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GE34
Ymateb gan: Cynhadledd Esgobion Catholig Cymru a Lloegr

Welsh Parliament
Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Green Economy
GE34
Evidence from: Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales



Green Economy Consultation Response – Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales

Executive Summary

- This consultation response is being submitted by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW).
- The Catholic Church has a long history of supporting environmental initiatives and Catholic social teaching has a strong message of care for our common home.
- The Catholic Bishops’ Conference has laid out suggested priorities for the Welsh Government. These are drawn from our experience working on environmental initiatives at a grassroots level and our pioneering research into the decarbonisation of Catholic buildings in England and Wales.
- Our priorities include: implementing a gradual and just transition to green economy while keeping the communities at the centre of decision making; engagement with communities at a grassroots level; support for environmental projects that aim to educate, raise awareness and work in collaboration with other faith groups; embracing cynefin through faith tourism.
- We will not provide a response for every question in the call for evidence, but will instead focus on questions 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Introduction

The Catholic Church in Wales

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) is the national permanent assembly of Catholic Bishops and Personal Ordinaries in the two member countries. CBCEW represents the Catholic community across the 22 dioceses across England and Wales, with three of those dioceses sitting within Wales.

The Catholic Church in Wales comprises of the Diocese of Wrexham, the Diocese of Menevia and the Archdiocese of Cardiff and is one of the largest minority faiths in Wales. The Welsh Catholic community contributes greatly to the nation’s proud heritage of religious, cultural and ethnic diversity. The Catholic Church also has a long history of environmental work at local, national and international levels.

The Catholic Church’s Environmental Work

In his encyclical letter *Laudato Si* (2015), addressed to all people of goodwill, which outlined the Catholic Church’s stance on climate action, sustainability and biodiversity, Pope Francis emphasised the inter-connectedness of environmental issues:

“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.”¹

Pope Francis emphasises that when the environment suffers, people – often from the poorest communities - suffer. This is why Pope Francis invites us to hear the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”²

¹ Pope Francis, 2015:139, *Laudato Si: On Care of Our Common Home* [Encyclical], available at: [Laudato si' \(24 May 2015\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](#)

² *ibid*, 49.

In response to this invitation, Catholic communities across Wales and England have been running a number of initiatives and research projects focussing on protecting our common home. These include:

- *LiveSimply* Award – a scheme awarding Catholic communities (e.g. parishes, schools, chaplaincies) for running initiatives that demonstrate a commitment to living simply, sustainably with creation and in solidarity with people in poverty.³
- “Guardians of Creation” – a national pioneering and collaborative research project that provides practical guidance for Catholic communities and dioceses across Wales and England on decarbonisation that can be used by both Catholic and secular organisations.⁴
- “The Call of Creation” - a document published in 2022 highlighting the Church’s stance on environmental matters produced for Catholic communities in England and Wales. It emphasises the interconnectedness between care for the environment and care for one another.⁵
- “The Common Good and The Catholic Church’s Social Teaching” – a teaching document that provides pastoral guidance on various matters including work, financial crises, and the importance of fraternity in caring for the most vulnerable in our society.⁶
- The Cost of Living Statement 2023 – ahead of the Government’s Autumn Statement of last year, the Social Justice Department of CBCEW published a statement on the cost of living. The document encouraged the UK Government to consider its priorities in relation to the most deprived communities in England and Wales, adopt policies that reduce carbon emissions, and urged the employers and businesses to remember their duty of care towards their employees. The statement also emphasised how Catholic communities can play a vital part in promoting the common good. For instance, by working with Catholic grassroots charities and people of goodwill to support local families in need.⁷

It is often the poorest and most vulnerable communities that bear the brunt of climate change, making them most in need of assistance. Championing the dignity of every human being is one of the central pillars of Catholic social teaching, aligning seamlessly with the broader principles of environmental, social and governance frameworks. The belief that everyone deserves to flourish, live with dignity and have access to their human and civil rights is a driving force behind the Church’s charitable, educational and pastoral work.

³ CAFOD, “Become a LiveSimply award community”, available online:

<https://cafod.org.uk/campaign/livesimply-award>

⁴ “Guardians of Creation” is managed by a consortium of organisations including St. Mary’s University and The Diocese of Salford and the resources are available online:

<https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/areas/theology-and-ethics/guardians-of-creation-project/about.aspx>

⁵ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, “Call of Creation”, available online at:

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/10/Call-of-Creation-2022b.pdf>

⁶ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, “The Common Good and The Catholic Church’s Social Teaching”, available at: <https://cbcew.org.uk/plain/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/11/common-good-1996.pdf>

⁷ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, “Cost-Of-Living Statement 2023”, available at:

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/cost-of-living-statement-2023/#:~:text=Introduction&text=In%20September%202022%2C%20the%20Department,time%2C%20some%20pressures%20have%20eased.>

Therefore, The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales welcomes the Welsh Government's commitment to transition to a green economy. The Conference also welcome the acknowledgement that the transition presents both challenges and opportunities which must warrant careful considerations.

What skills challenges exist in relation to transitioning to a green economy? What actions should be taken, and by whom, to ensure the skills are there to meet the growing demands of a green economy?

What will workers and employers need for a just transition to a Net Zero economy to be achieved, and what actions should the Welsh Government take to deliver the elements of this that lie within its devolved powers?

The transition to a green economy presents both opportunities and challenges for Welsh society.

Investing in a Just Transition

For some, the term "green economy" can carry negative connotations.⁸ This is particularly the case for communities living in more deprived areas that rely on traditional, carbon-heavy industries for employment and their associated income. The term can raise particular concerns around job security. For instance, the closure of Port Talbot's steelworks illustrates how job losses from decarbonisation efforts can lead to significant socio-economic hardships.⁹ To implement a truly just transition to Wales' green economy, it is vital for Welsh Government to actively involve and support communities most affected by these changes, ensuring that they are not left vulnerable.

There is, of course, a variety of ways in which to respond these challenges and it is not for the Bishops' Conference to make judgements between different approaches. However, where there are programmes of investment or re-training schemes, we would urge the Welsh government to actively involve the community to help them access alternative employment opportunities. As demonstrated by the assistance provided by local churches in Port Talbot recently, and the solidarity expressed by the Archbishop of Cardiff with the workers and their families, faith communities can play a vital role in supporting those affected. Notably, many churchgoers in Port Talbot have experienced job losses, finding solace and assistance within their congregations. It is therefore imperative that Welsh Government collaborates with faith communities to provide signposting to retraining programs and connect individuals with appropriate resources for mental health support.¹⁰

⁸ Schroeder, P. and Benton., T, "European Farmer's Protests Show the Need for A Just Transition to Net Zero", Chatham House, Published on Jan 31, 2024. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/01/european-farmers-protests>

⁹ Price., B and McCharthy., J., "Tata Steel: Half of Port Talbot Jobs at Risk, Unions Told." Published Feb 2, 2014. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-68185249>

¹⁰ Wilkinson., P., "A Sense of Doom Hangs Over Steel Town", Church Times, 2016. Available at: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/22-january/news/uk/a-sense-of-doom-hangs-over-steel-town>

Suggested Priorities for Welsh Government:

- Commit to a gradual transition to a green economy, keeping communities at the forefront of decision-making.
- Ensure that investment and retraining initiatives for those who are reliant on traditional industries and are most affected by the transition to green economy actively involve the communities affected.
- Recognise and support the work of the Catholic Church and other faith groups in community engagement and signposting throughout Wales.

How will the Welsh Government need to work in partnership with others to realise the potential of the green economy and deliver a just transition? To what extent is the partnership working that is needed being undertaken?

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has consistently provided practical guidance, education, and awareness-raising on green issues. With a strong record in decarbonisation, the Church is well-positioned to lead and set an example for sustainable practices. The bishops continually emphasise the importance of fostering a “shared duty of stewardship” among the Catholic community and beyond.¹¹ Considering the need for community involvement, it is essential for the Welsh Government to recognise and support organisations that work closely with local communities at a grassroots level on climate issues.

The Catholic Church is an important provider of education in Wales and has a strong history of collaborative work with partner organisations and inter-faith groups. Having led many projects in Catholic schools and in partnership with these groups, we are in a unique position to help facilitate this transition. These initiatives have not only raised awareness, engaged with local communities and provided education on green matters, but also demonstrated leadership in the field of grassroots environmental action. These initiatives include:

1. **“Guardians of Creation”** – This is a pioneering research project that aims to find practical answers to the challenges of decarbonisation for diocesan buildings. It is a collaborative project working with universities, charities, organisations and diocesan representatives. Using the Diocese of Salford as a case study, ‘Guardians of Creation’ aims to provide an insight into how a process of decarbonisation can be rolled out across England and Wales. The second set of guidance from this research project provides Catholic dioceses with the necessary understanding to begin their decarbonisation journey using a step-by-step process that can be followed by any diocese across England and Wales. Recommendations from this project can also be used to assist other organisations in becoming carbon neutral.

¹¹ CBCEW, “Call of Creation”, 2022, p2, available at: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/10/Call-of-Creation-2022b.pdf>

2. **Education and Awareness-Raising** - The Catholic Church is a provider of education in Wales and uses its experience working with students from Early Years Foundation Stage to Sixth Form. It provides excellent, age-appropriate education and awareness-raising on green matters. For example, the majority of Catholic schools across Wales use educational resources developed by *The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)* such as their current resource “Go Green For CAFOD”.¹² The initiative aims to empower children and young adults to care for the environment in their parish, school and home lives. Catholic schools in Wales are also committed to embracing a community focus, working with their local communities and parishes to undertake practical environmental and ecological projects to aid community education. The Catholic social teaching principle of subsidiarity recognises the value of such local initiatives, and the others described below, and proposes that governments provide support without taking over the role of the community in addressing social challenges.
3. **LiveSimply Award and Work with Local Parishes** – The CBCEW recognizes that often change is most effective when led by the local community. *The LiveSimply Award* encourages parishes and schools across England and Wales to make a commitment to live more simply, more sustainably and in solidarity with poor communities. *The LiveSimply* awards communities for working to make a positive impact on their environment, on the wider planet and the implications for future generations.¹³
4. **Interfaith and Collaborative Work** - The Catholic Church remains actively engaged with the Interfaith Council for Wales, Cytûn and the Faith Communities Forum. Given that many faith groups share a commitment to environmental stewardship, collaboration between them presents an opportunity for interfaith work and environmental action. Through initiatives such as the Catholic Church’s national “Guardians of Creation” project, it demonstrates exceptional leadership in decarbonisation efforts, providing practical guidance that extends to all churches, faith communities, charities, and businesses across Wales.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Welsh Government to share our research and expertise in this field to support Wales’ transition to a green economy.

Suggested Priorities for Welsh Government:

- Involve Catholic communities and other faith groups in decision-making and consultancy, recognising the important role these community groups play in their diverse localities;
- Acknowledge and leverage research projects like "Guardians of Creation" which can offer practical and valuable guidance for decarbonisation and cost-saving opportunities;
- Support projects in local schools and communities, such as the *LiveSimply Award* and *Go Green for CAFOD*, which aim to educate, raise awareness and provide practical action points for learners.

¹² CAFOD, Education resources, available at: <https://cafod.org.uk/Education/Education-resources>.

¹³ CBCEW, Environment Case Study, available at: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/environment-case-study-4/>.

The Welsh Government says it will face considerable budgetary constraints in the short term. How should it prioritise investment to support development of the green economy over the shorter and longer-term? What innovative approaches to financing could be considered to maximise potential investment and benefits?

To navigate budgetary constraints while promoting the transition to a green economy, the Welsh Government must use the expertise of faith communities and organisations. This can be ensured by supporting and learning from the essential work that these faith groups are already undertaking, specifically their role in bolstering tourism, preserving Welsh heritage, and providing crucial support to local people.

Innovative approach to financing #1: Investment in churches, faith tourism and provision of training for local communities

According to research conducted by National Churches Trust's project "House of Good" in 2020, the total economic and social value generated by church buildings in the UK amounts to at least £12.4 billion per year, averaging around £300,000 per church.¹⁴ With 54 listed Catholic buildings in Wales, Catholic architectural heritage in Wales alone contributes significantly to the Welsh economy, attracting tourism and subsequently providing skills-based jobs.

The Historic Environment Group's report on Historic Environment and Climate Change in Wales underscores the vulnerability of all types of historic assets to frequent high winds, storms, and associated damage. While hotter, drier summers may enhance tourism potential and economic development, they also pose risks to fragile historic sites due to increased visitor numbers.¹⁵ It is imperative to safeguard Welsh heritage, including historic buildings, from the threats posed by climate change in order to reap its economic benefits.

Latest figures from the Institute for Parentships and Technical Education show that interest in heritage sector occupations has grown significantly among the under 30's, with many young people seeking to gain skills in stonemasonry.¹⁶ Similarly, as demonstrated by past initiatives, authorities in Wales have effectively organized training courses for local residents, equipping them with the skills needed to renovate and maintain historic buildings, including churches. This provision of niche skills to Welsh communities, such as joinery and sash window assembly, has shown its capacity to empower people and ensure community resilience for the future.¹⁷

¹⁴ National Churches Trust, "House of Good", 2021. Available at:

<https://www.houseofgood.nationalchurchestrust.org/>

¹⁵ CADW, Historic Environment and Climate Change In Wales: Sector Adoption Plan, 2020. Available at:

<https://cadw.gov.wales/sites/default/files/2020-02/Adaptation%20Plan%20-%20FINAL%20WEB%20-%20English%20%281%29.pdf>

¹⁶ Hamilton., J. "Heritage Becomes Hip Choice for Gen Z", The Times, 2024. Available at:

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/heritage-becomes-hip-choice-for-gen-z-q85pvnqw3>

¹⁷ North Wales Live, "Courses to Revive Dying Skills", 2013. Available at:

<https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/courses-to-revive-dying-skills-2850792>

Initiatives which encourage green skill development in rural Welsh communities may be an innovative response to the challenges that are faced as could investing in Wales' historic religious sites and nurturing faith-based tourism. This could promote economic prosperity while safeguarding the beauty of these heritage sites. Given Wales' wide array of pilgrimage destinations and numerous breathtaking natural beauty spots, faith tourism, with its environmentally conscious approach to travel, may offer a sustainable way for visitors to explore the country's cultural heritage. There is a growing interest in pilgrimage which is integral to Catholic spirituality and fosters social connections and well-being. We aim to provide a valuable insight into this religious aspect of tourism and Catholic spirituality via the Welsh Government's 'Saints Way' project. On 16th March, the Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff, in collaboration with the Diocese of Llandaff, are organising the first-ever interfaith and ecumenical pilgrimage. Its aim is to build unity between faith groups and to share perspectives with one another. We are pleased that a number of MSs will be in attendance to show their support for pilgrimage and faith-based tourism.

Innovative Approach to financing #2: Investment in decarbonisation projects

The Catholic Church and its partner organizations have practical experience in decarbonisation efforts and community engagement through grassroots and national projects. Drawing inspiration from successful projects such as the Catholic Church's "Guardians of Creation" document, the Welsh Government can work in partnership with wider faith communities, as well as secular businesses and charities, encouraging them reduce their carbon footprint and improve energy efficiency in their buildings.

Furthermore, by supporting grassroots initiatives and projects, the Welsh Government can foster community involvement in the transition to a green economy while minimizing excessive budgetary expenditure. For instance, Catholic projects such as *LiveSimply Award* encourage parishes and schools across Wales and England to commit to living more simply, sustainably, and in solidarity with local communities.

Projects like this offer communities the opportunity to learn about their impact on their environment, our common home, and the implications for future generations.

Suggested Priorities for Welsh Government:

- Consider Investment in historic churches to preserve Wales' rich cultural heritage as well as invest in new skills-based jobs;
- Consider encouraging faith tourism and green tourism as an economic resource for current and future generations;
- Acknowledge and use the value of projects such as "Guardians of Creation" which can provide leadership and practical guidance for decarbonisation to other parishes and faith communities;
- Foster community involvement in the transition to green economy by supporting local initiatives and projects.