

Hotter summers and wetter winters forcing change



Historic gardens are on the frontline of climate change with severe weather shifts affecting all aspects of designed landscapes. Credit: Chiswick House and Gardens © Chris Gorman, Big Ladder Photography, August 2026.

We asked owners and managers of historic parks and gardens across the UK about how the climate crisis is affecting the places they care for.

Although the UK has over 2,800 registered historic landscapes, parks and gardens, there is limited guidance available for those who care for them on how to adapt and prepare for our changing climate.

We worked with Historic England to understand the impact of the climate crisis for these places. It's the first research of its kind. The results will help inform our future approach to supporting the UK's natural heritage through [Heritage 2033](#).

Without urgent support and advice, many of these precious landscapes will suffer and change beyond recognition.

Drew Bennellick, Head of Land, Seas and Nature Policy, The National Lottery Heritage Fund

What our research showed

We heard from over 100 participants through interviews and our online survey. They told us that across most sites, the climate crisis is affecting day-to-day management. Drier summers and wetter winters are forcing them to adapt.

Drew Bennellick, our Head of Land, Seas and Nature Policy, said: "It's clear our historic parks, gardens and cemeteries are facing unprecedented challenges due to climate change, and without urgent support and advice, many of these precious landscapes will suffer and change beyond recognition."

How the climate crisis is affecting historic parks and gardens

Hotter, drier summers are creating stress on plants and soils, causing mature trees and shrub losses in areas that aren't historically prone to drought. Manual watering is placing high demand on staff time and storing water can be a problem too.

More intense rainfall now floods areas that haven't flooded before. It's overwhelming historic drainage systems designed for steadier rainfall. Saturated soils are preventing routine work, while paths, slopes and riverbanks are eroding.

Shifting storm patterns are causing large-scale tree losses, from dozens in smaller gardens to 1000s on large estates, with uprooting now more common due to saturated soils. Sites are being forced to close for public safety, which affects income and visitor relationships.

How natural heritage sites are responding

Historic parks and gardens are adapting their planting to include more climate-resilient species, often from warmer or drier regions. They're improving efficiency through harvesting rainwater and reusing historic tanks to store it. Many sites are using mulches and organic materials to support soil moisture and health and planting new woodland to increase water retention.

Sites are also upgrading paths and installing new drains to cope with intense rainfall, as well as redesigning landscapes to accommodate flood water. Teams are also stepping back from labour-intensive tasks like mass bedding and reallocating that time to storm recovery and climate monitoring. Plus, they're investing in training focused on climate adaptation.



Rosie Fyles, Head of Gardens, stands in the scorched gardens at Chiswick House. Credit: Chris Gorman, Big Ladder Photography.

Rosie Fyles, Head of Gardens, Chiswick House and Gardens, said: "The threat of climate change on Chiswick's 300-year-old landscape is for all to see during drought; the gardens are scorched. The reality is that our ability as gardeners to minimise the negative effects, particularly on our 1800 trees, is quite limited.

"My role now is to plan intelligently and make the right informed decisions to prepare for the next 300 years, gathering as much advice and resources as I can to do so."

What support is most needed

More than half of the respondents to our survey asked for more appropriate and accessible information on the climate crisis, including guidance on how to carry out a climate change risk assessment for a park and garden.

Almost everyone interviewed said that funding is essential to make a difference and that a lack of resources and staff capacity is the main reason for not implementing changes.

Those who care for historic parks and gardens would also benefit from more centralised information, peer networking and continued training.

Erika Diaz Petersen, Principal National Landscape Adviser, Historic England, said: "This new research highlights the challenges owners are facing in managing sites in the face of risks such as flooding, drought, high winds and pest and diseases, and the need for advice and support as they work to secure these valuable places for the future."

Read the full report

Explore the [complete findings from our research](#), including recommendations on how else the sector might need to adapt.

How we're supporting historic parks and gardens

Since 1994, we've awarded over £2.3billion to 5,300 land, sea and nature projects in towns and cities and across rural and coastal communities throughout the UK.

If you're interested in doing more to help to protect the environment through your heritage project, explore our [environmental sustainability good practice guidance](#).



Credit: [Chris Gorman, Big Ladder Photography](#).



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[Sheffield General Cemetery](#).

[Gardens and cemeteries](#)



[South Cliff Gardens, Scarborough. Photo: Tony Bartholomew](#)

Scarborough's 200-year-old gardens returned to their former glory