

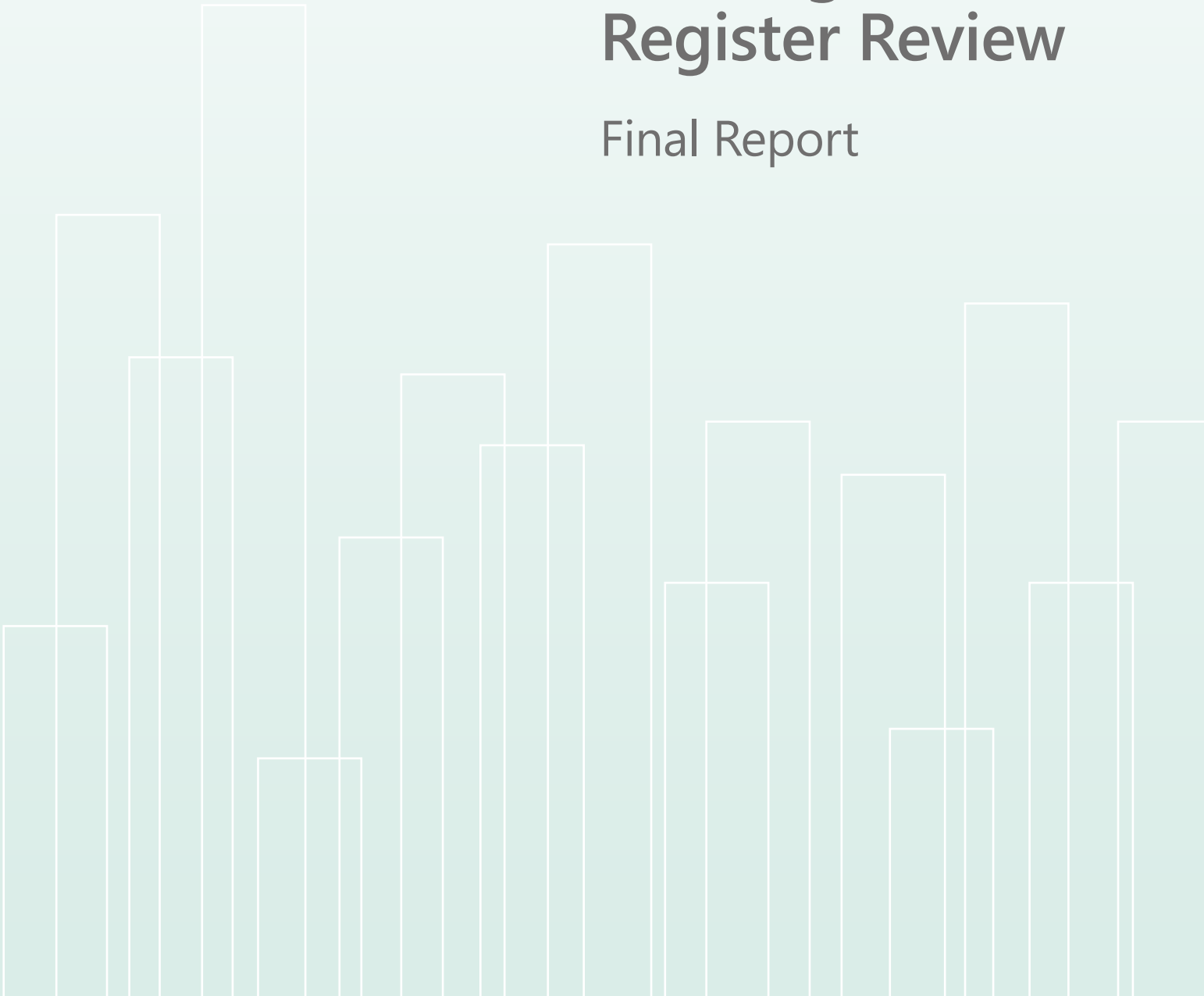


**HARLOW**  
CONSULTING



# Buildings at Risk Register Review

Final Report



March 2024

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## Acknowledgements

Harlow Consulting would like to thank Philip Robertson and the other members of the HES project reference group, Steven Grieve, Ann MacSween, Simon Stronach and Elizabeth McCrone, for their support and guidance; the many other HES staff who contributed to the internal BARR workshop, reviewed and corrected draft text and provided information and documentation; and Isabel Fry and Monica Warwick in the BARR team, for their patience and generosity with information, insight and ideas. We are also very grateful to the many people who spared their valuable time for stakeholder and depth interviews and for completing the survey. Particular thanks are due to Scott Handley, of the Handley Partnership, for sharing information and generously providing images from the Welsh listed building condition and use survey; and to Peter Jenkins and the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust for providing information about and images of their buildings at risk app.

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## Acronyms

**BAR** – Building(s) at risk

**BARR** – Buildings at Risk Register

**BEFS** – Built Environment Forum Scotland

**CARS** – Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme

**FTE** – Full-time equivalent

**HAA** – Historic Asset Assessment

**HARNI** – Heritage at Risk Northern Ireland

**HARR** – Heritage at Risk Register (Historic England)

**HE** – Historic England

**HES** – Historic Environment Scotland

**HS** – Historic Scotland

**LA** – Local authority

**LBC** – Listed building consent

**NLHF** – National Lottery Heritage Fund

**NPA** – National Park Authority

**NPF** – National Performance Indicator

**NPF4** – National Planning Framework 4

**PCAS** – Planning, Consents and Advice Service  
(Historic Environment Scotland)

**RCAHMS** – Royal Commission on the Ancient and  
Historical Monuments of Scotland

**SAVE** – SAVE Britain's Heritage

**SCT** – Scottish Civic Trust

**SHEA** – Scotland's Historic Environment Audit

**SIMD** – Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

**SNP** – Scottish National Party

**SPAB** – Society for the Protection of Ancient  
Buildings

**SVDSL** – Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey

**UAH** – Ulster Architectural Heritage

**WMHBT** – West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust

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# Executive Summary

## Background, aims and objectives

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) has commissioned Harlow Consulting to undertake a review of the Buildings at Risk Register (BARR).

The BARR began in 1990 in response to concern at the growing number of listed buildings and buildings in Conservation Areas that were vacant and had fallen into a state of disrepair. The BARR provides information on properties of architectural or historic merit throughout Scotland that are considered to be 'at risk'.

Since 2015, the BARR has been run as an in-house service within HES. In 2023, National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) included policies for bringing buildings at risk back into beneficial use.

The primary aims of this review are to:

- A** Report on the **impact of the BARR in bringing buildings back into use**, and
- B** Make **evidence-based recommendations** that will inform long-term decisions about the resource.

The research employed a mixed methods approach involving scoping interviews with major heritage organisations; a user survey; in-depth interviews; engagement with HES staff; desk-based research and analysis of BARR and planning data.

## Main findings

### Who uses the BARR?

**The majority of BARR users are from the heritage sector** – 82% of surveyed BARR users say they have a 'professional interest' in the historic environment.

**Users outside of the heritage sector represent a small proportion** (18%) of surveyed BARR users.

However, feedback from the BARR team together with Google Analytics data suggest that the **level of public engagement with the BARR may be higher than these findings suggest**.

### Why are users using the BARR?

89% of surveyed BARR users say the **main reason for using the BARR is seeking information about an individual building at risk**.

Users tend to access the BARR to **obtain information about buildings at risk in which they have a pre-existing interest**. Very few users use BARR to search for potential buildings to purchase, or to market buildings.

A **lack of up-to-date information** is one of the principal challenge areas of the BARR.

### To what extent is the BARR a factor in securing restoration and reuse?

**There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate empirically that the BARR has a significant impact in bringing buildings back into use.**

For a variety of reasons, there is a **lack of up-to-date information** about buildings on the BARR: only half of all 'at risk' buildings on the BARR have been updated in the past five years. BARR data is also **incomplete**. Only half (53%) of demolitions recorded in LBCs are captured by the BARR, suggesting that many buildings at high risk of loss are not being captured.

This situation limits the extent to which the BARR can be used to give an accurate picture of the number and condition of buildings at risk in Scotland. **The BARR therefore has arguable value as an information source about individual buildings, rather than as a dataset with which to measure trends in the historic environment.**

Many BARR users feel that the BARR has some positive impact on bringing buildings back into use. However, many are also uncertain.

### What information is useful in helping to secure outcomes?

Most BARR users consider the information available on the BARR to be the most important aspect of the register: Over two thirds of BARR users consider **descriptions of buildings** (68%), **information about a building's development / planning history** (67%) and **photographs** (69%) to be very important.

BARR users also consider information about **building ownership** (including details of owners) and **building availability** (including whether the building is for sale) to be particularly important aspects of the register.

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Much of the information available through BARR is also available through other sources.

## Does the BARR influence funding decisions?

Evidence suggests that the **inclusion of a building on the BARR has a positive impact on the outcomes of grant funding applications.**

Analysis of HES grant funding data shows that **applications involving buildings on the BARR, while much lower in number, have a higher success rate.** Evidence from discussions with grant giving bodies also supports the conclusion that grant funding applications generally carry more weight if they relate to a building on the BARR.

## Does the BARR influence planning decisions?

Evidence from interviews with local authority (LA) respondents suggests that the **BARR is likely to have some, albeit variable, influence over local authority [LA] actions.** However, the extent to which the BARR acts as a factor in LA actions is very difficult to quantify, as it is just one factor among many when making decisions.

## Does the BARR deliver other benefits?

The inclusion of a building on the BARR helps to **raise the public profile of individual buildings,** especially where it is reported in the press. This, in turn, can spur other actions. Labelling of a building as 'at risk' on a national register can galvanise communities behind redevelopment projects or, in some cases, induce LAs to take action. However, the study found little evidence to show this happening in practice.

Qualitative evidence also suggests that the BARR is sometimes used as a research tool, and as a resource to support a range of LA work (for example, helping LAs to decide areas for CARS projects).

## Learning from other registers

While this review identified several UK registers with different scopes and approaches, the review identified **no compelling empirical evidence to demonstrate that the national registers alone contribute significantly, in themselves, to bringing buildings back into use.**

■ **Cadw's listed building condition and use survey** is not conceived primarily as a tool for promoting restoration and reuse. However, it provides information on the state of all listed buildings in Wales.

■ **Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register** is not in and of itself a direct tool for promoting restoration and reuse; qualitative evidence suggests that the principal strength of HE's approach is in its holistic approach to the management of buildings at risk.

■ **The Heritage at Risk Northern Ireland [HARNI] Register** – similar in scope to the BARR.

Those registers that are primarily intended to promote restoration and reuse are those operated by independent amenity societies and heritage campaigning organisations. They can be effective by prioritising engaging narratives and impactful imagery to attract media and public interest but the degree of advocacy implied by this kind of register may sit uneasily with the objective and neutral approach expected of HES.

## Conclusions

**There is no clear evidence that the BARR is currently fulfilling any of its identified key purposes effectively.**

- It is not sufficiently clear, engaging, attractive, searchable to be an effective tool for restoring purchasers or for securing publicity for buildings at risk.
- It is not a robust dataset. It is neither comprehensive, nor current, nor representative.
- There is no clear evidence of beneficial impacts for restoration and reuse of buildings at risk.

The main underlying problems are:

- **Unrealistic scope:** the range of in-scope buildings is such that it would be practically impossible to maintain a fully representative, up-to-date list.
- **Lack of a consistent methodology for inclusion and exclusion:** nominations from public and local authorities combined with area survey mean constant ad hoc modification.
- **Duplication of purpose:** the most highly valued aspects are planning histories, which are now better researched via Public Access planning portals and online newspaper / magazine content.

■ **Competing purposes:** the BARR as data source and BARR as a tool for restoration and reuse imply different formats, approaches, and levels of coverage.

The issues with currency and completeness, duplication with other readily available data sources, and the narrowness of the regular user base suggest a need for careful consideration of the future of the BARR.

## Options for consideration

The report identifies options along with potential benefits and risks. Some of these options could be combined or be implemented sequentially or in parallel, potentially as part of a larger, longer-term strategy for Scotland's vulnerable and at-risk heritage. The options are:

- 1 **To discontinue the BARR** and redirect resource to other aspects of managing the historic environment, potentially with a focus on buildings at risk.
- 2 **To maintain the BARR in its existing form.**
- 3 **To undertake targeted modification of the existing BARR to enhance its basic functions** – changes could refine its scope and improve its content and functionality.
- 4 **To redesign or replace the BARR** to enable a more single-minded focus on a single key purpose:
  - A **securing interest and engagement from potential restoring purchasers; or**
  - B **providing a robust and consistent dataset of information on the condition of Scotland's listed buildings.**

In considering the way forward HES will need to consider its statutory responsibilities in the context of increased pressure on public funding, This may entail making difficult choices about where and how resources can be deployed to yield the greatest benefit, in terms of both the conservation of cultural heritage and wider socio-economic and environmental considerations.

# Introduction



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Project background, aims and objectives

The Buildings at Risk Register (BARR) was set up in 1990 in response to a concern at the growing number of listed buildings and buildings in Conservation Areas that were vacant and had fallen into a state of disrepair. The Register was first developed by the Scottish Civic Trust with funding from Historic Scotland. It is now maintained by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and provides information on properties of architectural or historic interest throughout the country that are considered to be at risk. The BARR website states that there are currently (January 2024) 2,219 buildings on the register.<sup>1</sup>

A Building at Risk is usually a listed building, or an unlisted building within a conservation area, that meets one or more of the following criteria:

- vacant with no identified new use;
- suffering from neglect and/or poor maintenance;
- suffering from structural problems;
- fire damaged;
- unsecured and open to the elements;
- threatened with demolition.

Evidence gathered through earlier consultations suggests that the BARR is not performing as effectively as it could be. In 2014, the Built Environment Forum of Scotland (BEFS) held a workshop of key stakeholders to explore the uses and future potential of the BARR. The workshop was held in anticipation of the BARR becoming an 'in-house' service within HES, following the merger of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) with Historic Scotland. Stakeholders spoke positively about the accessibility and neutrality of the BARR, but they also identified areas where the BARR could be improved, especially in relation to:

- Inconsistent coverage across local authority areas, and the perception that inclusion on the register is not itself a solution. One respondent noted that they struggled to see the value of a database that has '*no proactive application*'.

- Limited prioritisation of buildings on the register. Prioritisation was considered fundamental in directing public resources and it was felt that local authorities needed to take the lead on prioritisation, undertaking a '*prioritisation analysis*' of buildings on the register.

It was agreed by stakeholders at the workshop that 'success' on the BARR was defined as '*finding new uses for buildings*'.<sup>2</sup>

A more recent small-scale consultation targeting conservation officers found that high value was attached to the BARR but that users reported that information was often incomplete or out of date and, as in 2014, that the operation of the register could be more proactive.

Further consideration of the operation and effectiveness of the BARR is also particularly timely at the moment, as, due to changes to Scottish planning policy. Since April 2023, the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) has provided the overarching policy context for decision making in the Scottish spatial planning system. NPF4 identifies bringing historic buildings back into as a distinct consideration in national planning policy. The framework introduces a presumption of consent for 'development proposals which sensitively repair, enhance and bring historic buildings... identified as being at risk locally or on the national Buildings at Risk Register back into use'.<sup>3</sup> Bringing historic buildings in poor condition back into sustainable and productive uses is also a defined policy outcome for the historic environment.<sup>4</sup>

1. Welcome to Buildings at Risk Register | Buildings at Risk Register
2. BEFS, (2014), Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland: what next? [http://www.befs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/14.10.27\\_BARR\\_Workshop\\_Report.pdf](http://www.befs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/14.10.27_BARR_Workshop_Report.pdf)
3. Scottish Government, National Planning Framework 4 (February 2023), p. 46.
4. Scottish Government, National Planning Framework 4 (February 2023), p. 45.

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Historic Environment Scotland has therefore commissioned Harlow Consulting to undertake an independent external review of the BARR. The primary purpose of this review is to

- A** report on the impact of the BARR in bringing buildings back into use, and
- B** to make evidence-based recommendations that will inform HES' long-term decisions about future development of the resource.

## 1.2. Methodology

A mixed methods approach was employed to gather the broad range of evidence needed to address HES' research questions. The methodology consisted of the following stages:

### Scoping interviews

The research started with a series of scoping interviews with major heritage organisations. A total of six scoping interviews were completed with organisations which were considered to have the closest working familiarity with the BARR. The purpose of these interviews was to collect initial views about the BARR and the ways it is functioning, as well as to identify likely 'user types' and target audiences (including mailing lists) for circulation of our BARR user survey.

### Desk research

Alongside the scoping interviews, background research was carried out into likely BARR 'user types' (types of individuals or organisations who are likely to use the BARR). Desk research also focused on gathering information about equivalent 'at risk' registers used in other UK nations, with a focus on identifying their main features and any evidence that such registers make a positive contribution to bringing buildings back into use.

Desk research and a series of targeted interviews with key HES staff were also undertaken to enable an understanding of the BARR's development history. Particular attention was given to the BARR's history before it became an 'in-house' service within HES following the creation of HES in October 2015. This background information provided an understanding of the BARR's development trajectory, which provided important contextual knowledge when engaging with stakeholders and when developing options for how BARR could develop further.

### Survey of BARR users

Following scoping interviews, a broad survey of BARR users was designed and launched to collect more detailed and comprehensive information about the kinds of individuals / organisations who are using the BARR (and who are not using the BARR). The survey also aimed to gather data on different users' motives and reasons for using the BARR, along with views on the BARR's impact on bringing buildings back into use and ideas on how BARR could be changed, developed or improved.

The survey was publicised widely, to capture the broadest range of individuals and organisations who may (or may not) use the BARR, including actual or potential users outside of the heritage and historic built environment sectors. The communication and publication strategy for the survey involved dissemination through specific networks and mailing lists (such as the Conservation Officers' Network, IHBC's mailing lists, BEFS mailing lists, which were identified during the scoping interview stage).

The launch of the survey was also accompanied by a broad press release, which brought the survey to the attention of a wider range of audiences. The press release was distributed by an independent PR company, CauseUK, working in collaboration with Harlow Consulting, to a wide range of media outlets (including magazines, newsletters, blogs) in Scotland with a thematic interest in heritage, property and architecture. In total, some 200+ media titles were contacted, resulting in 17 pieces of coverage in the trade press (in outlets such as the Berwickshire News, the Kirkintilloch Herald and Scottish Construction Now) and an estimated combined total of 82,200 views.

The survey was launched in mid-October 2023 and ran for four weeks. A total of **120 responses** were received. This included:

- **95 BARR users** (respondents who say that they have previously used the BARR), and
- **25 BARR non-users** (respondents who say that they have never used the BARR before).

### Depth interviews

In order to deepen our understanding of users' reasons for using BARR, and to explore in more detail ways in which BARR could be developed to make it more effective for different users, depth interviews were carried out with **15 BARR users** in November 2023, the majority of which were identified and recruited through the BARR user survey.

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These interviews provided important contextual information with which to deepen our understanding of why different users make use of the BARR, as well as helping us to develop users' ideas about how BARR could be developed.

Depth interviews were completed with:

- An individual restorer
- Four BARR users affiliated with local authorities
- Two users affiliated with grant-giving bodies
- A user affiliated with a property developer
- A user affiliated with a community group
- A user affiliated with an organisation which represents development trusts
- A user affiliated with an organisation promoting better use of land in Scotland
- A user affiliated with an organisation promoting community regeneration
- A user affiliated with a Building Preservation Trust
- A conservation architect
- A conservation architect also affiliated with a grant giving body

### Workshop with HES staff

A workshop with HES staff was organised to gather views held by various HES teams on the purpose / objectives of BARR, its effectiveness in meeting these objectives and the role BARR plays in bringing buildings at risk back into use. The workshop took place on 9 November 2023 and was attended by a wide range of HES staff from: Heritage Research; Designations; World Heritage & Heritage Policy; Planning, Consents & Advice Service; and External Relationships and Partnerships.

### Analysis of BARR data and LBC data

Analysis of BARR data and planning data was undertaken to a) assess the BARR's effectiveness at capturing buildings at risk, and b) consider whether, within the limitations of time and resources available to the study, it would be possible to identify statistical evidence that BARR contributes to bringing at-risk buildings back into use.

This objective is, however, made challenging by the fact that there is **no authoritative baseline data which identifies and records the outcomes of 'at-risk' listed buildings not included on the BARR.** While HES holds data on all known listed buildings in Scotland,<sup>6</sup> this data does not provide information

about which of these buildings are in long-term disuse or poor physical condition, including which are earmarked for restoration or demolition.

The ideal approach would therefore be to construct representative baseline data on the condition, risk status and outcomes of heritage buildings in scope of the BARR, including those on and off the BARR, either nationally or in a series of 'case study' geographical areas. This approach would, firstly, tell us how effective the BARR is at identifying and including buildings at risk; and, assuming that the BARR is capturing only a proportion of all buildings at risk, enable outcomes for buildings at risk on or off the register to be compared. This approach would, however, be unrealistically time- and resource-intensive to carry out in the context of an intensive review such as this.

It was therefore proposed to carry out more limited analysis based on comparing BARR data with planning data for listed buildings only. The requirement to obtain listed building consent (LBC) for all substantial changes to listed buildings means that **listed buildings form an immediately extractable group of historic buildings that can be compared to the listed buildings included on the BARR.** The primary focus would be on comparing total demolitions recorded through LBC applications with those recorded on the BARR. Using the simplifying assumption that, with few exceptions, a listed building for which there has been a successful application for total demolition must have been 'at risk' for some time prior to the application being made, this would act as an objective measure of the BARR's success in capturing buildings at risk. In addition, the extent to which the BARR had succeeded in capturing the actual demolitions of a building included on the register would provide a similar measure of its currency. Finally, although more tentatively, it was hoped that it would be possible to identify areas of relatively complete coverage and from these potentially draw inferences about the impact of the BARR in securing reuse. However, no such external, authoritative record exists for listed buildings which are converted or brought back into use. This is because, while it may be possible to collate all LBCs involving a conversion or change of use, there is no way of knowing if those listed buildings were formerly 'at risk'<sup>5</sup> Thus, given these limitations, in order to

5. Change of use may involve listed buildings which do not meet the criteria for being 'at risk', whereas a building which is demolished is, by its nature, at risk.

make a judgement about the impact of the BARR in bringing buildings back into use, the intention was to triangulate actual demolitions, BARR demolitions and other BARR data to see if any patterns emerged that would give an indication of the BARR's comprehensiveness and, in areas of reasonable representativeness, whether there were positive outcomes for buildings on the BARR.

There are, however, a number of limitations to comparing demolitions data derived from LBCs against data on buildings saved recorded on the BARR. Firstly, focusing on demolitions means that buildings lost due to other processes (for instance, buildings which are simply falling into ruin through neglect; buildings lost to natural processes such as flooding) are not captured in our analysis. Secondly, in some cases there may be an application to demolish a building that displayed no previous risk factors; however, these are likely to be a minority of cases, as there are stringent tests that must be met before consent to demolish is granted, in most cases only likely to be met when a building has been in a state of serious and prolonged decline.

Data from the BARR (covering the period between 2011 and 2023) was shared with us by HES. BARR data was analysed to explore the total number of listed buildings at risk in each LA since 2011. The total number of listed buildings 'saved' and 'demolished' was then quantified in each LA to identify regional variations in the proportion of buildings on the BARR which have been brought back into use or demolished.

LBCs concerning demolitions works to listed buildings (published between 01/01/2011 to 31/12/2022) were then downloaded from the planning portals of each of the 32 Local Authorities (LAs), and the two National Park Authorities (NPAs). LBCs concerned only with **total demolitions of independent listed structures** were identified and collated in a spreadsheet.

### Inclusion criteria – identifying LBCs concerned with total demolition of listed buildings

The process of identifying LBCs concerned with the total demolition of listed buildings involved a number of challenges. The most important is that the great majority of demolition works to listed buildings for which LBCs are sought are concerned with partial demolitions. These typically involve dismantling specific sections or

elements of listed buildings (such as extensions, annexes, conservatories) or minor independent structures (such as sheds, lean-tos, outhouses, boundary walls, garages) which are located within the listing, but which generally hold little heritage significance in their own right.

These partial demolitions and demolitions of minor, subsidiary buildings have been excluded from our analysis as they do not amount to the complete loss of a whole historic building or heritage asset. Demolitions of listed building structures which involve façade retention and significant rebuilding have also been excluded from our analysis. This follows on from discussions with HES which concluded that the retention of a façade of a listed building does not constitute total demolition and may represent the optimal practicable course of action for some structures that might otherwise be lost completely.

The LBCs included in our analysis are therefore those that concern the **total demolition of any independent listed structure**. This includes subsidiary or curtilage buildings which form part of a wider listing and which have heritage significance in their own right, but it excludes demolitions of parts of buildings, minor outbuildings with no heritage value (sheds, lean-tos small outhouses etc.), modern additions and façade retentions.

LBCs concerning demolitions were then cross-referenced against BARR data. The purpose of this process was twofold:

- 1 To identify the proportion of all listed building demolitions captured by the BARR, which in turn gives a sense of how effective the BARR is at capturing historic buildings at risk.
- 2 To compare total demolitions of listed buildings in each LA against the total number of buildings saved on the BARR. This, in turn, gives a sense of the ratio of buildings demolished for every building saved through the BARR, which in turn can be used as a metric for assessing how effectively buildings at risk are brought back into use in each LA area.

## Methodological challenges in triangulating BARR and LBC data:

The process of cross-referencing the BARR and LBC data was made challenging primarily by questions surrounding the accuracy and currency of the information on buildings in the BARR.

While some of the listed building demolitions discovered through analysis of LBC data were included on the BARR as buildings that have been demolished, others are included on the BARR as 'at risk'. Furthermore, some buildings registered as demolished in LBCs are smaller subsidiary structures which form part of a broader listing, for which the main building is counted on the BARR as 'at risk', but not the subsidiary structure. In addition, some of the buildings counted as 'demolished' on the BARR are not in fact formal demolitions which required an LBC, but rather buildings which have collapsed or been lost to a catastrophic event, such as fire or flooding, or demolished without formal Listed Building Consent in response to a local authority issuing a Dangerous Building Notice.

In order to decide whether or not a demolition identified in an LBC is also included on the BARR, the following criteria were adopted:

- A demolition is noted as included on the BARR even if the building is registered as 'at risk' (rather than 'demolished'). This is because our analysis is concerned in the first instance with the extent of coverage, rather than the accuracy or currency, of the BARR. A demolished building which is on the BARR, but which has not yet been updated to 'demolished' has still been captured by the BARR.
- A demolition is marked as included on the BARR even if the building being demolished is not the main subject of a listing registered on the BARR – i.e. if the building being demolished is a substantial curtilage building or secondary structure (i.e. a steading or stable), but that which is registered on the BARR is the main listing (i.e. the farmhouse with which the secondary building shares the listing). In these instances, the demolitions are counted as included on the BARR.

However, while it is certainly possible to cross-reference building demolitions identified through LBCs with the BARR, in order to identify buildings that have been captured by the BARR in some way (either as 'demolished' or 'at risk'), it is considerably more difficult to assess how effectively historic buildings on the BARR are being restored and/or being brought back into use.

The conventional approach to doing this is by means of calculating a ratio of demolished to saved buildings. The first stage of analysis revealed that the BARR was neither complete nor up-to-date, meaning that neither side of the ratio could be ascertained robustly from the BARR data itself.

To provide some additional context, our analysis calculated the ratio of 'saved' to demolished buildings using the BARR data alone and also by taking the LBC data (rather than BARR data) as the most objective means of measuring empirically building losses in each local authority area. In other words, to assess the relative rate of restoration and reuse vs demolition in different areas of Scotland, the number of buildings registered on LBCs as demolished is compared to the number of buildings counted as 'saved' on the BARR. The results when the ratios were calculated from robust demolition data were highly divergent both within themselves and relative to the ratios calculated using the BARR alone. This further highlighted the difficulties with using this ratio as a performance measure.

## 1.3. Reporting

The results of the research are presented in a main report, which summarises the most important findings from the primary and secondary research undertaken for the project, considers their implications, and outlines potential options for developing the BARR. The detailed findings are then presented for reference in a series of annexes, each reporting on a specific strand of the research undertaken.

The main report sets out in turn:

- The background to the BARR, comprising a timeline of key developments and a summary of its current resourcing and operation, based

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on a combination of documentary research and interviews with or information from people currently or previously involved with the BARR.

- The main findings from the primary research undertaken, integrating quantitative data from the survey and qualitative data from the scoping and depth interviews; these findings are set out by key research themes and questions. This is supplemented by a concise overview of the scope and operation of other related registers of at-risk heritage assets elsewhere in the UK.
- The conclusions drawn by the researchers from the primary and secondary research and developed further through discussions and consultation with HES staff.
- Options for consideration, based on suggestions made in survey responses, in the qualitative interviews and HES workshop, best practice elsewhere in the UK, and the researchers' understanding of HES's main mission and responsibilities and how these might best be realised. Each option is set out with a rationale and the researchers' assessment of the main risks and opportunities its implementation would present.

There are seven annexes, presenting in turn findings from:

- 1 The initial scoping interviews with sector stakeholders.
- 2 The survey and subsequent depth interviews relating to who uses the BARR and why, including consideration user views of the BARR's objectives, and their levels of satisfaction.
- 3 The survey and subsequent depth interviews on the impact of the BARR on the reuse and restoration of buildings.
- 4 The qualitative research on how the BARR might be improved.
- 5 Analysis of LBC and BARR data.
- 6 Desk and interview research on other registers of at-risk heritage in the UK.
- 7 Analysis of grants data.



# Background to the BARR

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## 2. Background to the BARR

### 2.1. Outline chronology of the BAR

**1990** – Scottish Development Department's Historic Buildings and Monuments Division funds the Scottish Civic Trust [SCT] to set up a Buildings at Risk Register and its underlying databases. Information is available to enquirers via paper printouts and an annual printed bulletin. Regarded as the **first primarily public-facing heritage at risk register**. The register is intentionally set up at arms-length to enable SCT to take on an advocacy role that would be problematic for a government department. The aim is “to put potential restorers in touch with owners who are not in a position to tackle the problems themselves, in the hope of encouraging fruitful dialogue which might result in a building being given a new lease of life”. The first Buildings at Risk project officer brings an activist approach focused on **crafting engaging narratives** to secure press coverage and public interest in at-risk buildings. The SCT builds up an extensive paper archive of site photographs and press cuttings relating to buildings on the register. **Methods and area surveys are largely ad hoc at this stage.**

**2000** – Historic Scotland (HS) (established as successor to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Division in 1991) continues to provide grant funding for a single FTE staff member at the SCT to run the BARR and to cover the costs of publishing and distributing the bulletin. Appointment of a technical director begins a process of **professionalisation and standardisation of the register** by developing a standard **methodology for assessing buildings**, a **rolling resurvey programme**, and recruiting staff with architectural expertise to increase understanding of building condition. **Funding is secured from HS and the Barcapel Foundation to create a web-based portal.** SCT employs an Online Officer to clean the data, transfer it to a new Microsoft Access database, digitise the archive of images, and to make a public version of the BARR database permanently accessible online.

**2004** – Online portal at **www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk goes live with** information from the original BARR entries rewritten in a more ‘authoritative’ and neutral style. The target market is ‘property developers, architects, surveyors, and solicitors’. In the same year, a growing concern with evidence-

based policymaking leads to a call for an annual ‘heritage audit’ in Scotland. **Scottish Ministers instruct HS to begin work on Scotland's Historic Environment Audit 'SHEA'.**

**2005-06** – SHEA begins with research on best practice in historic environment audits, with **increasing focus on statistical data** about the historic environment.

**2006** – More than a thousand entries on the register. **Guidance documents published by SCT** on finding new uses for redundant churches and unused country houses. Change of emphasis away from bringing restorer and purchaser and owners into dialogue and stronger emphasis on information and awareness raising. At around this time the **BARR team stops compiling ownership details**, apparently due to privacy concerns and questions over the currency of information held.

**2007** – **BARR identified as potential SHEA data source** in SHEA report on data sources for the historic environment. It is reported to be incomplete but could ‘provide a useful methodology and a good basis for more representative sampling’. SCT itself notes major gaps in BARR coverage in an early 2007 draft project outline in preparation for the renewal of the service agreement between SCT and HS. SCT carries out survey with local authority conservation officers to establish levels of use of BARR and preferences for its future development, pointing towards a desire for more information on ‘saved’ buildings.

Later proposals suggest a dual ‘survey’ and ‘resolution’ approach, the former to focus on more important assets via rolling geographical survey by local authority area and the latter on developing strategies with stakeholders to achieve reuse, and potentially also on developing an archive of saved buildings with information on the costs of restoration. The former is implemented but the latter does not receive support from HS.

This same year the SNP forms a minority government and introduces the National Performance Framework that requires ‘National Performance Indicators’ to be identified and adopted for all the main areas of the Scottish Government’s activity. For the historic environment, **the proportion of Category-A listed buildings at risk is adopted as the National Performance Indicator.**



**2008 – SCT BARR service agreement is updated to reflect NPF requirements**, with additional resourcing (5-6 FTE in total) to enable a robust figure for the number of A-listed buildings at risk to be available by 2009, followed by broader surveying of B- and C-listed buildings and conservation areas, subsequently accompanied by rolling resurvey of A-listed buildings.

**2011 – SCT service period ends and contract to operate the BARR transferred to RCAHMS** on an initial 12-month contract after a competitive tendering process the previous year. Most BARR staff transfer from SCT, but copyright in photographic archive (not covered by the original service agreements) is retained by SCT. BARR database transferred from SCT's Microsoft Access software to RCAHMS's Oracle platform.

HS initiates a parallel '**BAR [Building's] at Risk initiative**', funded by HS from 2011-14 and carried out by the Architectural Heritage Fund. Funding is allocated to pilot restoration projects for A-listed buildings at risk and BARR stakeholder forum is established to 'to maximise the opportunities for stakeholders to work together to tackle the problems of buildings at risk across Scotland.' The BAR initiative coordinator develops a BAR toolkit to provide guidance to local authorities and other stakeholders on tackling buildings at risk.

**2012 – Review of RCAHMS's functions, financing and role leads to decision to merge RCAHMS with HS** to form Historic Environment Scotland.

**2014 –** In preparation for merger, HS arranges for BEFS to hold a sector workshop for BARR stakeholders. Participants appreciate neutrality and objectivity of BARR but are unhappy with the narrow focus on A-listed buildings and the inconsistency of coverage (of lesser buildings) between LA areas; they call for greater prioritisation, to be done locally but with HS support, and a more proactive, better publicised approach. It is estimated that **2.25 FTE staff** are needed to maintain rolling resurvey of Category-A buildings for NPF indicator and continue to generate additional records for lesser buildings.

**2015 – HS and RCAHMS merge to form HES**, meaning that **BARR becomes an in-house function of HES**.

**2017 – Proportion of Category-A buildings on BARR ceases to be NPF indicator.**

**2017-18 –** HES corporate plan commits to supporting local communities to use forthcoming **community rights to buy** and **community**

**asset transfer** to undertake **community-led regeneration of BARs**.

**2017 –** HES develops **proposals to change BARR from a 'register' to part of a BAR 'service'**, that would support **community-led regeneration** through targeting buildings where there were good prospects for socially beneficial restoration and reuse, although this is not taken forward.

**2018-20 – Further proposals put forward for a regeneration-focused BARR.** Resources to be focused to support heritage-led regeneration in areas of socio-economic. Starting point would be **targeted surveys** of deprived parts of specific local authority areas. Improved, more accessible guidance would be available through a **Buildings at Risk portal**, and **greater collaboration** with other HES teams and external stakeholders would help identify and realise opportunities. **Three pilot surveys completed.**

In late 2020 a new service plan is drafted looking at moving to a **5-year review of all entries, area-based resurvey, and promotion of BARs as local community regeneration opportunities**. For various reasons, including the COVID pandemic, these are not taken forward.

**2022 –** HES restructuring implemented: **BARR moves to Planning, Consents and Advice Service** in order to promote collaborative working with casework teams. In July, **a survey of BARR users in local authorities** is distributed through BEFS.

**2023 – National Planning Framework 4 [NPF4] is published.** Policy 7 m states that 'Development proposals which sensitively repair, enhance and bring historic buildings, as identified as being at risk locally or on the national Buildings at Risk Register, back into beneficial use will be supported.'

## 2.2 BARR – current resource input

The current baseline resource input into the BARR consists of three FTEs, who are responsible for a broad range of activities in the day-to-day running and management of the BARR. Chief among these is information gathering and updating existing entries on the BARR and adding new buildings identified as being at risk. In practice, however, it has proved difficult to update entries within current resources, and a majority of entries have not been updated for a prolonged period.

Information gathering is broadly split into **proactive** and **reactive** approaches. The **proactive** approach consists of a comprehensive, area-



1 Golffhill Primary School, Glasgow

based fieldwork programme, which since 2018 has followed a quinquennial cycle of rolling refreshes across Scotland. The proactive approach also involves monitoring planning applications (LBCs, Conservation Area Consents) for any indications of changes to buildings at risk, including whether an owner is undertaking a restoration or bringing forward an initiative. The BARR team also gathers third-party information from media outlets (including news articles about buildings at risk) and marketing websites for sales of buildings.

The **reactive** approach includes undertaking defined area surveys carried out in response to requests made by local planning authorities, usually to support an area regeneration bid, and assessing individual nominations for buildings to be added to the register. The reactive approach also involves verifying and assimilating information submitted by third parties (which includes local authorities, heritage bodies and members of the public). Third-party information is verified and standardised by the BARR team prior to being added to the register.

As a result of resourcing challenges, dating back to the merger between RCAHMS and HS to create HES, combined with a series of forced pauses to fieldwork,<sup>6</sup> the BARR team's cycle of five-yearly survey refreshes is currently running behind schedule. The BARR team recently submitted a proposal to accelerate fieldwork and get through the survey backlog. This proposal overlapped with the BARR's migration to PCAS; however, as a review of the BARR was proposed it was not considered appropriate to take forward significant fieldwork without the evidence to show that the BARR is effective and efficient. As a result, only two of

the proposed area surveys have been completed (Shetland and Glasgow). An approach based on national resurvey is understood to no longer be used in relation to Historic Environment Scotland's responsibilities for designation.

In addition to information gathering, the BARR team, like other teams across Heritage and wider HES, is also responsible for responding to enquiries, contributing to IT development work and change initiatives, and, in particular at present, incorporating BARR data into the development of Trove.Scot, due to launch in March 2024, which will act as a portal through which different HES datasets can be accessed in one place.

## 2.3 Discussion

The BARR has a long and complex history that has seen several significant changes in orientation. It was initially driven primarily by a concern to bring buildings at risk and restoring purchasers together. Initially this was done at arm's length from Historic Scotland by SCT, on a shoestring budget. In this respect, and as noted in the timeline, the initial decision to devolve administration of the BARR to the SCT was a conscious one. The intention was that this should allow greater freedom of manoeuvre in the operation of the register than would have been appropriate for an official government initiative.

6. The first of these pauses was during the merger and immediately following the creation of HES, when the BARR team was asked to suspend survey work for a full year. Survey work was then halted again in March 2020 with Covid travel restrictions and the furlough of staff. Survey work was then paused again during the transfer of BARR into PCAS.

At the same time, the arrangement enabled HS to act as a client, giving it substantial discretion to set out requirements for the BARR and make SCT accountable for their delivery.

During this time, a single BARR officer worked in distinctly ad hoc way, with relatively informal and inconsistent system and a strong focus on attracting a wide audience through engaging and at times emotive narratives. Following a change in both the leadership of the SCT and the staffing of the BARR, SCT became concerned to improve the accuracy and representativeness of the data within the BARR. This culminated in the cleaning, revision and transfer of the three legacy databases into a single new Access database, and the launch of a public-facing



2 Mavisbank House, Loanhead

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online register in 2004. Throughout this process, however, the basic focus remained on providing the kind of publicity that would help secure restoration and reuse.

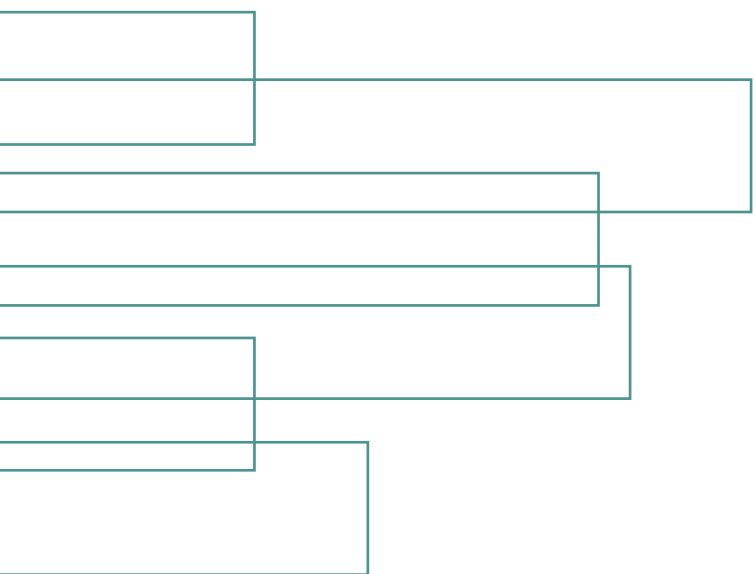
This began to change around 2005, reflecting a growing concern in Scotland to use robust statistical information as a foundation for, and way of measure the success of, government policy. In the historic environment, this emerged first in the creation of the SHEA and then, much more forcefully, in 2007 with the introduction by the new SNP government of the National Performance Framework. When the BARR was adopted as the basis for the NPF measure for the historic environment, it became focused on producing the relevant measure (identifying the number of Category A buildings at risk) with a high level of robustness. The main scope of the BARR therefore narrowed significantly, with highly listed buildings taking priority. Other aspects of the BARR also became increasingly secondary. The change of emphasis was consolidated when the register was tendered openly and awarded to RCAHMS, resulting (in spite of the direct transfer of staff from SCT) in significant changes to the operation and culture of the BARR team.

This was not inappropriate while the BARR primarily functioned as a statistical measure, but there was clear awareness in Historic Scotland that the original mission of securing restoration and reuse remained important. The 2011-2014 BAR strategy was intended to support this mission, both for its intrinsic importance and as a means of supporting the NPF ambition to reduce the number of A-listed buildings at risk.

It then seems to have been clear from around the middle of the decade that the appropriateness of the NPF measure was increasingly being called into question. This inevitably required reconsideration of the focus and purposes of the BARR. In 2017 and 2020 there were proposals for changes that would incorporate the register more closely into the wider functioning of HES and then use it as the basis for a 'buildings at risk service'. The intention was to make the BARR a central component in a wider initiative to promote and support area-based and community, regeneration by creating internal and external collaborative partnerships. As a result, there was change in the staffing and field officer role in the BARR team, and improved links with other teams in the organisation. This was supported by pilot area-based surveys and reports intended to encourage local authorities to consider targeted regeneration in areas of the greatest social and economic need.

However, a series of internal and external obstacles prevented these proposals from being fully implemented. The obstacles included staff turnover, impacts of Covid, a change freeze in preparation for organisation-wide restructuring, and the subsequent transfer of the team within Heritage. The transfer within Heritage led to further high-level reconsideration of the role and future development of the BARR, initially involving a small-scale sector survey publicised through BEFS, and then to the commissioning of the current external review.

The BARR has, then, gone through a series of distinct phases of development with varying foci: initially on securing restoring purchasers for individual at-risk buildings; subsequently on compiling robust statistical information; and most recently on promoting area-based regeneration as part of a wider BAR initiative. This last transition was, however, stalled and then discontinued. This complex history has left some uncertainty among stakeholders about the key and purposes and priorities for the BARR, especially given the expected incorporation of the information available through BARR into the Trove.Scot website. The BARR team has since been operating with limited resources until the BARR's future development is resolved. It was in this context that the present external review was commissioned.



# Main Findings

# 3. Main Findings

The following sections present an integrated, thematic overview of the findings from the main strands of primary research – scoping interviews, the open survey, and depth interviews. Together these give a rich picture of the use and perceptions of the BARR by external groups.

It should nevertheless be borne in mind that the open survey, though widely distributed through sector contacts and focused PR, achieved a relatively small sample size. A degree of caution is therefore necessary when generalising its results to BARR users as a whole. In particular, BARR users are known from Google Analytics data to be more diverse than the base of survey respondents. This suggests that the respondents are liable to self-selection bias, with those who have high awareness and who make more extensive use of the BARR more likely to respond than those with less familiarity. The survey results are consequently best regarded as offering insight into the group of users with the highest levels of engagement with or interest in the BARR.

## 3.1. Who uses the Buildings at Risk Register 'BARR' and for what purpose?

The majority of BARR users are from the heritage sector.

Evidence from the survey of BARR users suggests that **the main BARR users are individuals and organisations who have a professional involvement in the heritage sector** and in the care, management and preservation of the historic environment: 82% of surveyed BARR users say that they have a 'professional interest' in the historic environment.

Users outside of the heritage sector represent a small proportion (18%) of surveyed BARR users.

However, evidence from the survey also suggests that **the BARR is not used universally across the heritage sector**. Of the 25 'non-users' who responded to the survey, 10 (40%) say that they have a professional interest in the historic environment. Given that active users are intrinsically likely to be over-represented in a survey such as this, the implication would be that **a substantial proportion of historic environment professionals make little use of the BARR**.



3 Elvanfoot Suspension Bridge, Elvanfoot

According to evidence gathered through the survey of BARR users and depth interviews, **the principal BARR users** include:

- Historic built environment professionals, especially conservation architects
- Heritage organisations (including Building Preservation Trusts, City Heritage Trusts)
- Professional membership organisations
- Local authority planners and conservation officers (extent of usage of BARR varies between LA areas)
- Most heritage or architectural grant-giving bodies (who use the BARR when assessing applications for grant funding)

Users who **under-utilise**<sup>7</sup> the BARR include:

- **Property developers** (BARR usage is typically confined to developers with an established interest in heritage-led developments; BARR usage is not typical throughout the property development sector)

7. Under-utilise here means that, while these user groups do make use of the BARR, BARR usage is limited and is not representative of all individuals and organisations in these user types.

■ **Community groups** (BARR usage is irregular and inconsistent. While some community groups regularly make use of the BARR as an information source for buildings they are considering developing, usage is far from universal across the broad range of community groups)

■ **Individual restorers**

Groups for which insufficient evidence exists of BARR usage include:

- housing associations;
- construction companies;
- estate agents;
- solicitor's / legal practices;
- owners or neighbours of buildings at risk.

**Evidence relating to the extent to which the public engages with the BARR is limited.**

The survey of BARR users captured only 12 respondents who describe themselves as members of the public, of which four (33%) say that they have previously used the BARR (eight (67%) have not used the BARR before).

However, the level of public engagement with the BARR may indeed be higher than these findings suggest. Feedback from the BARR team reveals that the highest volume of enquiries sent through the BARR mailbox comes from members of the public seeking information or offering updates about specific buildings. Typically, these public enquiries fall into three broad categories:

- Questions from neighbours of buildings at risk concerned about impacts on their own property
- Requests from members of the public seeking enforcement action pertaining to a building at risk
- A range of more miscellaneous queries, such as information about how to buy/restore a building at risk; those with a connection to a building (family history); data for researchers, students asking questions, those wanting to use or buy photographs

These insights would suggest that the BARR team is addressing a considerable volume of public enquiries that are not strictly within the remit of the register: concerns about impacts of buildings at risk and enquiries about enforcement action are appropriately direct to the relevant local authority while more general research queries are more appropriately resolved by reference to HES guidance or enquiries to HES's Libraries and archives.

The range of queries received does suggest that there is some degree of **public engagement with the BARR, beyond its core heritage sector users, but that this engagement is limited in scope to specific concerns**. This implication is supported by the evidence of Google Analytics data for usage of the website. This data shows that the BARR had nearly 120,000 users in 2022-23, the vast majority (more than 75%) from within the UK. However, the average session duration was low at 2.5 minutes, while the 'bounce rate' (number of views that stopped after accessing a single page) was high at nearly 70% (relative to a desirable rate of below 40%). The proportion of new users was also extremely high, with repeat visitors represented by only just over a thousand users (less than 1% of all users, where 30% is regarded as desirable). Taken together, these findings show that **the BARR website has a very small core of more regular, intensive users and a large group of one-off visitors**.

Most users use the BARR as a source of information for specific buildings.

89% of surveyed BARR users say that the main reason for using the BARR is **seeking information about an individual building at risk**. This finding was also confirmed by evidence gathered from qualitative interviews with BARR users.

Findings from qualitative interviews with BARR users suggest that, in most cases, **users access the BARR to obtain information about buildings at risk in which they have a pre-existing interest**. Comparatively fewer users use the BARR to scout for projects; most instead use the BARR to gather information about buildings which come to them through other means.

Very few users use BARR to search for potential buildings to purchase, or to market buildings.

Findings from the HES staff workshop reveal that some HES staff use BARR as an information source for buildings at risk. The BARR provides detailed background information about buildings which supports some HES teams (Heritage staff and grants teams) in carrying out their work. Nevertheless, issues with completeness and currency and the availability of more complete planning data on Public Access planning portals were reported to have led to little use being made of the BARR during routine PCAS casework.

In general, the majority of BARR users consider the BARR to be useful to them or their organisation.

90% of respondents consider the BARR to be either 'useful' or 'very useful' to them or their organisation in achieving their objectives; 9% say that it is not very useful.

Of the small minority of users who express the view that the BARR is not useful, two say that the information available on the BARR is not useful because it is easily available through other sources. Another user (from a local authority) says that the **BARR largely provides information that they already know.**

A lack of up-to-date information is considered to be one of the principal challenge areas of the BARR.

Evidence from both the survey and interviews suggests that, while users are generally satisfied with the relevance and accuracy of information on the BARR, **many users consider the information on the BARR to be old or out of date.** Many users called for more regular updating of information on the BARR. Incomplete and out of date information was also mentioned as a challenge area in scoping interviews and the HES staff workshop. This perception was borne out by our analysis of BARR data, which found that half of current entries on the register were last updated more than five years ago.

A smaller number of users raised concerns about the **accuracy** of the information. One BARR user pointed out that, while the BARR offers a 'useful shortcut' to the older planning histories of some buildings, information on the BARR is often incorrect (due in part to the reliance on third-party information) and so should be approached with caution.

It should be noted that the BARR team are aware of the concerns around both accuracy and currency of information (in particular third-party information) and, for that reason, publish BARR terms and conditions of use which explicitly set out the challenges around data gathering and invite users to bring errors to the team's attention.

### **3.2. To what extent is the BARR a factor in getting buildings back into use 'in comparison to buildings not on the BARR'?**

This review has found that **there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate empirically that the BARR has an impact** (either positive or negative) **in bringing buildings back into use**, although there exists some anecdotal evidence to suggest

that the BARR has a small positive impact on outcomes for buildings at risk.

An absence of up-to-date information about the buildings on the BARR is the main barrier to assessing the effectiveness of the BARR in bringing buildings back into use. According to our analysis of BARR data, **only half of all 'at risk' buildings on the BARR have been updated in the past five years, and only 14% have been updated in the past year.** The majority (29%) of 'at risk' buildings on the BARR although there exists some anecdotal evidence to suggest that the BARR has a small positive impact on outcomes for buildings at risk. updated between 7 and 10 years ago.<sup>8</sup>

As well as being out of date, BARR data is also **incomplete.** Comparison of BARR data against LBC data reveals that only **53% of demolitions recorded in LBCs are captured by the BARR. This means that just under half of all demolitions of listed buildings are not captured by the BARR.**

While it is clear that many of the issues around the currency of BARR data are attributable to resourcing issues, the lack of up-to-date and complete information on the BARR limits the extent to which the BARR can be used to give an accurate picture of the number and condition of buildings at risk in Scotland.

**For many LA regions, the data is too out of date or too incomplete to conclude with confidence whether we are seeing more buildings being brought back into use, compared to buildings being demolished.** As a result, the BARR, in its current state, cannot reliably provide the statistical foundation for understanding whether there is overall improvement or decline in the condition of Scotland's historic buildings, and thus for gauging the BARR's effectiveness as a tool for promoting restoration and reuse. **At present, then, the BARR has greater value as an information source about individual buildings, than as a dataset with which to measure trends in the historic environment.**

Evidence from the survey of BARR users suggests that, overall, BARR users perceive the BARR to have some positive impact on bringing buildings back into use. However, many users are also uncertain. When asked about the impact of the BARR in bringing buildings back into use, the majority (38%) of BARR users say they are unsure if the inclusion

8. Many of the issues around the currency of BARR data owe themselves to contextual factors and resourcing issues dating back to the merger between RCAHMS and HS and the creation of HES. These explored in section 2.2, above.



of a building on the BARR makes it more or less difficult to re-use and/or restore a building, while a quarter say it makes no difference. 29% of BARR users say that the inclusion of a building on BARR makes it 'somewhat easier' to re-use and/or restore buildings.

Findings from interviews show that BARR users consider the BARR to be just one factor among many which influences the outcomes of buildings at risk. While most BARR users tend to agree that the BARR plays a role in helping to bring buildings back into use, the role it plays is not (or is rarely) seen as an active one: the fact buildings are on the BARR is not seen in and of itself as a trigger or stimulus to restoration. **Some users explain that the buildings on the BARR that have been restored would probably have been restored even if they had not been included on the BARR.** For instance, community groups that decide to take on a building tend to do so because that building is visibly derelict in the community – the inclusion of the building on the BARR may help by providing useful information about the building for funding applications, **but it is unlikely that the building will have been chosen for redevelopment primarily because it was listed on the BARR.**

**Some BARR users emphasise that the outcome of buildings at risk is more determined by the individual building and its location, than it is by that simple inclusion of the building on the BARR.**

### 3.3. What information on the BARR is useful in helping to secure positive outcomes?

Most BARR users tend to consider the information available on the BARR to be the most important aspect of the register: over two thirds of BARR users consider descriptions of buildings (68%), information about a building's development/planning history (67%) and photographs (69%) to be very important.

BARR users also consider information about **building ownership** (including details of owners) and **building availability** (including whether the building is for sale) to be particularly important aspects of the register. These findings are also confirmed by discussions with individual restorers and property developers, who suggest that information about whether a building is for sale is

particularly useful for those wishing to restore or develop a building on the BARR.

Findings from the HES workshop also show that some Heritage staff and the grants team consider the information contained within BARR about individual buildings to be a particularly important aspect of the register. Some HES staff – specifically the Buildings Team and Heritage Research Services – expressed the view that the BARR brings together in one place a much disparate background information about a building's planning history, including older information that would be more difficult to find through alternative sources.

However, some respondents from the Planning, Consents and Advice Service expressed concerns that the information was incomplete (many at risk buildings are not represented) and in many cases out of date. For this reason, the BARR was said not to be widely used in the Heritage Directorate.

In addition, much of this information is available through other sources, and HES staff (among other BARR users) are increasingly using these other sources to access this information. Planning histories can be found in local authorities' planning portals and descriptions of buildings are available in listed buildings records and press and media information is now available online. Much of the data which HES manages is also going to be made accessible through its new website, Trove.Scot.

### 3.4. Are there particular types of buildings or circumstances in which the BARR contributes to positive outcomes?

**There is very limited evidence with which to assess whether the BARR contributes to positive outcomes for particular building types** (or for buildings in certain regions of Scotland).

Although the survey of BARR users asked respondents if they think that certain types of buildings are more likely to be re-used if they are on the BARR, the majority of BARR users (56%) responded that they were 'not sure'. Only a quarter of users think that certain types of buildings are more likely to be used if they are on the BARR. Of these:

- 12 think that castles, palaces and fortified houses on the BARR are more likely to be restored

- 11 think that middle-sized houses (detached or semi-detached) on the BARR are more likely to be restored
- 11 think that farmhouses on the BARR are more likely to be restored
- 11 think that country houses, mansions and large villas on the BARR are more likely to be restored
- 11 think that industrial buildings on the BARR are more likely to be restored

The survey of BARR users also asked if respondents consider the BARR to be more effective at securing the re-use of buildings in certain areas of Scotland over others. Just under three quarters (73%) of BARR users responded that they were 'not sure', while only 12% responded 'yes'.

While issues surrounding the currency of BARR data mean that it is not possible to assess with certainty whether the BARR contributes to positive outcomes for certain types of buildings over others – or for buildings in certain regions of Scotland over others – analysis of BARR data suggests that **information within the BARR is more up to date in some regions of Scotland than others:**

LA regions with **most up to date information** about 'at risk' buildings on the BARR are:

- **Glasgow** – 84% of 'at risk' buildings have been updated in the last year<sup>9</sup>
- **Shetland Islands** – 79% of 'at risk' buildings have been updated in the last year
- **East Lothian** – 60% of 'at risk' buildings have been updated in the last year

LA regions with the least up to date information about 'at risk' buildings on the BARR are:

- **Orkney** – 80% of 'at risk' buildings were last updated seven years ago or more ago (and 15% updated in the past five years)
- **Aberdeenshire** – 73% of 'at risk' buildings were last updated seven years ago or more ago (and 23% have been updated in the past five years)
- **Argyll and Bute** – 61% of 'at risk' buildings were updated 10 years ago or more (and 30% have been updated in the past five years)
- **Scottish Borders** – 59% of 'at risk' buildings were updated 10 years ago or more (only 25% have been updated in the past five years)

Regional variations in the currency of BARR data are, however, largely attributable to the timing of the quinquennial survey cycle. The regions with most up to date data are those which the BARR team surveyed most recently. Similarly, two of the regions with the most out of date information (Scottish Borders, Argyll and Bute) have been identified in BARR's recent fieldwork proposal as priorities for a survey refresh, on the basis that they are regions which have experienced the longest interval since the last survey update.

Analysis of LBC and BARR data reveals that the BARR is more effective at capturing listed buildings at risk of demolition in certain regions over others.

LA regions which have the highest proportion of demolished listed buildings are recorded on the BARR are:

- **Glasgow City** (75% of demolished listed buildings included on the BARR)
- **Dumfries and Galloway** (67% of demolished listed buildings included on the BARR)
- **East Ayrshire** (67% of demolished listed buildings included on the BARR)
- **Edinburgh** (64% of demolished listed buildings included on the BARR)
- **Aberdeen City** (60% of demolished listed buildings included on the BARR)

LA areas which have the smallest proportion of demolished listed buildings recorded on the BARR are:

- **Aberdeenshire** (13% of demolished listed buildings included on the BARR)
- **Midlothian** (17% of demolished listed buildings included on the BARR)
- **Perth and Kinross** (17% of demolished listed buildings included on the BARR)

These findings suggest that **the BARR is more effective at capturing listed buildings at risk in Scotland's main urban centres.** This is likely to be a consequence of the fact the BARR team may receive more ad hoc requests for survey refreshes from LAs in urban areas, as well as a higher volume of information submitted by third parties, by virtue of the higher population density in these areas.

9. From September 2022 up to August 2023.

### 3.5 Does the BARR influence funding decisions?

Evidence from HES grant funding data and from interviews with grant giving bodies suggests that inclusion on **the BARR has a positive impact on the outcomes of grant funding applications.**

This finding was supported by evidence from the HES staff workshop. Information shared by the HES Grants Team suggests that grant applications concerning a building listed on the BARR are likely to be viewed more favourably.

Analysis of HES grant funding data reveals that, while **grant funding applications relating to buildings on the BARR represent only a small fraction of all applications submitted to HES [around 4%], applications involving buildings on the BARR, while lower in number, have a higher success rate.** Since 2017, 59% (23 out of 39) of all grant applications involving buildings on the BARR were awarded, while 33% (13 out of 39) were rejected. This compares favourably to applications concerning buildings not on the BARR: 46% (476 out of 1,026) of all grant applications involving non-BARR buildings were awarded, compared to 50% rejected (511 out of 1,026).

Thus, a grant application for a building on the BARR is nearly twice (1.8 times) as likely to be successful as unsuccessful, while a grant application for a building not on the BARR is slightly less (0.9 times) likely to be successful than unsuccessful.

It should be borne in mind that those buildings on and not on the BARR are unlikely to be directly comparable. Even allowing for the BARR's lack of complete representativeness, the fact that applications for buildings on the BARR form such a small minority of applications suggests that they will, on average, be in significantly poorer condition than applications for other building. Since building condition forms a significant factor in deciding grant decisions, then, we would expect to see greater success for applications related to buildings on the BARR, regardless of any weight attached to formal inclusion on the register.

Nevertheless, the disparity in success rates is considerable, and the HES grants team participants were clear that the formal assessment of condition that precedes inclusion on the BARR gives assurance that the building is an appropriate recipient of grant funding.

Evidence from discussions with grant giving bodies and also with representatives of sector organisations that submit a large number of applications for grants both largely support this. One interviewee reported requesting buildings should be added to the BARR specifically to increase the chances of receiving grant funding. **Funding bodies confirm that grant funding applications generally carry more weight if they relate to a building on the BARR.**

BARR users also who responded to the survey tend to believe that projects involving a building on the BARR have a higher chance of securing different types of funding:

- 69% of BARR users believe that the inclusion of a building on BARR helps (either a lot or a little) to secure grant funding for projects
- 63% of users believe that the inclusion of a building on BARR helps (either a lot or a little) to secure other types of local authority funding
- 53% of users believe that the inclusion of a building on BARR helps (either a lot or a little) to secure central Scottish or UK government funding

Evidence from interviews suggests that BARR users tend to have a perception that the inclusion of a building on the BARR gives grant applications more weight and increases their likelihood of success. This view was also expressed by the HES Grants team at the HES workshop: grant applications concerning a building listed on the BARR are likely to be viewed more favourably by funders.



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### 3.6 Does the BARR influence planning decisions?

Evidence from the survey of BARR users and depth interviews suggests that the BARR is likely to have some, albeit variable, influence over local authority (LA) actions, including the granting of LBCs, planning permission and enforcement action.

However, the extent to which the BARR acts as a factor in LA actions is very difficult to quantify – it is just one factor among many when making planning and enforcement decisions – and the impact of the BARR has been limited by the fact it has no statutory weight. Until NPF4, the inclusion of a building on the BARR was not a material consideration when assessing planning applications.

While BARR users tend to think that listed buildings on the BARR are more likely to be re-used or restored, only a small proportion of BARR users believe that a building on the BARR is more likely to secure LBC or planning permission, compared to a building not on the BARR. Most respondents say that they are unsure, or that the inclusion of buildings on the BARR makes no difference to the outcome of LBC/planning decisions.

Evidence from discussions with LA representatives reveals that the inclusion of a building on the BARR certainly has some impact on the outcome of planning decisions, **but it is not possible to say objectively just how much impact the BARR has.**

### 3.7 Does the BARR deliver other benefits?

Raising the public profile of individual buildings, galvanising communities and spurring actions

Where the BARR does have an impact on the outcomes of buildings at risk, it is likely that this impact is indirect in nature. Evidence from the survey and from depth interviews suggests that the inclusion of a building on the BARR helps to draw attention to that building. This can be particularly powerful where the inclusion of a building on the BARR is reported in the national and local press, which helps to bring the building to the attention of audiences beyond the BARR's regular users.

BARR users emphasise that the labelling of a building as 'at risk' on a national register – and the reporting of this in the press – has the effect of raising the profile of a building. Qualitative evidence provided by a range of interviewed BARR users

– including local authority representatives, grant giving bodies and land management charities – suggests that this effect can then spur other actions: it may galvanise communities behind redevelopment projects, or convince a community group to take on a building in their community; or it could factor in the decisions of LAs when considering a LBC concerning a building on the BARR.

However, these are anecdotal reports of indirect impacts, and there is perceived to be a limit to how much the BARR can do, especially in influencing LA decisions. **Ultimately, the fact that the Register has no statutory weight, and historically no place in planning policy, combined with challenges around resourcing at many local planning authorities, limits the extent to which the BARR can act as a catalyst for local authority action.**

Evidence from scoping interviews and interviews with BARR users suggests that the BARR offers **a picture [albeit an incomplete one] of the condition of the historic environment in Scotland.**

This in turn brings a range of other benefits. Evidence from surveyed BARR users suggests that the BARR is used as a research tool, both for students and for those with a broader interest in heritage and the historic environment. Evidence from local authority users also shows that the data provided by BARR is used as a resource to support a range of LA work: it enables LAs to benchmark against similar LA areas; the BARR can be used to support LA area-based work, including helping LAs to decide areas for CARS projects; one LA BARR user also reports that the BARR can be useful in negotiations with developers.

### 3.8 Have similar registers in other UK home countries demonstrated success in bringing buildings back into use? If so, are there lessons to be learnt?

While this review identified numerous examples of equivalent registers documenting historic buildings at risk – each with different characteristics and features compared to the BARR – this research has identified no substantial evidence, for any of the registers reviewed, which empirically demonstrates that the register alone is successful in bringing buildings back into use.

## Cadw listed building condition and use survey

Wales takes a very different approach to the management of information about buildings at risk. Cadw commissions a private contractor to carry out a condition and use survey of all Welsh listed buildings over a recurring five-year cycle. The database created is accessible only to Cadw and local authority officers – it is not a publicly accessible register of heritage at risk – and it contains information such as risk scores and building element condition assessments for all listed buildings in Wales. The database is the property of the private contractor, while the data itself is owned by the Welsh Government.

While qualitative feedback suggests that Cadw is broadly satisfied with the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the building condition and use survey and the resulting dataset, **this review has found no evidence relating to the success of this database in bringing buildings back into use. Due to its restricted accessibility the database does not currently play a direct role in attracting restoring purchasers.** Instead, its primary purpose is informational. It is used by Cadw to provide a consistent, objective measure of the condition of the historic environment; and by local authorities to help define priority sites for intervention.

## Historic England's (HE) Heritage at Risk Register (HARR)

One of the most significant ways in which HE's HARR differs from the BARR is in its restricted scope. The HARR covers only Grade I and Grade II\* listed buildings nationally, with the exception of London, where all listed buildings, including Grade II, are in scope.

**This review found no empirical evidence relating to the success of the HARR in bringing buildings back into use.** Qualitative evidence provided by both BARR users and HE staff, however, suggests that the principal strength of HE's approach is in its holistic approach to the management of buildings at risk. The HARR is only one component in a larger strategy for dealing with buildings at risk. This strategy involves decentralisation of the management of buildings at risk to a team of regional offices, rather than managing all buildings centrally, along with close working relationships with local authority partners to find solutions for buildings at risk. Regional officers have substantial discretion over how individual cases are dealt with, and each asset on the register is assigned to a

specific named individual within a regional office. Historic England also provides practical support and grant funding to local authorities to issue enforcement notices and undertake compulsory purchase, and in some cases may also underwrite some of the costs of compulsory purchase. This helps de-risk enforcement and remediation measures for local authorities.

## Heritage at Risk Northern Ireland

The Heritage at Risk Northern Ireland (HARNI) project is a partnership between Ulster Architectural Heritage (UAH) and the Department for Communities: Historic Environment Division (DfC:HED) which aims to act as a catalyst for conservation and re-use of built heritage at risk, by recording buildings that appear at risk which are of historical and architectural importance on the HARNI Register.

The scope of the HARNI Register is very similar to the BARR (covering listed buildings and unlisted buildings in a conservation area), but with the addition of scheduled monuments.

This review found very little empirical evidence to suggest that the HARNI Register has successfully contributed to bringing buildings back into use. A 2019 review of HARNI claims that the project has been "substantially successful, with opportunity for improvement in some areas." Metrics for success have been the number of buildings saved: Between 2006 and 2016, 192 structures on the HARNI were removed after finding new uses or owners. It is not clear, however, how far inclusion on the register directly facilitated these new uses.

# Conclusions

## 4. Conclusions



### 4.1 Synthesis of key findings

#### Value and purpose of the BARR

The research has found that the main users of the BARR are professionals within the historic environment sector; only a minority of users who responded were potential restoring purchasers. This suggested that awareness and use of the BARR beyond the sector is relatively limited, but that within it a significant proportion view the BARR to be useful.

This view seems to reflect a broad conviction of the importance of the BARR's key purposes. The users of the BARR who took part in the research saw it as having three main purposes:

- to provide a medium through which potential restoring purchasers can identify and be supported to take on opportunities for building restoration and reuse;
- to act as a source of information about individual buildings at risk, notably through collating and presenting information on planning and development history;

- to act as a source of information about the wider historic environment, enabling trends to be identified and traced, and success factors.

Perceptions within HES of BARR's purposes and value were complex. HES stakeholders who attended the internal workshop similarly viewed the BARR's main purposes as a means of promoting reuse and restoration and as a source of information about individual historic buildings and/or the wider historic environment. However, whereas the qualitative interviews suggested that most external users struggled to prioritise amongst BARR's purposes as a source of information on individual buildings and a means to facilitate restoration and reuse, within HES views seem more polarised. Indeed, comments received and dialogue during the HES workshop suggested that these were viewed as competing alternatives, either of which could only be developed at the expense of the other. Although not explicitly mentioned at length, it seems that this may in part reflect an assumption that resources for everything HES does, including developing the BARR, are limited and must demonstrate benefit proportionate to cost; it may therefore be possible to prioritise

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one or the other approach but more challenging to develop both. This perception has possibly been made more intractable by the history of the BARR, with the initial concern to secure restoring purchasers becoming increasingly displaced by statistical purposes. This has left a long legacy, with some HES participants seemingly lacking awareness of the BARR's more activist origins.

However, a number of internal and external factors now make it especially timely to reconsider HES's commitment to BARR and build a clear way forward. Within HES the BARR team is keen to have a clear sense of direction to bring an end to the period of stalled or partially implemented initiatives that has characterised the period since the BARR ceased to be an NPF indicator. Outside HES, there is clearly a desire to see the BARR's current weaknesses, particularly in terms of the completeness and currency of information, addressed.

### The BARR as information source

Almost all users who responded to the survey reported that the BARR was valuable or very valuable for their work. In most cases the favourable view seemed to reflect the value they attached to the information on individual buildings collated in the BARR, with planning histories – particularly earlier histories that are less readily accessible via Public Access and the broader contextual information from newspapers being especially frequently cited.

In line with the positive views of the BARR's value as a source of information, the survey suggests that there are broadly positive views of the accuracy and relevance of its data. There was nevertheless a substantial minority of users who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the accuracy of the data. The interview research add depth to this picture. The interviews showed that concerns focused primarily on the incompleteness of the BARR and had two major components: one is that many entries have not been recently updated; the other is that **there are many buildings at risk that are not on the BARR.**

**The majority of qualitative interviewees reported that coverage was patchy, with general incompleteness being exacerbated by inconsistencies of coverage between building types, listing categories and geographical areas. Concerns over accuracy were less widely expressed, but some respondents – including some of the most experienced professional participants – reported that the planning histories given were often incomplete or**

**inaccurate, and even, in some cases, seriously misleading.** It seems to be for these reasons that the BARR was often referred to as a shortcut or a convenience rather than as a fully reliable source of information in its own right. There was anecdotal evidence from within HES that officer use of the BARR in casework was very limited, and lower than it potentially could be, because of similar concerns. In both cases, the ability to find much of the same information about development history on public access or via internet searching, and in more comprehensive and original form, meant that the value of this aspect of the BARR was less than it had been when such information was far more difficult to find.

**The omission of many at-risk buildings was borne out by the analysis of data on LBCs for demolitions. While a somewhat crude measure, this did provide strong indicative evidence that coverage is likely to be around 50-60% even for more important, listed at-risk buildings. Coverage of lesser structures is likely to be much more incomplete and inconsistent.** The BARR data analysis has also shown that nearly half of entries were last updated seven or more years ago; in addition, an updated entry is not necessarily an up-to-date entry, given the considerable number ad hoc changes made to specific entries on a responsive basis.

Respondents were generally understanding of the challenges posed by trying to keep a register such as this up-to-date and complete. Nevertheless, there were mixed feelings about addressing this by reducing the scope of the register, for example by including only listed buildings, only highly listed (Category A or Category A and B) buildings, or only those buildings most likely to secure reuse. With regard to the former possibility, those taking a more national and 'strategic' view tended to be more supportive of restricting the criteria for inclusion. However, those with a more local focus emphasised the importance of lesser, often simple vernacular, heritage buildings to local character, as well as their particular vulnerability to loss. The broad view was therefore that the BARR needed some targeted additional investment to ensure that the information was accurate, complete and up-to-date and/or a tighter focus.

Many respondents to the BARR survey felt that information could be made more complete and current if a wider range of contributors were able to add information and images to the BARR. This meant that HES could or should loosen central control



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over at least some parts of the BARR to enable a wider range of contributors to add information and images to the BARR. Views were, however, very mixed as to the degree of discretion that should be allowed to such users, as well as to the range of users that should be permitted to contribute. Some advocated a completely open, public wiki approach, while others suggested allowing only local authority planning officers to make additions and changes.

The parallel research into related buildings at risk registers in the UK suggests that the very broad scope of the BARR has few parallels. The Historic England Heritage at Risk Register (HARR) excludes all assets that are not, approximately, equivalent to Scotland's Category A. The result is that the English register has 756 buildings (and around 4800 heritage assets in total, most of which are scheduled monuments) registered as being at risk, fewer than the BARR, in an area with approximately nine times the number of listed buildings, ten times as many inhabitants as Scotland, and a geographical extent 66% greater. The quantity of information contained in each HARR entry is also much smaller, with 20 data fields as opposed to 40 on the BARR, and only a short summary paragraph describing the current state of each building in place of the extensive development histories typically found on the BARR.

The research identified the Welsh listed building condition survey as by far the most comprehensive and sophisticated national-level informational base on the historic environment available to any of the UK home nations. It covers all listed buildings, not just buildings at risk, and is based on a commercially contracted five-year rolling cycle of area surveys. Its cost is relatively low at the equivalent of around 1 mid-grade FTE per annum, but its longitudinal depth and coverage are exceptional. Nevertheless, there is no attempt to cover unlisted assets or conservation areas, and the scope of information covered is much more tightly defined than on the BARR. It is not intended to be a source of detailed information on individual buildings and incorporates very little primary data other than basic 'tombstone' information, condition information, and photographs. Thus only nine reported variables are original data, the others all being derived using algorithms. This reflects the fact that the Welsh register is explicitly conceived not as a source of publicly accessible information on individual buildings but as a rigorous national dataset allowing the state of the totality of the listed historic environment to be understood through a series of five-yearly of 'snapshots'. Because of this, the Welsh condition survey also does not accept updates or

public nominations for inclusion, only corrections to information that was erroneous at the time of survey. This greatly reduces the scale of external data submitted to the survey that needs to be reviewed and potentially incorporated within the database.

The study of parallel registers also uncovered promising models for incorporating structured input from a wider range of contributors. Scott Handley, contractor for the Welsh survey, has developed an online training unit and user interface for inputting information into his proprietary risk register, which he reported had produced consistent results. The West Midland Building Preservation Trust's mobile app shows promise for enabling structured volunteer input at low cost, though difficulties were reported turning initial interest and completion of training into active involvement in data entry. These models imply that there is a middle way between relatively unmoderated public contributions and tightly controlled, centralised approaches.

### The BARR as tool for restoration and reuse of at-risk buildings

In spite of seeing one of the key purposes of the BARR as facilitating restoration and reuse of buildings, most participants in the qualitative research were sceptical that the register was widely used, or readily useable, as a tool for restoring purchasers to identify potential restoration projects. **Even where participants had long experience in the sector and a broadly positive view of the BARR, they tended to struggle to identify specific instances where the BARR was the decisive factor in securing reuse,** rather than one amongst a number of contributing components. The main exception related to the existence in the past of developers who specialised in restoring and reusing historic buildings. Many respondents suggested that changes to the format, search facilities and presentation of the BARR, and the supporting materials available on the BARR website, were not optimised for attracting and support potential restoring purchasers. Even so, there was limited but credible anecdotal evidence of BARR's continuing use by a small number of potential restoring purchasers to identify building projects, both domestic and commercial.

**The data analysis was unable to identify significant concrete statistical evidence that BARR led to improved outcomes for at-risk buildings included on the register.** At least in part, however, this reflected limitations in BARR's coverage that make it difficult to undertake the



6 The Shakkin' Bridge, Cults

kind of analysis that would confirm or disprove such links. There were insufficient areas of high coverage to enable information on the BARR to be triangulated with other data to make inferences about its contribution to reuse. In addition, 'saved vs demolished' ratios have tended to be used as a basis for understanding the success of the BARR. However, the extremely low bases that result from the very small number of listed buildings that are demolished mean that the ratios can change dramatically with only minor changes to input information. A more useful index, if it can be kept current, is accessions versus positive exits, as preferred by Historic England when presenting aggregate data from their HARR register. The advantage of this approach is that it enables an improving, stable or declining trend to be identified. Where there are specific initiatives to address BARRs, their success could at least potentially be measured by subsequent positive changes in the overall trend.

There were mixed views on whether inclusion on the BARR facilitated favourable planning and LBC decisions. While, until recently, inclusion on the BARR has had no formal status within the planning system, there was clear anecdotal evidence that 'at risk' status did have some broader benefits in terms of securing a more flexible approach from local authorities when assessing planning and listed building consent applications. The qualitative research suggested that while inclusion on BARR did not, perhaps, move the goalposts on what constituted acceptable interventions in historic fabric, it could help concentrate minds and lead to a higher level of engagement and support from

planning officers when potential applications for works were being made.

The qualitative evidence gathered was consistent that inclusion on the BARR is a significant factor for those making funding applications and one of a number of key criteria used by grant-givers to prioritise funding decisions and allocations. This applied to assessment of applications both within and outside HES: use of at-risk status as an important criterion for grants was reported of major funders like NLHF and was cited directly by funders talked to during the qualitative research. The HES grants team were clear that formal recognition of 'at risk' status by inclusion on the BARR is a significant factor when determining grant applications, by giving reassurance that the building genuinely was at risk.

The limited data analysis that could be undertaken within the context of this study suggests that applications for HES grants for buildings on the BARR have a significantly greater chance of success than those that are not on the BARR (1.8 vs 0.9 successful applications for every unsuccessful application for BARR vs non-BARR respectively). It should be borne in mind, however, that a simple statistical measure like this cannot disentangle the role of inclusion on BARR from more other potentially more fundamental factors, such as overall building condition or heritage significance, as a determinant of application success rates. In addition, the qualitative interviews revealed that in some cases those working in the sector ask buildings for which they are seeking grant funding to be added to the BARR, which may further boost apparent success rates for buildings on the register. Even so, the degree of disparity in success rates does suggest that BARR buildings benefit to at least some degree from their status during the grant assessment process. This implies that, given the issues with the BARR's currency and completeness, there is an ongoing risk of misallocation of scarce resources.

There was also a clear overall view that there should be at least some changes to the user interface and information available to make it more suitable for use by potential restoring purchasers. Suggested changes included:

- redesign and rebranding of the website to make it more attractive and intuitive to use;
- ensuring that ownership details are available for as many properties as possible, or at least providing links and guidance to show prospective

purchasers how to access details through the Registers of Scotland;

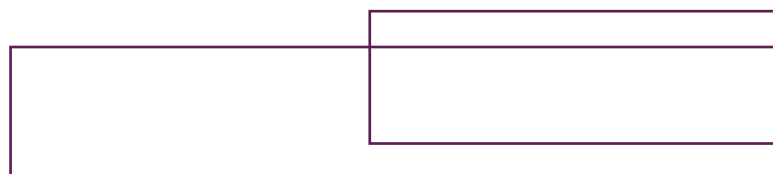
- updating and rewriting the toolkit to ensure that it is current and accessible to a wide range of users;
- ensuring that information on grants and support is clear and accessible, offering a clear pathway to finding support for potential restorers;
- having attractive, up-to-date case studies of saved buildings with a strong and engaging narrative and a 'how to' emphasis;
- adding functionality to the web pages for individual buildings, for example by including links to conservation-accredited professionals, contractor lists maintained by heritage organisations such as the Scottish Lime Centre;

The qualitative findings made it clear that for many respondents the BARR, even if optimised for the purpose, could not on its own be a solution to securing restoration and reuse of at-risk buildings. There should instead be broader strategy and targeted resources for addressing at-risk buildings. Some respondents emphasised that it was important that the BARR should form only one component of a broader 'eco-system' of disincentives for neglect and incentives for care of historic buildings, along with direct support – financial and/or advisory – for potential restorers of at-risk buildings. The depth research also revealed clear awareness, especially among experienced historic environment professionals, of the benefits of early intervention, often before buildings were formally declared to be 'at risk'.

The research into other registers revealed clear differentiations between those intended to promote restoration and reuse and those with more specifically informational purposes. At one extreme lies the Welsh register. As it cannot be accessed by the public, it cannot function as a means to attract the interest of potential restoring purchasers (though there is an aspiration to make more public-facing content available in the coming years). Rather, it functions primarily as a source of trend data on the historic environment as a whole, for the purposes of strategic analysis and monitoring. It is, however, used as a means of defining which buildings should be a focus for attention by Cadw and local authorities, using the algorithms to calculate an overall priority score that helps identify those at highest risk of further deterioration. Thus, while it is not intended to be directly facilitate restoration and reuse, it does provide a foundation for focused intervention at a local level.

At the opposite extreme, the SAVE Britain's Heritage buildings at risk register is possibly the best example of a register explicitly focused on attracting restoring purchasers, generating press interest and securing public support. The online register entry is clearly more viewed as a 'hook' than an end in itself. It sets out an engaging 'story' for each building, generally accompanied by a single striking colour photograph. The aim is clearly to encourage a restoring purchaser to make contact with SAVE or take the initiative by approaching an owner or starting a campaign. There is very little in the way of organised data. The SAVE register therefore maintains the kind of general approach taken in the early days of the BARR. SAVE's reputation for successfully facilitating resolutions of, in some cases, extremely challenging cases suggests that this approach remains effective.

The Historic England HARR represents an approach that sits somewhere between the two. It is very clearly a public-facing register but, on the evidence of the depth interviews, seems not to be viewed within HE primarily as a tool for attracting restoring purchasers. The focus is rather on using it as: a) an awareness raising tool, with the register itself forming the foundation for heavily promoted annual reports that seek to generate press and public interest in at-risk heritage; and b) a management tool that directs efforts by HE and its partners to identify viable opportunities to restore, redevelop and reuse important at-risk buildings or to restore or better manage other types of asset. The depth interviews also confirmed the existence of a well-developed wider ecosystem for addressing at-risk heritage, with significant resource within HE regional offices (50-60% of total human resource and the bulk of grant funding) committed to securing positive outcomes for at-risk heritage. This is likely to be an important factor in the consistent tendency for more buildings to leave than enter the register, and a consequent gradual but steady downward trend in the number of assets included. Almost all stakeholders familiar with both systems felt that the English approach was more effective in securing positive outcomes for the most important heritage assets. However, among HES respondents it was felt that the levels of human and financial resource directed by HE at heritage at risk would be unrealistic in the Scottish context.



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## 4.2 Discussion

The BARR appears to be valued by users within the historic environment sector as a source of information on individual historic buildings at risk. These users represent, however, a very small, if significant, constituency, with at most around a 1000 repeat (though not necessarily regular) users. This implies that the BARR's direct public impact is restricted to a very small proportion of Scottish society as a whole. Nonetheless, the value placed on this work by the sector; the recent focus by the Scottish Government on beneficial reuse of buildings at risk in the planning system; and the uniform use of similar registers by other home nations, all underpin a strong external view that the BARR, as the current national mechanism for recording buildings at risk, plays an important role in the management of the historic environment in Scotland.

These factors present both a challenge and a potential opportunity for HES and the sector: a challenge because of concerns that at present the BARR is neither sufficiently complete or current to act as a robust foundation for planning decisions; but an opportunity because NPF4 for the first time makes at-risk status a material planning consideration and gives an explicit role to the BARR as the current national mechanism for identifying which buildings should benefit from a presumption in favour of sustainable and appropriate reuse.

Taken together these would seem to imply that there should be a presumption in favour of retaining and enhancing work in relation to recording buildings at risk and that discontinuing the BARR as the mechanism for this at the national level, without a clear approach in place for replacing it in some form, would need to be robustly justified.

In this context, grounds for discontinuing the BARR would seem to be that: either a) that the BARR is not, and is unlikely to make a significant contribution to, fulfilling its key purposes and so is unlikely to have the potential to make a significant positive contribution to the historic environment; or that b) the key purposes themselves, though desirable, are not best pursued, on a resource vs outcome basis, by means of a register; or that c) there are no other potential purposes that will have significant beneficial outcomes that can best be realised through a register based on the BARR model. These grounds must, however, be considered carefully given the lack of secure evidence that the BARR is currently making a significant contribution to the

management of Scotland's historic environment or securing engagement beyond a small group of regular users whose main concern is to find information rather than identify buildings for reuse.

### The value of BARR's key purposes

The identified purposes of promoting restoration and reuse of buildings; providing information on individual buildings at risk; and providing broader data on the state of the historic environment in Scotland, would all seem to be unproblematically desirable in themselves. They are also closely aligned with HES's purposes, as set out in its mission statement, which affirms that 'Through enhancing knowledge and understanding of our cultural heritage, we aim to protect and conserve it, both now and for future generations.' It would therefore seem that developing a robust understanding of heritage at risk in relation to the overall condition of Scotland's built heritage, and promoting reuse and restoration of at-risk buildings should be central components of HES's activities. Similarly, the evidence that both HES and external grant funders give weight to formally recognised at-risk status when assessing grant applications implies consensus within the historic environment sector about the desirability of prioritising at-risk buildings when allocating resources. Arguably, the incorporation of the BARR into NPF4 recognises and formalises the role of a formal mechanism for recognising at risk buildings.

The question of whether a buildings at risk register represents the best way of realising these purposes is, however, more complex. The following sections consider the role of the BARR in relation to each of these key purposes in turn. Finally, a short section considers the extent to which these purposes are liable to be complementary or conflicting, in an attempt to identify the kinds of choices that future development of the BARR may entail.

### The BARR as information source on individual buildings

As we have seen, the BARR seems to be primarily valued by a small pool of users as a source of information on individual buildings, especially for its inclusion of older planning histories and the photographic record of their condition over time. There is therefore considerable perceived value in continuing to make this information available, which is expected to happen through the planned Trove portal. However, the large number of entries and the consequently large volume of information that

needs to be processed means that keeping this data current and complete would require considerable resource. The broader context of information available elsewhere has also changed in the last decade. Almost all recent planning applications and much other material, such as newspaper articles, are now readily available online. Moreover, because the BARR is often currently out of date and uneven in its comprehensiveness and accuracy, expert users tend to regard it as a 'shortcut' to information that in most cases needs to be independently verified or pursued in greater detail by consulting the original sources. The photographic record is clearly of value, but as it is largely restricted to images taken from the public realm it can in many cases be at least partially substituted by Streetview imagery available via Google Maps. This last is not, of course, a systematic record, but where available it is in many cases updated regularly, giving a good sense of the individual buildings' trend. The benefit relative to the cost of compiling such information centrally has therefore diminished significantly.

The BARR's value as a source of information on individual buildings is currently limited by its lack of representativeness. Almost all participants in the research cited numerous omissions of at-risk buildings. It is difficult to see that this can be addressed centrally within the available resource while the scope of the BARR remains so broad. The Welsh register shows that large numbers of buildings can be condition-assessed using a consistent protocol within tightly controlled resources. However, even in Wales there is no attempt to provide separate assessments for buildings in conservation areas or other individually undesignated heritage assets. This implies that the BARR's value might, in fact, be enhanced if it had a tighter scope but more comprehensive representation of assets within that scope.

Related to this, the example of the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust's volunteer-led mobile app shows that there may be technologically enabled ways of providing a tightly focused BARR with a broader complementary, but reasonably methodologically consistent, dataset at relatively low cost. Both the Welsh and the WMHBT registers are technologically enabled and suggest that some investment in mobile inputting of information could also make the survey process more efficient.

## The BARR as facilitator of restoration and reuse

This review has uncovered some anecdotal evidence that the BARR, at least in its present form, directly facilitates reuse of historic buildings through enabling potential restoring purchasers to identify buildings to acquire and reuse. **However, this evidence was limited and it has proven difficult to establish that there is a significant amount of regeneration directly attributable to inclusion on the register.** The BARR's use of the saved-to-demolished ratio as a means of identifying the relative success of the register is problematic. This is both because of the challenges of establishing that buildings are being saved through inclusion on the BARR rather than by extrinsic factors, and because of the low bases involved, which make the ratios highly sensitive to even very small inaccuracies in data collection. The main area where there was consistent evidence of impact was in increasing the likelihood of receiving grant funding. This is in one sense encouraging in that it demonstrates that an official register of at-risk assets can have impacts on the allocation of resources. Where the register provides accurate and comprehensive information this should enhance resource allocation. However, where information is incomplete, out-of-date, or inaccurate, there is a corresponding risk of misallocation by potentially directing resource towards those buildings that happen to be on the register, when other buildings might benefit more. As there clearly are concerns about the BARR's completeness, data currency and accuracy, there is therefore a real possibility that it is leading to misallocation of resources. **It therefore remains difficult to make a compelling case that the BARR in its current form directly facilitates and appropriately directs resources to restoration and reuse.**

Moreover, there are reasons to think that the register could be made more effective through a change of focus and presentation, potentially along the model used by SAVE and in the early days of the BARR, but potentially also including enhanced information and functionality designed to meet the needs of potential restoring purchasers. This would involve returning to the use of engaging narratives, images that attract curiosity and interest, and suggesting potential possibilities for renewed or alternative uses. It may also involve highlighting selected properties on a recurrent basis and seeking to foster media interest in them, as both SAVE and Historic England do. A potential issue with this, however, is the use of the BARR to prioritise grant funding. The

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SAVE approach is light on potentially important data for effective prioritisation and also intrinsically selective. This could lead to potential misallocation of grant funding.

There is also potential to follow the Historic England model of narrowing the focus of the national register to highly designated assets, allowing a greater concentration of effort on the most significant buildings. This kind of tighter focus may lead to a greater likelihood of positive solutions being identified and implemented with similar or even less overall use of resources. However, the apparent success of the HE HARR in facilitating restoration and reuse can only reflect the very high levels of resource directed by HE at seeking resolutions for at-risk heritage assets. This may not be replicable in Scottish context.

### **The BARR as source of information on the state of the historic environment**

The third purpose of providing wider information on the state of the historic environment, attracted less support from participants in the survey and depth interviews. This purpose also seems not to be adequately fulfilled by the BARR in its current form. The adequacy of the BARR for this purpose depends on its functioning as a formal dataset. This in turn implies the need for high levels of consistency in: the way that buildings are selected for inclusion; the assessment of structures within scope; the processes for updating the register; and the kinds of information included. None of these conditions are currently met. The scope for inclusion is very broad and has uncertain boundaries; inclusion of buildings is often ad hoc, drawing on public and local authority nominations as much as formal survey; updates are continuous but inconsistent, meaning that trend data is difficult to establish. This may in turn account at least in part for the relative lack of support this purpose received from respondents.

Nevertheless, some interviewees did value the kind of information that a robust dataset could provide, for example through enabling understanding of the relative condition of specific building types or of buildings in particular areas. The potential power of a genuinely robust dataset on the state of the historic environment was also demonstrated by the Welsh model. This has an unambiguous sampling frame of all listed structures, which leaves no doubt as to whether a structure is in or out of scope of the register while offering a broad but manageable sample of heritage assets. The survey is compiled on a systematic rolling basis, meaning that trend

data is consistent and that there is no scope for continuous updates. This has the concomitant benefit of providing a clear focus for data collection while precluding any significant volume of public nominations or updates to be dealt with by the compiler of the dataset. The Welsh example shows that it is possible to generate this kind of consistent dataset for relatively modest expenditure, while providing powerful tools for understanding past trends and predicting future change. If the Welsh model were better known, as will be if Cadw is able to bring its intention to create a public-facing register to fruition, it is possible that there would be greater interest in this purpose of the register or, indeed, pressure to replicate it.

The 2020 proposals for restarting the BARR survey did set out a framework for a systematic approach to resurvey and updating. These did not, however, seem to imply a total resurvey of all buildings within any of the in-scope categories. The most recent available proposals for restarting the survey also imply that there will continue to be a substantial ad hoc, nomination-based component.<sup>10</sup> If this is the case, it would greatly limit the ability of the approach to generate a robust dataset comparable to the Welsh one.

In this connection, it may be noted that robust data about the state of the historic environment could potentially be generated without the need for comprehensive survey. A rich and accurate picture could be built up with relatively modest use of resources by using a well-designed sample-based methodology, although statistical limitations means that this would be unlikely to generate robust results at the level of local planning authorities.

### **Other potential purposes**

There was, from 2018-2020, a well-developed set of proposals for reorienting the BARR towards area-based assessments of building at risk, focusing on providing local authorities with information on the potential of heritage-led regeneration to benefit areas of high socio-economic disadvantage. This approach was piloted in three local authority areas; reports were produced setting out findings in order to guide potential regeneration initiatives by the local authorities concerned. The introduction of area-based reports in connection with resurveys remains an aspiration for the BARR team.

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10. Buildings at Risk Register Service - 2022-23.

Area-based surveys focused on areas of high deprivation could have considerable potential for promoting heritage-led regeneration and its benefits both for the historic environment and local communities. There could also be opportunities to coordinate such activity with other initiatives targeted at such communities, such as Local Place Plans or the Vacant and Derelict Land Investment Programme.

However, doing this in a way that would be liable to lead to substantive results would almost certainly require close collaborative working with local authorities and with other teams within HES. This would imply significant deployment of additional resource, not only within HES but within thinly stretched local authorities. The BARR resurvey proposals also concede that focused area-based surveys would reduce the resource available for reactive survey and that the area reports could need to be sacrificed if the main survey cycle were to experience delays.

This kind of reorientation could consequently only be justified by clear evidence that this kind of focused survey and reporting would indeed generate substantive benefits proportionate to the resource absorbed. There could be benefit in following up on the earlier pilot schemes or conducting new pilot schemes. If evaluated consistently these could help provide evidence of the likelihood of heritage-led regeneration taking place while quantifying the extent of resource needed to secure it, as well as the potential impacts of directing resource in this way on other aspects of HES's work, including the BARR team's current activities.

### **Complementary and conflicting aspects of the key identified key purposes**

Even if some or all of the identified key purposes of the BARR could be demonstrably shown to be both desirable and feasibly realisable, it does not follow that these key purposes are mutually supportive. There were divergent views on this issue between external users and HES stakeholders. External users seemed to have little sense that there is an intrinsic tension between the BARR as a source of information about at-risk historic buildings and as means to promote reuse and restoration. Within HES there were divergent views about the realism of expecting the BARR to support both purposes.



Both perspectives can be defended. On the one hand creating and collating high quality information about buildings at risk would not seem to conflict, in and of itself, with presenting that information in ways that are liable to attract interest in those buildings' restoration and reuse. Comprehensive, accurate, engaging and useable information on buildings at risk clearly can have an important facilitating role by raising awareness of the potential of Scotland's at-risk historic buildings; by enabling users to identify potential buildings to restore or reuse; and, if appropriate content or links are included within the BARR, by helping users to identify sources of support to help potential restoring purchasers do this, whether in the form of information, funding or expertise. Equally, comprehensive, accurate, readily accessible and useable information on buildings at risk will provide a solid foundation for broader strategic understanding of the historic environment and for evidence-based policy making.

Practically, however, the different purposes may well imply different emphases and approaches, and even different mentalities or attitudes. The clear contrast between the SAVE buildings at risk register and the Welsh listed building condition survey reflects the differing priorities of restoration- and information-focused registers respectively. The first prioritises accessible narrative and an engaging imagery; it regularly prioritises a small selection of buildings in the hope of attracting wider media attention. The second contains no narrative content and focuses instead on gathering and presenting a restricted range of data relating to building type, location and condition along with a set of derived variables calculated by combining individual building data with external datasets using proprietary algorithms.

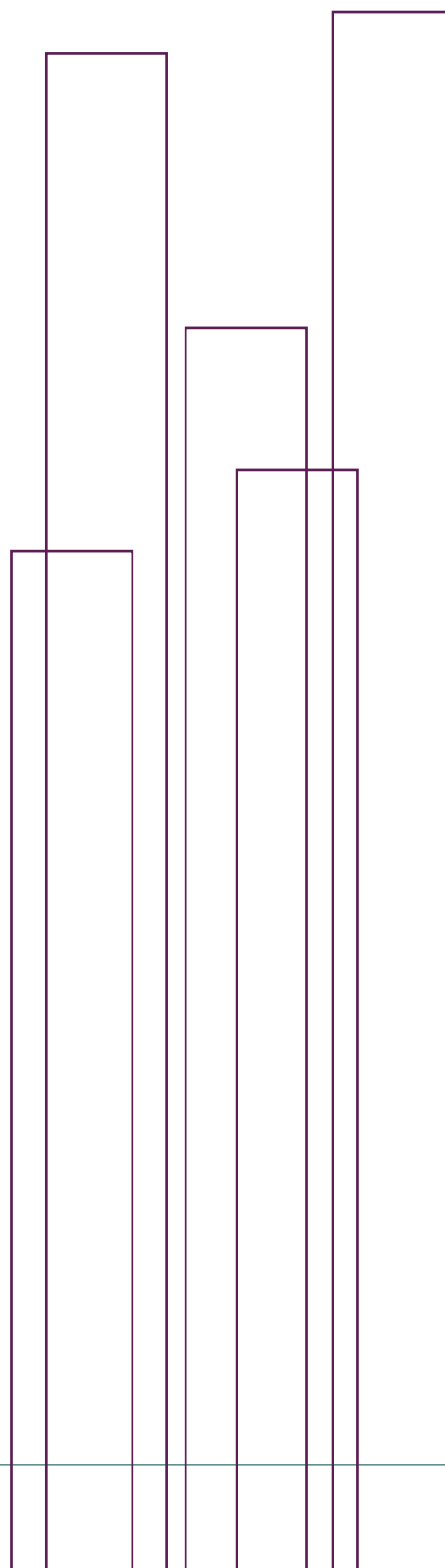
Equally, it is noteworthy that neither of the parallel registers in England and Wales seek to be tools both for securing interest from restoring purchasers and also for providing detailed information about individual buildings and/or the wider historic environment. This arguably reflects realism in both Historic England and Cadw about how much any register can practically accomplish while maintaining reasonable consistency and completeness.

The implication would seem to be that, ideally, the informational and regenerative aims that BARR is currently expected to fulfil are both valid but might best be pursued through distinct initiatives – one tasked with assembling a comprehensive and robust baseline of basic information, and other focused on extracting the information most relevant to restoring purchasers and packaging it in the most engaging, attractive and intuitively accessible way possible.

In practice, however, restrictions on resources may make it necessary to make choices between the two. The SAVE model for presenting and publicising buildings at risk would require very specific communication skills and be labour intensive if it were to be applied across all Scotland's at-risk buildings. It also requires latitude for a 'campaigning' approach. This may not be appropriate for HES but is more characteristic of third sector and non-governmental organisations, many of which are able to take advantage of volunteer effort for greater social purposes, with corresponding efficiency gains. SAVE accomplishes a great deal relative to its very limited resources but it not clear that HES could mobilise low-cost effort in the same way.

Similarly, developing a more comprehensive database could potentially be very costly. A very broad range of in-scope assets implies a correspondingly high resource requirement if consistency and completeness are to be attained. In practice, this means that there will almost always be a trade-off between the scope of assets covered and the consistency, comprehensiveness and currency of the data gathered. Even so, the Welsh example suggests that the quality of information on Scotland's historic environment could potentially be considerably improved with relatively modest investment. Indeed, the cost of approximately £50,000 per year of the Welsh listed building condition survey suggests that even the amount of resource HES currently expends on the BARR has the potential, if appropriately deployed, to produce a far greater informational yield than it is currently doing. Actually redirecting resource in this way may not, however, be easy to do in practice: the

efficiencies attained by the private contractor for the Welsh survey may not be easily replicable in a public sector organisation; and in the current constrained circumstances it may also be difficult to redirect HES resources to an external contractor.





# Options for consideration

# 5. Options for consideration

The issues with currency and completeness, duplication with other readily available data sources, and the narrowness of the regular user base suggest that there is a need for careful consideration of the future of the BARR. This section of the report sets out a series of five potential options for its future development, based on:

- 1** discontinuing the BARR and redirecting resource to other aspects of managing the historic environment, potentially with a focus on buildings at risk;
- 2** maintaining the BARR in its existing form;
- 3** maintaining the BARR while implementing targeted changes to improve its content and functionality;
- 4** comprehensively redesigning or replacing the BARR to enable a more single-minded focus on a single key purpose, either:
  - A** securing interest and engagement from potential restoring purchasers; or
  - B** providing a robust and consistent dataset of information on the condition of Scotland's listed buildings.

The basic rationale for each option is described and followed by consideration of potential benefits and risks.

Some of these options could potentially be combined with each other or be implemented sequentially or in parallel as part of a larger, longer-term strategy for understanding and managing Scotland's vulnerable and at-risk heritage. Before decisions on the optimal path to follow can be made, there should ideally be a more general strategic consideration of the amount of resource that should be allocated to identifying and tackling buildings at risk in relation to HES's other responsibilities. In a context of increased pressure on public funding, this may entail making difficult choices about where resources can be optimally deployed to yield the greatest benefit, in terms of both the conservation of cultural heritage and wider socio-economic and environmental considerations, relative to actual or anticipated costs.

## Option 1: Discontinue the BARR

### Rationale

There is relatively little evidence for the register's success in supporting the restoration and reuse of buildings and what evidence there is suggests its role is relatively minor. The existing register has poor coverage, is outdated, and incomplete, limiting its value as a source of information on individual buildings and on buildings at risk collectively. As a result, there is currently a risk of misallocation of resources where the BARR is used to guide funding and other resource allocation decisions. The unsystematic way that buildings are included in the BARR (without full survey of all potentially in-scope buildings) means that it cannot function as a dataset for robust analysis of the historic environment or the establishment of meaningful trend data. These weaknesses could not be practicably remedied within a reasonable timescale without significant investment of resources and, almost certainly, a reduction in the BARR's scope. The most highly valued aspect of BARR appears to be the summary planning histories, but in investing resource to update these the BARR team are duplicating information that is now readily available elsewhere in a more authoritative form. The information already in the register will be made permanently available through the new Trove website, meaning the older planning histories that are more difficult to access by other means will remain available to users regardless of whether the BARR itself continues to function as a standalone service.

### Benefits and opportunities

Existing time / resources allocated to BARR could be saved and be used for more targeted interventions in the historic environment, potentially including work on buildings at risk. There would be reduced risk of misallocation of resources during grant application processes. There would be no need for additional investment, in a context of high pressure on public funds, to reorient / develop the BARR to update it and make it more consistent and complete.

### Risks and challenges

If there were no BARR or equivalent, Scotland would become an outlier among the four UK home nations, with the potential to imply that HES is failing to fulfil

a 'taken for granted' responsibility for a national heritage body. This, coupled with the high value attached to the BARR by users within the historic environment sector, means that its discontinuation could harm HES's reputation both among sector professionals and, also, potentially also with peer organisations such as Historic England and Cadw.

Discontinuing the BARR would fail to capitalise on the inclusion of the BARR in NPF4 and place HES at odds with current, recently formulated Scottish Government planning policy. In doing so, HES could potentially be losing an important opportunity to:

- leverage the BARR as a way of promoting intervention and targeting attention and resource on at-risk buildings;
- use the implicit expectation within NPF of complementary 'national' and 'local' at risk registers to trigger greater formal local authority involvement in identifying and addressing at-risk historic buildings.

There would be a concomitant risk of harming relations with the Scottish Government, which clearly expects BARR to continue and to provide a reliable foundation for decision making related to the historic environment.

Such risks could probably be substantially mitigated only if discontinuing the BARR were to be presented in the context of a compelling and well-publicised strategy for dealing with buildings at risk that offered clear benefits over a register-based approach. Introducing such an initiative would likely cost more than the savings generated by discontinuing the BARR.

The risks of discontinuing the BARR are likely to be increased by the plan within Cadw to develop a public-facing version of the Welsh listed building condition survey. If this happens, the comprehensiveness and sophistication of its approach is likely become much more widely known in the near future. This may prompt policymakers and wider sector stakeholders to question why a similar resource has not been or could not be developed in Scotland. This questioning could be more acute were this to happen in the wake of recent discontinuation of the BARR (unless this were to happen in the context of plans to develop a similar survey, as discussed in option 5 below).

Discontinuing the BARR would mean that the opportunity to build on the main existing body of data held by HES on at-risk buildings would be made more challenging and complex. Any future decision to recreate such a register, should this happen after a considerable lapse of time, would have to restart the process of gathering data largely from scratch. Discontinuation would similarly fail to capitalise on the substantial experience, expertise and commitment of the BARR team, whose work has been stalled or disrupted for a prolonged period. However, careful management of the kinds of information currently gathered through the BARR could mitigate this risk. For example, some of the most important factors relating to risk, such as vacancy, and the most valuable records of at-risk buildings, such as photographic imagery, could be integrated within existing HES databases, such as listed building records and CANMORE data, that will be made available through the Trove.Scot website.



8 Jock's Croft, Glen Ogle

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## Option 2: Continue with the BARR in its current form

### Rationale

Maintaining the BARR in its current form is the 'path of least resistance'. It would be (close to) cost neutral. The BARR would continue to be available and such benefits that it does offer would not be lost. With resumption of regular surveys, the problems with outdatedness and incompleteness of individual entries are likely to be at least partly and probably substantially addressed over the medium to long term.

### Benefits and opportunities

This option would sustain existing institutional and staff knowledge and capability. There would be opportunity to explore the effectiveness of pilot reports to local authorities on opportunities for regeneration in areas of high socio-economic need. There would be a continuing foundation for future initiatives and/or development of the BARR, if such change should be required or desired at a future date. There may be benefits for team morale, provided that the BARR team members feel that they have sufficient moral and financial support to undertake their existing role satisfactorily.

### Risks and challenges

This approach will not address the BARR's weaknesses in terms of representativeness, as current resourcing and proposals for resurvey do not involve comprehensive assessment of all potential candidate buildings. The large number of buildings potentially in scope and the extent of data currently covered by the entries will continue to pose high and arguably unrealistic demands on the limited resource available to maintain and update the BARR. Resource will continue to be expended on updating planning histories when this information is now readily available elsewhere, meaning that resource is not optimally allocated.

Continued reliance on the BARR is likely to result in a continued risk of misallocation of grant funding. While this could be addressed within HES by formally removing BARR status as a consideration in grant awards, parallel changes may be more challenging to secure in external organisations. There may also be potential reputational risks attached to requesting BARR status to be disregarded in historic environment decision making, especially when this is now a material planning consideration.

The already somewhat old-fashioned user interface will become increasingly outmoded, though the forthcoming integration of the BARR data within Trove.Scot will mitigate this risk. At the same time, however, the accompanying loss of a standalone BARR website may risk giving the impression to external stakeholders (already incipient) that HES is not investing sufficiently in making the case for at-risk heritage.

Unless accompanied by meaningful moral and financial support from within HES, maintaining the status quo may have a negative impact on team morale.

Continued expenditure on the current form of the BARR would involve forgoing the opportunity to redeploy currently allocated resource in ways that may have greater and/or more clearly demonstrable benefits for the historic environment.

## Option 3: Targeted modification of the existing BARR to enhance its basic functions

### Rationale

Targeted use of existing resource and/or investment of limited additional resource could potentially be used to modify the existing BARR, with the aim of maximising efficiency and value for money while enhancing the BARR's useability.

As a foundational measure, it would seem sensible to consider which aspects of the BARR are most fundamental to its key purposes and which deliver most and least benefits relative to resource invested. The BARR team could then, as far as possible, reduce or discontinue those which deliver fewest benefits and develop those with the highest potential impacts. There are many ways in which this could be done, but some possible approaches could include elements or combinations of the following:

- Narrowing the scope of the core BARR dataset to a defined and manageable subset of historic buildings of the highest level(s) of significance, such as Category A & B buildings, or Category A buildings only. There may be value in replicating the process previously used of a full Category A resurvey followed by a broadening out of the sample to B-listed buildings. Equally, systematic survey of both A and B buildings by HES would have the benefit of corresponding approximately to statutory consultation requirements.

- Freeing up resource by suspending ad hoc modifications and additions to the register and formally discontinuing updates to individual development histories.
  - Broadening the base of contributors by enabling other HES Heritage Directorate staff and appropriately trained local authority staff to add images and hyperlinks to external information (such as planning applications or newspaper reports).
- Any resulting freed resource could be redeployed to develop other aspects of the BARR. For example, this could include:
- Taking advantage of the narrowed scope to accelerate the pace and increase the comprehensiveness of area resurvey, to make the register more adequately representative of all in-scope buildings at risk.
  - As an alternative to continued cyclical area-based survey, reorienting to an 'on-demand' survey approach, where resources are directed in relation specific requests or emerging requirements related to specific buildings or areas, allowing more detailed and responsive analysis to be undertaken on those buildings or areas that are reviewed.
  - Drawing on the methodology established by the WMHBT for its volunteer led register to develop a low-cost parallel register for assets excluded from the narrowed scope.
  - Developing a mobile interface to allow survey data collection to be pushed straight to the database, eliminating the need for 'writing up' and allowing more time to be used for survey.
  - Redesigning the existing BARR user interface to ensure that it is attractive to users and that its existing rich functionality is more intuitively available.
  - Updating, re-writing and re-presenting the BAR toolkit and funding advice to ensure that it is current, accessible, and accurate.
  - Including links on each building page to: a) the Public Access planning portal page for the relevant address, to enable direct access to original planning application documentation; and b) to the Registers of Scotland, the latter accompanied by guidance on how to identify building owners.
  - Integrating information on sources of conservation-accredited architectural, surveying and engineering expertise into the BARR; and

providing links to relevant lists of experienced/qualified contractors with experience and/or training of working on historic buildings.

- Maintaining greater contact with local authorities and other external stakeholders. Stronger relationships could: help identify opportunities for combining heritage-led regeneration with other regeneration opportunities, as envisaged by the BARR team; encourage greater local commitment to using and updating the BARR; act as a push for local authorities to develop parallel local registers of at-risk historic buildings, as implicitly expected in NPF4.
- Taking advantage of the narrowed scope to enable more focused attention on highly listed buildings, in particular by enabling HES to collaborate with external stakeholders, for example by:
  - working with local authorities to produce development briefs and to encourage potential users and funders to come together;
  - working with key sector organisations such as SCT and SAVE to publicise buildings with a realistic chance of reuse.

## Benefits and opportunities

A carefully calibrated narrowing of scope coupled with stable or modestly enhanced resourcing could potentially result in a BARR that does less but does what it does do more robustly, comprehensively and effectively. For example, if scope was adjusted in relation to the resource available for the BARR, then it may become realistic to turn future iterations of the BARR into robust, cyclical datasets that provide a solid basis for understanding and making decisions about higher significance heritage assets as well as for tracking longer-term trends in the historic environment. This could help inform grant funding decisions on more highly listed, and so presumptively more significant, assets

One-off investment in the user interface, ideally accompanied by a relaunch and stronger marketing, could enhance its useability for potential restoring purchasers. Updating and rewriting of advice and guidance to enhance relevance and useability would again facilitate public use and through that reuse of buildings. This is especially potentially beneficial given that many users will find such advice directly through internet search portals, rather than by navigating through the BARR website. This may help drive traffic to the BARR web pages and raise awareness of its functions.



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This approach would keep open the opportunity to leverage the opportunities presented by the BARR's inclusion in NPF4.

Continuity would be maintained, both in internal knowledge and experience, and for external users.

### Risks and challenges

Any attempt to narrow scope will attract criticism from the substantial minority of users who are concerned about the exclusion of unlisted local heritage, for which there are few other pathways to protection or support. Reducing the opportunities for public and sector input into the BARR may create a feeling of exclusion, particularly amongst those who are currently committed contributors. The high value attached by external users to planning histories may lead to particularly strong resistance to a decision to cease updating them, even though deploying resource this way is difficult to justify given the ready availability of such information by other means.

Continued expenditure on BARR would involve forgoing the opportunity to redeploy currently allocated resource in ways that may have greater and/or more clearly demonstrable benefits for the historic environment.

## Option 4: Redevelop the BARR as a tool for potential restoring purchasers and attracting publicity

### Rationale

The collation and presentation of information as a formal dataset to inform understanding and management of the historic environment implies a very different approach from that required to attract interest in restoration, regeneration and reuse, whether in general or in relation to specific buildings. A register with the explicit aim of promoting restoration and reuse should prioritise intuitive search; focus on buildings that are actively marketed or have potential willing sellers; and should present attractive narrative and imagery that engages audiences' emotions and inspires a strong sense of potential. There is a far greater probability of the BARR encouraging reuse and regeneration if it were to be reconceived around these priorities.

If based on the SAVE model, this would involve: writing appealing narratives for all the buildings it includes; highlighting success stories using

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accessible text, impactful images and video; and guiding the user to readily comprehensible advice and information on the practicalities of restoring historic buildings. The range of information covered could include grants, sourcing skills and expertise, and making appropriate functional, aesthetic and material choices during restoration. There would ideally be a focus on identifying and highlighting those buildings that might be realistically available for acquisition, and where possible seller, agent or owner details should be available for each listed property.

If such a redevelopment were to be implemented, it would be advisable to consider carefully whether this could be best accomplished in-house, or whether there may be benefits to returning to the 'arm's length' approach used until 2011. The latter could potentially maximise economy and permit greater latitude in the way that cases are discussed and advocated for while reducing reputational and financial risk for HES.

### Benefits and opportunities

A BARR of this kind would maximise the potential of a register to promote restoration and reuse. There is a higher probability that the BARR would become a source for the news media, with the potential for buildings to attract wider attention. This can often act as a catalyst for solutions to hard-to-resolve cases.

Changing the BARR to be more user-friendly and engaging is likely to be positively received by those who are calling for the BARR to take a more proactive approach. Many components of such a move have enjoyed consistent long-term support from sector stakeholders, in particular making available more information on key themes like grants, approaches to reuse and restoration. This in turn would also have the potential to enhance HES's reputation for responsiveness and for listening to the wider historic environment sector.

SCT is already considering how to become more committed to buildings-at-risk work. HES might find itself 'pushing at an open door' when exploring whether to reinvolve external partners in this kind of redevelopment of the BARR. This has the potential help build collaborative relationships across the sector.

In connection with this, there is likely to be high potential for and some benefits from such 'outsourcing' including greater potential for volunteer involvement, reduced costs and enabling

a stronger advocacy role than would be possible within HES.

As an overt advocacy and regeneration tool, there would be high potential for public involvement in nominating buildings and developing campaigning activities.

### Risks and challenges

To be implemented effectively, this option would require considerable resource to be invested when it is not yet clear that any buildings at risk register, in itself, act as a major factor in securing the restoration and reuse of at-risk buildings. While likely to attract external interest and support, the cost-benefit balance of this kind of register consequently remains difficult to quantify.

If implemented in-house, this could restrict the scope and attraction of the required narrative content due to the (legitimate) expectation that HES, as a public body, should maintain neutrality and objectivity. Conversely, if a high level of public and media engagement was sought this could compromise HES's reputation for neutrality and objectivity and attract negative political attention. More generally, the kind of media involvement that would be fundamental to this approach would be liable to unfold in unpredictable ways. These risks could be mitigated by supporting an external organisation to deliver the BARR.

In practice, reconceiving the BARR along the lines would entail abandoning its potential to act as a robust dataset. The focus on advocacy would inevitably shape the kinds of buildings chosen for inclusion or prioritisation. Outsourcing could also reduce HES's ability to control the quality of the data and raise issues of data ownership that would need careful management.

There is the potential for some buildings, because they are not being actively marketed or of a type thought to be liable to attract restoring purchasers, to be neglected, even though they may be of outstanding significance.

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## Option 5: Redevelop the BARR as a comprehensive cyclical condition survey

### Rationale

The current value of the BARR as a source of information about buildings at risk is compromised by its incompleteness and lack of currency. Transforming the BARR into, or replacing it by, a comprehensive cyclical condition survey would address these problems. The example of the Welsh listed building condition survey suggests that such a survey could be undertaken within currently available resource, though appropriate allowance would need to be made for set-up costs if this were to be undertaken in-house by HES. If such a survey made use of the systems developed by the Welsh survey's contractor, it could benefit from the contractor's high-quality and well-tested proprietary user interfaces, data collection methods, predictive algorithms, and access to wider comparative case data. The current contractor for the Welsh survey has indicated a willingness to be flexible in finding the right balance of external and internal provision, to assure HES of best value and long-term sustainability.

### Benefits and opportunities

The comprehensiveness and consistency of this approach would, for the first time, provide HES with a robust general dataset on the condition of the historic environment along with key baseline information on all in-scope assets. Over time, it would become a source of reliable trend data on the historic environment.

The systematic approach and requirement to maintain the rigorous structure and cyclical updating of the survey would reduce pressures for ad hoc updating, exclusion and inclusions. This need not preclude incorporating verified corrections and updates on the live version of the database, to ensure that those buildings that become vulnerable or at-risk between survey cycles are taken into account where necessary.

If implemented in collaboration with the consultant responsible for the Welsh survey, it would provide access to extensive comparative data and powerful predictive algorithms. This would provide objective information that could help prioritise individual at-risk buildings for intervention. The resulting dataset would also provide a robust foundation for prioritising grant allocations by both HES and external funders.

It would be readily possible to extract comprehensive lists of at-risk, nationally significant historic buildings, supporting NP4 and ensuring that Scottish Government expectations of the BARR are realised.

It would act as a sound foundation for understanding, policy development, and advocacy, by HES and others. If made publicly available, it would be of far greater value than the current BARR as a source for external scholarly research and sector advocacy.

This approach would also ensure that all formally designated nationally significant assets would be covered by the survey, helping to create a clear division of responsibility with local authorities, which would be responsible for identifying non-designated heritage assets at risk.

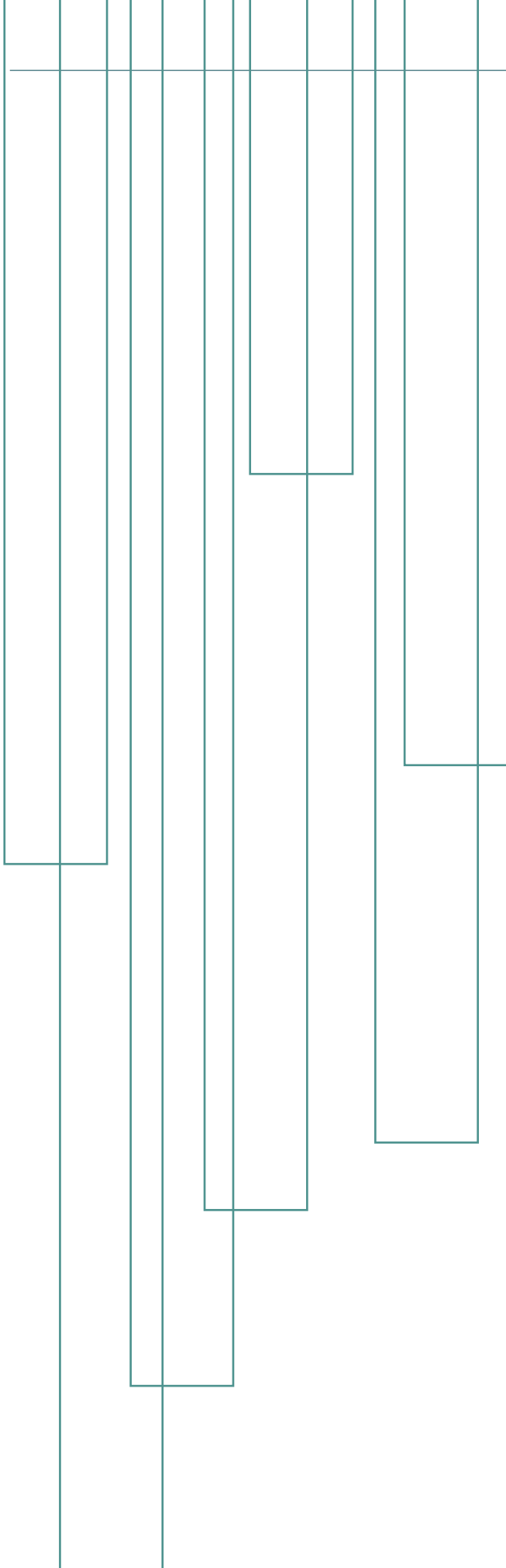
### Risks and challenges

There may be challenges implementing such a survey, whether this was pursued internally or through external procurement.

Internal implementation would impose a much higher burden of survey work on the BARR team, requiring consequent adjustments to job roles and expectations. It is not clear if the existing resource allocated to the BARR would be sufficient, within public sector constraints, to carry out a survey on this scale. If implemented entirely internally, it would be complex and costly to put in place the technologies needed to implement the kind of highly efficient data collection required by a) such an intensive survey cycle; and b) the extent of functionality available in the existing proprietary database used by the Welsh survey. As with all IT-dependent projects, there would also be a risk of cost and time overruns and functional inadequacies. It is also not clear that internal implementation would be as efficient as external procurement.

The risks of internal implementation could be substantially mitigated by external procurement. This would require competitive tendering. In practice, nevertheless, it seems likely that the existing contractor for the Welsh survey, if willing to tender, would provide best value for money and lowest risk. If externally contracted, there would need to be close attention to the terms of the contract to ensure that ownership of the data by HES and the long-term sustainability of the platform were fully assured. Even so, external involvement will always entail some risk, as HES would not have full control of the data and software.





Externally, replacing the BARR with a comprehensive condition survey and discontinuing the BARR in its present form could be viewed negatively by some stakeholders. This would particularly be the case for those stakeholders who especially value the development histories of individual buildings. This risk may not be as significant as it otherwise would be given the forthcoming launch of the Trove portal, with its integrated presentation of HES's publicly available data. Those who wish to see HES take a more proactive approach to tackling at-risk buildings may also be concerned by the BARR changing into, or being replaced by, a database focused solely on assessing building condition. This risk could potentially be mitigated by strategic use of the resulting information as the basis for prioritising and publicising buildings at risk in collaboration with organisations such as SAVE, SCT, the Heritage Alliance and Local Authorities. Finally, the necessary narrowing of attention to listed buildings associated with this approach may also be viewed negatively by those stakeholders concerned with non-designated buildings. This may imply a need for a clearer demarcation of responsibilities between HES as the national lead body and local authorities, with their more direct interest in and ability to monitor and control outcomes for locally significant heritage. The risk of less important assets being neglected should also be mitigated by the explicit policy outcome in NP4 to secure sustainable reuse of redundant or neglected historic assets. In addition, the risk could be further mitigated by offering targeted practical or grant support for local authorities or heritage groups to develop parallel registers of buildings of local historic or architectural interest.

