



Our Past, Our Future

The strategy for Scotland's
Historic Environment

**Baseline Refresh 2026
Summary Report**



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Baseline Refresh 2026 Summary Report

Purpose

This report provides a summary of the findings from the 2026 Baseline Refresh for *Our Past, Our Future* (OPOF): *Scotland's Strategy for the Historic Environment*.

The refresh assesses progress against the Strategy's nine Outcomes using the latest available evidence from national datasets, programme reporting, research, stakeholder engagement and sector monitoring.

It should be read alongside:

- **OPOF Baseline Refresh 2026 (detail)**
- **OPOF Midpoint Report 2026**
- **OPOF Delivery Plan 2026–2028**
- **OPOF Insights Report 2026**

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Scotland's historic environment is increasingly contributing to wider national priorities including climate action, community empowerment, regeneration, wellbeing and economic development.

Executive Summary

Three years into delivery of *Our Past, Our Future*, the evidence suggests positive progress across all nine Outcomes. Activity, investment and collaboration have increased across the sector, and there is growing evidence that the historic environment contributes to climate action, community empowerment, economic development and wellbeing. Progress is strongest in building the conditions for change through workforce development, community stewardship, partnerships and improved evidence. However, challenges remain around workforce capacity, organisational resilience, traditional building condition, inclusion and the consistent measurement of impact.

Evidence Overview 2026

Scotland's Historic Environment

- More than **55,000 protected heritage places** contribute to Scotland's identity, economy and environment
- Historic environment activity in 2024 contributed **£6.1 billion to Scotland's economy** and supports around **84,700 jobs**
- Traditional buildings form a significant part of Scotland's infrastructure, accounting for **33% of retail space, 24% of office space and 41% of public-sector space**
- Around **446,000 pre-1919 homes** remain in active use across Scotland in 2024
- Communities are increasingly important custodians of heritage, with **36% of community-owned assets identified as historic environment assets in 2024**
- **76,548** heritage volunteer hours were recorded annually in 2024, **91%** report improved wellbeing and **87%** report having a stronger connection to places in 2025
- The condition of traditional buildings remains a major resilience challenge, with **68% of pre-1919 homes experiencing critical disrepair** in 2024

Progress is strongest in:

- Building workforce skills and capacity
- Growing community stewardship of heritage assets
- Increasing heritage participation and engagement
- Strengthening climate awareness and adaptation planning
- Developing stronger partnerships and collaboration
- Building the evidence base for heritage wider impacts

Challenges remain around:

- Traditional building condition
- Workforce recruitment and succession planning
- Organisational resilience
- Inclusion and representation
- Unequal access to community ownership
- Consistent measurement of outcomes and impacts

The biggest opportunity

To embed heritage more fully within:

- climate action
- housing
- regeneration
- Community Wealth Building
- Place-based approaches
- wellbeing
- economic development



Priority 1: Delivering the Transition to Net Zero

Outcome 1: Reduced Emissions from the Historic Environment

Summary

The historic environment sector is strengthening its ability to understand, measure and manage emissions. Climate considerations are increasingly embedded in investment decisions, grant programmes and project delivery. While consistent evidence of sector-wide emissions reduction remains limited, the evidence base has improved substantially since 2024.

Key Statistics

- 97% of HES grant applications referenced climate change in 2025–26
- Reported emissions coverage increased from 13,656 tCO₂e in 2022–23 to 19,472 tCO₂e in 2024–25¹

What This Means

The sector is strengthening its capacity to support Scotland's transition to net zero and increasingly embedding climate considerations in the management of historic assets. Reported emissions have risen, largely due to improved carbon accounting and the inclusion of additional Scope 3 sources, giving a more complete picture of environmental impact rather than indicating increased emissions activity.

¹ Reported increases associated with the inclusion of additional Scope 3 emissions categories, particularly employee commuting, homeworking, electricity transmission and distribution losses, hotel stays and, most recently, estimated procurement emissions. Scope 3 includes all other indirect emissions that occur in the upstream and downstream activities of an organisation ([Carbon Trust](#)).

Outcome 2: The Historic Environment is More Climate Resilient

Summary

Climate resilience planning and adaptation activity are increasing across Scotland's historic environment. However, evidence shows that traditional buildings remain disproportionately vulnerable to climate-related deterioration and disrepair.

Key Statistics

- Around 446,000 pre-1919 dwellings remain in active use in 2024
- 68% of pre-1919 dwellings experience critical disrepair in 2024
- Urgent disrepair increased from 27% to 32% between 2022 and 2024 for pre-1919 dwellings
- Combined critical and urgent disrepair of pre-1919 dwellings amount to 37% in 2024 compared to 32% in 2022
- 100% of Historic Environment Scotland capital repair grants incorporated climate adaptation measures in both 2024–25 and 2025–26

What This Means

Maintaining, adapting and reusing traditional buildings is increasingly a climate resilience issue as well as a heritage issue.

Outcome 3: Improved Pathways for Historic Environment Skills

Summary

Skills investment, careers promotion and workforce engagement have increased since the 2024 Baseline. However, recruitment challenges and specialist skills shortages continue to affect the sector.

Key Statistics

- Over 7,000 people took part in careers awareness activities in 2025-26 which is 163% increase from 2024-25
- 79% of employers surveyed in 2025 noted they are facing skills or knowledge gaps
- 6,766 work-based learning opportunities taken up in 2025-26, a 4.3% increase from 2024-25
- A minimum of 2,600 people engaged with Heritage Careers Week, showing an increase of 51% from last year

What This Means

Workforce shortages remain one of the greatest barriers to delivering conservation, retrofit, regeneration and climate ambitions.



Priority 2: Empowering Resilient and Inclusive Communities and Places

Outcome 4: Organisations Have the Right Skills and Are More Resilient

Summary

Investment in organisational resilience within the sector, workforce development and volunteering has increased. This investment mainly comes from Historic Environment Scotland, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Museums Galleries Scotland and the Scottish Government. Financial and workforce pressures remain a significant challenge for many organisations.

Key Statistics

Within the sector:

- In 2025-26 the culture and heritage sector invested £25.5 million across 119 skills projects. 14.7% increase from funding for skills projects from 2024-25
- Skills project numbers increased by 56.5% between 2024-25 and 2025-26
- In 2025, 93% of volunteer-involving organisations supported volunteer skills development

What This Means

The sector is investing in the people, skills and leadership required to sustain Scotland's historic environment. Ongoing and expanded investment and partnership is still needed.

Outcome 5: Communities Have More Opportunities to Participate in Decision-Making

Summary

Community ownership and stewardship continues to grow, and communities are playing an increasingly important role in caring for Scotland's historic environment.

Key Statistics

- Community ownership increased from 84 assets in 2000 to 853 assets in 2024
- 307 community-owned assets are historic environment assets in 2024
- 36% of all community-owned assets are historic environment assets in 2024
- The most deprived communities own only 6% of community-owned assets as of 2024
- An estimated 7,728 volunteers contributed 35,742 hours through Doors Open Days in 2025

What This Means

Communities are now major custodians of Scotland's historic environment, but access to ownership and stewardship remains uneven. Additionally, baseline evidence of communities' active involvement in decision-making remains limited, making it difficult to assess the extent to which communities can influence how Scotland's historic environment is managed and developed.

Outcome 6: The Historic Environment is More Diverse and Inclusive

Summary

Participation and inclusion initiatives continue to expand, supported by dedicated programmes and partnerships. Progress is evident, but representation gaps remain.

Key Statistics

- More than 100 organisations engaged with Museums Galleries Scotland's Delivering Change programme
- Heritage participation increased across a range of demographic groups in 2023 including disabled people and those identifying as LGBTQIA+ (Scottish Household Survey (SHS), 2024)
- Visits to historic places increased from 29% to 33% between 2022 and 2023 (SHS, 2024)

What This Means

The sector is broadening participation through targeted inclusion activity and is seeing increased engagement from some underrepresented groups. However, persistent inequalities in participation and representation mean further action is needed to ensure Scotland's historic environment is accessible and relevant to all communities.



Priority 3: Building a Wellbeing Economy

Outcome 7: A Responsible Contribution to Scotland's Economy

Summary

Evidence continues to demonstrate the contribution of heritage to regeneration, investment, tourism, Community Wealth Building and local economic development.

Key Statistics

- The historic environment contributed £6.1 billion to Scotland's economy and supported around 84,700 jobs in 2024, demonstrating its role as economic infrastructure rather than solely a cultural asset
- Every £1 invested through HES grants attracted £5.94 of additional investment in 2025
- This leverage rate increased by 52% since the previous Baseline
- Between 2023 and 2024, the total direct economic impact of the historic environment increased by 2%, while the number of jobs supported grew by 4%

What This Means

The historic environment acts as economic infrastructure, attracting investment and supporting long-term regeneration.

Outcome 8: The Historic Environment Provides Fair Work

Summary

Awareness of Fair Work continues to improve, but workforce sustainability and skills shortages remain significant concerns.

Key Statistics

- 79% of employers identified as operating in line with Fair Work principles in 2025
- Investment in workforce development remains limited, with 32% of organisations allocating less than 5% of their budget to training in 2025
- Workforce shortages continue to affect recruitment and retention

What This Means

Fair Work and workforce sustainability remain critical to the long-term resilience of the sector.

Outcome 9: Increased Engagement with a Focus on Enhancing Wellbeing

Summary

The evidence increasingly demonstrates the contribution heritage makes to wellbeing, learning, social connection and volunteering.

Key Statistics

- 91% of heritage volunteers report improved wellbeing in 2025
- 87% report a stronger connection to place in 2025
- 71% of Scottish Household Survey respondents report happiness and enjoyment through participation in 2023
- 24% of Scottish Household Survey respondents state that cultural activities make them think and open their minds to other opinions, perspectives and cultures in 2023
- 76,548 heritage volunteer hours were recorded annually in 2024. This figure is understood to be significantly higher as 43% of organisations do not formally record volunteer hours and many smaller volunteer-led groups are not captured in sector-wide datasets
- Based on the recorded hours, heritage volunteer's contributions generate an estimated £1.35 million in annual value and approximately 50 FTE posts

What This Means

The historic environment contributes significant social value alongside cultural and economic benefits.

Looking Ahead to 2028

The evidence suggests that achieving greater impact by 2028 will require:

- **A larger, more diverse and better-skilled workforce capable of supporting conservation, retrofit, regeneration and climate adaptation**
- **Greater resilience of Scotland's traditional buildings through increased investment in maintenance, repair and climate adaptation**
- **More inclusive participation and leadership, ensuring the benefits of heritage are shared more equitably across Scotland's communities**
- **Stronger and more sustainable community stewardship of historic assets and places**
- **A shared approach to outcome measurement and impact reporting across the historic environment sector**
- **Greater recognition of heritage as a contributor to climate action, economic development, Community Wealth Building, wellbeing and place-based regeneration**
- **Continued collaboration between government, funders, public bodies, communities and heritage organisations to achieve impact at scale**

The 2026 Baseline Refresh provides a shared evidence base for the next phase of *Our Past, Our Future*. The findings will be taken forward through the OPOF Delivery Plan 2026–2028, with the OPOF Steering Group working alongside sector and adjacent partners to coordinate action, strengthen evidence, improve outcome measurement and support delivery of the Strategy's ambitions to 2028.



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