



Our Past, Our Future

The Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment

Annual Report 2024/2025

Ar n-Àm a dh'Fhalbh, Ar n-Àm ri Teachd

An Ro-innleachd airson Àrainneachd Eachdraidheil na h-Alba

Aithisg Bhliadhnail 2024/2025

Our Past Year

Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) is the Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment for the period 2023–2028. It outlines our collective mission to sustain and enhance the benefits of the historic environment, for Scotland's people and communities now and into the future.

This report provides an overview of activities towards achieving this mission from the second year of delivery.

Year Two has focussed on finalising the delivery and evaluation framework for the strategy, alongside targeting support for development needs areas and transitioning legacy work from the previous strategy, Our Place in Time (OPiT).

This has included preparatory activity, particularly linked to the development of a Route Map to Net Zero, reviewing community heritage support strategies, and scoping the role of heritage within place-making, all of which will be built on in Year Three of delivery. Furthermore, there has also been a focus on addressing gaps in knowledge or activities towards sectoral priorities identified in the 2024 [Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment](#) (SIP), and through the [Make Your Mark](#) in volunteering (MYM) campaign. Engagement with, and investments made by, major funders, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), and Historic Environment Scotland (HES), have been critical as OPOF has no dedicated funding stream and relies on sector-wide collaboration to drive change and outcomes.

Recent efforts have focused on strengthening the evidence base of the strategy and better demonstrating sector impact. In September 2024 two key publications supported this: the [OPOF Summary Baseline Report](#), which outlines current sector performance against strategic priorities, and [Scotland's Historic Environment Audit \(SHEA\)](#), which offers ongoing data on heritage assets and their development over time.

The second year of strategy delivery concluded at [Scotland's Historic Environment Forum \(SHEF\) 2025](#), where leaders and policymakers explored actions aligned with national priorities. Calls to action from the event were shared with the National Strategy Steering Group, which will guide delivery efforts over the final three years of the OPOF strategy.





Priority 1 – Delivering the transition to net zero

Prìomhachas 1 – A’ comasachadh an eadar-ghlusaigh gu cothromachadh-carboin

Delivering the transition to net zero is about ensuring that the historic environment can meaningfully contribute to Scotland’s target to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045.

In 2024/2025, key activities towards achieving this priority included:

- > National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) funding was secured for Scotland’s Centre of Excellence for Canals & Traditional Skills, delivered in partnership by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and Scottish Canals
- > HES, with funding from UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), announced plans for a dedicated [national centre for the retrofit of traditional buildings \(Retrofit Lab\)](#)
- > The [publication of a VAT report on repair and maintenance from Historic Houses](#) proposed a targeted rebate scheme to reduce effective VAT rates on the repair and maintenance of listed buildings. [Built Environment Forum Scotland \(BEFS\)](#) held a workshop to discuss a report commissioned by HES and published in May 2024, which looked specifically at whether a VAT rebate would help repair Scotland’s historic buildings
- > A Visitor Travel Emissions knowledge sharing workshop resulted in the set-up of working groups to progress methods for visitor emission data capture and to investigate funding sources
- > Publication of the [Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment \(SIP\) Year One Report](#) included a focus area on ‘Skills to address the Climate Crisis’ across ten historic environment work areas
- > Active contributions by BEFS and others to national policy, including the [Climate Change Targets Bill](#), the [Rural Delivery Plan](#) and the [committee to explore industrial change in Scotland](#)
- > Guidance was published on [retrofitting historic sash & case windows](#) by the University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh World Heritage
- > [Archaeology Scotland](#) completed their [Energy Through Time](#) project which applied an archaeological approach to sustainability and climate action, and coincided with the launch of their Centre for Archaeological Learning at Newbattle Abbey
- > The launch of the [Scottish National Adaption Plan 3 \(SNAP3\)](#) included new reporting requirements for traditional buildings and the historic environment
- > A [handbook](#) from HES, Cadw and Historic England was published to support learners undertaking retrofit qualifications
- > The first Heritage Careers Week was held, to raise awareness of the variety of heritage careers and pathways into the workforce, and inspire young people to consider a career in the historic environment.

Looking forward key actions will include:

- > Convening lead stakeholders and supporters to build on the seven strategic action pillars identified for the Route Map to Net Zero (Advice & Guidance, Training & Skills, Energy Efficiency & Retrofit, Adaption, Data & Evidence, Investment, Advocacy)
- > Co-ordinating the data and support required for reporting to Scotland’s National Adaption Plan
- > Producing targeted climate resilience and adaption guidance
- > Influencing investment streams from 2026 onwards
- > Developing a research methodology and expanded metrics to assess the condition and impact of Scotland’s pre-1919 building stock
- > Supporting activity to deliver a Sustainable Traditional Skills System and focus areas for ‘Green Skills’.



In focus: Keep Scotland Beautiful’s Our Heritage, Our Future programme

[Keep Scotland Beautiful](#), the charity which aims to inspire changes in behaviour to improve the environment, the quality of people’s lives, wellbeing and the places that they care for across Scotland, received funding in November 2024 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, with co-funding from Historic Environment Scotland, to deliver the [Our Heritage, Our Future](#) programme. This project supports communities to explore, record and protect their heritage by supporting the development of bespoke Community Heritage Climate Action Plans, providing cultural heritage skills development and accreditation, delivering climate awareness raising with a focus on risks to heritage, and developing a heritage topic for Eco-Schools Scotland.

In addition, Keep Scotland Beautiful continued to deliver Carbon Literacy training this year, which helps organisations to gain an awareness of the causes and impacts of climate change and an understanding of their carbon emissions, including bespoke training for the heritage sector.

In focus: Getting Net Zero ready at Rosslyn Castle

In October 2024, the East Range of [Rosslyn Castle](#) re-opened for holiday let bookings after extensive restoration and repair work undertaken and funded by Rosslyn Chapel Trust. The work included the installation of six air source heat pumps located in the sixteenth century, underground vaults. Combined with the installation of new heat emitters and low-embodied carbon insulation, which included the re-use of stone recovered from around the site, it is estimated that the building's heat and hot water energy consumption has decreased by 67%, saving over 17 tonnes of CO2 per annum.

The work was part of a project to add a permanent roof over the site's Great Hall and Tower, incorporating surviving historic masonry into the design, and protecting carvings and the historic sub-terranean vaults.

Historic Environment Scotland saw a

24%

reduction in emissions (energy, business travel, waster and water) in 2024-2025 against 2018-2019's baseline.

(Source: Historic Environment Scotland)



Priority 2 – Empowering resilient and inclusive communities and places

Prìomhachas 2 – A' cumhachdachadh coimhearsnachdan is àitchean a tha daingneachd agus in-ghabhalach

Empowering resilient and inclusive communities and places is about enabling the conditions which will put people and communities at the heart of Scotland's historic environment.

In 2024/2025, key activities towards achieving this priority included:

- > The publication of the [Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment \(SIP\) Year One Report](#), including underpinning datasets and plans for each of the ten historic environment workforce areas across eleven areas of skills focus
- > Inception of a new research project developed by OPOF, MYM and Volunteer Scotland to update the 2016 [Volunteering and the Historic Environment survey](#) and better understand and support heritage volunteering in Scotland
- > 10 of the 12 planned roadshows in [Scottish Community Heritage Alliance](#) (SCHA)'s Grassroots project, helped to identify the key issues and support needs for community heritage in Scotland
- > [Scotland's Community Heritage Conversations](#) (SCHC) 2024 event, coordinated by [Chartered Institute for Archaeologists](#), [Scottish Council on Archives](#), HES and Archaeology Scotland focused on connecting and creating capacity, and celebrating grassroots community heritage with a final session dedicated to OPOF future work
- > The launch of [Trove.scot](#) centralising HES's digital collections into a more discoverable and accessible public platform
- > The UK [Heritage Network](#)'s conference was held in Dunfermline in 2024, showcasing a variety of community-involving heritage projects in Scotland
- > [Museums Galleries Scotland](#) launched their [Resilient Heritage Business Modules](#), supporting organisations within the cultural heritage sector on their journey towards sustainable growth and inclusive, effective governance
- > [Scotland's Archaeology Month](#) (SAM)'s theme in 2024 was 'Routes, Connections and Pathways' and saw over 300 events take place from Orkney to Dumfries & Galloway
- > The content for regional archaeological research frameworks for South East Scotland and Scotland's Islands' was finalised. These are frameworks four and five of nine planned [regional frameworks](#).

The Scottish Household Survey, published in 2024, showed a

23%

increase in engagement with historic places and events in 2023 compared to 2022.

(Source: [Scottish Household Survey](#))

Looking forward some key actions will include:

- > Convening an expert round-table to explore current Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work in Scotland's historic environment and discuss opportunities to sustain and embed current activities, build stronger support networks and improve collective data and evidence
- > Scoping the next phase of community heritage advice needs and support plans to identify and build capacity, where possible
- > Supporting HES' Talking About Heritage project to understand what matters to people in Scotland about the historic environment, prior to the update of Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) 2026-2028
- > Analysing and publishing the results of the heritage volunteering survey, with a particular focus on evidencing the future skills of volunteers
- > Utilising the data gathered by the Skills Investment Plan Employee Survey to enhance support for targeted skills.

In focus: Co-designing taster sessions to promote engagement with the historic environment

In 2024 and 2025, the [Make Your Mark](#) (MYM) in Volunteering campaign supported three organisations to co-design a volunteer taster session with a marginalised or underrepresented group in their local area. The taster sessions were designed to provide an informal, relaxed and supported way for people to learn more about volunteering with a heritage organisation.

The first taster session, held in summer 2024, was hosted by [Archaeology Scotland](#) and [Scottish Refugee Council](#). The two groups first attended a co-design workshop, which shaped a taster session at Camphill Enclosure Site in Glasgow's Queen Park. The group carried out a hands-on archaeological survey with feedback noting that the session made participants feel more confident and connected to their local place. One participant noted that the 'event was beneficial for my wellbeing and general knowledge about the history of the place I'm living in now' while another 'felt that I had touched something monumental, ancient and historically important.'



In focus: Cross-sector support for finding futures for former places of worship

Building upon significant activity in previous years, 2024-2025 has seen activity across the sector to find futures for current and former places of worship. The sector continues to offer support and advice to communities taking on former places of worship through established organisations and networks, including [National Churches Trust](#), [Scotland's Churches Trust](#) and [BEFS Places of Worship Forum](#). There have also been new initiatives such as [Development Trusts Association Scotland's \(DTAS\) Community Ownership Support Scheme's \(COSS\) New Futures: Former Places of Worship](#) programme, which is designed to provide advice to communities considering bringing a church into community ownership, and the [Research in Action on Church Heritage](#) project delivered by the [Society of Antiquaries of Scotland](#) in partnership with Scotland's Churches Trust. Funders, such as the NLHF and [Architectural Heritage Fund](#), have also recognised places of worship as a priority for funding.

A national conference on 'Building Sustainable Futures for Scottish Churches' was held in Paisley Abbey in November 2024 and hosted by National Churches Trust, HES, Scotland's Churches Trust and Historic Churches Scotland. The event brought together around 300 attendees to hear from a wide range of speakers and engage with funders and organisations offering support and advice. This year has also seen regional events offering places for discussion and collaboration, such as the 'Future for North East Scotland's Church Heritage' conference, delivered by [Aberdeen City Heritage Trust](#), topic specific discussions, such as those facilitated by Heritage Network and Historic Churches Scotland as part of their [ongoing event series](#), or platforms for discussion such as the [DTAS Debates](#) held in April 2025 which focused on the role of development trusts in taking on former places of worship.





Priority 3 – Building a wellbeing economy

Prìomhachas 3 – Togail eaconamaidh maitheis

Building a wellbeing economy is about deepening our understanding of how our historic environment can allow current and future generations to live well and help our local places to thrive.

In 2024/2025, key activities towards achieving this priority included:

- > The publication of [Scotland's Historic Environment Audit \(SHEA\) 2024](#), providing valuable insight into the evolution of the historic environment sector and strong baseline evidence on economic impact and engagement levels
- > The launch of [Making Sense of Scotland](#), HES's outreach and learning framework, designed to forge deeper connections between Scotland's heritage and its people
- > Contributions by BEFS, HES and others to the call for views on the [Community Wealth Building Bill](#)
- > Convening a Short Life Working Group with [Visit Scotland](#), regional economic agencies, local authorities, NLHF, MGS, HES, [Creative Scotland](#) and the Scottish Government to explore how to better articulate and advocate for the role of heritage in place making activity, and provide input for the development of a road-map for future activity
- > Cross-sector capacity building events on the role of heritage in regeneration by the Heritage Network, who delivered a heritage-led High Street Regeneration conference, and [Scotland's Towns Partnership](#) who worked with HES to explore the heritage lens with their Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) group, and whose 2024 conference discussed the role of cultural and heritage assets to provide economic and wider social benefits for

sustainable towns for the future.

- > Contributions by HES to Local Authorities Local Development Plan Evidence Reports to ensure key information for historic assets and places is identified and fed into the development of plans.

Looking forward some key actions will include:

- > Supporting the establishment of a Heritage and Place Investment Group and the creation of a road-map to influence activity beyond the sector
- > Engaging lead stakeholders to progress targeted social impact research
- > Promoting new initiatives to tackle multiple deprivation, including new focused social inequality and Scottish Index Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) targeted funding programme by HES and the Architectural Heritage Fund
- > Publishing SGS AH funded research conducted by HES-hosted intern from the University of Strathclyde to consider the role of the historic environment in community wealth building and local procurement
- > Developing the methodology and research to scope understanding and implementation of the Scottish Government's Fair Work agenda across the historic environment sector
- > Monitoring the interest and support for a new Historic Environment Sector Scotland Mapping dataset to inform and influence sector needs.

In focus: Wellbeing Through Heritage in Dunfermline and West Fife

The Dunfermline and West Fife [Wellbeing Through Heritage](#) project has highlighted the role heritage can play in delivering the NHS's steps to mental wellbeing. The project structured a programme of events and resources around the five steps (Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give) – over 70 different events were advertised during the course of the programme, and a Wellbeing Toolkit was developed for people to download. The project also sign-posted to a wide range of local heritage organisations that individuals could engage with such as linking to volunteering opportunities at Culross Palace, encouraging people to follow in the footsteps of medieval pilgrims on the Fife Pilgrim Way, or even to engage with the Tombstones and Tales community group, to share research about gravestones at Dunfermline Abbey.

In focus: National Trust for Scotland partnership with Scotland Loves Local

In 2024, the [National Trust for Scotland](#) announced that [Scotland Loves Local](#) gift cards would be accepted in 47 of their places across Scotland, for spend in shops, cafes and for admission to properties.

Scotland Loves Local is a campaign to encourage people to think locally to support communities to thrive. Gift cards were introduced in 2021 and can only be used in participating organisations in the region in which they are branded. This encourages spend within a localised area.

With many of their retail lines, National Trust for Scotland works with local and independent suppliers, and spend therefore supports local artisans. The partnership also encourages local residents to explore the heritage in their area. In turn, profits from sales at National Trust for Scotland properties supports the conservation work of the organisation.

There was a 2% increase in total impacts (including supply chain multipliers) of heritage on Scotland's economy from 2023 to 2024 to

£6.1 billion

(Source: HES calculation from [Office for National Statistics](#) data)



The Priorities and Outcomes of Our Past, Our Future are:



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

Next Steps

In Year Three, we will continue to focus on establishing leadership, enhancing collaboration and identifying stakeholders and resources to support our strategic pillars.

To do this we will take the following steps:

- > Reshaping Scotland's Historic Environment Forum 2026 to facilitate increased opportunities for collaboration and consultation across a wider range of organisations and sectors on key topics linked to OPOF priorities
- > Producing a mid-point review of OPOF and progress against its outcomes, in the form of an evaluation report against the baseline
- > Strengthening the strategic leadership role of the OPOF Steering Group, utilising its expertise to respond to the mid-point review and prioritise action
- > Continuing to advocate for cross-sector collaboration to share and align data, to include the convening of a data and evidence workshop for key stakeholders
- > Providing support or collaborating with current sector groups and convening short-term advisory groups, where still required, to target gaps and drive implementation
- > Celebrating and promoting OPOF, and sector activities undertaken to deliver against priorities, across the sector and to adjacent sectors
- > Working with the main sector funders to acknowledge priorities for investment still remaining in OPOF and towards a more sustainable sector.





HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

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