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The new church house at Welwyn.

Deep Heat

By Ian Pearce

The building of a new church hall has given one Hertfordshire church the chance to go green by harnessing the heat that occurs naturally under the ground.

Anglican churches are being asked to reduce their carbon footprint. The Church of England has a campaign called "Shrinking the Footprint" which aims to reduce carbon emissions to just 40 per cent of current use by the year 2050.



The old and the new blend together.

The building of a new church house at St Mary's in Welwyn village provided a challenge. The church is newer than it appears dating from the early twentieth century but its style enables it to blend with much older buildings in the historic village. The solution was to build the new community facility at the rear of the church so as not to compromise the appearance.

The new building offers full disability access as well as wonderful new vista on the churchyard through a distinctive window which has resonances of the original church. Squirrels frolic undisturbed on the gravestones and an ancient tree which forms the centrepiece of the new view.

A slight hum from beneath a hatch gives away the real success of the new building. The church has installed what is believed to be the first integrated heat pump system in England which draws heat from the Earth to heat both the new church house and the original.



Three pumps extract heat from the ground

There are three electric pumps. For each unit of green sourced electricity they produce three to four units of heat. The principle works like a refrigerator in reverse. The church's Edwardian pipework is connected to the new system along with the shiny new pipes leading to the church house. A gas boiler has been retained for boosting the heat during cold snaps but has only been used on a couple of days this winter.



A new view of the historic churchyard.

The system cost £40 000 to install it will eventually save money. more importantly Saint Mary's has already exceeded the 2050 carbon reduction target and plans to go further.

The Team Rector of the Welwyn Team Ministry Canon Alan Winton says he hopes other churches will be inspired by what they've done. The scheme was highly commended in the Church Times Green Church Awards. The real benefit for Alan and the people of Welwyn is that they have a warm and welcoming historic church with a modern flexible community venue attached.

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