BASIS
British Association for Sustainable Sport

The Game has Changed

Climate risk and the future of sport in the UK



Contents

Foreword 3

Climate Science 4

The Game Has Changed 6

Sport is Part of Who We Are 8

Sport is exposed at every level 10

Grassroots: The Impacts 11

Professional: The Impacts 16

Flooding and insurance: The risk is already material 18

The Solutions: Building Resilience for Sport 21

Recommendations 24

Our Commitment 25

Foreword

Chris Boardman CBE
1992 Olympic Gold Medalist
Chair, Sport England

Sport depends on ordinary things working - a pitch that is safe, a hall that can open, a journey people can make and a fixture that goes ahead. When these become less reliable, the impact reaches far beyond a cancelled match.

Across the UK, hotter conditions, drought, heavy rainfall and flooding are putting increasing pressure on participation, facilities, volunteers and finances. Community clubs often carry the greatest burden because they have the fewest reserves and may have little control over the land and buildings they use. Disruption that a larger organisation can absorb may mean lost income, lost volunteers or lost members for a local club.

Sport England's Climate-ready sport work, set for publication in the wake of this report, focuses on what these pressures mean for grassroots sport and physical activity in England, and on practical steps organisations can start to take. The Game Has Changed report complements that work by widening the lens across the UK sporting system. It connects what happens on community pitches and in local leisure centres with decisions about governance, investment, insurance, major events and long-term planning.

That connection is vital because sport is part of a national system. If opportunities to be active become less safe, less affordable or less dependable, the consequences reach into public health and inequality. They also weaken the base from which sport grows. Protecting grassroots participation and protecting the future of professional and elite sport are different parts of the same effort.

There is much that sport can do now. It can plan for heat, manage water more responsibly, improve drainage and shade, design facilities for future conditions, and give staff and volunteers clear plans for extreme weather. But clubs cannot be expected to carry this responsibility alone. Governing bodies, funders, facility owners, local and national government and commercial partners all have an important role to play.

Sport is part of a national system

This report makes the case for climate risk to sit where other material risks sit: in board discussions, investment decisions, facility plans, safeguarding and the way the sector measures disruption. It also makes clear that adapting to the impacts already with us must go alongside reducing the emissions that will determine how difficult the future becomes.

Sport has always adapted to new circumstances. The task now is to do so deliberately, fairly and at the scale the evidence demands, so that people can keep moving and communities can retain the places and opportunities on which they depend.

Chris Boardman CBE
Chair, Sport England



Climate Science

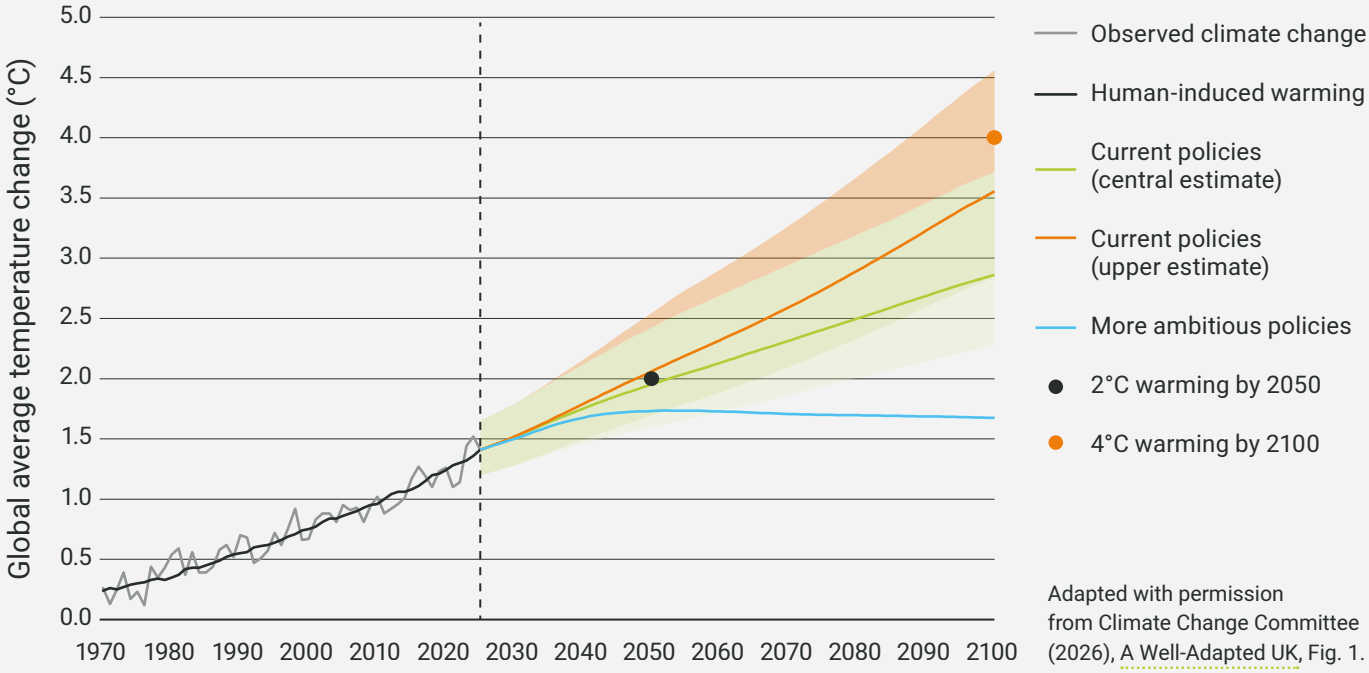
Human activity is warming the planet by increasing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, principally through fossil-fuel use, agriculture and land-use change. Global temperatures are now around 1.4°C above pre-industrial levels. Further emissions mean further warming.

Further global heating is inevitable. Until the world reaches net zero, emissions will continue and climate change will worsen. In the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, nations pledged to cooperate in pursuit of action to limit warming to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels. If every active climate plan in the world is delivered on time and in full – a big if – the UNFCCC currently projects warming of 2.6°C and the UN Secretary-General has conceded that overshooting the 1.5°C target is now inevitable. The UK retains a legal commitment to achieve net zero by 2040, so the CCC's balanced advice is for the UK to prepare for a 2°C rise by 2050.

In a 2°C UK, an extremely hot day could reach 45°C. Hotter and longer heatwaves could see 92% of existing homes overheat, creating dangerous conditions for vulnerable people. Peak river flows will be up to 45% higher, last longer, and be seen more frequently, driving increased flooding. Drier summers will mean shortfalls in water supply could reach over five billion litres per day, making drought more widespread.

While the UK's efforts to reduce emissions are, to date, largely a success story, the difficulties involved with going further, faster – combined with the reliance on every other country in the world doing the same – mean that the CCC's advice cannot rule out the prospect of 4°C warming by 2100. This, the Committee says, would pose fundamental challenges to society. Extremes in weather that are seen today would be more like average conditions in this scenario. It would severely compromise almost all aspects of life as we experience it in the UK today. Reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions remain essential to minimise the chance of these catastrophic damages.

Global warming under different emissions scenarios



Adapted with permission from Climate Change Committee (2026), A Well-Adapted UK, Fig. 1.

The advice on what needs to be done to start preparing for a 2°C scenario is clear - cooling to protect from heat, increased flood preparedness, and improved water management are the highest priorities - and we can interpret what these mean for sport.

- Sports facilities and stadia must be able to maintain safe temperatures to ensure spectators, athletes, staff and volunteers are not exposed to dangerous heat - with clear, implementable temperature protocols in place for sport and physical activity.
- Sports facilities and stadia, including the infrastructure they rely on, must become more resilient to flood risks.
- Sports facilities and stadia must be able to withstand and operate in drought conditions.
- Sports organisations must ensure their supply chains - from food and energy to equipment and apparel - are resilient to climate shocks around the world.

2050 lies within the working life of facilities being built or refurbished today. If they are designed for historical conditions then, without adaptation, they will be severely exposed to growing risk and may be uninsurable. Every decision around facilities and procurement must now include some element of climate assessment.

The CCC calculates the cost of a national adaptation programme at sufficient scale - which would necessarily include sport - at £11bn per year. This would be funded from a mixture of public and private sources, with significant returns on investment.

The committee stresses that the adaptations we need already exist, and that acting now is more cost-effective than acting later because investing in adaptation is cheaper than paying for the damages caused by climate change.

Indeed, in launching the Well-Adapted UK report, Baroness Brown highlighted that climate change is already costing up to 2% of GDP per year – a figure amounting to £60bn, which could rise to £260bn (5% of GDP) by 2050 without action.



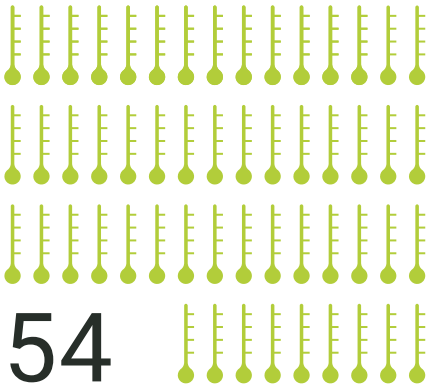
The Game Has Changed

Our Game Changer and Game Changer II reports helped to establish that climate change was an increasing factor in sport across the country, and projected a significant increase in disruption without action.

Those warnings have now become sport's new operating conditions. The impacts of global heating are changing the physical, financial and strategic conditions on which sport depends. The risks are visible and the costs are material. It affects individual clubs and the health of the nation.

Since the original Game Changer report in 2018, the UK has moved through a period of accelerating climate disruption. Four of the UK's five warmest years on record have occurred since then. Each of the four home nations has recorded its highest ever temperature. 2026 was the hottest summer ever with 54 Met Office weather stations breaking their temperature records. Severe droughts have returned in 2018, 2022 and 2026. Wildfire risk has escalated sharply, up from 425 in 2017 to 1354 in 2026. The extremes of the 2026 summer caused the deaths of nearly 3000 people, becoming the focus for COBRA meetings and national emergency alerts.

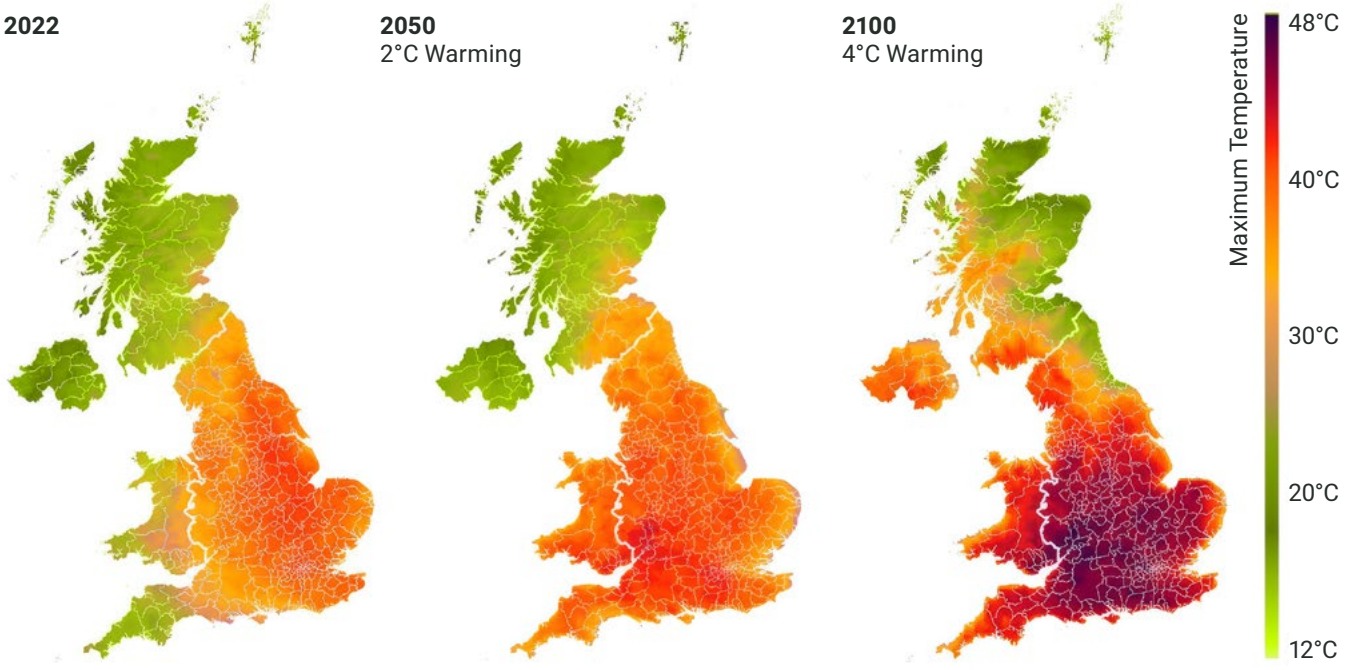
In the same timeframe, we have seen 47 named storms. Flood risk has increased at least threefold and the UK's exposure to coastal erosion is increasing and expected to accelerate as sea levels rise.



54

Met Office weather stations broke their temperature records during 2026, the hottest summer ever.

Recent and projected maximum temperatures



Adapted with permission from Climate Change Committee (2026), A Well-Adapted UK. Colours modified.

Anyone with a long memory who has been engaged in sport throughout their lives will be able to think of a waterlogged pitch, a flooded clubhouse or a cancelled fixture. Anyone who has spent a day watching cricket will know that sport has always had an important relationship with the weather. But the changes we are living through now and those which are guaranteed in the future are significant and impactful.

Disruption to fixtures, damage to facilities, barriers to access for people to be active, rising and unpredictable costs and long-term challenges around facility design, maintenance and insurance.

What makes this challenge new and serious is the combination of the increasingly severe impacts and their compound effects. Heat is more extreme, droughts are more serious and last longer, flooding is more widespread and intense and storms are more frequent and ferocious. These challenges collide with wider pressures - significant spikes in water demand happen at the same time water is most scarce and/or there are restrictions on use; sports accustomed to occasional disruptions are now being squeezed at multiple points in a season with waterlogged pitches in winter and rock hard surfaces in summer; maintenance costs are higher; insurance is either unaffordable or inadequate; and welfare risks for participants, spectators, officials and staff are growing.

Given the weight of climate science, the clarity of the CCC's advice, and the growing body of work on the relationship between sport and climate change, this should not be treated as a temporary spike before things return to normal.

Much of sport in the UK was designed for a climate that no longer exists and the operating model at every level must adapt to match current conditions and future risk.

That means adapting for the warming already experienced and preparing for the risks ahead. The impact, and how much worse the risk becomes, will depend on the adaptation and mitigation decisions made now.

> Sport's operating model at every level must adapt to match current conditions and future risk

Mitigation vs Adaptation

Climate change adaptation refers to the actions required to manage the effects of unavoidable expected climate change.

Climate change mitigation refers to actions to prevent or reduce greenhouse gas emissions to address the underlying causes of climate change.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines adaptation as "adjustments in ecological, social or economic systems" in response to actual and expected climate change.

While mitigation (often covered in sport under the broader term of 'sustainability') has historically been the focus of much action, adaptation is increasingly recognised as necessary to manage climate change: even if global targets to limit global warming are reached, there is scientific consensus that there will still be significant changes to the climate that require adaptation.

Sport is Part of Who We Are

Sport is a national characteristic - part of the UK's daily life. It shapes childhood, supports better health and wellbeing, and brings people together across politics, class, geography, faith and generation. It gives pride, identity and routine to places and communities. At a national level, we come together as a country when we are tested, and we come together to cheer on our national teams. Sport is an essential part of our shared story.

Nearly 64% (around 30 million adults) play sport or take part in physical activity each week in England. 3.5 million play team sports. Over the course of the 2025-26 season the turnstiles spun round nearly 16 million times in the Premier League alone.

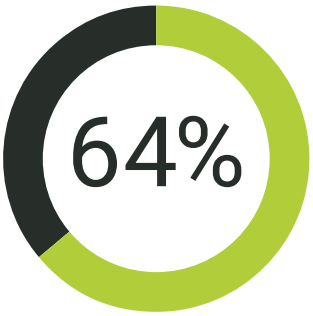
This vast engagement makes sport a significant economic player in the UK, with sport-related activity generating £99.6 billion of direct economic output and £36.2 billion of direct GVA, directly supporting roughly 1.25 million jobs, generating more than £14 billion in tax revenues, and saving £6bn in productivity gains from a healthier workforce taking fewer sick days.

Its social significance is arguably even greater, with an overall calculation of £122.9 billion in social value.

It is also a significant driver of the public's physical and mental health and wellbeing, delivering £8 billion in direct savings to the NHS and preventing more than 3.3 million cases of chronic health conditions. A further £20 billion of social value could be unlocked if the least active groups in society matched the levels of the most active - around £5bn more than the planned increase in defence spending between 2026/27 and 2029/30. With a return on investment of £4.38 for every £1 spent, sport and physical activity is a major national policy lever.



Given this overwhelming value, it is therefore vital that we build the best possible understanding of the level of risk facing one of the UK's most important sectors. A climate-exposed sport system is a core challenge for clubs, leagues and governing bodies, but its effects ripple into public health, local economies, national resilience, cultural life and the public purse.



Nearly 64% (around 30 million adults) play sport or take part in physical activity each week in England

> Sport is arguably overtaking faith in terms of cultural significance in the UK, with 37% of Britons saying their local club is a crucial aspect of their identity - over three times as many as attend a faith service each week
>
> Brown, G (2026).
> The Future Starts With Us.
> Simon & Schuster.

Mission statement

A climate-resilient UK is an active nation in which sport and physical activity remain a dependable part of everyday life.

Children can play safely and discover a lifelong love of movement, people of every age, ability and income can take part, compete, connect and find joy, and athletes can pursue excellence with their health and welfare protected. Clubs thrive at the heart of their communities, supported by volunteers who can spend their energy helping people flourish.

From local playing fields to national stadia, facilities are ready for changing conditions, use water and energy wisely, restore nature and provide safe places for participants, spectators and workers. When extremes disrupt play, sport can respond safely, recover quickly and keep people involved.

Businesses can plan and prosper with greater confidence, protecting livelihoods and investment while reducing exposure to risk and avoidable costs. Government and public bodies can invest in lasting success, with less public money consumed by preventable damage, disruption and ill health.

More people moving more often means better physical and mental health, less isolation, a more productive workforce and reduced pressure on the NHS.

By adapting together and cutting the emissions that drive further harm, we can sustain sport as an essential thread in our national life - bringing belonging, pride and opportunity to every community, from a child's first game to the occasions that unite the country.



Sport is exposed at every level

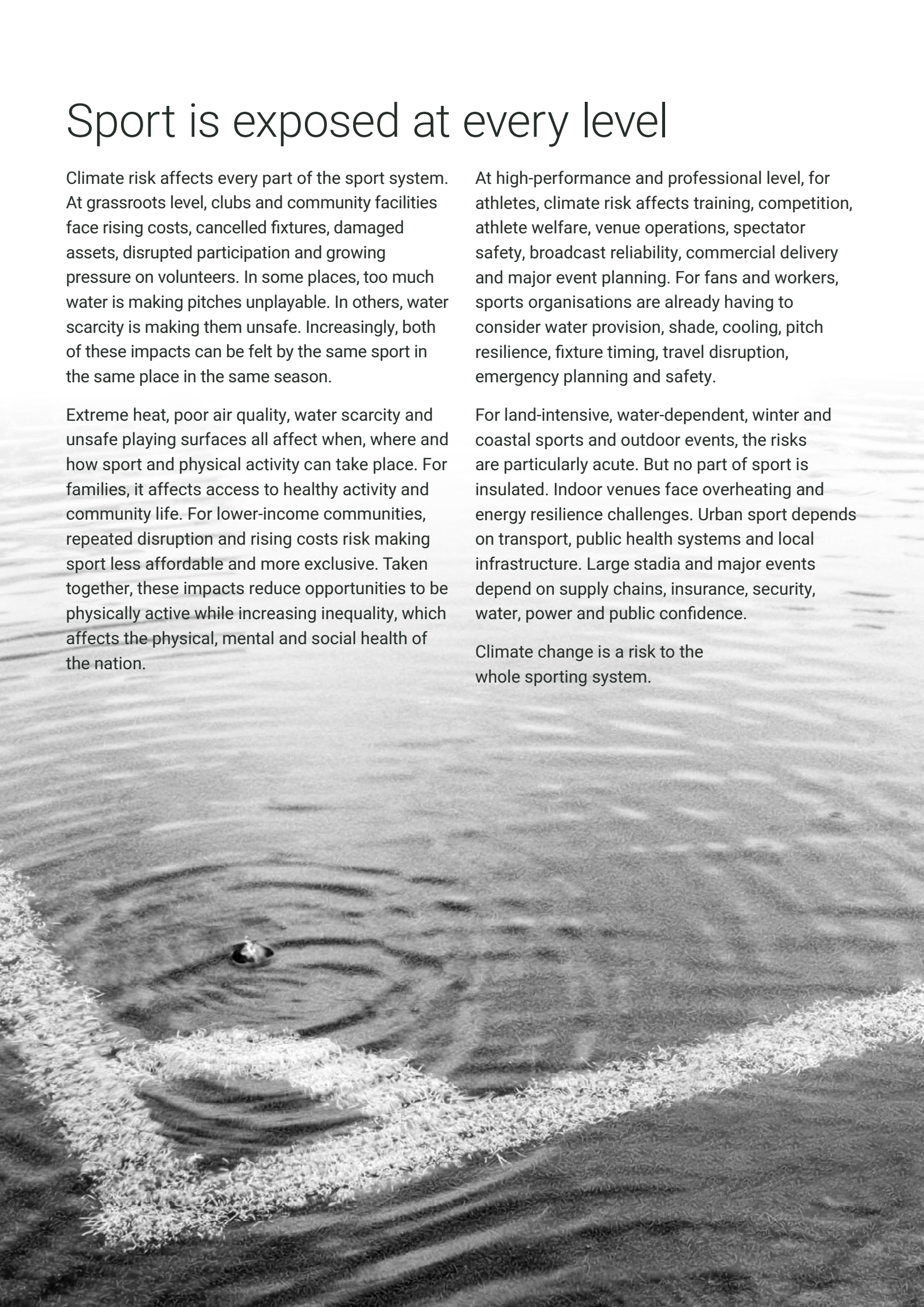
Climate risk affects every part of the sport system. At grassroots level, clubs and community facilities face rising costs, cancelled fixtures, damaged assets, disrupted participation and growing pressure on volunteers. In some places, too much water is making pitches unplayable. In others, water scarcity is making them unsafe. Increasingly, both of these impacts can be felt by the same sport in the same place in the same season.

Extreme heat, poor air quality, water scarcity and unsafe playing surfaces all affect when, where and how sport and physical activity can take place. For families, it affects access to healthy activity and community life. For lower-income communities, repeated disruption and rising costs risk making sport less affordable and more exclusive. Taken together, these impacts reduce opportunities to be physically active while increasing inequality, which affects the physical, mental and social health of the nation.

At high-performance and professional level, for athletes, climate risk affects training, competition, athlete welfare, venue operations, spectator safety, broadcast reliability, commercial delivery and major event planning. For fans and workers, sports organisations are already having to consider water provision, shade, cooling, pitch resilience, fixture timing, travel disruption, emergency planning and safety.

For land-intensive, water-dependent, winter and coastal sports and outdoor events, the risks are particularly acute. But no part of sport is insulated. Indoor venues face overheating and energy resilience challenges. Urban sport depends on transport, public health systems and local infrastructure. Large stadia and major events depend on supply chains, insurance, security, water, power and public confidence.

Climate change is a risk to the whole sporting system.



Grassroots: The Impacts

Grassroots sport is where the effects of climate change are most immediate and most socially consequential.

Lacking the reserves, strong infrastructure or sophisticated risk management of elite professional sports organisations, grassroots sport is the part of our system that relies most on volunteers, local authority facilities, ageing clubhouses, public parks, school spaces, modest membership fees, weekend routines and community goodwill.

It is also where sport delivers some of its greatest public value. When grassroots sport is disrupted, the consequences resound beyond missed fixtures. Children lose structured activity, adults lose routine, older people lose social connection, volunteers lose motivation, clubs lose income, the viability of local facilities is called into question and communities lose places that help bind them together.

The greatest climate risk to grassroots sport is not simply that pitches flood or facilities overheat. It is that sport becomes less safe, less reliable and less affordable — and people stop taking part.



The Key Issues

Sport England's Climate Ready Sport work, with technical input from Deloitte, is the most important current evidence base for grassroots sport in England. The full assessment examines five categories of sport and physical activity — court sports, field sports, indoor sports, outdoor water sports and multi-use open spaces — across 2°C and 4°C warming scenarios and the 2030, 2040 and 2050 time horizons.

Its central findings clearly show the following:

1. Climate change impacts are already disrupting grassroots sport and physical activity.
2. These disruptions will become more frequent, more severe and more unevenly distributed.
3. Prolonged periods of heat and drought, heavy rainfall and flooding, storms, and shifting seasonal conditions will have an effect on whether facilities remain safe, accessible, affordable and fit for purpose.

The assessment identifies a series of specific risks.

- Extreme heat that damages grass pitches, makes synthetic turf and rubber crumb surfaces excessively hot, increases cooling and ventilation costs, and increases risk of heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
- Heavy rainfall and flooding that leads to waterlogged pitches and courts, cancels training and fixtures, damages facilities and reduces motivation to participate.
- Drought and water scarcity that restricts irrigation, reduces pitch quality, threatens swimming pools and limits water-based sport.
- Strong winds and storms that damage facilities, fencing, trees, equipment and wider sports infrastructure, with long-lasting impacts on participation.
- Sea level rise and coastal erosion that threatens coastal sports facilities and water-sport access.
- Changing seasonal patterns that make training and competition schedules harder to plan and may require sports calendars to change.

This is a whole-system challenge, going beyond individual instances of disruption to create a new national operating environment.



Participation is the core risk

Climate adaptation in grassroots sport will be essential for sustained participation. Climate hazards are already affecting participation, facility reliability, costs and access, and pressures will intensify unevenly across sports, places and communities.

The implications are serious because participation is habit-forming. Cancelled sessions do not always return the following week. A parent who cannot rely on Saturday morning sport may stop organising around it. A volunteer facing repeated rescheduling may step back. A child who feels unsettled may stop playing their sport. An older person may choose not to travel. A participant with a disability may have no alternative accessible route when flooding closes the usual one.

Extreme heat is particularly important because it affects both safety and motivation. Sport England's 2026 Activity Check-in found 73% of participants experiencing heatwaves did less sport and physical activity. This is especially significant as the climate continues to warm, as UK physical activity tends to increase as temperatures rise to around 25°C, but declines beyond that threshold, with sedentary time increasing as temperatures move from 25°C to 30°C.

Given the role of sport and physical activity in reducing pressure on the NHS, boosting productivity and strengthening communities, the consequences of climate risks are stark and far-reaching.



of participants experiencing heatwaves did less sport and physical activity according to Sport England's 2026 Activity Check-in



These risks are an inequality multiplier

Climate impacts are not and will not be felt equally. The same heatwave, flood or facility closure will affect people differently depending on age, disability, deprivation, ethnicity, income, health and access to spaces. Adaptation must therefore be designed to protect participation and avoid widening inequalities.

Older adults are at greater risk from heat because of reduced ability to regulate body temperature and higher prevalence of health conditions. People with disabilities may face health and access risks, especially where flooding disrupts accessible routes. People living in more deprived areas may have fewer affordable indoor alternatives, fewer high-quality green spaces and greater reliance on free or low-cost provision. People from ethnic minority groups are more likely to live in urban areas, where heat, air pollution and limited green space can compound exposure.

This is where proper provision for climate adaptation becomes an issue of fairness.

If adaptation is left to the resources of individual clubs, better-off places will adapt faster. If higher operating costs are passed on through higher fees, those already facing barriers will lose access. If schedules are moved to avoid heat without considering transport, lighting and safety, women, girls, people with disabilities, children and older participants may face new barriers. These are the same groups that get a disproportionate benefit from being active.

A climate-ready sport system must therefore prioritise those places and groups where climate risk and existing inequality overlap.

Facilities are being squeezed at multiple points

Grassroots sport is increasingly experiencing a distinctive pattern of oscillating pressure between too much water and too little water at different points of the season, both of which can make sport unplayable.

The Game Changer and Game Changer II reports covered how heavy rain and flooding waterlog pitches, damage facilities and cancel fixtures. Significant challenges remain around data collection - covered later in our recommendations - but the data that does exist and the experiences of individual clubs illustrates a significant and growing problem.

> Hard, dry pitches increase the risk of injury

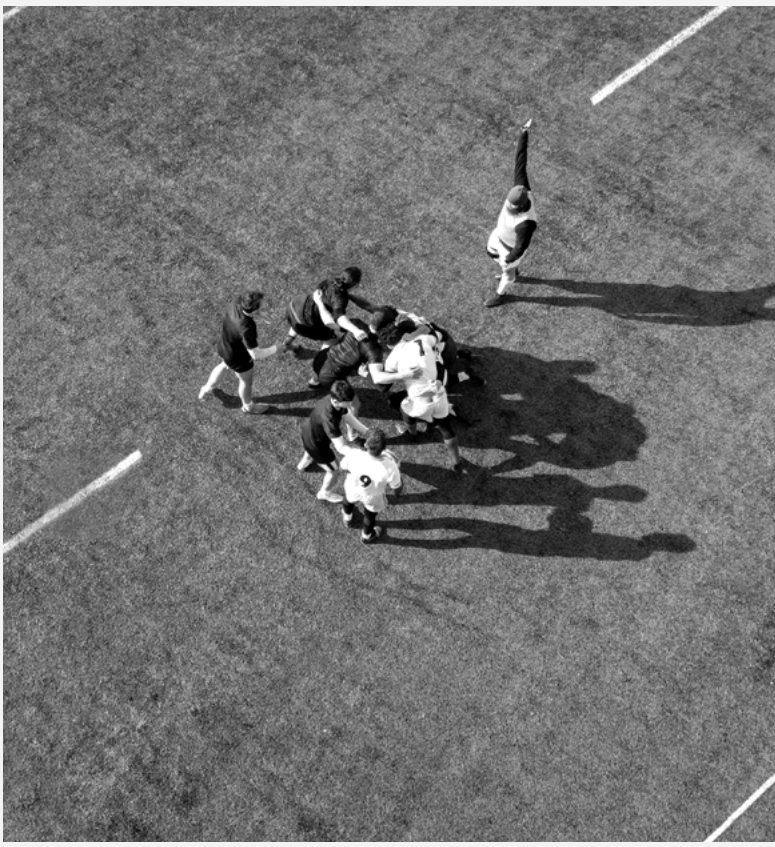
Around one third of grassroots football pitches in England already lose roughly six weeks a season to flooding and inadequate drainage. In Birmingham alone, roughly 9,000-10,000 games are postponed per season.

Clubs Against Floods, run by the Cool Down Network, reports that Tadcaster Albion, whose ground sits beside the River Wharfe, has spent around £150,000 over a decade recovering from floods rather than developing the club.

This disruption in winter pushes fixtures further into summer, where heat-hardened pitches become unsafe. The same club spent around £2,000 running sprinklers for six weeks, £750 on fertiliser after each drought and £800 per drainage episode in a single year. In drought conditions, water restrictions can limit irrigation, surface quality declines, injury risks rise and seasons may need to be delayed or restructured.

This risk became very visible in 2026 with a range of sports in the UK affected by safety concerns including football, cricket, golf, bowls and rugby. The RFU issued a blanket postponement of the community rugby season from 5 to 21 September to protect player welfare. It was an impressive move, centralised around player safety: “hard, dry pitches increase the risk of injury, particularly in the opening weeks of the season when players are returning to full contact. We recognise that many clubs have had to limit contact training in pre-season training due to the pitch conditions. We want players to return to competition safely and adequately prepared.”

The Anglian Combination - 100 teams at step 11 of the English football league system across Norfolk and Suffolk, and step seven of the National League - brought in a similar delay following reports of serious injuries during unofficial games, such as pre-season friendlies, over the summer months. Dale Brown, the Anglian Combination Committee chair, reported “a spate of injuries that have been in some circumstances life-changing,” including “smashed elbows, fractured skulls, falls onto extremely hard ground where it’s not just been a pull strain or a muscle ache — it’s been quite severe…We have never had to delay the start of the season ever before. This is completely unprecedented.”



Professional: The Impacts

Professional sport is just as exposed but in a different way. Over the course of six major reports, BASIS has sought to share examples of the impact extreme weather has on professional sport.

These examples remain relevant but we will not repeat them here. There are eye-catching instances of extreme weather disrupting the sporting calendar - like the postponement of the December 2024 Merseyside Derby at Goodison Park due to the impacts and dangers of Storm Darragh.

However, fixtures can generally be rearranged and extreme weather protocols can be introduced to protect players in the harshest conditions - so in purely sporting terms the starting point for professional sport is more resilient.

The real risk - and arguably sport's greatest exposure - is to the business model.

Professional sport depends on reliability. Fixtures are scheduled in advance. Broadcast rights are sold. Sponsors buy audience exposure. Fans book travel. Police, transport, hospitality, casual staff, medical teams and suppliers plan around matchdays and events. Athletes train to peak at specific moments. Clubs and venues build budgets around expected income.



Climate change introduces volatility into each of those assumptions.

In football, Pledgeball's analysis shows that, across the top six tiers of English men's football, at least 118 weather-related cancellations have occurred over the past five seasons - mostly in the EFL and National League.

Fixture postponements hit clubs on several fronts: turnstile revenue, club-shop sales, catering, lotteries, hospitality, wasted food, programmes, staff costs, pumps, floodwater costs and extra water provision during heatwaves. In the longer run, clubs face rising insurance costs and potentially reduced sponsorship value if audience exposure falls.

The analysis found that, while fixtures can be rearranged which - in theory - reduces the risk of lost revenues - the reality is that rearranged fixtures take place in midweek, and average midweek match attendance is far lower than at the weekend: 16% lower overall; 76% lower in League One; 74% lower in League Two. Lower league clubs have a disproportionate reliance on matchday income, and can least afford the spend required to build resilience against flooding - so a single flood event hits them three times: unrecoverable postponement costs; clean up cost; and lower matchday revenue when the fixture is rearranged.

The Adaptation Gap

Looking at the system as a whole, there is significant and important work underway across sport to both mitigate and adapt to climate change. On mitigation, an increasing number of clubs, venues and institutions are powered by renewable energy, have water efficiency measures in place, and run large scale programmes to protect and restore the natural environment. Part of BASIS' role is to help them do this. Again, on adaptation, some clubs, venues and institutions are beginning to assess their risk and resilience, and introduce measures such as heat protocols or advice. At a statutory level, Sport England is leveraging its influence as a funder to pursue system-level change.

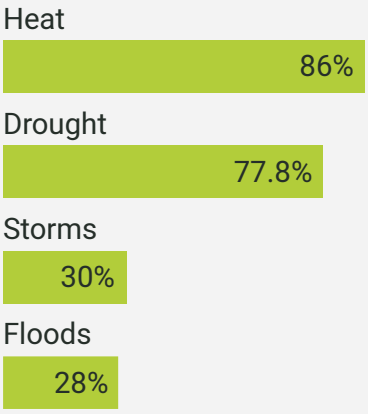
But in the context of sport's real experience, the response so far remains fragmented and inadequate. In a survey of BASIS' network of more than 200 sports organisations, 100% said they had been impacted by extreme weather in 2026 - especially heat (86%), drought (77.8%), storms (30%) and flooding (28%) - and more than 94% felt that sport in the UK is not adequately prepared for the impacts of climate change.

This reflects our more detailed analysis. Taking present and future flood risk as an obvious area of climate risk, we assessed every English stadium in the Premier League, EFL, Premiership Rugby, Superleague and First Class Cricket against publicly available geographical data provided by the Environment Agency. This data outlines both river/sea and surface water flood risk. Across the 127 stadia, 34 (27%) are at high or medium risk of present day flooding. This rises to 45 (35%) when looking at future risk. However, when taking the analysis beyond the stadium itself, every single club on the list is already at a high risk of flooding of either kind within a 500 metre radius of the stadium. Unsurprisingly, this high level of risk is sustained into the future. This is significant given that thousands of supporters, and much of the infrastructure each stadium relies on, will be present in that radius.

This sits alongside data from Zurich showing that four in 10 professional football stadiums in England are predicted to be at risk from multiple climate hazards by 2050.

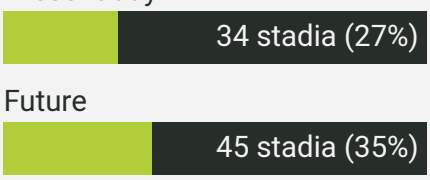
Despite this, our analysis of all the publicly disclosed accounts and reports from each of the same 127 clubs, plus the five EFL clubs located in Wales, shows that 9 specifically reference risks around climate change and extreme weather.

Percentage of BASIS survey respondents affected by each weather type in 2026.



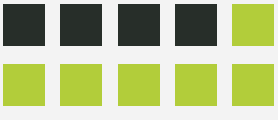
Stadia at high or medium flood risk

Out of 127 stadia



4 in 10

professional football stadiums in England are predicted to be at risk from multiple climate hazards by 2050



Flooding and insurance: The risk is already material

The warning signs are already visible. For some sporting institutions, physical climate risk actively is disrupting fixtures, eroding revenue, constraining investment in facilities and making insurance more expensive and more difficult to secure.

Worcestershire County Cricket Club is a clear example. Having played at New Road since 1899, the club is examining an additional venue to protect its future when flooding makes its historic ground unusable. Chief executive Ashley Giles has described the situation as "increasingly unmanageable", with each season bringing greater disruption, financial strain and barriers to investment.

The club's March 2025 statement reported that 19 of the 30 worst floods recorded at New Road since 1899 had occurred within the previous 25 years. The consequences extend well beyond clean-up costs, with matches relocated, food and beverage revenue lost, confidence weakened and repeated inundation degrading the playing and practice facilities. The club's studies concluded that a flood barrier would probably need to be at least 3.7 metres high and could cost £5 million–£20 million, potentially more, while displacing water onto surrounding land. Its conclusion was that preventing the ground from flooding was neither feasible nor sustainable.



Carlisle United has lived with a similar risk since Storm Desmond inundated Brunton Park in December 2015, forcing the club to play home fixtures elsewhere. Although flood-defence work has since been undertaken in Carlisle, the club's accounts state that Brunton Park remains in a high-risk area and that much of its built infrastructure is more than 50 years old. Their assessment is blunt: "Climate change worsens the risks." At the same time, the flood insurance available to the club remains "constrained and high cost".

> 19 of the 30 worst floods recorded at New Road since 1899 have come in the last 25 years

These are individual cases, but they sit within a wider insurance market already under pressure. Marsh claimed that 43% of its cancellation claims between 2022 and 2025 were because of extreme weather. The CCC estimates that 29% of UK economic losses from natural catastrophes were uninsured in 2024, compared with an average of 22% over the previous decade. It also reports that home insurers paid out more in flood claims than they received in premiums over the five years to 2024. By 2050, under approximately 2°C of global warming, it warns that many homes and businesses in high-risk areas may be unable to obtain insurance because cover is unavailable or premiums are unaffordable.

Achieving the CCC recommendation that the UK's insurance protection gap should not increase because of climate change between now and 2050 will require both physical adaptation – so that the remaining risk is still insurable – and changes to the insurance system. This will include insurance products that reward resilience, incorporating protective measures when damaged assets are repaired, new public-private risk-pooling arrangements and continued government involvement after the household-focused Flood Re scheme ends in 2039. Flood Re does not cover sports facilities, but the direction of travel is directly relevant – insurance is not a substitute for adaptation.

For sport, the implication is clear. Facilities and major capital investments must be tested against the climate conditions expected over their working lives, including the conditions associated with around 2°C of global warming by 2050. Where facilities are not adapted – or where adaptation is technically or financially impossible – organisations may face rising premiums and excesses, tighter policy limits, greater retained losses and, ultimately, the loss of affordable cover. Climate exposure then becomes a material risk to business continuity, asset value, borrowing and future investment.

Yet this urgency is scarcely reflected in sport's public reporting. In our five-year review of 134 clubs, the overwhelming majority had no mention of extreme weather or climate risk in their disclosures.

> AFC Wimbledon reported £1 million in flood damages



There are exceptions. The accounts for football clubs such as Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur mention extreme weather risk, as do Gloucester and Bath Rugby Clubs, and there are relevant disclosures from Lancashire CCC, Yorkshire CCC, Sussex CCC and Kent CCC. Oxford United FC describes training-ground renovation after January 2024 flood damage, with the facility reopening in March 2025.

AFC Wimbledon's accounts report £1 million in damage when Plough Lane was flooded with over 100,000 litres of water after the River Wandle broke its banks following heavy rainfall in 2024. This led to £881,019 of stadium-flood costs, £960,556 of insurance-claim income and £146,424 in flood donations – with the donations helping to meet its insurance excess, higher premium and other uninsured costs.

Manchester City goes into more general disclosure detail. Its 2024–25 sustainability report addresses flooding, drought, heat, wildfire smoke and operational continuity, and describes investments in rain gardens, water attenuation and harvesting.

Manchester United provides the clearest disclosure linking extreme weather directly to financial and insurance risk. In its 2026 filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, the club warns that extreme weather could damage property, disrupt matchday operations and create additional costs. It recognises that climate change may increase the frequency or severity of such events and that its insurance is subject to deductibles, benefit limits and limits on the period of business-interruption cover. It cannot guarantee that losses will be fully insured or that claims will be recovered in full.

If a club with Manchester United's scale and resources considers this risk sufficiently material to disclose to investors, smaller and less financially resilient institutions cannot reasonably treat it as peripheral. Sport also increasingly appears out of step with the governance expected elsewhere in the economy. The Prudential Regulation Authority already requires regulated banks and insurers to embed climate-related risk in governance, risk management, scenario analysis, data and disclosure. The Climate Change Committee proposes that all large companies should have high-quality adaptation plans integrated into their core business functions by 2035.

Sport has no comparable, consistently applied standard. To avoid falling behind the wider economy, clubs and governing bodies should be assessing the exposure of their facilities, quantifying the cost of disruption, testing their insurance assumptions and incorporating adaptation into capital planning, strategy and public reporting. The present shortfall is not simply a reporting gap – it risks being a gap in the management of core business risk.



The Solutions: Building Resilience for Sport

Sport needs a step change in how it understands and manages climate risk. As the CCC's work makes clear, the practical measures required are already available and - broadly speaking - we have time to implement them. The immediate task is to assess risk systematically, choose the right interventions and make adaptation a normal part of governing, financing and investing in sport.

Action should begin now. Planned improvements can be incorporated into maintenance, refurbishment and capital programmes. Waiting until a pitch, clubhouse or event fails narrows the available options and leaves organisations facing emergency repairs, lost income and damage that may be uninsured. Where a facility faces a known and recurring hazard, reducing that vulnerability is more cost-effective than repeatedly restoring the same exposure.

Collective Data

The starting point is to see the risk clearly. Sport needs a shared national assessment of its climate exposure and a common, proportionate way to record what is already happening. This should include cancellations and closures, heat and water incidents, damage to facilities, repair and insurance costs, and effects on participation. These records should be combined with climate projections and local knowledge to show how risks may change over the life of a facility or event.



Proper Reporting

That information must reach boards and senior leaders. It should be present in risk registers, budgets, investment cases, safeguarding arrangements and business continuity plans. Consistent evidence will also allow governing bodies and funders to identify patterns, direct support towards the places of greatest need and establish whether investment is working. It will give insurers and lenders a clearer basis for considering how organisations are managing the risks they retain.



Practical Actions:



Once the risk is understood, action can be matched to it. Many measures are manageable and relatively inexpensive: providing shade and reliable drinking water; introducing heat protocols and changing training or fixture times; improving ventilation; detecting leaks; using water-efficient fittings and irrigation; maintaining drainage; and moving equipment, records or electrical systems away from flood exposure. These changes can protect people, reduce disruption and lower operating costs.

Investment Decisions:



Other risks require capital investment. Solutions may include redesigned drainage, water storage and rainwater harvesting, flood-resilient buildings, passive cooling, energy-efficient refurbishment, resilient playing surfaces or, where protection is no longer practical, redesign or relocation. When Storm Desmond destroyed Corbridge Cricket Club's clubhouse, the replacement was raised above the previous flood level and incorporated rainwater harvesting and improved access. The rebuild shows how recovery and capital renewal can reduce future exposure while producing a better facility.

Investment decisions should consider the whole life of an asset - the days it can reliably operate, its maintenance and energy costs, its use of water, its accessibility and its performance under future conditions. Every major refurbishment provides an opportunity to remove a known vulnerability. Capital projects should also be assessed for both climate resilience and emissions, avoiding solutions that protect activity in the short term while creating greater energy, water or environmental pressures.

Community Engagement:



Many risks cannot be managed within the boundary of a single club or venue. For example, flooding is shaped by catchments, drainage systems, surrounding land and access routes. Heat and drought place pressure on shared water, power and health services.
Sports organisations should therefore work with local authorities, statutory environment and flood-risk bodies, water companies, emergency planners, landowners and neighbouring communities. Together, they can coordinate drainage and nature-based measures, protect access to facilities and connect sport with wider plans for flooding, water, public health and emergency response. Governing bodies, sports councils and funders will need to provide shared expertise so that volunteer-run clubs are not expected to manage these relationships alone.

Emergency Response:



Sport also has a role in strengthening the way communities prepare for and recover from crises. A suitable clubhouse, sports centre or stadium may be able to serve as a meeting point, a cool space during extreme heat or a base for support following a flood or storm. Staff, volunteers and members can help share trusted information and reconnect people. Reopening sport can itself restore routine and social connection after a disruptive event.

This role must be planned rather than assumed. Local resilience partners should agree in advance what a venue can safely provide and identify the requirements for access, water, sanitation, power, communications, accessibility, safeguarding, staffing and funding. These arrangements should be included in emergency plans and tested before they are needed. Preparing suitable facilities in this way would recognise sport as part of the country's community and resilience infrastructure, rather than calling on it informally after disaster has struck.

A Realistic Goal:



The end point is a sporting system that understands where it is exposed and acts before disruption becomes damage. Climate risk is visible in decisions and budgets. Governing bodies have practical adaptation plans. Facilities are designed for the conditions they will face. Events have tested arrangements to protect participants, workers and spectators. Local partners know how sporting assets can contribute to wider resilience. At the same time, sport continues to reduce the emissions that are making these risks harder and more expensive to manage.

This is a job that can be done well. The measures are available, the benefits extend beyond avoided damage, and every investment made now can protect participation for years to come. The seven recommendations and three BASIS commitments that follow set out the first steps in a ten-point adaptation plan for sport.

Recommendations

As the first steps towards that goal, we outline seven recommendations and three commitments in a ten point plan for sport:

1. Every major sports organisation should treat climate risk as a board-level issue. It should be included in organisational strategy, risk registers, financial planning, facility investment, safeguarding, event planning and reporting.

2. Every national governing body should develop a climate risk and adaptation plan, covering grassroots participation, facilities, competitions, athlete welfare, workforce safety, commercial exposure and long-term resilience.

3. Government and public bodies should explicitly include sport in national and local adaptation planning. Sport should be recognised as part of the UK's health, community, cultural, economic and resilience infrastructure.

4. Sport needs better data. The sector should develop a common framework for recording climate-related disruption, including cancellations, facility closures, heat incidents, flood damage, drought impacts, insurance costs, repair costs and participation effects.

5. Public and private investment in sport facilities should be climate-resilient by design. Funding should support drainage, cooling, shade, water efficiency, energy efficiency, nature-based solutions, clean power and long-term asset protection.

6. Major events and professional sport should adopt clear climate resilience standards, including heat protocols, water access, emergency planning, transport resilience, spectator safety and workforce protection.

7. Sport should use its public reach to make climate risk visible and relatable. Climate change can feel distant when discussed through abstract models and future dates. Sport makes it immediate: the cancelled match, the flooded pitch, the unsafe heat, the damaged clubhouse, the rising premium, the event that becomes harder to stage.

Our Commitment

BASIS will work with partners to develop a UK sport adaptation plan, bringing together governing bodies, clubs, venues, athletes, funders, government, local authorities, insurers, facility operators, public health experts and climate specialists.

BASIS will work to translate the Climate Change Committee's national risk analysis into practical action for sport. It should help the sector understand its exposure, protect participation, safeguard people, strengthen facilities, reduce costs, and build a credible evidence base for investment and policy.

BASIS will ramp up its existing programme of support to sports organisations on mitigation and sustainability: reducing emissions, improving energy use, supporting nature, protecting water, refining procurement, and helping organisations move from good intentions to credible action.



BASIS

British Association for Sustainable Sport

The sustainability hub for the UK sports industry. A not-for-profit committed to delivering a positive impact for sport at every level, and harnessing the power of sport to make a difference for all.

basis.org.uk