

60% BLANKET SAVINGS

How one church reduced bills with just a little padding

The charms of Shere are no secret – in fact it's reputation as a quintessential English village has travelled as far as Hollywood; blockbusters such as Bridget Jones Diary and The Holiday feature cameos of the cafes and paddling stream, not to mention St James, with its Lutyens Lychgate and medieval tower. So it shouldn't come as a surprise that this church knows a thing or two about warm welcomes.

Walk into communion on a frosty Sunday morning and you are apt to be greeted by two things – a blast of warmth from the 3 (THREE!) gas boilers; and a smiling welcomer handing you a very squishy cushion and a blanket.



It's a lovely way to start a service. Wrapped up in the cosiest of throws, hand-made by the Pilgrim Group, and sitting on a soft cushion that insulates you directly, stopping your body heat from seeping into the wood of the pew, you couldn't feel more cosy.

This chimes very much with guidance from the National Church about heating People First. How much simpler to wrap up the congregation in burgundy blankets than retrofit a cavernous, draughty building. It's cheaper and more effective. What's not to love?

But the Eco Team here at St James, headed up by the infinitely imaginative Jenny Janse and Shiona Bacon, didn't stop there. They dreamt up a plan so audacious that it's hard to believe it's actually worked. Unbeknownst to the congregation, 20 minutes into

...a plan so audacious that it's hard to believe it's actually worked

the service... the heating goes off. Click. Silently, automatically, the boilers power down, and the church begins to cool. But the service-goers, brightly warmed and amply insulated by their cushion/throw welcome pack, stay toasty throughout the rest of Eucharist. No announcement has ever been made. Sarah Hatton, associate priest, isn't as in favour as she feels people get too cold, but it's certainly been an interesting experiment.

I mean, imagine reducing your Sunday heating bill by 50 to 60% with no other outlay than a quick trip to Ikea's soft furnishing department. It's a cunning plan. Roll over air-source-chandelier-infra-red-under-pew-cushion-heaters. This is the ultimate in low-tech, high carbon savings. With No Faculty Required.



There's more. A recent glance at a diary caused palpitations, as the person responsible for programming the church heating realised they'd forgotten to set it to come on for a one-off service. Unfazed, it was simply turned on - via a mobile phone. From the Caribbean. The investment in a HIVE heating control system has allowed undreamt of controllability and has paid for itself in savings. The £792 cost included a new thermostat, full installation + VAT.

12 months on and Roger Moulden, Properties Team member who oversaw it going in, can't fault it. It was "easy to get done" and is even easier to use, without the need to stand in the vestry every week, programming service On and Off times, like they used to. So much easier, in fact, that several members of the congregation have been clamouring for all the details, looking to get it done at home. A real boon for the parish.

But Jenny and her team are not ones to rest on their laurels, and even with these brilliant solutions in place, they wanted to do more. Jenny has started up a Climate Cafe once a month in their sister church, St Marks in Peaslake. A collaboration between St Marks and Tillingbourne Earth, a local Eco group, it welcomes around 35 people every month, with new members



every time. They have a different focus each session, such as writing to the council about growing wildflowers on verges; going out together on a litter pick; or planning outreach activities for a Green Christmas. The breadth and depth of communication is amazing, and utterly infectious. You just want to be part of what is going on.

And this new wave of thinking is slowly seeping into every corner of the parish. Both churches have an Eco Corner, with leaflets, and posters, and a basket of reads by wonderful writers such as

Katherine Heyhoe. The books are for anyone to take home, which must be music to the ears of the local Eco Book Group, "Seeds of Change", who are networked into the growing green movement in Shere and Peaslake.

Last year there was a huge Eco Fayre in Shere, with countless outside groups joining together to celebrate what can be done to save our wildlife, and ourselves, as well as create momentum - all orchestrated by Jenny and the team. They are a force of nature, and seem to have everything covered, not least by those burgundy blankets.

