

## **St John's Church in Kingston Park goes solar**

To do its bit to tackle climate change and fulfil its commitment towards a greener future, St John's church in Kingston Park, has had 18 solar panels installed on its roof. With an overall output of 7,473 Kwh a year and 3,500 Kg a year CO2 emissions avoided, these panels will provide around a third of all St John's energy needs and help support Newcastle Diocese's ambitions to achieve operational net zero carbon.

One of the first actions of the newly formed 'Eco Team' at St John's church when it formed in early 2022, was to initiate a Green Journey energy audit, encouraged and paid for by Newcastle Diocese. The report from this audit highlighted some big potential savings, both financially and in terms of carbon emissions, and so in July 2022 the process of getting solar panels installed on the church roof in Kingston Park began.

St John's building benefits from being a modern (built in 1991) building and so free from many of the constraints and processes required for historical buildings and it also benefits from its design of having a 360 degree roof all around, so an optimum shape to make the most of Newcastle's often fleeting sun.

### **Finding out what to do, where to go, how it can be done....**

The first part of the process, as someone with minimal knowledge of different energy systems, was to wade through the overwhelming and quite bamboozling amount of information available on Google, podcasts and webinars etc... which if anything can make you feel like you understand it even less than you did at the start! Being also told that if we were to embark on the journey of becoming a solar powered church we would be somewhat the guinea pigs for the city in finding out how and if the process works didn't fill us with huge confidence either!

But two particular contacts at this stage proved to be especially helpful; Bethany Hume, Assistant Secretary for the Diocese of Newcastle and Ella Vickers, the Central Deanery Environmental Champion.

Spurred on by their advice and links, some further research identified some local solar panel fitters and installers, including local company SWH Electrical Solutions who were ultimately chosen to carry out the works. SWH carried out an assessment of the church and provided a report of technical details including suggested energy and carbon savings and recommendations for the best installation for the building, as well as a detailed quotation for the work.

Lucy Burfield, DAC Secretary, Diocese of Newcastle, was also helpful in providing advice about what would be required for an application to Faulty, which would be necessary. One further contact was also made at this time, to Newcastle City Council Planning Dept, which proved most helpful in finding out that due to the size and location of the panels being installed on a non-domestic building, no planning permission would be required, another big relief!

At this point St John's church completed a cost/benefit analysis, together with a discussion on aesthetics of the panels, and recommended proceeding with the works on the basis that the presence of panels was a positive statement of the churches commitment to environmental issues. The Church Council discussed the proposal and agreed to provide £5,000 towards the costs of installation if grants could be accessed to provide the remainder (The full quotation for the works was £12,500, so a further £7,500 would be required to be raised). Grant applications were then sent out to the most likely looking Christian sources of funding, from the list of potential funders provided by the Diocese website: A 'secular' funding grant application was also sent to the Net Zero Hub Fund.

Of these applications, the Net Zero Hub fund, administered through the Tees Valley Combined Authority, provided the largest grant to cover the shortfall, provided evidences and outcomes of the benefits of the installation would be provided, with the Bernard Sunley Foundation also returning with a contribution towards the costs.

And so, at a time of a cost of living crisis in the country and the cost of fuel rapidly rising, in January 2023 the panels were installed onto the church roof and wired in to the grid, to begin St John's green journey of solar enhanced energy provision.

If you might be interested in finding out more about the process St John's went through please contact John Gardener, St John's Eco Champion at [stjohnseco@hotmail.com](mailto:stjohnseco@hotmail.com).