



SCOTLAND'S PROTECTED HISTORIC PLACES

A LONG TERM STRATEGY FOR HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT DESIGNATION



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA

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Front cover: Aerial view of Dundee, including Discovery Point, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Nethergate, and Dundee Parish Church.

INTRODUCTION

This strategy sets out how Historic Environment Scotland (HES) will deliver national-level historic environment designation and lead the sector-wide conversation about how Scotland manages historic places.

It supports [Our Past Our Future](#): the strategy for Scotland's historic environment, and the HES Corporate Plan 2025-28: [Heritage for All](#).

SCOPE

Designation - giving places legal protection - is a core function of HES.

It informs decisions across planning, maintenance of historic properties, and archaeological investigation, and affects a wide range of stakeholders, including owners and developers, local authorities and communities.

This work exists in a wider context of historic environment management and protection delivered by local authorities, land managers, communities and others.

Following a review in 2024-25, this strategy sets out a refreshed approach to listing, scheduling, the inventory of gardens and designed landscapes, the inventory of historic battlefields, and advising Scottish Government on marine designation.

It also outlines our intention to lead a broader discussion about how Scotland protects its historic environment for the future.

Our strategy sets priorities for 2025-28 as the first step toward a longer-term vision for 2035, building the foundations for a more inclusive, collaborative, transparent, and future-ready heritage protection system.

We will update the strategy in 2028 to guide the next phase.

TERMINOLOGY

In this strategy, we use terms as defined in the [Historic Environment Policy for Scotland](#) (HEPS).

For example, 'designation' refers to the process of giving legal protection to historic sites and places.

To keep things clear, we use 'protected historic places' or 'protected places' as a collective term.

When we talk about 'the heritage protection system', we mean the overall approach to managing Scotland's historic environment - including designation, planning and consent processes, policies, guidance and the partnerships that support them.



Kraiknish dun, Isle of Skye, designated as a scheduled monument in 2024 (SM13795).

DEVELOPING OUR STRATEGY

Scotland's national-level historic environment designations have played a central role in shaping our places and protecting our most valued historic assets. These designations, built on decades of research and investigation, have been central to the survival of many of Scotland's valued places, through the combined efforts of owners, communities, and local authorities.

Heritage is dynamic. Understanding of how heritage is valued is evolving, and there are growing expectations for the representation of wider society, for inclusive engagement and participation in decision-making, better data, and more accessible, accurate information.

As societal, environmental, and technological change accelerates, our designation practices must evolve to remain effective and relevant.

REVIEW

In 2024-5, we undertook a comprehensive review of our designation function.

An internal study, State of Designations, provided baseline evidence for the five designations we administer, examining record quality, coverage and key challenges and opportunities. This was followed by stakeholder engagement, supported by MainStreet consultants, including publication of a discussion paper – Towards a designation strategy – to encourage feedback about our work and its broader context.

Our review confirmed support for the existing frameworks, with limited appetite for fundamental change. However, it also highlighted key areas for improvement:

- **Data and records:** Outdated or inaccurate records frustrate users and complicate decision-making. Some older records don't reflect our commitment to equalities. Improving record quality and enabling users to report issues should be a priority.
- **Service to users:** While we have focused on responding to external designation requests, there is a need to improve timescales and prioritisation to better serve users, and to ensure our processes are both efficient, while also accessible and transparent.
- **Setting the agenda:** Stakeholders want us to take a more proactive role in identifying what should be protected. This means collaborating across the heritage sector and engaging under-represented communities to ensure diverse perspectives shape our priorities, supported by targeted research and evidence to guide future designations.
- **Impacts and benefits:** There is limited evidence on the wider impacts of designation and a role for HES as lead body for the historic environment to work with partners to build a stronger evidence base to inform future policy.
- **Looking ahead:** There is a role for us in leading strategic and collaborative conversations to shape the heritage protection system in the longer term.

STRATEGY

We developed this strategy in response to the findings of the review.

In summer 2025, we consulted on a draft version of this strategy.

To learn more about how our research, engagement and consultation have shaped this strategy, see:

- **[Discussion Paper: Towards a long-term strategy for heritage designation](#)** - this paper provided baseline information on our five statutory designations from our State of Designations study. It was shared with stakeholders during our strategic review as part of our engagement programme led by MainStreet.
- **[Stakeholder engagement report](#)** - produced by MainStreet, this report summarises the feedback gathered during stakeholder engagement and provided recommendations for our review.
- **[Public consultation analysis](#)** - this document presents an overview of responses to the public consultation we undertook on our draft designations strategy.

OUR PURPOSE AND VISION

Within the broader mission of Historic Environment Scotland, **our purpose** in carrying out this work is:

‘to identify, protect, and provide information about Scotland’s most significant historic places. Our work supports planning authorities, owners and others to make good decisions, ensuring our historic environment is well-managed for current and future generations.’

Our vision is that:

‘by 2035, our protected historic places will more fully reflect Scotland’s rich and diverse cultural heritage. Protecting these places and providing accurate and accessible information about them will enable good decision-making, delivering better heritage outcomes and wider community benefits’



The statue of Donald Dewar, Buchanan Street, Glasgow.

OUR APPROACH

To achieve this, we will

- Lead the long-term conversation about how the historic environment is protected in Scotland.
- Look ahead and ensure heritage protection is responsive to our changing society and environment.
- Collaborate with partners and set priorities.
- Develop our staff, invest in research and technology and adopt innovative approaches.
- Provide a proactive and accessible designation service that ensures public confidence.



Glasgow Central Mosque, listed at Category A in 2025 (LB52642)

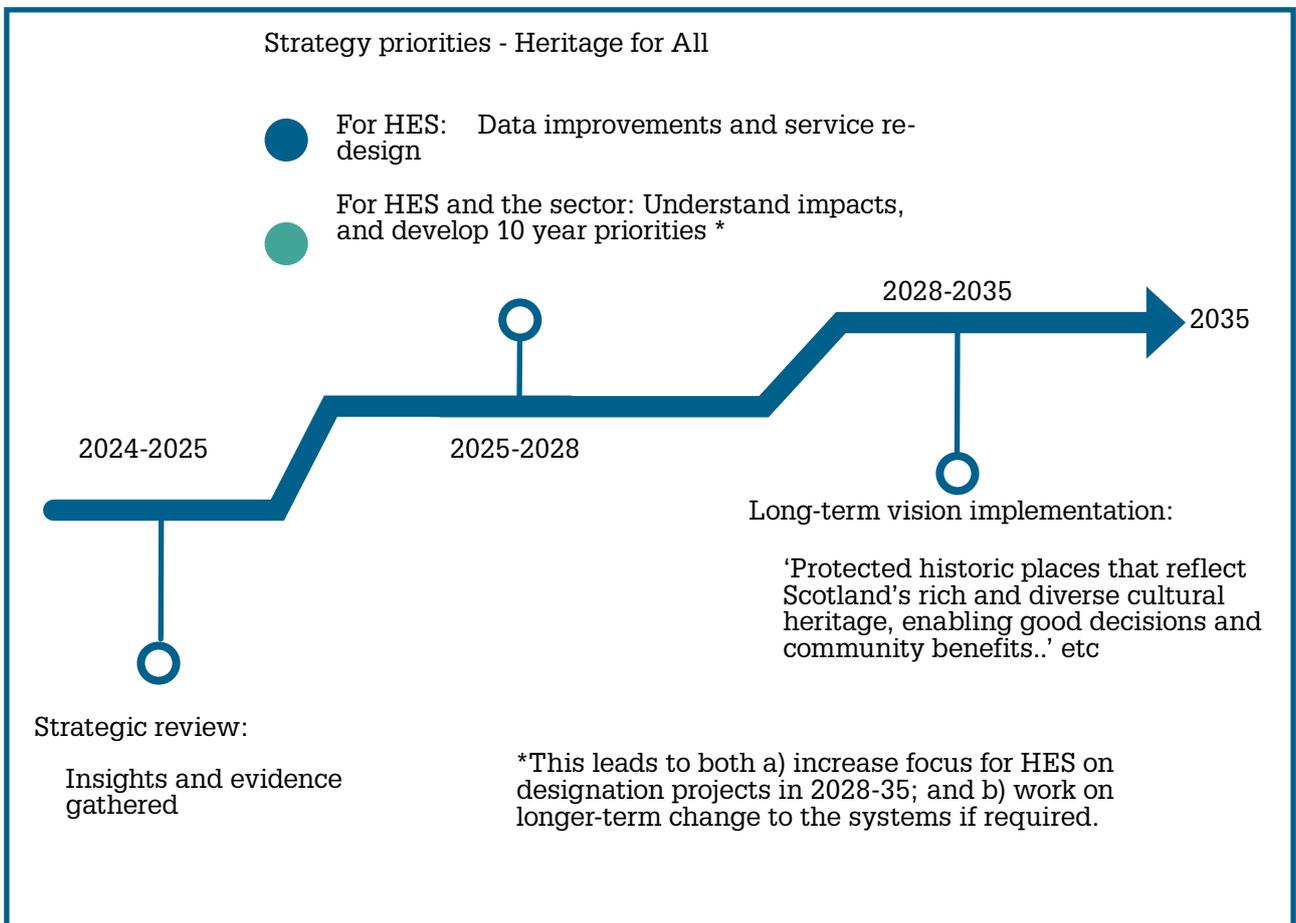
PRIORITIES 2025-2028 - 'HERITAGE FOR ALL'

Over the next three years, our designation work will focus on the following priorities identified through engagement and consultation:

Strategic priority	Who	How it supports the vision for 2035
Improving our information	HES	Ensures protected places are better understood and valued by enhancing the accuracy, accessibility and usability of our records
Improving our service	HES	Builds public confidence through a more transparent, timely and responsive designation process. Effective prioritisation frees up capacity for longer-term proactive work.
Understanding impact	HES and the sector	We understand if/how designation delivers better heritage outcomes and wider community benefits and how we use this evidence to develop longer-term approaches.
Looking ahead	HES and the sector	Shapes long-term priorities to ensure designation reflects Scotland's rich and diverse cultural heritage and Scotland's heritage protection system is fit for the future.

STRATEGIC PATHWAY TO 2035

This table shows how objectives for 2025-2028 are steps towards the longer-term vision.





Improving our information



Thatch building designation review, Tiree, Argyll and Bute.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

BY MARCH 2028, ENHANCE THE CLARITY AND ACCURACY, ACCESSIBILITY AND USABILITY OF OUR DATA AND RECORDS SO THAT SCOTLAND'S PROTECTED HISTORIC PLACES ARE BETTER UNDERSTOOD AND VALUED

Many of our 55,000 protected place records and spatial data don't meet current standards, impacting those who use them. We aim to improve at scale by engaging with our users, enhancing our data management, undertaking targeted record reviews, and technical innovation.

HOW WE'LL DO THIS:

- Engaging with users to inform them about known issues with our data and records, encouraging feedback on inaccuracies and prioritising areas for action.
- Creating a work programme to enhance protected historic place data and records towards [MIDAS standards](#) and to be Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable in line with the [FAIR Principles](#).
- Ensuring our records reflect the diversity of Scotland's people and address out-dated language and values.
- Piloting new technologies and approaches to help us improve records at scale as we adapt to an era of open data, data mining, and AI.
- Reviewing and prioritising records with inadequate descriptions or statements of significance, especially in areas of high development/land use pressure.



In November 2023, an audit revealed that 7% of over 55,000 designation records have the following information: Site Name/ Address, Category of Listing (where appropriate), Mapping, Grid Reference, Detailed Description, Detailed Statement of National Importance or Statement of Special Interest, Thesaurus Term.

THE DIFFERENCE WE WANT TO MAKE:

- **Outcome 1:** Our protected place data and records are more accurate, accessible, inclusive and easy to use - empowering stakeholders to confidently understand and engage with Scotland's protected historic places.
- **Performance indicator:** By March 2028, we will report the percentage of records and data that meet improved standards for accuracy, accessibility, and usability.



Improving our service



Tollcross Fire Station, Edinburgh, listed at Category B in 2023 (LB52620).

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

REDESIGN OUR PUBLIC OFFERING TO DELIVER TIMELY DECISIONS, PUBLISHING DETAILS OF A REVISED APPROACH BY MARCH 2026.

Over the last two decades, our focus has largely been reactive – responding to external proposals – which can be inefficient and may not reflect long-term priorities.

While responding to public requests will still be important, we're going to re-shape our service to enable timely, transparent decisions through effective prioritisation and engagement, streamlined processes and innovation. This will allow us to free up capacity for more proactive, project work in the longer term.

HOW WE'LL DO THIS

- Reviewing and streamlining our processes. As part of this, we will explore greater use of technology to support how we undertake our tasks.
- Formalising our prioritisation of external requests according to the level of heritage risk and impacts on people and communities.
- Adopting a risk-based approach for research and assessment to streamline our records and reports.
- Investing in technology and new approaches to enhance public engagement with our decision-making.

THE DIFFERENCE WE WANT TO MAKE:

- **Outcome 2:** A redesigned public service delivers decisions within transparent timescales set out in our service standard, supported by clear communication so users understand how to engage and what to expect.
- **Performance indicator:** We will report on our designation decisions as set out in our revised public service standard, published by March 2026. This standard will include information about how we prioritise the proposals we receive.
- **Outcome 3:** Greater capacity for proactive project work enables us to identify gaps and to design and deliver projects to address priorities.
- **Performance indicator:** We report against successful delivery of projects.



Understanding impact



ROBERT ADAMS	30	WILLIAM BOWIE	38	FERGUSON	1	THOMAS HENDERSON	1
GEORGE ANDERSON	40	MICHAEL COY	28	DAVID CAMPBELL	2	WILLIAM HENDERSON	2
IAN ANDERSON	23	ALAN CRADDOCK	31	ALAN COOPER	3	ALAN HENDERSON	3
JOHN ANDERSON	33	EDWARD CROWDEN	47	EDWARD COOPER	4	EDWARD HENDERSON	4
MARK ASHTON	19	BERNARD CURTIS	45	IAN GILL	5	IAN HENDERSON	5
BARRY BARBER	48	JOSE DA SILVA	56	JOHN HENDERSON	6	JOHN HENDERSON	6
GRAND BARCLAY	24	JOHN DAWSON	55	JOHN HENDERSON	7	JOHN HENDERSON	7
AMABLE JIM BORG	51	ERIC DELERRE	52	JOHN HENDERSON	8	JOHN HENDERSON	8
ERIC STANLON	32	ALEXANDER DUNN	50	JOHN HENDERSON	9	JOHN HENDERSON	9
MIKE BRISTON	40	CHRIS DUNN	50	JOHN HENDERSON	10	JOHN HENDERSON	10
HARRY BROWN	36	ERIC DUNN	50	JOHN HENDERSON	11	JOHN HENDERSON	11
STEPHEN BROWN	27	JOHN DUNN	50	JOHN HENDERSON	12	JOHN HENDERSON	12
ANDREW BRUCE	55	THOMAS DUNN	50	JOHN HENDERSON	13	JOHN HENDERSON	13
CHRIS BRUCE	42	WILLIAM DUNN	50	JOHN HENDERSON	14	JOHN HENDERSON	14
IAN BURRELL	35	ANDREW DUNN	50	JOHN HENDERSON	15	JOHN HENDERSON	15
DAVID CAMPBELL	23	DONALD FLEMING	50	JOHN HENDERSON	16	JOHN HENDERSON	16
DAVID A CAMPBELL	28	HARRY FLOOD	50	JOHN HENDERSON	17	JOHN HENDERSON	17
ALEXANDER CARROLL	26	GEORGE FOWLER	50	JOHN HENDERSON	18	JOHN HENDERSON	18
ALAN CARTER	43	ALEX FREW	50	JOHN HENDERSON	19	JOHN HENDERSON	19
ROBERT CULFAD	27	SAMUEL GALLAGHER	50	JOHN HENDERSON	20	JOHN HENDERSON	20
STEPHEN COLE	46	MICHAEL GALEZ	38	JOHN HENDERSON	21	JOHN HENDERSON	21
JOHN CONNOR	37	ERNEST GIBSON	48	JOHN HENDERSON	22	JOHN HENDERSON	22
BILL CO	37	ALBERT GILL	33	JOHN HENDERSON	23	JOHN HENDERSON	23

Piper Alpha Memorial (LB52621) sits within the Piper Alpha Memorial Garden (GDL00412), Aberdeen, commemorating the loss of 167 men killed in the Piper Alpha disaster in 1988.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

BY MARCH 2028, CAPTURE AND COMMUNICATE BASELINE EVIDENCE AND INSIGHTS INTO THE IMPACTS OF THE CURRENT HERITAGE PROTECTION SYSTEMS.

The benefits and impact are unclear.

We aim to enhance understanding of these through research and engagement. Such evidence is essential to inform longer-term policy and strategy development.

HOW WE'LL DO THIS

- Exploring information sources on heritage protection impacts.
- Undertaking and commissioning research to fill knowledge gaps.
- Creating better opportunities for public feedback on our work.
- Improving our communications.

THE DIFFERENCE WE WANT TO MAKE

- **Outcome 4:** Baseline evidence and insights into the impacts of current heritage protection systems are captured and made available to inform future policy development and strategic decisions, including objective 4.
- **Performance indicator:** Baseline evidence on the impacts of heritage protection is published and accessible by March 2028



Interior, Boghall Parish Church, listed at Category C in 2022 (LB52605)



Looking ahead



St Mary's Chapel, Crosskirk, near Thurso, Caithness (SM90086).

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

BY MARCH 2028, HES WILL BE LEADING AN INCLUSIVE CONVERSATION ON SCOTLAND'S HERITAGE PROTECTION SYSTEM TO SHAPE LONG-TERM (10-YEAR) APPROACHES AND SHORTER-TERM PRIORITIES.

We aim to establish a clearer and more forward-looking focus by working with others through inclusive engagement and research to examine our principles and policies, review our collective approach and explore alternatives to the current systems of protection.

HOW WE'LL DO THIS

- Pursuing opportunities for inclusive engagement and evidence-gathering through Talking about Heritage (2025-6), the reviews of Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) and Designation Policy and Selection Guidance (DPSG).
- Strategic engagement with stakeholders such as central and local government, communities, industry, amenity bodies, and academia/researchers.
- Making the most of digital platforms to maximise engagement in our work.
- Investing in and promoting research and collaborative projects to build understanding and evidence in emerging areas for heritage protection, including understanding and addressing gaps.

THE DIFFERENCE WE WANT TO MAKE

- **Outcome 5:** HES has gathered evidence to shape long-term approaches to the heritage protection system in Scotland through inclusive engagement.
- **Performance indicator:** Evidence gathered through inclusive engagement is documented and used to inform long-term heritage protection strategies
- **Outcome 6:** By 2028, HES will have established clear, collaboratively developed priorities for historic environment designation, which will guide project delivery as we work towards our 2035 vision.
- **Performance indicator:** Completion and publication by March 2028 of designation priorities developed with stakeholders.

DELIVERING OUR STRATEGY

We will deliver our strategy through a three-year implementation plan.

Each of our outcomes will be supported by a performance indicator, with progress measured and reported annually through established mechanisms such as the HES Planning Performance Report.

We will monitor the strategy annually to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to emerging priorities.

In 2028, we will refresh the strategy based on progress to date, feedback from partners, stakeholders and the public, and alignment with wider corporate priorities. This will ensure the next phase reflects lessons learned, evolving needs and opportunities for greater impact as we work towards our 2035 vision.



Livi Skate Park, listed
at Category B in 2024
(LB52626)



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