National Heat Risk Commission – Call for Evidence

About the Museums Association

The Museums Association (MA) is a membership organisation representing and supporting museums and people who work with them throughout the UK. Our network includes over 11,000 individual members working in all types of roles, from directors to trainees, and we represent 1,500 institutional members ranging from small volunteer-run local museums to large national institutions. Founded in 1889, the MA was the world's first professional body for museums. We lead thinking in UK museums with initiatives such as our Museums for Climate Justice campaign which empowers museums to be bold and brave in taking action, putting forward a systems change approach which focuses on climate and social justice.

Questions

1. How is extreme heat, and its companion hazards of drought or wildfire, affecting your organisation, sector and the people you work with or serve? Please tell us about impacts on your workforce, customers, service users, communities, operations, services, assets, supply chains, productivity or costs.

Some museums have offered their venues as "cool spaces", for people to find respite from the heatwaves due to them having air conditioning. Julie's Bicycle has created a map of cultural venues where people can cool down during heat waves.

However, not all museums have air conditioning in gallery spaces and installing it would have both a financial and environmental cost. Front of House staff are likely to be most affected by extreme heat in gallery spaces so some unions have requested staff be provided with additional rest breaks and that the museum increases staff rotations across gallery spaces.

This summer, a number of UK museums, particularly those that attract younger visitors, closed early during the extreme heat, including Oxford's Story Museum, London's Young V&A, the Museum of Somerset, and Stonehenge.

Partial closures took place at many other venues, with galleries shut at the British Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, Natural History Museum and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

A survey by Arts Council England found that almost all (96%) of the 296 cultural organisations who responded were affected by this summer's heatwaves. Respondents expressed their main concerns were around staff wellbeing, falling visitor numbers and financial losses.

Some objects in museums are temperature sensitive so extreme heat would pose a risk to them. High temperatures speed up chemical decay, while rapid humidity

changes can cause materials to crack. Other risks to objects could be caused by extreme heat affecting insect activity meaning species that would normally die out in the winter could make a home in the museum. It would be expensive and energy intensive for museums to control increases to heat and humidity to protect the collection and this would also be at odds with climate commitments that many museums have.

2. Are some people or communities more affected by extreme heat, drought or wildfire than others? Please tell us about any groups who may be particularly exposed or vulnerable, or who face greater barriers to preparing for and coping with extreme heat. This could include people affected because of their health, age, sex, disability, income, housing, location, occupation, access to services or other circumstances. We are also interested in whether existing responses to heat risk could create or worsen inequalities, or whether they could help reduce them.

The Museum of Homelessness has conducted investigations into how prepared homelessness systems in the UK are for the climate emergency understanding that people who are homeless are disproportionately impacted by extreme weather. Within homelessness, extreme weather is handled by an instrument called Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (Swep). The Museum of Homelessness in took direct action, activating its Heat Swep to provide support and relief to homeless people. During the hottest part of the day, from 1200 to 1700, the museum offered shade, cool indoor space, water, sunscreen, ice lollies and electrolytes to those who needed them.

3. What is your organisation doing to understand, prepare for and respond to extreme heat, and/or its companion hazards of drought or wildfire? This could include plans, policies, investment, changes to working practices, infrastructure, naturebased solutions, data or climate information, and consideration of both current and future risk.

According to research by Arts Council England (ACE), fewer than 1% of cultural organisations surveyed in England feel very prepared for future extreme heat.

The survey found that relatively few organisations had formal measures in place to prepare for extreme temperatures. Only 13% of respondents said they'd had a heatwave policy in place before this summer's heatwaves, 14% had included extreme heat in their risk registers, and under a quarter (24%) had heatwave guidance for staff.

4. What has worked well, and what have you learnt? We are interested in successful approaches, lessons from implementation, and actions that have not worked as expected.

Action taken by museums has generally been limited to basic cooling methods so a stronger and more coordinated approach is required. As an organisation, we would like to support museum to implement successful approaches to protect their communities, collections and buildings from the impacts of heatwaves.

Museums Galleries Scotland has a guide to support museums in Scotland to prepare for extreme heat events.

Julie's Bicycle has produced a Heat Adaptation Guide for Arts and Cultural Venues.

5. What tools, information, evidence or guidance do you use, and what is missing or needs to improve? This could include weather or climate data, risk assessment tools, standards, guidance, advice, good practice or decision-support tools.

Information on best practice and decision-support tools would support the sector.

The museum workforce is overstretched, and many won't have time to read lengthy reports and guidance documents so concise information would be most beneficial.

6. What barriers are preventing your organisation or sector from taking further action or delivering planned measures? For example, finance, skills, capacity, unclear responsibilities, regulation, competing priorities, organisational decision-making, uncertainty, technical constraints or difficulties moving from plans to delivery.

Lack of finance, capacity and knowledge is likely to prevent museums from taking further action.

7. What do you need from other organisations or institutions to become more resilient to extreme heat? This could include action from local, regional, national or UK governments, regulators, funders, infrastructure providers, professional bodies, suppliers or other partners.

The planting of more trees and creation of green spaces in cities would help to cool down museums in urban areas. In 2025, the National Trust announced a new mission to bring nature to towns and centres and in 2026, the Natural History Museum announced an initiative where it partners with museum around the UK to transform their grounds into green spaces and enhance biodiversity.

8. What wider changes would help your sector, communities and the UK become more resilient to increasing heat? We welcome both new ideas and perspectives on existing recommendations. Are there any policies, standards, regulations, investment priorities or other actions that you think should be considered?

Investment to adapt museum buildings to be resilient to increasing heat. Many museums are in historic and listed buildings so adaptation can be difficult and costly. Simplifying planning processes so that adaptation can take place.

9. In ten years' time, what would 'good' heat resilience look like? This could relate to your organisation, sector, communities or society. We welcome views on both the outcomes that would be desirable and those that are realistically achievable over this timeframe. 10. Is there anything else the Commission should understand or investigate?

Good heat resilience would look like:

- Museums understanding how heat affects their building.
- All museums monitoring building temperatures.
- Buildings designed to stay warm in the winter and cool in the summer.
- Flexible open hours both in terms of when museums open during the day and during the year.
- Museums approaching long-term collections care in a way that is environmentally sustainable, following the Bizot Green Protocol.
- Museums prioritising the wellbeing of staff and communities.
- Adequate investment in adaptation.
- Sustainable water supplies.
- Active collections management and disposal in museums.
- Support for civic organisations such as museums to be hubs for information, resources and cool spaces.