

Be prepared: the UK should act now to adapt to climate change

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The independent body that advises government on climate adaptation (the Adaptation Sub-Committee) today published the first national assessment of how well prepared the UK is for climate change. The report concludes that, with the impacts of climate change already being felt in the UK, people must start preparing now.

Climate change is already having an impact in the UK. Since the 1970s, average annual temperatures have risen by 1°C, and Spring arrives 11 days earlier. These impacts are likely to increase as a result of future climate change, with the incidence of extreme weather events such as floods, heat-waves and droughts becoming more frequent. The UK needs to start taking action to prepare for these impacts, ensuring that we have the resilience to cope with climate change.

The Committee stressed that adaptation is not an alternative to mitigation but complements our continued and essential efforts to reduce emissions by 80% in 2050. Adaptation is about adjusting the way that we do things to ensure that we are prepared.

The Committee found that some progress has been made by government in raising awareness, but crucially, that very little tangible action has taken place on the ground. The emphasis should therefore now be on moving from talking about adaptation to taking action in 5 priority areas:

- 1. Land use planning** – locating properties, infrastructure and green space strategically e.g. not building new homes on flood-plains, maximising use of green space in cities to help manage surface water drainage and to cope with rising temperatures and heat waves.

2. **Infrastructure** – designing infrastructure (power stations, roads and railways, water treatment works and flood barriers) with climate change in mind, to ensure that it can cope with rising temperatures and is resilient to storms, floods and droughts, and changing patterns of consumer demand.
3. **Buildings** – designing and renovating homes and buildings so they can cope with rising temperatures and droughts/ floods.
4. **Natural resources** – managing natural resources sustainably by using water more efficiently, setting up ecological networks and habitat bridges so that species can adapt and move as the climate changes; and making space for water along rivers and the coast.
5. **Emergency planning** – planning and risk management so that emergency services can better cope with natural disasters e.g. floods. For example, using weather forecasts to anticipate extreme weather events, ensuring care is available for vulnerable people during floods or heat waves e.g. the elderly.

Recent research suggests that taking measures to adapt to climate change could halve costs of climate change, and that the costs of failing to adapt will outweigh the costs of acting in the short term.

In addition, the UK stands to benefit from new economic opportunities if it plans for these now. For example, lengthened growing seasons will make growing exotic crops like apricots, walnuts, champagne and wine more viable. UK businesses could benefit by developing products and services that will be required in the retrofit of old buildings and to improve the resilience of supply chains.

Chair of the Adaptation Sub-Committee on Climate Change, Lord John Krebs:

“The UK must start acting now to prepare for climate change. If we wait, it will be too late. It is not necessarily about spending more, but about spending smart and investing to save. If we get it right, we can save money in the short term and avoid large extra costs in the future. The time has come to move from talking to acting”.

Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Caroline Spelman said:

“Climate change is an absolute priority for this Government. The UK is committed to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, but must also accept that some climate change is inevitable and already happening.

“The effects of this – such as heavy rainfall and flooding, heat-waves, and droughts – present a real challenge to infrastructure and business continuity. So in Defra we want to help communities and businesses prepare now in order to cope with the challenges which lie ahead.”

In 2011 the Sub-Committee will provide develop a further assessment of preparedness against this more detailed monitoring framework, together with formal advice on the Climate Change Risk Assessment, as required in the Climate Change Act.

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Notes to Editors

- The [ASC's report: "How well prepared is the UK for climate change?"](#) is available to download online. It is the 1st national assessment of the UK's preparedness.
- [Adaptation](#) is our response to climate change and relates to how we address the risks and exploit the opportunities that a changing climate presents.
- The [Adaptation Sub-Committee \(ASC\)](#) is a sub-committee of the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), established under the Climate Change Act 2008. The ASC is an independent statutory body that provides advice to Government to ensure that their programme for adaptation enables the UK to prepare effectively for the impacts of climate change.
- The ASC is Chaired by Lord John Krebs. Other [expert members of the Committee](#) are: Graham Wynne, Professor Jim Hall, Dr. Samuel Fankhauser, Dr. Andrew Dlugolecki, Baroness Barbara Young, Professor Martin Parry, Professor Anne Johnson and Professor Tim Palmer.

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