

Thames North Synod Eco Fund

Notes to accompany Thames North Synod Eco Grant Application Form

Serving Christ and living a life of love fundamentally involves caring for God’s creation and as part of our mission we should all strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain all life on earth. In caring for God’s world, we proclaim the Good News of Christ’s love, enrich our discipleship and serve those who are suffering because of climate or ecological change.

The URC has a policy nationally to hit net zero in its energy usage by 2030 and TNS fully subscribes to that aim and is working actively towards it. We are at an early stage but the time frame is short in which to make changes. TNS has set in motion three key initiatives:

1. To invest our finances ethically and divest from fossil fuel providers. This step has essentially now been achieved by TNS.
2. To encourage churches within TNS as well as the Synod itself to join the A Rocha Eco church programme and make as many practical steps as possible towards Bronze. Silver and ultimately Gold accreditation. This scheme is beginning to get underway in a number of churches in TNS and progress is being seen and encouraged by our team of Green Disciples
3. TNS have for 2023 taken the major step of setting aside a dedicated budget of £1m towards helping churches individually to optimise their energy usage and their properties and it is this third step to which the attached TNS ECO FUND grant form relates.

The £1m budget is to focus on the more complex issues particularly those that a church, its Elders and congregation might not easily achieve on their own.

The more complex issues will be a steep learning curve for us all. Many of the Trusts properties do not easily lend themselves to mainstream energy saving opportunities but some do. There are a number of steps you can consider as a means to making major energy savings some of which are quite radical:

1. Should we as a small congregation be thinking of merging with another church locally and do we need help to do that
2. Should we be considering a move to more modern more efficient buildings to continue our worship, mission and outreach and can Synod assist in accomplishing this
3. Should we be considering upgrading the energy efficiency of a manse occupied by our minister (we will not currently be funding a manse let out to third parties).
4. Should we be looking at applying for a TNS Eco Grant to optimise energy usage in the property we currently use be it the church buildings or adjoining halls. Perhaps for example double glazing or a heat pump or more efficient boiler or radiators or insulation, false ceilings or whatever would be more energy efficient.

Synod assistance will be available in considering and achieving any of these alternatives and helping bring them to fruition. However, within the URC the decision as to which course to follow rest with Church Meeting which means Elders have a key role in guiding their church to consider the effectiveness of their Eco position and what changes should be considered.

If you want to focus on items (iii) or (iv) of the above alternatives namely applying for a Synod Eco Grant then the first step is to complete the attached Eco Grant form and to assign a named Elder or member of your congregation as the named individual with whom Synod will correspond on your behalf.

The grant application in the first tranche has a closing date of 30th September 2023 so time is of the essence.

The grant form is more wide ranging than the normal Synod grant application format to enable us both to focus on where Synod assistance is best provided. For instance, there is a focus on some important areas to help us mutually assess the very complex issues involved so it looks for:

1. details of current worship numbers and their age mix as well as Elder numbers
2. energy usage in 2021/22 and estimates for 2023
3. how clear and up to date your Church Life Review is and what it contains
4. your financials and your M & M position
5. the project(s) or changes you would like considered.

A first step after evaluating the application will almost always be a discussion with Synod officers followed if appropriate by an energy audit and feasibility study which Synod will pay for as a first tranche of grant..

While Eco Grant applications are communicated to and through the Resources Committee and administered by them, because of the complexities they may well also involve discussions with the Pastoral and Discipleship Convenors and other elements of Synod like Property and the Synod Trust.

In the first instance please contact Dr John Wise (dr.jpwise@gamil.com) or Martyn Macphee (macpheemartyn@aol.com) to discuss any preliminary issues and through whom to submit your application.