



HISTORIC  
ENVIRONMENT  
SCOTLAND

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# Properties and Collections Strategy: Towards Sustainable Stewardship

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Draft for public consultation

Plain language

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# A New Approach

We look after many important historic places, buildings, and collections for the people of Scotland. These places and objects are a big part of Scotland's history and identity.



For a long time, we have focused on protecting and sharing these sites with the public. People's expectations about visiting and learning from these places are always growing.

At the same time, what people value about heritage is changing. We now see that these places can do even more for Scotland and its communities.

Looking after these historic sites brings both opportunities and challenges. Climate change is causing more damage, and it costs more to care for these places. We also have more repairs to do than before. Because of this, we need to rethink how we look after these sites and collections, and make careful choices about where to spend our resources. We also need to ensure that communities are properly engaged in what we do and how because we look after these assets on behalf of the people of Scotland.

## **This means we need to:**

- Review how we manage these places and collections
- Find new ways to fund our work
- Be creative in how we use these sites and collections
- Make tough decisions about what to prioritise

Our new long-term strategy explains how we will face these challenges and make the most of the opportunities. We will look at the value of each place and collection, both now and in the future.

This strategy brings a new vision for how we care for Scotland's heritage. We will still focus on what makes these places culturally important, but we will also consider their social, environmental and economic value. Our new way of working will balance all these things to make the best decisions.

We want these places and collections to have a positive impact now and for future generations. We will work together with others, using evidence and expert advice, to make the best use of our limited resources.

We also recognise that not all sites and collections are equally important. In some cases, it may not be possible or necessary for us to be the custodians of a place forever - there may be better options. We will actively review what we care for and the benefits these places bring.

**Our main priorities are:**

- Focusing on the places and collections that need the most care and have the greatest potential to benefit people and communities
- Making sure Scotland's most important historic places and collections are protected and managed well for the future

**Good management means:**

- Every place and collection has a clear plan
- Decisions are open, based on evidence, and use expert advice
- Communities help shape our plans and we work towards shared goals
- Resources are used wisely for long-term benefit
- Places and collections are protected and used in positive ways
- Our management is flexible and adapts to change
- Places are prepared for the effects of climate change
- Visitors have better experiences
- We work together and encourage new ideas

# Vision

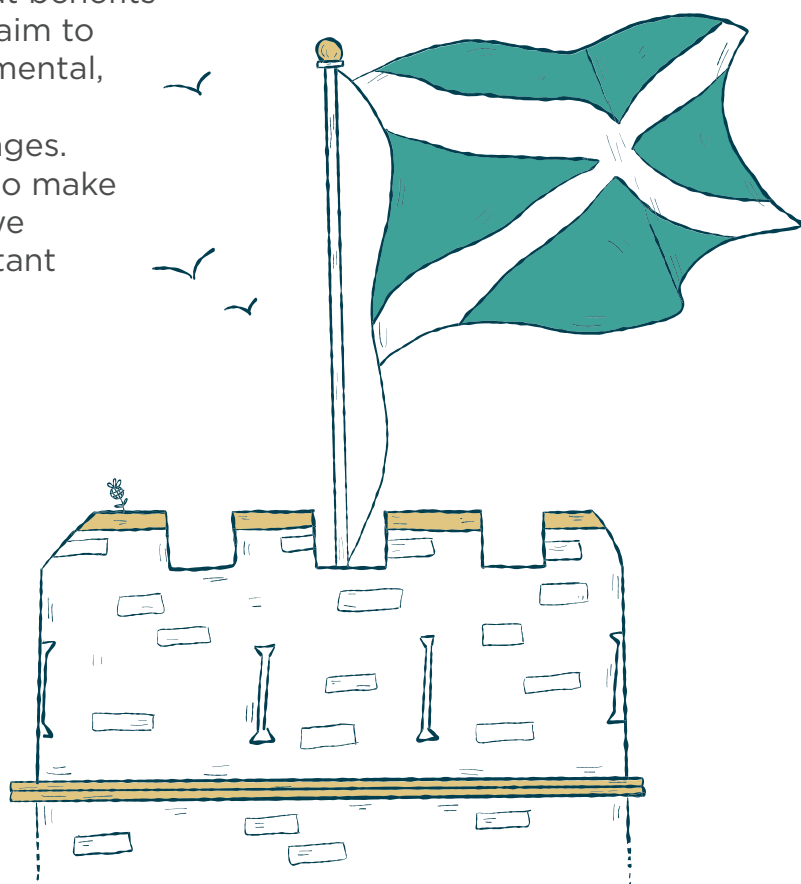
**Our vision for this strategy is to increase understanding and achieve sustainable management of the properties and collections in our care.**

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Understanding is at the heart of the strategy.

We want everyone to know more about the history and importance of the places and collections we look after, and how they matter to different communities. We will gather information and people's knowledge to help us reach good decisions about places and collections.

Sustainable management means looking after these places and collections in a way that benefits people now and in the future. We aim to balance social, economic, environmental, and cultural benefits, especially as climate change brings new challenges. We believe it is our responsibility to make careful, fair decisions about how we invest in and manage these important parts of Scotland's heritage.



# Strategic context

We are a public body with charitable status, and our job is to care for, protect, and promote Scotland's historic environment for the benefit of everyone.

The core ideas behind our work, looking after historic places properly and making sure people benefit, are still central to everything we do.

This strategy supports wider goals, including the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, and is aligned with Scotland's National Performance Framework. When we make decisions about the places and collections we care for, we will think about how to create long-term benefits and reduce inequality.

Scotland's national strategy for the historic environment, **Our Past, Our Future**, focuses on using heritage to:

- Help tackle climate change
- Support strong, resilient communities
- And grow a fair and healthy economy



Our own Corporate Plan for 2025–28, **Heritage For All**, shows our commitment to caring for these places and collections, making sure they are used well now and in the future, and that people can visit, enjoy, and benefit from them.

All of these strategic documents work together, guiding how we manage Scotland's heritage in a sustainable way and show how the historic environment can help drive positive change, including action on climate change.

# Value of the Properties and Collections

**We care for some of Scotland's most important historic places, objects, and records - over 300 sites, 43,000 objects, and 5 million archival records. These are valuable for Scotland's identity, society, economy and environment.**

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Our sites include everything from ancient standing stones in the Western Isles, to castles, cathedrals, abbeys, mills, and tower houses across the country. Many are in beautiful landscapes or at the heart of our oldest towns and cities. The story of how these places came under State Care is important, but not widely known.

We also look after important objects and everyday items linked to these places, such as the Orkney Venus (a Neolithic figurine) and the Honours of Scotland (the oldest crown jewels in the UK that are still in use today).

Our large archive helps us understand these places and their stories. Together, the sites, objects, and archives are more valuable than any one part alone. They help bring Scotland's history to life and are a rich resource for learning and engagement.

These places and collections tell Scotland's stories, matter to local people, attract visitors from around the world and support wellbeing, learning and nature. They are at the heart of this long-term strategy, helping to create positive change for people and places through new and sustainable ways of caring for them.



# Challenges and Opportunities

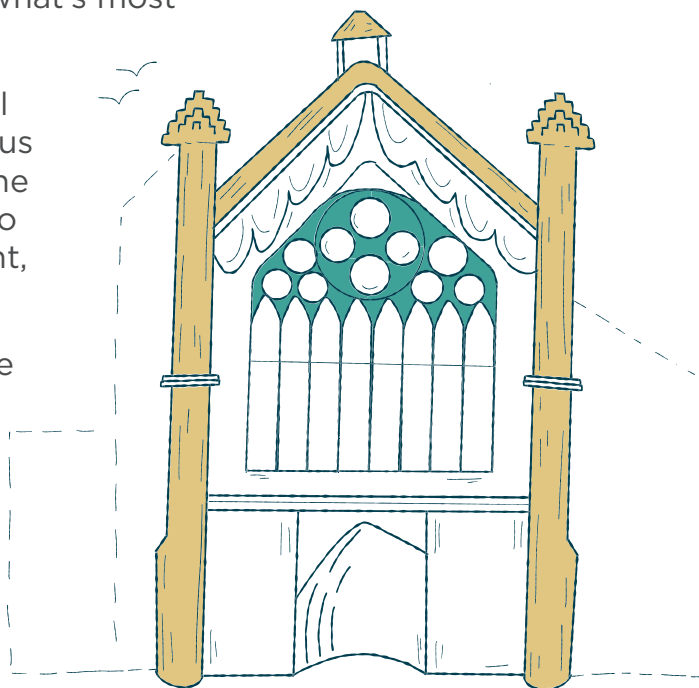
We face serious challenges in caring for the properties and collections. Climate change is speeding up decay, costs are rising and there is a shortage of skilled workers and traditional materials. Parts of some buildings are in poor condition and some sites are at risk from coastal erosion. At times, we have had to close sites for safety reasons.

We also need better storage and access to our collections and archives, and we must respond to changing visitor expectations.

Significant funding is required to keep our historic sites in good condition and carry out essential repairs. This is especially challenging where specialist traditional skills are required, as these are in short supply. Because we can't do everything at once, we have to make careful choices and focus on what's most important over the long term.

Despite these challenges, there are real opportunities. Challenging times push us to be creative and bold. We can lead the way in finding innovative approaches to conservation and heritage management, and support others to do the same.

We now have more flexibility in how we use our income. Instead of returning surplus funds to the Scottish Government, we can reinvest them directly into caring for the sites. As a charity, we can also raise more money through donations and partnerships.



## Our opportunities include:

- Embedding sustainable practices across our estate
- Leading innovation and supporting change in the heritage sector
- Using historic sites to train people in traditional skills
- Improving visitor experiences and access, including at free sites
- Strengthening partnerships and increasing fundraising
- Growing income and reinvesting it in conservation

Only a few sites generate enough income to support others, but free-to-enter sites are vital for accessibility. We aim to grow membership, retail and events to help fund our work, without compromising what makes these places special.

Sustainable management means meeting today's needs without harming the future. We will take a balanced approach that considers environmental, social, economic, and cultural value. This will guide our decisions and help us get the best long-term results from the places and collections we care for.

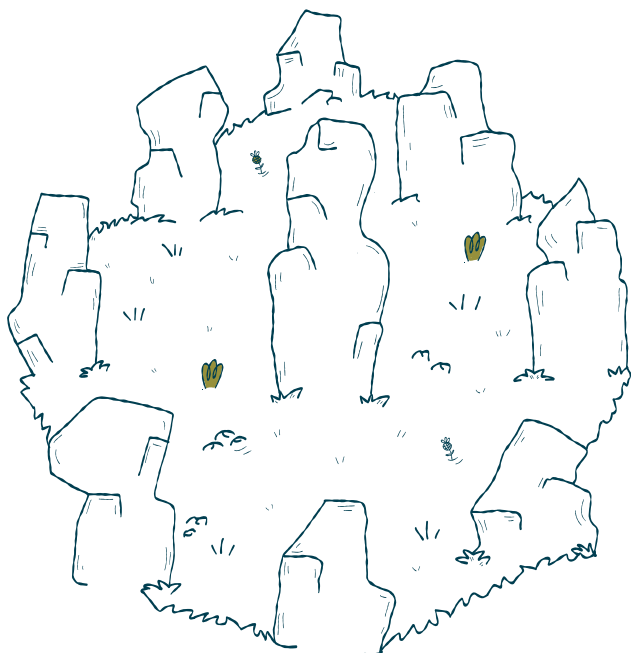
# Prioritisation

**Our core responsibilities are to keep people safe, protect the historic places and collections in our care, and make sure they are accessible to the public. These are the foundations of everything we do.**

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In the short term, we will focus on the sites and collections that are most at risk, where cultural significance is high and the chance of loss or damage is greatest. We will also protect and grow income from key sites, reinvesting that directly into the wider estate.

Looking ahead, our long-term priority is to care for the places and collections that have the greatest potential to make a positive difference to people and communities, and to ensure Scotland's most important heritage is protected for future generations.



# A New Stewardship Model

For over a century, State Care has meant preserving historic sites as found, with all sites seen as equally important. But we recognise that not all places and collections have the same cultural value or potential to benefit communities, the environment or the economy.

Today's challenges - climate change, rising costs and limited resources - mean we must take a more flexible and realistic approach. Change is part of heritage - buildings age, needs shift and new opportunities arise. Simply preserving everything exactly as it is, forever, is no longer always possible or appropriate.

Our new Stewardship Model focuses on sustainable management. This means:

- Balancing cultural, social, environmental and economic value
- Using historic places in ways that benefit people and communities
- Supporting training in traditional skills and improving visitor experiences
- Being open to adaptation, reuse, and restoration where appropriate
- Protecting the most culturally significant sites with traditional conservation methods

We will also explore new ways of managing sites, like collaborating with communities, testing new techniques and sharing responsibility with others. This includes reviewing which sites we care for directly, and where others might be better placed to take the lead in the future.

## The renewed purpose of State Care is:

- To manage historic places and collections in a way that benefits people, the economy, and the environment, while keeping cultural heritage at the heart of what we do

We will work with Scottish Ministers and other partners to review our portfolio, support others in caring for heritage and make sure the most important sites in Scotland are protected, whether by us or through new models of care.

Together, we aim to deliver Collective Stewardship - a shared effort to protect and make the most of Scotland's historic environment.



# Achieving Sustainable Stewardship

We aim to care for Scotland's historic places and collections in a way that benefits people now and in the future. This means making thoughtful, long-term decisions, working with others and adapting to changing needs and challenges. Our eight strategic objectives guide how we will do this.



## 1. Learn from the past to plan for the future

We will reflect on how sites came into State Care and how our approach has evolved, and needs to be shaped in for the future. This helps us make better decisions, especially in the face of climate change and changing public expectations.

### We will:

- Focus on long-term benefits
- Share the history of State Care in Scotland
- Review our portfolio and approach to climate change
- Promote shared responsibility for heritage

## 2. Protect what makes sites special

We will use research, data and innovation to understand and protect the cultural significance of our sites and collections.

### We will:

- Target research to guide conservation
- Use data, digital tools and expertise to manage risks
- Involve communities in research

### 3. Improve care and access to collections and archives

We will upgrade facilities, reconnect items to their original sites and make collections more accessible to the public.

**We will:**

- Build better storage and public access
- Link collections more closely to sites
- Use archives to enhance visitor experiences

### 4. Make sustainable decisions

We will consider cultural, social, environmental and economic value when planning investments and managing assets.

**We will:**

- Make decisions using a tool that helps us weigh different kinds of value - like cultural, social, environmental, and economic - so we can choose what brings the most benefit overall
- Balance benefits across sustainability goals
- Develop new income streams to support our work

### 5. Work together with communities

We will involve people in shaping plans and decisions, making heritage more inclusive and accessible.

**We will:**

- Be open and transparent
- Collaborate with communities and partners
- Build skills and confidence across our teams

## 6. Respond to climate change

We will adapt how we care for sites to make them more resilient, reduce carbon emissions and support biodiversity.

### **We will:**

- Make sites climate-ready
- Support Scotland's Net Zero goals
- Update conservation methods for long-term impact

## 7. Use sites to support skills, jobs and wellbeing

We will unlock the potential of our sites to support traditional skills, local economies and meaningful visitor experiences.

### **We will:**

- Train people in heritage skills and use traditional materials
- Support local wealth building
- Grow income responsibly and reinvest in the sites and collections

## 8. Plan clearly for every site

We will assess each site individually, set a clear direction, and be honest about what is possible, even if that means managing loss in rare cases.

### **We will:**

- Use evidence to guide decisions
- Create proportionate plans for each site
- Plan carefully for managing unavoidable loss

# What Success Looks Like

**This strategy is about making a positive, lasting difference. We will know we are successful if, over time:**



- Every site and collection we care for has a clear plan for its future
- Our decisions are open, based on evidence and expert advice and consider a wide range of values
- Local communities, employees, and partners help shape the future of our sites and collections
- We use our resources wisely, focusing on what matters most for long-term benefit
- Our sites and collections are used to train people in traditional skills and support the use of traditional materials
- We try new ways of managing sites, encourage community involvement and help local economies grow
- We adapt to climate change, build resilience, support biodiversity and reduce our carbon footprint
- Visitors have better experiences, with improved access and engagement, so everyone feels welcome
- We work together openly and creatively, empowering our staff to drive positive change



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