



Adaptation Training Recommendations for Historic England

Project Case Study, March 2026



Front cover image: External awnings on historic buildings can prevent overheating. © Historic England

Overview

Lead organisation

Sustainability West Midlands

Project Delivery team: Morgan Roberts (Project Manager), Louis March-Smith (Project and Data Officer), Alan Carr (Climate Change Adaptation Lead)

Customers



Main WM Sustainability Roadmap theme addressed



Project Duration

November to March 2026

The Project

The impacts of climate change on cultural heritage, from individual assets up to the landscape scale, are already being observed across England. The latest UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA3) identifies significant risks to cultural heritage, ranging from damage to historic properties, to disruption or damage to archaeological sites, to changes threatening our historic environment at a landscape-scale. CCRA3 also makes the difficult acknowledgement that heritage organisations and communities may need to accept the loss of some heritage assets and emphasises the importance of careful planning for adaptation to prevent negative, unintended consequences of climate adaptation measures.

As the Government's statutory advisor on heritage, Historic England (HE) has a significant role to play in understanding and managing these risks. It is therefore developing new adaptive approaches for heritage assets, including the handling of unavoidable losses, in the form of a long-term contingency planning approach.

HE recognises that to effectively apply and embed this approach into decision making for the heritage sector, key audiences will need resources and training to understand adaptation and adaptive pathways, and the approaches to prepare the historic environment in England for a changing climate.

SWM were therefore commissioned by HE to produce recommendations for their in-house training team on how to produce training materials that successfully help heritage asset owners, managers, local authorities and other decision/policy makers use a 'long-term

contingency planning approach' to manage climate-driven change within and increase the resilience of the historic environment in England. These recommendations were provided in the form of a report and supplementary resources, informed by:

1. SWM's existing expertise on adaptation and communicating complex and challenging subjects through training.
2. Work HE had already undertaken, such as a 'user needs assessment' for climate adaptation skills in the heritage sector.
3. A range of stakeholders across the heritage sector in the UK who SWM engaged with throughout the project.

Aims

The aims of the project were to:

- Provide well-informed, clear and practical advice to HE that ultimately allows it to develop and design training and knowledge sharing opportunities that successfully help heritage asset owners, managers, local authorities and other decision/policy makers to utilise a long-term contingency planning approach to the management of changing and building of resilience within the historic environment in England.
- Include, within this advice, recommendations on content, structure and presentation so that training materials and activities:
 - Communicate complex topics such as adaptive pathways.
 - Mindfully cover difficult topics such as climate change and heritage loss.
 - Tailor the core concepts and content that HE wishes to communicate for different audiences including heritage asset owners, HE staff, local authorities and other policymakers, taking into consideration their different priorities, capacity and background knowledge.
- Equip HE with the knowledge and tools to plan future activity.

Outputs

The outputs produced for HE were:

- The Adaptation Training Recommendations Report including:
 - Key principles and recommendations for undertaking training.
 - Who the priority recipients of the training should be.
 - A 'master curriculum' of recommended content.
 - Structure and presentation recommendations focused on six key training delivery methods.
 - Recommended next steps for the in-house training team to effectively use these recommendations.

- A Summary report for HE which it can use to share key findings with external partners, providing a high-level summary of the recommendations and an introduction emphasising the importance of this work aimed at senior leadership.
- A slide deck for HE to use when presenting the findings of the Adaptation Training Recommendations Report.
- A list of existing training and resources on adaptation and heritage for reference.

All outputs above were provided for HE's internal use and therefore will not be published. More information can be shared by contacting us (see below).

By way of stakeholder engagement, we:

- Met with the in-house training team, policy team, and team developing the long-term contingency planning approach.
- Consulted key partners of HE across the UK through online meetings.
- Presented to various relevant steering groups, including HE and partners.

Reflections

This project was a brilliant opportunity for the SWM team to spend more time exploring **what makes good training**. While tailored to the heritage sector for this project, many of these findings relate more broadly to anyone learning about climate change and adaptation and how to apply this to their own lives and work effectively.

For example, whilst technical training is extremely important, it was identified as just as important to provide 'changemaker training.' This includes subjects like how to be a good leader that enables adaptation, understanding values, beliefs and norms to influence behaviour, and communicating adaptation in a way that builds trust and drives change.

SWM were also able to explore in more detail how systems thinking applies to not only the content we teach people, but how we create, shape, and deliver training. This includes considering how training should sit within a wider programme of engagement and awareness raising activities, and how networks such as communities of practice and online forums help reinforce and apply the lessons learned from training in the long-term.

In the Future

Looking forwards, HE is hoping to start a programme of works to develop training on climate change adaptation for the sector. Our recommended next steps include factors such as identifying internal and external funding for training development and maintaining engagement with key partners such as the National Trust, Cadw and Historic Environment Scotland.

SWM thoroughly enjoyed working with the HE team and partners throughout this project, and hope to work with HE again in the future.

Testimonials

"It has been a great experience to work with SWM on this project. The report that SWM developed for us will help us as we consider our next steps to support the heritage sector increase its understanding of climate adaptation and build resilience. SWM's recommendations will help us to design and produce training and knowledge sharing opportunities that meet the needs of a range of stakeholders. Their ability to reach out to a variety of stakeholders was invaluable to this piece of work, and their collaborative approach to working with our team meant that they were able to tailor the project outputs to our needs as the project developed."

Contact details

For further information on the project or to work with us in one of a variety of ways, please [see our consultancy page](#) or contact the SWM team at enquiries@swm.org.uk.