



Service Area Factsheet

Natural and Built Heritage

How will our natural and built heritage 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 natural and built heritage in addressing climate change impacts as part of a wider suite of documents for other services.

What are the climate risks posed to our natural and built heritage?

Heritage is a key factor in bringing communities together, providing a healthy environment and forging identity and resilience¹. Heritage is intrinsically linked to economic activity in NI, the historic environment generating approximately £532 million each year². With over 16,000 historic monuments identified in Northern Ireland, the historic environment is vulnerable to natural decay and deterioration³. Risks from climate change to our natural and built heritage assets include:

- Increased flooding, weathering/erosion, land instability and windstorms associated with climate projections can cause long-term, chronic, damage to historic building fabric, and can also threaten the stability of, and human access to, natural heritage sites (for example, the Giant's Causeway).
- Potential irreversible damage and even loss of unique and irreplaceable heritage assets and cultural heritage, which may result in a decline in the distinctiveness of local places and a knock-on impact on the tourism economy.

- Increasing costs for frequent monitoring and management of interventions in natural heritage sites, and increased maintenance and repair costs for historic structures (for example, costs to repair after an extreme weather event).
- Structural problems could render assets as unstable affecting surrounding area (houses and/or, businesses at risk).

What actions could you take?

Climate change implications for conservation means doing what we do now better – more effectively and efficiently. Conservation that considers the impact of a changing climate not only reduces the risk of damage or loss, but can deliver wider cultural, economic, social and environmental benefits. 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 heritage including:

- Inclusion of climate change adaptation impacts as part of the heritage risk register.
- Identification and monitoring of flood and coastal risks facing the built and natural heritage in your area.
- Application of climate change projections (UKCP18) to help outline and support processes for undertaking assessments of the risk to and monitoring of heritage assets.
- Collaboration with other organisations to identify and gain expert knowledge on climate change adaptation actions i.e. Historic Environment Division, NI Universities.
- Consideration of increased flooding to heritage assets i.e. a buffer zone could be implemented to allow for climate adaptation measures such as SuDS to manage excess water in flood events.

Additional Resources

Our Place in Time – The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationId=fa088e13-8781-4fd6-9ad2-a7af00f14e30A>

Guide to Climate Change Impacts on Scotland's Historic Environment: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationId=843d0c97-d3f4-4510-acd3-aadf0118bf82>

References

¹Department of Communities (2016) 'Future Places- Using Heritage to Build Resilient Communities' Available online: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/future-places-symposium-report.pdf>

²Department for Communities, Northern Ireland (2012) Study of the Economic Value of Northern Ireland's Historic Environment, Available online: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/study-economic-value-northern-irelands-historic-environment>

³Climate Change Committee (2017) 'UK Climate Change Risk Assessment- Northern Ireland Summary' Available online: <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/UK-CCRA-2017-Northern-Ireland-National-Summary.pdf>