



Golders Green Synagogue Environmental Policy

May 2024

Status: Approved in principle, ahead of Synagogue Council sign off

Our commitment

At Golders Green Synagogue (GGS), we take our responsibility to the environment seriously. We believe that protecting our planet is a core tenet of our faith, and we are committed to integrating sustainable practices into every facet of our synagogue life.

This document outlines our ongoing policies and initiatives designed to foster a culture of environmental stewardship within our shul and wider community. It concludes with an overview of our sustainability journey so far.

Policies

Disposable Products

- **Shul & Children's Events:** We are a disposable-free zone. All events within the synagogue building, including children's and youth services, utilise reusable plates, cups, and cutlery. Exceptions exist for rare occasions like Pesach, where only paper or biodegradable options are permitted. Plastic disposables are to be avoided in all circumstances.
- **Shul Events at Rabbinic Homes:** Shabbat meals hosted by the Rabbinic team for members should avoid disposables if possible. For larger events, reusable tableware is preferred with a hired washer-upper. If infeasible, paper or bioware must be used instead of plastic.
- **Private Events On-Site:** Private events renting the synagogue space should not utilise plastic disposables or tablecloths. We encourage using the synagogue's kosher crockery with a licensed kosher caterer. For events without licensed caterers (e.g., children's parties), paper or bioware disposables should be used.

Sustainable Procurement

The synagogue prioritises purchasing non-toxic and recycled materials for everyday items, including:

- Envelopes
- Toilet paper

- Arts and crafts supplies (plastic-free)
- Bin liners

Cleaning Products

We will transition to plant-based eco-friendly cleaning supplies, including hand soap, detergents, and kitchen sprays.

Recycling Initiatives

- **Clearly Labelled Bins:** Blue recycling bins will be placed in every frequently used room. Signage will clearly explain acceptable recyclables to avoid contamination by regular waste.
- **Kiddush & Food Waste:** Proper recycling procedures will be implemented for kiddush food waste, office packaging, and any other recyclable waste generated by the synagogue. Educational posters will be displayed in the kitchen to guide proper sorting.

Food Policy

- **Vegetarian Kiddush Option:** We aspire to reduce red meat consumption as much as possible across synagogue events, including sponsored kiddush meals and shabbatons. Our hot kiddush offerings prioritise vegetarian cholent and kugel. Meat options are not included in the sponsored kiddush tiers.
- **Sustainable Packaging:** We continue to support Carmelli bakery for kiddush cakes and baked goods, who provide packaging in paper boxes instead of plastic domes.
- **Exceptions:** Exceptions may be made for single, large-scale annual events like the Chanukah hot kiddush.

Energy Usage

The synagogue is committed to exploring local renewable energy options to further reduce our environmental impact e.g. solar panels on the roof.

Nature and Biodiversity

- **Tree Planting:** GGS is a leader in tree planting, having contributed over 300 trees through the United Synagogue Dorot Plant a Tree campaign. We maintain strong partnerships with US and Eco Judaism, actively supporting their ongoing tree-planting initiatives.
- **Shul Gardens:** We maintain three existing synagogue gardens: two rose gardens and a biblical garden. We are committed to increasing the number and variety of plants and flowers within these spaces.
- **Community Partnerships:** We will continue to support the Friends of Child's Hill Park and Friends of Basing Hill Park other local environmental efforts.

Events and Education

- **EcoJudaism Eco-Shabbat:** We actively participate in annual Eco-Shabbat events, typically including a sponsored green or vegan kiddush, special eco-themed

children's and youth services, and a Rabbinic or youth speaker focusing on environmental issues.

- **Rabbinic Engagement:** The Rabbinic team will deliver environmental messages during key sermons at least three times a year, typically during Yamim Noraim (High Holy Days), Eco-Shabbat, and Tu B'Shvat.
- **EcoJudaism Involvement:** We actively seek opportunities to participate in EcoJudaism awards and events.
- **United Synagogue Dorot Collaboration:** We will continue to support and align ourselves with relevant US Dorot environmental projects.

Governance

- **Green Team:** A dedicated GGS Green Team has been formed to support adherence to our environmental policy and pursue ongoing improvements towards 'gold' standard (initial members include Naomi Verber and Rafi Addlestone, with opportunities for additional volunteers).
- **EcoJudaism Audit:** We will undergo an EcoJudaism audit every two years to assess our progress and identify new areas for improvement.
- **Budget Allocation:** An annual budget of around £500 will be allocated to support eco-friendly projects and audits.

This policy document outlines GGS's commitment to environmental stewardship. We are dedicated to continuous improvement and encourage our community to join us in protecting our planet.

Policy to be reviewed and updated in May 2025.

Overview of our sustainability journey

Our commitment to environmental responsibility began in 2018 with a focus on reducing disposable plastic use. We recognized the significant amount of plastic waste generated during catered events, particularly kiddush on Shabbat mornings. This led to a groundbreaking policy shift in May 2018 – the implementation of non-disposable kiddush. The success of this initiative prompted us to extend this policy to all catered events at GGS by September 2018.

We are proud that this "modest change," as we call it, has had a significant impact. By prioritising reusable and recyclable products, we've demonstrably reduced our environmental footprint and inspired other synagogues within the United Synagogue communities to adopt similar practices.

Going further

In 2018, GGS was the first United Synagogue shul to go disposables free. What started as a pilot project for Earth Day, became one of our flagship eco-projects, supported by the Rabbinic team and across the community. To this day, GGS is used as a case study on how a medium sized shul can run kiddushim and catered events without disposables. We share

our expertise with other shuls and continue to campaign for a plastic and disposable free environment.

In 2019, we joined EcoSynagogue (now EcoJudaism). This cross-communal initiative unites synagogues across the UK Jewish community in a shared mission to promote environmental awareness and action. Through EcoJudaism, we gain valuable resources, connect with like-minded communities, and amplify our collective impact.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we continued our commitment to sustainability through virtual events. We hosted several online discussions, including a panel on practical approaches to sustainability in June 2020 and a Tu B'Shvat panel focused on tree conservation in January 2021. These events fostered important conversations about the environment within our community, even during a time of physical separation.

In 2020, GGS was awarded a Barnet grant of £500 to create an outdoor social space, so social events like kiddushim and programming could be held outside while COVID restrictions applied. The money was used to provide seating for the elderly, as well as planting four olive trees to create a safe and nature friendly social space. Other potted plants have since been added.

Between 2022-2023 Ingrid Posen and other GGS members, led the Friends of Childs Hill Park campaign with the Barnet council to plant wildflower meadows and over 20 cherry blossom trees in the park, as well as creating family picnicking areas in space that was previously inaccessible. The shul backs onto the park and is heavily used by GGS members and Rimon Jewish Primary School which is on the shul campus. The plan and funding was secured by Ingrid, who ensured a local housing development project compensated the community. The shul mailing list and comms platforms were used to support the campaign with many members actively involved in delivering the project.

In 2024, GGS member Naomi Verber petitioned Barnet council to provide 10 additional trees in Childs Hill Park children's playground to provide shade during the increasingly hot summers. Following support from the shul and members the council provided the trees, making the playground more climate resilient.

GGS member Annable Rise is a leading figure of Friends of Basing Hill Park and builds support from the shul for rewilding and food growing projects in the park. She regularly runs shul volunteer planting days.

GGS worked directly with Barnet Green Spaces in 2024 to plant wildflower troughs and replace a culled tree on Dunstan Road. The approach to the shul is now alive with colourful wildflowers and bees.

In September 2024, a 'Forest School' accredited nursery will be opening at GGS. The nursery has already established educational 'nature paths' for the children between the shul and the park, which include things like bug hotels and kids allotment space. This exciting new development will be a new era of environmental education and infrastructure to our community.

Looking ahead

This document serves as a starting point, not an endpoint. We at GGS are constantly seeking new ways to reduce our environmental impact and integrate sustainability into the fabric of our synagogue. We are committed to working together with our members to ensure a greener future for generations to come.