Our Past, Our Future

The strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment

Detailed Baseline Refresh Summer 2026

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Introduction

Purpose of this report

This report presents the 2026 refresh of the baseline evidence for *Our Past, Our Future: Scotland's Strategy for the Historic Environment 2023-2028*.

The Baseline Refresh provides an updated assessment of progress against the Strategy's nine Outcomes. It draws on new research, monitoring information, national datasets, programme reporting, and stakeholder evidence collected since the publication of the original baseline.

It should be read alongside:

- **OPOF Baseline Summary Report 2026**
- **OPOF Midpoint Report 2026**
- **OPOF Delivery Plan 2026-2028**
- **OPOF Insights Report 2026**
- **Scotland's Historic Environment Audit 2026 (SHEA)**
- **Our Past, Our Future: The Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment**

What this report is and is not

This report is intended to provide the detailed evidence base that underpins the assessment of progress against the strategy.

It is not an evaluation of individual organisations, programmes or projects. Instead, it seeks to identify emerging trends, evidence of change, areas of progress, persistent challenges and opportunities for future action across Scotland's historic environment.

A separate short summary version of findings is published alongside it (OPOF Baseline Refresh Summary 2026) plus a set of Strategic Evidence Statements 2026.

How progress is assessed

Evidence has been drawn from:

- national datasets
- programme and project monitoring
- organisational reporting
- sector research
- stakeholder engagement
- case study evidence
- newly commissioned analysis

Where possible, the Baseline Refresh compares the 2026 position with the original 2024 Baseline. For some outcomes, the 2026 Baseline Refresh incorporates new data sources and expanded reporting requirements. Where this has affected comparability with the original Baseline, results should be interpreted as reflecting an enhanced evidence base rather than as direct indicators of change over time.

Key messages

Across all nine Outcomes, the Baseline Refresh identifies four overarching findings:

1. **Activity, investment and collaboration have increased across the historic environment sector**, with growing evidence of partnership working and coordinated action in support of all nine OPOF Outcomes.
2. **There is growing evidence that Scotland's historic environment contributes to wider national priorities**, including climate action, community empowerment, economic development, placemaking and wellbeing.
3. Progress is most evident in the conditions that enable change, including partnership working, capacity building, investment and organisational development. **The greatest opportunities for further progress lie in strengthening workforce and organisational capacity and accelerating the sector's ability to respond to net zero, climate adaptation and resilience challenges.**
4. **The evidence base is significantly stronger than in 2024, but greater consistency in data collection, outcome measurement and impact reporting is needed to demonstrate collective impact and support future decision-making.**

Three years into delivery of *Our Past, Our Future*, the evidence suggests that the sector is moving from building the conditions for change to delivering change at scale. Strengthening workforce and organisational capacity, alongside accelerating action on net zero, climate adaptation and resilience, represents one of the greatest opportunities to unlock progress across multiple OPOF Outcomes.

Priority 1: Delivering the Transition to Net Zero

Outcome 1: Reduced emissions from the historic environment

Summary

The 2026 Baseline Refresh presents a broader and more transparent picture of the historic environment sector's emissions. The evidence base has been expanded from three organisations in 2024, (Historic Environment Scotland (HES), The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and VisitScotland) to now include a wider range of public bodies and organisations whose activities influence, manage, fund, support or shape Scotland's historic environment. These organisations include NatureScot, South of Scotland Enterprise, the National Galleries of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland (NLS), National Museums Scotland (NMS), the National Records of Scotland (NRS), Scottish Canals, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HiE). Given the data sources, the dataset provides an indication of emissions associated with organisations that influence, manage, fund or support Scotland's historic environment, rather than as a measure of emissions attributable exclusively to heritage activity.

The headline evidence shows that aggregate reported emissions from these bodies increased from **13,656 tCO_2e in 2022–23 to 19,472 tCO_2e in 2024–25** (Figure 1 - Reported GHG Emissions Sector's Total (tCO2e)). However, the evidence indicates that this increase is significantly influenced by improved reporting practice, expanded reporting boundaries and the inclusion of additional Scope 3 emissions categories, rather than solely reflecting a rise in underlying operational emissions. The increase should therefore be interpreted as evidence of a stronger emissions baseline and more comprehensive reporting across the sector, while recognising that year-on-year comparability remains limited due to changes in reporting scope and methodology.

Since the launch of *Our Past, Our Future,* there has also been significant activity to support emissions reduction. For example, the proportion of HES grant applications referencing climate change increased from **25 of 62 applications (40%) in 2024-25 to 88 of 91 applications (97%) in 2025-26**. This has also been supported by the publication of retrofit guidance, increased climate-related grant requirements across funders, carbon baseline work, emerging carbon tools, developing climate-action networks, and evidence-building projects. These developments are helping organisations understand their emissions, build capacity and prepare more targeted action to support net zero objectives.

Meanwhile, policy consultations, such as those undertaken for the Heat in Buildings Bill, indicate a growing recognition of the role that traditional buildings must play in Scotland's transition to net zero. While this activity reflects consultation activity rather than final policy decisions, it demonstrates increasing consideration of how decarbonisation measures can be delivered in ways that are compatible with the conservation and sustainable use of traditional buildings.

Baseline Position (2024)

Based on the data that was available at the time, the 2024 baseline drew on emissions data from a smaller group of organisations, including HES, the NLHF and VisitScotland. This provided an initial evidence base for understanding the sector's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, but it did not represent a comprehensive sector-wide dataset.

The baseline assessment therefore established the need for more comprehensive reporting, with clearer boundaries and more consistent methodologies, particularly by organisations who manage assets, estates, funded activity or visitor-facing infrastructure connected to the historic environment.

Current Position (2026)

Aggregate reported emissions increased from 13,656 tCO2e in 2022-23 to 19,472 tCO2e in 2024-25 (Figure 1 - Reported GHG Emissions Sector's Total (tCO2e)**.**

However, since the original Baseline was published in 2024, many organisations have developed their reporting boundaries and emissions categories. Reported increases in emissions should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of worsening sector performance. In many cases, higher reported emissions reflect a more complete understanding of organisational emissions rather than an increase in underlying emissions.

Many organisations, for example, have expanded the scope of their reporting practices,[1] particularly in relation to Scope 3 emissions.[2] Therefore, reporting in 2026 is increasingly likely to include indirect emissions associated with activities such as commuting, homeworking, hotel stays, procurement, electricity transmission and distribution losses, and other supply-chain impacts. VisitScotland's latest increase, for example, is primarily attributable to procurement spend, higher-carbon-intensity purchasing and improved reporting of hotel stays, while most other categories decreased. A smaller number of organisations, including Scottish Canals and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, reported reductions linked to lower energy consumption and improved reporting accuracy.

The dominant message, therefore, is that reported totals are becoming more complete. While this means that the 2026 dataset is not directly comparable with that shared in the original Baseline, historic emissions data is presented throughout this report to provide context and illustrate trends within individual organisations where possible. However, the principal value of the 2026 Baseline Refresh is that it establishes a more comprehensive baseline from which future progress can be assessed.

[1] Reporting practices have been updated as follows: Scope 3 emissions: State of corporate disclosure & Emissions measurement and reporting approaches for the public sector
[2] Scope 3 includes all other indirect emissions that occur in the upstream and downstream activities of an organisation (Carbon Trust)

Key Indicators

TABLE 1 - OUTCOME 1 KEY INDICATORS

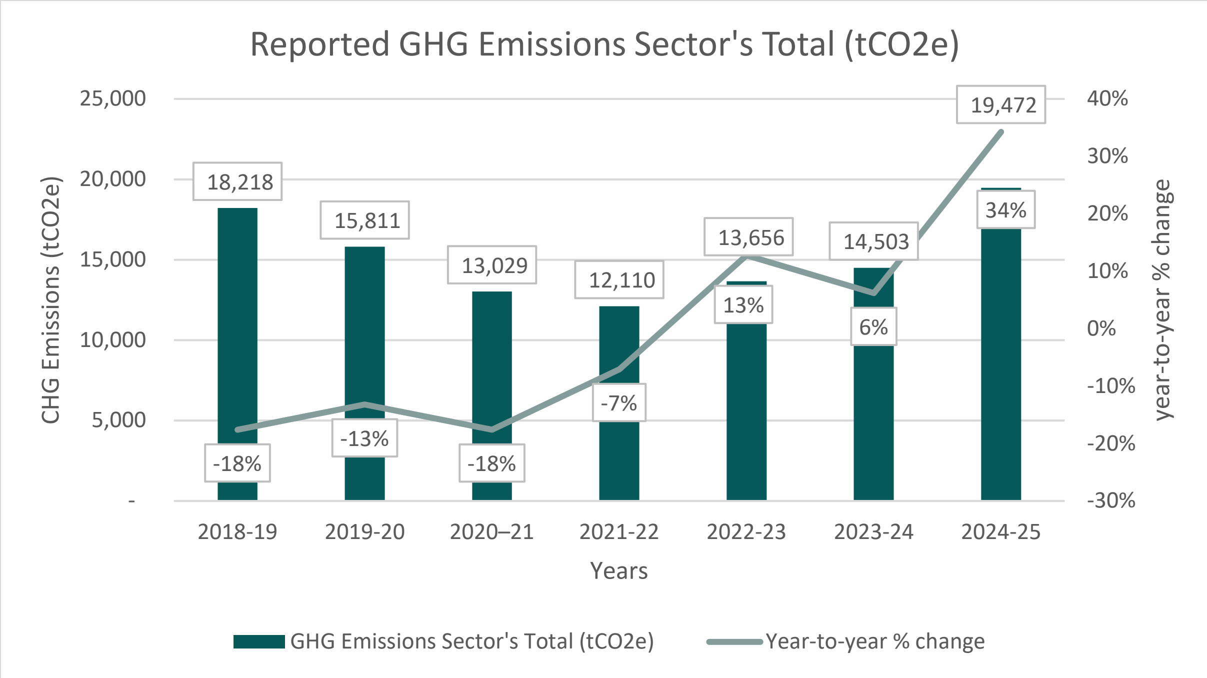
Indicator	Baseline (2024)	Current Position (2026)	Direction of Travel
Organisations included in emissions dataset	HES, NLHF and VisitScotland in 2024	Dataset expanded in 2026 to include NatureScot, South of Scotland Enterprise, National Galleries of Scotland, NLS, National Museums Scotland, National Records of Scotland, Scottish Canals and Highlands and Islands Enterprise	Trend: Improving coverage
Aggregate reported emissions	13,656 tCO2e in 2022-23	19,472 tCO2e in 2024-25	Trend: Reported increase; interpret with methodology caveat
Scope 3 and reporting methodology	More limited reporting coverage in 2024	Additional Scope 3 categories and reporting boundaries incorporated by several organisations by 2026	Trend: Improving transparency
HES grant applications referencing climate change	25 of 62 applications in 2024-25 (40%)	88 of 91 applications in 2025-26 (97%)	Trend: Positive direction of travel
Capital repair grants with at least one adaptation measure	11 of 11 projects in 2024-25 (100%)	3 of 3 projects in 2025-26 (100%)	Trend: Consistently included

Evidence and Progress

1.1. Emissions Trends

The evidence shows a sector that is improving the completeness and transparency of emissions reporting. The expanded dataset provides the most comprehensive picture of emissions currently available across organisations engaged with Scotland's historic environment. The reporting is made using the Conversion Factors provided by the UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

FIGURE 1 - REPORTED GHG EMISSIONS SECTOR'S TOTAL (TCO2E)



HES, the National Galleries of Scotland, the NLS and NMS report emissions from all their operations, including sites in their care. Other organisations report only on their own organisational emissions. To support meaningful comparison, emissions are therefore presented in three separate groupings: HES as a statutory body due to the scale of its estate (336 Properties in Care) (Figure 2 - Reported GHG Emissions HES's Total (tCO2e)); the National Galleries of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and the National Museums of Scotland[3] as a cluster due to the comparability of their collections and assets (Figure 3 - Reported GHG Emissions per Estate-Managing Organisations (tCO2e)) ; and the remaining organisations (NLHF, VisitScotland, NatureScot, South of Scotland Enterprise, NRS, Scottish Canals and HIE), which report on their own organisational emissions (Figure 4 - Reported GHG Emissions per Other Organisations (tCO2e)).

[3] From 2025–26, National Museums Scotland reports electricity emissions using location-based emissions factors, in line with SSN reporting requirements. Previous reports used market-based accounting reflecting the organisation's 100% renewable electricity tariff; caution should therefore be exercised when comparing data across years.

Figure 2 - Reported GHG Emissions HES's Total (tCO2e)

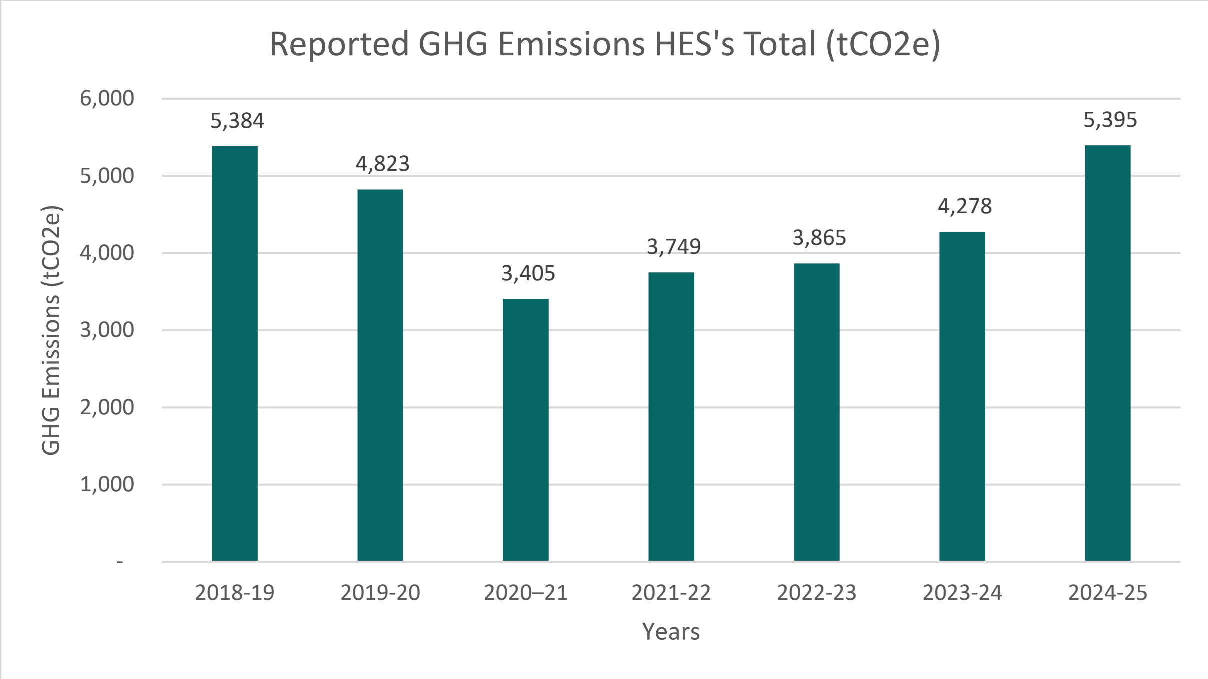


Figure 3 - Reported GHG Emissions per Estate-Managing Organisations (tCO2e)

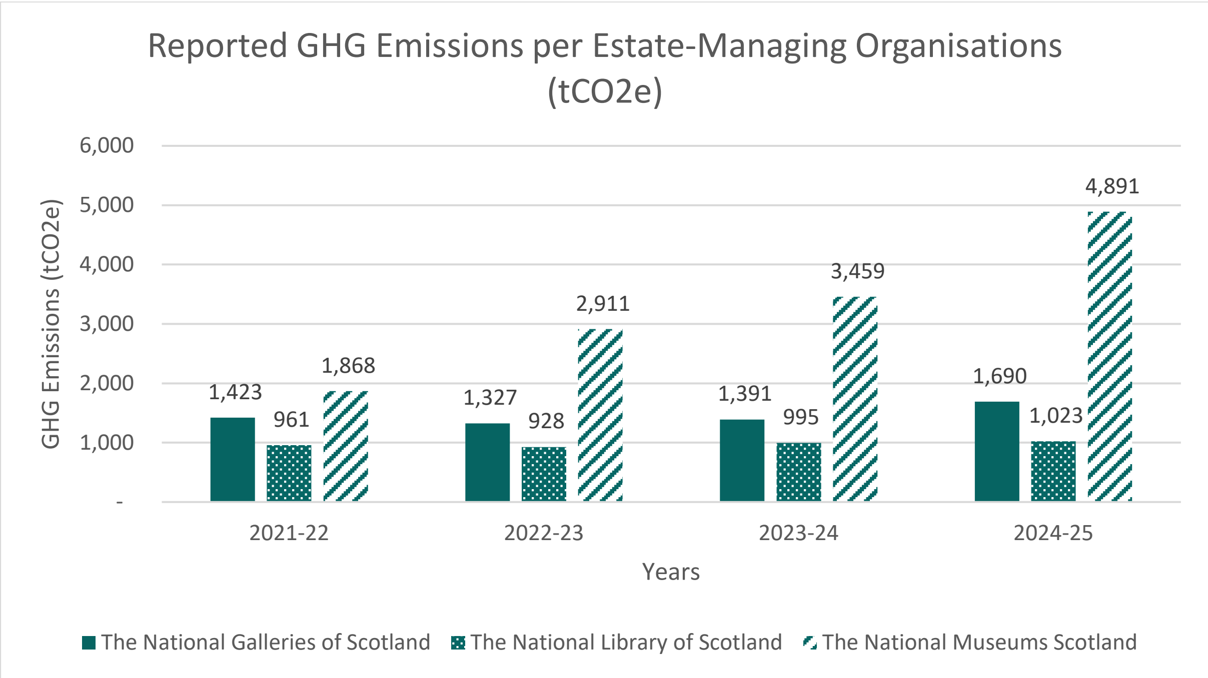
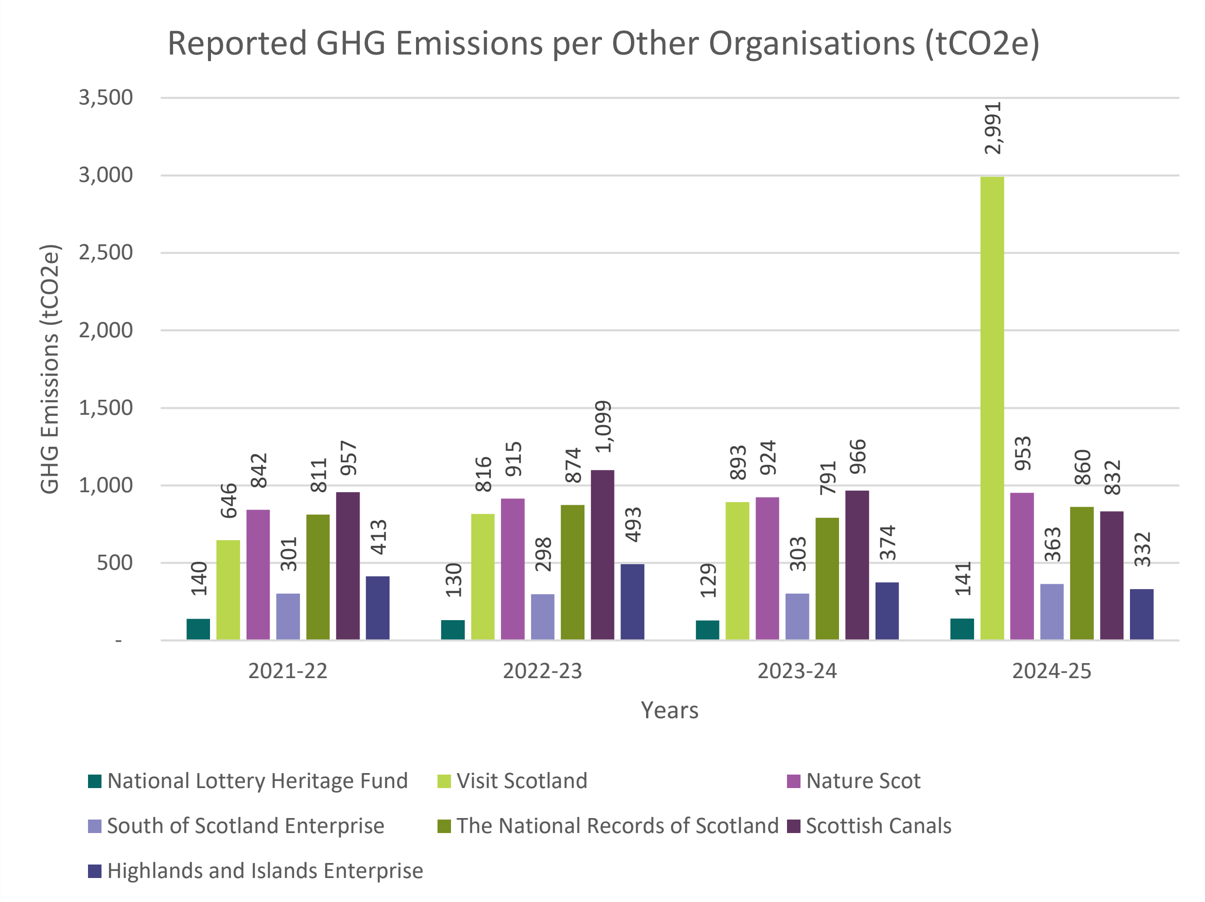


FIGURE 4 - REPORTED GHG EMISSIONS PER OTHER ORGANISATIONS (TCO2E)



Across the organisations included in the dataset, reported emissions varied considerably and reflect differences in estate size, asset portfolios, operational activity and reporting coverage. HES, the National Galleries of Scotland and South of Scotland Enterprise reported higher emissions associated with the inclusion of additional Scope 3 categories, particularly employee commuting. VisitScotland's reported emissions also increased following the inclusion of additional emissions sources and note that the latest increase is primarily attributable to procurement spend, higher-carbon-intensity purchasing and improved reporting of hotel stays, while most other emissions categories decreased.

A smaller number of increases are attributable to operational or estate-specific factors, such as changes in energy use at the National Records of Scotland or the inclusion of additional assets at NMS. In contrast, decreases are more limited; Scottish Canals and HIE have reported reductions that are largely linked to lower energy consumption and improved reporting accuracy, particularly to avoid double counting,

These findings are complimented by other sector activity. The NLHF's Portfolio Review, originally calculated in 2022 with a review ongoing and revised findings expected later in 2026, provides insight into the primary sources of emissions associated with funded heritage activity, particularly travel, procurement and capital works. By identifying where the most significant emissions occur across NLHF's grants portfolio, this work helps target emissions reduction efforts more effectively. It also provides an example of good practice for other funders seeking to better understand and manage their climate impacts.

Alongside changes in funding and project delivery, organisations across the sector are also investing in the people, skills and leadership needed to support the transition to net zero. Internal climate-action networks, such as Green Champion and dedicated sustainability roles, like those hosted by NMS and Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS), are helping to strengthen the historic environment sector's capacity to contribute to Scotland's net zero ambitions. These initiatives support shared learning, build staff capability and help embed climate action into organisational decision-making. In turn, this helps to create the conditions needed to deliver long-term emissions reductions and climate resilience across the sector.

Overall, the evidence provides a more comprehensive understanding of emissions across the historic environment sector and supports better informed climate action planning.

1.2. Significant Developments Since 2024

1.2.1. Retrofit Guidance and Delivery

There is significant available guidance on the retrofit of traditional buildings. HES guidance, for example, which is aimed at organisations and individuals seeking to improve the energy performance of traditional buildings while protecting their historic character, continues to support the adoption of energy-efficiency measures suited to historic assets. Evidence of its reach, including download and usage statistics, indicates continued demand for trusted retrofit guidance. Although the direct emissions impact of the guidance cannot be quantified, it plays an important enabling role in supporting lower-carbon approaches to the repair, maintenance and adaptation of Scotland's traditional building stock.

1.2.2. Research and Innovation

Research and innovation are also improving understanding of the role that historic buildings can play in contributing to emissions reduction goals. Scottish Historic Buildings Trust's (SHBT) Futureproofing programme is strengthening the evidence base for energy retrofit in Scotland's historic buildings through detailed energy performance evaluations of properties undergoing retrofit, including the Glasite Meeting House in Edinburgh.

Phase 1 modelling of the Glasite Meeting House using the Passivhaus Planning Package (PhPP) assessed the impact of a range of retrofit interventions, including fabric improvements, improved airtightness and low-carbon heating systems. The assessment found that combining insulation and airtightness measures with an upgraded heating system could reduce operational carbon emissions by between 61% and 71%, lowering modelled emissions from approximately 85 tCO_2e per year to between 34 and 24 tCO_2e per year.[4] The strongest performance was achieved through a

[4] Full assessment will be published by SHBT by Q3 2026

combination of fabric improvements and an air-source heat pump, which also reduced Primary Energy Renewable[5] demand by 84%.

These findings provide important evidence that sensitive retrofit measures can make a substantial contribution to emissions reduction within Scotland's historic building stock. By providing practical evidence of the costs, benefits and performance of retrofit measures, the programme is helping to build confidence that historic buildings can contribute to climate objectives while remaining viable, sustainable and in long-term use.

1.2.3. Research & Tools

The Highland Council Energy Performance Benchmarking Tool provides a further example of progress since the Baseline. While the dashboard associated with this Tool primarily reports emissions and energy performance, it also supports climate resilience by helping to identify high-consuming and high-emitting assets across the Council’s estate. This provides an evidence base for prioritising retrofit activity, energy-efficiency improvements and adaptation measures, thereby supporting more effective long-term asset management.

The scale of Highland Council's annual energy expenditure (£27.3 million) demonstrates both the economic significance of operating a large public estate and the potential financial benefits of reducing energy consumption and emissions. Although the estate comprises many building types and is not solely made up of historic assets, the benchmarking tool illustrates how evidence-led asset management can support resilience, prioritise investment and identify opportunities for retrofit and adaptation. Similar approaches may have value for historic assets seeking to improve performance while remaining in long-term use.

Organisations are continuing to strengthen the tools and frameworks needed to measure and coordinate progress. HES is currently developing a prototype carbon calculator, which represents an important step towards expanding emissions reporting beyond major organisations to include funded projects. Although still in testing, the tool has the potential to significantly broaden the evidence base by enabling more consistent project-level emissions estimation. Additionally, the development of a Route Map to Net Zero between HES and BEFS has the potential to provide a unifying framework for coordinating emissions reduction activity across the historic environment sector. Together, these initiatives demonstrate a growing emphasis on building the evidence, tools and partnerships required to support the sector's transition to net zero.

Therefore, while the absence of a comprehensive sector-wide emissions dataset continues to limit the ability to monitor collective progress, important advances have been made in developing the evidence base needed to support climate action. Increased emissions reporting and carbon measurement are helping organisations build confidence in identifying emissions sources, prioritising intervention and developing climate action plans. Continued investment in shared data approaches, guidance, research and capability-building will be important not only for improving monitoring and evaluation, but also for enabling organisations across the historic environment

[5] PER aims to quantify how much renewable energy generation would be required, in a future all-renewable grid, to supply the energy needed at the building (Passivhaus UK)

sector to take informed action towards Scotland's net zero ambitions and long-term climate resilience.

Contribution Towards OPOF Ambitions

The evidence suggests progress has been made towards OPOF's ambition to support the transition to net zero, particularly through improved climate-related evidence, guidance, funding practice and organisational capability. While the sector is not yet able to demonstrate robust sector-wide emissions reduction, it is building the data, skills and tools needed to support future reductions.

The strongest contribution is currently in enabling activity: improving measurement, embedding climate considerations in funding, strengthening retrofit evidence, developing climate-action skills and creating frameworks for more consistent action. These developments support the move from awareness and reporting towards targeted action and accountability.

Data Gaps and Caveats

The absence of a comprehensive, sector-wide emissions dataset remains a structural limitation. Individual organisations report emissions, but differences in reporting coverage, scope and methodology restrict direct comparison.

Progress should therefore not be assessed through reported emissions totals alone. Improved evidence, carbon literacy, and reporting capability are also important because they support organisations to identify emissions sources, prioritise actions and develop climate action plans.

While reporting of organisational emissions has improved significantly since the Baseline, there remains limited evidence of emissions associated with Scotland's wider historic environment, particularly its traditional building stock. This restricts the ability to understand the contribution of retrofit and other interventions at a sector-wide level.

Continued investment in shared data approaches, guidance, training and capability-building will be critical to strengthening both monitoring and delivery against OPOF Outcome 1.

Sources

- Greenhouse gas reporting: conversion factors 2026
- Organisational emissions data compiled for the Baseline Refresh 2026
- HES Guide to Energy Retrofit of Traditional Buildings
- HES grant application data.
- National Lottery Heritage Fund portfolio review: Establishing a carbon baseline and decarbonisation approach for our investments.
- Scottish Historic Buildings Trust Futureproofing programme evidence.
- Heat in Buildings Bill consultation analysis.
- Keep Scotland Beautiful Our Heritage, Our Future programme data.
- Highland Council Energy Performance Benchmarking tool.

Outcome 2: The historic environment is more climate resilient

Summary

The 2026 Baseline Refresh assesses climate resilience using a definition agreed by the National Strategy (OPOF) team and Steering Group: “the historic environment, through its tangible and intangible assets and the organisations that care for them, can mitigate and adapt to disturbances attributed to climate change”. This definition includes both mitigation, which reduces or avoids greenhouse gas emissions, and adaptation, which helps organisations, assets and places prepare for, respond to and recover from climate impacts.

The latest Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) indicates that Scotland's pre-1919 housing stock has remained relatively stable in its size but continues to be more vulnerable to disrepair than newer dwellings. While figures are survey-based and should be interpreted cautiously, indicators of urgent and extensive disrepair point to a growing severity of issues in Scotland’s oldest building stock. Although the survey does not identify the causes of this trend, the findings suggest that maintenance, repair and appropriate adaptation remain important factors in supporting the resilience of traditional buildings to future climate impacts.

Since the baseline, the sector has strengthened the foundations for resilience through risk screening, adaptation planning, funding requirements, training, community climate action planning and targeted retrofit advice. However, much of this activity remains focused on building knowledge and capability with further expansion required to achieve system-wide impact.

Baseline Position (2024)

The 2024 Baseline used Scottish House Condition Survey data to understand the condition and vulnerability of Scotland’s traditional building stock, particularly pre-1919 dwellings, as a key component of the historic environment.

The Baseline established that older buildings were more likely to experience disrepair to critical elements than newer dwellings. Although disrepair is an imperfect proxy for climate resilience, it provides an indication of a building's capacity to withstand and adapt to climate-related pressures. A building in good repair is not necessarily climate resilient, but unresolved defects such as roof, wall or drainage failures can increase vulnerability to damp, water ingress, flooding and severe weather. The findings therefore highlighted the importance of repair and maintenance as a foundation for improving the resilience of Scotland's traditional building stock.

Current Position (2026)

The Scottish House Condition Survey (SCHS) indicates that pre-1919 dwellings remain broadly stable as a share of Scotland’s occupied housing stock, at around 17-18%. The estimated number of pre-1919 dwellings fell from 466,000 in 2022 to 446,000 in 2024, a change of approximately -20,000 dwellings or -4.3%. As this is survey-based data, this movement should be interpreted as indicative rather than precise.
The UK Buildings Database (Verisk Data used under HES license 2024), as analysed by HES, shows

that traditional buildings make up 33% of Scotland's retail space, 24% of office space and 41% of public-sector buildings. These figures demonstrate the significant role that traditional buildings continue to play across Scotland and reinforce the importance of OPOF's aim to ensure that the historic environment contributes positively to a sustainable and climate-resilient future.

Key Indicators

TABLE 2 - OUTCOME 2 KEY INDICATORS

Indicator	Baseline (2024)	Current Position (2026)	Direction of Travel
Pre-1919 occupied dwellings	466,000 in 2022	446,000 in 2024	Trend: Broadly stable, slight indicative decrease
Any disrepair to critical elements in pre-1919 dwellings	71% in 2022	68% in 2024	Trend: High and fluctuating
Urgent disrepair to one or more critical elements	27% in 2022	32% in 2024	Trend: Worsening severity
Combined critical and urgent disrepair	32% in 2022	37% in 2024	Trend: Worsening severity
Community Heritage and Climate Action Plans	Not established in Baseline (2024) at this scale	4 plans delivered by Our Heritage, Our Future up to April 2026	Trend: Emerging positive action

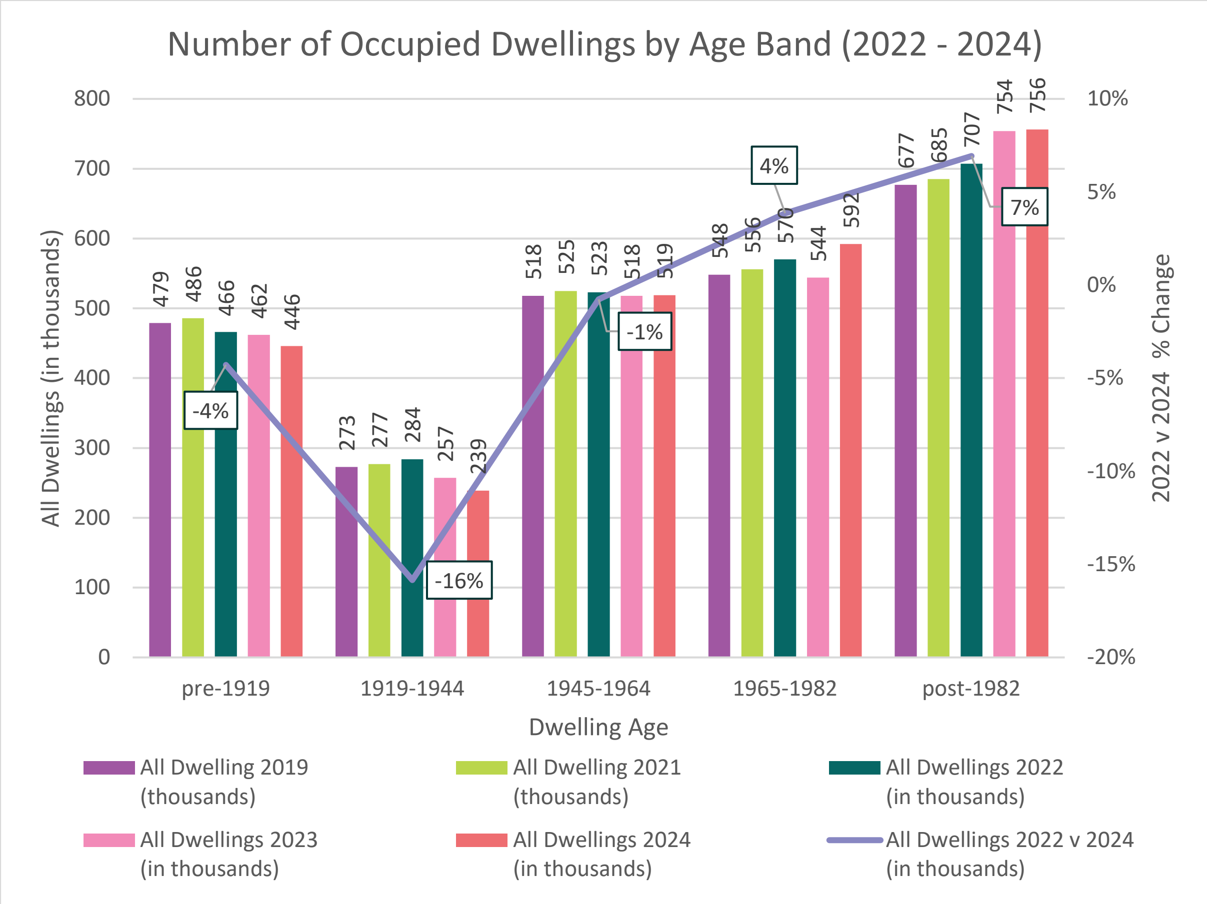
Evidence and Progress

2.1. Building Condition and Resilience Trends

The Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) provides important evidence on the condition and resilience of Scotland's pre-1919 building stock, which form a significant component of the historic environment. The survey data tracks changes in the prevalence, condition and vulnerability of traditional buildings, providing an evidence base to assess how well the historic environment is able to withstand and adapt to climate-related pressures.

The SHCS indicates that the share of Scotland's occupied dwellings built before 1919 has remained broadly stable at around 17–18%, although there has been a modest decline in the estimated number of pre-1919 homes over the most recent period (Figure 5 - Number of Occupied Dwellings by Age Band (2022 - 2024)). In 2022, pre-1919 dwellings were estimated at 466,000 (around 18% of all dwellings). The 2023 estimate was similar at 462,000 (around 18%), before falling slightly to 446,000 (around 17%) in 2024. Overall, this represents a change of approximately -20,000 dwellings between 2022 and 2024 (-4.3%).

FIGURE 5 - NUMBER OF OCCUPIED DWELLINGS BY AGE BAND (2022 - 2024)

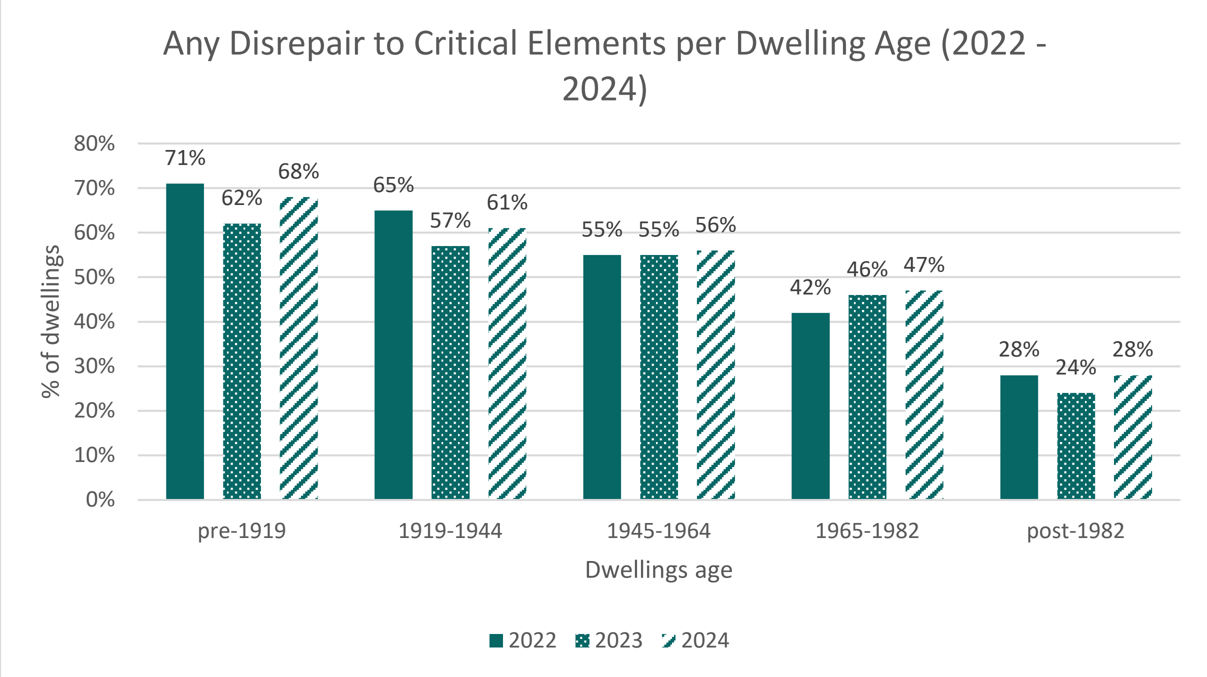


To better understand the resilience of pre-1919 buildings to current and future conditions, the analysis examined levels of disrepair across the building stock. Disrepair to critical elements refers to defects affecting parts of a building that are central to weather tightness, structural stability and preventing deterioration, such as roof coverings or the structure of external walls. These elements are listed in Section 2.7.1 of the SHCS Methodological and Technical notes.

While the pattern between 2022 and 2024 is mixed and based on survey-results, the SHCS disrepair indicators suggest that pre-1919 dwellings remain more likely than the average Scottish home to experience disrepair to critical elements.

Any disrepair to critical elements in pre-1919 dwellings were recorded at 71% in 2022, falling to 62% in 2023 before increasing again to 68% in 2024 (Figure 6 - Any Disrepair to Critical Elements per Dwelling Age (2022 - 2024)). This represents a net decrease of three percentage points between 2022 and 2024. However, rates remained consistently higher than those recorded across all Scottish dwellings, where corresponding figures were 49% in 2022, 45% in 2023 and 48% in 2024. This suggests that older buildings continue to face greater maintenance and resilience challenges than Scotland's housing stock as a whole.

FIGURE 6 - ANY DISREPAIR TO CRITICAL ELEMENTS PER DWELLING AGE (2022 - 2024)



To better understand the severity of disrepair, the SHCS also records urgent and extensive disrepair measures.[6] Extensive disrepair is used to identify cases where defects are more severe in nature.[7] While overall levels of critical-element disrepair fluctuated over the period, the more severe indicators showed a more consistent upward trend. Urgent disrepair affecting one or more critical elements increased from 27% in 2022 to 28% in 2023 and 32% in 2024 (Figure 9 - Urgent Disrepair to One or More Critical Elements per Dwelling Age (2022 -2024)). Similarly, the combined measure of any disrepair to critical elements alongside urgent disrepair increased from 32% in 2022 to 37% in 2024 (Figure 7 - Any Disrepair to Critical Elements and Any Urgent Disrepair per Dwelling Age (2022 - 2024)). Extensive disrepair also rose from 5% in 2022 to 7% in 2024, despite a temporary dip in 2023 (Figure 8 - Any Disrepair to Critical Elements, Any Urgent and Any Extensive Disrepair per Dwelling Age (2022 - 2024)).

Looking over a longer timeframe provides additional context. The proportion of pre-1919 dwellings with any disrepair to critical elements was 73% in 2018 and 71% in 2019, indicating that the 2022–2024 estimates sit within a consistently high, albeit fluctuating, range for Scotland's oldest housing stock.

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[6] Scottish House Condition Survey: Methodology Notes 2024 - 2.7.2: As defined in the SHCS methodology note: ‘Urgent disrepair is recorded where the SHCS surveyor deems that a dwelling has any disrepair which, if not rectified, would cause the fabric of the building to deteriorate further and/or place the health and safety of the occupier at risk. Urgency of disrepair is only assessed for external and common elements. Internal room floor structures and finishes as well as internal walls/partitions and the presence of dry/wet rot are the only critical elements for which urgency is not applicable.’

[7] Scottish House Condition Survey: Methodology Notes 2024 - 2.7.3: As defined in the SHCS methodology note: ‘It is recorded where any building element has an overall disrepair score exceeding 20% by area; or any building element assessed has a score of 'medium' or 'renew' on the 5-point repair scale (equivalent to an area of around 25% or more of the element); or dry/wet rot is recorded in two or more rooms.’

Figure 7 - Any Disrepair to Critical Elements and Any Urgent Disrepair per Dwelling Age (2022 - 2024)

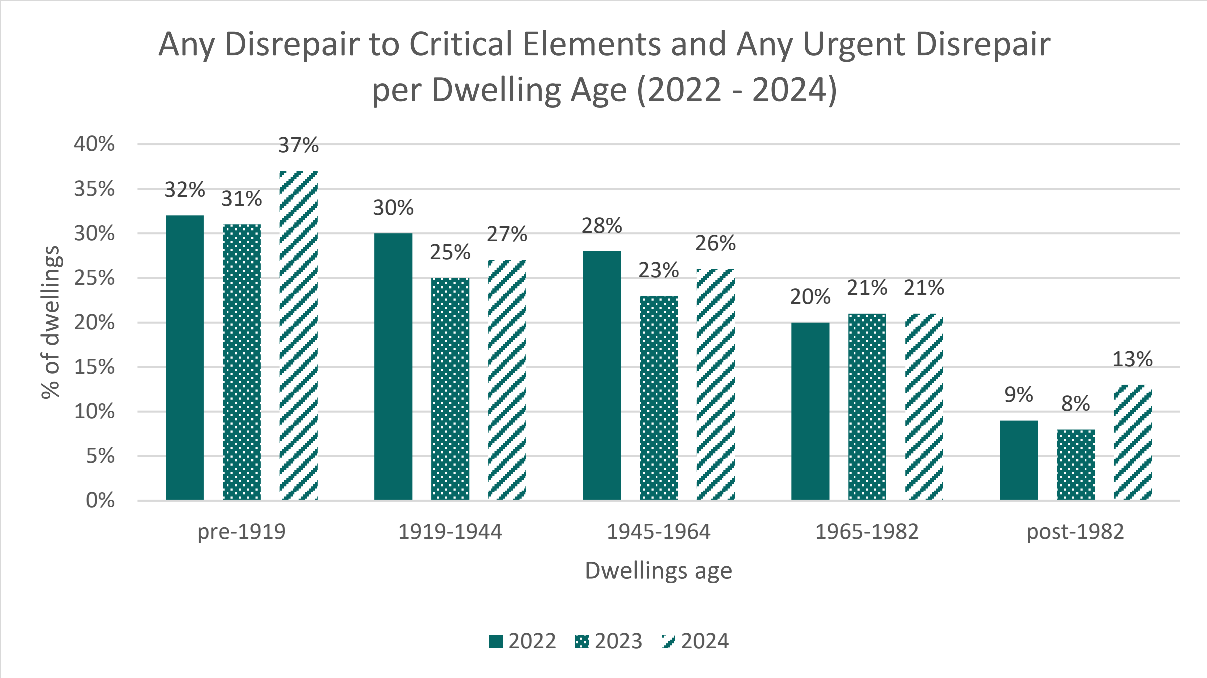


Figure 8 - Any Disrepair to Critical Elements, Any Urgent and Any Extensive Disrepair per Dwelling Age (2022 - 2024)

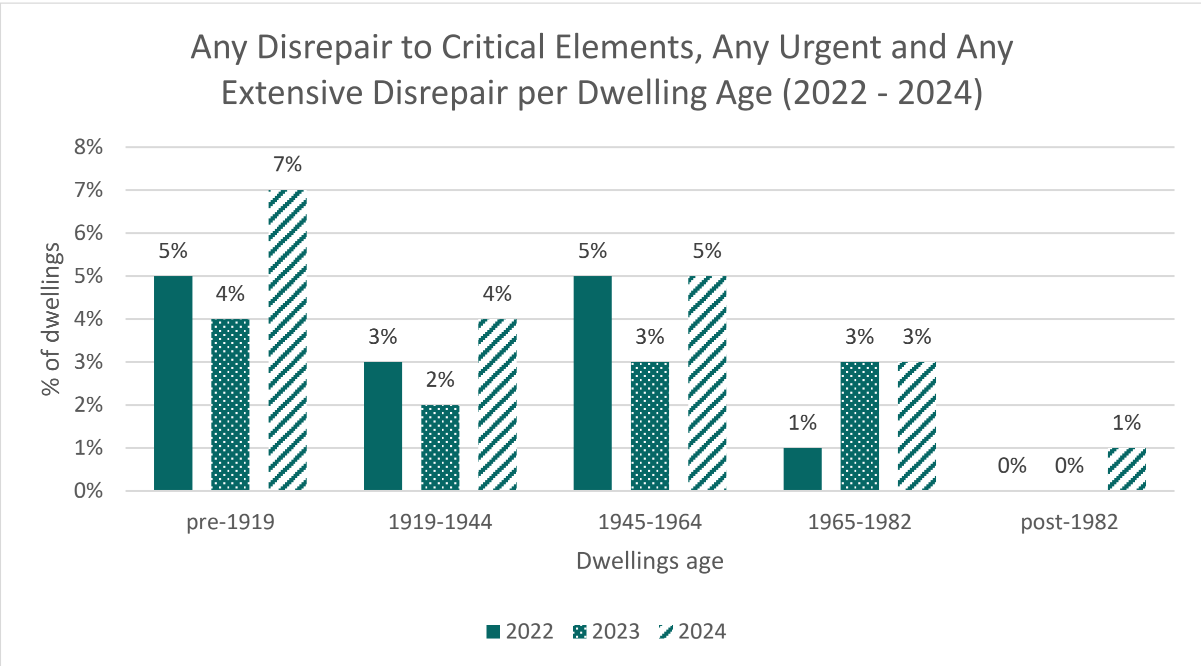
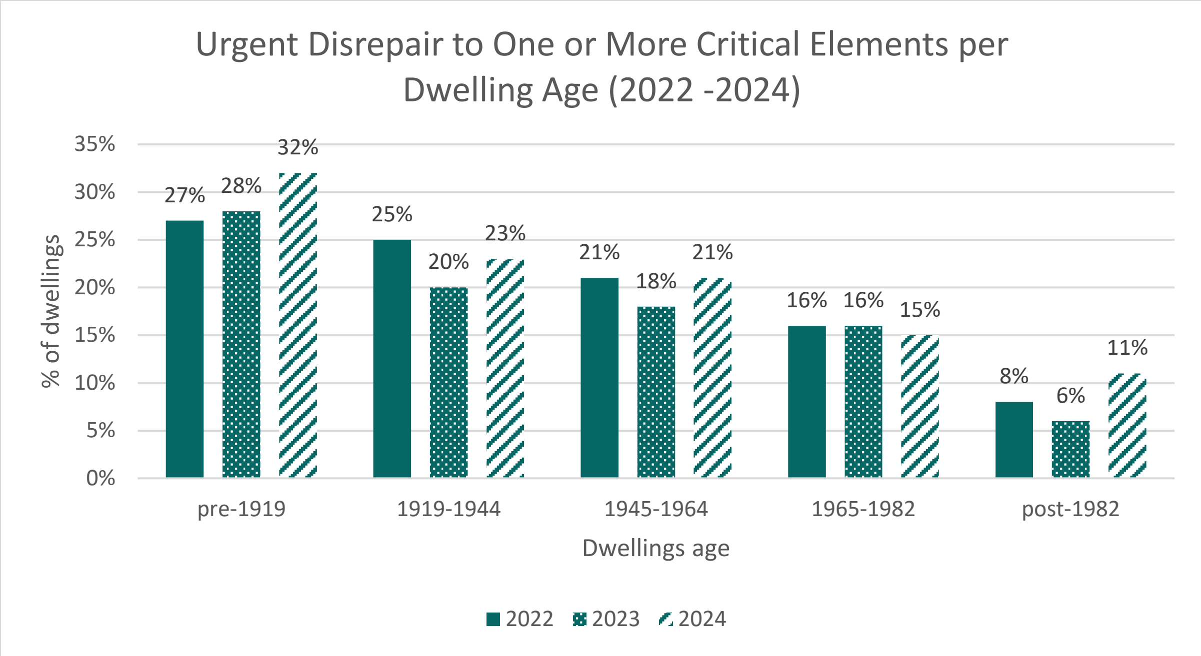
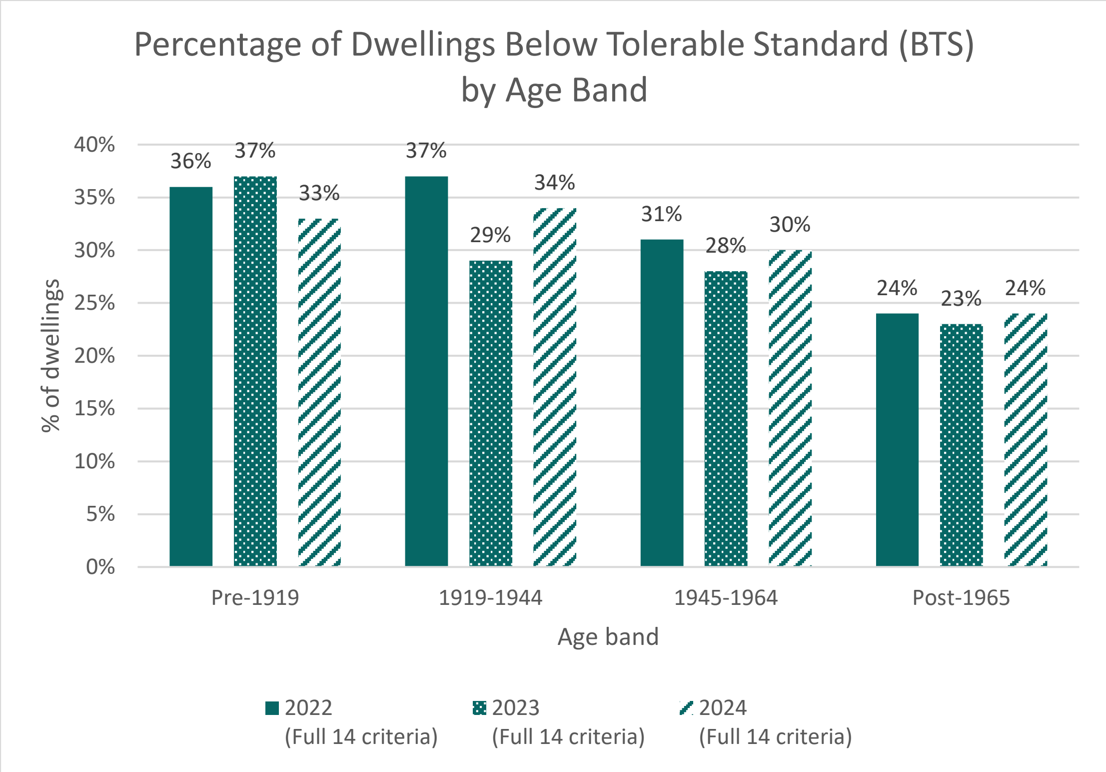


FIGURE 9 - URGENT DISREPAIR TO ONE OR MORE CRITICAL ELEMENTS PER DWELLING AGE (2022 -2024)



Broader measures of housing condition show a similar pattern. Using the SHCS "full 14 criteria" Below Tolerable Standard (BTS) measure introduced in 2022, pre-1919 dwellings (33%) and 1919–1944 dwellings (34%) performed less favourably than newer housing stock. This compares with 30% for dwellings built between 1945 and 1964, 24% for post-1965 dwellings and an all-dwellings average of 28% in 2024 (Figure 10 - Urgent Disrepair to One or More Critical Elements per Dwelling Age (2022 -2024)).

FIGURE 10 - URGENT DISREPAIR TO ONE OR MORE CRITICAL ELEMENTS PER DWELLING AGE (2022 -2024)



Taken together, the evidence indicates that Scotland's pre-1919 housing stock remains broadly stable in scale but consistently more vulnerable to disrepair than newer dwellings. This represents an ongoing resilience challenge within the historic environment. While levels of disrepair vary from year to year, consistently elevated rates among pre-1919 buildings, particularly in elements linked to weather tightness and structural integrity, suggests continued exposure to climate-related pressures such as increased rainfall, flooding and extreme weather events.

The increase in urgent and extensive disrepair is particularly significant. It points not only to the presence of defects but also to the growing severity of issues where intervention may be required to prevent further deterioration. Improving climate resilience is therefore less about the remaining number of historic buildings and more about ensuring that individual assets are well maintained, appropriately adapted and able to withstand the impacts of a changing climate. Continued investment in preventative maintenance, repair and climate adaptation measures will be important for safeguarding Scotland's traditional buildings and strengthening the long-term resilience of the historic environment.

2.2. Significant Developments Since 2024

2.2.1. Policy, Strategy and Adaptation Planning

Since the Baseline, the sector has increasingly shifted from understanding to actively managing climate risk. At an organisational level, tools such as GIS-based risk screening are enabling more targeted prioritisation of adaptation investment, particularly within large estates. At the national level, policy frameworks such as SNAP3 are strengthening expectations around adaptation planning and reporting, helping to embed resilience considerations into routine practice across public bodies.

This shift is being reinforced through funding and programme-level interventions, where adaptation is an increasingly common requirement within project design and delivery. It is also supported by capacity-building initiatives, including community climate action planning and practical resources such as retrofit guidance and tourism adaptation manuals. Together, these activities are helping to translate high-level climate risks into operational decisions and locally appropriate actions.

2.2.2. Community Action and Capacity Building

The Our Heritage, Our Future programme delivered by Keep Scotland Beautiful supports communities to develop Community Heritage Climate Action Plans and implement actions over time. By supporting community-led planning and action, the programme is helping communities identify and respond to climate risks which affect heritage assets, strengthening local adaptive capacity and resilience.

From 2023 to April 2026, Our Heritage, Our Future delivered four Community Heritage and Climate Action Plans, trained 220 participants on the impacts of climate change on heritage, supported 34 participants through conservation skills training and enabled 38 individuals to achieve accredited heritage skills units (Table 3 - Our Heritage, Our Future 2023 to 2026 Activities Data). In addition, 62 educator training sessions have been delivered, suggesting a wider multiplier effect through education, knowledge sharing and community engagement.

TABLE 3 - OUR HERITAGE, OUR FUTURE 2023 TO 2026 ACTIVITIES DATA

Activities	Count	Types
Community Heritage and Climate Action Plans	4	*plans*
Impacts of Climate Change on Heritage training	220	*participants*
Accredited heritage skills units	38	*people achieved a unit*
Conservation skills training	34	*participants*
Educators training on heritage and climate themes	62	*trainings*

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the foundations for climate resilience are continuing to strengthen through a combination of skills development, awareness-raising, targeted retrofit advice and local planning activity. Across the examples reviewed, there is evidence of both capability-building and practical intervention, although the extent to which this is occurring across the wider sector remains more difficult to assess.

2.2.3. Funding, Grants and Operational Delivery

Although there is no dedicated sector-wide retrofit programme, climate resilience and energy-efficiency considerations are increasingly being incorporated into funded repair, maintenance and research projects. Glasgow City Heritage Trust, for example, provides retrofit advice through its project work and participates in Glasgow City Council's Retrofit Advisory Group. The Trust will also contribute to the Warmer Tenements Glasgow initiative, which aims to improve the energy performance of traditional tenement buildings.

This growing focus on climate adaptation and resilience is also evident within HES's Grant programmes.[8] In 2024–25, 25 of 62 grant applications (40%) referenced climate change, rising significantly to 88 of 91 applications (97%) in 2025–26. This substantial increase suggests that climate resilience is becoming increasingly included within project development and funding applications across the sector.

The trend is also reflected in capital repair projects. According to assessment criteria developed jointly by HES's Climate Change and Grants Teams, all 14 capital repair grants that included technical development in both 2024–25 and 2025–26 incorporated at least one adaptation measure. While many of these measures form part of routine repair and maintenance activity, they nevertheless contribute to improving resilience by addressing vulnerabilities associated with weathering, water ingress and the increasing impacts of climate change on historic buildings and monuments.

The increasing integration of climate adaptation within heritage funding is also evident across the wider cultural sector. In 2026, Creative Scotland and the Scottish Futures Trust launched a £400,000 pilot fund to support climate adaptation projects in cultural and creative buildings, while Museums Galleries Scotland's Repair and Adaptation Fund continues to provide capital investment for repairs, accessibility improvements and measures that enhance the environmental sustainability and climate resilience of museum buildings. These initiatives are supporting practical measures to improve the resilience, sustainability and long-term viability of cultural and heritage buildings, while generating evidence and lessons to help inform future investment in climate adaptation across Scotland's cultural estate.

Taken together, these findings suggest that climate adaptation is moving beyond standalone climate projects and becoming an increasingly routine consideration within the conservation and repair of historic assets. This activity also demonstrates how public investment is helping to embed climate resilience within the management of Scotland's historic environment. Future work by HES to assess the scale and effectiveness of adaptation measures will further strengthen understanding of how funded projects contribute to reducing climate-related risks across the sector.

Contribution Towards OPOF Ambitions

The evidence suggests positive momentum towards improved climate resilience, particularly through skills development, awareness-raising, retrofit advice and better use of data to target interventions. The presence of community-led action planning is particularly significant, as it supports locally tailored responses to climate risks and increases the likelihood of sustained action over time.

The strongest contribution is currently in building the foundations for resilience. Training and planning activity are increasing confidence and capability, while funding and guidance are beginning to embed adaptation considerations into routine practice. However, system-wide impact will depend on the expansion and acceleration of delivery.

[8] Data taken from the HES SNAP3 APR - 2026 Indicators Commission

Data Gaps and Caveats

Scottish House Condition Survey results are survey-based and annual movements should be interpreted cautiously. Changes in the estimated number of pre-1919 dwellings should be read as indicative rather than precise.

There is also no dedicated sector-wide retrofit or adaptation programme for the historic environment. Evidence of progress is currently drawn from a combination of training, advice, community planning, grant requirements, local authority tools and individual projects. These provide useful indicators of momentum, but do not yet allow a full assessment of system-wide resilience outcomes.

The available evidence is also uneven across different aspects of the historic environment. Current indicators focus primarily on historic buildings and housing condition, while there is more limited evidence on the resilience of archaeological sites, monuments, historic landscapes and the skills and knowledge needed to care for them. Developing evidence across these areas would support a more comprehensive assessment of climate resilience in future refreshes.

Sources

- Definition of climate resilient agreed by the OPOF team and Steering Group, 2026.
- Scottish House Condition Survey 2022, 2023 and 2024.
- Scottish House Condition Survey Methodology Notes 2024, sections 2.7.1 to 2.7.3.
- Climate change: Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024-2029.
- Heritage Fund climate adaptation guidance.
- Keep Scotland Beautiful Our Heritage, Our Future programme evidence.
- Glasgow City Heritage Trust retrofit activity and Warmer Tenements Glasgow involvement.
- Highland Council Energy Performance Benchmarking tool.

Outcome 3: Improved pathways for historic environment skills

Summary

Activity across the historic environment skills system has increased, with career awareness participation rising from approximately **2,000 individuals at Baseline to around 7,000 in 2026**, and Heritage Careers Week engagement increasing from approximately **1,200 to 2,600 participants**. However, there is limited evidence that this has translated into improved workforce capacity.

Skills shortages continue to affect business growth, succession planning and sector resilience. While the sector is strengthening the foundations for future workforce development through improved coordination, awareness and targeted interventions, the underlying supply-demand gap remains and will require sustained, long-term investment and action.

Baseline Position (2024)

The 2024 Baseline identified persistent skills shortages, limited entry routes and a constrained education and training pipeline within the historic environment sector. It also highlighted the importance of workforce capacity for long-term sector resilience, including the ability to respond to climate-related pressures and maintain the historic environment.

Current Position (2026)

The Skills Investment Plan Year 2 evidence shows increased activity across the skills system, including expanded career awareness, modest growth in apprenticeships and higher levels of skills investment. However, this has not yet translated into a step change in workforce capacity.

Key Indicators

TABLE 4 - OUTCOME 3 KEY INDICATORS

Indicator	Baseline (2024)	Current Position (2026)	Direction of Travel
Career awareness and engagement participation	Approximately 2,000 individuals in 2024	Approximately 7,000 individuals in 2025-26	Trend: Positive activity increase
Skills-related investment	2024/25: Previous year baseline	£25.5m across 119 projects; 14.7% funding increase and 56.5% project increase in 2025-26	Trend: Positive increase
Heritage Careers Week engagement	Approximately 1,200 individuals in 2024	Approximately 2,600 individuals in 2025	Trend: Positive funding increase

Evidence and Progress

3.1. Skills and Workforce Development

The evidence gathered through the Skills Investment Plan (SIP) Year 2 Report provides an updated picture of workforce development, skills provision and skills demand across the historic environment sector. The report assesses progress since the 2024 Baseline and highlights activity across career awareness, apprenticeships, education and training provision, employer-reported skills shortages and investment in workforce development.

Investment data demonstrate progress. A total of £25.5 million has been awarded across 119 skills-related projects in Scotland by HES, NLHF, Museums Galleries Scotland and the Scottish Government. This represents a 14.7% increase from funding for skills projects from 2024/25 and a 56.5% increase in the number of projects compared with the preceding year.

HES awarded £12.5 million across 49 projects in 2024/25 containing skills and training elements, including at least £1.25 million directly supporting skills activity through qualifications, apprenticeships, continuing professional development and employability opportunities. The NLHF awarded £11.4 million across 32 projects, supporting climate leadership, youth skills development, future workforce development, health and wellbeing initiatives, community history and greenspaces. MGS contributed £863,362 towards projects focused on skills development, collections care, volunteering, leadership and engagement with underrepresented groups. In addition, the Scottish Government invested £200,000 through the Museum Futures programme.

Despite the increases in activity across the skills system discussed above, many of the challenges identified in the 2024 baseline remain evident. While there has been growth in career awareness initiatives, apprenticeships and skills investment, progress to date appears to have strengthened the foundations of the skills system rather than fundamentally changed workforce capacity or skills supply.

Career awareness and engagement activity has increased since the Baseline, with over 7,000 people taking part in careers awareness activities. Craft Your Career completed six pilot rounds of pre-apprenticeships involving 48 learners, testing both independent provider and college/local authority delivery models. Of participants, 89% achieved the NPA Construction Craft Technician qualification (SCQF Level 4) and 75% progressed into positive destinations within six months. The National Trust for Scotland is also developing Foundation Apprenticeships linked to the Mackintosh Illuminated and Fyvie Reimagined projects, creating new opportunities for people to develop heritage skills and enter the sector.

The Employer's Survey (2025), a biannual survey of employers in the heritage sector, points to persistent skills shortages. Nearly half of employers (46%) reported that their organisation does not currently have the skills it needs, while 79% identified skills or knowledge gaps within their workforce. Traditional and specialist heritage skills (54%) and IT and digital skills (44%) were the most frequently reported areas of need. Employers also highlighted challenges in accessing training, funding and clear professional pathways, with 42% reporting that they could not access the training provision they required. Suggested solutions included accredited courses, mentorship opportunities, greater engagement with young people, more accessible funding and increased apprenticeship opportunities, particularly in rural areas.

The education and training pipeline shows little overall change since the Baseline. Further and Higher Education provision continues to support approximately 70–80 core training places, with only marginal growth in enrolments. University enrolments increased slightly, by around 1.5%, but this does not represent a material expansion in capacity. No significant new courses or providers have entered the system during the reporting period, reinforcing the Baseline finding that the education pipeline remains relatively small, fragmented and insufficient to meet projected sector demand.

Employer-reported recruitment challenges remain evident across the sector. In 2025, 37% of employers cited a lack of interest in working in the sector as a key driver of future skills and labour shortages while 58% mention issues with training provision and 42% highlighted a lack of clear entry routes. More widely, employers continue to report concerns about shortages of skilled and qualified professionals (77%) and an ageing workforce (67%). These findings suggest that workforce attraction and recruitment challenges remain closely linked to broader skills pipeline and workforce sustainability issues.

3.1.1. Investment and Projects

Alongside investment in training and workforce development, organisations are undertaking wider work to improve inclusion, participation and organisational culture. While these initiatives are important to the long-term sustainability of the sector, much of this activity is more directly relevant to Outcome 6 and is considered there.

3.2. Significant Developments Since 2024

Evidence from the Employers Survey (2025) suggests that perceptions of entry and progression routes remain mixed, with employers evenly divided on whether pathways into and through the sector are clear and accessible. At the same time, there is evidence of ongoing action to improve workforce diversity and inclusion. More than two-thirds of organisations reported implementing initiatives in this area, including inclusive recruitment practices, staff training and the promotion of inclusive organisational policies and values. Together, these activities indicate a growing recognition of the importance of widening participation and broadening access to heritage careers.

Contribution Towards OPOF Ambitions

The evidence suggests that OPOF-related activity is contributing to stronger coordination, better awareness and increased investment in skills pathways. These are important foundations for future change, particularly given the role of specialist skills in maintaining, repairing and adapting Scotland’s historic environment.

However, the current level of activity is not yet sufficient to address the structural workforce challenges facing the sector. Continued investment, clearer entry routes, expanded training provision and stronger employer capacity will be required to deliver the scale of change needed.

Data Gaps and Caveats

The evidence is strong in showing participation, investment and activity levels, but weaker in demonstrating longer-term outcomes such as sustained entry into the workforce, retention, progression or increased employer capacity.

There is limited evidence that increased awareness activity has translated into higher entry into the sector, with interest in heritage careers remaining low at around 8% of young people. This makes it important to continue tracking the relationship between outreach, training, employment pathways and workforce outcomes.

Sources

- Skills Investment Plan Year 2 Report evidence used for Outcome 3.
- Employer-reported skills gaps and recruitment challenges data.
- Programme-level monitoring on career awareness, apprenticeships, training delivery and skills investment.

Priority 2: Empowering Resilient and Inclusive Communities and Places

Outcome 4: Organisations that care for the historic environment have the right skills and are more resilient

Summary

The evidence for Outcome 4 shows that skills and workforce resilience remain central challenges for the historic environment sector. The Skills Investment Plan evidence confirms persistent barriers, including limited access to appropriate training, financial constraints and unclear entry and progression routes. At the same time, investment in skills-related activity has increased, with **£25.5m invested by the culture and heritage sector across 119 projects in 2025/2026**, representing a **14.7% increase in funding and a 56.5% increase in project numbers** compared with the previous year.

Volunteering continues to make an important contribution to skills development and sector resilience. New evidence from Make Your Mark and Volunteer Scotland provides a more detailed understanding of volunteer-involving heritage organisations and heritage volunteers. It shows that volunteering supports transferable skills, wellbeing and community capacity, but there is potential to more closely align with the specialist skills gaps most critical to long-term workforce resilience.

Since the Baseline, sector activity has expanded through investment, careers platforms, organisational inclusion programmes and AHF-funded project activity. These developments indicate positive momentum, but structural issues around funding, progression routes, paid entry-level roles and access to specialist training remain significant.

Baseline Position (2024)

The Baseline position drew on the 2024 Skills Investment Plan (SIP) for the Historic Environment and the SIP employer survey that was carried out in 2023. It identified the most significant barriers to addressing skills gaps as access to appropriate training provision, limited funding for workforce development, and a lack of clear entry and progression pathways.

SIP data showed that skills gaps were affecting employer costs, succession planning, business growth and quality of work. Training was primarily delivered internally or through peer-to-peer learning and mentoring, while investment in workforce development remained limited across many organisations.

The 2024 Baseline also used Scottish Household Survey data from 2019 to estimate that 73,000 adults volunteered in the culture and heritage sector, while recognising that this evidence was not detailed enough to assess the role of volunteering in skills development and workforce resilience.

Current Position (2026)

The latest evidence from the SIP Year 2 Report (2026) reinforces the Baseline position. Employers continue to report difficulty accessing the training they need and almost half feel that entry and progression routes remain unclear. Financial constraints, training availability and limited awareness of opportunities continue to restrict skills development.

Volunteering evidence from surveys conducted in summer 2025 strengthens the evidence base. Responses from 53 volunteer-involving heritage organisations and 331 heritage volunteers and summarised in the Heritage Volunteering in Scotland Research Report, showed that volunteering supports skills development, wellbeing and local capacity. However, only a small proportion of volunteers reported developing skills in high demand by the sector such as specialist craft, digital, leadership and management skills.

Key Indicators

TABLE 5 - OUTCOME 4 KEY INDICATORS

Indicator	Baseline (2024)	Current Position (2026)	Direction of Travel
Employers surveyed experiencing skills and knowledge gaps expecting to have a 'considerable' or 'huge' impact on their organisation	63% of respondents in 2023	65% of respondents in 2025	Trend: Increase
Employers unable to access training they need or want	42% in 2023	Barrier remains evident in SIP evidence in 2025	Trend: Persistent challenge
Volunteer skills development support	Limited detailed baseline evidence in 2024	93% of organisations report supporting volunteer skills development in 2025	Trend: Improved evidence base
Work-based learning opportunities	Around 6,400 taken up in 2024-25	Around 6,800 taken up in 2025-26	Trend: Slight positive increase

Evidence and Progress

4.1. Workforce Capacity

The Skills Investment Plan (SIP) Year 2 Report (2026), together with the SIP Employer Survey (updated in 2025) referenced in the previous Baseline, provides evidence on workforce development, training provision and investment across the historic environment sector.

The evidence highlights that access to training, funding and progression routes continue to be among the most significant barriers to workforce resilience. SIP data show that 63% of employers experience increased costs as a result of skills gaps, while impacts are also felt through succession planning (59%), business growth (52%) and quality of work (48%). Financial constraints (63%), challenges accessing suitable continuing professional development or training (34%), and limited awareness of opportunities (16%) further restrict skills development across the sector.

These findings are reflected in employers' views of the current skills system. Around 42% of employers report that they are unable to access the training provision they need or want, particularly for upskilling and advanced continuing professional development, while a further 29% are unsure whether suitable provision is available. Employers attribute these challenges less to a complete absence of training and more to barriers such as limited funding, lack of staff time, geographically inaccessible provision particularly in rural areas, and unclear routes to recognised qualifications or professional accreditation. In addition, 49% of employers believe that entry and progression pathways remain unclear. To address these challenges, employers consistently identify the need for accredited training opportunities with clear progression routes, structured mentoring and workplace learning, greater awareness of heritage careers among young people, more accessible funding for skills development, and an expansion of paid apprenticeship opportunities, particularly for adults and in rural areas. Employers also highlight the value of targeted CPD, stronger links with education providers, and improved access to specialist training in areas where provision remains limited.

Workforce development continues to rely heavily on internal and informal learning approaches. Training is delivered primarily through internal provision (79%), alongside specialist networks (55%), private providers (43%), colleges (14%) and universities (11%). Common development approaches include peer-to-peer learning (70%) and mentoring (54%), both of which employers identify as valuable mechanisms for sharing specialist knowledge and supporting workforce development. These approaches are complemented by professional development awards (48%), apprenticeships (32%) and qualification development (20%). The challenge identified by employers is therefore not the prevalence of mentoring or peer learning itself, but the extent to which these approaches are relied upon alongside limited access to accredited training, formal progression routes and dedicated training resources. This is reflected in investment patterns, with 32% of organisations allocating less than 5% of their budget to training and a further 14% reporting no dedicated training budget.

Alongside these challenges, there is evidence of positive action to strengthen workforce resilience and create a more inclusive sector. The SIP reports that 68% of employers are taking action to promote diversity and inclusion through initiatives such as staff training, inclusive recruitment practices and organisational policies. These measures support broader workforce resilience and contribute to the ambitions of Outcome 4 by widening participation and helping to create a more sustainable workforce for the future.

4.2. ALGAO Workforce Capacity

The position within local authority archaeology services presents a distinct set of workforce challenges and is considered separately below. ALGAO Scotland's staffing dataset, which was not included within the original Baseline, is a particularly valuable evidence source as it provides a continuous record of workforce capacity within local authority archaeology services from 1997 onwards. As one of the few long-term datasets available for the historic environment workforce, it offers important insight into the sector's skills base, organisational resilience and capacity to deliver public benefit.

Staffing within ALGAO Scotland local authority archaeology services increased from 22.9 FTE in 1997 to a peak of 34.9 FTE in 2006, reflecting a period of growth and investment. Since then, workforce capacity has generally declined, reaching a low of 17.0 FTE in 2024–25. The latest data show a partial recovery to 21.0 FTE in 2025–26; however, staffing remains around 40% below peak levels and approximately 20% below the long-term average of around 26 FTE. Some of the recent increase reflects temporary posts, while further retirements are anticipated, meaning workforce capacity is likely to remain in a state of flux over the coming years.

The reduction in staffing has implications for the resilience of local authority archaeology services and their ability to provide specialist expertise, maintain Historic Environment Records, support planning functions, respond to climate-related risks, engage with communities, and deliver strategic priorities. The average staffing resource available to each ALGAO Scotland member organisation has fallen from around 2.7 FTE at peak levels to approximately 1.6 FTE today, reducing organisational resilience and limiting opportunities for succession planning, mentoring and skills development.

Overall, the evidence indicates that workforce capacity remains a significant challenge for the sector. Rebuilding staffing levels and strengthening recruitment, retention and skills development pathways will be essential to improving organisational resilience and ensuring local authority archaeology services have the capacity and expertise required to meet current and future demands.

4.3. Volunteer Capacity

Volunteers continue to make a significant contribution to the historic environment sector and remain an important element of overall workforce capacity.

The 2024 Baseline drew on Scottish Household Survey data (2019), which estimated that approximately 73,000 adults volunteered in the culture and heritage sector. However, this dataset did not provide a current or sufficiently detailed assessment of the role that volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) play in supporting skills development, workforce capacity and resilience under Outcome 4.

To address this evidence gap, additional research was undertaken in partnership with Make Your Mark and Volunteer Scotland. This research, published as the Heritage Volunteering in Scotland Research Report (2026), provides an updated evidence base for understanding the contribution of volunteering to skills development, workforce resilience and pathways into the historic environment sector.

The evidence is drawn from surveys conducted during summer 2025, with responses from 53 volunteer-involving heritage organisations and 331 heritage volunteers. Participating organisations ranged from volunteer-run organisations (24%) to large organisations employing more than 250 staff (17%), with the largest group (33%) comprising small to medium-sized organisations employing between one and ten staff. Respondents represented a broad cross-section of built cultural and natural heritage organisations. Volunteers were drawn from 30 of Scotland's 32 local authority areas, with 55% based within the Central Belt. They supported a diverse range of organisations, including historic sites and monuments (21%), nature and environmental organisations (14%), museums and galleries (12%), historic landscapes and gardens (12%), and archives and libraries (10%).

The findings reinforce the importance of volunteering to Outcome 4. Learning and skills development are central to the volunteer experience, with many volunteers motivated by opportunities to gain new skills, remain active and make a meaningful contribution to heritage.

Consistent with the Skills Investment Plan baseline findings on training and workforce development, 93% of organisations report actively supporting volunteer skills development. Volunteers most commonly develop transferable skills such as visitor engagement, communication, teamwork and interpersonal skills. These skills contribute positively to employability, organisational effectiveness and community engagement, demonstrating the broader value of volunteering as a mechanism for learning and development.

However, the evidence also highlights a challenge for workforce resilience. The baseline workforce analysis identifies shortages in traditional and specialist craft skills, digital capability and leadership and management skills. Despite the widespread provision of volunteer learning opportunities, only a small proportion of volunteers (1–4%) report developing these higher-demand skills. This suggests that the skills most commonly gained through volunteering do not always align with the areas of greatest workforce shortage. However, this should not be interpreted as a weakness in volunteering provision. Volunteers contribute substantially to organisational resilience, and many volunteering opportunities are designed primarily to support participation, community engagement and organisational delivery rather than to develop specialist occupational skills. In practice, volunteering may therefore strengthen workforce resilience both by supporting day-to-day operations and by freeing staff capacity to focus on specialist activities, even where it is not directly addressing identified skills shortages.

4.4. Volunteering as a Career Pathway

The research also suggests that volunteering can function as a pathway into heritage careers, although this role remains relatively limited in practice. While 76% of organisations report supporting volunteers' career ambitions through training, references and informal guidance, only a minority of volunteers are actively seeking employment in the sector. The volunteer cohort is predominantly older, with 60% identifying as retired and only 20% considering a career in heritage.

For those seeking to enter the sector, barriers remain consistent with the wider findings of the Skills Investment Plan. Volunteers identify a lack of paid entry-level opportunities, high competition for jobs, job insecurity, low pay, geographical barriers and unclear progression routes as key challenges. These structural barriers limit the extent to which volunteering can currently function as a clear and reliable pathway into employment within the historic environment sector.

While three-quarters of organisations (76%) provide some form of support to volunteers, relatively few use structured approaches such as formal training plans, skills audits or career development frameworks. Among organisations unable to provide greater support, limited staff capacity was identified as a key constraint. Strengthening structured skills development and progression support therefore represents a significant opportunity to improve pathways into employment for those seeking this and thereby contribute to long-term workforce sustainability.

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates that volunteering is already making an important contribution to workforce resilience, skills development and community capacity across the historic environment sector. However, there is potential to increase this contribution further by strengthening the connection between volunteering, priority skills needs and employment pathways. Doing so would help ensure that volunteering not only supports organisational resilience and community engagement but also contributes more directly to addressing longer-term workforce challenges across the sector.

4.5 Significant Developments Since 2024

Evidence from across the sector demonstrates that organisations are actively investing in workforce resilience, skills development and access to heritage careers, helping to advance the ambitions of Outcome 4.

Historic Houses has taken significant action in this area through its UK-wide report, In Good Hands: Understanding Careers in the Heritage Sector, which reveals that over 90% of heritage workers would recommend their careers, with 87–93% expressing satisfaction and intent to remain in the field. This reflects the sector's ability to foster workforce resilience through meaningful, purpose-driven roles. However, the research also highlights barriers such as limited career progression opportunities, challenges in recruiting skilled crafts makers and a lack of structured entry schemes, with only 5% of respondents entering the sector via formal internships or apprenticeships.

To address these gaps, Historic Houses has launched Work In A Castle, a free careers platform providing guidance, networking and visibility of heritage roles. This initiative supports Outcome 4 by improving access to heritage careers, strengthening skills pipelines and promoting a more diverse and sustainable workforce across Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Action is also being taken by Museum Galleries Scotland (MGS) to address structural barriers and create a more inclusive heritage workforce. Through its Delivering Change programme, MGS is working to tackle systemic exclusion and embed anti-racist and anti-ableist approaches across the sector. The programme focuses on removing barriers to participation and progression while supporting organisations to develop more inclusive cultures and practices.

To date, more than 100 organisations have engaged with the programme, and 29 events and activities have been delivered during the reporting year. While developed within the museum sector, the programme has relevance to Outcome 4 given the close links between museums, historic buildings, heritage collections and public engagement.

Skills development outcomes are also evident through projects supported by the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF).[9] Skills-related outcomes were reported across 49 funded projects, with 30 projects indicating that new skills had been gained to a considerable or extreme extent and a further 19 projects reporting skills gains to some extent. In addition, at least 49 volunteers received non-

[9] Data from the HES 2025-26 AHF Grant Data Report

accredited historic environment training through funded activity. Activity like this demonstrates how project-based investment can help build capacity across the sector.

The Scottish Community Heritage Alliance's Grassroots Heritage in Scotland Roadshow Feedback Form Report adds an important community-led perspective to this evidence. The report highlights that grassroots heritage groups face significant challenges around core funding, volunteer recruitment, volunteer skills, digital capacity, marketing and organisational sustainability. The report also shows strong demand for peer learning, practical advice, mentoring, case studies and regional networking opportunities. These findings suggest that resilience for community-led heritage bodies depends not only on access to traditional and specialist heritage skills, but also on the capacity to recruit and support volunteers, secure funding, collaborate with other groups and build confidence in areas such as digital engagement and organisational development.

Taken together, this evidence demonstrates that organisations across the sector are actively investing in workforce development through careers promotion, inclusion initiatives, training opportunities and project-based learning. While wider workforce challenges relating to skills shortages, recruitment and progression remain, these initiatives are helping to strengthen the foundations of a more skilled, diverse and resilient workforce. In doing so, they contribute directly to the ambitions of Outcome 4 by improving access to opportunities, supporting capacity building and helping to ensure the long-term sustainability of Scotland's historic environment sector.

Contribution Towards OPOF Ambitions

The evidence suggests that Outcome 4 is being supported through increased investment, stronger attention to inclusion and expanded activity across training, volunteering, career pathways and community-led capacity building. This contributes to OPOF's ambition to build a skilled, resilient and inclusive sector.

However, the evidence suggests that these contributions are most visible in strengthening organisational capacity, supporting service delivery and enhancing resilience at the organisational level. The baseline provides less evidence on how these activities influence wider sector resilience, including the impact of external pressures such as rising operating costs, material costs and workforce availability. Continued focus will therefore be needed to both understand the drivers of organisational resilience and strengthen the specialist skills pipeline, paid entry routes and structured progression pathways required to address long-term workforce shortages.

Data Gaps and Caveats

Comparable training data is not consistently available across organisations. While ALGAO, for example, provides a useful example of workforce development activity its data should be treated as organisational evidence rather than a sector-wide measure.

Volunteering evidence provides a much stronger picture of skills development than was available at the Baseline, but it does not yet demonstrate whether volunteering is translating into paid employment, specialist skills development or long-term workforce retention at scale.

Evidence on community-led heritage organisations remains more qualitative and programme-specific than the employer and investment evidence. The Scottish Community Heritage Alliance roadshow findings provide valuable insight into the challenges faced by grassroots heritage groups, particularly around funding, volunteering, digital skills and collaboration, but they do not yet provide a comprehensive sector-wide measure of community organisational resilience.

Sources

- Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment Year 2 Report, 2026.
- SIP employer survey data reported in the 2024 baseline.
- Heritage Volunteering in Scotland Research Report (2026).
- HES, NLHF, Museums Galleries Scotland and Scottish Government skills investment data.
- National Museums Scotland communicated workforce training data, 2026.
- Architectural Heritage Fund 2025-26 grant data report.
- Historic Houses In Good Hands report and Work In A Castle platform.
- Museums Galleries Scotland Delivering Change evidence.

Outcome 5: Communities have more opportunities to participate in decision-making about the historic environment

Summary

Outcome 5 evidence shows continued growth in community ownership, but with a marked slowdown in the rate of growth since the Baseline. Scottish Government data show 853 assets in community ownership in 2024, up from 793 in 2022 and 84 in 2000. While this confirms a strong long-term upward trajectory, annual growth has slowed significantly in recent years. Importantly, a bespoke assessment linking the community ownership dataset to HES spatial data found that 307 community-owned assets, representing around 35% of the total, are historic environment assets. This demonstrates that communities already play a significant role in the stewardship, management and future decision-making of Scotland's historic environment, particularly through ownership of listed buildings and assets within conservation areas.

Since the Baseline, activity led by HES, AHF, Make Your Mark, Heritage & Place investment, MGS Delivering Change and other community-focused initiatives has strengthened opportunities for participation, co-design and stewardship. However, economic pressures, affordability, geography and deprivation continue to influence who can access community ownership and decision-making opportunities. Community ownership remains an important indicator of community influence, but it provides only a partial measure of participation. Further evidence would be required to understand the extent of public involvement in decision-making across community organisations, public bodies and other historic environment asset owners.

Baseline Position (2024)

The Baseline tracked community ownership as a key indicator of empowerment and local stewardship. Long-term Scottish Government data showed substantial growth in community-owned assets since 2000 and identified community ownership as an important mechanism through which people can care for and benefit from the historic environment.

The Baseline also recognised that community ownership is affected by wider economic conditions and that communities need access to funding, advice, capacity and technical support to acquire, manage and sustain assets.

Current Position (2026)

Scottish Government data show that there are 853 assets in community ownership in 2024, compared with 793 in 2022 and 84 in 2000. Between 2000 and 2022, community ownership expanded at an average annual growth rate of around 10.6% (Figure 11 - Number of Assets in Community Ownership, 2000 to 2024). Between 2022 and 2024, growth slowed to an average of 3.7% per year.

The recent slowdown is visible in annual asset increases. The number of new assets entering community ownership fell from a peak of 80 in 2021 to 23 in 2024, one of the lowest levels recorded. Recent evidence from the Scottish Land Commission points to rising land values and changing market conditions linked to natural capital and carbon investment, alongside wider economic pressures, funding constraints and the capacity demands placed on community organisations, as factors that may influence community acquisition opportunities.

Spatial analysis shows uneven progress across Scotland. Highland, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway, Orkney Islands and Aberdeenshire saw relatively strong growth between 2022 and 2024, while some areas remained stable or declined. Community ownership remains heavily concentrated in rural and island areas, while Scotland's four largest cities account for just over 4% of community-owned assets (Figure 15 - Number of Assets in Community Ownership by Local Authority 2024).

Analysis by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation shows that assets are heavily concentrated in middle-deprivation areas. The most deprived communities account for only 6% of assets, indicating that access to community ownership remains uneven (Table 9 - Assets in Community Ownership SIMD Mapping (2024)).

Key Indicators

TABLE 6 - OUTCOME 5 KEY INDICATORS

Indicator	Baseline (2024)	Current Position (2026)	Direction of Travel
Community-owned assets	793 in 2022	853 in 2024	Trend: Continued growth but slower pace
Average annual growth rate	Around 10.6% between 2000 and 2022	Around 3.7% between 2022 and 2024	Trend: Slowing growth
Confirmed historic environment assets in community ownership	New bespoke assessment not completed in 2024	307 confirmed historic assets in 2026, around 36% of all assets	Trend: Improved evidence base
Most deprived SIMD quintile share	49 assets in 2022	52 assets in 2024; 6.1% of total	Trend: Persistent equity gap
AHF grants supporting community stewardship	49 projects in 2023-24	62 projects in 2025-26; 46 involved community-led groups not already owning the building	Trend: Positive targeted support

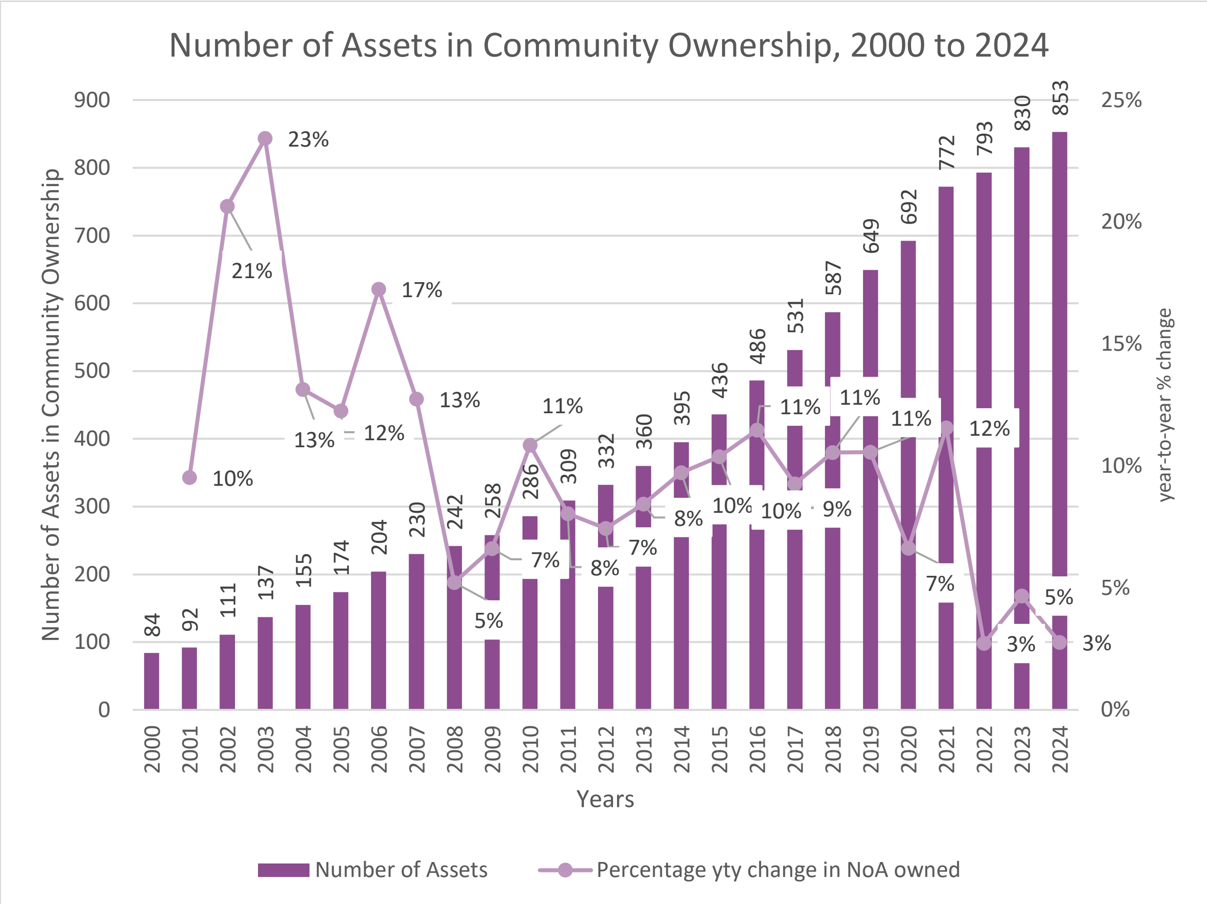
Evidence and Progress

5.1. Community Ownerships Trends

Community ownership continues to grow and remains an important mechanism for community participation, stewardship and decision-making. However, growth has slowed significantly since 2022 and remains uneven across Scotland, with clear geographic and socioeconomic inequalities affecting access to ownership opportunities.

The Scottish Government's [Community Ownership in Scotland 2024](#) (2025)[10] data continues to identify community ownership as an important indicator of empowerment, participation and local stewardship under Outcome 5. There were 853 assets in community ownership in 2024, an increase from 793 in 2022 and just 84 in 2000. While this confirms the long-term growth of community ownership in Scotland, recent data indicates that the pace of expansion has slowed considerably (Figure 11 - Number of Assets in Community Ownership, 2000 to 2024).

FIGURE 11 - NUMBER OF ASSETS IN COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP, 2000 TO 2024



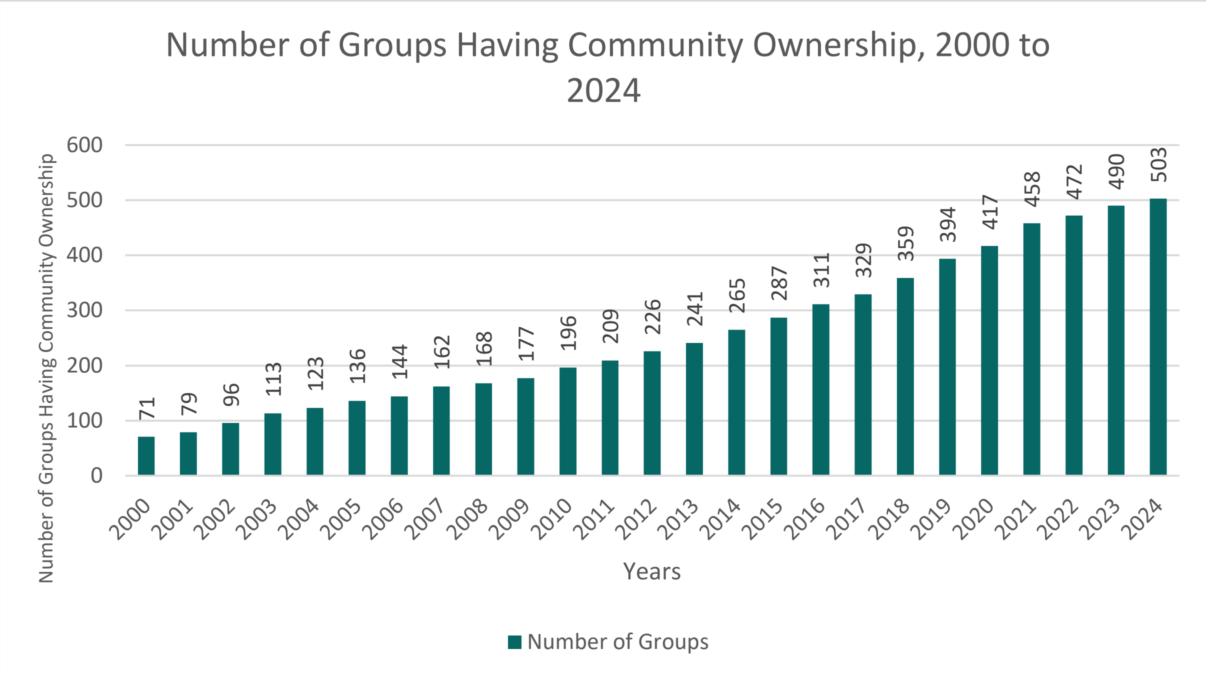
Between 2000 and 2022, community ownership expanded steadily, with an average annual growth rate of around 10.6%. However, growth between 2022 and 2024 has slowed significantly to an average of 3.7% per year. Annual increases have declined from a peak of 80 assets in 2021 to just 23 in 2024; one of the lowest levels recorded. Over the most recent period (2022–2024), the total number of assets increased by 60 (+7.6%), compared to growth of 123 assets (+19%) between 2019 and 2021, indicating that expansion has reduced to less than half of pre-COVID 19 levels (Figure 11 - Number of Assets in Community Ownership, 2000 to 2024).

This trend reflects the sensitivity of community ownership to wider economic conditions, consistent with patterns observed following the 2007 financial crisis and more recently during the cost-of-living

[10] While the data has been collated and quality assured against the Land Register held by Registers of Scotland, the Scottish Government notes that it is aware there may be instances of community ownership which are not currently included in this publication. (Community Ownership in Scotland 2024, Data and Methodology)

crisis. The sharp decline in growth in 2022, a partial recovery in 2023 and renewed stagnation in 2024 suggest ongoing structural constraints, including reduced access to funding and increased financial pressures on community organisations.

FIGURE 12 - NUMBER OF GROUPS HAVING COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP, 2000 TO 2024



However, the overall profile of ownership also reflects a maturing movement: the largest share of assets (30%) has been held for 6–10 years, corresponding to the period of strongest growth prior to recent economic pressures and a smaller but significant number have been sustained for over 25 years, demonstrating the long-term viability of community ownership once established (Figure 13 - Number of Assets and Length of Ownership (2024)).

The data also highlights the increasing importance of affordability in enabling community ownership. Over a quarter of all assets have been acquired at nominal cost or through non-monetary transfer, underlining the critical role of mechanisms such as asset transfer schemes in lowering barriers to entry. Mid-range acquisitions (£10,000–£1 million) account for the majority of assets, while high-value acquisitions remain rare, reflecting the challenges of securing significant capital investment during periods of economic uncertainty (Figure 14 - Number of Assets and Purchase Price (2024)). Taken together, this distribution suggests that reducing financial barriers, particularly through low-cost transfers and targeted support, remains essential to sustaining momentum to enable communities to acquire and manage local assets.

Figure 13 - Number of Assets and Length of Ownership (2024)

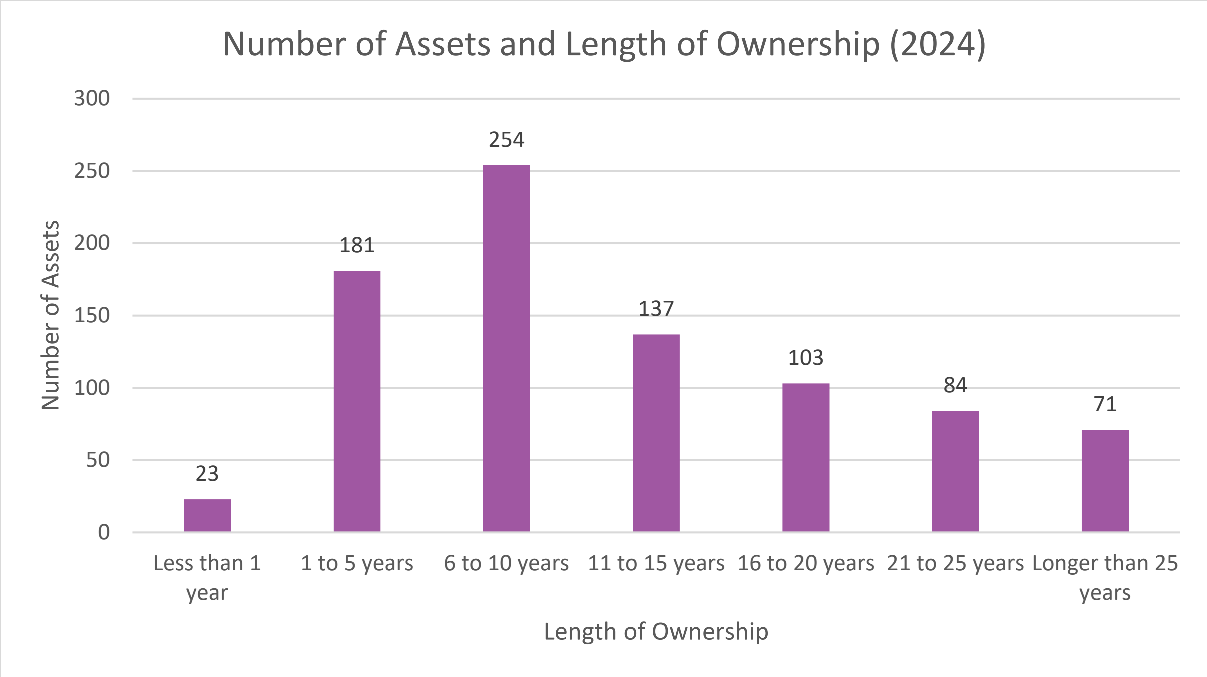
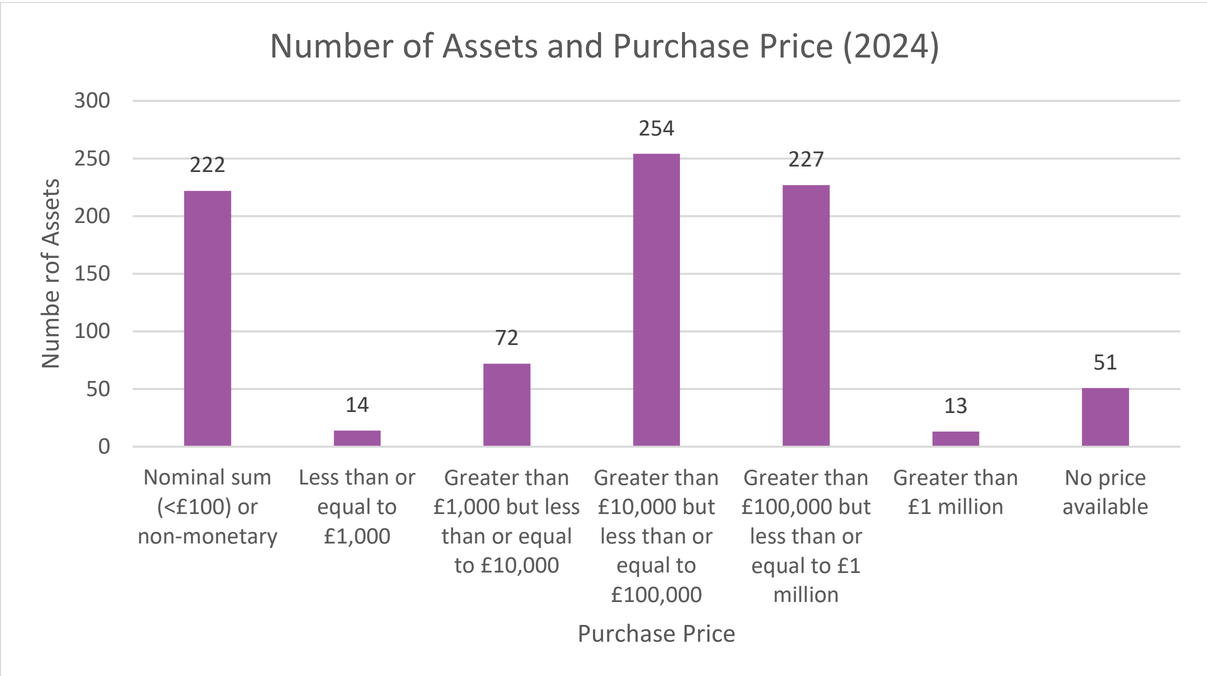


Figure 14 - Number of Assets and Purchase Price (2024)



Spatial patterns in community ownership further illustrate how progress towards Outcome 5 is being realised unevenly across Scotland. While overall growth has slowed, some local authority areas particularly Highland, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway, Orkney Islands and Aberdeenshire have continued to see relatively strong increases in community-owned assets between 2022 and 2024 (Table 7 - Assets in Community Ownership Geographical Representation 2022 v 2024 (Growth)). In contrast, a small number of areas have experienced stability or decline, likely reflecting reclassification of assets, transfers between ownership categories, or, in some cases, assets leaving community ownership (Table 8 - Assets in Community Ownership Geographical Representation 2022 vs 2024 (Stable or Declining)).

Strongest Growth (2022-2024):

TABLE 7 - ASSETS IN COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION 2022 V 2024 (GROWTH)

Local Authority	Assets (2022)	Assets (2024)	New Assets	Growth
Highland	177 assets in 2022	210 assets in 2024	+33 new assets	+18.6%
Argyll and Bute	97 assets in 2022	116 assets in 2024	+19 new assets	+19.6%
Dumfries and Galloway	49 assets in 2022	68 assets in 2024	+19 new assets	+38.8%
Orkney Islands	39 assets in 2022	55 assets in 2024	+16 new assets	+41.0%
Aberdeenshire	34 assets in 2022	42 assets in 2024	+8 new assets	+23.5%

Stable or Declining:

TABLE 8 - ASSETS IN COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION 2022 VS 2024 (STABLE OR DECLINING)

Local Authority	Assets (2022)	Assets (2024)	Change
Na h-Eileanan Siar	69 assets in 2022	67 assets in 2024	Change of -2
East Ayrshire	17 assets in 2022	10 assets in 2024	Change of -7
Moray	44 assets in 2022	37 assets in 2024	Change of -7
Perth and Kinross	18 assets in 2022	12 assets in 2024	Change of -6

These patterns reinforce a pronounced urban vs rural divide. Community ownership remains heavily concentrated in rural and island areas, with Highland alone accounting for nearly a quarter of all assets, while Scotland's four largest cities collectively account for just over 4% (Glasgow 2.1%, Edinburgh 1.4%, Aberdeen 0.5% and Dundee 0.1%). This reflects structural differences in land availability, asset types and opportunities, with urban areas facing higher land values and more constrained opportunities for acquisition Figure 15 - Number of Assets in Community Ownership by Local Authority 2024).

Mapping assets against the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), also shows whether community ownership reaches the communities that are identified as most deprived.

TABLE 9 - ASSETS IN COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP SIMD MAPPING (2024)

SIMD Quintile	Assets (2024)	Share of Total
SIMD 1 (Most Deprived 20%)	52 assets in 2024	6.10% of total
SIMD 2	142 assets in 2024	16.65% of total
SIMD 3	417 assets in 2024	48.89% of total
SIMD 4	204 assets in 2024	23.92% of total
SIMD 5 (Least Deprived 20%)	38 assets in 2024	4.45% of total
Total	**853 assets in 2024**	**100%**

Community-owned assets are heavily concentrated in middle-deprivation areas (Quintile 3), which holds nearly half of all assets (49%) while the most deprived communities account for just 6% of assets. Although all deprivation groups have seen growth since 2000, the rate of increase has been consistently lowest in the most deprived areas (Table 9 - Assets in Community Ownership SIMD Mapping (2024)).

TABLE 10 - ASSETS IN COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP SIMD MAPPING CHANGES (2022 V 2024)

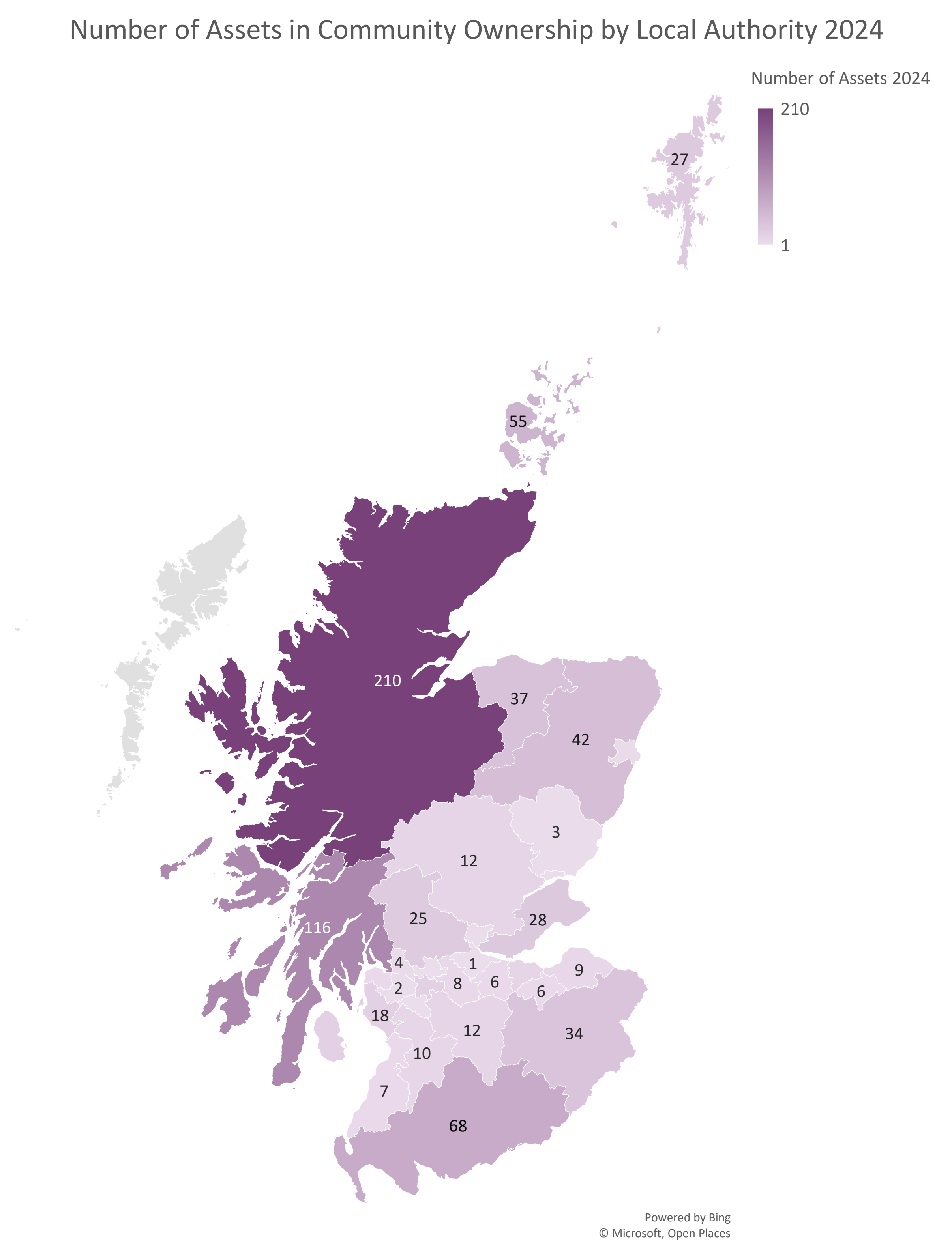
SIMD Quintile	2022	2024	New Assets	Growth
SIMD 1 (Most Deprived 20%)	49 assets in 2022	52 assets in 2024	3 new assets	6.12% increase
SIMD 2	129 assets in 2022	142 assets in 2024	13 new assets	10.08% increase
SIMD 3	387 assets in 2022	417 assets in 2024	30 new assets	7.75% increase
SIMD 4	194 assets in 2022	204 assets in 2024	10 new assets	5.15% increase
SIMD 5 (Least Deprived 20%)	34 assets in 2022	38 assets in 2024	4 new assets	11.76% increase
Total	**793** assets in 2022	**853** assets in 2024	**60** new assets	**7.57% increase**

Recent trends reinforce this pattern. Between 2022 and 2024, the most deprived communities saw the smallest increase in assets, gaining only three new assets over the period, while growth remained concentrated in the middle (Table 10 - Assets in Community Ownership SIMD Mapping Changes (2022 v 2024)). This indicates a persistent equity gap in access to community ownership.

TABLE 11 - ASSETS IN COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP SIMS MAPPING CHANGES (2000 V 2024)

SIMD Quintile	2000	2024	Growth	Multiple
SIMD 1 (Most Deprived 20%)	7 assets in 2000	52 assets in 2024	45 new assets	The number in 2024 is **7.4 times** the number in 2000
SIMD 2	12 assets in 2000	142 assets in 2024	130 new assets	The number in 2024 is **11.8 times** the number in 2000
SIMD 3	41 assets in 2000	417 assets in 2024	376 new assets	The number in 2024 is **10.2 times** the number in 2000
SIMD 4	19 assets in 2000	204 assets in 2024	185 new assets	The number in 2024 is **10.7 times** the number in 2000
SIMD 5 (Least Deprived 20%)	5 assets in 2000	38 assets in 2024	33 new assets	The number in 2024 is **7.6 times** the number in 2000
Total	**84 assets in 2000**	**853 assets in 2024**	**769 new assets**	The number in 2024 is **10.2 times** the number in 2000

FIGURE 15 - NUMBER OF ASSETS IN COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP BY LOCAL AUTHORITY 2024



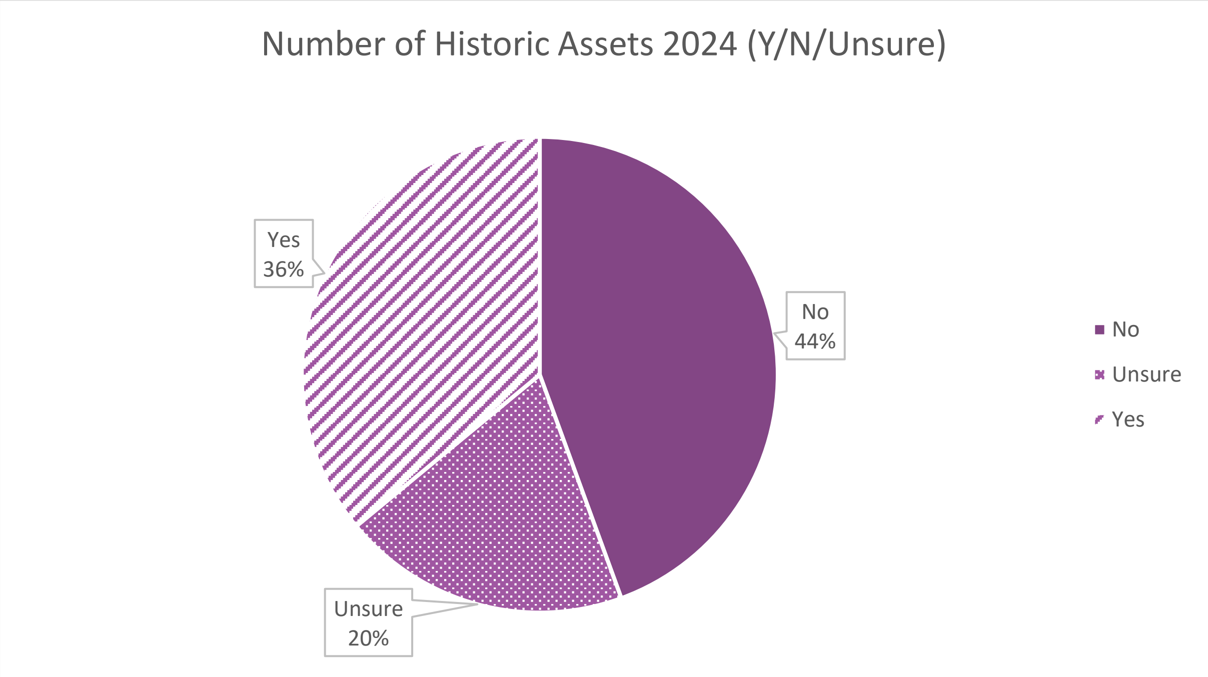
5.2. Historic Environment Community-owned assets

To better understand the contribution of community ownership to Scotland's historic environment, a bespoke methodology was developed for this baseline that links the Scottish Government's Community Ownership dataset with Historic Environment Scotland (HES) spatial data. Each community-owned asset was matched against PastMap and the HES Designation Map using postcode data to identify whether it corresponded to a recognised historic environment asset.[11]

This represents a first-of-its-kind exercise undertaken specifically for this Baseline Refresh. While the findings should be interpreted with an appropriate degree of caution due to postcode-matching limitations and potential data inconsistencies, the methodology provides an indicative measure of the extent to which community ownership contributes to the care and stewardship of Scotland's historic environment.

The analysis found that over one-third (36%) of all community-owned assets can be identified as historic environment assets (Figure 16 - Number of Historic Assets 2024 (Y/N/Unsure)). This demonstrates that community ownership is not solely supporting local empowerment and asset management but is also making a substantial contribution to the stewardship, use and long-term sustainability of Scotland's historic environment.

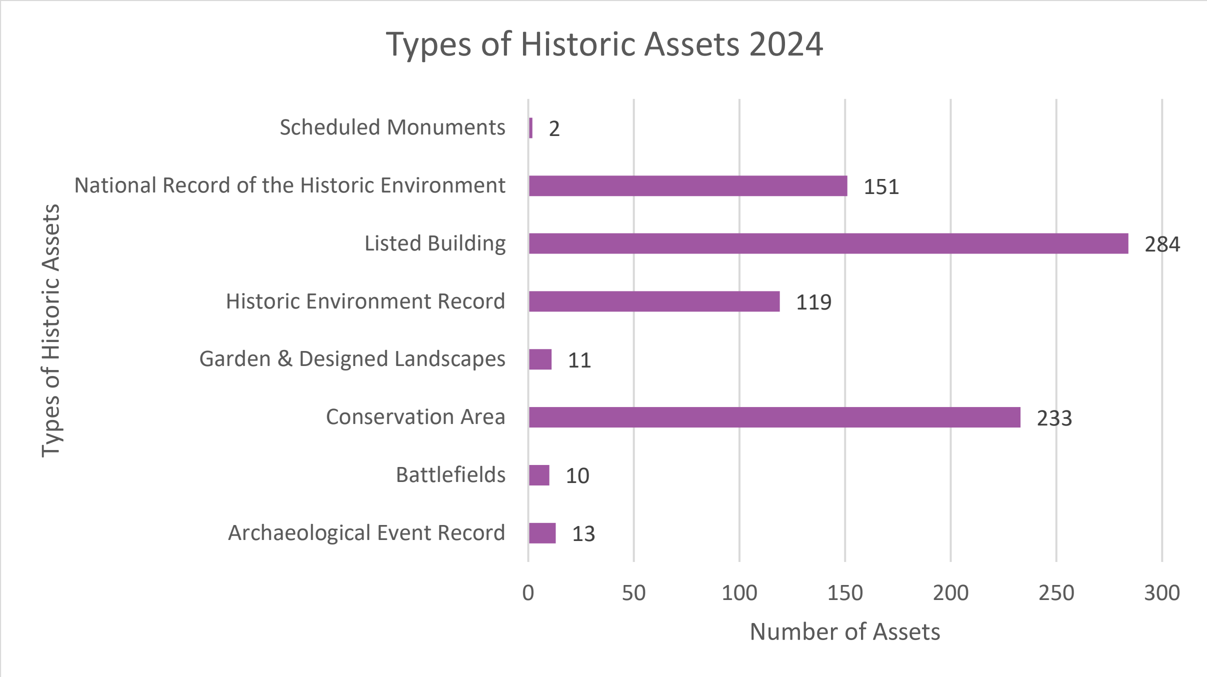
FIGURE 16 - NUMBER OF HISTORIC ASSETS 2024 (Y/N/UNSURE)



Further analysis of the 307 community-owned assets identified as historic provides insight into the types of heritage for which communities are acting as custodians. Collectively, these assets hold 819 heritage designations, reflecting the fact that many sites carry multiple forms of recognition and significance (Figure 17 - Types of Historic Assets 2024).

[11] In this context historic environment asset types include Archaeological Event Records, Battlefields, Conservation Areas, Gardens and Designed Landscapes, Historic Environment Records, Listed Buildings, entries within the National Record of the Historic Environment and Scheduled Monuments.

FIGURE 17 - TYPES OF HISTORIC ASSETS 2024



The distribution of designations suggests that community ownership is particularly associated with heritage assets that continue to play an active role in community life. Listed Buildings represent the largest category of designation, indicating that communities are frequently managing historic buildings such as village halls, churches, former schools and other buildings that can remain in active use while preserving their heritage value. Conservation Areas also account for a substantial proportion of designations, demonstrating that many community-owned assets are located within historic town centres and places of concentrated heritage significance.

In addition, a significant number of assets are recorded within the National Record of the Historic Environment and local Historic Environment Records. This suggests that community ownership often extends beyond buildings to include landscapes, archaeological sites and places with broader historical importance. Other designation types, including Gardens and Designed Landscapes, battlefields and scheduled monuments, occur less frequently but represent assets of particularly high cultural and historical significance.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the important role that communities play as stewards of Scotland's historic environment.

However, the findings also highlight some of the practical implications of delivering Outcome 5. Owning and managing designated historic assets often requires specialist knowledge, ongoing maintenance, regulatory compliance, and access to technical advice. These responsibilities can place significant demands on community organisations, particularly those that rely heavily on volunteers and operate with limited financial or staffing resources.

In the current economic context, these challenges may be amplified by rising operating costs, pressures on funding and increased competition for financial support. As a result, the long-term sustainability of community ownership depends not only on successful acquisition of assets, but also on communities having the skills, capacity and resources needed to manage them effectively.

At the same time, heritage ownership creates important opportunities. Designated assets can provide access to specialist funding streams, support heritage-led regeneration, contribute to local tourism and strengthen community identity and pride of place. They can also help develop stronger and more meaningful relationships between communities and their local historic environment, supporting the wider ambitions of Outcome 5 around empowerment, participation and stewardship.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that community ownership is already making a significant contribution to Outcome 5. Community ownership of historic environment assets represents one of the strongest forms of participation in decision-making, giving communities direct influence over how these sites are managed, used and developed. Ensuring that communities have access to the funding, skills, guidance and technical support needed to manage these assets successfully will be critical if the full benefits of community ownership are to be realised. This will enable communities not only to acquire historic assets, but also to sustain, use, and benefit from them over the long term.

5.3. Significant Developments Since 2024

The evidence suggests that community participation is becoming increasingly included within the management, interpretation and stewardship of Scotland's historic environment, reflecting the ambitions of Outcome 5 to empower people and communities to care for and benefit from heritage.

HES ran a national conversation about what heritage matters to communities and how they want to see it looked after, with 6,328 participants, including dedicated workshops designed to include underrepresented communities. A clear majority of respondents emphasised the importance of experience and connection, with 88% stating that it is the experience of being there that matters to them most about heritage. There is also strong support for change where it enables greater public benefit, with 79% of respondents willing to support adaptations that improve access and use. Similarly, high levels of support were recorded for changes that protect heritage (88%), enhance biodiversity (79%) and improve understanding of the past (78%), indicating that communities value both the care and active use of heritage assets. These findings demonstrate broad public support for a more inclusive, accessible and sustainable approach to managing the historic environment.

Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) continues to play an important role in shaping decision-making across Scotland's planning system. Analysis using Searchland data identified 23,502 planning applications referencing National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Policy 7 between April 2023 and April 2026. Of these, 7,091 applications (30%) also referenced HEPS, demonstrating its continued relevance in the consideration of change affecting the historic environment. This indicates that HEPS provides the overarching framework that supports the interpretation and application of heritage policy in practice. By establishing the principles and language of heritage management, it helps decision-makers assess impacts on the historic environment, justify recommendations and align development proposals with Scotland's national approach to managing change. The strong level of co-reference with NPF4 Policy 7 highlights the role of HEPS in embedding heritage considerations within planning and development decisions.

Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) supported activity further demonstrates progress towards Outcome 5 by strengthening community capacity to take on the stewardship of historic buildings.[12] In 2025–26, AHF awarded grants to 62 projects, the majority of which supported community organisations exploring, developing or progressing plans for community ownership of historic assets (Table 12 - AHF: Number of grants in last three years (April 2023-March 2026)). Of these, 46 projects involved community-led groups that did not already own the building at the time of application, representing 74% of grants awarded. In addition, 52 projects reported moderate, significant or transformational impacts on participants' confidence to lead heritage projects, while 9 historic assets were repaired or brought back into use as community amenities or cultural venues. Together, these findings demonstrate how targeted investment is building local capacity and creating pathways towards the long-term stewardship and sustainable use of Scotland's historic environment.

TABLE 12 - AHF: NUMBER OF GRANTS IN LAST THREE YEARS (APRIL 2023-MARCH 2026)

Year	Grants	Offered
2023-24	49 grants	£ 451,097 offered
2024-25	54 grants	£ 485,312 offered
2025-26	62 grants	£ 809,316 offered
3 Year Totals	**185 grants**	**£ 1,745,725 offered**

Volunteer contribution to Scotland's historic environment has grown substantially since the pandemic, highlighting the sector's capacity to engage people in heritage activities. As one example, an estimated 7,728 volunteers contributed 35,742 hours through Doors Open Days in 2025, compared with 4,740 volunteers and 18,565 hours in 2022.[13]

Despite the absence of volunteer data during the COVID-19 period and disruption to the 2022 programme, volunteer participation and hours in Doors Open Days have increased steadily year-on-year, demonstrating the important role volunteers continue to play in supporting heritage activity, public access and community engagement across Scotland.

A similar shift can be seen within place-based regeneration programmes. Projects like Granton Waterfront Heritage & Place investment demonstrates how community participation is being included within major regeneration projects through dedicated community engagement roles and co-designed programmes of activity. Community members are involved through open days, exhibitions, tours and volunteering opportunities, helping ensure that local people play an active role in shaping and benefiting from investment in their historic environment.

[12] HES 2025-26 AHF Grant Data Report
[13] These figures are drawn from the Doors Open Days programme and should be considered alongside, rather than directly compared with, wider volunteering evidence collected elsewhere in the sector.

Forres Conservation and Heritage Scheme provides another example of this approach. Activity within the programme have been identified and shaped through community input, with a strong focus on strengthening local connections, wellbeing and sense of place. This reflects an increasingly consistent trend across place-based heritage programmes, where communities are helping to set priorities and influence the design of activities rather than simply participating in pre-determined initiatives.

Community ownership is also receiving support through more coordinated national approaches. There has been significant recent activity, for example, to support communities acquiring former places of worship. One example is DTAS's 'New Futures' programme which provides Scotland-wide support for church reuse and community ownership. This represents a notable development since the previous Baseline and reflects growing recognition of community ownership as a long-term stewardship model for historic buildings.

Community participation is also increasingly influencing how heritage is interpreted and presented. Through its Delivering Change programme Museum Galleries Scotland is supporting community organisations to work alongside museums in co-producing exhibitions and activities. This approach moves beyond consultation towards shared authority and collaborative decision-making, enabling communities to play a more active role in shaping how heritage stories are told and represented.

At the same time, organisations are improving how they understand and evidence the value that communities place on heritage. The growing use of the Social Value Toolkit and related methodologies demonstrates an increasing emphasis on understanding heritage through the perspectives of the people and communities who use, value and benefit from it. Recent applications such as the National Trust for Scotland assessments at Newhailes and Fyvie Castle, as well as the ReACH project's work at Whitekirk, explore the social, cultural and community value associated with historic places. By systematically capturing community perspectives alongside cultural, environmental and economic considerations, these approaches support more informed decisions about investment, management and future use.

Despite these positive developments, some of the wider mechanisms through which communities influence the future of their places are progressing more slowly. Progress towards the adoption of new Local Development Plans by Local Authorities has been slower than anticipated, with many planning authorities expecting adoption beyond 2028. This suggests that opportunities to fully embed community priorities, heritage considerations, climate adaptation and placemaking objectives within local planning frameworks have yet to be fully realised.

Overall, the evidence points to growing efforts to incorporate community perspectives into stewardship, regeneration, ownership, interpretation and decision-making. While challenges remain, particularly in relation to planning processes, representation and long-term capacity, the overall direction of travel aligns with Outcome 5's ambition to increase opportunities for communities to influence the future of Scotland's historic environment.

Contribution Towards OPOF Ambitions

The evidence shows clear alignment with OPOF's ambition to empower people and communities to care for and benefit from the historic environment. Community ownership remains an important pathway for local stewardship and targeted programmes are helping communities build confidence, influence and capacity.

However, participation in ownership and decision-making is still shaped by structural inequalities. OPOF ambitions will require continued emphasis on financial support, technical advice, capacity-building and targeted work with communities facing the greatest barriers.

Data Gaps and Caveats

The heritage community ownership assessment is a bespoke first-of-its-kind exercise using postcode matching against HES spatial data. It provides a valuable indicative measure but should be interpreted with caution due to postcode matching limitations and data inconsistencies.

Community ownership data can reflect reclassification, ownership changes or assets leaving community ownership, so local authority-level changes should be interpreted carefully.

Evidence on how community perspectives are influencing long-term management and investment decisions remains more qualitative and programme-specific than comprehensive for the sector as a whole.

Sources

- Community Ownership in Scotland 2024.
- HES spatial data, PastMap and HES Designation Map matching exercise.
- Talking About Heritage Conversations 2025/26.
- Architectural Heritage Fund 2025-26 grant data report.
- Make Your Mark volunteer taster session evidence.
- Granton Waterfront Heritage & Place investment evidence.
- Forres Conservation and Heritage Scheme evidence.
- New Futures programme evidence.
- Museums Galleries Scotland Delivering Change evidence.

Outcome 6: The historic environment is more diverse and inclusive

Summary

Outcome 6 evidence shows increased attention to inclusion across funding, volunteering, engagement and organisational practice. HES and NLHF funding approaches indicate that inclusion is increasingly being embedded within grant-making, while Museums Galleries Scotland's Delivering Change programme provides evidence of more structured sector-wide work on anti-oppressive practice, and human rights-based approaches. Together, these initiatives suggest a shift from inclusion as an additional consideration towards inclusion as an increasingly recognised expectation across the sector.

Participation in historic places increased from **29% in 2022 to 33% in 2023**, moving closer to the pre-pandemic level of **34% recorded in 2019** (Figure 20 - Attendance & Participation in Historic Environment-Related Activities (2018 - 2023))**.** Historic places, museums and galleries have all experienced increases in attendance, although participation levels have not yet fully returned to pre-pandemic levels. This provides important context for understanding current patterns of access and engagement across the historic environment.

New evidence on volunteering, workforce diversity and inclusive practice suggests that representation remains uneven and that barriers to participation persist for some groups. While there is growing evidence of initiatives designed to widen access, improve inclusion and incorporate community perspectives, stakeholders continue to highlight the need for greater participation, representation and accountability in delivering change. Overall, the evidence points to positive progress but also suggests that achieving a historic environment that is fully accessible, relevant and representative for all communities remains a work in progress.

Baseline Position (2024)

The Baseline identified inclusion, access and representation as central challenges for the historic environment sector.

Evidence from cultural participation, funding, volunteering and organisational practice showed that participation was not evenly distributed and that some groups faced persistent barriers to engagement.

Current Position (2026)

HES Grants data demonstrates a continued focus on equity and inclusion, with a substantial share of funding directed towards communities in the most deprived areas. While the share of place-based initiative investment in these areas decreased from 48% in 2024–25 to 39% in 2025–26, the change reflects a focus on engaging partnership applicants who have not traditionally participated in place-based initiatives (Figure 18 - HES Grants investments (% of total funding 2024-25 & 2025-26)).

NLHF data show increasing use of its Inclusion, Access and Participation Investment Principle in funded projects. In 2024–25, 27 projects took inclusion into account and 28 strongly included it, with the trend continuing into 2025–26(Figure 19 - NLHF Scotland awarded projects meeting Inclusion Access and Participation Investment Principle (2023-24 to 2025-26)).

Scottish Household Survey (SHS) data collected in 2023 and published in 2024 provide the latest available participation evidence at the time of reporting. The data show recovery across historic environment-related cultural activities, with attendance at historic places, museums and galleries increasing following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, most categories have not yet fully returned to pre-pandemic levels. Comparisons with 2022 are useful for assessing change since the Baseline, while recognising that 2022 may still have been affected by the pandemic recovery period.

However, volunteering evidence highlights persistent inequalities. Volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are drawn from a relatively narrow demographic, with older, highly educated, female, and white ethnic groups overrepresented. Many volunteers also report long-term health conditions or caring responsibilities, demonstrating that access is shaped not only by representation but also by practical and structural barriers to participation.

Key Indicators

TABLE 13 - OUTCOME 6 KEY INDICATORS

Indicator	Baseline (2024)	Current Position (2026)	Direction of Travel
HES place-based initiative investment in most deprived communities	48% in 2024-25	39% in 2025-26	Trend: Substantial targeted support continues
NLHF inclusion principle	Early reporting in 2023-24	2024-25: 27 projects took inclusion into account and 28 strongly included it	Trend: Strengthened funding expectation
MGS Delivering Change reach	Programme developing in 2024	97 Museum Activists, 17 Transformers, 7 Community Catalysts, 5 co-production partnerships, 300 anti-racism training participants	Trend: Positive organisational change activity
Historic place participation	29% in 2022	33% in 2023, close to 2018 level of 34%	Trend: Recovery but not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels
Disabled participation in historic places	18% in 2022	22% in 2023, below non-disabled participation at 37%	Trend: Improvement but persistent gap

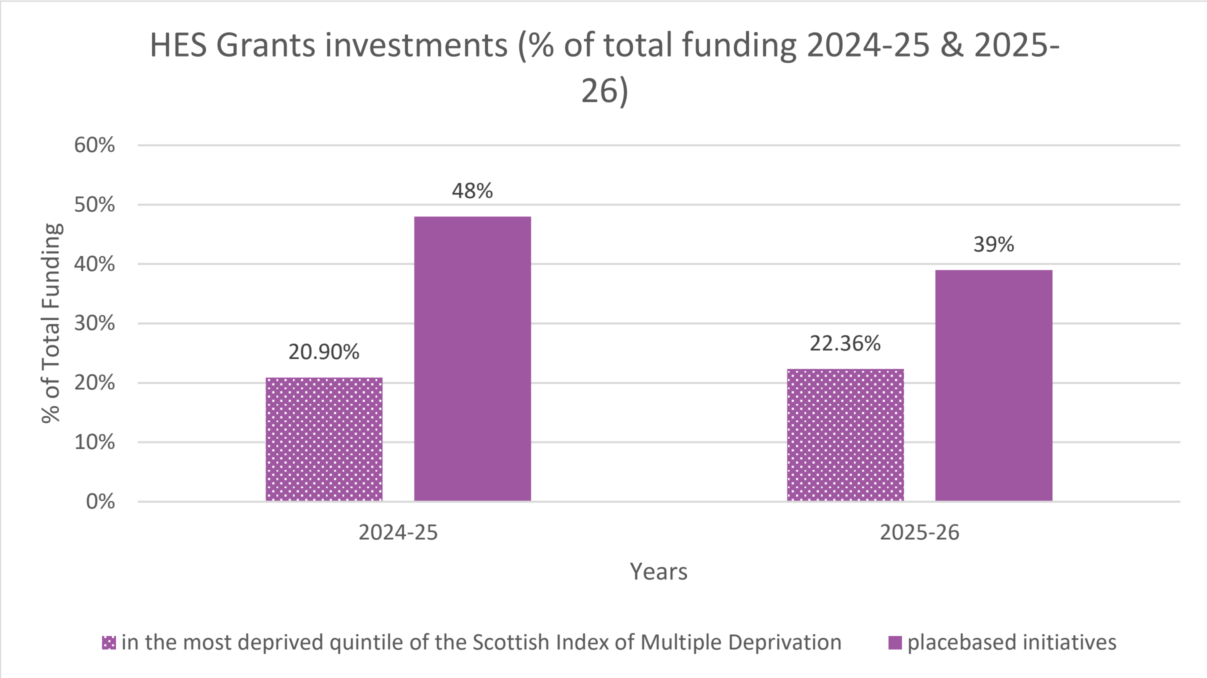
Evidence and Progress

6.1. Embedding Inclusion in Funding and Organisational Practice

The evidence shows that inclusive practice, including efforts to remove barriers to participation and improve accessibility, is being increasingly embedded in funding, programme design, volunteering support and organisational processes. This represents a shift from simply recording inclusivity towards actively incorporating inclusion into the design and delivery of activities.

HES Grants data shows a step-change in targeting deprived communities:

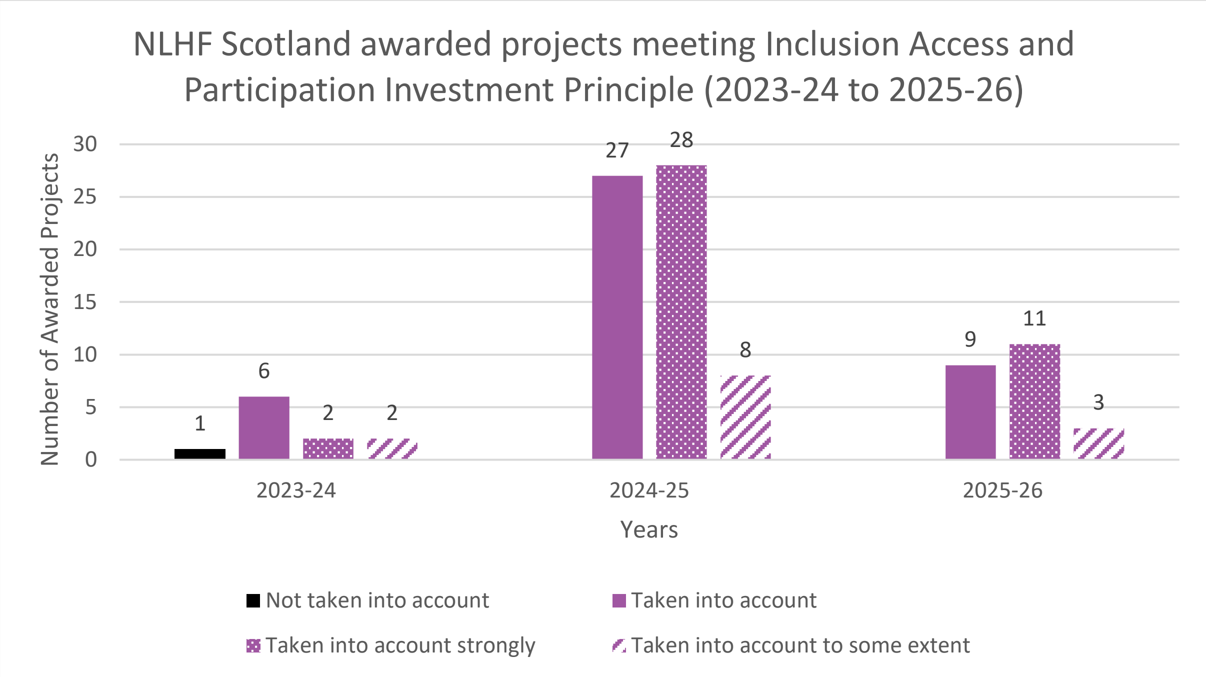
FIGURE 18 - HES GRANTS INVESTMENTS (% OF TOTAL FUNDING 2024-25 & 2025-26)



HES Grants data demonstrate a continued focus on improving equity and inclusion under Outcome 6, with a significant proportion of funding directed towards communities in the most deprived areas. While the share of investment in these areas has decreased from 48% in 2024–25 to 39% in 2025–26, this remains a substantial level of targeted support. This shift reflects a deliberate focus on engaging partnership applicants who have not traditionally participated in place-based initiatives, helping to broaden access and address structural inequalities.

Data from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) further demonstrates progress towards Outcome 6 through the application of its Inclusion, Access and Participation Investment Principle.

Figure 19 - NLHF Scotland awarded projects meeting Inclusion Access and Participation Investment Principle (2023-24 to 2025-26)



While initial reporting in 2023–24 showed relatively low numbers, as it is reflecting the early stages of the organisation's Heritage 2033 strategy, there is a clear increase in the number of projects in Scotland meeting or strongly meeting this principle in subsequent years. In 2024–25, the majority of funded projects either took inclusion into account (27 projects) or strongly included it (28 projects), with this trend continuing into 2025–26 (9 and 11 projects respectively).

Together, these approaches demonstrate a shift from project-based inclusion towards embedding inclusive practice within organisational structures and funding systems, helping to improve access, remove barriers to participation and support a more representative historic environment sector.

6.2. Representation and Participation in Volunteering

While these findings indicate growing attention to inclusion and a gradual recovery in participation, evidence from the Heritage Volunteering in Scotland Report suggests that significant inequalities remain. Both volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are drawn from a relatively narrow demographic: predominantly older (50% aged 60–74 and 53% retired), highly educated (66% holding degree-level qualifications), female (64%) and largely from white ethnic backgrounds (60% White Scottish, with only 8% from other ethnic groups). These patterns suggest that participation remains uneven despite efforts to widen access and create more inclusive pathways into the sector. Together, the findings indicate that younger people, minority ethnic groups and some other communities continue to be underrepresented as volunteers in the sector.

At the same time, the data show that many volunteers face additional barriers to participation: 28% report a long-term health condition and 31% have caring responsibilities, with a majority of those affected indicating that this limits their day-to-day activities. This aligns with wider evidence under

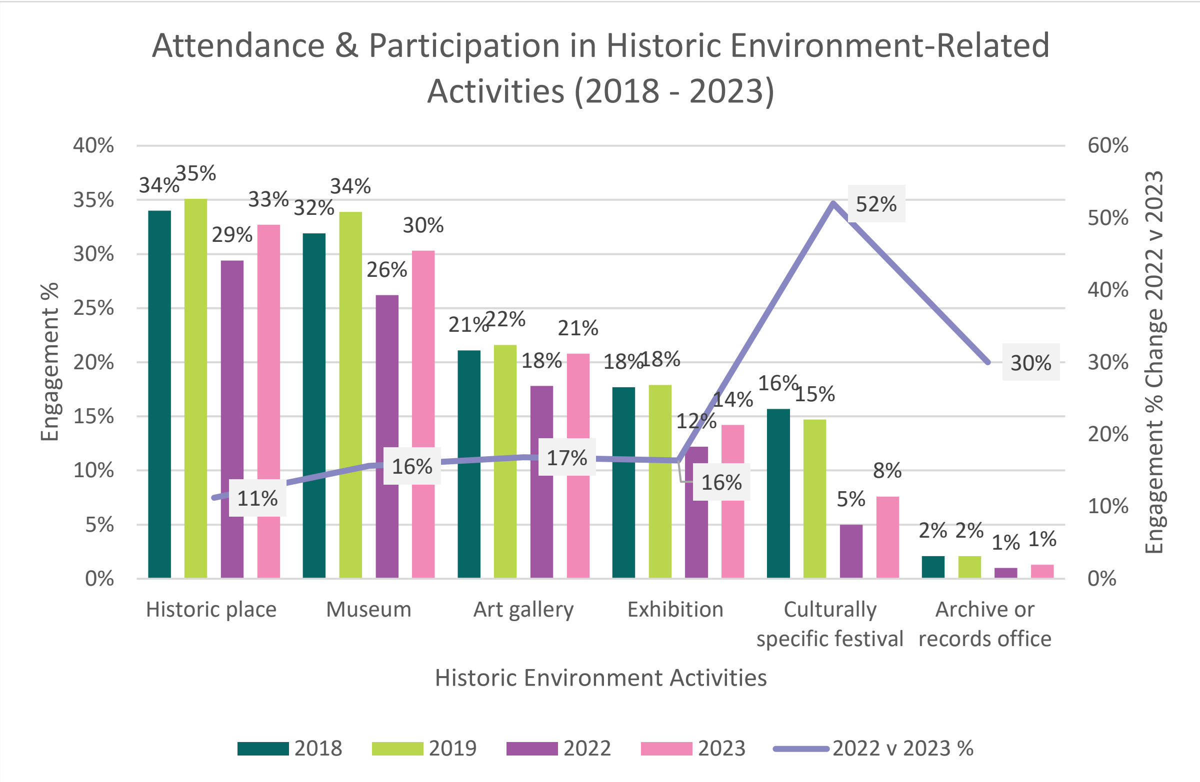
Outcome 6 that access is shaped not only by representation, but also by practical and structural barriers that influence people's ability to participate.

Taken together, these findings highlight that, despite progress in embedding inclusive practices, participation in heritage volunteering remains uneven and shaped by both demographic and socio-economic factors. The evidence generated through the volunteering survey has directly informed sector responses, identifying the need for more flexible, accessible and targeted approaches to widen participation. The findings have also informed wider discussions among funders and sector organisations, helping to prioritise investment in more inclusive, accessible and representative approaches to volunteering. This demonstrates how evidence-led insight is translating into coordinated action, contributing to Outcome 6 by strengthening inclusion, widening participation and improving representation across the historic environment sector.

6.3. Participation Trends and Demographic Differences

Overall, the 2023 data suggest a broad recovery in attendance at historic environment-related places and events following the sharp declines observed in 2022. The strongest proportional recovery is visible for culturally specific festivals, while historic places and art galleries appear closest to returning to their 2018 levels. The analysis therefore shows 2023 as a year of partial recovery, while noting the significant effort of the sector to broaden and increase engagement.

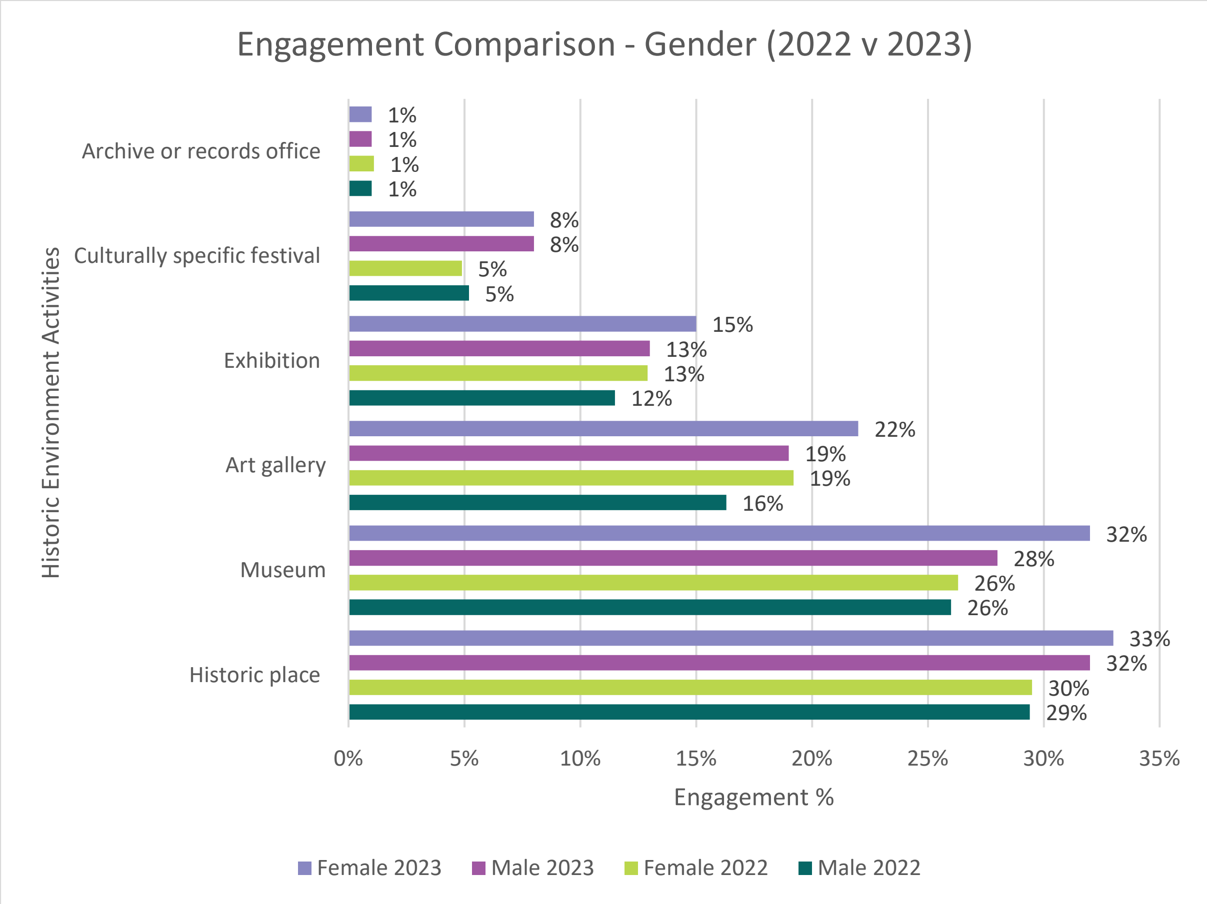
FIGURE 20 - ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION IN HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT-RELATED ACTIVITIES (2018 - 2023)



6.3.1. Gender

When examining information from the SHS, engagement with the historic environment remains relatively balanced across genders, with no substantial disparities evident in the data.

FIGURE 21 - ENGAGEMENT COMPARISON - GENDER (2022 V 2023)

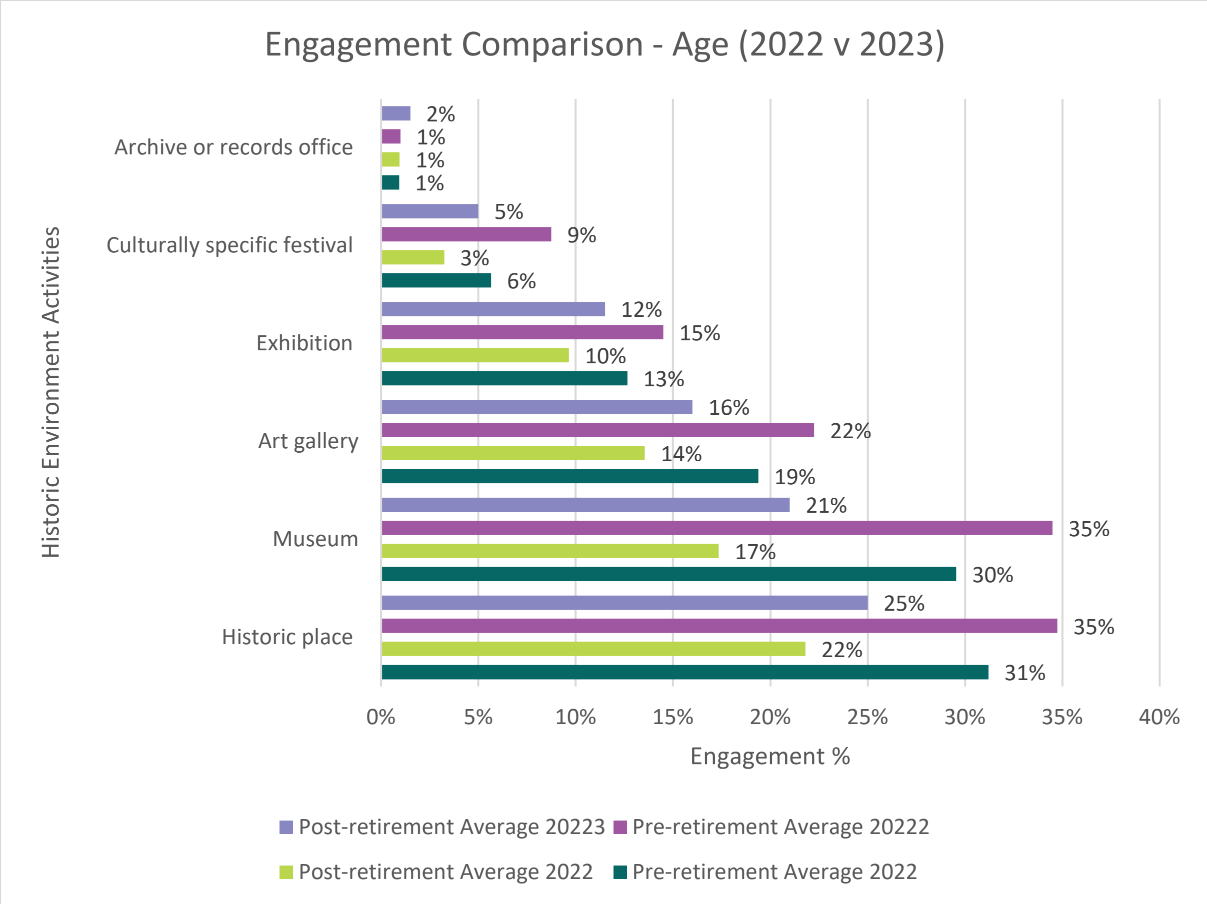


Compared with 2022, participation increased for both men and women across almost all activities, suggesting a general growth in engagement rather than a shift favouring one gender (Figure 21 - Engagement Comparison - Gender (2022 v 2023)). The small differences observed indicate that the historic environment continues to attract broad participation across genders, supporting OPOF's ambition to make heritage relevant and accessible to all.

6.3.2. Age

Age continues to be a significant factor influencing participation (Figure 22 - Engagement Comparison - Age (2022 v 2023)). Individuals of pre-retirement age consistently reported higher levels of engagement than those in post-retirement age groups across all historic environment activities.

FIGURE 22 - ENGAGEMENT COMPARISON - AGE (2022 V 2023)



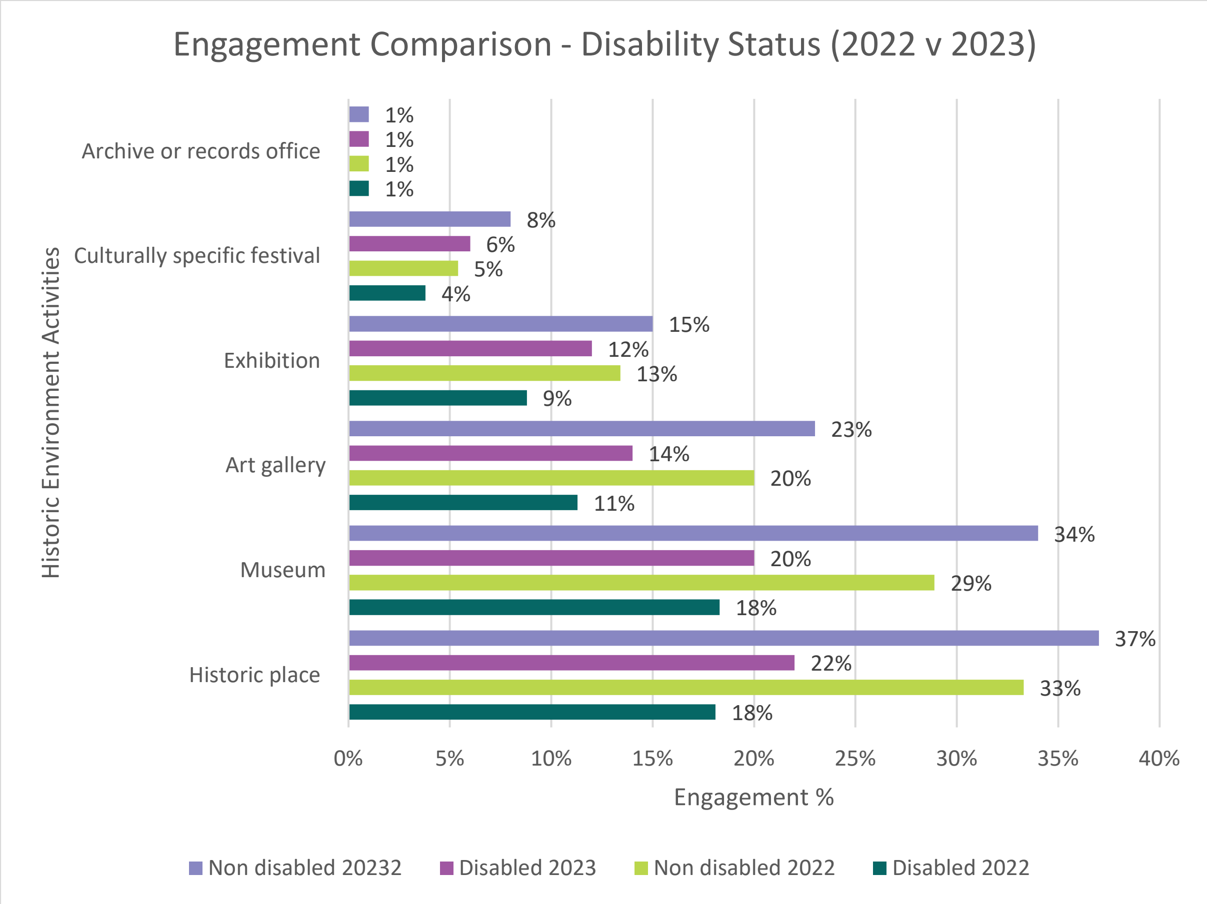
Between 2022 and 2023, participation increased among both age groups. However, the increase was particularly strong among pre-retirement adults, whose combined participation across activities rose notably.

While older adults remain active participants, lower participation rates among post-retirement groups may indicate opportunities to further address barriers such as accessibility, transport, health considerations or digital exclusion. Supporting participation across all life stages remains an important consideration for achieving OPOF's inclusion objectives.

6.3.4. Disability

A clear disparity remains between disabled and non-disabled people (Figure 23 - Engagement Comparison - Disability Status (2022 v 2023)). Across every activity measured, disabled respondents reported lower participation rates than non-disabled respondents.

FIGURE 23 - ENGAGEMENT COMPARISON - DISABILITY STATUS (2022 V 2023)



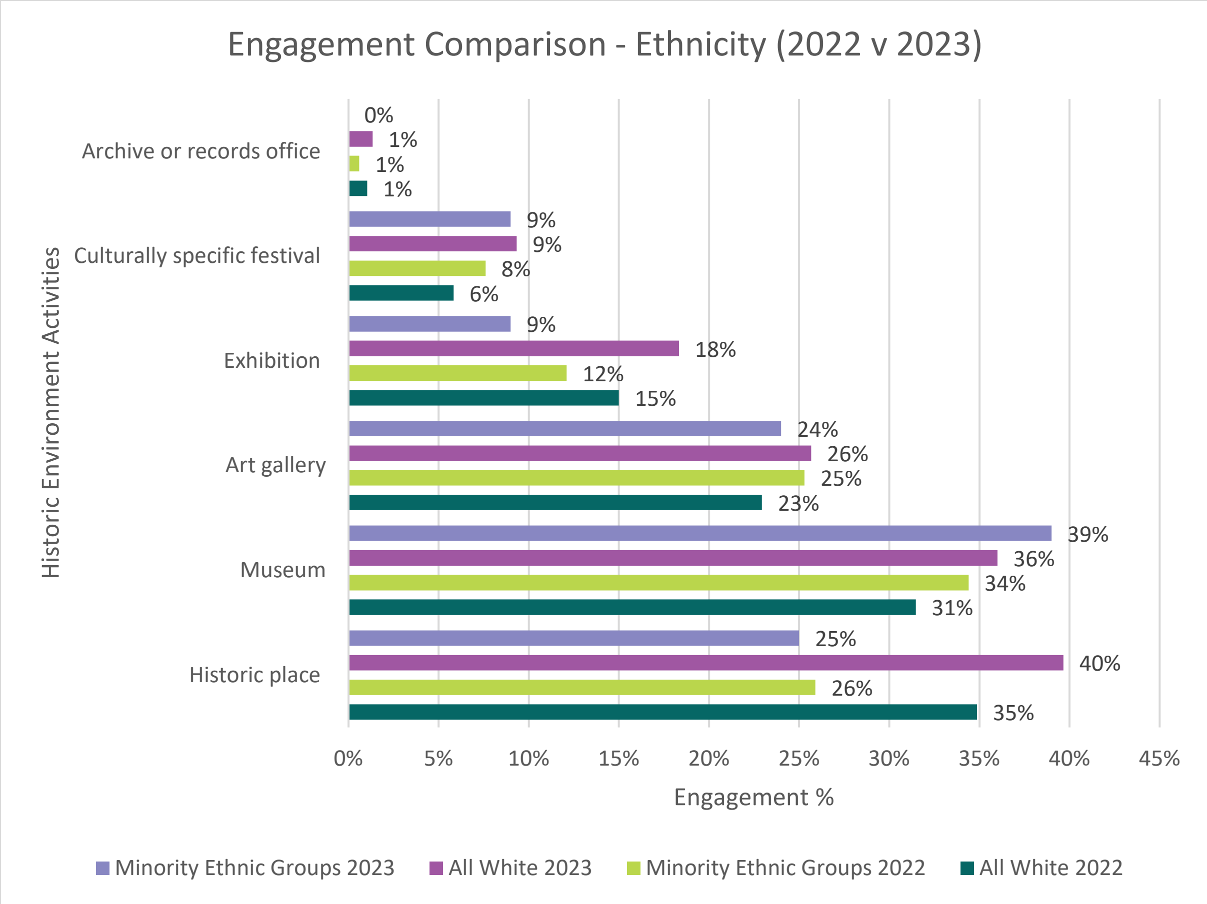
However, for disabled people, participation in visits to historic places increased from approximately 18% to 22%, while engagement with museums and art galleries also rose.

These positive movements may suggest that ongoing efforts to improve accessibility, interpretation and inclusive experiences are helping to broaden participation. However, the persistent gap highlights the continued importance of accessible infrastructure, inclusive design and targeted engagement initiatives as priorities within OPOF.

6.3.5. Ethnicity

Differences in participation by ethnicity remain evident (Figure 24 - Engagement Comparison - Ethnicity (2022 v 2023)). White respondents generally reported higher levels of engagement than respondents from minority ethnic groups across several historic environment activities.

FIGURE 24 - ENGAGEMENT COMPARISON - ETHNICITY (2022 V 2023)

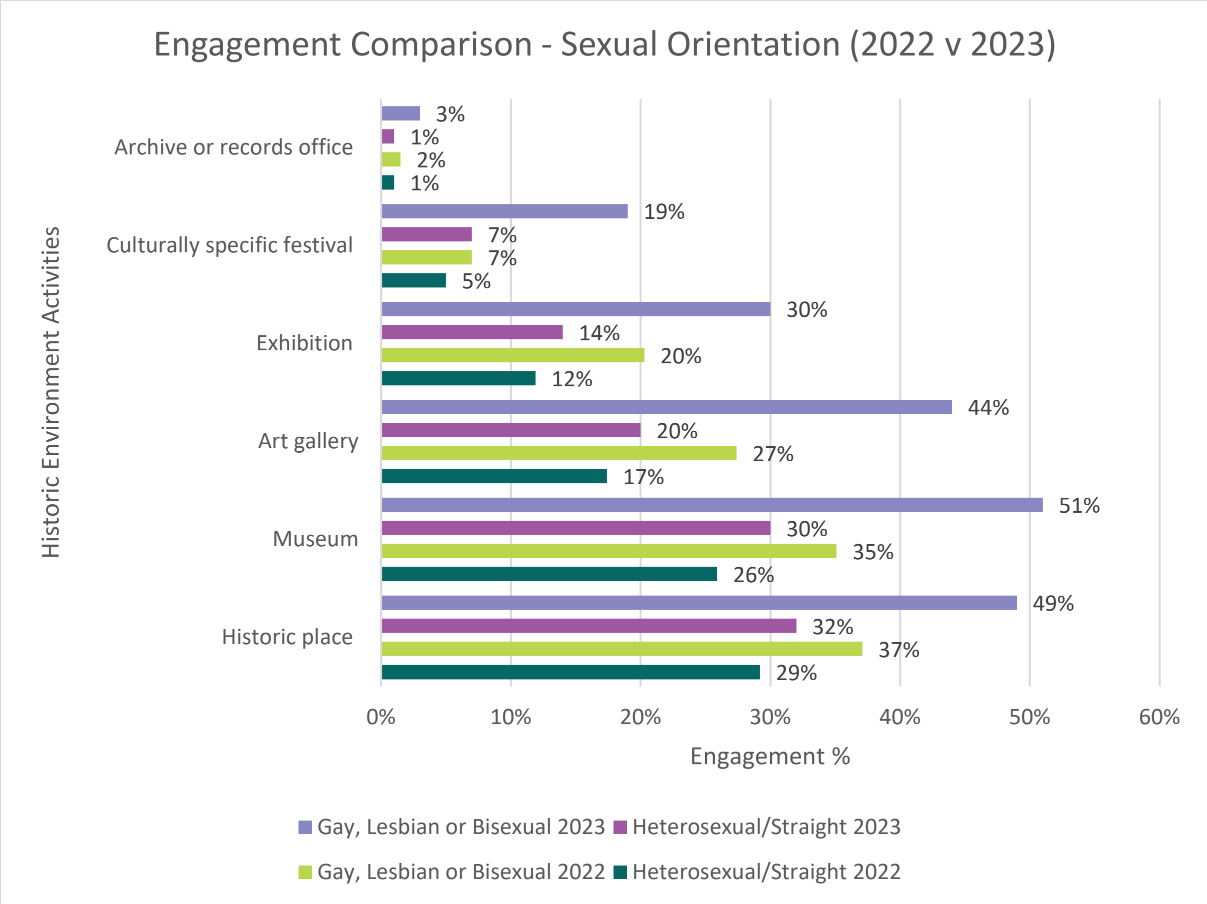


However, between 2022 and 2023, engagement among minority ethnic groups increased across museums, art galleries, exhibitions and culturally specific festivals did increase. This may indicate growing awareness, relevance, or accessibility of heritage activities amongst more diverse communities. While participation gaps remain the direction of travel is broadly positive.

6.3.6. Sexual Orientation

Engagement levels among gay, lesbian and bisexual respondents were consistently higher than among heterosexual respondents across all measured activities in both years (Figure 25 - Engagement Comparison - Sexual Orientation (2022 v 2023)).

FIGURE 25 - ENGAGEMENT COMPARISON - SEXUAL ORIENTATION (2022 V 2023)

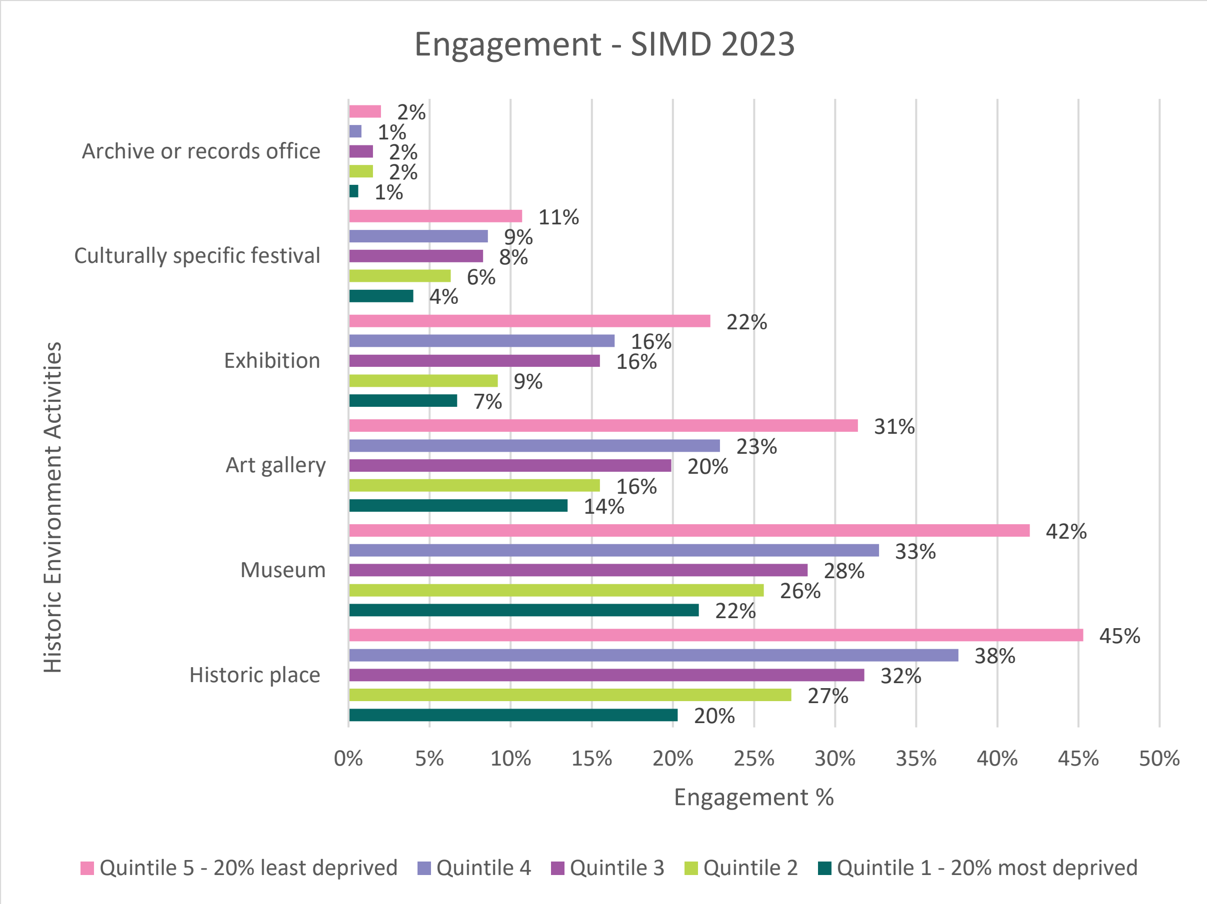


Participation among LGBTQ+ respondents increased substantially between 2022 and 2023, particularly for visits to historic places, museums and art galleries. While care should be taken when interpreting smaller population samples, the data suggests that historic environment activities continue to resonate strongly with LGBTQ+ communities.

6.3.7. Socie-economic Inequality

Reducing inequalities and broadening access are central ambitions of *Our Past, Our Future*. Analysis by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) therefore provides an important perspective on how engagement varies across socioeconomic groups (Figure 26 - Engagement - SIMD 2023).

FIGURE 26 - ENGAGEMENT - SIMD 2023



The 2023 data show a clear relationship between levels of deprivation and participation in historic environment activities. Engagement generally increases as deprivation decreases, with people living in the least deprived areas reporting substantially higher participation across all activity types than those living in the most deprived areas.

These findings highlight that socioeconomic barriers remain a significant factor influencing engagement with Scotland's historic environment. Cost, travel, awareness, confidence and competing priorities may all contribute to lower participation among people living in more deprived communities.

6.3.8. Conclusion

The 2023 data provides an important early baseline for measuring progress against OPOF's ambition to make Scotland's historic environment more inclusive and accessible. While significant differences remain between some demographic groups—particularly in relation to disability, ethnicity and socioeconomic deprivation—the overall direction of travel is broadly positive, with increases in participation recorded across most groups and activities between 2022 and 2023.

As the first year of OPOF implementation, these findings should be viewed as indicative rather than conclusive. Continued monitoring over future years will be necessary to determine whether these early upward trends develop into sustained improvements in participation and whether longstanding inequalities in historic environment engagement begin to narrow over time.

6.4. Significant Developments Since 2024

6.4.1. MGS funding approach

Museum Galleries Scotland has strengthened its leadership on inclusion and co-production through targeted investment. A total of £175,000 has been awarded to five museums through the Sustainable Co-production Fund, supporting projects that embed power-sharing approaches and meaningful collaboration with systemically excluded communities. This demonstrates a shift towards recognising co-production as a core mechanism for inclusion, with dedicated funding and structured support enabling it to be integrated into funded heritage activity rather than applied retrospectively.

Further targeted investment by Museum Galleries Scotland is supporting a shift towards more community-led approaches to inclusion. A total of £125,000 has been awarded to five community organisations (£25,000 each) to work in partnership with museums to co-produce exhibitions and activities that amplify underrepresented voices. This reflects a broader move away from institution-led models towards shared authority and community-led production, aligning with Outcome 6's aim of creating a more inclusive and diverse sector.

6.4.2 MGS Delivering Change Programme (NLHF, Scottish Government, Esmée Fairbairn investment)

Alongside this, sector-wide organisational change programmes are supporting deeper, long-term transformation. Museum Galleries Scotland's Delivering Change programme operates as a national, multi-strand initiative focused on anti-oppressive practice, including strands such as Museum Activists, Transformers, Community Catalysts and sustainable co-production. By 2025, the programme has engaged 97 Museum Activists, 17 Transformers and 7 Community Catalysts, alongside supporting 5 co-production partnerships, delivering anti-racism training to 300 participants and 72 hours of human rights-based approach training.

TABLE 14 - MGS DELIVERING CHANGE REACH (2025)

Delivering Change Reach (2025)	Numbers
Museum Activists	97
Museum Transformer	17
Community Catalysts	7
Sustainable Co-production partnership	5
People in anti-racism training	300
HRBA training hours	72

6.4.3. Make Your Mark in Volunteering Campaign

Work to support inclusive volunteering is also becoming more structured and evidence led. Updates to the Make Your Mark Inclusive volunteering toolkit, which is designed to address barriers to participation in volunteering, drew on member survey data (52 respondents) and focus group insights. This reflects a clear shift towards more deliberate, evidence-informed practice to improving access to volunteering opportunities.

In addition, Make Your Mark's co-designed volunteer taster sessions, including activities developed with refugee communities and other underrepresented groups, demonstrate a more targeted approach to inclusion. By collaborating directly with participants to design activities and address barriers to involvement, these initiatives help ensure that participation in the historic environment becomes accessible to a broader range of communities.

6.4.4 Targeted approaches to reduce barriers

Perhaps the most significant development since the Baseline is the increasing focus on reducing barriers to participation. Across the sector, organisations are placing greater emphasis on understanding who participates, identifying barriers to access, and testing approaches to widen engagement. This includes the Historic Environment Scotland School travel visits subsidy fund provided by the Scottish Government. This intervention is designed to improve accessibility and participation for areas of multiple deprivation and extends use beyond HES properties to selected National Trust for Scotland sites and New Lanark World Heritage site.

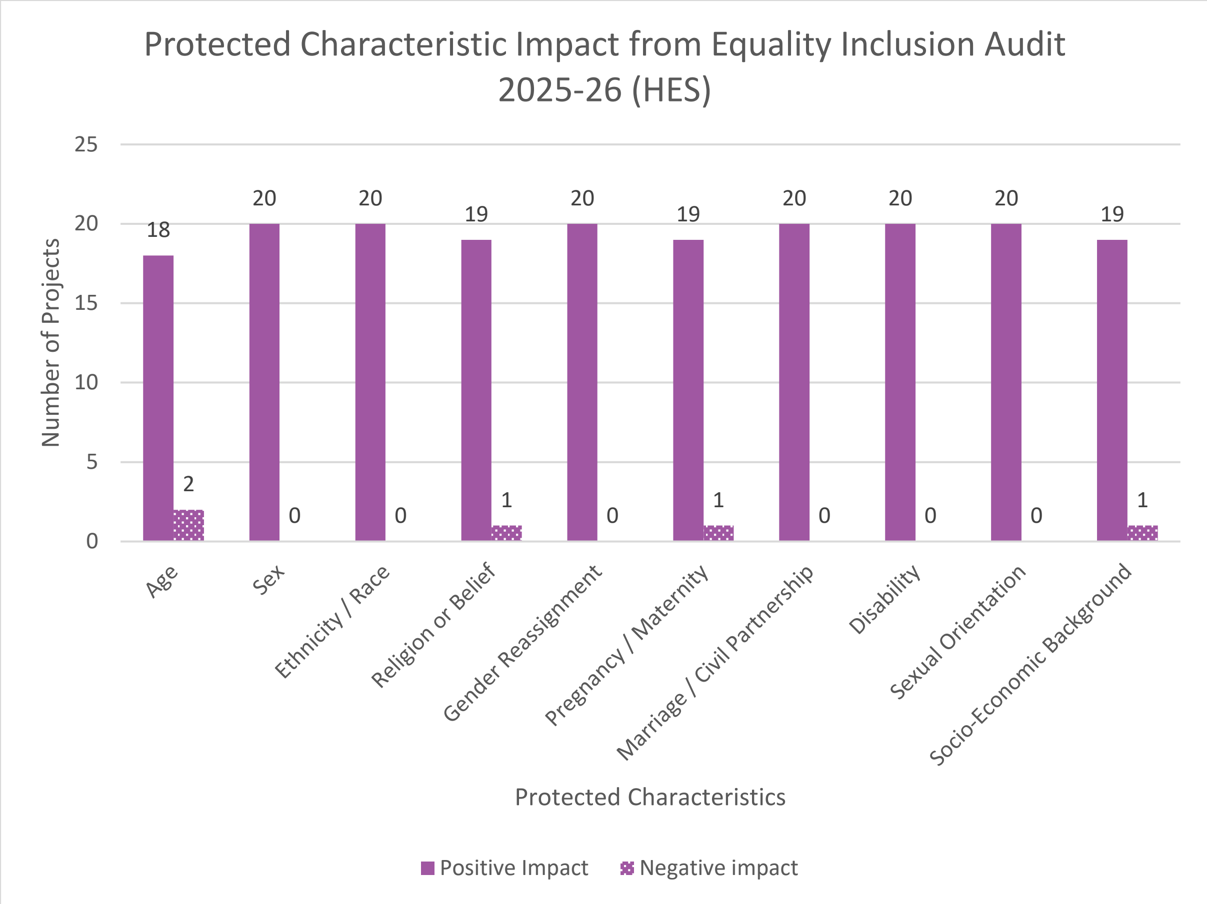
Furthermore, National Museums Scotland's 2022–23 evaluation identified transport costs and distance as key barriers preventing schools from visiting museum sites.[14] In response, a revised pricing model was introduced in 2024–25 offering free workshops to schools with high proportions of pupils in SIMD 1 and 2 areas. Digital learning continues to be offered free of charge, alongside measures such as bus bursaries, Additional Support Needs (ASN) support and other targeted access initiatives. While these examples sit within the museum sector, they provide useful learning for the wider historic environment sector regarding how practical barriers to participation can be identified and addressed.

6.4.5 Equality Impact Assessments

Findings from the internal HES Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) audit provide evidence that equality, diversity and inclusion considerations are being systematically applied within HES activities, aligning with the aims of Outcome 6. The audit recorded consistently high numbers of positive impacts across all protected characteristics, while negative impacts remained low (**Error! Reference source not found.**). As an internal assessment, these findings should be interpreted as evidence of organisational progress within HES rather than a measure of sector-wide change. However, they demonstrate how structured assessment processes can support the identification and mitigation of barriers to participation and engagement.

[14] NMS Communicated Data (2026)

FIGURE 27 - PROTECTED CHARACTERISTIC IMPACT FROM EQUALITY INCLUSION AUDIT 2025-26 (HES)



This pattern reflects a shift towards more consistent and measurable application of EQIA processes, with teams increasingly integrating inclusion into project planning rather than addressing it retrospectively. The ability to record and assess impacts across protected characteristics also strengthens accountability and evidence-based decision-making. Overall, this demonstrates clear progress towards Outcome 6 by including inclusive practice within organisational processes and ensuring that the historic environment is more accessible, equitable and representative for all.

Contribution Towards OPOF Ambitions

The evidence suggests positive progress towards Outcome 6, particularly through the increasing integration of inclusion within funding programmes, organisational processes, volunteering initiatives and community engagement activity. Across the sector, there is growing recognition that inclusion requires active efforts to remove barriers, widen participation and support underrepresented groups.

The strongest evidence of progress is found in the systems and structures that support inclusion, including grant-making criteria, co-production approaches, equality impact assessment processes and targeted participation initiatives. These developments demonstrate that inclusion is becoming more embedded in sector practice rather than being treated as a standalone consideration.

However, the evidence also highlights persistent inequalities in participation. Differences remain across disability, ethnicity, age and socioeconomic status, while volunteering continues to be dominated by a relatively narrow demographic profile. These findings suggest that improved practice has not yet translated into equitable participation across all groups.

Overall, the direction of travel is positive. Continued focus on reducing barriers, improving accessibility, strengthening representation and monitoring participation trends will be important if the historic environment is to become fully inclusive, accessible and relevant to all communities.

Data Gaps and Caveats

The participation analysis is based on Scottish Household Survey data collected in 2023 and published in 2024, reflecting the latest dataset available at the time of reporting. As with many national surveys, a lag exists between data collection and publication due to validation and processing requirements.

As 2023 represents the first year of delivery of *Our Past, Our Future* (2023–2028), the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of the strategy's impact in isolation. Participation levels are influenced by a wide range of factors, and changes in engagement often take time to emerge. Comparisons with 2022 provide a useful indication of change since the Baseline, although participation patterns may still have been influenced by the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In line with *Our Past, Our Future*, this analysis adopts a broad definition of the historic environment and includes participation in historic places, museums, galleries, exhibitions, archives and culturally specific heritage events. While this provides a more comprehensive picture of engagement with heritage, it also means that some findings reflect wider cultural participation patterns rather than engagement with historic environment assets alone.

Evidence relating to ethnicity, sexual orientation and some other protected characteristics should be interpreted with caution due to smaller survey sample sizes. Annual changes may reflect sampling variation as well as genuine changes in participation.

Volunteering evidence is derived from a specific survey sample and may not fully reflect the diversity of volunteers or volunteer-involving organisations across the wider historic environment sector.

Sources

- Scottish Household Survey 2023 (published 2024).
- HES Grants Funding Reports.
- National Lottery Heritage Fund Inclusion, Access and Participation Investment Principal reporting.
- Heritage Volunteering in Scotland Research Report.
- Make Your Mark Inclusive Volunteering Toolkit.
- Make Your Mark Volunteer Taster Sessions evidence.
- Museums Galleries Scotland Delivering Change programme evidence.
- Museums Galleries Scotland Sustainable Co-production Fund.

- National Museums Scotland communicated data (2026).
- HES Equality Impact Assessment audit evidence.
- Scottish Government funded Heritage School Visits Travel Subsidy.

Priority 3: Building a Wellbeing Economy

Outcome 7: The historic environment makes a responsible contribution to Scotland's economy

Summary

The evidence for Outcome 7 shows that the historic environment continues to make a measurable contribution to Scotland's wellbeing economy through heritage tourism, construction activity, grant-funded investment and wider place-based economic activity. Between 2023 and 2024, direct economic impact increased by 2% and jobs supported grew by 4%, indicating continued growth after the exceptional post-pandemic recovery period. Although these increases are more modest than the **20% increase in economic impact and 17% increase in jobs supported recorded between 2022 and 2023**, they indicate continued growth in a more stable operating environment (Figure 28 - Direct Impacts Jobs (no multipliers) 2008 - 2025 & Figure 29 - Direct Economic Impact £m (no multipliers) 2008 -2025).

Gross economic impact also increased between 2023 and 2024, showing that the historic environment continues to generate value beyond its immediate activities through supply chains and wider spending effects. The latest construction data for 2025 reinforce this picture, with both economic impact and jobs supported increasing by 3%.

Since the Baseline, new evidence and policy developments have strengthened the wider case for the historic environment's economic role. Tourism data, grant leverage, AHF-funded regeneration outcomes, social value research, evidence-based advocacy and place-based policy frameworks all show how heritage contributes to local economies, investment, community resilience and wellbeing.

Baseline Position (2024)

The Baseline drew on Office for National Statistics data as analysed through Scotland's Historic Environment Audit to assess the historic environment's economic contribution. The analysis focused on heritage tourism and construction activity, including economic impact and full-time equivalent jobs supported, net attributable and with supply-chain multipliers.

The Baseline established that the historic environment contributes to Scotland's economy through visitor activity, construction, regeneration, employment and supply-chain effects. It also highlighted the importance of interpreting economic measures alongside wider social and cultural value in a wellbeing economy context.

Current Position (2026)

Between 2023 and 2024, direct economic impact from the historic environment increased by 2%, while jobs supported increased by 4%. These increases are more modest than the 2022 to 2023 recovery period, when direct economic impact grew by 20% and jobs supported by 17%, but they indicate continued positive movement in a more stable operating environment (Figure 28 - Direct Impacts Jobs (no multipliers) 2008 - 2025 & Figure 29 - Direct Economic Impact £m (no multipliers) 2008 -2025).

The most recent construction data available for 2025 shows further growth, with both direct economic impact and jobs supported increasing by 3%. This suggests that investment in the historic environment continues to support skilled employment, local supply chains and economic resilience.

Gross economic impact also remains positive. Between 2023 and 2024, total gross economic impact increased by 1.9%, while jobs supported increased by 4% across heritage tourism and construction (Figure 30 - Gross Impacts Jobs (including supply chain multipliers) 2008 - 2025 & Figure 31 - Gross Economic Impact £m (including supply chain multipliers) 2008 - 2025). This demonstrates continued multiplier effects through supply chains and wider spending activity. While this growth presents a positive economic picture, it also reinforces concerns identified elsewhere in the Baseline. Employers report widespread shortages in traditional, specialist, digital and leadership skills, suggesting that the sector's ability to meet growing demand may increasingly depend on its success in attracting, training and retaining a skilled workforce.

HES Grants leverage also strengthened. In 2025, every £1 invested through HES Grant funding attracted a further £5.94 from other sources, representing a 13% increase on 2024, a 52% increase since the previous Baseline and a 25% increase compared with 2021 (Figure 32 - HES Grants Leverage (2021 - 2025)).

Key Indicators

TABLE 15 - OUTCOME 7 KEY INDICATORS

Indicator	Baseline (2024)	Current Position (2026)	Direction of Travel
Direct economic impact	£3.18bn in 2024	Increased by 2% (£3.25bn) between 2023 and 2024	Trend: Continued growth
Jobs supported	81,700 in 2024	Increased by 4% (84,700) between 2023 and 2024	Trend: Continued growth
Construction economic impact and jobs	£1.92bn & 13,700 jobs in 2024	2025 construction data increased by 3% (£1.98bn & 14,100)	Trend: Positive increase
Gross economic impact	£6.0bn in 2024	Increased by 1.9% (£6.1bn) between 2023 and 2024	Trend: Continued growth
HES grant leverage	£3.92 for every £1 in 2023-24	£5.94 for every £1 in 2025-26	Trend: Strengthened investment leverage
AHF funded regeneration outcomes	Not directly comparable	24 historic properties operating/generating income; 5 new residential units created in 2025–26	Trend: Positive local economic contribution

Evidence and Progress

7.1. Evidence of Change

The evidence shows that the historic environment remains an important economic asset. Growth has slowed compared with the exceptional post-pandemic recovery period, but both economic impact and jobs supported continue to increase. Between 2023 and 2024, direct economic impact increased by 2% and jobs supported by 4% (Figure 28 - Direct Impacts Jobs (no multipliers) 2008 - 2025 & Figure 29 - Direct Economic Impact £m (no multipliers) 2008 -2025). While not directly comparable to wider Scottish economic growth, which stood at around 1.1% over the same period, they suggest that demand for heritage-related activity, services and skills remains strong. The findings therefore reinforce the importance of addressing the workforce and skills challenges identified elsewhere in the Baseline if the sector is to sustain future growth and maximise its economic contribution.

The Baseline draws from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) statistics as analysed through Scotland's Historic Environment Audit (SHEA) with:

- Amount generated for Scotland's economy (net attributable including supply chain multipliers)
- Number of full-time equivalent jobs (net attributable including supply chain multipliers)[15]

[15] 2025 data is not yet available for tourism.

FIGURE 28 - DIRECT IMPACTS JOBS (NO MULTIPLIERS) 2008 - 2025

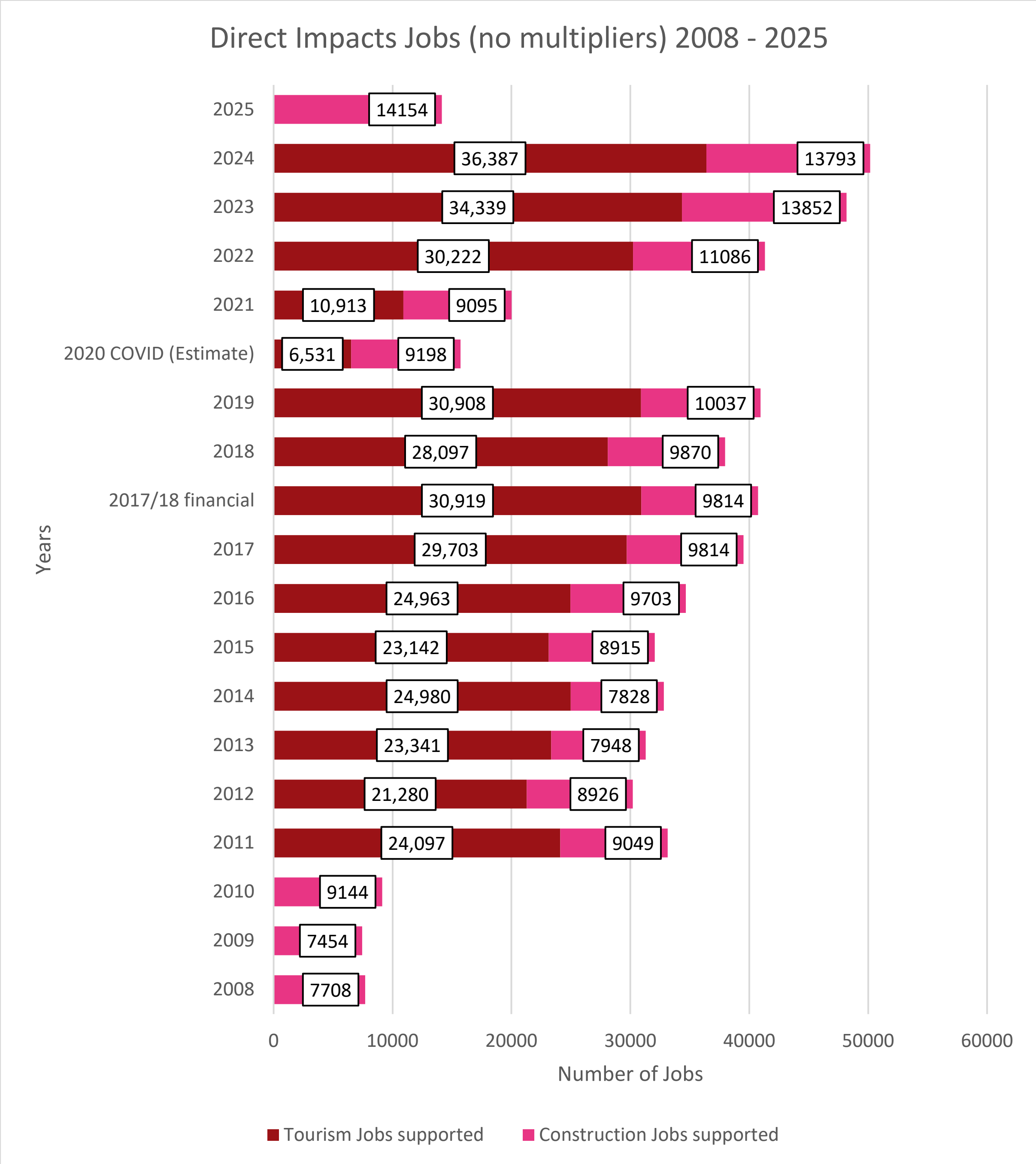
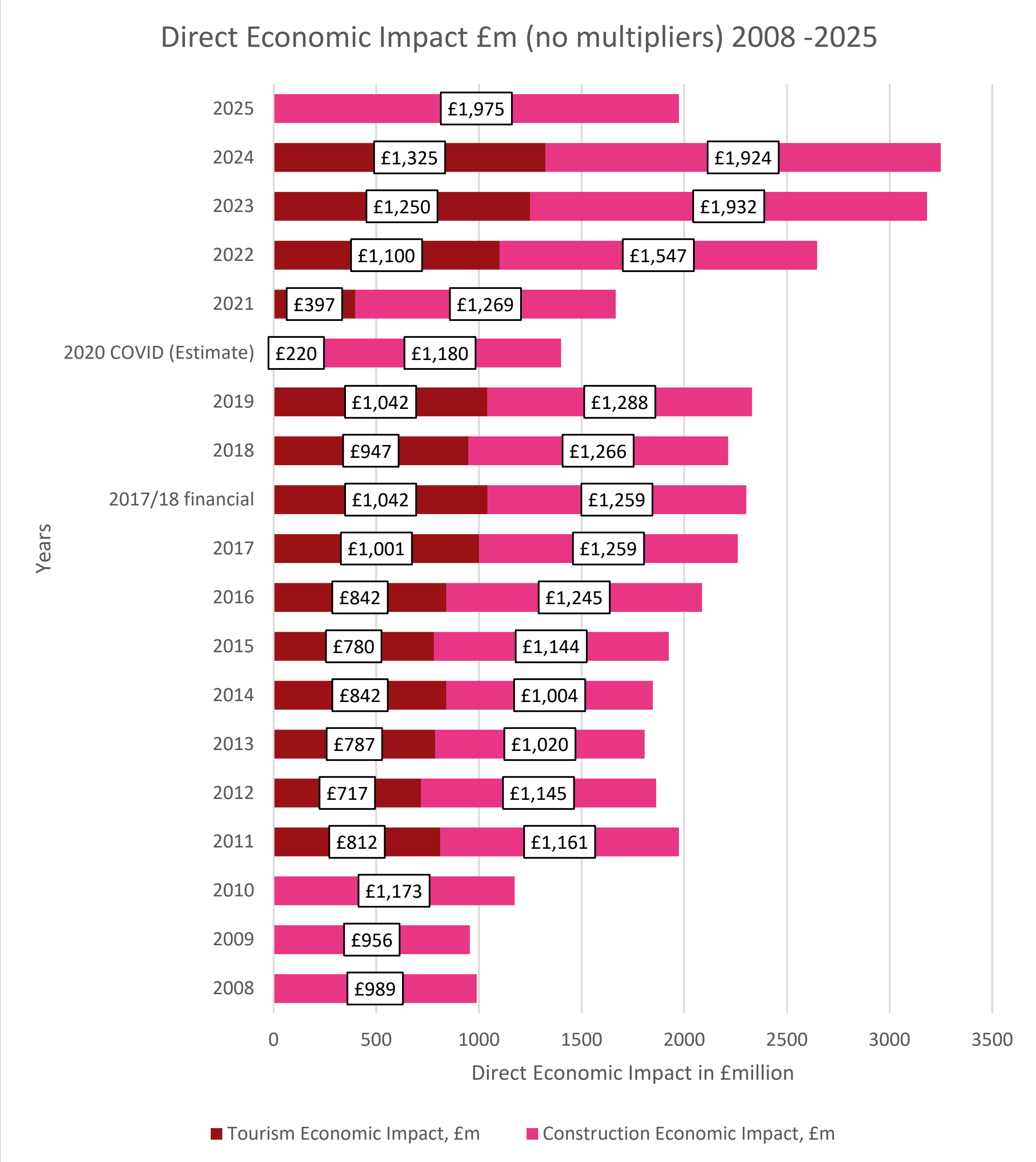


FIGURE 29 - DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT £M (NO MULTIPLIERS) 2008 -2025



Growth has been more modest than some pre-pandemic years, such as 2016–17, when direct economic impact increased by 8% and jobs supported by 14% (Figure 30 - Gross Impacts Jobs (including supply chain multipliers) 2008 - 2025 & Figure 31 - Gross Economic Impact £m (including supply chain multipliers) 2008 - 2025). However, the continued positive trajectory demonstrates the sector's ongoing economic value and its ability to sustain employment and generate economic activity in a more challenging operating environment characterised by inflationary pressures, increased costs and economic uncertainty.

The most recent data available for 2025, covering construction activity, further reinforces this picture. Direct economic impact and jobs supported through the historic environment construction sector both increased by 3%, indicating continued growth despite wider economic pressures. This suggests that investment in the historic environment continues to support skilled employment, local supply chains and economic resilience.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the historic environment remains an important economic asset, contributing to sustainable growth while supporting jobs, places and communities across Scotland.

FIGURE 30 - GROSS IMPACTS JOBS (INCLUDING SUPPLY CHAIN MULTIPLIERS) 2008 - 2025

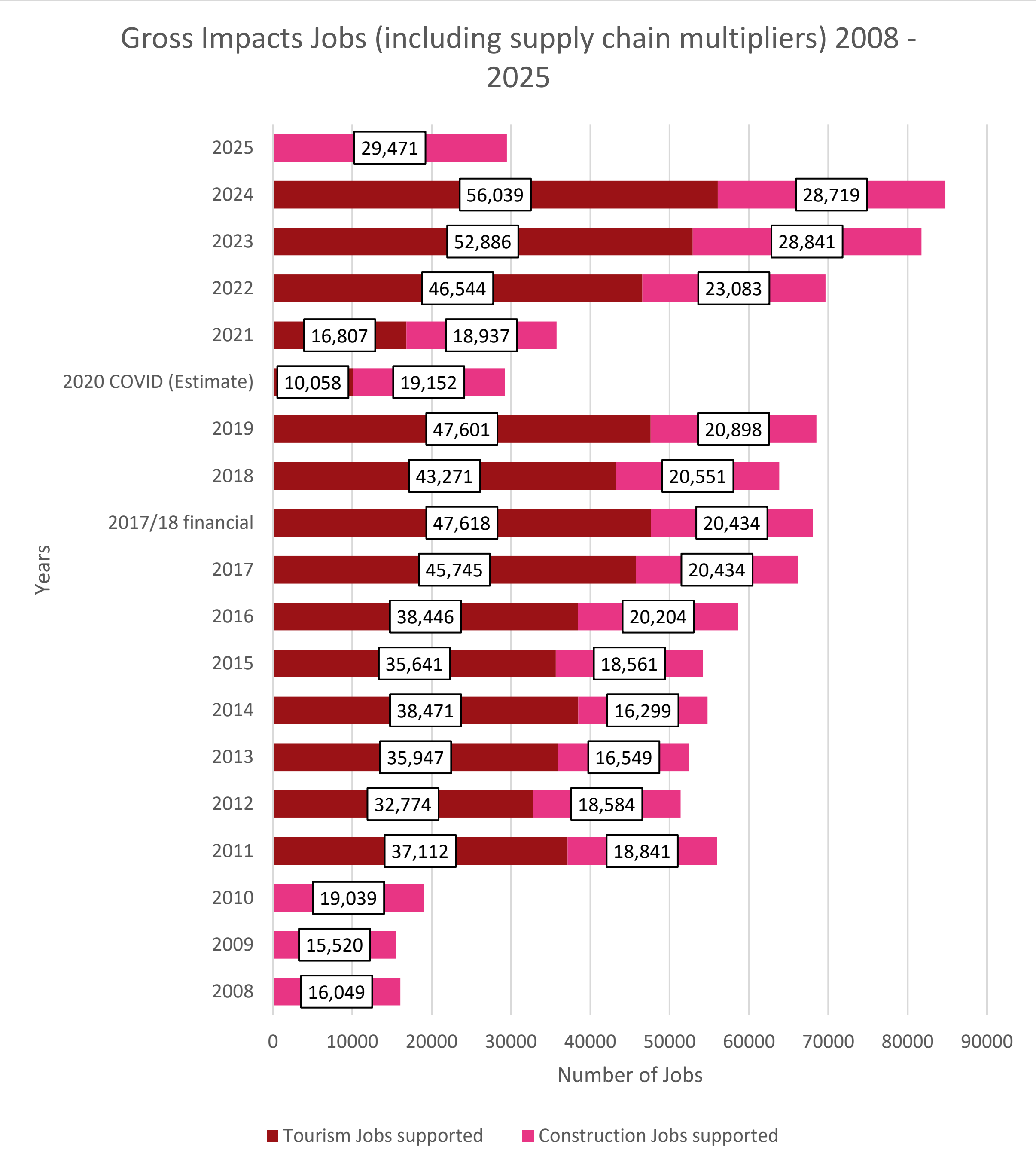
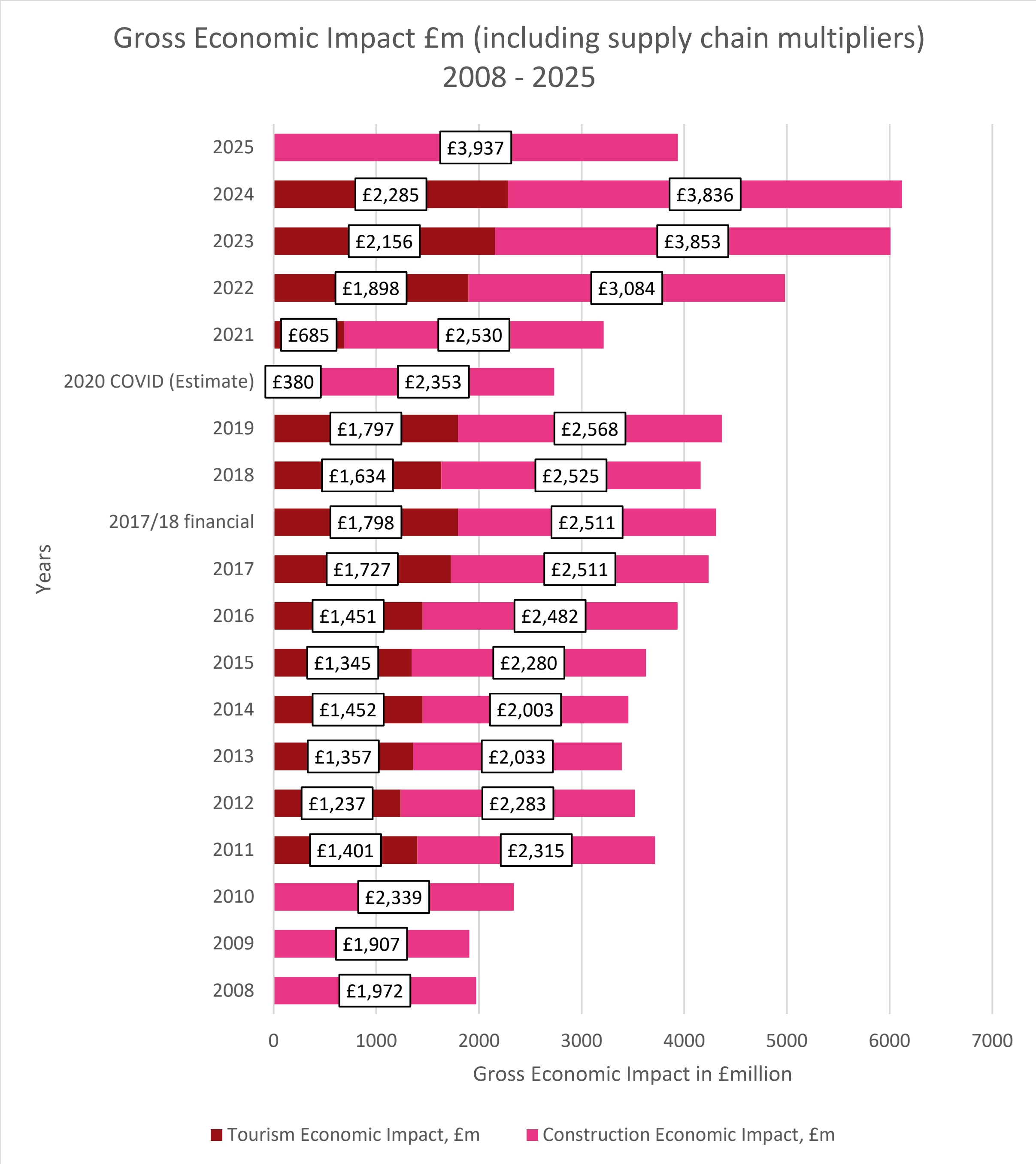


FIGURE 31 - GROSS ECONOMIC IMPACT £M (INCLUDING SUPPLY CHAIN MULTIPLIERS) 2008 - 2025



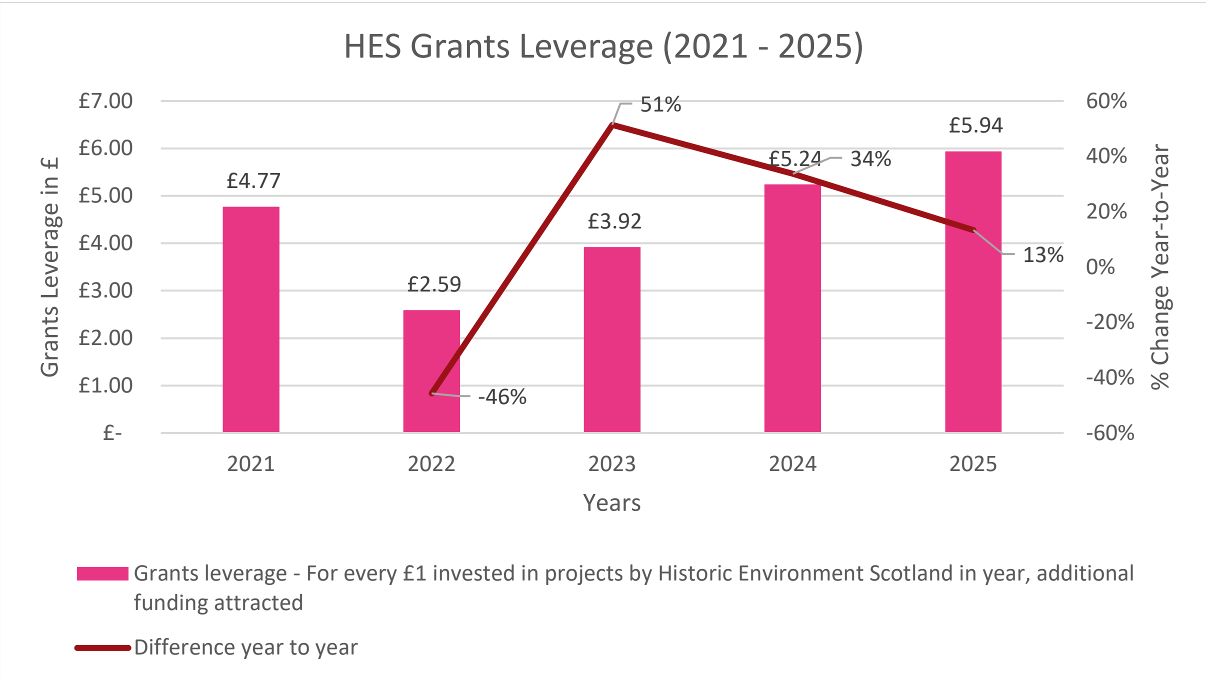
The wider economic contribution of the historic environment shows a similarly positive trend when measured through gross economic impact, which captures both the direct value generated by the sector and the additional economic activity supported through supply chains and wider spending effects across the Scottish economy.

These findings demonstrate that the historic environment continues to generate significant economic value beyond its immediate activities, supporting employment, businesses and local economies throughout Scotland. The multiplier effects associated with heritage investment highlight the sector's contribution to a wellbeing economy, where economic benefits are shared across communities and supply chains while also supporting cultural, environmental and social outcomes.

Recent evidence from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre highlights the important contribution that arts, culture and heritage-related employment make across Scotland's regions. While Edinburgh and Glasgow continue to have the highest concentrations of cultural workers, several rural and island areas also demonstrate relatively high levels of cultural employment. However, high concentrations of cultural workers do not necessarily imply a resilient cultural economy, as many rural and island communities continue to face challenges relating to funding, infrastructure, population change and workforce sustainability. The evidence therefore demonstrates that cultural and heritage-related employment is geographically dispersed across Scotland, while highlighting the need to better understand the conditions that enable cultural activity to contribute to long-term local economic resilience.

The value of investment in the historic environment is demonstrated not only through its direct economic contribution, but also through its ability to attract additional funding and stimulate wider economic activity. Historic Environment Scotland's Grants leverage ratio reached £5.94 in 2025, meaning that for every £1 invested through HES Grant funding, a further £5.94 was secured from other sources (Figure 32 - HES Grants Leverage (2021 - 2025)). This represents a 13% increase on 2024 levels, a 52% increase since the previous baseline and a 25% increase compared to 2021, highlighting a sustained strengthening of the sector's ability to attract investment.

FIGURE 32 - HES GRANTS LEVERAGE (2021 - 2025)



This trend demonstrates growing confidence in the historic environment as an investment proposition and illustrates how public funding can unlock significantly greater levels of economic activity. Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) funded projects provide a practical example of these wider benefits.[16] In 2025–26, 24 historic properties were operating (including partially or under meanwhile use) and generating income as a result of investment, while five new residential units were created within historic buildings. These outcomes demonstrate how heritage-led regeneration can support local economic activity, housing provision and the productive reuse of historic assets. The increasing leverage ratio also reflects the sector's capacity to support regeneration, conservation and community-led projects while maximising the impact of public expenditure

7.2. Significant Developments Since 2024

7.2.1. Tourism

Heritage assets continue to make an important contribution to Scotland's visitor economy through both domestic and international tourism. VisitScotland and Scottish Government evidence reinforces the importance of tourism as a driver of Scotland's wellbeing economy. Visitor spending reached £10.8 billion in 2023, while tourism supported approximately 245,000 jobs and 16,045 businesses in 2024. While tourism evidence should be interpreted carefully as the historic environment is only part of a collective visitor offer, Scotland's historic attractions, places and landscapes significantly contribute to the appeal of destinations across the country and support wider visitor spending that benefits local economies, businesses and communities.

7.2.2. Community Wealth Building and Regeneration

Heritage continues to contribute to local economic development through regeneration activity and community-led investment. More broadly, there is growing evidence that the historic environment is being considered alongside other local assets within place-based economic development and Community Wealth Building discussions. While heritage is not a central pillar of Community Wealth Building policy, historic assets can support wider ambitions around regeneration, tourism, local enterprise, skills development and community wellbeing. In doing so, the historic environment contributes to several National Performance Framework outcomes, including communities, culture, economy and wellbeing, while supporting the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act's emphasis on enabling communities to shape the places where they live. Together, these developments demonstrate how the historic environment can contribute to a more responsible and sustainable model of economic development, generating economic value while supporting local wealth retention, community resilience and long-term wellbeing.

7.2.3. Social Value and Wellbeing

Beyond economic contribution, evidence highlights the wider social and wellbeing benefits generated through engagement with Scotland's historic environment. The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Heritage 2033 strategy demonstrates a growing emphasis on the wider contribution that heritage makes to people, places and the economy. Funding programmes increasingly require applicants to demonstrate not only financial outputs but also the broader economic, social and community benefits generated through their projects. This reflects a shift towards recognising heritage investment as a driver of long-term value creation, supporting outcomes such as community resilience, skills development, regeneration, wellbeing and local economic growth.

[16] HES 2025-26 AHF Grant Data Report

This echoes a growing recognition across the sector and more broadly that the contribution of the historic environment extends beyond traditional economic measures.[17] This includes the development of the Social Value Toolkit, led by the University of Stirling, which provides a framework for measuring the social value generated by culture and heritage activities. The methodology has subsequently been applied through initiatives such as the National Trust for Scotland's social value work and the ReACH project's exploration of community and social outcomes associated with historic places. To build from this Historic Environment Scotland has commissioned the University of Birmingham to undertake new research exploring the relationship between the historic environment, social value and place-based wellbeing, with publication expected in December 2026. The research aims to develop a stronger evidence base for understanding how heritage contributes to community wellbeing, social cohesion and wider societal outcomes alongside place-based impacts.

Recent individual projects which demonstrate how the built environment can contribute to regeneration include the multi-million-pound transformation of the Inverness Castle Experience and the redevelopment of the Northern Meeting Park, both completed within the reporting period. Alongside Highland Council's Energy Performance Benchmarking programme, this activity demonstrates an increasingly integrated approach to asset management that considers both environmental performance and wider social and economic outcomes. This aligns closely with the ambitions of Outcome 7 and the wider wellbeing economy agenda, showing how climate resilience, place-based regeneration and economic sustainability can be delivered together rather than as separate objectives.

7.2.4. Evidence-based Advocacy

Ongoing research continues to strengthen understanding of the historic environment's contribution to Scotland's economy and society. Evidence-based advocacy is becoming increasingly prominent across the historic environment sector. Organisations including Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS), through its Manifesto and Advocacy Toolkit and the National Trust for Scotland, through its Speaking Up for Heritage campaign, are drawing on research, data and sector evidence to articulate the contribution that the historic environment makes to Scotland's economy, tourism, employment, place-making and community wellbeing.

7.2.5. Summary

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates that Scotland's historic environment continues to generate economic, social and community benefits. While evidence is strongest in relation to tourism and economic contribution, a growing body of research is also improving understanding of wider social value and wellbeing impacts.

[17] More broadly, Tools and frameworks such as Scotland's Towns Partnership Circular Communities Toolkit and Place Standard Tool are increasingly supporting organisations, local authorities and communities to assess the social, environmental and economic benefits generated by places and assets.

Contribution Towards OPOF Ambitions

The evidence demonstrates clear contribution to OPOF's wellbeing economy ambitions. The historic environment supports jobs, attracts investment, contributes to tourism and construction, stimulates local supply chains and strengthens places and communities.

The strongest contribution is seen where economic value is linked with wider public benefits, including regeneration, community stewardship, responsible tourism, social value, place-making and wellbeing. This supports a broader understanding of economic success that reflects the principles of a wellbeing economy rather than solely a narrow financial return.

Data Gaps and Caveats

The ONS/SHEA economic categories used to represent the historic environment do not provide a perfect one-to-one definition of the sector. The analysis should therefore be presented with a clear note on the categories included and their limitations.

Tourism figures relate to Scotland's tourism sector as a whole and should not be attributed solely to the historic environment. The historic environment is a significant contributor to the national visitor offer, but it sits alongside other drivers including landscapes, events, food and drink, outdoor recreation and contemporary culture.

Some areas of evidence relating to social value, wellbeing and place-based impacts remain emerging. While a growing number of organisations are adopting approaches to understand and measure wider social and community benefits, the evidence base is still developing, and methodologies are not yet applied consistently across the sector.

Sources

- Office for National Statistics data analysed through Scotland's Historic Environment Audit.
- HES grants leverage data.
- HES 2025-26 AHF Grant Data Report.
- VisitScotland and Scottish Government tourism evidence.
- Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre evidence on arts, culture and heritage employment.
- National Lottery Heritage Fund Heritage 2033 delivery plan.
- HES and University of Birmingham wellbeing and social value research.
- BEFS Manifesto and Advocacy Toolkit.
- National Trust for Scotland Speaking Up for Heritage and Social Value / Portfolio Review material.
- Place Standard Tool, Scotland's Towns Partnership Circular Communities Toolkit and Pride in Place policy context.

Outcome 8: The historic environment provides Fair Work

Summary

The evidence for Outcome 8 presents a mixed picture. The 2025 Employer Skills Survey indicates that **79%** of respondents classified themselves as Fair Work employers, compared with **88% in 2023.** While awareness of Fair Work remains high, this suggests progress has not been linear and warrants further investigation.

Volunteering evidence highlights an important tension for the sector. Volunteers contribute substantial social, cultural and economic value and play a critical role in sustaining heritage activity. At the same time, volunteering cannot fully address the workforce challenges identified elsewhere in the Baseline Refresh. While many volunteers are not seeking paid employment, survey evidence indicates that those wishing to pursue heritage careers continue to face barriers including limited entry-level opportunities, job insecurity, geographical constraints, unclear progression routes and low pay.

New Fair Work research commissioned by HES suggests that the sector is culturally aligned with Fair Work ambitions, but implementation remains constrained by short-term funding, limited organisational capacity, workforce precarity and inconsistent monitoring. This indicates that progress depends not only on commitment but also on the resources, guidance and structures needed to make Fair Work deliverable.

Baseline Position (2024)

The Baseline referred to historic environment organisations listed through the Scottish Living Wage website and wider evidence on the sector's Fair Work position. It also highlighted the importance of fair, secure and accessible work as part of a sustainable historic environment workforce.

The Baseline established that Fair Work is important both for paid staff and for the relationship between paid roles and volunteering. It identified the need to ensure that volunteering complements rather than replaces employment and that clearer routes into paid work are available.

Current Position (2026)

The 2025 Employer Skills Survey found that 79% of respondents classified themselves as Fair Work employers, compared with 88% in 2023. This decline should be interpreted cautiously until the reasons are better understood.

The volunteering research highlights the scale of unpaid contribution. Organisations surveyed reported at least 76,548 volunteer hours during 2024 (Figure 34 - Distribution of Hours Recorded Among VIOs (VIOs answers)).[18] However, this should be treated as a minimum estimate because 43% of organisations surveyed do not formally record volunteer hours and many smaller volunteer-led groups are not captured in sector-wide datasets.

The volunteering hours captured in the Heritage Volunteering in Scotland report equate to **approximately 50 full-time equivalent posts. Valued against average Scottish earnings, this**

[18] This figure does not include Doors Open Days data.

represents an estimated annual economic contribution of £1.12 million, rising to £1.35 million when employment-related costs such as pension contributions and holiday pay are included (Table 17 - Calculation Formal Volunteering Economic Value)**.**[19]

Key Indicators

TABLE 16 - OUTCOME 8 KEY INDICATORS

Indicator	Baseline (2024)	Current Position (2026)	Direction of Travel
Respondents identifying as Fair Work employers	88% in 2023	79% in 2025	Trend: Decline; requires interpretation
Recorded volunteer hours	New volunteering research evidence published in 2026	At least 76,548 hours in 2024	Trend: Significant contribution; undercount likely
Estimated volunteer FTE equivalent	New volunteering research evidence published in 2026	Approximately 50 FTE posts based on recorded hours in 2024	Trend: Substantial contribution
Estimated economic value of recorded volunteering	New volunteering research evidence published in 2026	£1.12m, rising to £1.35m with employment overheads in 2024	Trend: Minimum estimate
NMS permanent contracts	92% at 31 March 2024	94% at 15 January 2025	Trend: Strong employment stability example

Evidence and Progress

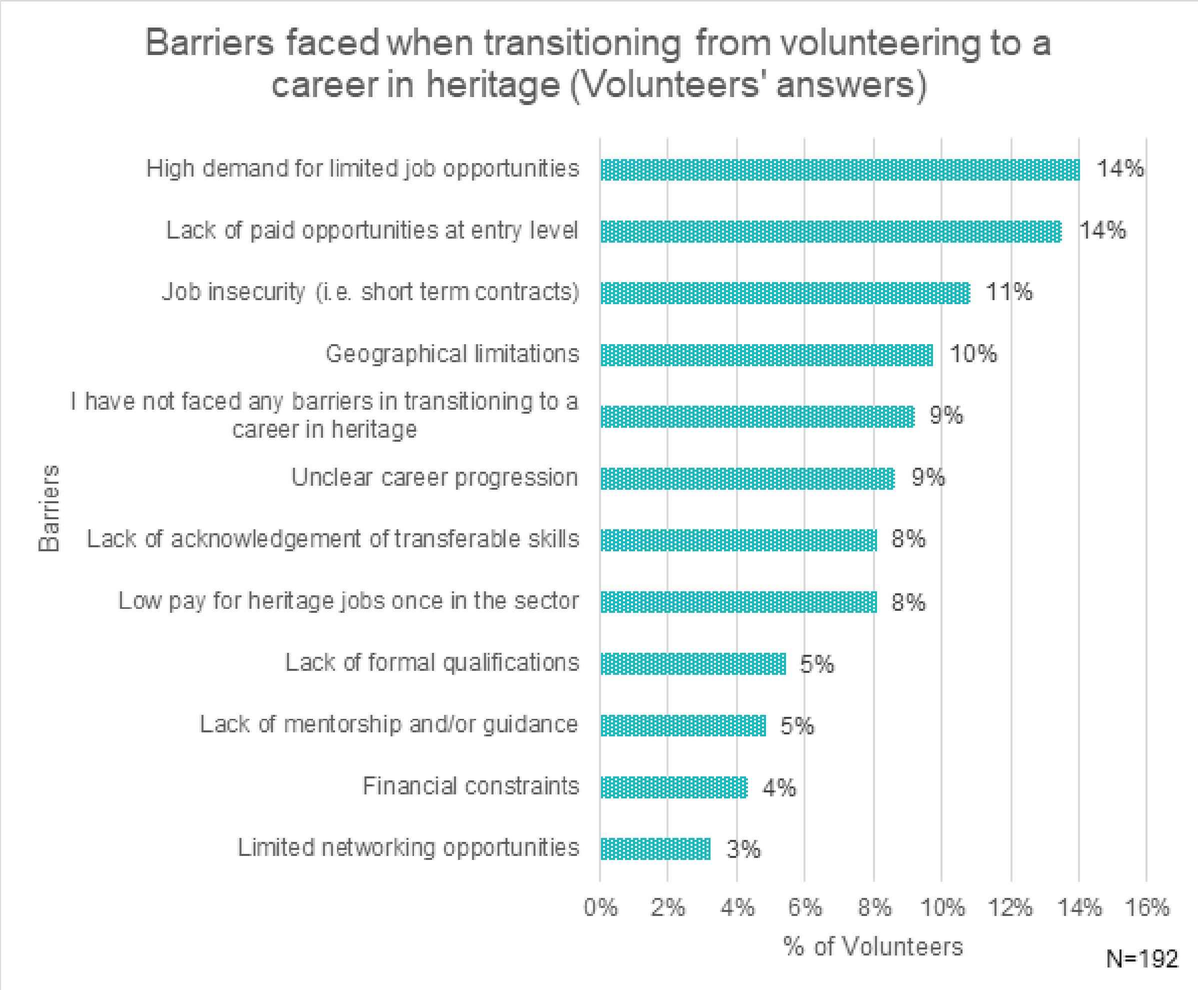
8.1. Evidence of Change

The volunteering research highlights both the significant contribution volunteers make to the historic environment sector and the challenges this creates for delivering the ambitions of Outcome 8. While volunteering remains a vital part of the sector's workforce, the findings raise important questions about the long-term sustainability of relying on unpaid labour to support core activity.

Survey respondents identified a lack of paid entry-level opportunities and high competition for jobs as the most common barriers to transitioning from volunteering into heritage careers (Figure 33 - Barriers faced when transitioning from volunteering to a career in heritage (Volunteers' answers)). Job insecurity, low pay, geographical constraints, and unclear progression routes were also frequently cited. These findings suggest that, while volunteering can provide valuable experience and skills, it does not consistently translate into fair and accessible employment pathways. This reflects wider concerns identified through the Fair Work research regarding workforce precarity, limited career progression and barriers to entering the sector.

[19] These figures are not weighted and are based on survey respondents.

FIGURE 33 - BARRIERS FACED WHEN TRANSITIONING FROM VOLUNTEERING TO A CAREER IN HERITAGE (VOLUNTEERS' ANSWERS)



The scale of volunteer contribution remains substantial, although current estimates are likely to understate the true value generated across the sector. Organisations reported at least 76,548 volunteer hours during 2024, but 43% do not formally record volunteer hours and many smaller volunteer-led groups are not captured within the survey sample (Figure 34 - Distribution of Hours Recorded Among VIOs (VIOs answers)). This highlights both the importance of volunteering to the historic environment sector and the challenges of fully understanding its contribution.

FIGURE 34 - DISTRIBUTION OF HOURS RECORDED AMONG VIOS (VIOS ANSWERS)

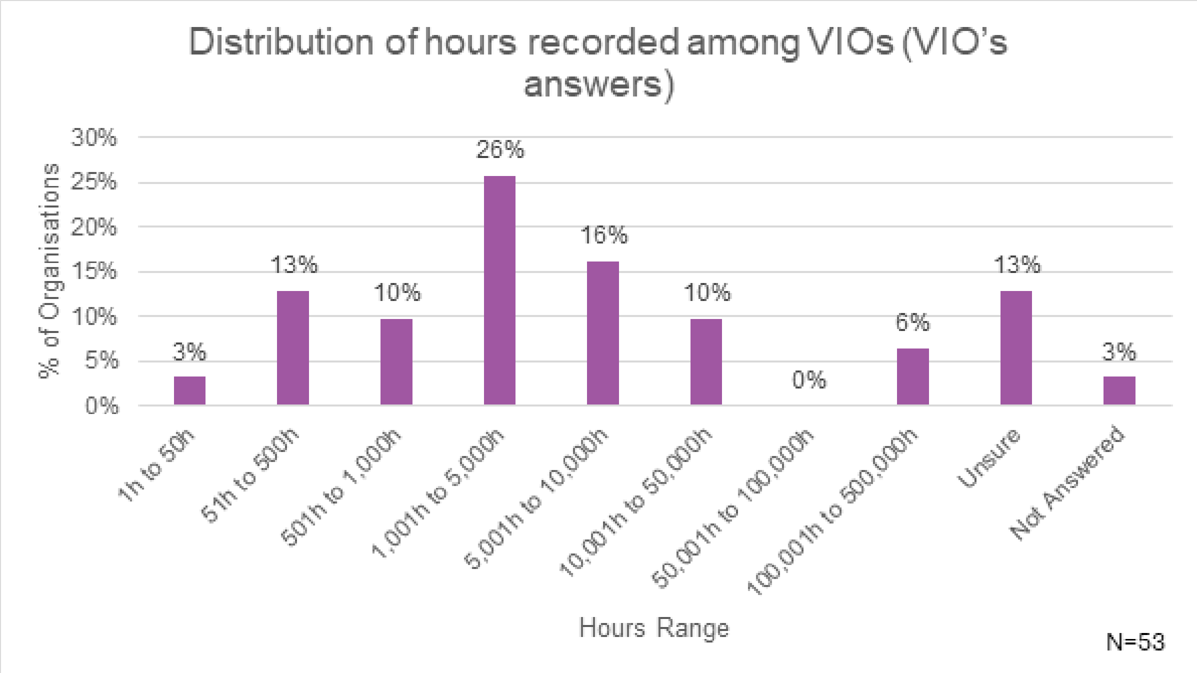


TABLE 17 - CALCULATION FORMAL VOLUNTEERING ECONOMIC VALUE

Hours volunteered in last 4 weeks	6,379	Multiply by 12 to get the hours volunteered in past year
Hours volunteered in past year	76,548	Divide by 35 to convert to FTE weeks
FTE weeks (35 hours per week)	2,187	Divide by 44 to convert to equivalent number of full-time jobs (Optional)
FTE jobs per annum (44 FTE weeks in a year)	50	N/A
Average Scottish weekly wage	513.1	(ASHE 2021 average (median) weekly earning for f/t employees (excluding overtime) in Scotland)
Annual economic value of volunteering	1,122,194	FTE Weeks multiplied by ASHE weekly wages
Annual value inc. employment overheads	1,346,632	Annual economic value of volunteering *1.2 (Additional 20% added to represent employment overheads such as pension and holiday pay)

In the context of Outcome 8, these findings reinforce the need to balance the benefits of volunteering with the creation of fair, secure and accessible employment pathways. This raises important questions about long-term workforce resilience and the relationship between volunteer and paid roles within the sector.[20] While many volunteers are not seeking paid employment, survey evidence suggests that those who do wish to pursue heritage careers continue to face barriers relating to job availability, progression opportunities and pay. Addressing barriers to employment, strengthening progression routes and creating more entry-level opportunities will be critical to ensuring that the historic environment sector can deliver Fair Work principles while continuing to benefit from the important contribution of volunteers.

8.2. Significant Developments Since 2024

Funders are increasingly encouraging or requiring Fair Work principles within grant applications. This indicates stronger integration of Fair Work expectations within funding mechanisms across the sector.

New research commissioned by Historic Environment Scotland in 2026 highlights that, while the principles of Fair Work are widely supported across the historic environment sector, their implementation remains constrained by structural challenges. The research found that awareness and understanding of Fair Work are strongest among publicly funded organisations, while freelancers, micro-organisations and volunteer-led groups often have limited engagement with the framework. Short-term and uncertain funding emerged as the most significant barrier, creating workforce instability, limiting long-term planning and contributing to a cycle of precarity, high workloads and reduced wellbeing.

The research also identified challenges relating to organisational capacity, workforce development and inclusion. Smaller organisations often lack the HR expertise, systems and resources needed to consistently embed Fair Work practices, while barriers to entry, limited career pathways and underrepresentation continue to affect workforce diversity and progression. Although Fair Work principles are generally valued across the sector, implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in relation to effective employee voice, career development and monitoring of outcomes.

Contribution Towards OPOF Ambitions

The evidence suggests that the sector has strong alignment with the principles of Fair Work, but delivery remains uneven. OPOF’s ambition for fair, secure and accessible employment will depend on better-funded roles, clearer progression routes, practical guidance and support for organisations of different sizes.

The volunteering evidence reinforces the need to balance the positive contribution of volunteering with the creation of paid opportunities. Fair Work in the historic environment requires both valuing volunteers and ensuring that paid employment pathways are accessible, secure and sustainable.

[20] The sector has recognised the importance of ensuring that volunteering compliments rather than replaces paid employments. As an example, some organisations, such as Historic Environment Scotland, have committed to Volunteer Scotland’s Volunteering Charter, which promotes good practice and helps safeguard the relationship between volunteers and paid staff.

Data Gaps and Caveats

The reason for the decline in the proportion of respondents identifying as Fair Work employers is not clear from the available data. It may reflect changes in the respondent base, greater awareness of what Fair Work entails or changes in organisational practice.

The volunteer economic value estimate is based on recorded hours only and is therefore likely to underestimate the true scale of contribution. The data is not weighted and is based on survey respondents.

If the Scottish Living Wage website measure used in the Baseline is not repeated, the report should explain why it has not been included and how consistency in reporting will be addressed.

Sources

- 2025 Employer Skills Survey.
- Volunteer research and survey evidence on volunteer contribution, barriers and economic value.
- Volunteer Charter.
- HES-commissioned Fair Work research.
- HES grants Fair Work expectations.
- National Museums Scotland communicated workforce contract data.
- Scottish Living Wage website baseline measure.

Outcome 9: Increased engagement with the historic environment, with a focus on activities that enhance wellbeing

Summary

The evidence for Outcome 9 shows that engagement with culture and heritage continues to contribute to wellbeing, learning, social connection and community belonging. Scottish Household Survey data from 2023 show a broadly positive recovery in several wellbeing indicators following the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, although some measures remain below 2019 levels (Figure 35 - Reasons for Culture and The Arts Making a Positive Difference to People's Lives (2019 -2023)).

For this analysis, the historic environment is interpreted broadly within the Scottish Household Survey, and includes historic places, museums, galleries, exhibitions, archives and culturally specific heritage events. The decision to broaden analysis beyond historic places was taken as it was recognised that many, although not all, museums, galleries, exhibitions, archives and culturally specific heritage events include engagement with the historic environment.

Volunteering research and organisational evidence strengthen this picture further. Volunteers report high levels of wellbeing and connection to place, while examples from across the sector illustrate the range of engagement opportunities being delivered through schools, digital learning, family learning, outreach, festivals and community programmes. However, financial pressures, time constraints, access needs and limited practical support continue to affect who can participate.

Baseline Position (2024)

The Baseline used Scottish Household Survey evidence to understand how engagement with culture and heritage contributes to wellbeing. It considered outcomes such as enjoyment, mental wellbeing, physical health, social connection, learning, community belonging and intellectual benefits.

The Baseline also recognised that participation had been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and that recovery would need to be assessed over time, with attention to both participation levels and the wellbeing benefits people associate with cultural and heritage engagement.

Current Position (2026)

The current position builds from the Scottish Household Survey results published in 2024, and which reflect answers provided in 2023. Analysed in greater depth below, responses show that many feel that engagement with cultural activities, which includes historic environment activities, is of benefit to them.

Key Indicators

TABLE 18 - OUTCOME 9 KEY INDICATORS

Indicator	Baseline (2024)	Current Position (2026)	Direction of Travel
Enjoyment and happiness from cultural engagement	77% in 2019; 74% in 2022	71% in 2023	Trend: Strong but below prior levels
Mental health and wellbeing benefit	44% in 2019; 46% in 2022	39% in 2023	Trend: Decline but still substantial
Intellectual benefit	3% in 2019; 20% in 2022	24% in 2023	Trend: Positive increase
Learning new skills or knowledge	28% in 2019; 19% in 2022	24% in 2023	Trend: Recovery in progress
Feeling part of local community	17% in 2019; 15% in 2022	17% in 2023	Trend: Recovered to 2019 level
NMS participation	New date in 2026 baseline.	219,422 attendees in 2025-26 KPI data	Trend: Large-scale engagement

Evidence and Progress

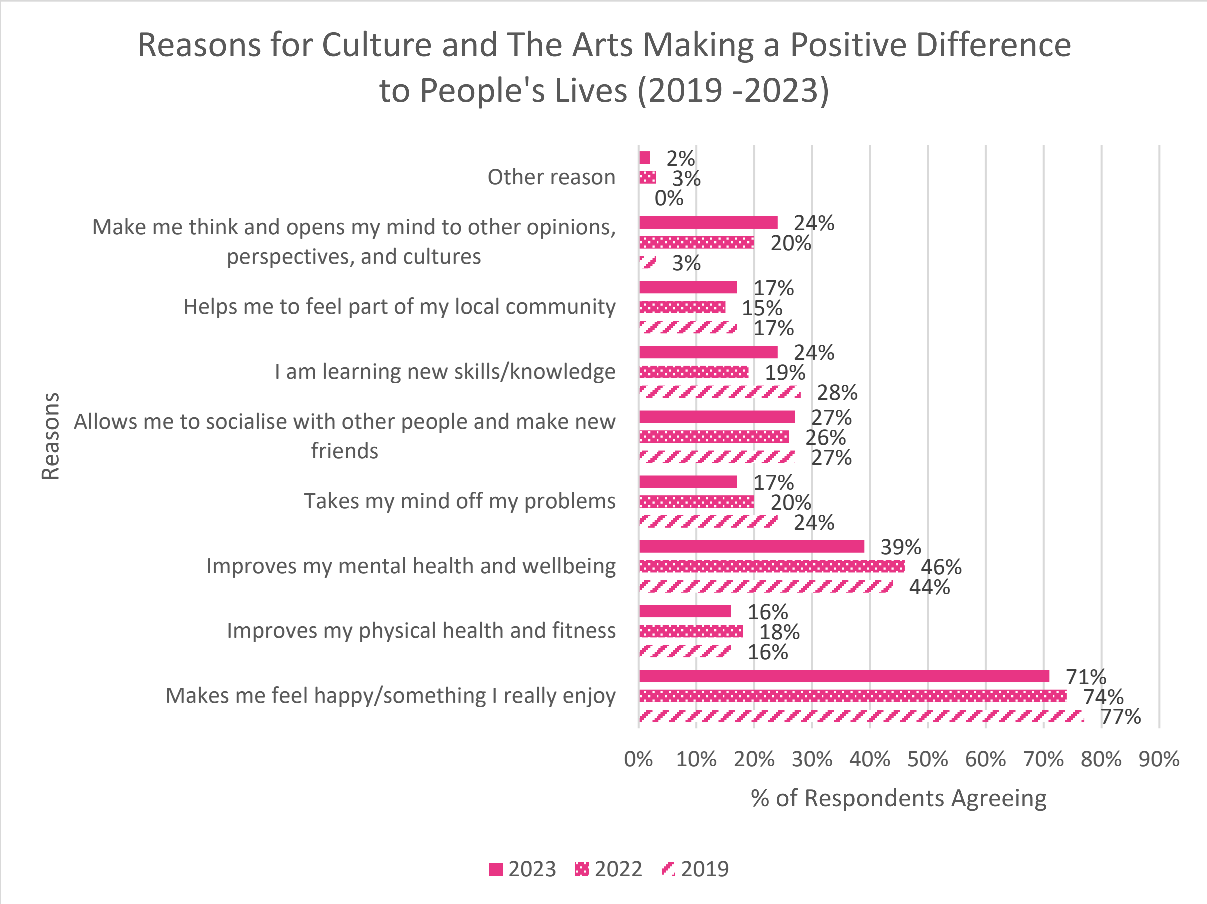
9.1. Evidence of Change

9.1.1. Scottish Household Survey (SHS) evidence

The evidence shows that culture and heritage continue to contribute to individual wellbeing, community identity and quality of life. Enjoyment remains the strongest reported benefit, while learning, community belonging and intellectual engagement have all shown signs of recovery or growth.

Data from the Scottish Household Survey continue to demonstrate the important contribution that engagement with the historic environment makes to people's wellbeing and quality of life. Comparing 2023 data with both 2022 and pre-pandemic levels in 2019 shows a broadly positive picture, with several wellbeing indicators improving and some exceeding their pre-pandemic levels.

FIGURE 35 - REASONS FOR CULTURE AND THE ARTS MAKING A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE TO PEOPLE'S LIVES (2019 - 2023)



The strongest reported benefit remains enjoyment and happiness. In 2023, 71% of respondents stated that engagement with cultural activities (including the Historic Environment) makes them feel happy or is something they really enjoy. While this remains slightly below both 2022 (74%) and 2019 (77%), it continues to demonstrate the strong emotional value that cultural and historic environment engagement provides for the majority of participants (Figure 35 - Reasons for Culture and The Arts Making a Positive Difference to People's Lives (2019 -2023)).

Similarly, 39% of respondents reported benefits to their mental health and wellbeing and 16% reported benefits to their physical health and fitness through cultural participation in 2023.The proportion of respondents stating that cultural activities make them think and open their minds to other opinions, perspectives and cultures increased from 20% in 2022 to 24% in 2023, compared with 3% in 2019 (Figure 35 - Reasons for Culture and The Arts Making a Positive Difference to People's Lives (2019 -2023)). Together, these findings indicate that cultural participation continues to deliver a range of personal and social benefits.

Learning-related benefits also show signs of recovery. In 2023, 24% of respondents reported learning new skills or knowledge through cultural participation, an increase from 19% in 2022, although still below the pre-pandemic level of 28% recorded in 2019 (Figure 35 - Reasons for Culture and The Arts Making a Positive Difference to People's Lives (2019 -2023)). This indicates that opportunities for learning are recovering but have not yet fully returned to previous levels.

Social and community benefits present a more mixed picture. The proportion of respondents reporting that cultural activities allow them to socialise and make new friends increased slightly from 26% in 2022 to 27% in 2023, returning to the 2019 level (Figure 35 - Reasons for Culture and The Arts Making a Positive Difference to People's Lives (2019 -2023)). Similarly, the percentage feeling part of their local community increased from 15% to 17%, recovering to pre-pandemic levels and suggesting renewed connections between cultural participation and community belonging.

One exception is the proportion of respondents who feel cultural activities help take their mind off problems, which declined further from 20% in 2022 to 17% in 2023, compared with 24% in 2019 (Figure 35 - Reasons for Culture and The Arts Making a Positive Difference to People's Lives (2019 - 2023)).

Taken together, the 2023 findings indicate that the contribution of the historic environment to wellbeing remains strong and, in many areas, continues to strengthen following the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Improvements in mental wellbeing, learning, community belonging and intellectual engagement demonstrate the diverse ways in which the historic environment enriches people's lives. While some measures have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, the overall direction of travel is positive and supports Outcome 9's ambition that Scotland's historic environment contributes meaningfully to individual wellbeing, community connection and lifelong learning.

The wider data on views on culture and heritage also demonstrates the importance that people place on culture and heritage within their communities[21]. A majority of respondents believes that Scotland's heritage should be well looked after, with around 86% either strongly agreeing or tending to agree with this statement (Figure 36 - Views on Culture & Heritage (2023)). Similarly, approximately three-quarters of respondents agree that the heritage of their local area is well looked after, indicating generally positive perceptions of heritage stewardship at both national and local levels.

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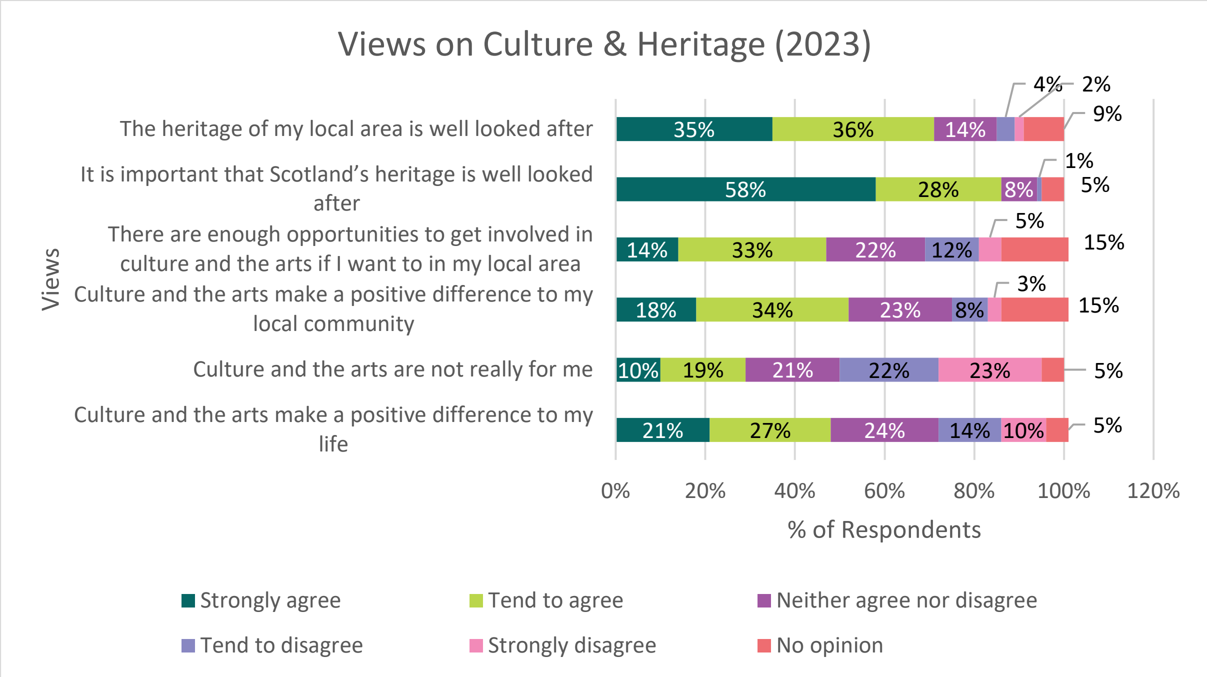
[21] Note that the Scottish Household Survey have changed their method and reduced the number of questions asked each year. Further information can be found at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-2024-questionnaire-review/. Hence why the data points in following sections are only available for 2023.

Figure 36 - Views on Culture & Heritage (2023)



The data also highlight the perceived contribution that cultural and heritage engagement makes to community wellbeing. Within the Scottish Household Survey, this includes participation in a broad range of activities relevant to the historic environment, such as visits to historic places, museums, galleries, exhibitions, archives and culturally specific heritage events. Around half of respondents agree that these activities make a positive difference to their own lives, while a similar proportion believe they make a positive difference to their local community. This suggests that the benefits of engagement extend beyond individual enjoyment and learning, contributing to wider outcomes such as community connection, belonging and wellbeing.

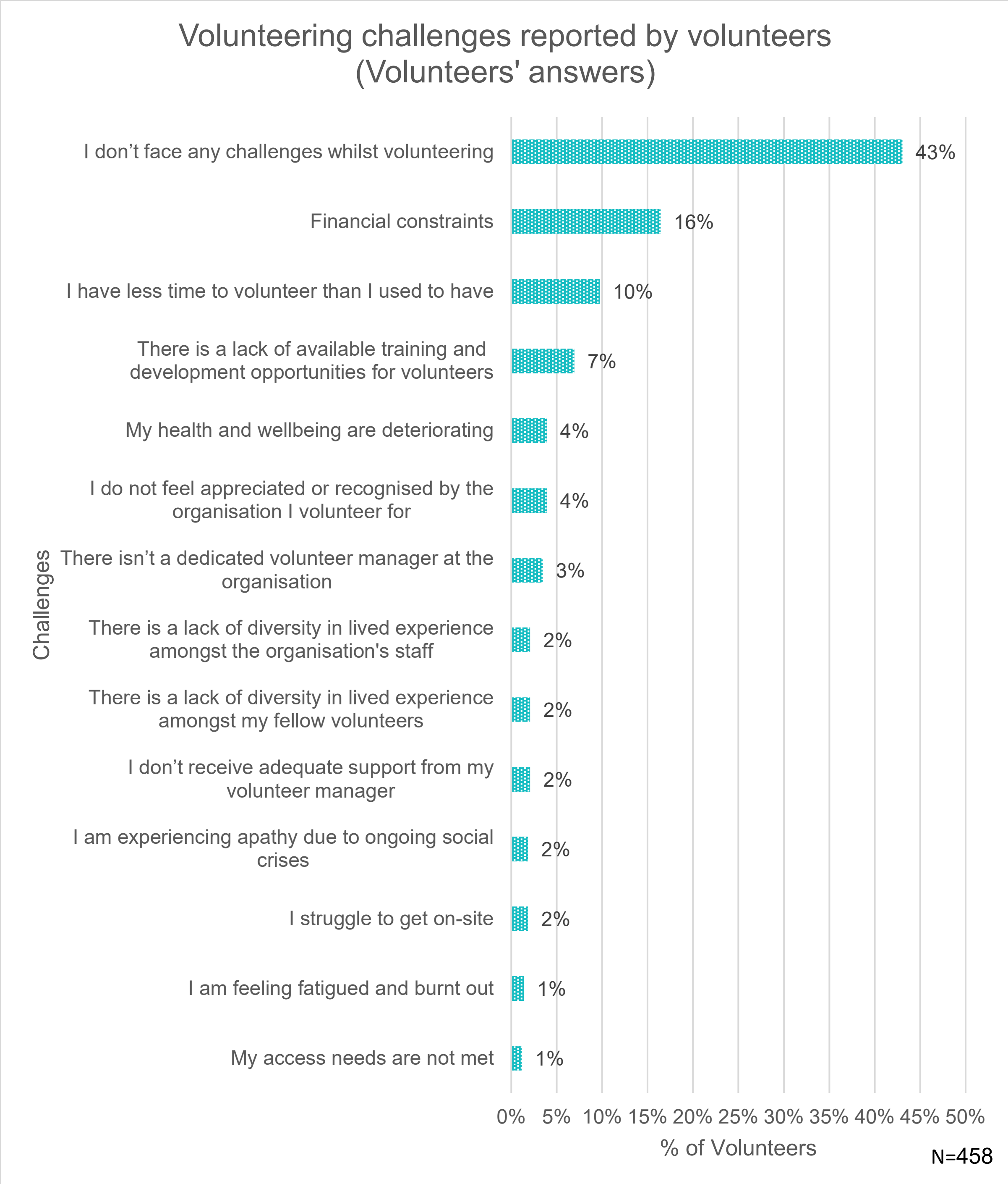
However, the results also point to opportunities for further progress in widening participation (Figure 36 - Views on Culture & Heritage (2023)). A clear majority of respondents (71%) felt that culture and the arts are "for people like me", indicating that most people already see cultural and heritage activity as relevant to their lives. This provides a strong foundation on which to build further engagement. Nevertheless, around 29% did not share this view or were uncertain, highlighting the continued importance of reducing barriers to participation and ensuring that opportunities are visible, accessible and relevant to diverse communities. Similarly, mixed views regarding the availability of local opportunities suggest that access to cultural and heritage activities is not experienced equally across Scotland.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the evidence that culture and heritage contribute positively to individual wellbeing, community identity and quality of life. Alongside the improvements seen in mental wellbeing, learning and community belonging between 2022 and 2023, the attitudinal data suggest that public support for culture and heritage remains strong.

9.1.2. Participation Barriers

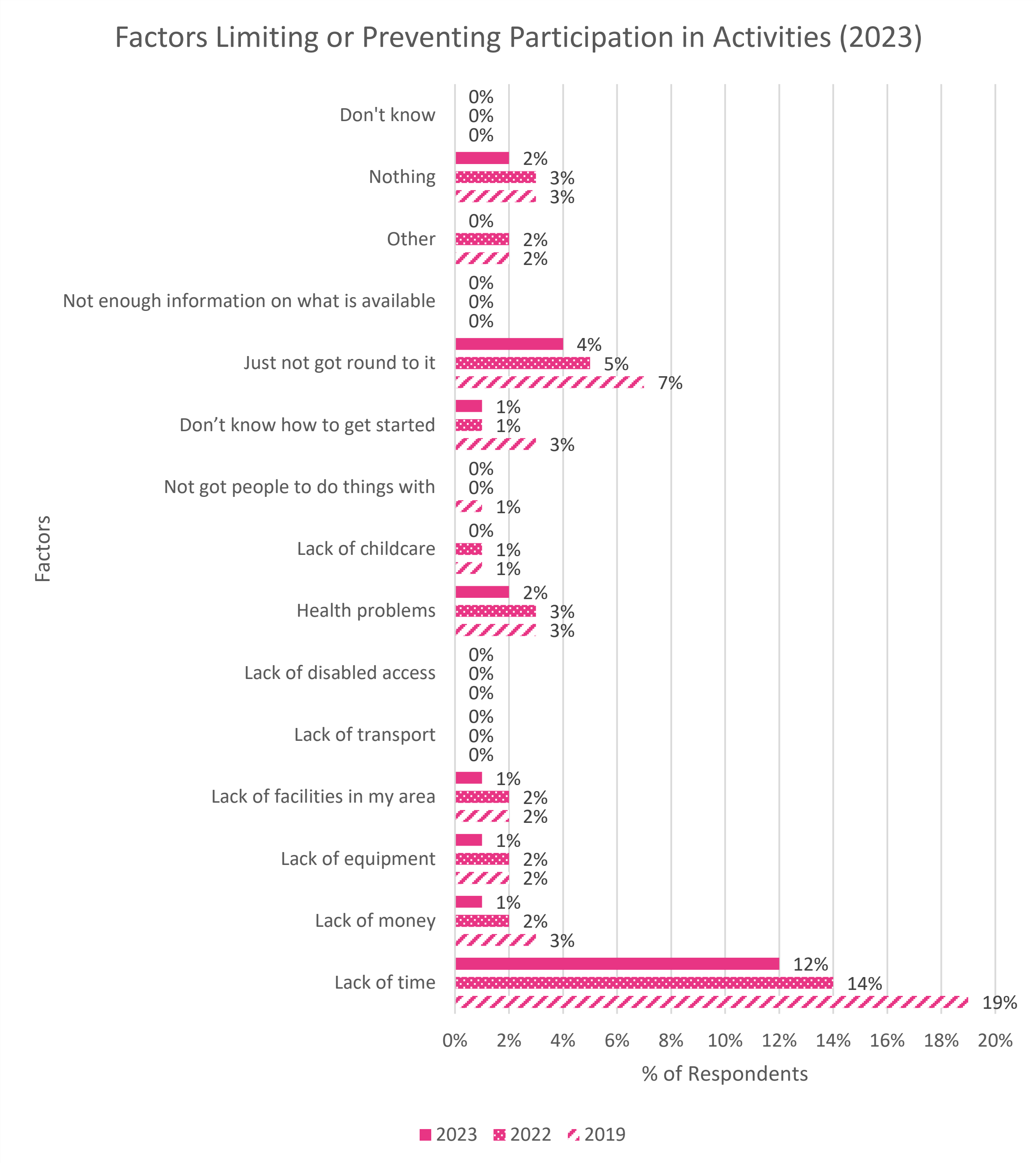
While participation is associated with positive wellbeing outcomes, evidence indicates that barriers to engagement remain for some groups. The Heritage Volunteering in Scotland Research Report findings are consistent with wider Scottish Household Survey evidence on participation barriers, suggesting that practical and financial constraints continue to influence who is able to engage with heritage and cultural activities. While 43% of volunteers reported experiencing no challenges in their volunteering role, financial constraints were the most frequently identified barrier among those who did encounter difficulties (16%), followed by having less time available to volunteer than previously (10%) and a lack of training and development opportunities (7%) (Figure 37 - Volunteering challenges reported by volunteers (Volunteers' answers)).

FIGURE 37 - VOLUNTEERING CHALLENGES REPORTED BY VOLUNTEERS (VOLUNTEERS' ANSWERS)



These findings mirror broader participation trends. Across the Scottish Household Survey, lack of time remains the most significant barrier to participation in cultural activities, although this has fallen from 19% in 2019 to 14% in 2022 and 12% in 2023, suggesting some improvement since the pandemic (Figure 38 - Factors Limiting or Preventing Participation in Activities (2023)). Financial barriers have remained relatively stable over time, with around 2–3% of respondents identifying lack of money as a limiting factor, while health-related barriers continue to affect a small but consistent proportion of the population. Together, these findings indicate that although participation opportunities may be recovering, practical constraints continue to shape who is able to engage.

FIGURE 38 - FACTORS LIMITING OR PREVENTING PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES (2023)



The volunteering data provide further insight into how these barriers are experienced in practice. While organisations recognise financial pressures as a challenge for volunteers, direct support remains limited. Only 6% of volunteer-involving organisations report covering travel expenses, 4% provide equipment, 2% offer food and none offer childcare support. This suggests that the costs associated with volunteering are often absorbed by volunteers themselves, potentially creating barriers for those on lower incomes, with caring responsibilities, or facing other financial pressures.

When considered alongside the findings on volunteer demographics and career progression, these results reinforce the importance of accessibility in delivering both Outcome 6 and Outcome 9. The data suggest that participation in the historic environment is not solely influenced by interest or motivation, but also by practical factors such as affordability, available time, caring responsibilities and access to support. Addressing these barriers remains important if the wellbeing benefits associated with engagement are to be experienced more equitably across Scotland's population.

9.1.3 Volunteering and Wellbeing

Volunteering provides a particularly strong example of the wellbeing benefits associated with engagement in the historic environment. Despite the barriers identified above, the volunteers surveyed in the Heritage Volunteering in Scotland surveys reported overwhelmingly positive outcomes from their participation. Survey findings showed that 91% of volunteers experience improvements in their wellbeing, while 87% reported a stronger understanding of and connection to places through their involvement. These findings align closely with wider Scottish Household Survey evidence showing that participation in culture and heritage supports happiness, mental wellbeing, learning and community belonging.

The research also highlights the significant social value generated through heritage volunteering. Beyond supporting heritage organisations, volunteering contributes to personal confidence, lifelong learning, social connections and a sense of purpose. For many participants, volunteering represents more than simply giving time; it provides a pathway to belonging, personal growth and active participation within communities. These outcomes contribute directly to national priorities, including Scotland's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and demonstrate the important role that the historic environment can play in supporting healthier, more connected communities.

The available evidence consistently suggests that volunteering contributes not only to the sector's capacity but also to participants' wellbeing, skills development and social connectedness.

9.2. Significant Developments Since 2024

9.2.1. Organisational examples

Examples from across the sector provide additional evidence of how engagement with historic environment activities supports individual and community wellbeing. Heritage organisations across Scotland continue to engage people through events, learning programmes, volunteering and community activities, creating opportunities for participation, learning, social connection and wellbeing. Increasingly, organisations are also seeking to better understand and evidence the wider social value of the historic environment, helping to strengthen the evidence base for Outcome 9.

Illustrative evidence from **National Museums Scotland (NMS)** demonstrates the potential contribution of heritage engagement to wellbeing, learning and participation.[22] Between 2018–19 and 2022–23, 60% of Scottish schools engaged with NMS, with digital learning reaching almost 23,000 pupils from 496 schools across all 32 local authority areas. In 2024–25, NMS also recorded more than 62,000 participants across school visits and learning programmes, alongside wider engagement activity exceeding 219,000 participant contacts. Qualitative feedback suggests that these activities support learning, confidence, social connection and wellbeing, particularly through

[22] NMS Communicated Data (2026)

community-focused initiatives such as Museum Socials and Sensory Sundays. While these data relate to a single organisation and should not be interpreted as representative of the wider sector, they provide a useful example of how heritage engagement can contribute to educational, social and wellbeing outcomes.

Similarly, HES’s Making Sense of Scotland (MSOS) programme, which engages learners with the historic environment, continued to expand opportunities for participation across Scotland's historic environment during 2025–26. During the year, more than 100,000 learners engaged with Learning and Inclusion activities an increase of 1.5% on the previous year. Learners were supported by Free Learning visits, which enabled 53,189 learners to access HES’s sites, and the Heritage Travel Subsidy for schools, which both helped to reduce barriers to participation and improve equitable access to Scotland's historic environment.

Alongside large-scale national programmes, project-level initiatives are also contributing to wellbeing outcomes. For example, Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF)-funded projects engaged approximately 200 people through events, activities and informal learning opportunities. While this represents an organisational project-level example rather than a sector-wide measure, it illustrates how heritage investment can create opportunities for participation, learning and social connection within local communities.

The significance of these findings is reinforced by **Scotland's Population Health Framework (2025),** which identifies place, community and prevention as key determinants of population health and wellbeing. The framework recognises that health outcomes are shaped not only by healthcare services but also by wider social, environmental and economic factors. This aligns strongly with evidence from across the historic environment sector, which demonstrates that engagement with heritage, museums, volunteering, community assets and local places can support social connection, learning, confidence, belonging and overall wellbeing.

9.2.2. Summary

Although these examples are not necessarily representative of the sector as a whole, they provide valuable insight into the different ways in which wellbeing benefits are being realised through historic environment activity. Taken together, the evidence suggests that the historic environment is making an important contribution to wellbeing across Scotland. Heritage places and activities provide opportunities for enjoyment, lifelong learning, social interaction, cultural participation and connection to place. At the same time, organisations are becoming increasingly sophisticated in measuring and evidencing these outcomes, helping to strengthen understanding of the role that heritage can play in supporting healthier and more resilient communities. Overall, the evidence continues to indicate a positive relationship between engagement with Scotland's historic environment and wellbeing.

Contribution Towards OPOF Ambitions

The evidence aligns closely with OPOF’s ambition to increase engagement with the historic environment in ways that enhance wellbeing. The strongest contribution is seen where engagement supports enjoyment, learning, community belonging, social connection, confidence and place attachment.

OPOF's ambitions will be strengthened by continued investment in accessible, inclusive and locally relevant heritage opportunities. Addressing barriers such as cost, time, transport, access needs and practical support will be critical to ensuring that wellbeing benefits are experienced more equitably across Scotland's population.

Data Gaps and Caveats

Scottish Household Survey evidence on culture and the arts includes a broad range of activities relevant to the historic environment. This should be made explicit wherever survey findings are used to support Outcome 9.

Changes between 2019, 2022 and 2023 should be interpreted with reference to the ongoing effects of the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery. Some positive changes may also reflect changes in the types of activities and programming being offered rather than changes in public attitudes alone.

AHF engagement figures should be presented as one illustrative project-level example because many other organisations deliver engagement at larger scale, including Doors Open Days, HES events and NMS programmes.

Sources

- Scottish Household Survey cultural engagement and wellbeing data.
- Volunteer research and survey evidence on barriers, wellbeing and connection to place.
- HES 2025-26 AHF Grant Data Report.
- National Museums Scotland communicated data, 2026.
- National Trust for Scotland Portfolio Review / Insights Value Framework material.
- Scotland's Population Health Framework 2025.

Conclusion

Three years into delivery of *Our Past, Our Future*, the evidence suggests that significant progress has been made in strengthening the foundations required to deliver long-term change across Scotland's historic environment.

The strongest evidence of progress is in the foundations that support long-term change, including stronger evidence, greater collaboration, increased investment and enhanced organisational and community capability. While examples of positive impact are emerging across all nine Outcomes, further time and sustained action will be required to demonstrate consistent system-wide transformation.

The refresh identifies positive developments across all three Strategic Priorities. Climate action is becoming more visible within sector activity. Community ownership, stewardship and participation continue to grow. Skills development, workforce planning, inclusion initiatives, climate capability, and place-based partnerships are receiving increasing attention and investment. Heritage is also becoming more strongly connected to wider policy agendas including regeneration, Community Wealth Building, wellbeing and climate action.

However, the evidence also highlights a number of persistent challenges. Workforce shortages, organisational capacity pressures, uneven participation, inequalities in access and ongoing funding constraints continue to affect delivery. Progress is often strongest at project and programme level, with less evidence of consistent system-wide change.

A recurring theme throughout the Baseline Refresh is the need to improve the quality, consistency and comparability of data collection, outcome measurement and impact reporting. While the sector now possesses a much stronger evidence base than in 2024, gaps remain in understanding collective impact and demonstrating contribution to wider national outcomes.

The evidence therefore suggests that the final phase of the Strategy should focus on scaling successful approaches, diversifying partnerships, strengthening workforce and organisational capacity, accelerating action on net zero, climate adaptation and resilience, improving reporting and evaluation, and increasing the influence of heritage within wider policy and investment decisions.

Taken together, the findings confirm that the Strategic Priorities and Outcomes remain the right framework for delivery and provide a robust evidence base for the next phase of collective action through *Our Past, Our Future*.

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