Bristol Climate &
Nature Partnership

EVENT SUMMARY

Weathering It Together: Climate Resilience in the West of England

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Introduction

Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership is a unique network comprised of 1,300 member organisations united by one vision: a zero-carbon, nature-rich, socially just future for our city and region.

On 6 October 2026 our Gathering, ‘Weathering it Together; climate resilience in the West of England’, brought together over 200 attendees from 132 organisations. We welcomed representatives of communities, businesses, and the public sector to explore how we can increase our region’s resilience to climate change, as a collective.

The large-scale, half-day event was sponsored by the West of England Combined Authority and Bristol Water, and hosted by We the Curious.

This summary has been produced by Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership. It is a high-level overview of the insights and perspectives shared during the event.

Resilience touches upon many different issues including food, energy, nature, health, water availability, and national security. The Gathering aimed to open the conversation and explore the opportunity for a collective approach on climate resilience. The intention was also to emphasise the need for this work to sit alongside, not instead of, action to reduce carbon emissions and restore nature, which will prevent more severe impacts in the future. Work to increase resilience willl to bring additional benefits to people, business and nature.



WHAT A CHANGING CLIMATE MEANS FOR THE WEST OF ENGLAND



In the West of England and beyond, our climate is changing. From heatwaves and floods to disrupted supply chains and infrastructure, the impacts of climate change on all our lives are already being felt and are likely to intensify.

Manu Maunganidze (Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership Director and Director at Nature Youth Connection and Education, Global Goals Centre, and SOS-UK) opened and chaired the event, acknowledging that:

- **Adapting to and showing resilience in the face of change is something that we all do** as part of everyday life and can do more of. For example, in relation to changes in health, community, social cohesion, and economic conditions.

- **The impacts of climate change are not distributed fairly.** Some communities both locally and globally are already impacted and will be more negatively impacted by the impacts of climate change than others. Ensuring that equity is a central part of the response is essential. This is sometimes referred to as ‘just resilience’.

- **This topic can be frightening and overwhelming** which is why the Gathering incorporated opportunities for inspiration, connection, and joy, as well as practical ideas for action. We wanted attendees to feel more empowered than when they arrived.

- **Climate resilience will require collective action across the whole of society** which means there are opportunities for everyone to contribute. Whilst some of the solutions are technical such as new or adapted infrastructure; others are non-technical such as networks and communication channels to support collective action.



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Ben Smith (Partnership Director and Associate Director for Climate Resilience at AtkinsRealis) presented a summary of what our changing climate means for the West of England.

He shared that, here in the West, we can expect:

- **A more volatile climate:** swinging from very dry to very wet and much less of what we would think of as ‘normal’.
- **A climate which regularly breaks records:** driest, hottest, wettest.
- **More extremes:** including heatwaves, downpours, and flooding.
- **Temperatures changes:** Decrease in frost, snow, and days you need the heating on in winter, and an increase in hot days, and very warm, uncomfortable nights in summer.
- **Precipitation changes:** Wetter winters, drier summers, heavier rainfall.

- **Flood and drought:** increased risk of coastal, river, and surface water flooding, and severe drought.
- **Wildfire:** an emerging and significant risk.

Ben then described the likely impacts of these changes:

- **More disruption** – more chance that you notice the weather because it's making life harder.
- **Greater strain on public services** across the region.
- **Business disruption** on supply chains, productivity, safety.
- **Greater challenges around restoring nature** whilst managing the effects of drought, flooding and heat.
- **Risks to major transport networks** and regional connectivity.
- **Impacts on both physical and mental health**, and excess deaths during extremes.
- **Potential to increase inequality.**

Ben highlighted that, although the projections are serious, building resilience also provides a unique opportunity to create a positive vision of thriving, resilient communities. He emphasised that, instead of starting from scratch, we can layer climate resilience into existing networks, community organisations, and climate plans.

Attendees then heard compelling perspectives from speakers, whose diverse contributions illustrated how climate change is already shaping our lives and will continue to shape our future.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?



Key messages on our region’s current climate resilience position were:

- **We were caught out.** We weren’t prepared for this summer, which was dominated by extreme heat, wildfires, and lost lives. We've known about climate change for decades, but this summer we all felt it. Now we know what we’re facing, which presents an opportunity: what do we need to do to better prepare for the future?

- **This summer’s heat won’t be a one off.** Our climate will become more volatile. This isn't just an environmental issue, but a health, economic, and social issue. For example, violence and hate crime increases during extreme heat, and NHS Accident and Emergency admissions broke summer records this year.

- **We need each other.** Climate impacts cascade across systems and demonstrate how interconnected we are. For example, if schools close, organisations are impacted where employees with children have no other childcare options. Our response to the climate and nature crises must be collective and united. How can we work across sectors instead of in isolation? How can those with more privilege be better allies to those facing injustice?



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We’re not starting from scratch. Climate and nature action is happening all around us, with much more in the pipeline. We have a strong foundation to build upon, and collectively we have enormous power to do so. As one speaker shared, it's either, ‘resilience by design or disaster by accident’.

Communities play a critical role. They must be at the heart of building climate resilience in the region. West of England Mayor Helen Godwin reinforced this message. She outlined her ambition to put nature recovery and climate resilience at the forefront of devolution, working with the amazing ecosystem of organisations in the region. As Ben Smith said, ‘resilience is human before it is structural’, meaning that our region’s work on climate resilience must be inclusive, and people centred.



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WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?



During the Gathering we invited attendees to share opportunities, ideas and tangible actions to grow and strengthen our region's climate resilience.

The solutions that emerged reflected a common emphasis on the need to balance community action, physical adaptation, and systems-level change across the West of England.

Resilience was identified as much a social challenge as an environmental one. Community infrastructure, communications and storytelling, cool spaces, local food systems and cross-sector collaboration consistently coming up in conversations, alongside nature based-solutions.

The most popular, shared themes emerging from the workshops were:



Community networks, hubs and local organising

Attendees frequently highlighted the importance of local relationships, existing community organisations, trusted spaces, and neighbourhood-level leadership. They see social infrastructure as equally important as physical infrastructure.

Solutions highlighted:

- Build on existing community networks rather than creating new structures.
- Community centres, churches, schools, and local venues can become resilience hubs and cool spaces.
- Support and formalise the roles of community organisers, networks, climate wardens and local stewards.
- Strengthen neighbour-to-neighbour support and local resilience networks.
- Resource communities rather than expecting them to solve challenges without funding and support.
- Support community cohesion; this aids climate resilience.



Better communications, storytelling and public engagement

Many attendees felt the adaptation and resilience conversation is still too abstract, technical, and distant. Meanwhile climate resilience depends on useful information travelling through spaces and networks that people already use and trust. There is appetite for a regional resilience communications campaign that feels practical, hopeful, and locally relevant.

Solutions highlighted:

- Make climate resilience personal and relevant.
- Use stories and visual storytelling rather than technical language.
- Focus on practical actions people can take, for example, public information campaigns similar to recycling campaigns.
- Share good news and success stories alongside the reality of what we're facing.
- Use trusted messengers and familiar community settings.
- 'Go where people are, don't preach' and translate information for different audiences. Link resilience to other things people care about such as food, football, schools, family, and health.
- Communicate through schools, sports, community and faith groups, and other existing local networks.

Cool spaces and heat adaptation

Heatwaves have shifted resilience from a future issue to a current need. We should be looking for short-term opportunities to build resilience alongside longer-term upgrades to infrastructure. Climate resilience should be incorporated into all new infrastructure.

Solutions highlighted:

- Create a regional cool spaces network and cooling projects for community centres.
- Support community venues to become trusted cool spaces and adapt schools for heat.
- Develop standards, guidance, and funding to make cool spaces effective.
- Increase shade, ventilation, and passive cooling.
- Increase tree cover around public buildings.
- Energy efficiency measures can ensure homes remain comfortable in heat and cold.
- Plan for hotter summers now rather than reacting later, with better public information during heat events.

Schools as critical community infrastructure

Schools can provide a safer environment for children during extreme temperatures, provided they are adapted. To date they have been overlooked as a critical component of climate resilience. Ensuring they can stay open also minimises disruption for other workplaces including emergency services.

Solutions highlighted:

- Schools are resilience assets, not just education assets. With funding and support they can become education, community, and emergency resilience hubs.
- Climate adaptation plans for school estates are needed as well as decarbonisation plans. There is potential interest from businesses to provide support.
- Greening school grounds is essential.



Nature-based solutions and urban greening

There was strong support for working with nature and exploring nature-based solutions, rather than relying solely on engineered solutions. Conversations also highlighted that greening is currently concentrated in advantaged areas, and in any case, this can lack aftercare. For example, failures to maintain trees after planting can result in them dying. Nature-based solutions and urban greening should be accompanied by long-term stewardship and maintenance.

Solutions highlighted:

- More trees and nature-based cooling.
- Provision of shade and canopy cover.
- Greening neighbourhoods, prioritising those with low access to green space and low canopy cover.
- River restoration, wetlands and sustainable drainage.
- Living roofs and walls.



Food security and local growing

The food system will continue to be heavily affected by climate change, and is a system in which agency is very dispersed. Ideas were shared about food banks, community farms, allotments, community gardens, and simply the joy of eating together. Food is one of the most accessible ways to engage communities in resilience conversations, as it connects immediate need, affordability, health, community, land and nature, local supply, skills, and resilience to disruption.

Solutions highlighted:

- More community growing, including schemes linked to resilience hubs.
- Reimagining allotments as collective spaces.
- ‘Dig for Victory’ World War 2 style movement.
- Adaptation support for farmers.
- Increased regional food security planning.



Cross-sector collaboration

Conversations at every table reflected that everyone needed to be involved in growing and strengthening resilience, and importantly, that no one is left behind. It is critical for those with lived experience of climate change and those most at risk, to be included and represented in decision making. Attendees believe many solutions already exist, but they are fragmented and insufficiently connected or inclusive.

Solutions highlighted:

- Shared strategy.
- Knowledge exchange.
- Better coordination of solutions.
- More visibility of what is already happening.
- Climate risk is a blind spot for businesses – sector-specific advice and support is required.



The role of governance

Attendees identified the need for an approach combining regional leadership with local ownership, avoiding either purely bottom-up or purely top-down solutions.

Solutions highlighted:

- Regional strategy is essential, developed with fairness as a core principle.
- Leadership must filter into local delivery.
- Resilience should not be optional or seasonal.
- Communities need funding and authority to act.
- Approaches should enhance and work alongside climate mitigation, without hampering, displacing or diverting resources from these efforts.



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Community priorities

In addition to the priorities identified above, the community breakout session identified the following as climate resilience enablers:

- **Long-term, coordinated funding designed** for and accessible to non-climate specialists
- **Community wealth building** to increase resilience to all shocks and decrease reliance on centralised systems.
- **Community spaces where people feel supported, connected and held** and projects that build in mental health and wellbeing support through joy and creativity.
- **Hope and positivity** to demonstrate what we gain from taking action, not only what we lose.
- **Learnings from Covid applied** to climate resilience work, including the benefit of connection with nature, mutual aid, and the critical role of community organising.



Business priorities

During the business breakout session, these priorities were identified as most valuable to support businesses to build climate resilience:

- **Opportunities to connect and learn** from others.
- **Information on funding** for resilience.
- **Events on specific risks**.
- **Sector-specific events**.
- **Resources on climate resilience.**
- **Sharing of internal policies** for example risk registers.
- **Legislation, a political acknowledgment, and governmental commitment to act** on climate resilience. This includes financial incentives to drive business action.
- **Showing leadership as a region** with involvement of local government representatives and businesses. The West of England is potentially able to set an example of good practice to the rest of the country.
- **Support on how to make resilience a priority for senior leaders** and executives, and to communicate it simply with guidance on steps we can take.
- **Increased opportunities to invest in nature.**

CONCLUSION



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In summary, there is a clear opportunity for climate resilience in the West of England to increase through investment in trusted local networks, community cohesion, cool spaces, schools, and nature-based solutions, and supported by regional leadership and practical public engagement.

The need to come together as a region on climate resilience is clear. The Gathering demonstrated that there is strong local appetite and potential to build a collaborative, regional approach. This should be guided by a new Climate Resilience Strategy, which the West of England Combined Authority aims will raise ambition and accelerate action by 2030, provide clear roles and responsibilities; and inform better decision-making to protect our communities and businesses.

Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership is seeking opportunities to continue to support this work. If you are interested in working with us, we'd love to hear from you.

For information about how you can get involved please visit our website or get in touch to share your ideas via contact@bristolclimatenature.org



“Every guest speaker brought crucial insights, and I had the chance to speak to so many people who are doing some really great work in the region.”

MOSS VALENTINE

Visit West

“It was really heartening to see we're not alone in our journey and how much will there is in the city to improve things for people and nature. It brought hope and positivity in what can be a very bleak conversation. Thank you for bringing everyone together.”

EVENT ATTENDEE

Amplify Education



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“It gave me such great opportunities to meet and speak with people who are usually hard to reach. I really appreciated the chance to share my experiences with people who were outside of my sector.”

NAOMI BOWLER

Event attendee

“I came back feeling very energised to continue prioritising climate action...to build our resilience and help us feel more capable to cope with heat waves and flooding risks.”

ISABEL KEARNEY

Windmill Hill City Farm

Event feedback statistics

78%*

rated the event 4 or 5 out of 5

100%*

felt better informed about regional climate risks

with 69% either a great deal or quite a lot better informed

100%*

felt better informed about existing work to build resilience

with 71% of those either a great deal or quite a lot better informed

100%*

felt better prepared or more motivated to act

with 72% either a great deal or quite a lot better prepared or more motivated

*of people who completed the feedback form

RECOGNITIONS



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EVENT SPEAKERS AND FACILITATORS

Louise Brogan – Environmental Manager, Avon Fire & Rescue Service

Lara Davies-Jones – Climate Strategy Co-ordinator, Bristol City Council

Chris Dunford – Sustainability and Science Director,We The Curious

Liz Gadd – Climate, poverty and equity advisor

Helen Godwin – Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority

Amy Harrison – Head of Community Partnerships, Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership

Emma Howard Boyd – Chair of the National Heat Risk Commission (remotely)

Luke McCullough – Senior Public Policy Manager, Aviva

Katherine Phillips – Sustainability Coordinator, Bristol City Council

Alex Raikes – CEO, SARI (Stand Against Racism & Inequality)

Sanjoy Shah – Consultant in Intensive Care and Medical Director — Innovation and Sustainable Healthcare, Bristol NHS Foundation Trust

Richard Stanbrook – Water Services Director, Bristol Water

Matthew Sugden – Senior Project Manager, Avon Riversides 2100

Manu Maunganidze – Director at Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership (event chair)

Lizzi Testani – CEO, Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership.

Lucy Vilarkin – Climate Resilience Manager, West of England Combined Authority

Joe Watts – Head of Sustainability & Facilities, Wiper & True

EVENT HOSTS

we the curious

EVENT SPONSORS

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WEST OF ENGLAND MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY

PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTING MEMBERS

Avon Wildlife Trust

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UWE Bristol | University of the West of England

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CATALYSING COLLECTIVE ACTION TOWARDS A ZERO-CARBON, SOCIALLY JUST, AND NATURE-RICH BRISTOL AND REGION

Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership are seeking opportunities to continue to support this work. If you are interested in working with us, we'd love to hear from you, email contact@bristolclimatenature.org

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FURTHER RESOURCES



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Throughout the event many examples of existing climate resilience guidance and information were identified, including:

Community Climate Adaptation: The Community Climate Adaptation Routemap, developed in Scotland, provides a practical guide for communities to adapt to climate change. Shared with kind permission from Verture.

Community Climate Resilience Guides: The Centre for Sustainable Energy has pioneered the development of climate resilience guides for community organisations to understand and plan for extreme weather events.

Community Resilience Guide: SARI and Bristol City Council have developed a new Community Resilience Guide to help individuals, families, businesses, community centres, places of worship, and other vital community hubs plan for, respond to, and recover from emergencies of any kind.

Preparing for Heatwaves: Guidance for Bristol Businesses available here, as part of a wider Climate Action Programme supporting organisations to reduce their carbon emissions, regardless of their size, sector or starting point.

Heatwaves, adaptation and racial justice. Black South West Network have produced a policy brief with recommendations for adaptation policy to sufficiently address how extreme heat affects Black and Racially Minoritised communities.

Climate risks – building resilience: A guide to preparing your business for the impacts of a changing climate from our Climate Action Programme

Guidance for Households an advice sheet for households on staying cool from the Centre for Sustainable Energy