



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

## Welsh Government: Draft Climate Change Adaptation Delivery Plan for Wales

### Icon response

1 March 2019

The Institute of Conservation, Icon, welcomes the Welsh Government's consultation on the [Draft Climate Change Adaptation Delivery Plan for Wales](#) and fully supports measures to prepare for the impacts of climate change. We believe the cultural heritage conservation sector holds considerable potential to inform and encourage action to address the effects of a changing climate.

Icon is a registered charity and the professional body for the conservation of our cultural heritage. Icon raises awareness of the cultural, social and economic value of caring for heritage and champions high standards of conservation. We represent nearly 3,000 individuals and organisations comprising professional conservators, heritage scientists and many others who share a commitment to improving understanding of and access to our cultural heritage.

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### 2. Overall, to what extent do you agree with the potential actions for adapting to climate change set out in this document? (1=completely agree, 5=completely disagree)

1 2 3 4 5

#### Please explain the reasons for your answer:

Icon agrees with the plan's strategic approach to adapting to the impacts of climate change. We have focused our comments on actions related to our area of expertise, i.e. the section on 'Protecting our heritage' and 'Caring for the historic environment.'

While we welcome the plan's recognition of the value that heritage brings to communities and people, we find its definition of heritage narrow. The plan discusses the risk of climate change to heritage exclusively in the sense of built heritage or the historic environment. This ignores the risk that a changing climate poses on moveable heritage and misses an opportunity to employ collections and their conservators in helping communities to adapt to climate change.

Many heritage buildings derive an element of their significance from their contents, whether they are museums, galleries, historic houses, cathedrals or churches. Similarly, sites, landscapes and gardens may owe some of their significance to outdoor sculptures. Accordingly, we recommend a broader view of heritage that considers risk to both immovable and moveable heritage is incorporated into the plan.

While built heritage is inherently more exposed to climatic changes, collections and objects housed indoors – in museums, archives, libraries, historic houses, etc. – are also vulnerable. Extremes and fluctuations in temperature and humidity, increased rain, drought and flood risk, stronger levels of light and pollutants, new pests and physical forces can risk heritage assets by impacting the interiors in which they are stored or displayed.

Professional conservator-restorers mitigate the risk to collections and objects through the management of environmental conditions. However, there is an inherent tension between creating ideal environmental conditions and the need to reduce energy use.

For example, the use of air conditioning and other high energy cost systems is not consistent with aims to reduce our carbon footprint. Although most practitioners welcome the move towards using passive environmental controls where possible this must be balanced against the knowledge that more relaxed environmental specifications could lead to faster deterioration rates and increased requirement for conservation treatment in the future. More support for research and innovation is needed in this area to broaden our understanding of the range of balanced solutions for preserving heritage in environmentally sustainable ways.

Improved understanding of the impacts of climate change on collections and objects should be incorporated into research programmes. Icon calls on the government and funders to support further research around lower energy solutions for managing environmental conditions, developing more intelligent environmental standards for collections and developing damage functions for a wider range of materials to allow modelling of different climate change conditions.

### **3. Please tell us if you have any ideas for how we should deliver the potential actions for adapting to climate change**

Icon agrees that the delivery of the potential actions will require cross-sector input.

The heritage sector has potential to support safe, resilient and environmentally sustainable homes and places through its traditional and craft skills and expertise. Traditional building methods can boost the long-term resilience of homes and infrastructure. Research indicates that traditional materials and techniques may be more resilient and recover more quickly from effects of climate change, such as flooding. Traditionally constructed buildings can also cope well under a warming climate. Craft practice is rooted in the idea of longevity and lasting quality and often uses traditional materials, which have a track record of being durable and having a low carbon footprint. Employing traditional and craft skills can result in products that are more robust and easier to maintain and repair.

Icon calls on government, planning and local authorities and developers to consult the cultural heritage sector in the design and adaptation of homes and buildings and to make use of its traditional and craft skills. The use of traditional skills can not only support more resilient infrastructure, but also help safeguard the skills themselves, which are an important living cultural tradition and integral part of our intangible heritage.

### **4. We strongly believe everybody has a role to play in adapting to climate change. What ideas do you have to adapt and contribute to our objectives?**

Conservator-restorers and heritage scientists should be involved in measures to make heritage – whether built or moveable – more resilient. These professionals possess the skills to identify and monitor effects of climate change as they understand the chemical and physical properties of materials and recognise evidence and causes of change. Their appreciation of the various values of heritage means they can ensure mitigation and adaptation measures are sympathetic to the significance of heritage. Conservator-restorers naturally promote the sustainable use of resources, reinforcing the need to care for, rather than replace, assets.

Icon recommends a holistic approach to climate change adaptation that draws on the conservation sector's internationally-renowned expertise and experience. Icon's Conservation Register can help stakeholders source professionally qualified conservator-restorers. Each practice selected for the Conservation Register completes a rigorous application process run by Icon and is led by a conservator-restorer who meets the standards required.

Icon is pleased that the National Lottery Heritage Fund has made environmental sustainability a key policy area, expecting all applicants to take steps to reduce their negative environmental impacts. We hope that the Welsh government will encourage other sector funders and bodies to embed environmental sustainability aims within their strategies.

## **5. What else can Welsh Government do to improve communication around the risks and impacts of climate change and the need for adaptation?**

Icon urges the Welsh Government to employ diverse channels to communicate climate change to a wide range of stakeholders and the public.

We believe that heritage can be an accessible resource for understanding and communicating the impact of climate change and adaptation strategies. Collections data can provide a benchmark for monitoring change, help make informed predictions and analyse the consequences of climate change. Natural history collections help scientists to draft future scenarios by forecasting whether and how organisms will be vulnerable to environmental change. Notebooks compiled by past naturalists are being used to map changes in the progress of seasons, temperatures and in species. Records, archives and paintings describing and illustrating past landscapes can effectively engage the public in understanding changes in the environment and convince even the most sceptical of the realities and urgency of climate change.

Engaging heritage organisations and sites in the conversation on communicating climate change would be valuable. The museums sector has a wealth of good practice examples that the heritage sector could draw upon with support from government and funders, for example, Climate Museum UK – a mobile museum creatively inspiring responses to climate change. Supporting or commissioning heritage bodies to run environmental projects could encourage wider participation across society and enable messages to resonate with a broader audience.

In England, Julie's Bicycle was established as a charity based on the belief that the arts and culture community is uniquely placed to transform the conversation around climate change and translate it into action. The charity aims to equip cultural professionals and artists with the knowledge and confidence to speak out and together on climate change, using their creativity to influence one another, audiences, and the wider movement. The Fit for the Future network aims to support its members to become climate friendly, adaptive and resilient through improved communication and collaboration. The network supports over 100 charities, heritage organisations and cultural venues to share best practice examples and practical solutions. These holistic approaches to communicating climate change could be used as models for the Welsh cultural sector.

## **6. How can you contribute to communicating the risks and impacts of climate change and the need for adaptation?**

Icon will continue to promote the positive role heritage can play in informing responses to and communicating climate change and encourage its members to think sustainably about their work.

## **7. How do you think the potential actions to adapt to climate change might affect you or the organisation you work for?**

Engaging the cultural heritage sector in climate change action can inspire Icon's members to embed environmental sustainability into their operations and practice. Empowering the conservation sector with an active role in addressing climate change can occasion a culture change in working practices, for example by encouraging people to make sustainable choices in terms of the materials used in conservation and restoration projects.

## **8. How do you think the potential actions in this plan might affect the following?**

- **Public health**
- **Communities**
- **The Welsh language**
- **Equality**
- **Children's rights**

Icon is not responding to this question.

**9. How do you think the potential actions to adapt to climate change might contribute to achieving the national well-being goals? You can read descriptions of the goals at <https://futuregenerations.wales/about-us/futuregenerations-act>**

Icon is not responding to this question.

**10. Do you have any other comments about this consultation?**

Icon welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation and wholeheartedly supports the Welsh Government's ambitions to create a resilient Wales by preparing for the impacts of climate change.

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Links to further information:

Icon website <https://icon.org.uk/>