

Introducing *ecocell*

“Daring to Imagine Completing the Journey to Low Carbon Living”



The Destination

ecocell will be for those of us who are willing to take on the very demanding commitment of completing the journey to sustainability.

We will commit ourselves to getting our carbon footprints down to the level required for sustainability.

We will also ensure that we respect the laws of nature (in which we see the hand of our Creator) and the needs of the natural world, in all aspects of our lives.

The Distance to be Travelled – and the time it will take



In relation to greenhouse gas emission reduction, as members of an *ecocell* group, we will commit ourselves to getting down to about **15%** of the current UK average (which is of the order of 15 tonnes of carbon dioxide per person each year¹) – i.e. down to somewhere between two and three tonnes annually, the type of emission level required for sustainability².

We will work to similar targets in other ecological areas. For this very demanding challenge we will give ourselves about five years.

But we as Christians can give a stronger and clearer lead.

We are saying that, irrespective of what our emissions figures are now, or of how big a change we need to make, we will get our emissions down to the required levels.

So we just don't accept our own lifestyle as 'given', and then 'shave off a bit' here and there (which of course is easy to do if your current lifestyle is luxurious and wasteful).

But on the other hand, we are also giving ourselves a realistic (five year) time frame in which to make the changes.

Who might undertake this journey?

Ideally *ecocell* will be undertaken by people who have completed *Nine First Steps* or any other similar programme (such as the Sheffield Churches OMEGA Programme).

But the essential requirement is that we as members are willing to work with each other to make whatever changes in our lives are required for living sustainability.

The implications of living within sustainability limits are quite daunting for most of us: how many of us are willing to 'leave all and follow ...'? And one implication of group formation is that members of the first groups may not all live in the one locality. A mixture of face-to-face meetings and electronic communication will probably be required.

¹An article in *The Ecologist*, September 2008 issue demonstrated how different figures are obtained depending on whether you just take into account emissions within the UK borders; or you add in emissions by UK citizens outside the UK borders (from international shipping, aviation and tourism); or you add in (net) emissions abroad arising from the production of goods imported into the UK.

²See, for instance, *Heat* by George Monbiot (2007) for discussion of such estimates.

Preparation for the Journey

As with *First Nine Steps*, this journey is too difficult to travel alone. We need mutual support and challenge; we need to share expertise and resources.

Like all such journeys we will go further if we make it an exciting and interesting experience (the guitar and the Frisbee may be as important as the technical manual and prayer book!).



Maps and compasses

One of the first tasks of this programme will be to clarify what the goals mean: the nature of the terrain to be traversed, of the mountains to be scaled, and of the 'compasses' to be used to guide our progress.

This will involve identifying meaningful sustainability targets for all aspects of our lives, and the most appropriate footprint measures³ for those targets.

We realise that we may need to redefine our 'maps and compasses' to help us on our journey to the sustainability 'peak'.

Realistically, how far can we get in minimising our emissions and impacts, and what are the best footprint calculators or other instruments that we can use to measure our progress?

The identifying and refining of the best measures of greenhouse gas emissions, impact on biodiversity, the use of non-renewables, etc, are part of the collective challenge.

Excuses like '... too difficult to measure', '... impossible in this society' are just that: excuses.

Our personal or household emissions and impacts can be roughly divided into **five main activity sources**⁴.

- 1 Energy use in the home: relatively easy to measure, provided we keep the records. We need to get the figures, but we can get down to the difficult business of taking some of the required action as soon as possible, before we have collected many months data.
- 2 (Personal) travel – the same applies
- 3 Food: much more difficult to measure: there are so many different type of food – grown or reared in so many different ways – so we may have to learn and discover what a sustainable diet is (using the best expertise available), as well as how to provide it for our household
- 4 Other purchases: the same applies as for food. We may first have to learn and discover what a 'sustainable wardrobe' is, for example
- 5 Public services (provided for out of taxation): here we may have little or no direct influence. But what forms of indirect influence can we use?

Each of these activity areas will be the basis of a **separate module** in the *ecocell* programme. In addition, there are two supporting modules (*First Module* and *Core Module*) and other information in the documents (*The ecocell Concept*, and this document *Introducing ecocell*).

³ Footprint calculations usually attribute emissions and impacts to the final consumer (even though most of them are caused by producers back along the supply chain), because all production is (allegedly) for our benefit as consumers.

⁴The five main activity areas are based on *Carbon Detox* by George Marshall, except that the surface and air travel have been amalgamated into one activity.

We will interpret the targets we set (such as getting down to about 15% of the current UK greenhouse gas emission average) in a practical but principled way, and in such a way that the targets motivate us rather than confuse or preoccupy us.

For instance, carbon emissions arising from fuel use in the home and from transport are relatively easy to calculate, and the modules will provide very clear guidelines as to how to measure and how to achieve the required reductions.

For other areas, like food and general shopping, it is not easy to estimate the carbon emission, non-renewable resource use and other problems created for global life-support systems. Emissions and impacts arising from the public services that we use are even trickier to measure and to influence.

In each case, our aim will be to develop the best possible practice that is attainable in this society.

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The following change model may also be helpful, given the different types of challenge posed by the different areas of activity (home energy, food, travel, etc):

- 1 How far can you get with personal behavioural, technical or practical 'ecological efficiency' savings?
- 2 What can you achieve through lifestyle/life situation changes, in where you live, size and type of house or flat, leisure pursuits, etc?
- 3 What can you achieve through local community action? Some of us may have significant roles in our churches, communities or workplaces.
- 4 And through 'higher level' political action?

These levels are not of course in a time sequence. For instance, for this programme it may be more sensible to consider life situation measures before investing a lot of time and money on technical measures to 'shore up' an unsustainable lifestyle.

We also realise that there are very significant **variations between people**⁵.

Which means that we will find that different people will start at very different places, with varying levels of 'mountaineering' skills, as it were.

Practically, we will suggest that we set targets for each of the five main activity areas, and develop plans for working towards those. For instance, an annual CO₂ target for transport of half a tonne per year is clearly attainable in this society – a large number of UK citizens already achieve it.

Support for the Journey

The *Core Module* of this programme will be the home group or 'base camp' that we return to after each of our explorations, to provide us with sustenance for continuing our journeys.

To this end, we will pray together, and play together, as well as work together.

In particular, we will explore how people lived very full lives within sustainability constraints in other times and places.

For instance, Andrew Simms⁶, argues that the generation who experienced World War Two would be well-placed to cope with carbon rationing, and we can learn from their wisdom and experience.



⁵In a programme Green Christian ran for the churches in Streatham, south London, we found for instance that annual transport generated emissions varying from 0.2 tonnes to 20 tonnes per person, and home energy emissions varied from one one tonne to nearly 10 tonnes per person.

⁶*An Environmental War Economy*, Andrew Simms (2001), New Economics Foundation.

We may want to interview some of the older members of our communities and hear their stories. The other modules can be introduced as members are ready to explore how best to reduce the emissions and resource depletion arising from their diets, shopping, heating and lighting, travel, etc. But practical action in the present will be combined with researching the past and visualising the future, so that we find the programme an interesting as well as a challenging experience.

Help for us on the Journey from Green Christian 'Guides'

Practically: like *First Nine Steps*, resources will be available from the Green Christian website: information and discussion guides, measurement tools, guides to practical or technical information, prayers, poems and stories, group activities.

Spiritually: we will use the four key concepts framework of the *ecocell* programme, that help us to frame and guide our journeys, to deepen our convictions, to impel us to action, and to provide the motivational 'sparks' that inspire us:

- **See:** understanding where we are and how we got here. Each module has facts and information, and members are encouraged to explore Bible readings and other studies, poems and stories, and other material relevant to our Christian faith.
- **Grieve:** when we think about the loss and damage to God's world, we feel a storm of despair and sorrow in our hearts. Prayers and poetry try to put that sense of loss into words and so help us to grieve.
- **Hope:** the spiritual energy that empowers us to choose to take action, to learn, pray, struggle and act, so that God's kingdom can be realised in our damaged, exploited and unjust world. It is hoped that each module will have inspirational quotes and hope-filled stories of what others have done or are doing to inspire action (or you can find them on the Green Christian website).
- **Act:** to find ways of living more lightly on the Earth. We account for our Earth care by measuring the impact of our current lifestyles, finding out about and discussing ways of limiting our footprints, committing ourselves to realistic but challenging targets, taking action, and measuring our progress throughout the programme.

Theologically: Green Christian has a high regard for many other programmes (both faith-based and secular) which introduce the notion of a simpler and sustainable lifestyle. In designing *ecocell* we have taken much care and energy to produce the practical tools to aid the process of the change to low carbon living. The inspiration for *ecocell* is faith in God, the Creator and Sustainer who calls us to the costly, spiritual journey of carbon-free Christian discipleship.

And Visualising the Destination?

Calculations etc are essential to guide us on our journeys.

But we do not want the programme to become calculation and target-obsessed, and if it does so, it loses its purpose.

Think rather of the power of the message, of the tipping point potential, of a group of people demonstrating by their action what can and needs to be done: the potential influence of this on friends and neighbours, on politicians and other public figures.





As the miracle of the loaves and fishes (Matthew 14:14-21) can be interpreted: our (relatively) small offerings, our small but well-thought-through actions can be very significant, can have a large multiplier effect.

Using the pilgrimage metaphor, we can see the cherished 'mountain' in the sunlight in the distance. But as we take our bearings, we see all the swamp land and dense undergrowth all around us – and the six-lane motorways and other hazards.

We know this pilgrimage will be difficult, and will take a while. It will also have its joys and its lighter side, as any journey in company should (but you certainly cannot do this pilgrimage on a Ryanair flight!).

In his book *Carbon Detox*, George Marshall points to the absurdity of offering lists of 'easypeasy' activities as a solution to a huge global problem.

Christians have never expected the cost of discipleship to come cheap. Why should we expect stewardship of our threatened life-support systems to be cheap and easy?

This programme will also have a campaigning side to it. A good MP or Councillor will listen to any local group. But we will be that much more credible as we present ourselves as church or faith groups that are actually walking the talk. We can arrive at their surgeries by bike. We can tell them we don't fly. We can point to the fruit and vegetables growing in our personal and communal gardens. And to our fully insulated homes, with wood stoves or solar panels, and produce our (much-reduced) fuel bills.

We won't get to this point in six weeks. But when we do, we can make a very credible campaigning case for all those legal and tax changes that will motivate institutions and people to do likewise.

We do not want our commitment to result in the zealotry or 'fundamentalism' that so many movements have fallen prey to. Ideas and suggestions always need to be open to systemic analysis; discussion is never closed; there is no linguistic censorship.

These are the important qualities required for all forms of group learning; even more so when the challenge is so new and so complex. Analysis and critique, prayer and poetry, reflection and action – and humour – are all good antidotes to extremism. Perhaps the most important message we can give is about how much happier and fulfilled we will be, having crossed ravines together, with the destination now at least in sight.

