

Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation Strategy

Summary

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Strategy summary

Why we need this strategy

The climate emergency remains the challenge of our time, and time is running out. The best action we can take is to cut our emissions as quickly as possible. We already have a plan to do this, with an ambition to be a carbon neutral borough by 2030.

However, we also know that our climate is changing now, and it is changing fast. In its most recent report (March 2023), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) made its starkest warning yet on the urgency and the scale of action. The report showed not enough progress is being made by world leaders and estimated that current policies would see global temperature increases exceed 1.5°C, reaching around 3.2°C by 2100. National projections show we are locked-in to experiencing extreme weather such as heat and flooding, risks to our water and food supply as well as new pests and diseases.

We have to respond to the science and act urgently to prepare Southwark for the future. Our strategy is the first step towards doing this, it will get Southwark climate ready by creating a framework to protect our communities, homes, infrastructure and environment.

It is a strategy for the whole of the borough, and sets out how we will:

- Future-proof the borough's buildings, streets and critical infrastructure.
- Work with others to prepare, plan and respond to challenges and shocks.
- Improve the borough at the same time, such as by improving air quality and biodiversity and reducing inequalities.

The council already undertakes significant work in these areas. Such as:

- Shaping new building design in planning policy to minimise overheating.
- The management of flood risk and delivery of sustainable urban drainage schemes.
- Emergency planning that ensures a quick and effective response to support residents in times of need.
- Substantial greening and planting programmes.

This strategy recognises this ongoing work, while ensuring we are prepared for challenges that climate change will bring, as well as providing an opportunity to identify new areas of work.

What are the climate risks?

There are a range of risks and threats that will be caused by the climate emergency, many of which will overlap with one another. We have broken these down into five categories to help us target our work. We have summarised the categories below. If you would like more detail, you should look at our full strategy document, [available online](#).

The section following this one shows how we plan to address each risk.

Overheating

Overheating is where the temperature becomes too warm for us to safely continue as normal. This might be because the higher temperatures have a direct impact on physical and mental health, or it may be because the strain on public services and risks of wildfires mean that it is increasingly dangerous or unsafe.

In Southwark, as an inner-city borough, we are particularly at risk of overheating. Being too hot during heatwaves is something that many of us already struggle with, and temperatures in London are predicted to keep rising.

Flooding

Flooding is where properties, businesses and essential services are damaged by water. There are different types of flooding that we need to prepare for, such as:

- Flash floods, when there is too much water for our networks to drain away, also known as 'surface water flooding'.
- Long periods of excessive rain, which means no more water can soak into the ground. This might lead to a basement or low-lying land becoming underwater.
- Flooding from the Thames due to sea level rises, also known as 'tidal surges'.
- Pollution from our sewer network, during rainfall, into our streets and rivers.

In Southwark, we experienced major surface water flooding in July 2021. As a low-lying area we are also at risk from sea-level rises, although we are currently protected by the Thames Barrier against tidal surges.

Water scarcity

Water is an essential resource for all of us in the borough, in nearly everything that we do. However, the climate emergency threatens our vital water resources due to droughts, which means our rivers and groundwater are running dry. London already suffers from serious water stress, which means there is a need to reduce water use.

Trade and food security

We have seen in recent years, from COVID to the war in Ukraine, how global shocks have a major impact on our ability to access and afford food and other essentials here at home. Climate Change has the potential to cause similar shocks and stresses which will have major impacts to supply chains, global infrastructure and food production.

Currently, in the UK, we import around 40% of our food, meaning we will be affected by the changes happening in other countries. As food insecurity increases globally, we would expect to see price increases and increasing inequality in Southwark.

Pests and diseases

As our climate changes, we are seeing pests and diseases thrive in new and unexpected ways. These pests and diseases are a threat to us, as well as to our plants and wildlife. There are a few different types of threats:

- New species, which can now survive in a warmer UK climate, and cause damage to our native plants and wildlife.
- Increased risks to humans of diseases that are currently found in warmer countries.
- New pests and diseases, which can threaten our plants and animals, such as sudden oak death, which thrive in more moist and wet conditions.

How we're going to prepare Southwark

Our vision is for a just, equal and resilient Southwark, where all residents are protected from the changing climate and have the same opportunities to thrive in our borough. The impacts of climate change do not impact all people in the same way, and inequalities could be made worse without us taking action now.

We cannot achieve this alone, and will only do it by working with partners in London such as the Greater London Authority, London Councils and other boroughs. We will need to work with major organisations in the borough such as universities, schools and NHS trusts. We will partner with Government, the Environment Agency and others, and we will also work with local businesses, residents and all those committed to building a fairer and more sustainable Southwark.

Below are the goals and key actions we have set out to tackling each climate risk.

Overheating

We will tackle overheating by cooling buildings, providing respite from heat and preparing for extreme temperatures. This means:

- We will identify communities that are especially at risk from overheating.
- Residents can escape from extreme heat in cooler spaces, inside or outside.
- Buildings will stay cool while minimising their carbon emissions.
- The borough's infrastructure will have adapted to cope with extreme heat.

Flooding

We will reduce the risk of flooding by improving drainage, reducing the demand on the sewer system and improving our flood defences. This means:

- We will identify households that will be more at risk of flooding.
- There will be reduced surface run off and an increased amount of land that drains water.
- Demand will be reduced on the sewer system.
- Flood defences will be improved with more sustainable drainage systems.

Water scarcity

We will conserve more water and adapt our green spaces to be drought-resistant. This means:

- Improved water conservation, including greater use of rainwater.
- Parks, gardens and green spaces will be adapted to be drought resistant.

Trade and food security

We will improve food security by reducing wastage and increasing local supply. This means:

- Strengthening our local economy, with an increase in local trade reinvesting in our local economy.
- Maximised local food suppliers and local food production.
- Increased capacity for communities to share food and reduce food waste.

Pests and diseases

We will protect public health and our biodiversity from new pests and diseases. This means:

- Existing biodiversity will be protected from new pests and diseases.
- We will have an up-to-date risk register of emerging diseases as a result of climate change.

How you can take part

Every part of our borough needs to work together to make sure we are as prepared as possible for the changes in our climate.

We want to know what a resilient Southwark is from your perspective, so this plan works for the whole of the borough.

Please take the time to complete our short survey to help us understand how to make our resilience and adaptation strategy and action plan as helpful as possible for all of Southwark. You can do [complete our survey online](#).

If you would like to read more about our resilience and adaptation strategy, you can head to our [web pages](#). Here you will find:

- Our full climate change resilience and adaptation strategy
- Our draft actions, that will inform a final action plan
- A background document, to show how we have considered various international, national and regional policies and frameworks.