

CREATING

WILDER

CHURCHES

Britain's churches have provided refuge for different cultures and religions for thousands of years. As more and more of our land gets built upon and fragmented, churches, old and new, can provide another vital refuge. A refuge for nature.



Nature provides many opportunities for leisure, relaxation, and meditation. Studies have shown that connecting with nature has many benefits for our mental wellbeing; we feel happier and healthier. Furthermore, many church-goers are increasingly reconnecting with nature, as these moments spent outside can be incredibly calming and spiritual.

The State of Nature report (2019) revealed that 41% of UK species have declined since 1970, due to increased habitat destruction, pesticide use, and climate change. However, by changing our habits, using less chemicals and inviting nature back into our lives, we can help stop these drastic declines. Stewardship theology teaches us that we all have a responsibility to take care of the Earth. Now, our churches have a unique opportunity to make space for nature, both on its land and in the hearts of the congregation and wider community.

Before you start

Due to the corona virus pandemic, please adapt your activities to adhere to the most recent government guidelines and help prevent the spread of the virus. Actions suggested in this toolkit are suggestions only and should be modified in a way that suits you and the community best.

Make space for nature

There are around 16,000 churches in England, which means there are over 16,000 spaces that could be made into wildlife havens. Whether your church or church hall has a lot of open space or not, you can make space for nature by being creative and open minded. Furthermore, making space for nature is not just a physical action, but a change in attitudes and behaviours, too. You can encourage your community to reconnect with nature, ask them to go wild in their own homes, and teach children about the importance of nature.



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Graveyards and burial sites

There are over 20,000 burial sites in England and Wales, but they are under threat due to encroaching development and mismanagement. While many cities and towns have expanded and built upon our natural landscapes, burial sites have mostly remained undisturbed, escaping the changes that have occurred around them. This means that over time, our burial grounds have become valuable wildlife havens. It is estimated that 75% of the UK's veteran and ancient yew trees, are found in churchyards - and a yew tree is considered ancient if it's older than 800 years!

We can help you!

On the Trust's website, you will find many resources on how to make space for nature. We offer free 30 minute phone consultations to discuss your space and possibilities with you and, for a fee, we will visit your grounds and offer professional advice.

Open spaces around the church

Many churches have other open green spaces where people gather. No matter how big the space is, you can transform it into a wildlife haven. You can grow a wildflower meadow, dig a pond, or plant trees. Your actions depend on what resources you have and how much work you're willing to put into the project. If the space is paved over, you can grow plants in containers or window boxes. Please visit our website: Hiwwt.org.uk/wildlife-gardening to find out more.

Go wild with your congregation

Your congregation are important players in helping you to create a Wilder Church. By involving them in the decision making and execution of a Wilder Church, you are empowering them with a sense of ownership over the project and they're more likely to commit to maintaining those wild spaces in the future.

You can incorporate environmental theology into sermons and events, so that your congregation has a better understanding of what the gospel says on taking action for nature. A Rocha UK (ARUK) is a UK national charity focused on supporting Christians and churches in taking care of nature. Their Wild Christian programme helps to support Christians in exploring the relationships between their faith, the natural environment, and how we live. To find out more, go to: arocha.org.uk/wildchristian.



We have lots of free resources!

Watch and share [our video](#) of how churchyards are beneficial to wildflowers. As you encourage your congregation to come on this wild journey with you and the church, you can also encourage them to go on their own wild journeys at home. Our website: hiwwt.org.uk/actions has many ideas for how individuals can take action for wildlife at home.

Wilder children

If your church runs a Sunday School or a similar programme to teach younger children about your faith, this is an excellent opportunity to also engage kids with nature. Being in and interacting with nature helps to foster a child's emotional, intellectual, and physical development.

If you'd like to incorporate activities that engage children with the natural world into your programme, go to: wildlifewatch.org.uk. The website has many ideas for activities you can get children involved with, though they will need to be refocused to complement your theology. Get children involved with nature around the church, and let them be a part of your wilder initiatives. Go to: hiwwt.org.uk/Schools-groups to see what the Trust can offer children.



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Be a part of Wilder Streets

Wilder Streets is a Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust initiative to create neighbourhood nature recovery networks. Wilder Streets encourages residents, businesses, and other landowners from the same street to work together to create an urban wildlife corridor and hopefully connect with other Wilder Streets.

Churches have acted as the heart of our communities for centuries, and though their role in the community may be changing, many people still visit churches for reasons other than their faith. People now go to churches for quiet contemplation, ceremonies, or community events. Becoming a Wilder Church on a Wilder Street can help your church interact with your community in a different way. Conserving your burial sites can help start conversations about the history and ecological importance of your church. Making other spaces in your church places for more people to enjoy and learn from will also encourage more community engagement.

Get your Wilder Streets toolkit

You can download our Wilder Streets toolkit from our website: hiwwt.org.uk/team-wilder/team-wilder-resources-toolkits.



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Join Team Wilder

If you're committed to creating a Wilder Church, in any of the ways mentioned above, we'd love for you to join Team Wilder. Team Wilder is an initiative led by the Trust to encourage local action for nature. We provide people with resources, toolkits, and training to help them on their wilder journey, as well as connect people with one another. Find out more about Team Wilder on: hiwwt.org.uk/team-wilder.



Share your work with us

We love hearing about the work that you're doing to protect nature. The majority of us are already taking action in one way or another and we want to celebrate that! We will be your cheerleaders every step of the way, so please share your stories with us on Facebook: @HampshireandIsleofWightWildlifeTrust
Instagram: @HantsIWWildlife
and Twitter: @HantsIWWildlife



Be a leader for #TeamWilder

Team Wilder has a Wilder Communities Leader programme that we think you'd be perfect for! By joining Team Wilder as a Wilder Leader, you will receive free training and resources on engaging your wilder community in taking action for nature. Find out more at: hiwwt.org.uk/become-wilder-champion.

For further reading

A Rocha International is a Christian organisation engaging in community based conservation projects and environmental education. Read more here: arocha.org. Caring for God's Green acre is a UK charity taking care of burial grounds and graveyards across the country. Read more here: caringforgodsacre.org.uk.

There are several churches around our two counties that are already becoming wilder. Check out this [YouTube video of Peartree Church](#) in Southampton.

**Hampshire & Isle of Wight
Wildlife Trust**

Beechcroft House, Vicarage
Lane, Curdridge, Hampshire
SO32 2DP

Registered Charity Number 201081

01489 774400
Wilder@hiwwt.org.uk
hiwwt.org.uk/team-wilder

