PCC Environment Champion), Diana Linford (St Mary’s Parish Environment Officer), Marion Russell (Vicar, St Mary’s) and James Theodosius (Rector, Holy Trinity) have been discussing the possibility of applying for a RCEF grant. This would initially be for Stage 1 funding for a feasibility study into what sort of renewable energy generation model would be best suited to each church and how and if the project would be self-financing.

In order to be eligible for RCEF funding, we have to work in a partnership of at least two organisations. These can be other churches or other local community organisations. So far, we have held discussions with other churches to gauge interest and there seems to be a small group of churches who would like to work together to explore this possibility.

We do not have to commit to set up an energy project at this stage. If our application for RCEF funding is successful, the feasibility study would determine if there is a renewable energy model which would be appropriate for us. The options would then be discussed by the PCC before any decisions were made. The bid is for 100% funding of the feasibility study and will have a small element of contingency costed within it, with costs being closely monitored during implementation. In the unlikely event of the study exceeding that contingency, any additional cost would fall on the participating churches. There is a very tight timescale for applications for RCEF funding – the final two deadlines for applications are 1 February and 1 May 2021. We intend to apply by 1 February (see below for key dates).

**Draft Statement of Purpose of the Renewable Energy Group**We have drafted the following Statement of Purpose:
The Renewable Energy Group has been formed to assist some churches in the Skipton area to investigate possible approaches to local renewable energy projects, with the aim of meeting the General Synod’s goal of being carbon neutral by 2030. The initial brief is to compile a bid to the Rural Community Energy Fund for finance to cover a detailed feasibility study of the most likely options. While different churches may pursue different approaches, the role of the Group is to assist in the compilation of a bid for submission. The Group will work on behalf of the respective PCCs in this with reports back to those councils.

**The way forward**The Renewable Energy Group would like to continue to discuss options with other churches and possibly other organisations with a view to expanding the membership of the group. We understand that guidance and support will be available from the Tees Valley Combined Authority and from the Diocese. Once we have gathered sufficient information, we will take an informed view as to whether to apply for the Stage 1 funding to pay for a feasibility study into possible options for community energy generation for the organisations in the group. We will continue to keep the incumbents and PCCs fully informed of our research and progress. However, time is so tight that we need to move quickly in order to apply for the RCEF funding. We therefore now ask the PCCs to give us the authority to continue to research the issue, and, if appropriate, to prepare a draft bid for Stage 1 funding, for consideration by the PCCs before submission.

**Key dates**In order to submit our bid on time, we suggest the following key dates:
Nov 2020: PCC discussions
31 Dec: PCCs to confirm if they wish to take part in the RCEF bid process, with
 key parish-specific points to be submitted to the bid-writing team
Mid Jan: Draft funding application to be submitted to PCCs for their consideration
1 Feb: Deadline for RCEF funding application
 **RECOMMENDATIONS** **FOR PCC CONSIDERATION**

1. That the PCC approves the statement of purpose of the Renewable Energy Group.
2. The PCC authorises the Renewable Energy Group to prepare a bid to the Rural Communities Energy Fund for stage 1 funding. The bid will be referred back to the PCC before final submission.

PE/LH/DL