

Grounds Maintenance

How will grounds maintenance be impacted by climate change?

Our climate is changing. We each need to understand our role in addressing this challenge and work together to increase the resilience of our organisations and society. Cutting carbon emissions is vital as we must reduce the severity of climate change. However, it is equally important to begin preparing for the increase in extreme weather which we are already experiencing, and which is projected to increase substantially in intensity and frequency in the coming decades. We call this act of preparation 'Climate Adaptation.'

Local councils will play a pivotal role in the implementation of any measures, and so require a collaborative approach from different service areas in order to address the impacts of climate change. Every service has something to offer to increase resilience for the council and communities it represents, from overall strategies to daily decisions and management.

This brief is not designed to provide a comprehensive overview, but rather to initiate discussion on the role of grounds maintenance in addressing climate change impacts as part of a wider suite of documents for other services.

What are the climate risks posed to grounds maintenance?

Aside from the various tasks such as upkeep of the landscapes and general appearance of all the grounds, the projected changes to Northern Ireland's climate will affect the concept of landscape designs to delivery and maintenance. Expected climate change impacts to ground management include:

- Increased weeding, mowing and pruning will be needed as the growing seasons are extending with warmer springs and autumns.
- Warmer conditions will aid the spread of pests and diseases that will require more intensive activity to manage.
- Damage and/or loss of green space due to extreme weather events.
- Extreme weather events can increase costs and pressure on resources for maintenance, repair to damaged area and clean-up.

What actions could you take?

You could take action by getting involved with your council's adaptation planning process, which should outline short to long-term impacts, implications and recommended actions for grounds maintenance including:

- Incorporating into the budget an emergency fund for extreme weather conditions when additional resources may be needed.
- Consider climate resilient planting that could also reduce frequency of maintenance. For example, consider using slower growing plants, and plants that require minimum water in landscaping to reduce frequency of maintenance.
- Strategic planning and implementation of blue-green infrastructure including:
 - Create natural shade or cooled areas
 - Alleviate flood risk
 - Increase rainwater harvesting
 - Use natural irrigation systems
 - Encourage wildlife corridors to enable natural species migration

Additional Resources

Royal Horticultural Society – Gardening in a Changing Climate. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/pdf/RHS-Gardening-in-a-Changing-Climate-Report.pdf>