Historic England's response to the Committee for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs call for evidence: Climate and weather resilience
October 2025

About Historic England

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners, and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed, and cared for – and contributes to thriving places. We are firmly committed to climate action and supporting national and local government, and asset owners/occupiers and their advisors to manage the impacts of climate change at their sites.

Summary of response

- The third UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA3) highlights that coastal change, including erosion and sea level rise, is one of the biggest environmental threats to the historic environment, and landslips and ground instability are serious threats. The risk to heritage assets, from individual structures to landscapes and their communities, would have a significant impact on cultural heritage and sites, which are important to local communities in terms of place, and by extension, civic pride, wellbeing and local economic growth.

- Heritage and the impact on heritage needs to be taken into account by decision makers when developing and implementing coastal management strategies and action plans. Heritage organisations are effective partners in the development of risk management strategies. The contribution of the historic environment to communities, places and the economy is well-documented. Many heritage assets also form part of coastal flood defences.

- Ensuring continued access to damaged historic sites and landscapes from coastal change over the short term will require ongoing adaptation at many sites. Over the long term, more significant and costly adaptation solutions will be required, including the need to take challenging decisions about the management of inevitable loss over time.

- The social, psychological, and economic effects of coastal erosion and landslips can impact hugely on local communities. The historic environment can be a powerful catalyst in bringing people together to consider and manage the impacts of coastal change.

- Historic England and DCMS have commitments within the third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3) to communicate the scale of climate risks to the historic environment. To do this and develop adaptation solutions and management strategies, Historic England is modelling risk using updated coastal erosion datasets, identifying suitable adaptation options, and developing a long-term approach to adaptation and the management of loss.

- The most effective, efficient, and sustainable approach to the management of coastal erosion and landslip risk is to ensure that adaptation projects consider climate action, community, the environment, and heritage together rather than in isolation.

Response to specific questions

1. **What is the scale and nature of the risks posed by coastal erosion and landslips to communities, the economy and the environment?**

Coasts across the world are recognised as some of the most vulnerable areas to climate change. Coastal erosion and flooding threaten communities, businesses, and the natural and historic environment. However, currently, the UK's coastal data resources are fragmented making a systematic and integrated approach to understanding coastal flooding and erosion data, spatial datasets for buildings, infrastructure networks, and many other indicators difficult.[1]

UK coastal systems have always been subject to environmental change. Climate Change, however, acting as a risk multiplier, exacerbates existing environmental processes. There is significant coastal archaeological data that offer insights into these processes regarding past, changing coastlines, and how communities have responded to coastal change through historic flood defences and other nature-based solutions.[2]

1.1 Risks posed to communities

Climate Change Risk and Impact Assessments (CCRIA) have marked coastal communities as priority risk areas. Coastal communities in the UK already face socio-economic challenges that increase their vulnerability to climate change and their ability to respond to gradual changes and specific severe events.[3] This includes short- and long-term impacts on lives and livelihoods via damage to properties, infrastructure and businesses;[4] potential prevention of access and egress,[5] and potential need for the relocation of entire communities.[6] Forced relocation and community displacement can also have severe psychological impact on communities.[7]

The risk to cultural practices, traditional livelihoods, wellbeing, community and collective memory and identity, and a sense of place is immense.[8] As the physical geography of coastal landscapes change, so too will disruptions to local cultural stories and place-based identities. Traditional ecological knowledge, such as knowledge of tides, aquacultural

[1] Lazarus, E.D., Aldabet, S., Thompson, C.E.L. *et al.* The UK needs an open data portal dedicated to coastal flood and erosion hazard risk and resilience. *Anthropocene Coasts* 4, 137–146 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1139/anc-2020-0023
[2] Atkins (2013). Assessment of Heritage at risk from environmental threat. Historic England Research Report Series 72/2013.
[3] LSE (2011). How is climate change affecting coastal flooding in the UK? and Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2011). Impacts of climate change on disadvantaged UK coastal communities. and House of Lords (2019). The future of seaside towns.
[4] CCC (2018). Managing the coast in a changing climate and BBC News (2024) Dawlish railway: Decade on from storm devastation.
[5] BBC News (2023). Jurassic Coast: Charmouth beach landslip leaves walkers cut off by tide.
[6] Western Telegraph (2025) Cost of fixing Saundersfoot coastal path up to £700,000.
[7] National Flood Forum, Impact on Communities.
[8] Davies, M.H., Dunlop, C., Firth, A., Jay, H., & Whitewright, J. Impacts of Climate Change on Cultural Heritage in the UK and Ireland. MCCIP Science Review 2023, 18pp.

industries (e.g. fishing) can be disrupted, as can other traditions tied to place or associated with specific landscapes.

1.2 Risks posed to economy

The cultural heritage sector wields a substantial influence on our national and local economies.[9] Using the latest available national statistics (2022), England's heritage sector is estimated to have contributed £44.9 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the UK economy in 2022 and supported the employment of over 523,000 workers.[10]

As coastal erosion and landslips pose significant economic risks by damaging infrastructure, decreasing property values, harming tourism, and disrupting local lives, livelihoods and ecosystems, this risk includes heritage assets (defined in Section 1.3). According to the British Geological Survey, in the UK, current annual damages from coastal flooding are estimated at over £500 million per year,[11] and costs are likely to increase under projections of future sea-level rise. Historic assets are also under threat: buried archaeology and historic structures, such as the Godwin Battery on Spurn Point, have already been lost to coastal erosion. Meanwhile, whilst there is data on repair costs to assets and their associated facilities, there is no estimation of permanent damages to the intrinsic value of affected heritage sites. Another example of economic cost can be found in the winter flooding of 2013–2014. For these floods alone, the economic estimates of damages to tourism and recreation assets - including holiday cottages, beach huts and other tourism infrastructure – is estimated at £3.5 million, with a range of £2.6 million to £4.4 million.[12]

1.3 Risks to environment (with focus on heritage assets)

Some coastal sites are already experiencing dramatic damage due to climate change, which is predicted to increase in future due to high energy wave action, storm winds, frequent flooding events, and tidal scouring. Saving or stabilising all assets is not financially viable.

Historic England recognises heritage assets as buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas, or landscapes that have significance due to their historic, archaeological, architectural, or artistic interest. They include designated heritage assets, such as listed buildings, scheduled monuments, conservation areas, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields, protected wreck sites, and World Heritage Sites. Heritage can also include undesignated assets, which can be identified by local planning authorities or communities (for example, through local heritage lists or neighbourhood plans) as having local value. Most evidence about risks to heritage assets pertains to designated assets, but the importance of other kinds of heritage (such as buried archaeology) must also be considered.

Nationally important heritage sites currently eroding or under imminent threat of starting to erode are legion. One example is the undermining of foundations at Hurst Castle (due to severe weather conditions, ongoing coastal erosion and rising sea levels) which led to a partial collapse of the structure. For context, Hurst Castle is one of only 400 sites considered important enough to be in the National Historic Collection, in the care of English Heritage for the nation, and its damage has had a demonstrable negative impact on the local community. It is a Tudor fortress with later additions built on shingle on an exposed spit of land by the

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[9] Historic England, Heritage and the Economy.
[10] CEBR (2024), 'The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy: An updated report for Historic England' and Historic England (2024), The Economic Value of the Heritage Sector.
[11] British Antarctic Survey, Sea Level Rise.
[12] Environment Agency (2024). National Assessment of flood and coastal erosion risk in England 2024 and Environment Agency (2016). The costs and impacts of the winter 2013 to 2014 floods.

Solent. 2021 saw the collapse of a section of the 19th-century east wing, and further deterioration has followed in other parts of the site.

Several sites will be especially vulnerable to tidal flooding from sea level rise, such as Piel Castle and Bayard's Cove Fort. There are currently over 30 scheduled monuments on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register listed as At Risk with coastal erosion as their principal vulnerability. Historic England commissioned a study in 2019 to consider coastal risks to designated heritage assets. For coastal erosion, this study found that over the long term and including climate change impacts:

- 9% of listed buildings situated within 1km of the High-Water Mark are at risk – over 4,150 assets;
- 30% of registered parks and gardens situated within 1km of the High-Water Mark are at risk – 62 assets;
- 20% of scheduled monuments situated within 1km of the High-Water Mark are at risk – over 450 assets.[13]

CCRA3 highlights coastal change, including coastal erosion, as one of the largest threats to cultural heritage. Coasts in England embody tangible and intangible heritage, an untapped source of knowledge which can contribute to informed decisions about local development and change. Approximately a fifth of England's coastlines are defined as Heritage Coasts, recognised for their exceptional scenic quality and for the special significance of their environmental/cultural features.[14] CCRA3 also includes potential risks to heritage from landslip and ground instability, while noting current gaps in monitoring data for heritage assets.[15]

1.4 Landslip risk

There are landslip risks to heritage that are exacerbated by climate change hazards, such as changing rainfall patterns and coastal erosion. In January this year, four miles of heritage railway closed due to a landslip that led to the collapse of a wing wall holding up the bridge over the Mor Brook of the Severn Valley Railway.[16] The event sent a shockwave through the local community and also impacted their heritage tourism. Thousands of pounds have been raised for repairs.[17] A severe storm in previously caused major damage to the railway in 2007, which cost approximately £3.7m to repair,[18] damaging the summer tourist trade to the railway and the wider economy and community.

In some historic landscapes, the dynamic nature of the coast (including erosion and landslips) is an integral part of the coast's significance. For example, the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site (WHS)[19] relies on the constantly changing coastline, around 96% of which lies seaward of the National Coastal Erosion Risk Mapping baseline.[20] This can conflict with the needs of

[13] LUC (2019), Coastal Risk and Priority Places. Historic England Research Report Series 37/2019.
[14] Heritage Coasts (England), Natural England Open Data Geoportal and Natural England (2022). Heritage Coasts Review.
[15] UK Climate Risk Independent Assessment: Technical Report, Chapter 5: Communities and the Built Environment. Risk H11 covers risks to cultural heritage.
[16] BBC News (2025). Work begins to find cause of railway landslip.
[17] Severn Valley Railway (2025), SVR to move ahead with landslip repairs and BBC News (2025), Thousands raised after railway landslip.
[18] Sowden, Phil (2012). Severn Valley Railway Recollections, the story of the Big Flood. Silver Link Books.
[19] UNESCO, Statement of Outstanding Universal Value: Dorset and East Devon Coast.
[20] LUC (2019), Coastal Risk and Priority Places. Historic England Research Report Series 37/2019.

coastal communities to protect themselves from risk. For example, in April 2021, a substantial landslip occurred near Thorncombe Beacon on the Jurassic Coast, prompting closure of parts of the South West Coast Path due to instability and posing risks to people, communities and archaeological sites.[21] The Partnership Plan for the WHS notes the important of proactive collaboration with local communities to find pragmatic solutions, while recognising the significance of this ever-changing coastline.[22]

2. **What strategies are currently in place, or needed, to reduce the risks of landslips and coastal erosion, and what research gaps exist? What policies are in place nationally and locally, such as within the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy, for mitigation of hazards associated with landslips and coastal erosion? How effective and well-resourced are they and what types of impacts are considered within the policy framework?**

The coast is a dynamic environment with a long history associated with anthropogenic management practices. Changing climatic factors have exacerbated change, highlighting the need for collaborative coastal management action. Government bodies such as Defra and the Environment Agency are investing approximately £5.2bn in Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) between 2021 and 2027, with investment strategies stressing the need for dialogue and cooperation between local government, communities, and the private sector.[23] Historic England regularly engages with the Environment Agency and other relevant Government bodies on the development of regional/local flood and coastal risk management strategies and on the development of national approaches, such as the development of 2025 NCERM and NaFRA data.

Policymakers are keen to use arts and culture to support environmental behaviour changes by empowering communities, and actively communicating, inspiring and engaging audiences and the general public.[24] Heritage organisations can be effective contributors to strategies that address the management of environmental impacts.

2.1 Flood and coastal erosion risk management policy

In terms of physical conservation, a more integrated approach could be taken to heritage that also serves as FCERM assets, such as historic seafronts. The importance of heritage in place-making could contribute more to maintaining local distinctiveness and character where interventions are required; there could be greater recognition of heritage as a source of economic and social value when developing cost benefit analyses for coastal schemes.[25]

For local authorities, it is important to consider the 'heritage profile' of their area in decision-making and resource allocation, including for FCERM Grant in Aid. Recent research by Coastal Partners has indicated that "a lack of suitable funding streams, combined with uncertainties surrounding accountability… for heritage assets, puts significant pressure on the effective delivery of FCERM, risking both their permanent irretrievable loss or damage and putting communities at increased risk."[26] This work has found that although adequately protecting heritage assets within FCERM schemes can add to the cost of schemes, for

[21] BBC News (2021) 'Substantial' rockfalls between Seatown and Eype Beach.
[22] Dorset Council (2025). Jurassic Coast Partnership Plan 2020 – 2025.
[23] Defra (2024) Flooding and coastal erosion risk management funding for local authorities.
[24] British Council and Julie's Bicycle (2019), Culture: The Missing Link to Climate Action (p17ff).
[25] CIWEM (2025) Postcards from the Edge II - Adapting to our changing coast - CIWEM pp.45-6.
[26] Coastal Partners (2025), Coastal Heritage within FCERM: the Challenge of Conflicting Priorities. Summary report (p3).

example through the cost of expert advice or suitable adaptation works, the benefits and values of doing so is not recognised within the economic case for FCERM funding.

In our response to a recent Defra consultation, Historic England encouraged the integration of heritage data into FCERM asset registers, given that some FCERM assets are also heritage assets. This would allow better understanding of the need for early consultation with heritage specialists where relevant. The response also made the case for FCERM investment priorities to account for the economic, environmental, and social value of heritage assets benefitting from FCERM projects. The current approach creates a perverse disincentive, discouraging attention to heritage assets even though they may be a source of major benefits (such as tourism income). Historic England believes that a revised approach to value for money for FCERM investment should recognise the value of heritage in calculating Benefit Cost Ratios.[27] Methods of recognising the cultural and societal value of heritage consistent with Green Book requirements are set out in recent DCMS guidance.[28]

2.2 Shoreline Management Plans and heritage data

Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) set out a planned approach to managing flood and coastal erosion risk around England's coast to 2105. In addition to providing a large-scale assessment of the risks associated with coastal erosion and change, they contain information on the risks from flooding and erosion to people and the developed, historic, and natural environment. Although SMPs contain information on the historic environment, the SMP Explorer,[29] a map-based and publicly accessible digital tool, only contains scheduled monuments within the searchable mapping layers. This highlights a gap as the Explorer does not allow users to see potential risks to other designated assets, such as listed buildings.

3. What are the social, economic, and psychological impacts of landslips and coastal erosion on affected communities? And how can these be addressed?

Landslips and coastal erosion impacting heritage sites or landscapes may have a large impact on the local community, as set out at Q1 above.

Heritage can be a powerful means of drawing communities into discussion about the impacts of coastal change by providing settings to explore the relationship between people and changing coastal environments over time, and to develop adaptational narratives.[30] Through citizen science, heritage offers opportunities for agency too, so that people can do something positive themselves to identify and record what is important to them about their coastal places.[31]

An example of this was the successful community campaign to move the Bude storm tower in Cornwall further back from an eroding coastline. Constructed in 1835, the Grade II listed tower had previously been moved back from the cliff in 1881, and the local community came together with local authorities to crowdfund a campaign to save it, leading to further funding from local government and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Following public consultation, the local landmark was relocated in 2023.[32]

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[27] Historic England (2025), Response to Defra consultation 'Reforming our approach to flood funding'.
[28] DCMS (2024), Embedding a Culture and Heritage Capital Approach.
[29] Environment Agency, Shoreline Management Plan Explorer.
[30] CIWEM (2025) Postcards from the Edge II - Adapting to our changing coast - CIWEM pp.45-6.
[31] Historic England, Missing Pieces Project.
[32] Bude Statton Town Council (2024), Bude's Iconic Storm Tower: A Journey from Peril to Preservation

It will not be possible to save all our coastal assets and communities that are at risk. The Coasts in Mind project, led by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) focuses on empowering coastal communities to record the impact of coastal and climate change. Through events, memory walks and the recording of archaeology, it is creating a Community Archive holding evidence of coastal change from the 1920s to the present day, capturing local knowledge and encouraging positive action in the face of coastal change.[33]

Historic England is one of the founding partners of the Coast-R Network. The network is a collaborative community of groups that works to enhance the resilient management of coastal communities, including living with uncertainty and developing skills, strategies and tools to support the implementation of effective action.[34]

6. **To what extent is the protection of and access to significant natural landscapes and heritage sites being undermined due to coastal erosion or landslips, what are the impacts of this, and how could this be addressed?**

6.1 Impact on the protection of and access to heritage assets and landscapes

To maintain access in the shorter-term, ongoing adaptation is needed at many coastal heritage sites. The changing climate also means longer-term actions are often required to address the complex challenges that affect coastal heritage sites. Moreover, there is a practical impact posed by these coastal changes – entering heritage sites or landscapes under risk from erosion or landslip, or having recently suffered from such an event, can be hazardous and may require specific training beyond that of many custodians of such sites. Recovery of heritage objects and stabilization of heritage assets may also require specific expertise, (e.g., fire and rescue and structural engineering) that is beyond the capability of heritage bodies.

It is important that impacts on the natural environment are considered alongside impacts on the historic environment because natural capital and heritage are mutually dependent parts of our landscapes. 19% of Scheduled Monuments coincide with Sites of Special Scientific Interest, as do 24% of Registered Battlefields and 16% of Registered Parks and Gardens. Other historic features, such as traditionally constructed buildings (pre-1919) and dry-stone walls are important as habitats. In the coastal environment, historic structures such as jetties and piers provide better habitats for marine life than monolithic modern structures.[35] Historic wrecks are biodiversity hotspots and serve as de facto Marine Protected Areas by restricting trawling.[36] Therefore, this interdependence demonstrates that the historic environment has a valuable role as part of the Government's ambitions on nature recovery and environmental protection, meaning the threat from landslips and coastal erosion must be mitigated.

Historic England recommends drawing on the Natural England publication 'Nature recovery and the historic environment', which details four principles for integration of the historic environment into plans for nature recovery.[37]

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[33] Coasts in Mind
[34] Coast-R Network
[35] Timothy Baxter, Martin Coombes, Heather Viles (2022). Identifying priorities for the joint conservation of maritime built heritage and marine biodiversity: An assessment of shoreline engineering on the Isles of Scilly, UK, using historical datasets. Ocean & Coastal Management, Volume 227.
Timothy Baxter, Martin Coombes, Heather Viles (2023). Intertidal biodiversity and physical habitat complexity on historic masonry walls: A comparison with modern concrete infrastructure and natural rocky cliffs. Marine Pollution Bulletin, Volume 188, March 2023.
[36] Jenny Hickman, Joe Richards, Adam Rees, Emma V. Sheehan (2024). Shipwrecks function as de facto Marine Protected Areas in areas of heavy fishing pressure. Marine Ecology, Volume 45, Issue 1.
[37] Natural England (2023). Nature recovery and the historic environment

6.2 Understanding and responding to coastal erosion and landslip risk

NAP3 details Government plans to protect cultural heritage from climate change, including specific actions related to coastal heritage and modelling the long-term impacts of climate change.[38] In 2024, Historic England published its Climate Change Adaptation Report which provides an overview of ongoing work in response to NAP3 actions.[39]

In recent years, Historic England has worked with local authorities and other partners to assess a range of heritage assets at risk from coastal erosion, including Sandsfoot Castle in Dorset, Sandwich Bay in Kent, and Seaford Head in Sussex. These investigations are intended to better understand the significance of and risk to heritage assets from coastal erosion to inform asset owners, local authority and managers when taking their decisions about conservation.

Historic England is working to better understand the scale of these risks to designated heritage assets, and to identify potential solutions:

- **'A Matter of Time & Tide'**: this newly started project will use the EA's recently published NCERM2 and NaFRA2 datasets to quantify the number of one particular class of protected heritage asset (scheduled monuments) that are currently or are likely to become at risk from coastal erosion and on what timeframe.

- **Multi-criteria analysis for sites at risk from coastal erosion**: this project aims to establish a framework for assessing adaptation options for historic buildings and structures at risk from coastal erosion using multi-criteria decision analysis. The project will examine several case study sites to identify adaptation options (including loss), to understand potential constraints impacting different options and to aid future decision-making processes for adaptation, grant-making, etc.

- **Developing a framework for adaptation, including responding to loss of heritage assets**: The need for the heritage sector to consider ways to manage climate-driven loss was highlighted CCRA3. In response, Historic England has committed to develop a decision-making framework and toolkit to help owners and managers prepare for and manage climate-change driven impacts to heritage sites, including the unavoidable loss of heritage assets from risks including coastal erosion or increasing ground instability. This approach is based on adaptive pathways, which can help owners and decision-makers plan future adaptation within the uncertainty of climate change.

- **Defra's Coastal Transition Accelerator Programme** (CTAP): This programme is developing ways of helping coastal communities that cannot be defended from coastal erosion. Of the two major projects, Historic England staff are on the Steering Group of Changing Coasts East Riding (CCER) and supporting Coastwise in North Norfolk with advice on heritage policy.

[38] Defra (2023), Third National Adaptation Programme (pp 81 – 84).
[39] Historic England & English Heritage Trust (2024), Climate Change Adaptation Report 2024.