



Regenerating our Common Home

*Quaker Considerations for Restoration
and Protection of the Environment*



Introduction

This booklet was prepared during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. We witnessed at that time some new social behaviours which, ironically, helped the environment. It would be a positive development if these continued as the pandemic recedes. These include:

- People cannot fly off on holidays as easily as previously.
- More people are working at home and not commuting.
- People are taking more exercise, walking in parks and nature, etc.
- More people are walking, cycling, and making less use of cars.

Other developments, such as special social welfare/social security payment arrangements during the pandemic, open up opportunities for new thinking about how we live. These include Universal Basic Income (UBI) and a shorter working week. These in turn might open conversations about unnecessary consumption.

What we offer here is a combination of spiritual considerations and practical advice on how we as Friends can best live sustainably and continue to walk cheerfully over this beautiful and bountiful Earth. There is a great deal of scientific, philosophical, and economic information offered, some areas of which may interest you more than others. We encourage Friends to read the sections which speak to them in whatever order they see fit. There is no right or wrong way to read this booklet.

This booklet asks many questions which we do not expect you to answer. Rather we encourage Friends to reflect on them and, like *Advices and Queries*, to use them as aids in guiding each of us in our own personal, spiritual, and ecological journeys.



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Regenerating our Common Home: **Quaker Considerations for Restoration and Protection of the Environment**

As we look around our world and to our shared future, and consider how to create a more equitable and beautiful home, it is clear that two distinct needs are present. We need to protect what remains of intact natural ecosystems, so they may provide a basis for wider ecological recovery. We need to restore what we have already lost, to return a balance to the natural systems that sustain the planet and its inhabitants, including our own species and society.

Our present cultural norms and habits are tremendously destructive in their interactions with the natural world. We need to examine them with care and consideration, and make the changes necessary in our lives and society. In the current culture and economic system in which we are steeped, almost every aspect of our life plays a role in converting nature into money.

How then do we approach the monumental task of overhauling our whole society to better protect, nurture and restore the natural world, our shared and only home? One way is to ask what our needs are and then explore how to meet them in ways that are regenerative rather than extractive.

For our bodies to survive we need air, water, food, and shelter. For our souls to thrive we need love, the company of others and connection with something greater than ourselves. It appears that most of the ways that we meet the needs of the body have evolved to destroy the very means of the planet to provide them. We pollute the air, contaminate our water, overfish the seas, and erode the soil. Perhaps it is through love, company, and connection with that small still voice within that we will find ways to protect what should be held as sacred; the Earth that supports us.

Air: How do we make choices that prevent air pollution, reduce climate change, and restore our climatic systems? Can we source our needs locally rather than from afar to minimise our carbon footprint?

Water: Where do we source our water, and what impact does this have on the planet? Where do our wastewaters go? Are they a useful resource for other living things and ecosystems or are they a source of pollution and ecological stress downstream in our catchments?

Food: How do our lifestyles impact the oceans? Do our plastic wastes make their way to the seas via the toilet or even via our recycling collection? In what ways can we protect the seas from overfishing? Do we select food that has been grown without agrichemicals that contaminate and erode the soil? Do our food choices support regenerative farming practices to build soil and support a healthy soil ecosystem?

Shelter: How can we clothe ourselves and house ourselves in a way that nurtures the world rather than causing damage? Why is it that it is so difficult to find clothing of natural materials, grown locally without harmful chemicals, and made locally? Are there ways in which we can contribute to a society where such a thing is normal rather than nearly impossible? Can we break from the pressures 'fast fashion' marketing places on us? The same can apply to building materials. Can we limit prospecting for yet more fossil fuels and minerals without our state being sued for huge amounts of money due to international trade agreements, in particular the Energy Charter Treaty?

- Is there scope to bring messages to the hearts and minds of our members outside of our direct Meeting house responsibilities?
- How do we travel to and from Meeting?
- Where do we source our food? Do we seek local, organic, regenerative, plastic-free fruit, vegetables, and meat?
- What role can we play in our own lives to protect biodiversity where it is most threatened, and most valuable, namely in equatorial regions. These are often places where local protectors are threatened with their lives on a regular basis.

One issue which has emerged is the need for just transition. This refers locally to the need to ensure that those whose lives must change due to the need to save the environment should not be the only ones to suffer. A good example is workers being made redundant from fossil fuel extraction plants, such as Bórd na Móna workers. Justice in the environmental transition should also spread to people in the Global South, who, having contributed least to global warming, will ironically be the ones who will suffer most from rising sea levels and droughts. It will stretch us to come up with solutions in this case.

As we examine this short list of the things that are essential for our basic survival needs, it is clear that our current structuring of society, and particularly the social agreement that we call money, gets in the way of making choices that are ecologically regenerative. Do we need to change our underlying assumptions about how the world works as we move into the future together?

Have the economies of the Global North reached a stage where we can reduce our consumption, share it more equally and live a comfortable, less stressful life? And, in doing so, stop the constant drive for growth and profits, and act as a guide to other parts of the globe?



Introducing the Science

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

In order to move towards sustainability, the following measures have been suggested:

- The use of finite non-renewable resources should be kept to a minimum.
- The use of renewable resources should not be greater than their regeneration.
- The capacity of local and global sinks to absorb our waste should not be exceeded.¹

After the Second World War, the drive was for spending to increase economic growth. By the 1970s it was plain that raw materials were finite. By the 1990s it was obvious that there was a limit to the capacity of ecological systems to absorb pollutants and waste. Since “sustainable”, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means something that can keep going over time, unbridled manufacturing and disposing could not go on forever. Ultimately, the use of finite non-renewable resources (most notably fossil energy) must be phased out.

The Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, 1987, stated: “*Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. The present generation should refrain from living beyond the earth’s carrying and leave a fair legacy of natural resources for future generations. This is referred to as *intergenerational equity or fairness*. Post-war economics needed to give way to ecological economics which emphasised the interconnectedness of economy and ecology.

“Meeting the needs of the present”, which covers economic, social, cultural, health and environmental needs, should include everyone’s needs, and geographical equity must prevail. As the international

environmental agenda is mainly dominated by the more powerful, the priorities of marginalised people and people living in the Global South are being ignored. A sustainable society needs to come to terms with the life support limits of the planet in such a way that the most vulnerable people can survive with dignity in a self-reliant manner. We need to remain mindful that not every culture or country needs to follow our Western model of development.

CARBON ZERO?

Climate science shows that the extent of global warming is proportional to the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) that human activities add to the atmosphere. To stabilise climate change, CO₂ in the atmosphere needs to return to safe levels. To achieve this, carbon emissions need to fall to net zero and lower.²

Zero carbon means that no carbon emissions are produced from a product or service. For instance, zero-carbon electricity could be provided by a 100% renewable energy supplier. It means achieving a state in which activities result in no net impact on the climate from greenhouse gas emissions.

Carbon neutral means that while emissions are generated, these are offset somewhere else making the overall net emissions zero. Organisations and individuals can 'balance' out their carbon footprints by drawing down carbon into plants or the soil. This is often termed **carbon offsetting**. For example, if you emit one tonne of Green House Gases, and fund or purchase one tonne of emissions reduction, also called a **carbon credit**, you have a net carbon footprint of zero. Carbon offsetting, which can include investments in projects such as tree planting in developing countries, risks lessening the imperative for the rich to lower emissions through behaviour or operational change, although it can play an important part in mopping up carbon emissions, if not used as an excuse for business as usual. Environmental justice advocates and indigenous groups argue that emissions trading leaves the poor bearing the brunt of pollution. As this neo-liberal practice is not compatible with **geographical fairness**, our wider aspiration needs to be to achieve net zero carbon

within our local society, and move towards regenerative practices that actively draw down carbon into trees, soils, and the oceans.

CARBON OFFSETTING

How is carbon offsetting done?

A standards body issues carbon credits and the project owner sells them. They can then be traded in the financialised carbon economy until the point when a buyer “retires” them. The buyer that retires the credit is said to have caused the reduction, avoidance, or removal of a defined quantity of greenhouse gases; in this sense, their emissions have been “offset” by the reductions of someone else.

For example, when Joe (buyer) goes on holiday to Australia, he purchases forty euro of carbon credits from greenmyholiday.com (project owner). Greenmyholiday.com uses these funds to finance tree-planting projects in Ethiopia. Joe has now “offset” his trip to Australia.

These actors all have conflicts of interest – developers want to sell more credits, while standards agencies and auditors want to gain market share. The resulting credits they certify are offered as a cheap means to appear green. Wealthy buyers of carbon credits are often able to use carbon offsetting as a way to continue their lifestyles without having to make any changes to reduce their carbon footprint.

A high-profile report launched at the World Economic Forum seeks to rapidly expand the market, and offsetting was placed on the agenda of COP26, the UN climate summit held in Glasgow in November 2021.

Carbon Sequestration

Carbon sequestration is the process of capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide. Tree planting is often proposed by companies as a key offsetting measure because of trees’ ability to sequester carbon. Forests are one of our best lines of defence against climate change and restoring them is crucial, but this measure alone cannot be a substitute for reducing carbon emissions directly.

A newly planted tree can take as many as twenty years to capture the amount of CO₂ that a carbon-offset scheme promises. An enormous number of trees would need to be planted over decades to offset even a fraction of global emissions. Even then, there is always the risk that these efforts will be wiped out by droughts, wildfires, tree diseases and deforestation.

When trees and plants die, whether from fires or logging or simply old age, most of the carbon they have trapped in their trunks, branches and leaves returns to the atmosphere. Changes in the climate mean that droughts and higher temperatures will strain forests in the future. The risk is that trees planted as part of offsetting projects could become a source of emissions if they die prematurely. Carbon “stored” in trees or other ecosystems is not the same as fossil carbon left underground.

WIDER ECOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We need, also, to be mindful that not only are we in the midst of a global climate emergency, but also a biodiversity emergency - namely the sixth mass extinction event that this planet has witnessed. Thus, care must be taken to explore and respond to the ecological implications of our decisions, purchases and actions. Climate and carbon are only one element of these implications.

There is also a social justice element to the combined issues of climate and biodiversity. Often poorer communities and nations carry the brunt of the impacts of our modern economic system. The triad of care in permaculture takes account of this in its three ethics: Earth Care, People Care and Future Care, acknowledging that our endeavours need to consider ecological sustainability, social equality, and intergenerational aspects of all we do. Satish Kumar of the Resurgence Trust sums up the solutions beautifully in the title of his book, *Soil, Soul and Society*.

Advice for Business Meetings

CALCULATING CARBON EMISSIONS

By looking at how we live and the resources we use, we can calculate the resultant carbon emissions. This gives us the opportunity to consider how to reduce carbon emissions by making different choices. There are some online tools to help with this, e.g., an online calculator at www.carbonfootprint.com. However, many of these calculators are quite limited, and don't account for lifestyle changes, such as whether food is imported or locally grown.

APPLYING THE TEST OF SUSTAINABILITY TO DECISIONS

Every decision taken by a Meeting or committee has consequences for our environment and impacts our ability to achieve sustainability. By applying a sustainability test to each decision across all levels of the Society of Friends, we can minimise the negative impacts our actions have on our planet and maximise the potential benefit they can bring to achieving our sustainability goals.

1. Is this action essential?

The simplest way we can help achieve sustainability is by simply doing less. Almost every action we take in the modern world is guaranteed to result in some form of carbon emission or have some other environmental impact, so by only engaging in actions that are absolutely necessary we can eliminate tonnes of wasteful emissions. This test can also help our meetings to become more time and business efficient, as well as more sustainable.

For example, is it essential for us to meet in person for a committee meeting? Could we make decisions using social media, including email, or by using on-line meetings?

2. What are the environmental impacts of this action?

Even limiting ourselves to essential actions, these still often have some ecological impact, so it is important to recognise what impact those actions will have on our environment in order to allow us to best choose our path forward with care.

For example, meeting in person may require us to travel by car to the Meeting house, which in turn will have to be heated and lit while we are there.

3. Are there other more sustainable options available?

Sometimes the decision taken is essential, but the action taken to carry it out is not. Often by taking a closer look at the options, a more sustainable choice will reveal itself. These can often be more expensive by comparison, but the ecological impact should always take priority over the economic.

For example, the committee could meet online instead of travelling. This is more expensive as it requires the committee to purchase a teleconferencing software subscription, but it could reduce the carbon emissions of the meeting by up to 90%.

4. What actions can I take to offset the environmental impact of this decision?

Even by doing our best to eliminate unnecessary actions and picking a more sustainable choice for our essential business, we will almost always come up short. This is why it is important to counter each negative action with a constructive one. Such actions may include carbon offsetting, regenerative agriculture, tree planting, enriching soil by composting, and creating wildlife habitats.

For example, we could use the time we saved from not having to travel for the committee meeting to work in our gardens and outdoor spaces, planting some native wildflowers and trees, which will not only absorb carbon but aid biodiversity.

APPOINTING A GREEN VOICE

Achieving sustainability and net zero emissions should be the shared goal of the Meeting, and not the responsibility of one committee, group, or person. Important steps towards sustainability are often overlooked or actions are not taken, as we can assume that it is someone else's job to deal with environmental issues.

However, many Meetings decide to appoint a sustainability committee or form an eco-group to deal with the ecological concerns of the Meeting and help it transition to a more sustainable footing. While this has worked very effectively for Meetings with larger memberships, it may not be suitable for everyone, especially those with smaller memberships that may be reluctant to add another committee to their list.

For smaller Meetings, the appointment of a 'Green Voice' may be more suitable. As with a sustainability committee, they can help with concerns raised and advise on matters concerning sustainability and the transition to net zero. They can also serve as an additional point of contact between the Meeting and the EcoQuakers Committee, as well as other Meetings' sustainability committees/Green Voices.

For either the appointment of a committee or a Green Voice, a background in ecology or environmental science is helpful but not necessary. The goal of these roles is not to solve all the sustainability concerns of the Meeting, but to help identify them and encourage action from across all the levels of our Society. A keen interest in preventing climate breakdown is more than sufficient, as this is what we should hope to inspire in everyone.

Ideally, the end result of any eco-group or committee should be to have the entire Meeting included in its membership and to focus everyone towards tackling climate breakdown and widespread biodiversity losses. In fact, if the Meeting can achieve a point where it is active and ambitious in implementing its sustainability plan and integrating it into every aspect of its business, a committee or Green Voice may not be needed at all.

Advice for Premises Committee

NET ZERO BUILDINGS

A. Where do we start?

These are actions that nearly all Meetings can benefit from, even low occupancy Meeting houses used only on a Sunday. They are relatively easy, with a relatively fast pay back. They are a good place for Meetings to start when trying to move towards 'net zero' carbon.

The building itself:

- Maintain the roof and gutters, to prevent damp entering the building and warm air escaping.
- Fix any broken windowpanes and make sure opening windows shut tightly, to reduce heat loss.
- Insulate around heating pipes to direct heat where you want it. This may allow other sources of heat to be reduced in this area.
- If draughts from doors are problematic, draught-proof the gaps or put up a door-curtain.
- Consider using rugs/floor-coverings (with breathable backings) and cushions on/around the benches/chairs.

Heating and lighting:

- Switch to 100% renewable electricity and 'green' gas (biomethane) if available.³
- Match heating settings better to usage, so you only run the heating when necessary.
- If you have water-filled radiators, try turning off the heating fifteen minutes before the Meeting ends; for most Meeting houses this allows the heating system to continue to radiate residual warmth.
- If you have radiators, add a glycol-based antifreeze to your radiator system and review your frost setting.

- Add radiator reflective insulation behind radiators to prevent heat loss into the walls.
- When lightbulbs require replacing, replace them with LEDs, where simple replacement is possible.
- Replace floodlights with new LED units with movement sensors and light-dependant resistors.
- If you have internet connection, install a HIVE- or NEST-type heating controller, to better control heating.
- If your current appliances fail, then replace them with A (new scale) A+++ (old scale) appliances.

People and policies:

- Complete an energy footprint tool each year, such as 360°carbon (<https://360carbon.org/church/start>) and communicate the results. 360° carbon is a collaborative, web-based tool which enables churches to measure their carbon footprint from different activities - energy, travel, food, waste, water, and other expenditure - commissioned by A Rocha UK and the Church of England.
- Closely monitor energy bills and encourage people to turn things off when not needed.
- Write an energy efficiency procurement policy and commit to renewable electricity and A+++ rated appliances.
- Consider moving committee meetings elsewhere or online during cold months, rather than running the Meeting house heating.

Offset the rest:

- For most low usage 'Sunday' Meeting houses, once you have taken steps like these, your remaining non-renewable energy use will be very small.
- You may want to offset the small remaining amount of energy through Climate Stewards or other reputable schemes (<https://www.climatestewards.org/>)
- Think about your Meeting house grounds. Is there an area where you could let vegetation, wildflowers or trees grow?

B. Where do we go next?

These are actions with a reasonably fast pay back for a Meeting with medium energy usage, used a few times a week. Most actions cost more

than the ones above, and/or require more time and thought. Some require some specialist advice and/or installers. They are often good next steps for those Meetings with the time and resources to move on further towards 'net zero'.

The building itself:

- If you have an uninsulated, easy-to-access roof void, consult about insulating the loft.
- If you have problematic draughts from your door, and a door curtain would not work, consult about installing a glazed door within your porch, or even a draught-lobby.
- Consider creating one or more smaller (separately heatable) spaces for smaller events.
- Consider fabric wall-hangings or panels, with an air gap behind, as a barrier between people and cold walls.

Heating and lighting:

- Learn how your building heats/cools and the link to comfort, by using data loggers (with good guidance).
- Improve your heating zones and controls, so you only warm the areas you are using.
- Install thermostatic valves on radiators in Meeting rooms, to allow you to control them individually.
- If you have radiators, install a magnetic sediment "sludge" filter to extend the life of the system.
- Consider thermal and/or motion sensors to automatically light different areas of the Meeting house when people come in, for security lights, and for kitchens and WCs.
- Get your energy supplier to install a smart meter to better measure the energy you use.

People and policies:

- Vary Meeting times with the seasons, so in winter you meet early afternoon when the building is warmer.
- Consider holding some Meetings online, particularly committee meetings.

C. Getting to zero

These are bigger, more complex, projects, which only busy Meeting houses with high energy use are likely to consider. They could reduce energy use significantly but require substantial work (which itself has a carbon cost) and have a longer payback. They all require professional advice.

The building itself:

- Draught-proof windows.
- Double-glaze or secondary-glaze suitable windows in well-used areas.
- Internally insulate walls in well-used areas.
- If you have platformed flooring, consider insulating under the wooden platforms with breathable materials.
- Carpeting.
- Reinstate ceilings and insulate above.

Heating and lighting:

- Install a new LED lighting system, including all harder-to-reach lights, new fittings, and controls.
- Install solar panelling, if you have an appropriate roof and use sufficient daytime electricity in the summer.

D. “Only if....”

These are actions you would do at specific times (such as when reordering is happening) or in very specific circumstances. Nearly all require professional advice.

The building itself:

- If you are reroofing, then insulate the roof if it is possible.
- If you have an uninsulated wall with a cavity (typically buildings from 1940 onwards) then insulate the cavity with appropriate environmentally-friendly insulation.
- If the building is regularly used and suitable, consider appropriate environmentally-friendly external insulation or render, appropriate for the age and nature of the building.

Heating and lighting:

- If there is no alternative that does not run on fossil fuels, then replace an old gas boiler or an old oil boiler with a new efficient gas boiler.
- If yours is a well-used Meeting house which you want to keep warm throughout the week, then consider an air or ground source heat pump. Ground source heat pumps are more expensive and invasive to install than air source heat pumps, but run more efficiently once installed, depending on ground conditions.
- If you are doing a major reordering or lifting the floor anyway, and yours is a very regularly used Meeting house, then consider under-floor heating. This can work well in combination with a heat pump (above).

Meeting house grounds:

- If you have car parking that is sufficiently used, Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points for electric cars can work out cost neutral or earn a small amount of income for the Meeting house. They will increase the building's own energy use but will support the uptake of electric cars. They could be good in combination with Solar Photovoltaic (PV) panels.

E. By exception

The following actions are often mentioned in this context, but are generally not recommended, because of the risk of harm to the fabric, energy used, and/or the cost:

- Installing solar thermal panels to generate hot water (hot water use is generally not high enough to justify it). If installing solar panels some electricity can be diverted to the water heating system for a relatively low initial cost.
- Providing constant background space heating, unless needed for stabilisation of interiors (high energy use).
- Installing extensive insulation to Meeting houses that are only used once or twice a week.

REWILDING OUR GROUNDS

Another area that we can contribute to protection and enhancement of biodiversity is to encourage wildlife in our Meeting house grounds. Even a small area of wild space can provide benefits to wildlife. To maximise

biodiversity, it can be helpful to maximise the number of habitats available. The All Ireland Pollinator Plan has a wealth of resources on their website (<https://pollinators.ie/resources/>) including a dedicated booklet *Faith Communities - Actions to Help Pollinators*. There is a list of 24 actions that can be taken to help support and encourage pollinating insects in our burial grounds and gardens.

Other ways to support wildlife include planting for birds and pollinators, putting in a bog garden or shallow pond, creating a log pile, planting an orchard, leaving a wild area for nature, leaving ivy in place, erecting swift boxes or barn owl boxes (in consultation with your local Birdwatch Ireland or RSPB branch), gardening for bats (<https://www.batconservationireland.org/get-involved/gardening-bats-wildlife>), encouraging lichens and fungi by keeping deadwood and avoiding chemicals, enhancing soil biodiversity by composting and mulching.

If we want to keep our eyes clearly on local ecological protection along with an awareness of the wider world and society at large, then adopting a permaculture design for our premises may be an excellent way to proceed (<https://horticultureconnected.ie/news/permaculture-not-just-for-hippies/>)

GREEN SPACES/VEGETABLE GARDENS

Many of our Meeting houses are blessed with some outdoor space and some are fortunate to have green space and garden areas. These can and in some cases have already been used to provide places for plants that will attract and support wildlife as well as for growing edible produce.

Gardening can be a great and popular activity for children and young people, giving them a real sense of involvement with the Meeting house as well as the chance to marvel at the miracle of nature and plants. Of course, the act of gardening can be used as a way to consider and act upon our impact on the environment.

- Using organic and environmentally-friendly garden techniques let our actions do the talking.
- Gathering up and storing a few pairs of boots and gardening gloves (children's and adults) and some basic gardening equipment can be good so that when the opportunity to do some gardening comes along you have these things to hand.
- Good hygiene and safety considerations are always important with any gardening but especially when involving children and young people.
- Distributing produce grown in the grounds of the Meeting house can add to the sense of community as well as connecting us with the seasons, reducing food miles, and promoting care for the planet and healthy eating.
- Taking a soft-touch approach and allowing areas of your Meeting's greenspaces to go wild will allow wildflowers such as dandelions and buttercups to grow and foster biodiversity.

There are many books and online resources on wildlife-friendly/organic gardening available, but the best resource is to identify the seasoned gardeners within your membership and tap into their wisdom, knowledge, support, and expertise.



A dvice for Treasurers

ACCESSING FUNDS

Understandably, the question of cost arises when sustainability issues are raised with regard to the structure and fabric of the Meeting house. It may not seem practical to many to spend a considerable amount of funds for structural changes to a building which is seldom used outside of Meeting for Worship. This mindset is one of cost versus benefit, and while there are indeed many low-cost ways to make our Meetings more sustainable, we ask Friends to think beyond the costs of sustainable improvements and to focus on its benefits towards achieving net zero. It may not be economical to improve a building's insulation or install a solar panel in the short term, but the long-term environmental benefits they provide are enduring and will contribute significantly to achieving greater sustainability.

To help with the associated costs, there are several funds and grants that Friends in Ireland can access through their Monthly and Quarterly Meetings:

- The Robert and Kezia Stanley-Chapman Trust⁴
- Ulster Quarterly Meeting Property Development Fund

Additionally, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) provides a range of grants and financial support systems that can save as much as 35% of the cost of retrofitting new heating systems. More information on the application process, criteria, and supports that are offered is available on their website: www.seai.ie/grants

The UK government also provides financial support for retrofitting in Northern Ireland, information for which is available at: www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/energy-advice/energy-saving-grants

Further advice on the correct use of funding and investments can be found in Quakers and Ethical Investments by EcoQuakers Ireland Committee.⁵



Advice for Young Friends

GETTING INVOLVED IN DECISIONS

Due to the universal nature of climate change and species extinction, it is vital that young Friends feel involved in the decision-making process of their Meeting regarding the building of a sustainable future. This is an issue about which many young people feel deeply concerned and they are often eager to have a hand in the decision-making process.

Any committee meetings that undertake the issue of sustainability should be advertised to the young people of the Meeting. Meetings should consider the possibility that, for young Friends, attending a committee meeting regarding sustainability may be too daunting a prospect. One solution to this may be to nominate an older Friend in the Meeting to consult the young people before the committee meeting and update them regarding the decisions that occurred. During a committee meeting, this Friend would put forward any ideas or suggestions that the young people have had.

Another option would be to nominate two young people as eco-representatives who could put forward young people's vision regarding sustainability at any sustainability meetings and connect with the EcoQuakers committee via email and social media.

TEACHING SUSTAINABILITY

One way that sustainability can be taught in Meetings is by discussing it in children's Meeting and with young Friends in general, in an age-appropriate way. Conversations are often the start of learning and an important way to find out how young people are feeling about sustainability issues.

One of the best ways to address the theme of sustainability is to designate this topic to one of the young people's sessions that take place alongside worship. For instance, a session for older children could involve discussing recent climate developments and the current position we find ourselves in regarding climate change. For younger children, this could mean discussing the weather and learning how our actions can affect it. In such a session it is also effective to look at sustainability in terms of our faith. Young people may need guidance on finding a spiritual and hopeful way to view this issue and would benefit from discussions around this topic.

Another method may be to hold informational presentations or invite guest speakers to integrate the teaching of sustainability in the Meeting. This also allows a space for both young and older Friends to learn about sustainability together and helps to open up dialogue about the issues at hand.

Young Friends often look to the older Friends as an example and it's important that the older Friends also have discussions about sustainability and not label it as just a young Friends' issue. It's important that young Friends feel supported in discussing how sustainability can be implemented in the Meeting, and it is equally important for older Friends to educate themselves on these topics. Older Friends should be mindful that they can learn much from young Friends when discussing sustainability.

It is important for young Friends to know they can discuss sustainability in the Meeting and have someone to discuss this with. This can be another young Friend or an older Friend. It can be beneficial to the Meeting and to one's own mental health to be able to speak about it.

While biodiversity loss, ecocide and climate collapse are big and often scary topics to be discussed, we must remember that hope still flourishes. It is important for the mental health of the Meeting to discuss, learn and teach about sustainability with practical action in mind and to offer a hopeful and transformative response to the planetary crisis.

C **ooperation between Meetings**

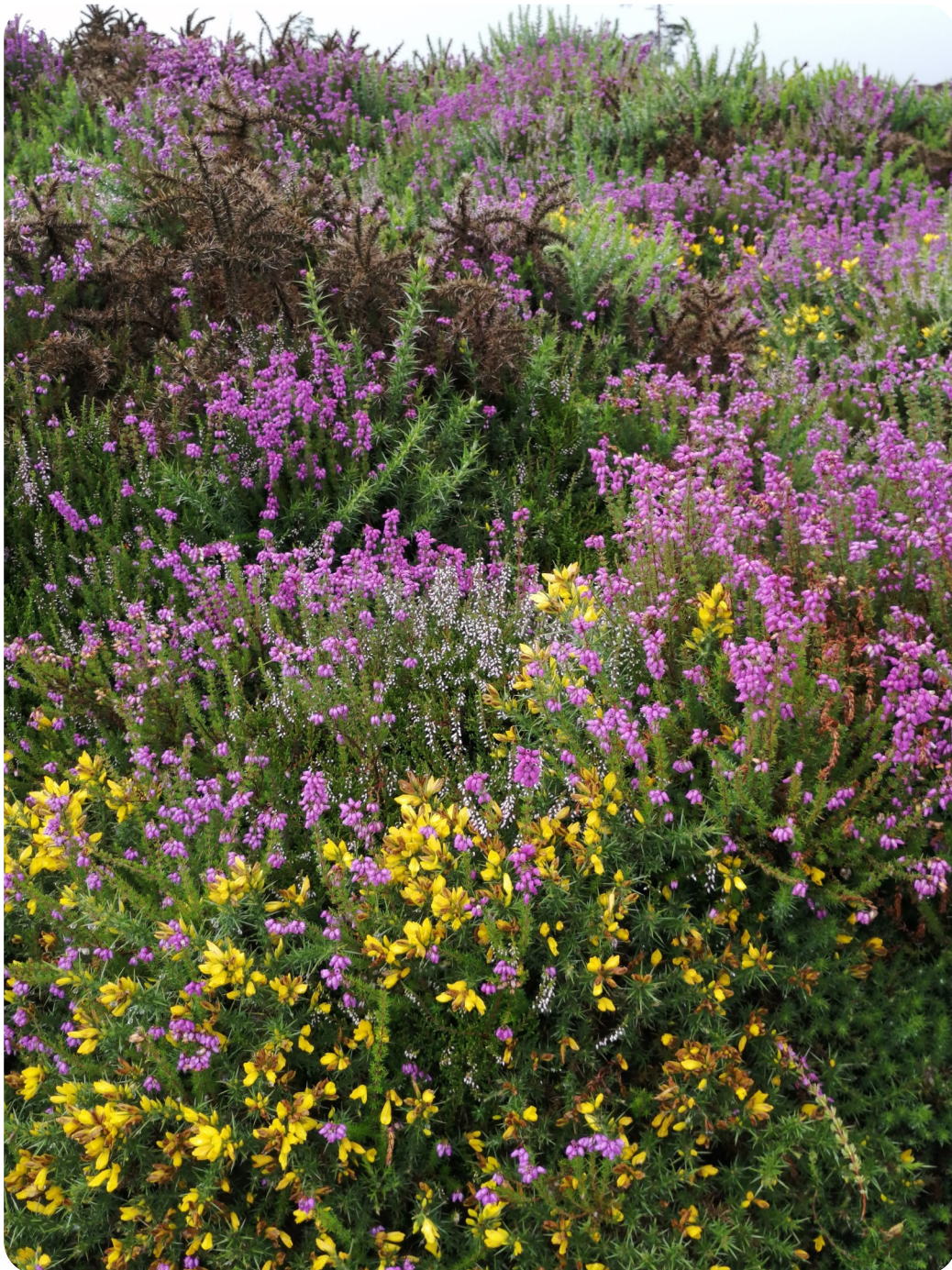
There is a lot of information to consider, and it can be very challenging deciding upon which actions are most eco-friendly and socially just. There are so many factors to consider that it can be overwhelming. For example, when buying food, whether it is better to buy local produce that is intensively grown, or organic produce from further away. We also need to consider the impact of transport, processing, packaging, whether it benefits biodiversity, fair trade, whether its production has a negative impact on water tables, water quality and soil health, animal welfare, use of herbicides, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, and much more.

With a view to engaging all Meetings and learning from each other, one thing we can do is share names of businesses and groups that aim to offer goods and services in an environmentally-friendly way that will help us reduce our carbon emissions and benefit biodiversity and society. Also, we can share practices that are eco-friendly. We might start by looking at a relatively simple issue. For example, how do we clean our Meeting houses? How do we tend our Meeting house grounds? In our own lives, where do we source our food, clothing, and other needs?

One idea to throw into this process is to explore options around how we meet and how we heat our Meeting houses. For example, if we alternate between neighbouring Meetings; one Meeting house can hold a physical Meeting for Worship and the other(s) could hold it online at the same time, connected electronically with the physical Meeting. Thus, we meet one another in Meeting without driving around the country, and leave the other Meeting house unheated on the days when it is unused.

There are many questions to consider as we reflect on these issues. What impact, for example, do our purchases have on biodiversity, on climate change, on local communities, and on the wider society?

EcoQuakers Ireland have developed an online, and editable, document listing suppliers of goods and services that serve to help build a world that is more ethical, equitable, regenerative, and sustainable. With this collaborative document, we invite others to share eco-friendly solutions, so all our Meetings can play an active role in building a valuable resource for us all to use. This document is available on the Quakers in Ireland website (www.quakers-in-ireland.ie/ecokuakers).



Speaking Truth to Power

If we, as Friends adopt, all the measures suggested in this booklet and achieve all our sustainability goals as Quakers and as individuals, it is still not enough. To prevent climate breakdown, a complete structural change must be made to the nature of our society.

Friends have a long tradition of highlighting issues of social injustice or inequitable practice on the part of governments or big business. Along with climate breakdown and mass extinction, we are witnessing great social upheaval as well, with growing inequality, widespread cultural genocide, the steady breakdown of support structures and interconnections throughout society and many other challenges.

Friends were instrumental in addressing the need to end slavery, but the direction of our current economic model has simply recreated slavery and exploitation, as well as widespread ecocide (and potentially genocide as we continue on this dangerous path of ecological destruction). We have done so on many different levels under many different names, so we still have work to do in identifying the challenges and speaking out our clear message to those in positions of authority.

If we look more deeply into some of the basic structures of society, we can often find the seeds of war and ecocide under the surface. Some questions that we may wish to consider are: Where does our energy come from? Where and how is our food grown and how is it packaged? In what ways do we rely on plastics and other petrochemicals in our day to day lives?

Given the ubiquity of problems with plastics, from microplastics to ocean pollution to landfill to the toxicity of incineration, can we as a society continue to support the use of petrochemical based plastics? Indeed, are they too dangerous to allow into our society at all?

With these questions in mind, can we as a society tolerate annual global subsidies for fossil fuels, their use and extraction and clean-up of \$5.2trillion/year? Irish government subsidies of fossil fuels are estimated at €2.4 billion/year. The UK government subsidies of fossil fuels are estimated at £10.5billion/year.⁶ There is an opportunity as a society and individually to speak truth to power in this instance and encourage our governments in both Dublin and Belfast to remove all fossil fuel subsidies.

An issue with fossil fuel subsidies is that imported chemically grown food looks cheaper than local organic produce at our farmers' markets. There are hidden costs to industrial food and international transportation that must be taken into account when we consider where and how to spend our money, including the wider cost of health care related to air pollution and high consumption of processed food. We can speak truth to power and endeavour to remove the causes of wasted energy in our food, farming and supply chains.

There are many well-established proposals from civil society that can help build a saner, safer world. These include:

- True cost accounting where the cost of a product includes hidden costs (rather than passing on the directly related fossil fuel costs of air pollution, climate breakdown, ocean plastics proliferation etc. to the taxpayer).
- Declaring ecocide an international crime.
- Introducing universal basic income as a way to overcome poverty and free up human creativity.
- Supporting Cap Global Carbon (a campaign to keep fossil fuels in the ground) <https://capglobalcarbon.org/>

The most fundamental way in which we can achieve this is to use our vote to support parties and politicians who are advocating these policies. We can support these initiatives with our time and resources, by signing petitions, and campaigning for change. Campaigning can be as simple as writing to our local politicians, joining local organisations and advocacy groups, and attending demonstrations.

Wider questions that we could reflect on as we explore advocacy and lobbying work may include the following:

- Can we scale back consumption and embrace a model of degrowth, rather than simply removing fossil fuels only to replace them with lithium-ion batteries and the social and ecological footprint that they embody?
- Degrowth (reducing the overall growth of economies) makes sense. However, it requires sensitive handling. It is unfair to ask people in poverty and people in the Global South to give up their desire for a higher standard of living. We need to concentrate on reducing production of unnecessary consumer items and to increase growth in communal production, such as in areas of education and health. Ideally, this would also be accompanied by a reduction in the working week.
- Could we redesign and re-envision a society that is not built on the backs of poorer nations and endless ecological extractivism?
- How could we redesign our money system as a society so that it does not rely upon endless growth on a finite planet? (<https://www.countercurrents.org/eisenstein020312.htm>)

While considering how best to speak truth to power, it is helpful to envisage a thriving world that is filled with joy, peace, and vitality to help steer us towards the world we want to see around us.

ther Resources

EcoQuakers Ireland

www.quakers-in-ireland.ie/ecoquakers

The EcoQuakers Committee has compiled a spreadsheet listing suppliers of eco-friendly goods and services, resources that can aid in moving towards net zero and promote biodiversity, and organisations that are supporting campaigns in favour of a more just and equitable world which we may consider supporting. Links to previous EcoQuaker talks and videos, and guides for ethical investments and crafting sustainability plans are also available. The 'Goods and Services Resources' spreadsheet is located at: <https://quakersireland.files.wordpress.com/2022/01/ecoquaker-goods-and-services-resource.pdf>

Friends World Committee for Consultation

www.fwcc.world/sustainability/resources

FWCC has a wide range of sustainability resources on its website, including case studies from Friends around the world, testimonies, videos, podcasts, and articles (including one written by EcoQuaker Féidhlim Harty). There is also a clear outline and timeline of Friends' views and policies regarding the climate crisis, sustainability statements made by Friends, and campaigns that Friends can support to address the climate crisis.

www.fwcc.world/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Feidhlim-Harty-article-2018.pdf

Eco-Congregation Ireland

www.ecocongregationireland.com/resources

Eco-Congregation Ireland encourages churches of all denominations to take an eco-approach to worship, lifestyle, property and finance management, community outreach and contact with the developing world. Their vision is to see churches of all denominations throughout Ireland celebrate the gift of God's creation, recognise the inter-dependence of all creation and care for it in their life and mission and through members' personal lifestyles. They offer resources and support to help churches take practical eco action in the context of their Christian faith. A simple church checklist helps churches assess what they are already doing and determine future priorities. Once you have completed this checklist, you are on your way to becoming an eco-congregation. Their free to download resources also include sections on

Worship and Teaching, Children's and Youth Work, Property and Grounds Management, Finance and Waste, Personal Lifestyles, Working with the Local Community and Thinking Globally.

Christian Aid

www.christianaid.ie/climate

Christian Aid is a partnership of people, churches, and local organisations committed to ending poverty worldwide, holding a vision of a better world, free from poverty and climate change, where everyone has enough to eat, and can live without fear of their home and land being destroyed. They are affiliated with numerous churches and faith groups, including Quakers, and are a part of a number of faith-based campaigns against climate breakdown. Links to all their campaigns and resources are available through their website.

Uplift.ie

www.uplift.ie

Uplift is a people-powered campaigning community of over 340,000 people who take coordinated action for progressive change across Ireland.

Campaigns are informed by shared values: to promote social justice, to defend fairness, protect human rights, preserve the planet and to deepen democracy. Using digital tools and a variety of campaigning strategies, members participate and take action to advance Uplift campaigns. Uplift is run by a small team of volunteers and staff experienced in social justice campaigning. The Board of Directors advises and supports the core team. Uplift is completely independent and not aligned to any political or corporate interests.

Petition Parliament

<https://petition.parliament.uk>

UK residents and British citizens have the ability to directly petition the British Government to enact or change legislation. Any British citizen or UK resident can start a petition. If the petition meets the standard of the Parliamentary Petitions Committee, it will be published on the UK Government website. Any petition that receives over 10,000 signatures will receive an official response from the Government, and any petition that receives over 100,000 signatures will be debated in parliament. This resource has been used in the past by ordinary citizens and grassroots organisations to draw national attention to the issues of climate change, biodiversity loss, social justice, and human rights.

Case Studies

CORK MEETING REFURBISHMENT

In June 2020 our Meeting house was returned to us from our main building contractor. An extension has been constructed and the 1938 main building renovated. The work was carried out using sustainable materials wherever this was feasible and not prohibitively expensive. The new build is wood frame with hemp insulation and Ecocrete was used for the base. All other materials used are from non-petrochemical sources, as far as possible. In the old building, insulation underfloor, and in the attic, is provided by EcoCell, a locally made paper-based insulation. Triple glazed windows are installed throughout, and draughts have been eliminated. The vehicle area is gravel covered to reduce run off, although this has maintenance challenges. There is now an area for parking bikes.



Having been out of the Meeting house for two years, we have been treading water as far as other environmental measures in the grounds are concerned, and Covid further delayed our return to the Meeting house as a Quaker Community. We can now take forward the intentions in our sustainability plan that we have not yet done.

A Building Energy Rating (BER) of A3 was achieved for the whole building (new extension and refurbished 1938 part). See above about insulation. The walls of the old building were not insulated – partly to contain cost, partly because it would have had to be external and would conceal the old building. We could do this later and our architects have recommended using cork-based material. Cavity wall insulation was not recommended as it is difficult to obtain material that is rated to deal with the rainfall intensity in Ireland. Energy use is being monitored and we will see what is achieved in practice. There was an opportunity to install solar panels and we were told that would give us an A2 rating. We didn't do it with the building works to contain costs. To be viable, we would need either a good feed-in tariff or equivalent or economic battery storage. Apart from heating, our electricity needs are small. If a community energy project emerged around the Meeting house, we should be able to participate in it.

The Meeting house now uses an air source heat pump for heating. On demand, instant electric water heaters are used in the kitchen and toilets – demand for hot water is erratic and low. All kitchen appliances are electric. The heating is controlled through five zones, each with a timer and thermostat. Is it possible to use a more sustainable company as a source of energy/heating for our Meeting house? Yes, we could switch – but then the electricity we receive is only as green as the mix supplied to the National Grid. We are set up to get greener as the grid is decarbonised.

We have two acres of green space, which is mostly used as our burial ground. There are also 'new' banks around the Meeting house which will eventually need planting up. We also use the grounds as a play area for the kindergarten who use the Meeting house and there are a variety of fruit trees. A recent tree survey by the local Green Spaces initiative counted 99 trees in our grounds. We have thought about a possible vegetable patch, but we were waiting until the building work finished before pursuing that and other initiatives. There is a tension between the role as a burial

ground, economic maintenance of a large area by a small community and developing further eco-friendly measures. For example, we have a ride-on petrol mower to keep the grass areas cut. If the machine is to be usable, this must be done regularly so we have a large area of lawn not meadow (and some like it that way).

The Meeting owns a small house on the edge of the burial ground which is rented out to generate income. It was not included in our sustainability plan, and we will need to add it. It will be a challenge as the core was built in 1820 and there is a relatively modern extension which is not very energy efficient. Funding of work will be an issue as we stretched ourselves to deal with the Meeting house. One thing that stunned us with the Meeting house was the discovery of damaged asbestos in the attic and under the floors. This cost €35k to remove before we started any work. It was a major environmental hazard of which we were unaware. A hazardous material survey ought to be made of every building the Society owns. This is a legal requirement in the UK.

Our unique experience is in having just done a major renovation and extension of our building. We welcome enquiries on our development, and we are always willing to help other Meetings reach their full potential.

Compiled by Richard Bloomfield, Cork Meeting

USE OF BURIAL GROUNDS FOR BIODIVERSITY

Friends Burial Ground, Balmoral Avenue, Belfast:

There are a lot of spring flowers, such as primroses in the grounds, so the grass is not mowed until after these spring flowers have bloomed and died back naturally. Some areas have been left unmowed to create a wildflower meadow.



A local beekeeper also keeps hives in the burial ground. They find it the perfect environment for bees as there are few people around to disturb the hives, and the bees have access to lots of local suburban gardens which have an abundance of flowers. Urban bees tend to thrive more than rural bees these days.



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ferences

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Kumar, Satish (2015) ***Soil, Soul and Society: a new trinity for our time***. Leaping Hare Press.

Endnotes

¹ 1998 Sachs, Loske, Linz et al in Greening the North: A Post-Industrial Blueprint for Ecology and Equity.

² 'Net Zero' means that we will limit the amount of greenhouse gases being released ('emitted'), to a level no more than the amount of greenhouse gases that are removed from the atmosphere.

³ Ireland: <https://switcher.ie/gas-electricity/guides/energy-suppliers/going-green-renewable-energy-in-ireland/>

Northern Ireland: https://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/comparison_tool/begin

⁴ Email: rksct@quakers.ie

⁵ <https://quakersireland.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/quakers-and-ethical-investment.pdf>

⁶ These figures are for the year 2019. This equates to roughly €480 for every Irish resident and £157 for every UK resident.



*“Let our worship and daily lives enrich each other.
Growing in the spirit is a consequence of taking
actions, and action flows from our spiritual growth;
here is the connectedness we seek”*



*This booklet was compiled by EcoQuakers Ireland
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