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Church buildings are often solidly built and, when maintained well, have withstood the weather over the centuries.

However, as the climate changes, and weather events becomes more extreme, they can become vulnerable. We need to be protect these precious buildings from harm.

At the same time, our churches act as sanctuaries for their communities; they are often built on higher ground and more solidly-constructed than the houses around them, so can be a place of safety during a flood, and can act as a cool sanctuary in a heatwave.

Below, you can explore the kinds of changes that could help your church adapt to our changing climate, so that extreme weather events cause less harm and can be recovered from more quickly.

Clicking on diagram below will let you explore the main risks, and potential risk mitigation actions you can take.

Why does climate resilience / adaptation matter?

Even if all greenhouse gas emissions were to stop today, climate change would continue to become more severe for another 30 to 40 years, due to the greenhouse gasses already in the atmosphere. After this period, the climate would slowly start to stabilise.

It is therefore crucial that we protect our communities and buildings from existing and future climate change, and the associated severe weather events which come with it.

We need to become 'Climate Resilient' so we can respond to more extreme, changing weather.

[Read more about climate change here.](#)

What weather do we need to be ready for?

The following general changes in climate can be expected. The longer we keep releasing greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, the more severe and frequent they will become:-

Headline climate changes:

- Greater risk of warmer, wetter winters
- Greater risk of hotter, drier summers
- Greater risk of severe weather event

Likely changes in severe weather events:

- Increased risk of very hot days and intensity of heatwaves.
- Increased risk and intensity of droughts.
- Increased risk of intensive rainfall and flash (pluvial/urban) flooding over short periods, mainly during the summer period.
- Increased risk of high daily rainfall totals and (fluvial/river) flooding, especially during the winter.
- Reduced risk of wintry conditions, snowfall and frost.
- Increasing frequency and severity of severe weather events, including storm surges.
- Increasing rate of sea level rise.

You can find more on this on the [Met Office website](#).

Where to start, and where to get advice

The first step is to **check the condition of your building. Look at your past Quinquennial Inspection reports**, to see what may have already been highlighted. Discuss any points you are unsure of with your Quinquennial Inspector.

Review your existing maintenance plan, and find out if it is being followed. A well maintained and thermally insulated building will not only be more climate resilient it will also be more energy efficient and so have a lower carbon footprint (see the [Practical Path to Net Zero](#) for more details).

Use the diagram below to learn more about the potential risks, and what actions can be taken to become more resilient.

If changes need to be made, it would also be wise to **seek advice from your church architect** on any proposed alterations to the building.

If your church contains any sensitive fixtures and fittings, such as stained glass windows or wall paintings, make sure you have **checked with your DAC and any appropriate specialists** about how climate change, and any actions you take in response, might affect them.

Prior to taking any of the potential resilience actions, **ensure you have appropriate permission** such as List B (Archdeacon's permission), faculty or planning permission. Check with your DAC if you are unsure.

Regarding any type of flood risk, please contact your Local Authority, Environment Agency, and water company. These organisations often work together as a **Resilience Team** to tackle and advice on all types of flood protection.

The climate resilient church

Webinars, advice and support

There is a range of advice and support available to help you on your journey towards being a 'climate resilient church'.

People to speak to

- Speak to your local 'Resilience Team'; the local authority, the water company, and the Environment Agency
- Contact your own inspecting architect.
- Get advice on your building from your local DAC Secretary. If you don't have their contact details, [look on the map here](#).
- Find [your local Diocesan Environment Officer](#).
- At a national level, [contact Catherine Ross](#), who leads on environmental matters for the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division

Historic England guidance

- [Flooding in historic buildings.](#)
- [Emergency Response Plans](#)
- [How to treat and store items after an emergency](#)
- [Lighting protection](#)
- [Webinar recording - flooding part 1.](#)
- [Webinar recording - flooding part 2](#)
- [Webinar recording - flooding, lessons from the past](#)
- [Webinar recording - Climate adaptation, whole house approach to retrofit](#)
- [Webinar recording - Assessing Future Summertime Overheating Risk](#)

Other useful resources

Download Historic Environment Scotland's ["Short Guide to Climate Adaptation for Traditional Buildings"](#) and ["A Guide to Climate Change Impacts"](#)

For pests, look at [What's Eating Your Collection?](#) and [Integrated pest management.](#)

Gathering stories of climate resilient churches

The Cathedral and Church Buildings division has received funding from NERC to create a cache of valuable case studies and resources, during 2022.

Our researcher will identify examples from around the country, which show churches creating climate resilient, future-proof buildings and supporting their communities through extreme weather events.

We're actively looking for people to take part in this project.

If you think a church in your diocese might be a good case study, we'd love to hear from you. We are looking for examples that show churches:

- creating a more climate-resilient worship space,
- protecting important heritage from extreme weather, or
- utilising the space as a refuge against extreme hot, cold wet or windy weather.

For more information watch the short intro video below (1 min) and/or take a look at our [2-page project summary](#). Then contact the researcher, Chris Walsh, for a quick chat at christopher.walsh@churchofengland.org.

This page was created collaboratively with staff and volunteers from the Diocese of Leeds.

We are very grateful to them for their expert input.



Also of interest

A diagram showing the outside of a net zero carbon church.

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Net Zero Carbon Church Guidance

Find advice on how to move towards net zero carbon at your church.



Why you should act

There is a climate crisis, and it is impacting around the world now

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/climate-resilient-church>