



Our Past, Our Future

The strategy for Scotland's
Historic Environment

**Midpoint Report
Summer 2026**

Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this Midpoint Report for *Our Past, Our Future: The Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment*.

Three years on from the launch of the Strategy, this report provides an opportunity to reflect on what has already been achieved and to look ahead to the actions needed to maximise its impact over the years to 2028.

When *Our Past, Our Future* was published in 2023, it set out a clear vision: to sustain and enhance the benefits of Scotland's historic environment for people and communities now and into the future. That ambition remains as relevant today as it was then.

What this report demonstrates is the power of collaboration. Across Scotland, communities, volunteers, businesses, charities, local authorities, funders and public bodies have come together around a shared mission. Through collective action, new partnerships have emerged, community leadership has strengthened, and the evidence of the historic environment's contribution to Scotland's wider ambitions continues to grow. The task now is to build on that momentum and accelerate impact.

This matters because Scotland's historic environment is about our future as much as our past. As these reports show, our historic places, buildings, landscapes, traditions and skills create vibrant places to live, work and visit. They support jobs and investment, strengthen community identity and resilience, contribute to wellbeing, and play an important role in responding to the climate and nature crises.

These contributions align strongly with the priorities set out in the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2026–2031. As we work to grow Scotland's economy, tackle climate change, empower communities and create opportunities for future generations, the historic environment has a valuable role to play.

The achievements highlighted in this report belong to the many people and organisations who care for Scotland's historic environment and recognise its importance to our future. I thank them for their commitment, leadership and ambition.

As we enter the final phase of delivery, by continuing to work together, strengthening cross-sector partnerships, empowering communities and focusing on shared outcomes, we can continue to build a Scotland that values its past while investing confidently in its future.

Màiri McAllan MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic



Executive Summary

Midpoint at a Glance

1. What has been achieved?

Collaboration and collective leadership are stronger. Governance is in place, the sector is sharing learning through Scotland's Historic Environment Forum (SHEF), and partnerships are growing within and beyond heritage.

Evidence of heritage contribution is growing. Baseline Refresh work has improved our understanding of historic environment sector impact on national priorities, including Climate Action, Wellbeing, Place and Regeneration, Community Wealth Building and Fair Work.

Community leadership and participation are increasing. Community ownership, stewardship, volunteering, peer learning and co-production are becoming more visible across heritage delivery.

OPOF midpoint message: Keep building the evidence, partnerships and community leadership needed to sustain and enhance Scotland's historic environment.

2. What are the key challenges?

Evidence and measurement remain inconsistent. Sector-wide reporting, impact measurement and evaluation need to become more consistent across key outcomes.

Capacity, skills and resilience pressures continue. Workforce shortages, succession challenges, reliance on

volunteers and financial pressures are affecting organisational sustainability.

Heritage is not yet fully embedded in wider agendas. There is scope to strengthen links with housing, planning, climate, health and economic development partners.

3. Priorities to 2028

Strengthen evidence and evaluation. Improve reporting, data sharing and impact measurement so partners can make clearer decisions and advocate with confidence.

Deepen cross-sector partnerships. Work more closely with climate, housing, planning, community development, health and economic partners to deliver shared outcomes.

Scale what works. Expand proven approaches for community leadership, climate action, skills development, inclusion and place-based delivery.

The Midpoint Report should be read alongside:

- > **OPOF Baseline Refresh 2026** – detailed evidence and analysis of progress against the nine OPOF Outcomes
- > **OPOF Insights Report 2026** – A strategic interpretation of the evidence, highlighting the contribution of Scotland's historic environment to wider national priorities
- > **OPOF Delivery Plan 2026–2028** – actions and responsibilities for the final phase of delivery
- > **Our Past, Our Future** – the Strategy for Scotland's historic environment (2023–2028)

What are we aiming for?

Our Mission

To sustain and enhance the benefits of Scotland's historic environment, for people and communities now and into the future.

Our Strategic priorities and outcomes



Priority 1: Delivering the transition to net zero

Outcome 1: Reduced emissions from the historic environment

Outcome 2: The historic environment is more climate resilient

Outcome 3: Improved pathways for historic environment skills



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

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

Outcome 6: The historic environment is more diverse and inclusive



Priority 3: Building a wellbeing economy

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

Outcome 8: The historic environment provides fair work

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

A strategy delivered through partnership

Like many national strategies, OPOF is not delivered by a single organisation, which is its strength. Progress has depended on the commitment and collaboration of people across businesses, community organisations, funders, heritage asset owners and custodians, national and local organisations, professional bodies, the Scottish Government and volunteers. References to partnership, alignment and collaboration identify opportunities emerging from the evidence and stakeholder engagement, not formal commitments by individual organisations.

Improving and measuring progress

Progress is assessed using a combination of annual reporting, baseline assessment and refresh activity, case studies, national datasets, project reporting, quantitative data

and stakeholder feedback. The detailed evidence position for all nine outcomes is presented in the accompanying Baseline Refresh.

Good governance, coordination and development

The Scottish Government sets the strategic direction for *Our Past, Our Future*. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) leads and coordinates delivery of the strategy, hosting the National Strategy (OPOF) team and supporting collaborative action across the sector. The OPOF Steering Group provides strategic oversight, while Scotland's Historic Environment Forum (SHEF) brings the sector together to share learning and shape future priorities.



What has changed Since 2023?

Then (2023)		Now (2026)
Limited shared evidence base across OPOF outcomes		Baseline Refresh completed twice, Scotland's Historic Environment Audit (SHEA) updated twice, new research strengthening sector evidence
OPOF launched with new governance arrangements		Established OPOF National Strategy Steering Group, strengthened coordination and sector engagement through Scotland's Historic Environment Forum
Heritage contribution often discussed through individual projects		Growing evidence of heritage role in climate action, wellbeing, regeneration, place making and Community Wealth Building
Climate action emerging across the sector		Growing climate skills, adaptation programmes, retrofit activity, carbon measurement and planning, beginning the Historic Environment Route Map to Net Zero
Community activity often fragmented and locally focused		Stronger community networks, peer learning, ownership models and place-based partnerships involving heritage
Growing awareness of inclusion challenges		Sector-wide EDI discussions, recommendations, practical inclusion initiatives underway and strong support for driving further change
Concerns about future workforce capacity		Skills Investment Plan delivering action on workforce pathways, apprenticeships and future skills, and building more knowledge of the ecosystem needed to drive change
Limited engagement with sectors beyond heritage		Stronger relationships with climate, community development, social inclusion, regeneration, tourism and local and regional economic partners
Increasing recognition of heritage value, but inconsistent influence		Greater interest from policy, regeneration and investment partners, with further opportunities to grow influence

Three years of progress



Priority 1: Delivering the Transition to Net Zero

Three years into Our Past, Our Future, the historic environment sector has made important progress in responding to the climate and nature crises. Activity has increased across all three Priority 1 outcomes, with greater collaboration, improved awareness of climate risks, investment in related skills development, and an expanding body of practical guidance and evidence. The development of the emerging **Route Map to Net Zero for Scotland's Historic Environment** by Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS) and Historic Environment Scotland (HES), the expansion of **Carbon Literacy training** led by Heritage Network, Keep Scotland Beautiful and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, growth in **retrofit and climate skills programmes**, and increased participation in **climate adaptation initiatives** all demonstrate a sector that is increasingly engaging with climate action.

Notable progress has also been made in strengthening strategic relationships and building sector green skills capacity. Initiatives such as **Craft Your Career**, and

Heritage Careers Week have helped strengthen pathways into traditional building skills, retrofit, low-carbon construction and emerging climate-related skills. Recent activity has increasingly focused on supporting the development of green and enabling skills across the historic environment sector.

Across Scotland, organisations are demonstrating how heritage can contribute practical solutions to climate mitigation and adaptation challenges. Scotland's Coastal Archaeology and the Problem of Erosion (**SCAPE's**) **Coastal Zone Assessment Surveys** have supported communities to identify and monitor heritage at risk from coastal erosion. Adaptation planning by organisations such as the **National Trust for Scotland** has helped improve understanding of, and response to, local climate risks affecting historic buildings, landscapes and collections. Meanwhile, guidance developed by **HES and VisitScotland** has equipped the heritage tourism sector with a simplified risk assessment for climate impacts.

SPOTLIGHT: Building Climate Resilience Through Community Action

The impacts of climate change are already being felt across Scotland's coastlines, where erosion is threatening irreplaceable archaeological sites and historic landscapes. Through SCAPE's [Coastal Zone Assessment Surveys](#), volunteers are helping identify and record vulnerable heritage before it is lost. In 2025, participants conducted surveys of the Dornoch Firth in Highland and Yell in Shetland and identified 185 previously unrecorded sites, 19 of which were prioritised for future monitoring or intervention. Beyond the immediate findings, these actions demonstrate how communities are contributing valuable evidence to support climate adaptation decisions. As the pace of environmental change accelerates, locally generated knowledge is becoming an increasingly important part of managing risks to Scotland's historic environment.

There are also emerging examples of practical climate action. The **Scottish Historic Buildings Trust's (SHBT) Futureproofing programme** has demonstrated how traditional buildings can be sensitively retrofitted to improve energy efficiency, reduce operational carbon and increase occupant comfort while safeguarding heritage significance. Local delivery has also expanded through initiatives such as **Stirling City Heritage Trust's Traditional Buildings Health Check and Retrofit Service**, which provides tailored advice on appropriate energy efficiency improvements for traditional buildings. Alongside this, **HES's work to update its Climate Change Risk Assessment for its Properties in Care** will risk assess the historic environment for current and future climate impacts. Similarly, HES strengthened its contribution to Scotland's third National Adaptation Plan (SNAP3), increasing reporting on climate change adaptation activity and progress. Together these initiatives illustrate how the sector is combining retrofit, skills, evidence and adaptation measures to support Scotland's transition to net zero and build climate resilience.

However, analysis also indicates that progress remains uneven and that

activity is often concentrated within a relatively small number of organisations and projects. While awareness and commitment have increased, there is less evidence of consistent sector-wide delivery at the scale required to meet Scotland's climate and nature ambitions. Significant gaps remain in **emissions reporting, climate risk assessment, adaptation planning and impact measurement**. As a result, there is limited data available to show how retrofit, adaptation, green skills and climate resilience activities are contributing to emissions reduction or resilience outcomes across Scotland.

Analysis particularly highlights the importance of improving carbon measurement and reporting. **HES** has developed a new methodology for measuring the impact of its grant funding on delivering climate adaptation and mitigation measures and begun testing approaches to carbon emissions reporting. **The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)** is also developing approaches to carbon measurement through work to establish a baseline carbon footprint for its grant portfolio and explore how environmental performance data can be collected across funded projects.

SPOTLIGHT: Supporting Owners to Retrofit Traditional Homes

Scotland's transition to net zero depends not only on new developments but on improving the performance of existing buildings. For owners of traditional tenements, navigating repair, maintenance and retrofit options can be complex. [Under One Roof](#) has become a key source of trusted information, bringing together guidance from across the heritage, housing and construction sectors. By translating technical information into practical support for homeowners, the organisation is helping bridge the gap between national retrofit ambitions and action on the ground. Its work highlights a recurring theme emerging through OPOF: achieving climate objectives will depend as much on empowering building owners as on developing new policies or technologies.





Scotland's traditional building skills are not just heritage skills. They are green skills and fundamental to delivering our wider ambitions for housing, net zero and a more sustainable built environment."

Jocelyne Fleming – Scottish Policy and Public Affairs Lead, Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)

The evidence also highlights the need for the historic environment sector to **become more fully embedded** within wider policy agendas. While collaboration has improved, stronger alignment is needed to ensure the historic environment is consistently reflected in the standards, guidance and programmes shaping these sectors. Strengthening links with programmes focused on **building retrofit, climate adaptation, green skills, digital capability, innovation and technology adoption, place-based regeneration, coastal resilience and landscape recovery** will be key to increasing the sector's influence, supported by stronger evidence of the impacts already being delivered through heritage-led climate action. **The emerging Route Map to Net Zero for Scotland's Historic**

Environment provides an important opportunity to coordinate this activity, strengthen cross-sector partnerships, and demonstrate the contribution of the historic environment to Scotland's wider climate objectives.

Looking ahead, the challenge is not simply to continue current activity but to increase its scale, influence and impact. Greater emphasis should be placed on demonstrating the value of heritage-led approaches, improving sector-wide data collection, strengthening the evidence base, building partnerships beyond the traditional heritage sector, and ensuring that historic environment interests are represented in decision-making on climate, nature and place.

Priorities for the Next Period

- > **Improve carbon measurement, emissions reporting and evidence of climate impact**
- > **Scale retrofit, climate adaptation and resilience activity across the historic environment**
- > **Expand climate, retrofit, digital and green skills development to support future workforce needs**
- > **Strengthen partnerships with housing, energy, planning, land management and environmental sectors**
- > **Increase the understanding and influence of heritage within Scotland's net zero, climate adaptation and nature recovery agendas**



Priority 2: Empowering Communities and Places

The emerging evidence highlights the central role that communities play in shaping, sustaining and championing Scotland's historic environment. Nationally, community organisations, volunteers, development trusts and local heritage groups continue to lead projects, take ownership of assets and use heritage to support wider community priorities. At the same time, the findings highlight growing expectations on communities to lead and deliver change, creating both opportunities and challenges for the sector.

Strong examples of community leadership can be seen through **Scottish Community Tourism (SCOTO)**, **Scottish Community Heritage Alliance (SCHA)** and **Scotland's Community Heritage**

Conversations (SCHC), which have created new opportunities for peer learning, collaboration and knowledge exchange. Community organisations are increasingly taking long-term responsibility for significant heritage assets and shaping their future use. In 2025, **Gracemount Mansion Development Trust** secured community ownership of the Category B-listed Gracemount Mansion in Edinburgh, creating new opportunities for heritage-led regeneration, wellbeing activity and community enterprise. Projects such as this demonstrate how local stewardship can strengthen resilience, build local capacity and ensure heritage assets continue to deliver social and economic value for communities.

SPOTLIGHT: A Network Delivering Local Solutions

Twenty years after the first City Heritage Trust was established, the model continues to demonstrate the value of locally based delivery. While individual Trusts respond to different local priorities, together they support building repair, climate adaptation, skills development and regeneration across Scotland's cities. Recent examples range from [Traditional Buildings Health Checks](#) in Stirling to support for Glasgow's [Heritage Hub](#) and retrofit initiatives delivered through Edinburgh World Heritage. Increasing collaboration between Trusts is helping spread innovation and good practice across the network. Their collective success highlights one of the clearest findings emerging at midpoint: national outcomes are often delivered most effectively through locally trusted organisations.



Through a deep understanding of their local context, Scotland's City Heritage Trusts demonstrate that national priorities can be delivered through place-based action."

Niall Murphy – Director,
Glasgow City Heritage Trust

SPOTLIGHT: Helping Communities Navigate Change

As increasing numbers of places of worship face closure or disposal, communities are being required to make complex decisions about the future of buildings that often hold significant cultural, social and historic value. Programmes including [Research in Action on Church Heritage \(ReACH\)](#) and [New Futures](#) are helping communities better understand those values while providing practical tools and support to explore future options. Work at places such as St Mary's Whitekirk has demonstrated how capturing social and community value can inform decisions about future use and stewardship. These approaches reflect a growing shift towards community-led decision-making and illustrate how heritage can support local conversations about identity, change and long-term sustainability.

The strategy period has also demonstrated the value of heritage in **place-based regeneration and Community Wealth Building**. Place Projects supported through the NLHF and HES's Heritage & Place funding programme has strengthened understanding of how heritage contributes to thriving places, regeneration and community confidence. Significant work on the future of **churches and places of worship**, led by organisations including **Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS)** through its **Community Ownerships Support Service (CoSS)** **New Futures: Former Places of Worship** programme, **BEFS Places of Worship Forum**, the **Research in Action on Church Heritage (ReACH)** programme, **HES's pilot Scotland's Places of Worship Fund** (confirmed for 2026/27), **Historic Churches Scotland**, the **Church of Scotland** and others, has helped communities explore sustainable futures

for places of worship. This activity highlights both the opportunities and challenges associated with community stewardship, asset transfer and adaptive reuse while reinforcing the importance of churches as community infrastructure.

Progress has also been made in broadening participation and access. Initiatives such as the **Society of Antiquaries of Scotland's Dig It!**, the **Heritage Network Youth Forum** and community archaeology programmes delivered by **Archaeology Scotland** have engaged new audiences and encouraged more inclusive approaches to participation. The **Make Your Mark in Volunteering (MYM)** programme has also supported co-designed volunteering opportunities with underrepresented groups. Meanwhile, HES' new **Trove.scot** website has transformed public access to heritage information and collections through digital engagement.



Supporting communities to make informed decisions about historic buildings is just as important as preserving the buildings themselves."

Linda Gillespie – Head of Community Ownership, DTAS

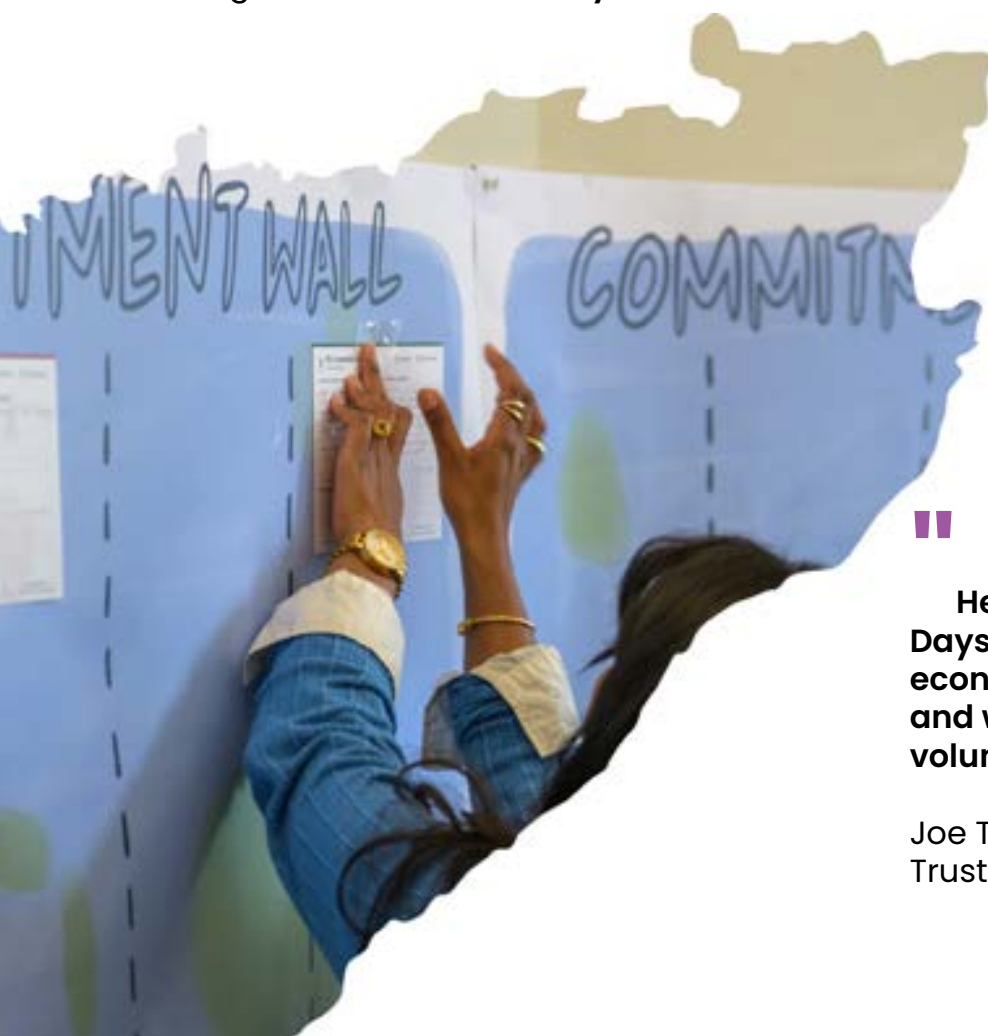


An important development during this period has been the growing recognition of **intangible cultural heritage** as part of Scotland's historic environment. Following UK ratification of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, collaborative work involving **Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS), HES, Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland (TRACS) and partners** has helped raise awareness of living traditions, skills and cultural practices, and their contribution to community identity, cultural continuity and intergenerational learning.

However, the analysis indicates that the sector must now focus not only on expanding participation, but on the quality and influence of participation. OPOF discussion workshops on **Collaborating for Communities** highlighted growing expectations that heritage organisations move beyond consultation towards shared decision-making and co-production.

Evidence also points to significant challenges around **community**

capacity, skills and organisational resilience. OPOF's **Mapping Scotland's Historic Environment Sector (2026)** indicates the scale of the sector. However, it is recognised that many heritage organisations rely on a small number of committed volunteers, community leaders and organisations working with limited resources. Managing heritage assets, delivering projects and sustaining long-term activity requires funding, skills, leadership and specialist support. Alongside **Make Your Mark**, programmes such as **MGS's Museum Futures programme, HES's forthcoming Your Heritage Fund**, and development of the **Heritage Skills at Risk Register by the Institute of Conservation (ICON)**, highlight growing recognition of the need to support organisational resilience, volunteering, workforce development, vocational pathways and future leadership. However, the sector continues to face challenges around succession planning, organisational sustainability and long-term investment in people and skills.



Heritage events like Doors Open Days support local venues and economies and improve the health and wellbeing of visitors and volunteers every year"

Joe Traynor – Director, Scottish Civic Trust

SPOTLIGHT: Demonstrating the Wellbeing Value of Heritage

Evidence gathered through programmes such as [Doors Open Days](#) and [Make Your Mark in Volunteering](#) is helping strengthen understanding of the wider benefits of heritage participation. In 2025, 97% of surveyed Doors Open Days visitors reported improved wellbeing following their visit, while participation in volunteering initiatives has been linked to improved confidence, stronger social connections and greater connection to local places. These findings are important because they move discussions about heritage beyond preservation alone, providing growing evidence of its contribution to wellbeing and community resilience. As OPOF enters its next phase, this evidence will become increasingly important in demonstrating heritage's contribution to wider national priorities.

Similarly, evidence gathered through the OPOF **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) workshop and recommendations** suggests that while awareness and commitment to EDI have increased, further progress will require system-wide change. Activity such as **West of Scotland Regional Equality Council's (WSREC) Roots Scotland programme, Scottish Civic Trust's (SCT) Diverse Heritage project** and **MGS's Delivering Change programme** demonstrate positive progress. However, embedding inclusion across funding, policy, governance, workforce development and organisational practice remains a significant challenge,

requiring clearer accountability and greater capacity to implement system change.

Looking ahead, heritage has an opportunity to play a much greater role in creating empowered, resilient and sustainable communities and places. Achieving this will require closer collaboration with **community development, regeneration, housing, planning, health and wellbeing, education, employability, local government, climate action and equalities partners**, ensuring heritage contributes more directly to wider social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Priorities for the Next Period

- > **Strengthen community capacity, leadership and organisational resilience**
- > **Expand co-production, shared decision-making and community influence across heritage activity**
- > **Support volunteering, workforce development and future leadership pathways**
- > **Embed equality, diversity and inclusion within governance, participation and organisational practice**
- > **Increase the contribution of heritage to community empowerment, regeneration, place-making and Community Wealth Building**





Priority 3: Building a Wellbeing Economy

Evidence gathered suggests that the historic environment is contributing to regeneration, Community Wealth Building, tourism, jobs, learning, engagement and wellbeing outcomes across Scotland. However, the evidence also suggests that heritage is not yet consistently recognised within wider economic, housing, education, health and investment agendas, and stronger evidence and partnerships will be needed to increase its influence and impact.

Some of the strongest evidence comes from **heritage-led regeneration and place-based investment**. Place

projects supported through **The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)** and **HES's Heritage & Place** funding programme demonstrates how heritage can support wider regeneration outcomes in places including **Govan, Girvan, Tarbert and Buckhaven**. Work led by Scotland's **City Heritage Trusts** (increased to add Dunfermline CHT this year), the **Scottish Historic Buildings Trust (SHBT)** and the **Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF)** further demonstrates the role of heritage in supporting the repair, reuse and sustainable regeneration of historic buildings and places.

SPOTLIGHT: Heritage as a Driver of Regeneration

Place projects supported through The National Lottery Heritage Fund and HES's Heritage & Place funding programme demonstrate the pivotal role historic buildings and places can play in wider regeneration efforts. In both Girvan and Govan, investment is combining repair and conservation activity with skills development, community engagement and long-term economic ambitions. Rather than treating heritage as an outcome in itself, these projects position it as a key part of a wider approach to creating thriving places. This reflects a broader shift highlighted through OPOF's work on Place and Community Wealth Building, where historic assets are increasingly recognised as infrastructure that can support economic growth, community confidence and local resilience.





Historic towns and places are at the heart of Scotland's thriving communities. Our heritage is not just about our past but a powerful asset of the future. Historic assets and places create identity, attract people and investment, support local economies and help to ensure Scotland's towns are resilient, unique and vibrant."

Kimberley Guthrie – Chief Officer,
Scotland's Towns Partnership

The strategy period has also strengthened understanding of the role of heritage in **Community Wealth Building**. Research undertaken by Historic Environment Scotland has explored links between heritage, local procurement, employment and community enterprise. Meanwhile organisations, including AHF, are helping communities, such as **West Calder and Harburn Community Development Trust**, who are developing the **Scottish Co-operative Discovery Centre**, bring historic buildings back into productive use through innovative funding models that combine grants, loan finance and community investment.

Evidence also points to significant opportunities associated with Scotland's **traditional and pre-1919 building stock**. Stakeholders consistently identified the repair, retrofit, reuse and adaptation of existing buildings as an area where heritage can contribute directly to national priorities for housing, regeneration, net zero and Community Wealth Building, while supporting more sustainable use of existing assets. This creates **opportunities for closer alignment with housing, planning, regeneration and economic development agendas** and will require a workforce with the traditional

conservation, retrofit and technical skills needed to support Scotland's existing building stock.

There is also growing evidence that heritage can contribute positively to **wellbeing and social value**, strengthening its role in place-making and regeneration. The National Trust for Scotland's **Engaging Communities** programme has collaborated with communities around sites including Fyvie Castle, Torridon, the Hill House and the Tenement House, to address priorities such as social isolation, wellbeing and community connection, while HES's **Making Sense of Scotland** programme has expanded participation through collections-based learning and engagement. More recently, HES's **Historic Places, Breathing Spaces** campaign and new research on heritage volunteering have strengthened the evidence linking heritage engagement to wellbeing, belonging and quality of life. Building on this, research commissioned through the **OPOF** programme is identifying the evidence, messages and partnerships needed to position heritage more effectively within social value, wellbeing, place-making and regeneration investment.



SPOTLIGHT: Balancing Visitor Pressures and Local Priorities

Scotland's historic environment attracts visitors from around the world, but sustaining these benefits requires balancing visitor demand with community wellbeing and environmental resilience. National initiatives such as the HES and Visit Scotland [Climate Change Adaptation Manual for Heritage Tourism](#) are helping organisations identify and adapt to climate-related risks, while SCOTO's [Press Pause](#) programme is supporting communities to shape tourism around local priorities. By May 2026, 60 Press Pause initiatives had supported more than 80 communities across Scotland, reflecting growing interest in community-led approaches to tourism planning and delivery. Together these initiatives highlight an important lesson emerging through OPOF: responsible tourism works best when communities are active participants in shaping its future.

Discussions through the first three years of OPOF have also highlighted growing recognition of heritage as a form of **cultural and community infrastructure**. Organisations beyond the heritage sector, including **South of Scotland Enterprise**, are increasingly recognising heritage as a contributor to regeneration, Community Wealth Building and economic development. This was reflected at **SHEF 2026**, where the **Scottish Futures Trust**, Glasgow City Region and other partners highlighted the need to embed heritage more consistently within regional investment and place-based development.

However, one of the biggest overall challenges in OPOF remains around **data, evaluation and sector messaging**. While Scotland's Historic Environment Audit (SHEA) provides a strong national baseline, stakeholders identified gaps in local data relating to economic impact, wellbeing outcomes, volunteering and

Community Wealth Building. This limits the sector's ability to demonstrate cumulative impact, influence policy and communicate value to external audiences. OPOF research on **Fair Work** has similarly evidenced implementation but shows an ongoing need to improve our understanding of heritage workforce challenges, and the need to grow implementation through funding approaches, workforce development and organisational support.

Looking ahead, analysis suggests there is an opportunity to strengthen the role of heritage within regeneration, Community Wealth Building, housing, tourism, health and economic development agendas. Achieving this will require better partnerships with **economic development, enterprise, housing, planning, regeneration, tourism, health, employability, education, skills and local government partners**.

Priorities for the Next Period

- › Strengthen evidence of heritage economic, social and wellbeing contributions
- › Improve data collection, evaluation and impact reporting across the sector
- › Support implementation of Fair Work recommendations and workforce wellbeing
- › Increase heritage influence within regeneration, housing, tourism, economic development and investment decisions
- › Develop stronger and more consistent messaging about heritage contribution to Scotland's wellbeing economy

Underpinning Activities: Building the Foundations for Collective Action

The first years of OPOF have focused not only on delivering activity against outcomes, but also on building the structures, relationships, evidence and leadership needed to support long-term change across Scotland's historic environment sector.

From the outset, the National Strategy Team recognised that achieving the ambitions of the strategy would require more than individual projects or programmes. Success would depend on creating deeper connections between organisations, aligning existing activity around shared outcomes, improving evidence, supporting collaboration and enabling new partnerships to emerge. Much of the work undertaken since 2023 has therefore focused on creating the conditions needed for collective action.

A significant achievement has been the establishment of a stronger national framework for collaboration and coordination. The creation of the **OPOF Steering Group** brought together national organisations, funders,

delivery partners and strategic stakeholders around a shared programme of action and collective accountability. Alongside this, **Scotland's Historic Environment Forum (SHEF)** has evolved beyond an annual sector meeting to become an important mechanism for identifying common challenges, sharing learning and shaping future priorities with other sectors beyond heritage.

Throughout the strategy period, OPOF has increasingly functioned as a convening mechanism, building relationships with organisations beyond the traditional heritage sector. Collaboration with partners including **Scotland's Towns Partnership, Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS), Scotland's Urban Regeneration Forum (SURF), Scottish Futures Trust, VisitScotland, NatureScot, the Improvement Service, and Adaptation Scotland** reflects growing recognition that heritage can contribute to wider national priorities.



The strategy has also evolved in response to emerging evidence and stakeholder feedback. Rather than following a fixed programme of activity, OPOF has adopted an agile approach to identifying challenges, testing ideas and facilitating targeted development work. This approach has led to a series of focused discussions, workshops and recommendations produced by the National Strategy Team, which are now helping shape future delivery.

Important examples include:

- > **Collaborating for Communities workshops and recommendations**, which highlighted the importance of moving further beyond consultation towards partnership and co-production
- > **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion workshops and recommendations**, which identified priorities for creating a more inclusive historic environment
- > **Data and Evidence workshops and**
- > **Data Hub recommendations**, which highlighted opportunities to improve evidence gathering, data sharing and reporting
- > **Heritage & Place Short-Life Working Group recommendations**, which strengthened understanding of the heritage contribution to place-based policy and regeneration and identified pragmatic steps to influence change
- > Development of a **Skills Taskforce** and continued delivery of Scotland's **Skills Investment Plan for the historic environment**, helping strengthen focus and action to address long-term workforce challenges and maximise opportunities
- > Partnership to ensure alignment with **Scotland's Archaeology Strategy** refresh
- > Feedback gathered through **SHEF**, helped confirm yearly priorities for the strategy

SPOTLIGHT: Addressing Skills for a Changing Future

Scotland's historic environment depends on a workforce that can respond to new challenges while maintaining specialist traditional skills. Programmes like Craft your Career or [Heritage Careers Week](#) are helping attract new entrants, develop expertise, and broaden awareness of heritage careers. Programmes like these reflect an increasing recognition that skills shortages present one of the biggest risks to achieving long-term ambitions around retrofit, climate adaptation and building reuse. The growing focus on skills development across the sector demonstrates a shift from protecting skills in isolation to viewing them as critical enablers of wider economic, climate and community outcomes.



Alongside this, substantial progress has been made in strengthening the evidence base needed to support future decision-making. The ongoing research or publication of the OPOF **Baseline Refresh (2026)**, **Scotland's Historic Environment Audit (SHEA) refresh (2026)**, **Wellbeing Research**, **Community Wealth Building Research**, **Fair Work Research**, **Climate Action Skills Mapping** and the emerging **Mapping Scotland's Historic Environment Sector** project have all contributed to a better understanding of the sector, its impacts and its future needs.

The next strategy period moves alongside wider changes in the policy and funding landscape. The establishment of a new area within **Scottish Government with responsibilities for heritage**, development of the forthcoming **Culture Bill**, evolving approaches to investment by **HES** and **The National Lottery Heritage Fund**, and wider discussions around public sector reform all create opportunities to strengthen the contribution of heritage within national policy and investment agendas.

At the same time, stakeholder feedback consistently highlights the need for greater clarity around leadership, delivery and support roles across the

system. Discussions throughout the strategy period have identified an ongoing need to better articulate how organisations, including Historic Environment Scotland, contribute through a combination of leadership, enabling activity, support, investment, evidence gathering and direct delivery.

Over the next two years, OPOF should build on these foundations. While quick progress has been made in creating systems, relationships and evidence, the emphasis now needs to shift towards using these foundations to accelerate impact. This will require strengthened governance arrangements, a potentially refreshed role for SHEF, deeper engagement with adjacent sectors, significantly improved data and evidence systems, closer alignment with funders and investment priorities, and stronger strategic engagement with government, policy makers and national stakeholders.

The evidence also highlights the importance of ensuring that future system change is designed with inclusion in mind. Heritage is not yet as accessible, representative or welcoming as it could be. Future success will depend not only on expanding participation but also on embedding inclusion, co-production and systems thinking into the way the sector plans, invests, leads and delivers.

Priorities for the Next Period

- > **Strengthen leadership, governance and collective action across the OPOF and SHEF partnership**
- > **Improve evidence, evaluation and shared approaches to reporting impact**
- > **Deepen collaboration with communities, funders, policy makers and cross-sector partners**
- > **Align investment, delivery and decision-making around shared outcomes and priorities**
- > **Embed participation, inclusion and co-production more consistently across the historic environment system**
- > **Increase the sector's influence and contribution to Scotland's net zero, community and wellbeing ambitions**

What needs to change between now and 2028?

Experience from delivery and stakeholder feedback shows that the Strategic Priorities and Outcomes remain the right framework for delivery.

Midpoint Headlines

We have strengthened:

- > Collaboration
- > Evidence in some areas
- > Community leadership
- > Workforce development

We need to strengthen further:

- > Evidence in particular areas
- > Inclusion
- > Organisational resilience
- > Investment alignment

We need to increase:

- > Cross-sector influence
- > Participatory practice
- > Place-based delivery
- > Strategic partnerships

Themes for Change

The challenge for the final phase of the strategy is not to change direction, but to build on what has been achieved and strengthen the conditions needed for success. Across all three Strategic Priorities, the evidence points to a few common **themes for change**. These do not replace the existing Outcomes or their needed actions. Instead, they underpin them and represent the areas where focused effort could help accelerate progress and increase impact during the remainder of the strategy period.



Strengthen Leadership, Coordination and Collective Action

Continued progress will require strong relationships, effective coordination and clear opportunities for organisations, communities and partners to collaboratively contribute to shared priorities.



Build a Stronger Data & Evidence System

While the sector has a more robust evidence base than it did in 2023, the next phase should focus on improving the quality, consistency and use of evidence to support decision-making, influence policy and demonstrate impact.



Put Place and Communities at the Centre of Delivery

Developing from strong progress on place-based approaches and community leadership, there is an opportunity to strengthen links between heritage, regeneration, community development, climate action and local decision-making.



Improve Participation and Inclusion

Awareness of inclusion and participation has increased significantly. The challenge now is to embed these principles more consistently across governance, funding, workforce development, decision-making and delivery.



Invest in Skills and Resilience

Meeting many of the challenges identified through the strategy will depend on building a strong, accessible and resilient skills ecosystem for the sector, improving workforce pathways, supporting volunteers, developing leadership and strengthening organisational sustainability.



Align Investment and Infrastructure with Shared Outcomes

Greater alignment between evidence, investment, infrastructure opportunities and outcomes provides an opportunity to increase impact and strengthen long-term sustainability.



Increase Heritage Influence and Advocacy

The evidence highlights that heritage contributes to climate action, community empowerment, regeneration, wellbeing and economic development. The next phase should focus on ensuring that this contribution is more widely recognised and reflected in policy, investment and decision-making.

These priorities inform the Delivery Plan 2026–2028, which sets out how organisations, communities, funders, government and partners can work together to maximise progress towards the ambitions of *Our Past, Our Future*.

Conclusion

The midpoint of *Our Past, Our Future* marks an important transition from building foundations to increasing impact.

Over the first three years, organisations, communities, funders and partners have strengthened collaboration, improved evidence, supported participation and demonstrated the contribution Scotland's historic environment can make to wider national priorities.

The evidence confirms that the Strategic Priorities and Outcomes remain the right framework for delivery. The challenge for the final phase is to build on this progress and focus effort where it can make the greatest difference.

This progress and feedback from SHEF 2026 informed the OPOF Steering Group's steer on priorities for action for the

remaining years of the Strategy. The seven Strategic Change Themes identified in this report provide the focus for that. Together they aim to strengthen leadership, improve evidence, support communities, increase inclusion, invest in people, align investment and increase the influence of heritage within wider policy and decision-making.

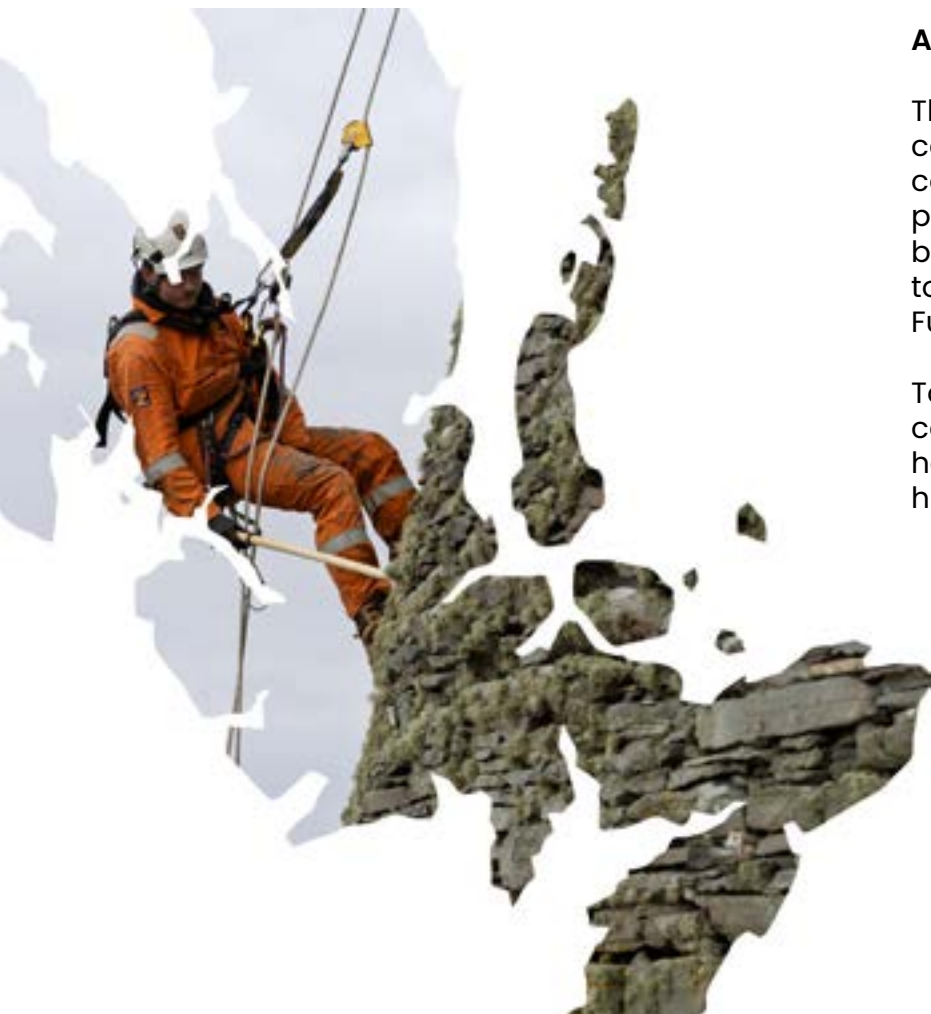
The Delivery Plan 2026–2028 translates these priorities into actions, responsibilities and measures of success for the final phase of the strategy.

Achieving these ambitions will require continued commitment and collective action throughout the country. Strong foundations have been established. The next phase is about accelerating progress and maximising impact.

Acknowledgments

This report has been prepared with contributions from organisations, communities, volunteers, practitioners, funders and public bodies across Scotland who continue to support the delivery of *Our Past, Our Future*.

Together, they demonstrate the collective commitment that lies at the heart of Scotland's strategy for the historic environment.





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