

Supporting faith communities to take action on climate change

[Footsteps, a project of Birmingham Council of Faiths](#), which brings together faith groups to respond to the challenge of climate change, received funding and data from 3D to support faith communities to take action on climate change.

The project made a significant contribution to the local community and received national recognition. From fuel poverty support for people struggling to pay their energy bills, to inspiring behaviour change, to encouraging energy assessments in places of worship, the project emphasised the importance of engaging with faith communities.

The challenges and successes of the *Faiths for a fair, low carbon future* project.

Footsteps is mostly funded by individual donations and several places of worship. Alongside [EcoBirmingham](#), [Act on Energy](#), [Birmingham Faith Leaders](#), and the [Active Wellbeing Society](#), Footsteps decided to apply for funding through the 3D project. The fund was used for crucial climate work in faith communities, engaging EcoBirmingham, Act on Energy and The Active Wellbeing Society to develop partnerships, to bring the concept for *Faiths for a fair, low carbon future* to life.

The project, *Faiths for a fair, low carbon future* supported faith communities with understanding climate change and how to take climate action in their own lives. To do this, a key objective was to widen the range of places of worship Footsteps and the project partners engaged with. Like many others, people of faith are keen to get started on a journey to a low carbon future, but there are often more obstacles to overcome. Barriers have included a lack of understanding around climate change and where to start, finding ways to engage with the communities themselves and addressing the issues with faith buildings, such as being draughty and leaking wasted energy.

The project took several approaches:

- Faith community mapping:** Using data from the 3D Hub, and support from CSE, digital maps were created to identify places of worship across the city. Key local data including fuel poverty, the energy performances of houses, waste, and air pollution data were included in the maps to support community engagement surrounding fuel poverty, waste reduction, and energy efficiency advice in faith communities to plan activities. There are [user guides for these maps](#) so that people can look up their own areas and see their performance. In the final stages of the project, the maps were made viewable and searchable on the Footsteps website.
- Identify faith buildings for building assessments, carried out by EcoBirmingham:** Many faith and community buildings are out of date and need improvement. Using existing relationships within the faith community, and data from the 3D Hub, suitable faith buildings were identified for EcoBirmingham to assess. Assessments highlight how to save energy and money, and how to use energy efficiently.
- Energy advice and fuel poverty support:** Increasing engagement with people in vulnerable circumstances was important to extend energy advice through faith communities. Support included a 'fund and fuel' voucher scheme worth £1100 to help alleviate fuel poverty. This was delivered by Act on Energy who ran events to engage with places of worship, encouraging people to contact their Warm Homes project for support.

- **Encourage waste reduction, reuse and recycling:** Often, the most vulnerable and isolated in a community won't know how to begin reducing their waste. Three 'swishing' events were held around Birmingham by the Active Wellbeing Society. The events encouraged people to swap – or 'swish' – clothes instead of throwing them away. There were also volunteers to help repair household items, and offer a safe space to ask for advice and support.
- **Radio shows on Unity FM:** [Unity FM Birmingham](#) is the UK's largest Muslim community radio station. The project team secured fortnightly radio shows providing appropriate information and advice about climate change, increasing their reach to multiple communities.

What challenges has the project faced?

An obvious challenge was Covid-19. Running the project throughout lockdown was difficult because there were reduced opportunities for face-to-face contact. As a small team of volunteers, they had limited resources. But the activity which was still possible was taken forwards, including setting up project management meetings, reporting, impact monitoring, and beginning the faith community mapping. The project team were also able to re-establish relationships with places of worship they'd previously worked with.

What has been the key impacts of the project?

The team have supported 61 adults and children by providing energy advice, £882 of fuel vouchers, and small energy saving measures. This has meant that, on average, each home has saved around £250 a year, which has eased peoples' financial burdens. Through the Active Wellbeing's repair cafes, 46 items of clothing and household appliances have been saved from landfill by being fixed or exchanged. Fewer items have been wasted and the costs of replacing/repairing minimised.

Seven shows were broadcast on Unity FM covering topics like energy efficiency, communicating climate change, energy crisis and reducing waste, which has given listeners practical tips and tools to make changes in their homes and change their behaviours to make a difference. In 2022, the Footstep's website hits have gone up 422% since 2021, which further demonstrates the impact and the awareness raised in local faith communities.

Ecobirmingham carried out 12 building assessments on places of worship. Through small grants funded through this project, four buildings – Greek Cathedral of St Andrew and St Mary, Selly Oak Quaker Meeting, Al-Hijrah Mosque and Acocks Green Baptist Church – received a total of £2141 for energy saving measures like LED lightbulbs and draught-proofing. This amounts to a total combined carbon saving of 6.6 tonnes/Co2 a year. The money saved on energy can be put towards other beneficial projects in the community. Having prominent examples of energy saving measures will encourage local communities to start thinking about their own consumption, making places of worship great sources for learning about energy use and its impacts.

While exploring community-level action in the UK, the UK Climate Change Committee visited Birmingham and spent an hour with faith leaders. This led to a meeting with the council, and six members of Footsteps, to talk extensively about what net zero means at a local, community level. This meeting increased the credibility of the project with the council and campaigning organisations, made the project more known to other faith communities, and highlighted the team effort from all the delivery partners. There's been interest in the faith mapping work from NHS for social prescribing and the West Midlands Police Commissioners Office violence reduction unit. Chris

Martin, Project Coordinator at Footsteps, has been asked to present to the West Midlands Combined Authority green event and has received an award from the Birmingham Council of Faiths.

What's next?

A short video has been created to highlight the importance of saving energy to the Muslim communities. This will be shared on social media, supported by multiple Mosques that the project partners will continue to work with to strengthen energy advice, signposting and support.

This project has laid the foundations for developing relationships with key faith leaders and places of worship. The team are exploring an energy champion network and will continue to work on the faith mapping.

Throughout this project, valuable links have been formed between the project partners and other organisations. The project has been successful based on good communication, shared priorities, and a determination to help people. Councils and other funders have taken more interest in this work, which can lead to future opportunities to develop more influential work. [Find out more information on the Footsteps website.](#)

Chris Martin, the project coordinator and Footsteps secretary commented “working with CSE’s 3D project has been a valuable experience for Footsteps. It has helped consolidate Footsteps’ key role in bringing faith communities together in Birmingham around climate justice and environmental concerns. Working with partners Ecobirmingham, Act on Energy and The Active Well-being Society has given Footsteps experience of collaborating with larger organisations with shared aims and values. This has led to launching our energy champion project addressing the energy efficiency and price crisis many Birmingham households face this coming winter. “

For more information about the 3D Data Hub, and how it can help your local projects, [visit the 3D website.](#)