

## Committee for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs | Call for evidence: Climate and weather resilience – wildfire

### Response from Historic England

May 2026

#### 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 and environmental change at their sites.

#### Summary of response

- Heritage organisations are effective partners and have relevant expertise in the development of risk management strategies to combat wildfire.
- Heritage organisations can contribute to public engagement activity to increase understanding of the human causes of wildfire ignition.
- Our natural and historic landscapes are inseparable, and the historic environment has a valuable role as part of the Government’s ambitions on nature recovery and environmental protection.
- Using the historic environment and sector expertise to inform land management practices and nature-based solutions for more resilient landscapes will result in sustainable and therefore more effective solutions to climate change and environmental risk management.
- Historic England has existing engagement with Defra funding schemes and potential suggestions for how these can further support land managers to adapt to the increased risk of wildfires while protecting heritage assets on their estates.

#### Responses to specific questions

##### **What role do nature-based solutions, such as improving biodiversity and more resilient landscapes, have in the prevention and control of wildfires?**

###### 1.1 Connection between the natural and historic environment

- 1.1.1 Our natural and historic landscapes are inseparable, and the historic environment has a valuable role as part of the Government’s ambitions on nature recovery and environmental protection.<sup>1</sup> The sector’s expertise in traditional land-management practices and nature recovery can inform nature-based solutions which result in improved conservation, reduced wildfire risk and climate change mitigation.

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<sup>1</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Protect the Environment](#). Pg 10.

- 1.1.2 A recent report for UK Parliament POST on nature-based flood and drought resilience considered that nature-based solutions, such as floodplain reconnection, wetland restoration, and land and soil management increase resilience to drought and dry conditions.<sup>2</sup> Certain types of vegetation cover reintroduced by such schemes may increase vulnerability during dry spells or droughts, for example the practices of increasing scrub cover and afforestation by natural regeneration. A study by University of California has also found that traditional forest management techniques such as controlled burning and restoration thinning can also be effective in reducing wildfire risk.<sup>3</sup> When developing nature-based solutions, it is important to take a balanced view of the potential risks and benefits – including those related to the historic environment.
- 1.1.3 Many historic environment managers are already changing practices to adapt their sites and estates to the increased risk of wildfire, for example by changing maintenance and vegetation management regimes to clear pathways of vegetation as natural fire breaks. This is highlighted in recent National Trust adaptation manual guidance on wildfire response.<sup>4</sup> Using the historic environment and sector data on past land management and use, along with heritage expertise, to inform land management practices and nature-based solutions for more resilient landscapes will result in more effective solutions to climate change and environmental risk management.<sup>5</sup>
- 1.1.4 The joint statement between Natural England, Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund recognises that nature comprises habitats, species, geology, landscape, historic features, cultural connections, and the opportunities we have to connect with the environment.<sup>6</sup> As national institutions, we have committed to working together to support the delivery of sustainable places through integrated management, delivering environmental and cultural heritage benefits. [Historic England](#) and [Natural England](#) also have a suite of guidance available on nature recovery and the historic environment.

## **How best can Defra funding schemes be used to support land managers to adapt to the increased risk of wildfires?**

### **2.1 Connection between the natural and historic environment**

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<sup>2</sup> Cutting, B. and Wentworth, J. (2026). Nature-based flood and drought resilience. POSTnote 768. <https://doi.org/10.58248/PN768>

<sup>3</sup> UC Berkeley News, [Twenty-year study confirms California forests are healthier when burned — or thinned.](#)

<sup>4</sup> National Trust, [Climate Change Adaptation Guidance – Places: Wildfires.](#)

<sup>5</sup> Historic England, [Historic Landscape Characterisation.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Natural England, Historic England, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, [Joint statement on Integrating the management of the natural and historic environment.](#)

- 2.1.1 The historic environment has a valuable role as part of the Government's ambitions on nature recovery and environmental protection,<sup>7</sup> including within our existing and regular engagement with Defra funding schemes and, as part of this, the potential for future recommendations for how these can further support land managers to adapt to the increased risk of wildfires while protecting heritage assets on their estates.
- 2.1.2 We feel it important therefore that Defra schemes include appropriate actions to facilitate identification and assessment of these and other climate related risks, and having identified high risk areas, actions to avoid or mitigate these risks.

**What impact does the monitoring of wildfires have on our understanding of the causes and risks of these events in the UK, and how can this be improved? Are there international examples or best practices that can be used in a UK context?**

**3.1 Monitoring systems and data gaps**

- 3.1.1 Increased monitoring of wildfires and predictive models of ignition probability could have a large impact on our understanding of causes, risks and ability to respond to wildfire events. The<sup>8</sup>. Although the Met Office's Fire Severity Index is a vital tool for<sup>9</sup> considering when to identify exceptional conditions and suspend open access rights on vulnerable land, it does not predict when or where wildfires will start.<sup>10</sup>
- 3.1.2 A recent National Environment Research Council-funded project, 'Toward a UK Fire Danger Rating System',<sup>11</sup> has come to an end. However, the project team is testing a fire behaviour prediction system, 'FireInSite', which forecasts the probability of ignition and surface fire rate of spread for a set of core UK fire-prone vegetation types.<sup>12</sup> There are gaps in available data, such as vegetation type (fuel) maps which prevent complete modelling. As noted in Section 3.2 below, historic environment managers and experts would be valuable partners in future projects to address these gaps.

**3.2 Historic environment expertise in responding to wildfire**

- 3.2.1 Heritage organisations, whether as landowners or expert advisors like Historic England, have relevant landscape-scale expertise and can be effective partners in the monitoring of and response to wildfire. This is shown through Historic England's contribution to the response to the Fylingdales Moor wildfire (August 2025) in the North York Moors National Park (NYMNP), which was the largest wildfire recorded in England.

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<sup>7</sup> HM Government, [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Protect the Environment](#). Pg 10.

<sup>8</sup> [UK Fire Danger Rating System](#) project website

<sup>10</sup> Met Office, [Fire Severity Index](#)

<sup>11</sup> [UK Fire Danger Rating System](#) project website

<sup>12</sup> [FireInSite](#)

- 3.2.2 The wildfire posed a serious threat to the lives and properties of people across the National Park, including tenants, landowners, and people working in agriculture and tourism who maintain this important cultural landscape. The Met Office is clear that the cause of this unusually warm summer was human-driven climate change, determining that this made the high summer temperatures of 2025 70 times more likely to occur.<sup>13</sup>
- 3.2.3 Burning over 25 square kilometres, the fire threatened nearly 30 Scheduled Monuments and nine Listed structures.<sup>14</sup> However, the damage went beyond designated assets. Where the fire burnt through vegetation and peat, it exposed both known and previously unrecorded archaeological sites. Peatlands can create exceptional conditions for preserving organic archaeological materials and the moors are a rich archaeological and cultural landscape. Historic England guidance on peatland restoration provides advice on the management of peatland restoration projects, with a particular focus on maximising the benefits of these schemes for peatland heritage and ensuring that restoration works are carried out in a way that protects and enhances the historic environment.<sup>15</sup>
- 3.2.4 Additionally, efforts to contain the fire included the construction of approximately 50 km of firebreaks, typically 10–15 m wide. While such measures are essential for effective firefighting, they can unintentionally disturb or damage archaeological deposits. We are therefore working closely with the NYMNPA to ensure that known archaeological deposits are identified in advance, enabling informed decisions about the placement of firebreaks and helping to minimise potential damage to heritage assets. Given the extent of the fire, a large amount of newfound archaeology is currently being identified and recorded before further damage is caused by flooding and rain. The images presented at Appendix 1 show the scale of the fire and damage caused to heritage assets and newly uncovered archaeology.
- 3.2.5 Historic England's Archaeological Investigation Team worked with the North York Moors National Park Authority (NYMNPA) and Natural England to assess the damage and help develop future strategies for combating wildfire.<sup>16</sup>
- 3.2.6 Historic England's Aerial Survey team was also responsible for the initial survey after the fire; our long experience in aerial survey meaning that we could rapidly respond to capture and share data with the NYMNPA and Natural England. In November 2025, Historic England also captured drone-based lidar and aerial imagery to assess the condition of the rapidly eroding Cross Dyke on Shooting House Moor, which was provided to the NYMNPA. Working with the National Park, areas of the monument that were at risk could be identified and conservation work rapidly implemented.

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<sup>13</sup> Met Office, [Summer 2025 is the warmest on record for the UK](#).

<sup>14</sup> North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service, [Press release: Cause of Langdale/Fylingdales Moor Fire](#).

<sup>15</sup> Historic England (2025), [Peatlands and the Historic Environment: Guidance for Carrying out Peatland Restoration](#)

<sup>16</sup> North York Moors National Park, [Fylingdales Moor fire six months on](#).

- 3.2.7 Historic England has been working with the North Yorkshire Emergency Resilience Forum to coordinate with stakeholders during the response phase, support environmental recovery, and plan for the future.
- 3.2.8 In November 2025, Historic England's National Grants Panel approved a £100,000 regional capacity building grant for the NYMNPA to support training and development of remote sensing techniques. This grant will build future capacity of the NYMNPA to respond to wildfire.
- 3.3 International best practice
- 3.3.1 An example of international best practice is in Canada, where the risk of forest fires is extremely high, with over 8000 fires burning some 2 million hectares every year. The Canadian Government, through Natural Resources Canada and the Canadian Forest Service, maintains a world-leading fire monitoring service.
- 3.3.2 This includes an interactive map of current wildfire locations<sup>17</sup> and a Forest Fire Danger Rating System, which has been implemented by many other countries including parts of the United States and New Zealand, Spain, Portugal and Sweden.<sup>18</sup> The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre also coordinates aid, resource and knowledge sharing around fire management planning and strategy.<sup>19</sup>
- 3.3.3 In California, comprehensive guidance and resources are also available from several institutions for landowners looking to recover from wildfire incidents.<sup>20</sup> Arup has also developed a framework for fire safety in informal settlements, which considers many relevant factors that relate to vegetation, management and mitigation measures.<sup>21</sup>
- 3.3.4 Reviewing international best practice and resources could inform UK policy and practice such as considering where future Defra funding schemes could incentivise land management practices which may need to change to reduce wildfire risk. For example, in places where wildfires are already a regular risk, landowners/managers may maintain fire breaks and vegetation cover to reduce fire risk.

## **What resources and training do emergency services and local authorities need to respond to the increasing number of wildfires, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas?**

### **4.1 Emergency planning resources for the natural and historic environment**

- 4.1.2 Historic England provides advice and support on emergency planning for both the historic environment and emergency planning sectors, considering how historic sites

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<sup>17</sup> Government of Canada, [Interactive Wildfire Map](#)

<sup>18</sup> Government of Canada, [Canadian Forest Fire Danger Rating System](#).

<sup>19</sup> [Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre](#)

<sup>20</sup> University of California, [Recovering from Wildfire: A Guide for California's Forest Landowners](#).

<sup>21</sup> Arup, [A Framework for Fire Safety in Informal Settlements](#).

and collections are impacted by events such as floods and fires. We have a suite of technical guidance on our website, as well as delivering training from our Emergency Planning Training Centre in Portsmouth.<sup>22</sup>

- 4.1.3 Historic England does not yet have guidance specifically on response to wildfires. We intend to use the experience of providing support for the Fylingdales Moor fire response and other events to develop guidance and sector resources.
- 4.1.4 The case study of the Fylingdales Moor response above demonstrates the importance of Local Resilience Forums understanding how to consider the needs of the historic environment during response and recovery planning. Historic environment professionals can play an important role in helping emergency planners and responders to understand the wider impacts associated with wildfire damage, including unintended damage to assets caused by firefighting techniques, and to establish recovery objectives. This can also ensure that response agencies have awareness of and access to heritage data when making decisions about fire breaks and other actions likely to damage heritage assets.
- 4.1.5 It would also be helpful for emergency services to be aware and make use of the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) in planning their responses to wildfire.<sup>23</sup> MAGIC is hosted by Defra and provides geographic information from across government about the natural environment, including the historic environment.

## 4.2 Engagement with heritage professionals

- 4.2.1 Better engagement between Local Resilience Forums and heritage professionals including Historic England, would help the emergency services develop wildfire fighting strategies and tactics that have a reduced impact on the historic environment. This could also include adopting measures to keep emergency responders safe whilst operating in a heritage environment, for example in identifying, understanding and mitigating the risk of unexploded ordnance in historic military landscapes.
- 4.2.2 Historic environment professionals could also work with other land-management agencies and the fire and rescue service to risk assess and prioritise heritage landscapes using a formula that considers the heritage value of the landscape (and therefore potential impact of wildfire), the pre-existing vulnerability of the landscape to wildlife, and the challenges associated with undertaking response and recovery activities within the landscape. Heritage landscapes deemed at greater risk could then be prioritised for multi-agency risk management planning, site familiarisation and exercising activities.

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<sup>22</sup> Historic England, [Emergency Planning and Fire Advice](#)

<sup>23</sup> Defra, [Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside](#).

- 4.2.3 Better engagement between Historic England, Local Resilience Forums and the National Fire Chiefs Council may inform how Historic England can support the provision of UK-specific guidance and training. Guidance to this effect for cultural heritage has already been produced by UNESCO, including measures that local authorities and landowners can take to reduce the risk and limited the impact of wildfire on heritage landscapes.<sup>24</sup>

**What are the most effective activities for tackling the human causes of wildfire ignition, for example public engagement and campaigns? How can the UK Government best support the delivery of these activities at both a local and national scale?**

5.1 Heritage organisations can support public engagement

- 5.1.1 Improving understanding of the holistic importance of landscapes through learning and engagement activities could encourage people to reconsider activities that deliberately or accidentally result in wildfire damage. Heritage can be a good medium through which to do this.
- 5.1.2 As local historic places foster deep emotional connections by providing familiarity, belonging and a sense of stability, they help people make sense of who they are and feel secure in their everyday lives. The loss or threat of cherished historic places can cause genuine grief and distress.
- 5.1.3 Therefore, heritage organisations, including large-scale landowners and visitor attractions, can help people and partners to understand the rich history of our cultural landscapes, including physical heritage assets and the connections between nature and culture, to enable them to better identify with the landscape as an important aspect of their own identity and sense of place. This places a higher social value on the landscape among individuals and communities and thus fosters a more caring relationship for the location among those interacting with it.
- 5.1.4 The UNESCO Fire Risk Management Guide for cultural and natural heritage includes advice on engaging communities in wildfire risk management.<sup>25</sup> Enhancing the role of local communities in any form of disaster risk management and prevention is an important method by which to build relationships between these communities, local authorities and Local Resilience Forums. Communities can also be a valuable source of local knowledge about heritage assets and landscapes which can aid the establishment of response and recovery objectives and actions.

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<sup>24</sup> UNESCO (2024), [Fire risk management guide: Protecting cultural and natural heritage from fire](#).

<sup>25</sup> UNESCO (2024), [Fire risk management guide: Protecting cultural and natural heritage from fire](#).

**Given that responsibility is spread across government departments and bodies (e.g. Defra, Forestry Commission, MHCLG), how should the government coordinate a cross-departmental approach to tackle the increasing risk of wildfires?**

**6.1 Knowledge sharing and cross-cutting interest groups**

- 6.1.1 Given the wide spread of responsibility, expertise and interest in this area, an initial step could be to convene a working group of key officials from across government departments and bodies to identify roles, responsibilities and knowledge sharing opportunities.
- 6.1.2 Historic England has had positive experiences with such cross-cutting interest groups, particularly relating to Property Flood Resilience. Defra and FloodRe convene a semi-regular interest group which brings together a similar range of stakeholders. This has developed relationships across departments and other bodies, identified research gaps and informed coordinated ways of working within a complex policy area.
- 6.1.3 Convening relevant bodies to discuss fundamental issues such as responsibilities and sources of expertise would provide a foundation for the development of a future strategic approach to wildfire risk such as the development of national and regional strategies for disaster response and recovery and to boost the capacity of local services and authorities to respond. It could also build links across those departments and organisations responsible for encouraging land management practices which may need to be introduced or change to reduce the risk of fire spread.
- 6.1.4 Any cross-departmental working group should have a central point of contact with the Local Resilience Forum network and the National Fire Chiefs Council. This would avoid any potential duplication for these bodies which might otherwise need to interact with government departments individually. It is recommended that Local Resilience Forums in particular build relationships with organisations outside of their normal network, such as heritage organisations, to help them better understand the impact of wildfire across different sections of society and levels of government.

Appendix 1: Images from the Fylingdales Moor fire, August 2025



Fire damage on the hill leading up to [Lilla Cross on Lilla Howe, Fylingdales Moor](#) (List Entry No. 1010076), a Scheduled Monument that narrowly escaped the worst of the blaze. Photo – Historic England.



Vertical aerial photograph showing a scheduled later prehistoric cross-dyke and trackways in the aftermath of the wildfire. HEA\_S3556\_V\_0601 29-SEP-2025 Historic England



An example of archaeology revealed by the wildfire – while difficult to be sure, this could be the remains of a historic campsite (firepit and seat, with erosional mark created by where people had moved around). Historic England.



Vertical aerial photograph showing the scheduled World War II bombing decoy site in the aftermath of the wildfire. HEA\_S3556\_V\_0758 29-SEP-2025 Historic England



Vertical aerial photograph showing firebreaks rapidly constructed to contain the wildfire; one firebreak intersects a scheduled round barrow. Historic England