

**ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST**  
**CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE**  
**CAMBRIDGE**

**Powering Our Future**



## From the Vicar

I warmly invite you to read this vital strategy, outlining our energy needs for St John's Church and Centre.

Please support us in meeting our 2026 Gift Day Challenge.

Revd Canon James Shakespeare  
Vicar, St John the Evangelist Cambridge



## A Word of Welcome

*“Let us build a house where love can dwell, and all can safely live.”*

For 130 years St John's has adapted, again and again, so that it could keep serving this corner of Cambridge. The timber hall of 1893 became a permanent church by 1896; the church grew in stages through 1908 and 1928; the Wilkinson Room arrived in 1982; and, most recently, Enlarging Our Tent (EOT) reshaped our community rooms in 2018. Each generation has left this place a little more able to welcome the next.

Today we are the generation being asked to respond to something new: the urgent, practical work of moving St John's away from its dependence on gas, towards clean, reliable, and affordable energy, in keeping with the Church of England's own commitment to a Net Zero Carbon estate. ‘Net Zero Carbon’ refers to the aim of using energy that is either generated on-site (i.e. isn't drawn from the grid) or is derived from renewable sources. General Synod has emphasised that this is very much part and parcel of the Church's mission, in safeguarding creation and caring for the environment.

This booklet sets out plainly what is happening behind the scenes, why it matters now rather than later, what it might cost, and how we are proposing to meet that cost, beginning with this year's Gift Day. Thank you for taking the time to read it, and for all you already do to keep St John's a warm and welcoming home for worship and community life.

*“St John's adaptability is its strength — and a reflection of its pastoral commitment to the communities it serves.”*

— St John's Conservation Development Strategy, 2024

## Our Story So Far

St John's was founded in 1894 to serve the fast-growing New Cherry Hinton suburb, in a Cambridge transformed by the arrival of the railways. Building began in 1896, and our buildings have been extended and adapted in stages ever since: in 1908, 1928, 1952, 1982, 1994 and, most recently, in the Enlarging Our Tent project (EOT) of 2017-18, which upgraded our kitchen, toilets and accessibility to bring St John's into a single, welcoming Church and Community Centre.

That pattern of careful, staged renewal is exactly the model we are following again now, but this time the challenge is not our facilities, it is our energy.



## Recent milestones

- 2016–18 — Enlarging Our Tent: new kitchen, toilets, accessible facilities and entrance link
- 2023 — Quinquennial Inspection identifies urgent and looming maintenance needs
- 2024 — Conservation Development Strategy adopted by the PCC, mapping our estate's future
- 2024 — New audio-visual system, improving the church's acoustics and broadcasting worship more widely
- 2025 — A buried gas pipe fails, forcing us to confront our ageing services infrastructure
- June 2026 — PCC commissions an Energy Strategy to chart our route to cleaner and more reliable heat and power
- July 2026 — at an Extraordinary meeting, the PCC approves appointing a consultant in relation to installing a 3-phase upgrade, paving the way for work before the winter.

## Why Now? The Problem We Face

St John's runs on infrastructure that, in places, is close to a century old. None of it was ever designed to serve a building complex the size we have become, still less to meet the demands of net zero.

### Five boilers, one ageing system

The whole site depends on gas for heating and hot water, spread across five separate boilers of very different ages, the oldest around 35 years old. Our servicing contractor has already warned that spare parts for some of them are becoming difficult, or impossible, to obtain. The Church of England (CofE) will resist our replacing gas with gas, so a sudden failure could leave us very cold and in deep trouble.



### An electricity supply at its limit:

Our single-phase electricity supply is believed to date from 1928, long before anyone imagined a Community Centre approaching the size of the church itself sharing the same site. It is already at the limit of its capacity: it restricted the choice of kitchen appliances during EOT in 2018; even so, the consumer unit in the community rooms occasionally trips when demand is high.

### The wake-up call

In 2025, a suspected porous underground gas pipe caused a leak and had to be replaced as an emergency. It was expensive, and it exposed how little slack our services infrastructure has left. Together with the CofE Net Zero Carbon policy, it prompted the PCC to look seriously at what a modern, resilient, low-carbon energy supply for St John's might look like.



## The Wider Picture: Net Zero and Eco Church

St John's is not tackling this alone, and we are not the only church facing it. In February 2020, the Church of England's General Synod voted for the whole Church, every parish, cathedral and diocese to work towards Net Zero Carbon by 2030. A detailed Route-map, endorsed by General Synod in 2022, sets out milestones parishes are asked to work through: measuring our energy use, reducing demand, and switching from fossil fuels to renewable and low-carbon sources.

In July 2026, a progress report to General Synod acknowledged that the Church of England as a whole is unlikely to hit the 2030 deadline in full, even though genuine progress has been made, including: capacity-building grants, retrofit surveys, and nearly 5,000 churches now engaged with the Eco Church scheme. General Synod's response has been to keep pressing forward rather than abandon the ambition. For a parish like ours, the practical message is the same either way: measure our footprint, cut our demand, and move steadily away from gas.

**2030**

The Church of England's Net Zero Carbon target, set by General Synod in 2020

### Our own Eco Church journey

For several years St John's has worked with À Rocha, the Christian environmental charity, through the Eco Church award scheme. We already hold Bronze award status and are actively working towards Silver. À Rocha's guidance on our transition from gas to electricity is expected to be central and may well be important to the success of future grant applications.

*"Net zero is needed by 2030, but it starts now — a significant reduction is needed every year, year on year."*

— Church of England Net Zero Carbon Route-map

# Our Energy Strategy Project

Rather than jumping straight to a solution, the PCC has commissioned a proper Energy Strategy — a carefully staged piece of evidence-based professional work that will tell us what St John's actually needs. An Energy Strategy Project Group has been set up, led by one of our Church Wardens, with a Client Representative keeping the work on track at every stage.

## The four stages

- Stage 1 — Information Gathering: site inspection and gathering everything already known about our buildings and services
- Stage 2 — Data Assembly & Energy Audit: filling in the gaps (surveys, meter data, utility records) to build a full energy audit
- Stage 3 — Option Appraisal: testing the realistic options — solar panels, battery storage, heat pumps — against our actual needs
- Stage 4 — The Energy Strategy: a preferred solution together with a step-by-step Critical Path for achieving it, some approximate budget costs and an eye on possible grants.

Consultants were invited to tender for developing and producing the Strategy in April 2026, with Illuminous Consulting being appointed in June. The Project Group aims to have the Strategy ready later in the year.

By the end of July 2026, Stage 1 (Information gathering) and Stage 2 (the Data Assembly & Energy Audit) were complete. Illuminous Consulting is now nearing completion of Stage 3 (Option Appraisal), testing realistic options against the data gathered. Alongside this wider work, one piece of infrastructure could not wait for Stage 4 to conclude: the move to a new three-phase electricity supply, covered in greater detail in the pages that follow.

Crucially, the Strategy is being generated hand-in-hand with our Conservation Development Strategy (2024), so that whatever we do to address our energy needs respects the character of a building loved by generations of this parish, and does not close off future options for St John's.



## Why We Are Installing a Three-Phase Electricity Supply

While the full Energy Strategy is being developed, one piece of work cannot wait: bringing a modern, three-phase electricity supply onto the site.

Our current single-phase supply is around a century old and already stretched to its limit by the Community Centre it was never designed to serve. A three-phase supply gives us far more electrical headroom, so that one part of the site will no longer be competing with the other for power.

### A bridge, not the destination

Three-phase power does not make St John's carbon neutral (it will still come from our electricity suppliers as before). It is not the destination because if we did nothing else we would be reliant on a single public utility market and an expensive one at that. But it is an essential bridge: it gives us a reliable, resilient supply capable of coping if one of our old boilers fails suddenly, and it would be like a stepping stone: it could power heat pumps until photovoltaic panels and battery storage could generate and store our own electricity, sharing the load in an integrated infrastructure.

The three-phase electrical work involves two linked parts: a new supply and meter from UK Power Networks, sited in a cabinet on the north wall of the church near the vestries, and new cables routed from there to our existing electrical installations. Our ambition is to have the three-phase supply in place before the onset of this coming winter, so that we are not caught out the way we were in the 2025 gas leak.

**2025**

The year a gas leak forced us to face our infrastructure head-on

## How This Decision Was Made

Decisions like this do not happen in a single meeting. Over the summer of 2026, both the route for our new three-phase supply and who would deliver it were worked through in detail.

### Agreeing the Route

A 100 Amp three-phase supply is expected to be enough for the full range of heating options being considered, without triggering a costlier network upgrade or a change to more expensive Half-Hourly Metering — keeping both the installation and our ongoing running costs proportionate.

On 28 July 2026, our Energy Strategy Project Group met to weigh three possible routes and locations put forward by our energy consultant. They agreed to ask UK Power Networks to bring the new supply in from Blinco Grove to a meter cabinet on the north wall of the North Transept, close to our existing installation in the Vicar's vestry. This may be on a temporary basis, depending on how our plans develop as the wider Energy Strategy reaches its later stages. Equally, we do not know yet if the existing cabling from the vestry to the Community Centre will be sufficient to cater for that part of the site, but looking into the future, and the need for a 3-phase supply to drive e.g. heat pumps, in the long term replacement seems likely.

In August the PCC concluded a separate agreement with Illuminous Consulting to represent it and negotiate with the monopoly provider UK Power Networks. All the installation work beyond the UK Power Networks meter will be separately tendered by contractors.

### Protecting Our Car Park

Every option on the table was also weighed against a simple but important fact: with almost all of our congregational giving going to our Diocesan Parish Share, St John's depends heavily on the income the Community Centre generates and the car park is central to that. Whatever else changes, the agreed routes will not compromise the parking and cycle spaces the Community Centre relies on.

### Appointing Someone to Deliver It

The Energy Strategy Project Group then turned to a second question: who should manage the practical work of negotiating and procuring the upgrade with UK Power Networks? After weighing the benefits of a single, whole-project overview against a cheaper but narrower alternative, it made a recommendation which the PCC approved unanimously at an extraordinary meeting on 30 July.

### An Outreach Opportunity

One welcome idea came out of these same discussions. It was suggested that a local school or VI Form College might like to send students to follow our Net Zero journey as it unfolds, as part of e.g. their Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) work: in a small way such work could serve the wider community as well as our own, alongside the usual safeguarding and confidentiality considerations. The idea was warmly received, and the Energy Strategy Project Group agreed to make an approach.

# Generating Our Own Power

Looking further ahead, the Energy Strategy Project Group is examining how St John's can generate and store more of its own low-carbon energy on site, rather than relying entirely on the expensive option of the grid.

## Photovoltaic panels

Both the church and the Community Centre have generous areas of south-facing roof. Arrays of photovoltaic (solar) panels there could supply and, with battery storage, help retain a meaningful share of our electricity needs, reducing both our bills and our carbon footprint over time.

## Battery storage

Because our pattern of use varies enormously from quiet weekday mornings to a packed church at Christmas or Remembrance Sunday, as it does also between the church and the Community Centre, storing energy for when we need it most is just as important as generating it. Unlike a roof full of panels, we may be able to build battery storage capacity over time, as funding allows.

## Heat pumps

Air or ground source heat pumps may also have a role in replacing our ageing gas boilers, though our tight urban site limits some of the options available to larger rural sites. This is exactly the kind of question the Option Appraisal stage of our Energy Strategy is designed to test properly, rather than guess at.

None of these choices are final. They are genuine options currently being tested against real data, our actual energy use, our actual roof space, our actual budget, so that whatever emerges as the preferred option is the right solution for St John's, not just a fashionable one.



## The Financial Position

We want to be straightforward with the congregation about money, because a project like this only succeeds if it is properly funded.

### Costs already incurred

Thus far our costs have been confined to seeking professional advice where we lack the skill-set in-house: building services consultancy and surveying. Together these have come to nearly £13,500 (including VAT).

### Costs expected imminently

In 2025 UK Power Networks (UKPN) provided a minimum cost estimate approaching £6,000 plus VAT to bring in the new three-phase supply. This was hedged around with warnings that the figure was ‘the minimum cost... not the final cost’ and to it must be added the costs of the civil engineering works, the meter cabinet, cables from the meter cabinet to our electrical installations – which themselves may need upgrading. We are waiting for a firm quotation specific to us from UKPN before asking for quotations for the additional works, which are likely to cost several thousands more - until the UKPN quote is through, we can only repeat that the figure above is almost certainly too low and should not be treated as accurate.

We will apply to the Diocese of Ely’s new Decarbonising Grant Fund once it opens for applications.

### Costs still to be defined

Since the Energy Strategy preferred option has yet to emerge, the cost of implementing it is also unknown. We can expect it to be considerable (well into six figures), given its scope. Hence the need for a Critical Path to implement the Strategy over time.

The idea of the Critical Path is to divide the project into manageable and fundable stages, achieved over the next few years, rather than all at once for a daunting single sum. At the same time, when it is sensible to do so, we plan to incorporate much needed maintenance work into each stage.

When a suitable grant opportunity arises, we will pursue it. But the PCC expects to fund the work largely through the generosity of our own congregation and community. Alongside that generosity we will set about fundraising events and the like.

*“Properly managed care can be revenue affordable. Importantly, when project-dedicated budgeting is in place, it can encourage targeted fund raising — and vice versa.”*

— St John's Conservation Development Strategy, 2024

## How We Propose to Raise the Money

We are deliberately taking this in manageable, well-communicated steps, following the same principle as the Energy Strategy itself: a series of individually fundable stages, each with its own clear goal, rather than one overwhelming single target.

### Gift Day 2026

**£20,000**

Our Gift Day target for 2026

This year's Gift Day target is £20,000, to help meet the immediate costs of upgrading our electricity supply and keeping our current heating running safely and reliably while the wider Energy Strategy is tackled.

### Beyond Gift Day

- Ongoing giving and fund-raising events as each stage of the Critical Path is defined and costed
- Grant applications, once our Energy Strategy gives funders confidence in our plans
- Continued support from the Diocesan Advisory Committee
- Transparent, staged reporting back to our St John's community, so that every gift can be seen to be contributing in a specific way.

This mirrors exactly how St John's Church and Community Centre came into being over time: stage by stage, as money became available, matched to a clear and present need. It worked in 1896, in 1908, 1928, 1952, 1982, 1994 and in 2017-18. We believe it will work again now.

## How You Can Help

We hope every member of our St John's community will respond to this appeal and contribute, according to their circumstances. Gifts at all levels are much appreciated, and the more we raise, the more we can hope for from the grant applications we make, since many grants are allocated according to how much the church has raised themselves so far. So your gift can have extra value, and every contribution is important.

- Gifts can most easily be made via the **Parish Giving Scheme**, through which you can make both regular and one-off payments, as you choose: the relevant page can be accessed on <https://www.parishgiving.org.uk/donors/find-your-parish/cambridge-st-john-evangelist-cambridge> or by scanning the QR code shown here
- If you are also able to **Gift Aid** it, we can reclaim 25% of its value back from the government, at no extra cost to you
- If you feel this way of giving is not appropriate for you, please ask the Treasurer for further information
- Please also consider giving St John's a **legacy** in your will.



## Ways to help beyond giving

- Pray for the Project Group, our consultants, and everyone taking these decisions on our behalf
- Ask questions, of the Treasurer, the Churchwardens, or others on the Fund-raising committee; we would rather explain than have anyone left guessing
- Share this booklet with anyone in the congregation who may have missed it.

*“When the Wilkinson Room community suite was established in 1982, it delivered facilities which had previously been difficult to provide... It has been that vision that has sustained St John the Evangelist Church ever since.”*

— St John's Conservation Development Strategy, 2024

## Behind the Scenes

None of this happens by itself. A great deal of unseen, unglamorous work has gone into getting us to this point, and we want to say thank you to those involved.

The Energy Strategy Project Group have been meeting together and liaising with our appointed consultant at every stage, checking that the Strategy stays true to what St John's actually needs and to the character of the buildings we love. Similarly, the PCC have had Extraordinary meetings as well as those on the usual schedule in order to keep a close eye on what is happening and make sure that decisions are reached together, and we are grateful to all the members of both groups for their input and for their generosity with their time.

Similarly, we are of course very conscious of the guidance and support we are receiving from our appointed consultants, Illuminous Consulting, and most grateful for it.

Thanks are due also to all those who have contributed to this booklet and to everyone who gives time, expertise and patience behind the scenes.



