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Adapting Parks

Climate change and local authority greenspace



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Adapting Parks: Climate change and local authority greenspace

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1 Introduction

Climate change is now recognised as one of the planet's most pressing issues, affecting environments, world economies and the health of every living thing on Earth. Recent headlines tell of catastrophic bleaching of the coral colonies which make up the Great Barrier Reef melting glaciers flooding Alpine villages and low-lying Pacific islands being threatened with sea level rises.

It is currently estimated that weather-related disasters are displacing 23 million people each year and leaving many more vulnerable to poverty.

However, unlike most global impacts, which are often seen as happening to someone or somewhere else, the impacts of climate change are now being felt in our everyday lives and in the places we live. Incidents of extreme weather, flooding, illnesses relating to heat extremes, poor air quality etc. are now becoming more commonplace, making climate change a very personal experience.

The main causes of climate change are largely attributed to increasing concentrations of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere such as carbon dioxide and methane. These greenhouse gases act like a blanket, trapping heat and warming the Earth. This situation has been caused mainly by human activities over the past 250 years through the burning of fossil fuels for energy, growing global levels of industrial processes, and large-scale global deforestation. While natural factors such as volcanic eruptions and orbital changes can influence climate, however, the current rapid rate of warming is believed to be largely attributable to human activities.



Brown Coal Power Station, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, Europe

Thankfully, some national governments are beginning to take a stand against the causes of climate change by looking to reduce their carbon emissions through changes to industrial processes and activities. They are also looking at how our natural assets can help absorb greater levels of carbon, known as sequestration, thereby reducing levels of carbon emissions to the atmosphere.

In a highly urbanised country like the UK, where nearly 85% of the population resides in towns and cities which are major sources of carbon emissions the importance of green spaces is increasingly being recognised for their role in absorbing and ultimately helping to reduce carbon emissions.

Urban green spaces, including public parks, woodlands, cemeteries, allotments, street trees, and greenbelts, are vital resources that help communities adapt to climate change. They play a key role in managing flood risks, lowering temperatures through shade during heatwaves, and improving air quality. Beyond environmental benefits, green spaces are also widely acknowledged for their positive impact on health and well-being. As a result, the importance and value of both green and blue spaces have never been greater or more widely recognised.

As managers of many green and blue spaces, local authorities are now expected to take a lead in ensuring these spaces and the 'ecosystem services' they provide are managed in the most effective and efficient way. Ecosystem services are often described as the benefits that nature and natural processes provide to humans, encompassing everything from food, water, and timber to flood regulation, climate control, and cultural experiences like recreation and spiritual enrichment.

It should also be noted at this early stage in the briefing note, that as well as needing to try to ameliorate and combat the effects of climate change, we cannot help to recognise that linked to this is the need to protect and enhance national and global levels of biodiversity, which have equally suffered and continue to suffer from the effects of climate change and habitat loss.

1.1 The need for a new approach

Across the globe, a significant portion of urban green space is maintained as closely mown amenity grass. This type of grassland often demands high levels of maintenance and irrigation; practices that may become increasingly unsustainable as temperatures rise and droughts become more frequent. Indeed the practices used to maintain such spaces can become sources of carbon emissions through the use of petrol mowers and the industrial process used to create fertilisers and herbicides. In response, to the climatic and horticultural practices currently used, local authorities and urban land managers must rethink their approach to greenspace management. Ensuring resilience to climate change while enhancing biodiversity will be crucial, all while continuing to support the vital health and well-being benefits that green areas provide for urban communities.

One indication of the growing recognition of the need for change is the increasing introduction of species-rich grasslands and wildflower meadows, reflecting a shift toward a less managed, more naturalised approach to urban greenspace management. This is not to suggest that amenity grasslands are without value as they will continue to play an important role in supporting recreation and leisure. Rather, it highlights an evolving appreciation for how these spaces can be adapted to better address the challenges posed by climate change, while also offering more attractive and ecologically valuable habitats for pollinators and small mammals. This report will consider the benefits of such changes a little later.

Change and adaptation will be necessary. Whilst manicured lawns and well-weeded flowerbeds look attractive, these landscapes are often very water-intensive, and their high levels of maintenance do not utilise or allow nature's full adaptive potential to be recognised.

Therefore, the need to move towards wilder and more climate-resilient green spaces will undoubtedly require a culture and operational change in what we currently expect or accept as well-kept green space. This will need to be led by changing the ways in which we design and manage these spaces both now and in the future.



2 Adaptations in parks

Climate change is an evolving process. Many of its impacts are well known. Some less so. And some may not yet have become apparent. But it is safe to say that these impacts will be with us for decades, possibly even centuries. Therefore, we will need to adapt or even completely change how we manage our greenspaces.

May 2025 recorded the highest temperatures ever seen in the UK for that month. It was also one of the driest Mays in recent years. In fact, the combined months of March, April, and May 2025 marked the driest spring period since records began in 1893.

This shift to drier springs, wetter summers and milder winters has led to what some experts call '*seasonality breakdown*.'

These changes are having significant effects on plants, pollinators, and entire ecosystems. One of the most concerning consequences is the phenomenon known as *ecological mismatch*. This occurs when species do not adapt to environmental changes at the same rate. For example, some pollinators may rely on specific plants for nectar, but if those plants bloom earlier due to shifting climate conditions – before the pollinators have emerged from winter dormancy – the flowers may wither before they can be used as a food source. As a result, pollinators may go hungry, and the plants may not be effectively pollinated. This mismatch can lead to reduced fruit and seed production, which ultimately diminishes future food supplies for birds and other wildlife that depend on these resources.

In the UK, studies have shown that plants are flowering almost a month earlier than just a few decades ago. This change is mainly caused by milder winter temperatures or warmer spring's accelerating the rate of plant growth. Some experts predict that if global temperatures continue to increase at their current rate, spring in the UK could eventually start in February, furthering the potential impacts of ecological mismatch mentioned previously, but also threats from late frosts. Climate change is not only causing earlier flowering but also altering rainfall patterns. In particular, it is leading to heavier rainfall events and an increased frequency of these events, especially during the summer and autumn months. These intense rainfall occurrences are expected to become more common in the future.

The effects of these extreme rainfall events can lead to waterlogging of soil, soil erosion and nutrient leaching.

As if the above impacts weren't concerning enough, climate change – through rising temperatures and increased rainfall – is contributing to the spread of both pathogens and pests by expanding their range into areas like the UK, where colder conditions once limited their survival. The increasing occurrences of extreme weather can weaken trees and other plants making them more susceptible to pests and diseases.



Warmer, wetter winters favour soilborne pathogens like Phytophthora

As stated previously, because climate change is an evolutionary process it is not having the same level of effect in all areas across the UK. However, bearing in mind the known and potential impacts, perhaps now is the time to start to consider how green space professionals look at how to adapt and possibly change the way our greenspaces are managed.

Local authorities are beginning to develop adaptation plans, or sometimes known as Landscape Succession Plans, as part of their climate change actions to prepare for specific climate impacts in their areas. These plans may involve changing planting schemes to ensure that local ecosystems can withstand changing conditions. Landscape succession planning is a process of determining and managing shifts in a landscape, whether it's a garden, park, or broader natural area, to better cope with climate change and other environmental factors. It involves assessing the current landscape, identifying vulnerabilities to climate change (e.g., Increased heat, drought, flooding), and developing strategies to adapt or mitigate these impacts Kew Botanical Gardens has developed a Landscape Succession Plan that acts as a blueprint for urban spaces, botanic, and public gardens, with a focus on identifying "trees of the future" and planning for geographic shifts in climate suitability.¹

A local authority's landscape succession plan outlines how they will manage and adapt their green spaces to ensure their long-term health and biodiversity, especially in the face of climate change and other environmental pressures. The plan is a proactive approach to maintaining and

¹ <https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/landscape-succession-plan>

improving the quality of public landscapes, encompassing tree management, biodiversity strategies, and promoting sustainable practices.

The plan can be divided into a number of key components:

Purpose and Scope

- **Adaptation:**
- Landscape succession planning addresses the need to adapt to changing environmental conditions, such as increased temperatures, altered rainfall patterns, and the spread of pests and diseases.
- **Long-term Vision:**
- It focuses on the future health and resilience of green spaces, ensuring they remain valuable assets for the community.
- **Integration:**
- It often involves integrating with other policies like tree management plans and biodiversity strategies.

Key Elements

- **Planting for the Future:**
- This involves selecting tree species and other plants that are resilient to future climate conditions and contribute to biodiversity.
- **Biodiversity Enhancement:**
- The plan aims to improve the diversity of plant and animal life within the landscape.
- **Sustainable Practices:**
- It incorporates sustainable landscaping techniques, such as water conservation, reduced pesticide use, and the use of native plants.
- **Monitoring and Review:**
- Regular monitoring of the landscape and the effectiveness of the plan is crucial, with adjustments made as needed.

2.1 Trees: Future proofing our long-term assets

In response to climate change and increasing biodiversity opportunities, many local authorities are undertaking large scale tree planting programmes across the UK.

However, Spring 2025 has been a difficult time for many young trees planted due to long spells of hot weather and low levels of rainfall. With this in mind, there are a number of actions we may need to consider helping protect their ongoing health and resilience.

One of the most obvious is: right tree, right place. A common enough phrase but one which now has another consideration: adaptability of the tree to changing climatic conditions.

Due to their long-life span, some trees may be slow to adapt to the changing climate conditions we are predicting in the future, such as hotter and drier summers and wetter warmer winters.

Therefore, many of the trees we are planting now will encounter a changing and much different climate by the time they reach maturity. Dealing with these changes may well stress those trees which are unable to adapt, making them susceptible to diseases and pests. Drought is also likely to become an ever more present threat to our trees, woods and forests as our climate changes. Some of those trees identified at most risk include oaks, hollies and acers.

Therefore, there is a need to identify which trees will be able to not only deal with the current conditions of climate change, but also warmer and wetter conditions in the future. It will be important, indeed essential, that any woodland creation or restocking programmes assess the potential for changing local conditions over the lifespan of the trees being planted.

There is a great deal of useful information to be found which can help to identify which trees are most likely to cope with changing climatic conditions.

Forest Research's Ecological Site Classification system can help local authorities and other land managers identify the best trees for both current soil and site factors as well as predicted future climate suitability. The Right Trees for a Changing Climate database supports species choice in an urban environment where a range of characteristics may be important.

Modern technology, including climate modelling and species mapping, is playing a crucial role in identifying tree species that could serve as future alternatives to native trees struggling to cope with the UK's changing climate. Recent modelling has highlighted regions such as the Hyrcanian Forest of Iran and Azerbaijan, parts of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico, areas of continental Europe and the Mediterranean, as well as the Eurasian steppe, as promising sources of climate-resilient plant material suitable for the UK. For example, research conducted at Kew Gardens suggests that the English oak is likely to face increased stress from rising temperatures and prolonged droughts. However, oak trees grown from seeds sourced in regions like the Eurasian steppe have shown natural resilience to these conditions. This insight is vital, as it allows for the introduction of more climate-resilient tree species into the UK without significantly altering the traditional character of its landscapes.

As well as considering the types of trees we grow in the future, we can still try to protect our existing tree stocks through tried and tested horticultural practices, such as:

- Ensuring large trees are regularly watered, particularly during times of drought. Some authorities are looking to volunteers to take on this role.
- Regular weeding to prevent plants around the tree roots competing for water.
- Where the soil is cracked, make sure young trees are in contact with the soil to avoid damage to exposed roots and to reduce evaporation so that they can extend their root systems in search of water. This can be achieved by firming up the soil around the roots to fill in any cracks.
- Mulching can be helpful in controlling both competing weed growth and maintaining soil moisture immediately around the plant; this is especially relevant where bare earth is present at the planting location. Mulching can also be done as a response to drought by preventing water loss through evaporation.

Protecting our existing trees is essential – especially in urban areas where mature trees play a vital role. Replacing them with new plantings cannot replicate the ecosystem services that established trees provide. Research shows that an 80-year-old tree delivers environmental benefits up to ten times more effectively than a 20-year-old tree, highlighting the irreplaceable value of mature trees in our cities.



1000 year old oak tree down a country lane

2.2 Flowers and shrubs: Urban parks and gardens

It should be remembered that climate change will not only affect our trees, but it will also impact on the flowers and shrubs we plant and grow in our urban spaces, such as parks, allotments and domestic gardens.

Many of our traditional plants are water hungry because they have been planted to cope with a climate where predictable patterns of rainfall and heat have occurred (seasons). These plants have generally become the mainstays of our parks and gardens. It has been observed that some are now beginning to struggle to varying degrees due to increased drought and extreme levels of rainfall, these include: fuchsias, hydrangeas, roses, anemones, astilbes, ferns, heuchera, phlox, dahlias, hosta, rudbeckia, rhododendron, magnolia and camelias.

It appears many of these plants are suffering from either a lack of water, heat damage or both. In some cases, early flowering is also affecting the level of pollination they are receiving.

This list is not exhaustive. But what it does show is that many of the nation's favourite flowers and shrubs could be at risk. Therefore, greater care and higher levels of monitoring may be needed in order to ensure they remain healthy.

To address these worries, many gardeners and greenspaces managers are beginning to look at other options and alternatives, the most common being Mediterranean drought tolerant plants. Whilst not intended to replace native UK or UK style planting schemes, these 'drought tolerant plants can help in those areas of the UK where more traditional flowers and shrubs are struggling and will increasingly struggle as climate change impacts increase.

Below are some of the trees and plants being considered:

Trees: Olive Tree (*Olea europaea*), Italian Cypress

Shrubs: Lavender, Bougainvillea, Oleander, Rosemary, Star Jasmine

Flowers: Salvia, Geraniums, Sea Holly, Euphorbia, Artemisia, Lamb's Ear, Santolina, Verbena, Sedum, Agapanthus, Geums.

2.3 Drought resilience

Drought is a recurring theme among the various impacts of climate change. In the UK, drought typically refers to periods lasting weeks rather than the extended dry spells seen in hotter regions. Even so, drought has not traditionally been common in the UK. Nevertheless, due to climate change, it is becoming increasingly frequent and is expected to occur more often in the future. As a result, incorporating drought-tolerant plants and adopting drought-resilient planting strategies is a sensible and forward-thinking approach for the design and maintenance of future parks and gardens across the UK.

Should greenspace managers consider the use of drought-tolerant plants then there is a real need to ensure that the sourcing of such plants, particularly if they are from outside their region or the UK, has been certified safe to do so. This can be done by checking that trees or plants are sourced from suppliers who meet the requirements set out in the Plant Health Management Standard², such as by being a member of the Plant Healthy Certification Scheme³ or by obtaining a successful Ready to Plant assessment⁴. In this way we can be sure the trees and plants are disease and pest free and suitable for planting in our parks and gardens.

² <https://planthealthy.org.uk/resources/plant-health-management-standard-1-1-2-2-2>

³ <https://planthealthy.org.uk/>

⁴ <https://readytoplant.fera.co.uk/>

2.3.1 *RHS Gardens – Hyde Hall, Essex*

Part of the RHS gardens at Hyde Hall in Essex contains a dry garden which hasn't been artificially watered in 22 years. The garden is planted with drought tolerant plants that have are able to withstand heatwaves and hold soils together during heavy rainfall.

Many of the plants grown in this garden may have potential in urban parks as the impacts of climate change increase.

3 Beyond parks

Local authorities manage a wide variety of greenspaces beyond urban parks and gardens, such as road verges, open spaces, cemeteries, recreational and amenity spaces. Here too, the impacts of climate change are being felt. For example, summer browning of grassed areas is occurring, which can be a sign of drought stress because of grasses conserving water and energy.

Many local authorities are now focusing on these areas to tackle climate change and enhance biodiversity. UK grasslands are estimated to store around two billion tonnes of carbon in their soils. Increasing the variety of plants and grasses in these spaces can significantly boost carbon uptake. This is because different species have varying root depths, allowing them to access water and nutrients more efficiently than short-mown amenity grass, which typically has shallow roots. In times of drought, these shallow-rooted grasses struggle to reach deeper water reserves. In contrast, the diverse root systems found in more natural grasslands support a healthier soil ecosystem and improve resilience to environmental stresses like drought.

Grasslands, when surrounded by different habitats such as hedge, scrub, woodland and even bare ground, can support a rich community of wildlife, and many local authorities are now managing their grasslands in a more naturalised way to take advantage of the climate change and biodiversity benefits they bring.



Mesnes Park Newton-le-Willows , St.Helens Merseyside

Complementing this work is the decision by many local authorities to include wildflower planting as part of this grassland naturalisation approach, bringing additional benefits to pollinators, insects, birds and other small mammals.

APSE has produced a guidance note/report on the value of naturalising grasslands and creating wildflower meadows which you can access [here](#).⁵

In addition, there is also a training course on this area of work for which again a link can be found at the end of this report.

⁵ <https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2025/25-02-grassland-management/>

4 Local case studies

Projects across the country are demonstrating that local authorities are beginning to adapt their planting regimes to reflect the need to make them more resilient to climate change.

In urban parks and across the wider local authority area, planting choices are shifting to address climate change, focusing on resilience and adaptability as well as increasing opportunities for biodiversity. These changes include selecting plants from warmer climates, incorporating more native species, and diversifying planting mixes to enhance the ecosystem's ability to withstand changing climatic conditions.

4.1 Wakefield Council

The Council is actively enhancing its green spaces within its city centre with new, more sustainable flower beds.

Their latest project is 'Wakefield One' flower beds. This bed consists of plants that, once established, are self-sufficient in terms of watering. This is now a theme they are replicating across the district.

To date, they have created 8 new flower beds that aim to capture carbon dioxide and releasing clean oxygen. This is complemented by 20 new trees in the town centre to improve the air quality as part of their urban greening projects. They also operate their own greenhouse, allowing them to grow and propagate plants in-house. This not only reduces plant delivery vehicle emissions but also generates significant cost savings for the Council.

The Council's recent transition to fully battery-powered equipment for mowing, leaf blowing, strimming, and hedge cutting further contributes to cleaner air and reduces noise pollution. Finally, they feel they have vastly improved their biodiversity levels in the city centre with the introduction of the new flower beds.

4.2 Highland Council

The Council is introducing more wildflower/naturalised areas, feeling that these types of types of plants are more resilient to heavy rain periods, lengthy drought spells, and can regenerate after any wildfires.

Their bedding schemes are now being chosen on a year-to-year basis and many traditional water hungry species are falling by the wayside.

The Planning Department is currently looking to diversify tree species used within new builds after consultations with the Amenities Department with regards to future resilience.

4.3 North East Derbyshire District Council

The council is introducing several changes regarding combatting the effects of climate change and increasing biodiversity in their greenspaces.

On some of their sites, they are reducing the frequency of mowing and allowing these sites to naturalise. They have also been participating in No Mow May on select sites since 2023. On these sites they have installed signage which is being used as a soft engagement method to seek public comments, particularly in support of extended reduced mowing on the site and test the waters for any objections. Where there is public access, they are mowing paths through the grassed area and/or mowing adjacent paths to ensure pedestrian access is unaffected.

They are also undertaking tree and hedgerow planting on suitable open spaces to increase wildlife corridors.

With regards to new tree planting, the Council's preference is still native or naturalised species. However, they are considering non-native species which may be more appropriate for planting in order to increase resilience against climate change and reduce the impacts of pests & disease. They are also establishing community orchards, normally on semi-dwarf rooting stock, to increase biodiversity and benefit the community; these fruit trees will mature sooner than other (ornamental) species, delivering flowers/fruit to support pollinators and other species.

The Council is also moving from seasonal bedding twice a year (summer and spring) to perennial planting in floral display beds, extending the flowering season and reducing the environmental impacts (waste) of planting up which will also deliver long-term cost savings. Some of the Council's display beds were made 100% perennial in 2024, with others a mixture of perennial and annual planting. Further perennial planting has been undertaken during 2025. Perennial schemes include evergreen plants, using a mix of native and non-native species for resilience, visual amenity and biodiversity, with preference given to plants/flowers on RHS Plants for Pollinators lists.

Finally, water retention granules are being used in tubs/flower towers.

4.4 Wirral Council

The Council has developed a Hedgerow and Woodland Strategy (2020-2030) with 3 key aims: to participate, protect and plant. The Council has engaged with local communities and key partners to help plant over 21,000 trees each year for the next decade, based on the principle of right tree, right place. As well as the participation of these stakeholders, Wirral Council is also ensuring that, as well as planting new trees, they are also protecting established trees, due to the understanding that new saplings do not provide the same environmental benefits as fully mature trees with the view that retention is better than planting.

Wirral Council has also recognised the importance of sourcing trees from well-established nurseries to protect against disease and pests. In fact, they are intending to take this one step further by establishing their own tree nursery, recognising that saplings may be hard to come by as demand across the UK increases due to national tree planting schemes. At the same time, this means the Council's trees will have local provenance.

By taking the above approach Wirral Council hopes to nurture a diverse and resilient stock of trees of varying ages and species, supported by other planting such as hedgerows. This work will see Wirral's tree canopy rise from the current 13% to 25% by 2030.

4.5 Kent County Council

The Council has had to adapt its Highways Landscape Management because of the impacts of climate change which is increasingly influencing the way they manage these areas.

One of the most noticeable effects has been the extension of the growing season, with grass now requiring cutting from mid-March through to the end of November. This prolonged period of growth is driven by milder temperatures and increased rainfall, resulting in more frequent maintenance cycles and placing additional pressure on their landscape contractors.

In parallel, they are experiencing a rise in the frequency and intensity of storm events, particularly involving wind and heavy rainfall. These conditions have led to a higher incidence of tree failures, increasing both the safety risks and the volume of emergency response work.

The combination of warmer, wetter conditions has also led to greater weed proliferation and perennials overwintering which is requiring more intensive and sustained control efforts, and what was once considered a short-term fluctuation, now appears to be a persistent and long-term trend. These issues mean not only an increase in operational costs, but it also adds to the environmental and logistical challenges of maintaining roadside vegetation. Overall, these climate-related changes are placing a sustained pressure on Kent County Council's resources – from staffing and equipment to budgets and planning capacity.

However, in an attempt to minimise the impact of the changing weather patterns, the Council has become more flexible with their contracts and the timing of works. Where they use to carry out one shrub bed visit over the Autumn/Winter period they now taper visits which commence in July to tackle the increased growth and in some instances increase these visits if safety is an issue. Grass cutting/weed treatment also can be delayed or advanced.

The Council is also looking at their overall highway greenspace asset to determine what areas need to be prioritised or could become a safety issue and bring this forward in programmes. For instance, they will treat weeds on their coastal areas before they go inland because due to the microclimate weeds start becoming a problem quite early in the year.

The machinery that their contractors use has also changed with most of the grass cutting operations – both urban and rural – being completed with flail mowers that can better cope with increased growth.

Finally, their tree planting is based around a “right tree right place” philosophy and this now includes species selection for drier conditions or thin soils. The watering regime for newly, planted trees has also changed so that they have an increased frequency in the first year to ensure better establishment rates.

These case studies demonstrate that a range of approaches, implemented at various scales, are being used to mitigate the impacts of climate change. While many initiatives are still in their early stages, local authorities are beginning to reassess and adapt their traditional planting schemes. They are not only addressing climate-related challenges but also recognising the potential of these changes to enhance and support biodiversity.

5 Private gardens

'We have more garden area in UK than all National Parks combined, so what gardeners do really does matter' - Dr Chloe Sutcliffe, Sustainability Fellow, RHS⁶

Many local authorities are now looking beyond their own green space assets and are beginning to provide advice to their residents on how they too can help address both climate change impacts and increase biodiversity by making small improvements and changes to their private gardens at home.

Just growing plants in front gardens can help reduce rainwater run-off that contributes to flooding, increase biodiversity by providing habitat and food for wildlife, and increase the opportunities for air quality improvement and carbon storage in the local environment.

The reason for highlighting 'front gardens' is that increasingly there has been a decline in front gardens nationally due to the amount which have been paved over to allow off street parking. Perversely, this situation has increased due to the introduction of electric cars and the installation of charging points on the side of houses.

As well as the potential of increasing runoff in times of heavy rainfall, as paving is often not porous, it also reduces opportunities for biodiversity and increases the heat island effect in densely populated areas.

The Royal Horticultural Society has estimated that a considerable number of front gardens are now paved, with one in four fully paved, and a further one in three having no plants growing in them at all.

Solutions to address the issues raised by increased paving of front gardens are being put forward, including:

- The use of gravel, permeable concrete, or other materials that allow rainwater to drain through.
- Raising awareness about the environmental benefits of green front gardens and the negative consequences of paving.
- Supporting initiatives that encourage homeowners to rewild their front gardens by planting wildflowers and other native plants.
- Exploring the possibility of implementing planning policies that restrict the conversion of front gardens to hard surface.
- Some local authorities, as part of their climate change and biodiversity promotion, actions, are making it their mission to encourage homeowners to make simple changes that help achieve the above aims.

⁶ <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/articles/greening-cities>

With regards to making gardens, both front and back, more environmentally friendly and climate resilient, suggestions include promoting practices like planting native and climate-appropriate plants, using organic gardening methods, and conserving water.

Below is a more detailed breakdown:

Choose Climate-Appropriate Plants

Select plants that are well-suited to the expected climate conditions, including increased temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns.

Reduce Hard Landscaping

As this can help regulate temperatures, absorb rainwater, and provide habitat for wildlife.

Create your own Compost and avoid peat-based composts

Peatlands are vital carbon stores and peat extraction is damaging these areas. By making your own compost from garden and kitchen waste or by using peat-free compost, this will help protect these areas and reduce your own waste.

Use Natural Fertilizers

Consider using natural fertilizers like seaweed extract or homemade nettle fertilizer.

Conserve water

By collecting rainwater in water butts this will reduce the reliance on mains water and choose plants that are adapted to lower water needs and drought conditions.

Avoid Chemicals

Reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and herbicides, as they can harm beneficial insects and other wildlife.

Leave Some Areas Wild

Allow parts of your garden to go wild, creating a natural habitat for insects and other wildlife.

6 Conclusion

Recent experience in the UK and around the world has shown the dramatic impacts that periods of extreme weather can have on trees, plants and the wider environment. Greenspace Managers are increasingly faced with the growing impacts of climate change and the multiple threats it brings and there is therefore an urgent need to start to address these challenges.

The threat of seasonality breakdown is a particular worry with natural cycles going out of sync and the potential risks to the required pollination levels for plant productivity and sustainability, perhaps even more of a worry for farmers and the food industry in general.

There may now be a need for a change of approach regarding the trees and plants we grow in the future and the way we manage our green spaces via a more naturalised style of horticulture. Therefore, as greenspace managers, we must look at more environmentally sustainable gardening and greenspace management.

We must explore and properly source new trees and plants that can thrive in warmer climates, look to reduce our use of water in preparation for more periods of drought and consider alternative greenspace management approaches such as the naturalisation of spaces to reduce the impacts of climate change and increase opportunities for biodiversity. From a more day-to-day operational perspective, we need to consider a move away from petrol driven machinery, reduce our use of fertilisers and chemicals, maintain the move towards peat-free products and ensure our procurement policies are environmentally friendly.

Urban greenspaces play a crucial role in addressing the impacts of climate change and supporting biodiversity. They provide a wide range of environmental benefits, including flood mitigation, improved air quality, temperature regulation, and carbon sequestration. Beyond these ecological services, greenspaces also contribute significantly to public health and well-being, deliver economic value, and enhance overall quality of life – particularly in densely populated urban areas.

Yet despite all these globally acknowledged benefits these spaces continue to be under threat from a variety of sources, such as housebuilding, industrial development and road building. Therefore, there is a broader need to ensure future planning policies build sufficient and sustainable greenspace into any future developments and equally ensure sufficient resources are made available to allow these spaces to be sustainably maintained.

Darryl Moore author of 'Gardening in a Changing World- Plants, People and the Climate Crisis' (2022) stated, 'Working more wisely with plants will prepare us for confronting the challenges of the future'.

Climate Change is something humans have brought upon themselves over the last two centuries, through our inbuilt desire to be 'top dog', to be the best at everything, control nature, to prove our superior intelligence and authority over everything around us. We see ourselves apart from the very natural cycles which brought us into being. We need to recalibrate and step back into those natural cycles and begin to acknowledge our place in the world. Plants will help us to make that journey by continuing to provide food, shelter, medicines and succour.

We are as a species beginning to reach a 'tipping -point'. but, thankfully, we do seem to be acknowledging the need for change. The role of the greenspace manager in all of this is to ensure the sustainability of the multiple benefits greenspaces bring and to manage and nurture the future of these spaces by looking after what we currently have in a more environmentally friendly and sustainable manner to ensure these current and future benefits are deliverable.

How can APSE help?

All APSE members can sign up to APSE's Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Network, which is an online network providing four learning events across the year, with expert speakers from across local government and the wider parks and greenspace sector. You can sign up to the network using [this link](#).

Training

APSE Training has also designed several special interactive online course for parks professionals:

1. **Wildflower Meadows and Grasslands Management for Local Authorities.** This training course will look at adopting different grassland management techniques, including wildflower planting schemes, which can be implemented at a much faster rate, with similar benefits to tree planting. You can book your place on the course [here](#).
2. **Making Space for Nature in our Burial Grounds and Churchyards.** The course will look in depth at the challenges of gaining acceptance to naturalise areas of burial grounds and the approaches some local authorities have taken to successfully overcome such challenges to improve opportunities for biodiversity in these spaces. You can book your place on the course [here](#).
3. **Biodiversity Net Gain: Preparing Parks Professionals.** This training has been specifically designed to familiarise parks and greenspaces colleagues with this legislation. Through a variety of interactive activities, learners will have the opportunity to gather information and discuss strategies for practical application. You can book your place [here](#).

Benchmarking

APSE Performance Networks is the largest voluntary public sector benchmarking organisation in the UK. With over 200 authorities in membership, Performance Networks assists local councils by:

- Demonstrating progression on carbon reduction/ecological actions
- Helping to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Identifying the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local authorities and for others.
- Assessing the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis.
- Helping to report data in meaningful ways to both elected members and the public.
- Identifying direction of travel and pace of change with regard to service delivery.
- Identifying inefficiencies such as poor productivity and high cost.
- Supporting service improvement through process benchmarking and sharing best practice examples.

For more information about how your parks service can benefit from Performance Networks membership, click [here](#).

Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular network meetings, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE Network meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national networks include:-

- FM and Building cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Armed Forces and Veterans Network
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more details.



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