



Historic England

# **HERITAGE AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

A strategy for Historic England's response  
to the climate, energy and biodiversity crisis

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The scale of the climate change challenge can feel overwhelming, but our heritage is part of the solution, and will inspire practical solutions for a more sustainable way of life, today and tomorrow.

*Duncan Wilson, Chief Executive*



Lightning strikes the North Sea behind Dovercourt Lighthouse, Harwich, Suffolk



# INTRODUCTION

This strategy describes Historic England's response to the climate crisis. It includes our Vision and Aims, what we are doing as an organisation and how we will prioritise our work. It also explains how we will work in partnership, and support and empower people outside Historic England to combat climate change. It is written primarily for our people at Historic England, for our colleagues across the heritage sector, and for key stakeholders including the government.

Climate change is one of the most challenging issues of our time, with potential negative consequences for both people and heritage. It is both an immediate challenge and a long-term one. Historic England strongly supports urgent climate action and, crucially, believes that heritage is part of the solution.

This goes to the very heart of our purpose: to champion and protect the historic environment, because we recognise the power of heritage to improve lives.

Severe weather events are happening more frequently



# THE ROLE OF HERITAGE

Historic England has been studying, collaborating with partners, and raising awareness of the impact of climate change on our heritage and historic environment for decades.

Heritage properties require specialist care to adapt to increasingly severe weather events

## We already know:

- Reusing our buildings is one of the most effective ways to reduce carbon emissions and eliminate unnecessary waste. By adapting our historic buildings appropriately, we can reduce carbon emissions, improve quality of life and nurture the skills needed for a green economy.
- Our rich and unique heritage provides an invaluable source of practical information about how we are already responding to a changing climate, including low-carbon living. We can use this knowledge to understand the challenges and opportunities of living more sustainably.
- We must continue to work in partnership, both inside and outside the heritage sector, to find solutions. Our heritage is looked after by a wide variety of individuals, communities, owners and organisations; we need to equip people with the information and support they need to respond to the climate crisis.
- Our climate is already changing. Projections can be used to estimate where and when hazards driven by climate change will threaten vulnerable heritage. We need to prepare to experience some loss of heritage.

The climate, energy and biodiversity crisis will affect every aspect of Historic England's work. Our work in this area is complex, multi-faceted and evolving; it will continue to adapt and respond as we learn more.



Sustainable energy sources are critical in reducing climate change



# VISION

By 2040, our heritage will have played an important role in the global fight to limit climate change and its impact on people and places. We will have enabled people to live more sustainably and adapt to a changing climate, while conserving our irreplaceable heritage for future generations.

This means that by 2040:

- Historic buildings, places and landscapes will have led the way to our low-carbon future, sustaining new jobs and extending our country's global influence.
- The cherished character and distinctiveness of local places will be protected, continuing to add to quality of life and to attract investment and visitors.
- Places will become ever more resilient as people learn to adapt to a changing climate.
- Our obligation to pass on our cultural inheritance to future generations will be respected.

There are three strands that guide our climate change programme, now and in the future:

**1. Mitigation**

**2. Managing risk**

**3. Adaptation**



Coastal erosion threatens large numbers of properties, as well as hidden heritage



Renewable energy: Linton Falls is a scheduled monument that has found an economic future by reverting to its original use as a hydro-electric power station

# 1. MITIGATION

## ACHIEVING NET ZERO

### AIM

**We will proactively remove sources of emissions to achieve net zero for Historic England by 2040.**

The government has committed to reduce the UK's carbon emissions to net zero by 2050. Removing carbon emissions and sustaining our heritage are compatible goals.

We will lead by example and support other heritage organisations on their journey towards net zero. We will help others to understand how heritage and the historic environment can be part of the solution.

We will climate-proof our policies, advice, guidance, and operations to play our part in delivering the government's Net Zero Strategy, while making sure our heritage continues to be protected and cherished.

### ACTIONS

- 1.1.** In 2022, we will publish our baseline carbon footprint and a reduction plan that shows how we will achieve net zero by 2040, including a clear trajectory and milestones. The plan will outline what we will do to accurately identify and record our carbon emissions and to remove them from our operations. We will establish annual carbon reduction targets and report our progress against them each year from 2023 onwards.
- 1.2.** In 2022, we will focus on the skills gap in construction, which must be addressed so our historic buildings can be retrofitted appropriately. We will work with others to quantify the skills gap and how to address it.
- 1.3.** We will share our experience of reducing our emissions with heritage organisations that need support to reduce their own emissions. By 2023, we will learn what heritage organisations need to respond to climate change, so that we can tailor our help accordingly.
- 1.4.** By 2024, we will develop accessible, tailored and practical guidance, training and support for those retrofitting historic buildings.
- 1.5.** By investing in high quality research, often in partnership with others, we will continue to find practical ways in which reusing historic buildings can play an essential part in achieving the government's [Net Zero Strategy](#) targets. We will use this evidence to help influence policies and programmes designed to reduce carbon in the built environment.
- 1.6.** We will continue to share our knowledge of heritage and the historic environment to help inform carbon reduction and sequestration, and support biodiversity.



Volunteer groups are critical to help care for, maintain and protect places important to local communities



# 2. MANAGING RISKS

## UNDERSTANDING THE THREATS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

### AIM

We will identify, understand, and respond to threats to heritage from a changing climate. We will share our insights: listening, learning, and collaborating with partners to effect, enable and catalyse change and risk management.

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The climate crisis requires us to think differently and act creatively, both in terms of how we look after our heritage and manage our operations. We will not meet our emission targets and sustain our heritage without changing our approach.

*Ian Morrison, Director of Policy and Evidence*

### ACTIONS

- 2.1. We will continue to work with climate science specialists in government, universities and private practice to increase people's understanding of, and access to, future climate projections and their implications for heritage.
- 2.2. From 2022, we will develop ways to quantify and monitor climate-related risks. We will make sure the risks to heritage are fully incorporated into the fourth UK Climate Change Risk Assessment report.
- 2.3. Working with partners, we will map climate-related hazards and share our findings to identify which aspects of our heritage are most vulnerable to a changing climate.
- 2.4. We will monitor and evaluate human responses to climate change and how they are affecting heritage.



Flooding in York City Centre, 2012

# 3. ADAPTATION

## PREPARING FOR A CHANGING CLIMATE

### AIM

As we improve our knowledge of climate projections and their implications for heritage, we will engage and equip people to take action in support of the places they care about.

We will develop, innovate and adopt good practice – including emergent areas of work – responding to new insights, technical developments and changes as our work progresses. We will gather evidence to show how our historic environment can contribute to the resilience of places and communities, and how people can adapt to climate change.

### ACTIONS

- 3.1.** We will embed climate adaptation thinking into our operations. In all our future business decisions, we will remain mindful of future climate scenarios and their impacts.
- 3.2.** In 2022, we will publish a consultation draft of a Historic England Advice Note (HEAN) on climate change. This will provide a framework for responding to climate change while sustaining our heritage.
- 3.3.** In early 2022, we will review our existing Adaptation Report (submitted to Defra in 2016) and prepare and submit an updated Adaptation Reporting Power Report to the government.
- 3.4.** We will continue to identify ways to adapt heritage to future climate threats, develop new adaptive approaches, and assess their effectiveness for different heritage assets. We will provide annual summaries of these approaches from 2023 onwards.
- 3.5.** By 2025, we and others will develop a toolkit that equips those who care for our heritage to plan for and manage decisions where some loss of, or transformative change to, heritage assets is unavoidable.
- 3.6.** We will contribute to the third National Adaptation Programme (NAP) and gather evidence on how heritage can help society adapt to future climate conditions.
- 3.7.** We will continue to identify, document and champion the contribution of heritage to climate-resilient places and communities.
- 3.8.** As well as demonstrating good practice, we will also identify, document and share solutions to common problems with climate change responses. We will do the same with experiences of unintended negative consequences of climate change responses.



Converting Victorian terraces in The Welsh Streets, Liverpool. Retrofitting heritage properties has a significantly lower carbon impact than building anew.



# GLOSSARY



Bude Storm Tower, at risk from accelerated coastal erosion

<b>Biodiversity</b>	Biological diversity; the variability among living organisms
<b>Carbon</b>	There are six greenhouse gases responsible for causing global warming and climate change - carbon dioxide (CO <sub>2</sub> ) is by far the most common. Collectively the six gases are often abbreviated to 'carbon'
<b>Climate action</b>	Action that helps reduce emissions and adapt to climate change
<b>Climate adaptation</b>	Action that helps cope with the actual or anticipated effects of climate change – either to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities
<b>Climate change</b>	'[A] change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods' (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, article 1)
<b>Climate mitigation</b>	Action that helps reduce the production and/or emission of greenhouse gases that cause climate change into the atmosphere
<b>Energy efficiency</b>	Measures to reduce the amount of energy required for products and services
<b>Net zero</b>	A state where any greenhouse gas emissions are balanced by absorbing or removing an equivalent amount from the atmosphere. The UK is committed to a target of net zero emissions by 2050
<b>Retrofit</b>	Add new technology or features to an older building
<b>Resilience</b>	The capacity to cope with a hazardous event or change in climate while retaining functionality and/or significance
<b>Risk</b>	Climate change risk is the result of the interaction between climate related hazards (including the likelihood of their occurrence), vulnerability and exposure

Definitions are taken from the [United Nations glossary of climate change](#).



# NEXT STEPS

A Climate Change Programme Board will oversee Historic England's delivery of the commitments in this strategy. The Board will report directly to the Executive Team and the Chief Executive.

We will report regularly on these actions, normally but not exclusively, in our Annual Report.

More details of our climate change programme and activities can be found on our [website](#).



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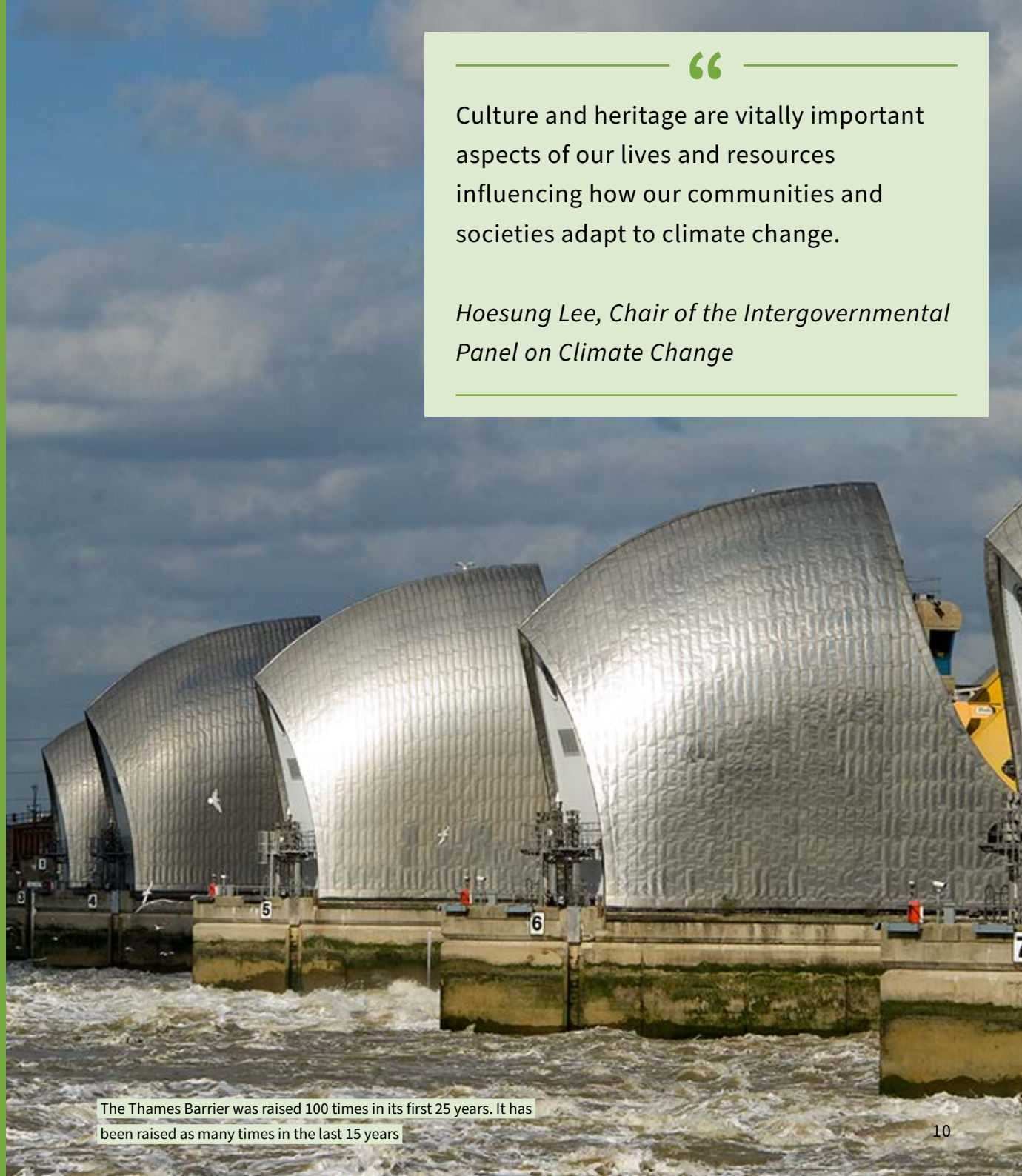
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Culture and heritage are vitally important aspects of our lives and resources influencing how our communities and societies adapt to climate change.

*Hoesung Lee, Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*

The Thames Barrier was raised 100 times in its first 25 years. It has been raised as many times in the last 15 years