

An aerial photograph of a large, square stone tower with a steeply pitched roof, situated on a grassy hill. The tower is made of rough-hewn stone and has several small, rectangular windows. The surrounding landscape is a mix of green fields and brown, plowed earth, with a line of trees in the distance. The lighting suggests late afternoon or early morning, with long shadows and a warm glow.

Pointing the way to the future

The climate and nature crises and our approach
to our regulatory and advisory services in the
planning and other consenting systems



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA

INTRODUCTION

The global climate and nature crises affect every aspect of our lives. We must take all our decisions in full knowledge of the situation we face. Decisions about the historic environment are part of our response to these crises. We have a duty to understand the impact of those decisions.

As lead public body for the historic environment in Scotland, we recognise [our role and responsibility in Scotland's climate response](#). This statement formally acknowledges this in the context of our regulatory and advisory services in the planning and other consenting systems. These services are set out in full in our [Regulatory Framework](#).

The Scottish Government declared a Global Climate Emergency on 28 April 2019. Our national policy for the historic environment, the [Historic Environment Policy for Scotland](#), was developed in 2017 and 2018. It identifies our changing climate as a challenge and opportunity, and in the years since we have been working as a society to understand what that means. There is still more to do, and far more action needed.

Scotland's historic environment inspires and fascinates people from all over the world. It is part of our identity, and part of our future. It makes our communities stronger and gives us a sense of place. It can also be vulnerable to change – and much of it can't be replaced.

To achieve our net zero target by 2045, our world will look different, and we will live in it in a different way. The decisions we make now must protect our most valuable resources and support a sustainable future for everyone.

Purpose

This statement explains how our regulatory role intersects with our response to the global climate and nature crises. But we also want it to be the start of a conversation.

We need to make sure this part of our work maximises the contribution the historic environment can make to our climate response. This statement is the start of a process of engagement and consultation which will explore the ways we can do this. That engagement will inform our approach to our decisions, advice and guidance.

The [final section](#) of this statement sets out our first steps. We'll be asking questions – and listening to the answers – along the way.

A statement of recognition and intent

All of our work, and every action we take, is in the context of the climate and nature crises. We know that our world is changing significantly and quickly. Our society will change on a scale most of us have not seen before.

In our role in planning and other consenting regimes, we have a special responsibility. We make decisions that shape and change the places around us. And our advice influences other people's decisions, as well.

Decisions made now will have long-term impacts across our country and beyond. They must be sustainable in the long term. As lead public body for the historic environment in Scotland we will use our powers and influence to make and support good decisions. We know our decisions and advice impact our response to the climate emergency and the nature crisis. We are working to understand those impacts as we focus on the sustainable future of our historic environment.

Our role is to protect the historic environment as part of our wider environment. Every landscape, townscape and seascape in Scotland has been influenced by human activity. The historic environment is fundamental to every place in Scotland, and it's impossible to separate it from the rest of our environment. As our climate and environment change it will be part of that process, and part of our response.

This approach is set out in the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS). The principles in HEPS guide all our decisions and advice. The considerations explained here are not new. But in the face of the emergencies that we are all living through, we think it is important to state clearly that our work is part of our nation's response.



Responding to the emergency

The historic environment can and must be part of our response to our changing world and the challenges we face. To achieve net zero, we must make the best use of what we already have. That includes our existing buildings and infrastructure.

The planning system is one of the main ways we manage change to the historic environment in Scotland. Our [National Planning Framework](#) (NPF4) states that the global climate and nature crises will be given significant weight in all decisions. It recognises a key policy connection between the historic environment and climate mitigation and adaptation.

The environment around us

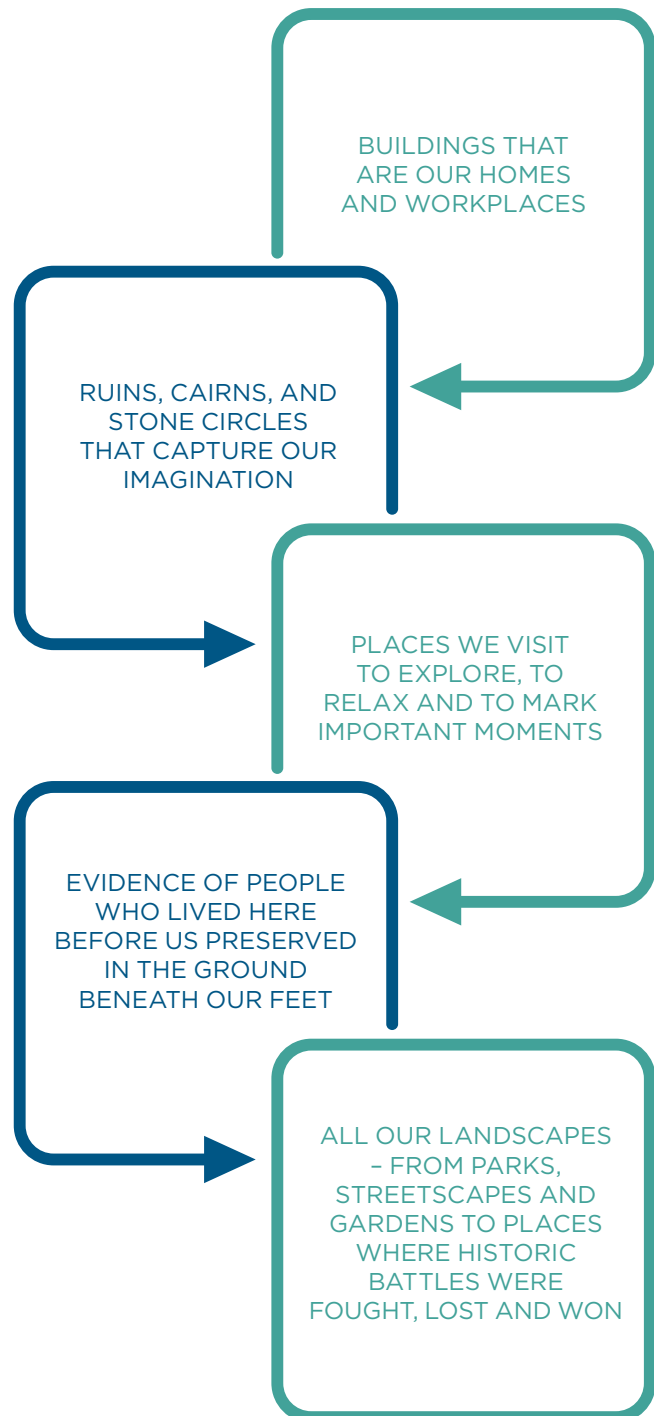
The historic environment isn't a collection of individual buildings, sites and features. It is our surroundings as they have been shaped, used and valued by people in the past, and continue to be today.

The historic environment is part of our circular economy. We have invested huge amounts of carbon in our historic structures – in building them, in maintaining them, and in adapting them. We can get the best value from this investment by keeping our historic structures in use and adapting them to new uses. Where that isn't possible, we should reuse or recycle the resources that created them.

The historic environment as a whole is a resource of incredible information about how we have responded to our changing needs and climate over many lifetimes. It supports biodiversity, contributes to a range of habitats, and influences land use. We still have a lot to learn from it.

Historic sites and places are part of how we understand our world. And part of how we, and all life on our planet, live in it.

Historic sites and places are part of every landscape and townscape in Scotland. We see it at every scale:





Ben Cruachan turbine hall and Ben Cruachan dam are listed buildings. Ben Cruachan turbine hall is a monumental engineering achievement and an integral part of one of Britain's most innovative hydro electric power schemes.

Living sustainably

The historic environment teaches us about living sustainably. Traditional building materials and design responded to their environment and climate just as we must do today. [Traditional buildings](#) can show us ways to maximise light, warmth and available resources.

Our historic environment is part of our response to our changing climate. Our historic sites and places have changed over time, often to meet new and different needs. This is part of their story. Our [Green Recovery Statement](#) explains the many ways the historic environment can contribute to sustainable development and climate mitigation and adaptation.

Now more than ever, we must not be wasteful of what we have. And this includes the cultural significance of our most important sites and places. The value they have to our communities, to our environment and to our economy are part of a just transition to a fairer, greener Scotland.

Just transition

To achieve a just transition to net zero we must also put equality and diversity at the heart of our decisions. Sustainable development must reflect the United Nations [Sustainable Development Goals](#), including reduced inequalities.

The historic environment is part of a just transition to net zero. It contributes to our places, communities and identities. Our Corporate Plan, [Heritage For All](#), highlights the role our historic environment has in making our communities stronger, and more sustainable. It gives us a sense of identity and often pride. We also know that built heritage can be a reminder of injustice and inequality.

Not all communities will be equally affected by the steps we take in response to the climate emergency and nature crisis. We must be aware that the steps we take can affect the sites and places these communities value.

Legal and policy context

As lead public body for the historic environment in Scotland, an important part of our role is giving advice and making decisions on changes that affect the historic environment. We do this through the planning process and other regulatory systems. Our [Regulatory Framework](#) explains these responsibilities.

In our regulatory and advisory roles, we work towards seven goals:

- Valuing our heritage
- Looking after our heritage
- Improving equality
- Building a better future
- Responding to our changing climate
- Restoring biodiversity
- Empowering communities



Our response to the crises we face is fundamental to achieving these goals.

We also have a wider duty, as a public body – and as citizens with some degree of power and influence – to respond to the climate and nature crises. Some of these responsibilities are defined by the [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#) and the [Nature Conservation \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#).

We also have a duty to put these issues at the forefront of our minds in every decision we make.

What we will do

The climate and nature crises are part of our daily lives and work. Our actions to improve our response will be built into our plans and strategies. We will not ring-fence this topic. It will be on the table and in our minds at all times.

Our regulatory functions are an opportunity to lead change, and to enable others to make good decisions. It's important for us to maximise the good we can do. The first step towards this is agreeing some clearly defined actions.

Our [Climate Action Plan](#) details our climate action ambitions for the historic environment for 2020–2025. It focuses on our operations. Now we are starting to set specific actions for our role influencing decisions and change in the wider world.



St Kilda is one of the few World Heritage Sites to hold mixed status for both its cultural and natural qualities. St Kilda has exceptional natural beauty and significant habitats. The cultural landscape is an outstanding example of land use, which results from a type of subsistence economy.

ACTIONS

We will:



engage with people and communities, ask them what their priorities are, and use their answers to inform national historic environment policy



understand the impact of our regulatory work on the climate and nature crises, and report on this annually



influence policy and strategy across Scotland, to make sure that the historic environment is at the heart of our response to the climate and nature crises



share and celebrate the best work we see in nature conservation and climate adaptation and mitigation – through case studies, newsletters and social media



review our guidance on good decision-making in the historic environment, responding to our changing world and priorities

These are high level actions, so we expect to identify smaller scale tasks too. We'll work with stakeholders and listen to the public. This means we'll be consulting and engaging more about these issues, and we'll use the responses we get to inform our work.

Historic Environment Scotland is the lead public body established to investigate, care for and promote Scotland's historic environment.

We are committed to ensuring this publication is accessible to everyone. If you need it supplied in a different format or language including Gaelic, please get in touch.



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Note on cover photo: Smailholm Tower is a scheduled monument in the Scottish Borders. It has a sedum and grass roof, which was completed in 2011, to aid weather protection.