Understanding the impact of climate change on historic parks, gardens and cemeteries

11/08/2026

See all updates

We worked with Historic England to better understand how the climate crisis is affecting the UK's natural heritage sites and the people that manage them.

Attachment	Size
PDF View Historic parks, gardens and cemeteries climate change executive summary as PDF(437.56 KB)	437.56 KB
PDF View Historic parks, gardens and cemeteries climate change full report as PDF(2.65 MB)	2.65 MB

The first research of its kind

We asked owners and managers of historic parks, gardens and cemeteries how these places are being managed and maintained in response to climate challenges. It's the first research to show how these 2,700+ registered natural heritage sites are coping.

Bramhill Design and Sarah Rutherford Historic Environment Ltd led the work, which included a literature review, interviews with 23 site managers, owners, curators and head gardeners, and an online survey which generated responses from 79 sites.

Their analysis examines current practice in responding to the damage and threats caused by the climate crisis.

What we've learned

Our research found that while there are individual examples of good practice, work is needed to ensure management decisions are taken quickly and consistently to protect the most significant and vulnerable heritage.

The most critical need of heritage managers is climate adaptation guidance specifically designed for historic parks, gardens and cemeteries.

Other key findings included:

- Climate conditions are more severe and less predictable, affecting parts of the UK in different ways. For example, dry periods are longer and harsher in the south east of England, while rainfall tends to be more intense and unpredictable in northern areas.
- Pests and diseases are thriving in the milder and wetter conditions, sometimes resulting in the loss of entire plant groups.
- Management responses are inconsistent, depending on resources available to owners and managers. Barriers to consistent practice include:

- lack of funding, especially for capital works such as drainage, flood management and planting replacement
- lack of staff capacity as the volume of reactive work increases leaving little room for strategic thinking and forward planning
- fragmented and generic guidance and a lack of joined-up management planning advice and training

The research also identified opportunities to:

- shift towards less intensive management, for example, leaving grass to grow long where appropriate
- increase public engagement with environmental issues
- increase funding for work such as water management, carbon reduction and nature-based solutions

Next steps

We'll collaborate with Historic England and stakeholders across the natural heritage sector to respond to the report's recommendations. Our first action will be to share case studies of good management practices.

Find out more

Read the executive summary and full report in the PDFs attached to this page to explore all the findings. The full report in Welsh will be available soon.

Learn about our support for historic gardens, parks and cemetery projects across the UK, including our Nature Towns and Cities strategic initiative.

Our research and evaluation

We regularly conduct research to discover what is happening in the heritage sector, and we evaluate our work to better understand the change we're making.?Read more of our insight.



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.



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t a vital public resource parks are

Spring arrives at Kew’s Palm House. Credit: Ollie Dixon.

The Palm House at Kew Garden’s journey to a greener future