

This month's issue looks at many different dimensions of the sustainability challenge.

There are stories showing how big savings on energy consumption can be made at the household level and beyond – in this case, Christchurch Cathedral.

Inside, we talk to "dial a Nerd" founder, James Bell, about how he re-uses parts from old computers in his business, saving landfill waste and repair costs for his clients. We also interview the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Dr Jan Wright, who discusses her priorities a year into the job.

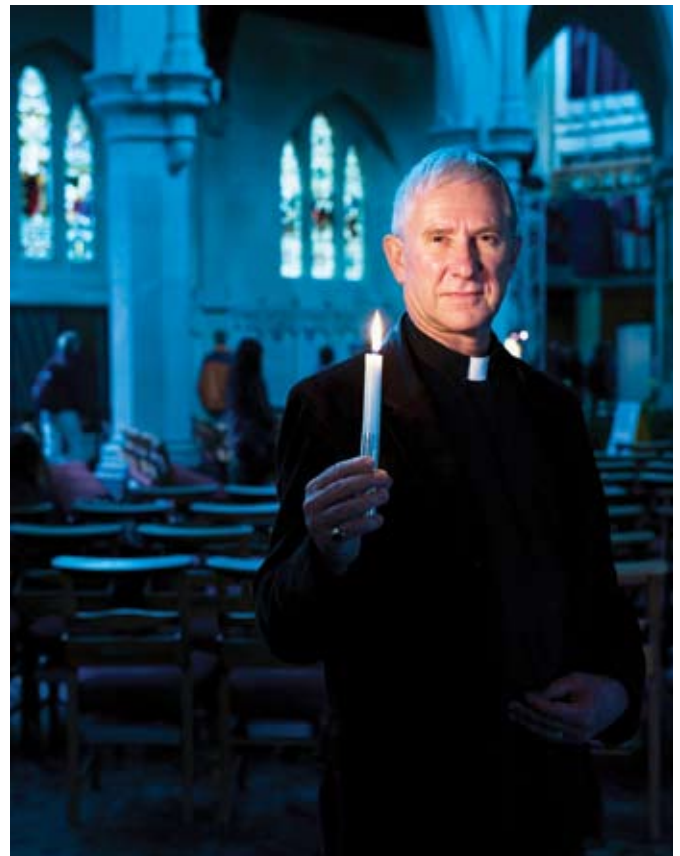
The back page covers initiatives that are getting people out of their cars and onto bikes or their feet, as well as "Earth Hour" – 8pm on 29 March – when people worldwide switched off energy for climate change.

Kind regards



Lindsay Gow

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> Above: The Dean of Christchurch The Very Revd Peter Buck
Photograph: Stephen Goodenough

↘ Cathedral goes sustainable

The Dean of Christchurch, The Very Revd Peter Buck, has introduced modern-day sustainability to Christchurch's iconic, traditional cathedral.

Electricity used for lighting the building has been cut by a massive 87 per cent through replacing the old halogen lights with energy-efficient LED lighting.

Neil Pritchard, the electrical consultant for the work, says the new, longer-life lights have improved the light quality in the building: "It's now lit to really show off its architectural features, and the congregation feel better because they can read the song sheets."

The cathedral's 4 kW infra-red heaters has also been replaced with lower-wattage 3.6 kW radiant heaters. The heating was now fully controlled to operate at night, when the power is cheaper, saving energy overall. "If you let the stone walls cool right down, it takes a lot of energy to warm them back up."

Neil estimates the new heaters will achieve cost savings of 10–15 per cent, and will also deliver heat to more areas of the building.

The cathedral is extremely pleased with the result of the upgrade, Neil says. "They have got better congregational lighting, better energy efficiency, longer lamp life, lighting of architectural features, and colour-changing lighting, which can set a mood."

↳ Painless power saving

Grahame Peck says his new centameter “makes it easier to be careful” – and to save big money on power bills.

Grahame won his centameter in January through a competition on the sustainability.govt.nz website. Since then, his power bill has fallen by more than \$50 a month, from \$228 to \$176.

“That’s much more than I was expecting. I would have been happy with 10 per cent,” says Grahame. “The best thing about the centameter is the instant feedback covering the house – it’s far easier than checking each room for left-on appliances.”

The unit shows how much power the house is consuming at that point in time, he says. “It is very responsive – turn on the jug and

it shows in around five seconds. Read-out is provided in money, power or CO₂ emissions.”

When he got the unit, Grahame set about establishing the running cost of different appliances and finding the ‘lowest-level baseline’ for the house – in his case, around nine cents an hour.

“Once I knew this, the centameter instantly showed how many extra things were running, so I could go and find the culprit.”

What made the most difference to his power use? “Switching off kids’ TVs and computers,” Grahame says. “I have a large house with lots of kids, so consumption is often raised by kids just leaving stuff on.”

↳ Nerds get sustainable

The sustainability message is spreading far and wide – even the nerds are joining up.

dial a Nerd, the Wellington computer repair company, does about 40 per cent of its repair work with recycled computer parts. Managing director James Bell (pictured) says that re-using components is good for the environment and for business.

“I think lots of businesses don’t get the whole sustainability green thing,” he says. “They think it’s going to cost them money. It’s not – if you do it right, it’s going to save you money in the long run, and you might still have a world to trade with in 100 years, instead of only 50.”

dial a Nerd has been re-using computer parts since James founded the business three years ago. For him, it’s more about personal values than money.

“I’m a bit of a greenie – I feel very strongly about the environment. It’s obviously impractical to do a lot of things that I’d like to do, but I try to do as much as I can in terms of recycling at home – we only put out about one rubbish bag every three weeks.”

James and his team cannibalise old computers for the many parts that are in good working order, including graphics and network cards, memory, and CD-ROM drives.

“Second-hand parts are only a quarter to half the price of brand new, sometimes a lot less depending on age.”

The computers usually come from clients. “It’s really hard to sell old computers – they are obsolete straight away. We are cheeky enough to ask if they want them. It saves putting them in storage. But we do give the owners first right of refusal on their old parts.”

He uses the recycled parts to repair clients’ computers, and sometimes builds computers from scratch using second-hand components.



“Even though they are of a certain age, they might still be a fairly decent email machine,” he said. “We have built a few for elderly clients who needed an upgrade but didn’t want to spend the money on a new machine.”

Once the components are stripped out, James takes the metal boxes to a recycling centre.

↘ Quietly making a difference

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment readily acknowledges that it's not easy for the public to see what she does.

"A lot of my role is about engaging in dialogue," says Dr Jan Wright. "It's pretty rare to have a one to one correspondence between our recommendations and a result."

But make no mistake – Dr Wright and her team are extremely active, quietly providing advice, support and encouragement on new and exciting directions in environmental policy-making.

A year into the job, Dr Wright says her role is mainly about laying the foundations for environmental change. As an Officer of Parliament, her top priority is working with politicians.

"Someone said to me, 'fundamentally your job is to educate MPs about the environment,'" she says. "The environment is hard to understand, and MPs don't have time to read a lot."

Dr Wright's small office provides advice on the environmental impacts of a wide range of legislation – "not just legislation that is consciously environmental. Many other things have environmental aspects".

"An example was my recent presentation to the Finance and Expenditure Committee enquiry on monetary policy, where I talked about the impact of approaching natural resource limits on inflation and growth," she says.

Dr Wright's office also deals with complaints about environmental issues, launches its own investigations – including a recent study of high country tenure review – and gets out and about among environmental stakeholders.

"There's an enormous number of different things you can do – prioritisation is a real challenge," she says.

Dr Wright had input into the recent affordable housing enquiry. "I think our cities are very much outliers in terms of population density. We need to think in terms of nodes. You are not going to get public transport working properly when you have people living a long way apart."

As an economist, Dr Wright is keenly interested in the use of economic instruments for environmental management.

"Economic instruments are not well understood. Traditional environmental management is about regulation – economic instruments are about incentives," she says.

"The fundamental parameters are price and quantity. You can either increase price through a tax, and quantity will decrease, or you can say 'this is the quantity that we want' and you allow people to trade among themselves, and a price emerges."

Dr Wright says price signals can be applied to environmental 'goods' like energy and water, and to 'bads' like emissions.

"When things are free, there is no signal," she says.

The New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme is a good step in the right direction, especially because it includes everyone – "but because it's hard to understand, it comes under attack".

The recent higher profile of sustainability had made the job "really exciting," she said. "The environment has moved from the margins to the mainstream. Everybody is interested."



↳ Sustaina-briefs

Earth Hour switch-off

Millions of people worldwide turned off their lights for an hour for climate change at 8pm on 29 March. Earth Hour, launched by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), was supported by major cities including Chicago, Montreal, Copenhagen, Melbourne, Manila and Christchurch, which along with Suva and Lautoka were the first cities in the world to switch off. Christchurch's involvement was a combined initiative of the Christchurch City Council, Environment Canterbury, The Press newspaper and the WWF. At the time of publication, more than 3300 New Zealanders had pledged their support on the official Earth Hour website, the sixth-highest total of countries globally.



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Walk, bike weeks popular

A record number of Kiwis hit the footpaths and walked to class 'feet first' during Feet First Walk to School Week (3–7 March) and hopped on a bike and gave cycling a go during Bike Wise Week (23 February to 2 March). The events, run by Land Transport New Zealand (LTNZ), encourage New Zealanders to use sustainable forms of transport like walking and cycling for commuting throughout the year. LTNZ thanks everyone who participated in Bike Wise Week and Feet First Week, which are annual events.



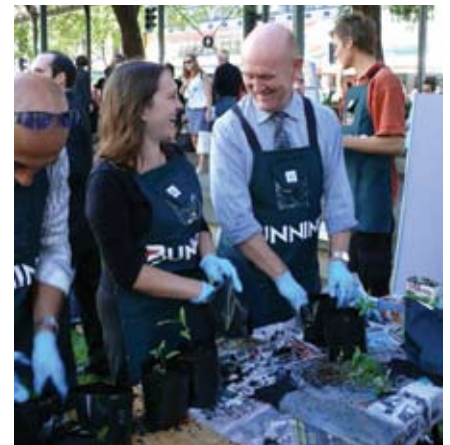
> **Feet First fun:** Greater Wellington Regional Council chair Fran Wilde, Minister of Transport Annette King, Land Transport New Zealand chief executive Wayne Donnelly and Zanda the Zebra join kids from Wellington's Lyall Bay School at the launch of Feet First Walk to School Week.

Green Bay bans bags

Shops in Waitakere City's Green Bay are getting rid of plastic shopping bags. The 24 retailers in the suburban shopping centre, including a supermarket, take-away bars, a hardware store and vet clinic, declared themselves plastic bag-free on 26 March. Green Bay Ratepayers' and Residents' Association president Glenn Turner says there is growing awareness that plastic bags are an environmental nightmare. "We live in Waitakere, the Eco-City, and this is one small step that this community is taking towards improving our environment," he says. "The response from retailers has been absolutely fantastic, and now we hope the community comes on board with the idea."

Lunchtime tree planting

Marina Conway, from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and Mike Wignall, from the Ministry for the Environment (pictured), spent a lunch-hour potting young trees in Wellington's Midland Park recently. The 'Downtown Eco-Therapy Project' involved dozens of office workers. The plants were taken to nurseries run by 43 tree-planting groups in Wellington, for eventual planting around the region.



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