



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

An illustration of a white house with a dark roof and solar panels. The house has blue shutters and a small balcony with a potted plant. It is set against a blue sky with a large yellow sun and green trees.

Preparing for a Changing Climate

Keeping Cool During Hotter Weather

A practical guide to help people and communities prepare
for hotter summers and heatwaves in West Oxfordshire.



Preparing for hotter weather

Climate change, caused by rising greenhouse gas emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, is changing the weather experienced in the UK and globally. Summers are becoming hotter and periods of extreme heat are expected to occur more often. In West Oxfordshire, this can mean warmer homes, increased health risks and greater pressure on water, wildlife and local infrastructure.

Climate resilience means preparing so that people, homes and communities can cope safely with changing conditions. Practical changes to buildings, daily routines and neighbourhoods can reduce overheating and protect health, while longer-term improvements can make places more comfortable in summer and winter.

This guide sets out practical actions to take before and during hot weather and complements the wider Preparing for a Changing Climate guide.

Preparing homes for hotter summers

Many homes in West Oxfordshire were designed to retain heat rather than manage prolonged hot weather. The main aim is to stop heat entering during the day, then release it when the air outside becomes cooler.

Shade windows before the heat enters

External shading is particularly effective because it blocks sunlight before it reaches the glass. Awnings, shutters, external blinds, pergolas, trees and climbing plants can all help. Prioritise east-, south- and west-facing windows. Where external shading is not practical, close curtains or blinds on sun-facing windows during the day.

Ventilate at the right time

Open windows only when the air outside is cooler than indoors. During the hottest part of the day, keep them closed if they would let in warmer air. Open windows in the evening, overnight or early morning when it is safe, and create cross-ventilation where possible.

Reduce heat generated indoors

Turn off lights and electrical equipment when not needed, cook at cooler times where possible and check that heating is switched off. Fans can improve comfort by moving air when indoor temperatures are below 35°C, but they do not cool the room itself.

Use the coolest parts of the home

Ground-floor, north-facing and shaded rooms are often cooler. Spend more time in these rooms and, where practical, sleep there during a heatwave. Open internal doors where this improves airflow, but close off rooms that are much hotter.

Add greenery and manage water wisely

Trees and planting provide shade and help cool the surrounding area. Replacing some hard paving with planting or permeable surfaces can also reduce heat and manage rainwater. Water plants in the early morning or evening, use a water butt where possible and prioritise established plants that provide shade.



Plan improvements carefully

If you own a property, when renovating, ask how insulation, glazing, ventilation and shading will work together in summer as well as winter. Insulated homes can still overheat if heat enters through unshaded windows and cannot escape. External shading, secure night ventilation and well-designed ventilation can improve summer comfort. Some changes may need permission or consent.

Keeping yourself and others cool

When hot weather is forecast, check the weather and Heat-Health Alerts, make sure fans and fridges work, identify the coolest room and arrange support for anyone who may need help.

Ways to keep cool

- Drink regularly throughout the day. Water is usually the best choice, and alcohol should be limited because it can increase dehydration. 
- Avoid strenuous activity and prolonged exposure to direct sunlight during the hottest part of the day. Plan exercise, gardening, dog walking and essential journeys for the morning or evening where possible. 
- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing, seek shade and use suitable sun protection when outdoors. 
- Cool the skin with a short cool shower, damp cloth or water spray. A wrapped cold pack can be placed on the neck or under the arms for short periods. 
- Never leave babies, children, older people, vulnerable adults or animals in parked vehicles or other enclosed spaces. 
- Carry water when travelling and check for delays or disruption. 
- If your home remains very hot, consider spending time in a cooler public building, such as a library, place of worship, community building or supermarket, provided you can check opening times and travel there safely. 

Recognising heat exhaustion and heatstroke

Heat exhaustion can cause tiredness, dizziness, headache, nausea, heavy sweating, pale or clammy skin, cramps, thirst or weakness. Move the person to a cool place, remove unnecessary clothing, give cool water or a rehydration drink and cool their skin with water and a fan. Stay with them; they should improve within about 30 minutes.

Call NHS 111 if you are struggling to manage the symptoms or need advice. Call 999 if the person remains unwell after 30 minutes, or has a very high temperature, hot skin without sweating, confusion, poor coordination, a seizure, breathing difficulties or loss of consciousness. Heatstroke is a medical emergency.



Stay safe around water

Open water can remain very cold even when the air is hot. Sudden entry can cause cold water shock, leading to gasping, rapid breathing and panic. Use lifeguarded locations where possible, follow warning signs and local guidance, enter slowly, never swim alone and avoid alcohol. If you fall in unexpectedly, float until your breathing is controlled, then call for help. Call 999 if someone is in difficulty.

Supporting people at greater risk

Anyone can become unwell in extreme heat, but risk is higher for older people, babies and young children, pregnant women, people living alone, those with heart or breathing conditions, limited mobility or taking certain medicines. Top-floor flats and poorly ventilated homes can become particularly hot.

How you can help

- Check in regularly by phone or in person, including during prolonged hot weather.
- Encourage regular drinking. Some people may not recognise thirst or be able to get drinks without help.
- Help close blinds or curtains during the day and open windows when it becomes cooler outside, provided this can be done safely.
- Check that medicines are being stored as directed on the packaging. A pharmacist can advise if there are concerns.
- Help the person move somewhere cooler and watch for unusual tiredness, dizziness, confusion, nausea or breathlessness.
- Make sure carers, relatives or neighbours know who will check in, especially if the person lives alone.
- Many local charities and community groups are already working with people who may need extra help. Finding out what local organisations are doing to support people during periods of hot weather, and see how everyone can work together to reduce isolation and stay healthy during a heatwave.

Advice and local support

The [Energy Saving Trust](#) and [Better Housing Better Health](#) provides free advice on energy efficiency and home improvements. [Citizens Advice](#) offers independent support on housing, money and benefits. [Age UK Oxfordshire](#) provides advice and services for older people. The [Livewell Oxfordshire](#) guide shows services available to Oxfordshire adults. If you have concerns about a rental property WODC's [Private Housing](#) Rental pages have further information.

Further official guidance

Further official guidance [GOV.UK Beat the Heat](#) · [NHS heat exhaustion and heatstroke](#) · [RNLI cold water shock](#)

Reducing the cause as well as managing the effects

Preparing for hotter weather reduces immediate risks, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions helps limit future climate change. For practical local advice, visit West Oxfordshire District Council's [Climate and Nature Action](#) pages or the [Climate Action Oxfordshire](#) websites.



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