



Our Past, Our Future

The strategy for Scotland's
Historic Environment

Insights Report 2026

Our Past, Our Future Insights Report 2026

The Historic Environment's Contribution to Scotland's National Priorities

Foreword

Scotland's historic environment is often viewed as a cultural, environmental or conservation interest. The evidence collected through the Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Baseline Refresh 2026 demonstrates a much broader contribution.

Historic buildings, places, collections, landscapes and heritage organisations contribute to many of Scotland's most significant national priorities, including economic growth, climate resilience, community empowerment, workforce development and wellbeing. They provide infrastructure for communities, businesses, tourism, skills development and civic life while supporting wider ambitions for a fairer, greener and more prosperous Scotland.

This report draws together the most strategically significant findings emerging from the OPOF Baseline Refresh 2026 and presents them through the lens of Scotland's national priorities. It is intended to inform policy development, investment decisions, funding strategies and partnership activity across government and beyond.

While the accompanying Baseline Refresh Summary 2026 presents evidence against individual OPOF outcomes, this Insights Report 2026 synthesises evidence across those outcomes to explore progress and challenges in relation to Scotland's national priorities.

Executive Summary

The findings suggest that Scotland's historic environment functions not simply as a cultural asset, but as a fundamental part of the nation's economic, environmental and community infrastructure. The evidence demonstrates that Scotland's historic environment is contributing to national outcomes far beyond the heritage sector.

The strongest findings show that the historic environment:

- Generates economic growth and attracts additional investment
- Supports regeneration and Community Wealth Building
- Contributes to Scotland's climate adaptation and resilience ambitions
- Provides homes, workplaces and community assets that are critical to local places
- Supports skills development and employment
- Delivers measurable wellbeing benefits
- Enables community empowerment and local stewardship
- Commands strong and sustained public support

The evidence also identifies significant challenges that require coordinated action, including climate-related building deterioration, workforce shortages, inequalities in participation and ownership, and inconsistent approaches to impact reporting.

References to partnership, alignment and collaboration identify opportunities emerging from the evidence and stakeholder engagement, not formal commitment by individual organisations.

At a Glance: 10 Key Evidence Statements

1. Historic environment investment attracts significant additional investment

Every £1 invested through Historic Environment Scotland grants attracts £5.94 of additional investment in 2025 (HES Grants Funding Report, 2025). This has increased by 52% since the previous OPOF Baseline.

2. The historic environment contributes £6.1 billion to Scotland's economy

Historic environment activity directly contributed an estimated £6.1 billion to Scotland's economy and supported around 84,700 jobs in 2024 (Scotland's Historic Environment Audit (SHEA), 2026).

3. Heritage is part of Scotland's infrastructure

Traditional buildings are living infrastructure and account for around 33% of retail space, 24% of office space and 41% of public-sector space in Scotland (SHEA, 2026).

4. Communities are now major custodians of Scotland's heritage

Over one-third (36%) of all community-owned assets are historic environment assets in 2024 (OPOF Baseline Refresh, 2026).

5. Community ownership has transformed stewardship

Community ownership has grown from 84 assets in 2000 to 853 assets in 2024 (Scottish Government, Community Ownership in Scotland 2024, 2025).

6. Traditional buildings are central to Scotland's climate challenge

Around 446,000 pre-1919 homes remain in active use across Scotland (Scottish House Condition Survey (SCHS), 2024).

7. Traditional buildings face disproportionately high levels of disrepair

68% of pre-1919 homes experience disrepair to critical elements in 2024, compared with 48% of Scottish dwellings overall (SHCS, 2024).

8. Workforce shortages are constraining delivery

79% of employers reported they are facing skills or knowledge gaps, while 46% reported that their organisation does not currently have the skills it needs (Skills Investment Plan (Skills Investment Plan (SIP), 2026).

9. Heritage volunteering delivers substantial social value

At least 76,548 volunteer hours were recorded in 2024, 91% of volunteers report improved wellbeing and 87% report having a stronger connection to places (Heritage Volunteering in Scotland Research Report, 2025).

10. Public support for heritage remains exceptionally strong

86% of people agreed that Scotland's heritage should be well looked after in 2023 (Scottish Household Survey, 2024).

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Strategic Insights

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Scotland's Economic Growth



Scotland's historic environment is a significant economic asset, supporting jobs, attracting investment and contributing to sustainable, place-based economic growth.

Why This Matters

Economic growth increasingly depends on attracting investment, supporting sustainable regeneration, creating thriving places and strengthening local economies. The evidence shows that Scotland's historic environment is already contributing to these ambitions at local and national levels.

Evidence at a Glance

£6.1bn

contributed to Scotland's economy directly and annually in 2024

84,700

jobs supported in 2024

£5.94

generated for every £1 invested through HES grant programmes in 2025

52%

increase in investment leverage since the previous OPOF evidence baseline

What Heritage is Already Delivering

- Supporting regeneration and town centre renewal
- Leveraging public and private sector investment
- Contributing to Community Wealth Building
- Supporting tourism and local business growth
- Bringing historic buildings back into productive use
- Strengthening confidence and investment in places

Opportunity to Do More

- Recognise heritage as economic infrastructure
- Embed heritage within regeneration and local growth strategies
- Increase use of heritage-led approaches within Community Wealth Building
- Strengthen economic impact evidence to inform investment decisions

Contribution to national priorities through delivery of Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Outcomes:

- **Outcome 7:** The historic environment makes a responsible contribution to Scotland's economy
- **Outcome 9:** Increased engagement with the historic environment with a focus on activities that enhance wellbeing

Climate Transition & Resilience



Scotland cannot achieve its climate ambitions without addressing the future performance and resilience of its traditional buildings and historic places.

Why This Matters

Historic buildings form a substantial part of Scotland's homes, workplaces and public buildings. Their condition, maintenance and adaptation are increasingly important to achieving climate resilience, net zero and sustainable reuse objectives.

Evidence at a Glance

446,000

traditional pre-1919
homes remain in active
use in 2024

68%

experience critical
disrepair in 2024

97%

of HES grant applications
referenced climate
change in 2025-26

100%

of HES capital repair
grants incorporated
adaptation measures
since 2024-25

What Heritage is Already Delivering

- Climate adaptation and resilience planning
- Sustainable building reuse
- Lower-carbon repair and maintenance approaches
- Climate-focused investment programmes
- Development of retrofit and climate skills
- Evidence and innovation supporting net zero ambitions

Opportunity to Do More

- Strengthen links between climate, housing and heritage policy
- Scale adaptation, repair and retrofit activity
- Expand climate and traditional building skills provision
- Improve climate risk and emissions evidence
- Position historic buildings as part of Scotland's climate solution

Contribution to national priorities through delivery of Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** Reduced emissions from the historic environment
- **Outcome 2:** The historic environment is more climate resilient
- **Outcome 3:** Improved pathways for historic environment skills

Communities & Place



Communities are becoming custodians of Scotland's historic environment, using heritage to strengthen places, build local capacity and support community-led change.

Why This Matters

Community empowerment, local decision-making and place-based approaches are increasingly central to Scotland's ambitions for resilient communities and inclusive growth. Historic buildings and places often provide the platform through which these ambitions are delivered.

Evidence at a Glance

307

heritage assets in
community ownership
in 2024

36%

of all community-
owned assets are historic
environment assets
in 2024

7,728

volunteers supported
Doors Open Days activity
in 2025*

6%

of community-owned
assets are located in
Scotland's most deprived
communities in 2024

What Heritage is Already Delivering

- Community ownership and stewardship
- Local leadership and volunteering
- Stronger place-based partnerships
- Community Wealth Building opportunities
- Greater community participation
- Support for local identity and belonging

Opportunity to Do More

- Strengthen community influence and shared decision-making
- Improve access to ownership and stewardship opportunities
- Increase support in disadvantaged communities
- Build community capacity, leadership and resilience
- Embed heritage within wider place-making and regeneration activity

Contribution to national priorities through delivery of Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Outcomes:

- **Outcome 5:** Communities have more opportunities to participate in decision-making about the historic environment
- **Outcome 6:** The historic environment is more diverse and inclusive
- **Outcome 4:** Organisations that care for the historic environment have the right skills and are more resilient

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Workforce & Skills



The workforce that cares for Scotland's historic environment is also essential to delivering national ambitions for housing, climate adaptation, regeneration and economic growth.

Why This Matters

Without sufficient workforce capacity, specialist skills and future talent, Scotland's ambitions for repair, retrofit, adaptation and regeneration will become increasingly difficult to achieve.

Evidence at a Glance

79%

of employers reported they are facing skills or knowledge gaps

£25.5m

invested across 119 skills-related projects in 2025/26

7,000+

people took part in careers awareness activities in 2025/6

46%

of employers report in 2025/26 they do not currently have the skills they need

What Heritage is Already Delivering

- Traditional and specialist skills development
- Green and retrofit skills
- Apprenticeships and vocational opportunities
- Workforce development and capacity building
- Volunteer pathways into employment
- Support for Fair Work and workforce wellbeing

Opportunity to Do More

- Expand workforce entry routes and apprenticeships
- Improve recruitment and retention
- Grow climate, retrofit and digital skills
- Strengthen workforce data and planning
- Align heritage skills with green skills and housing priorities

Contribution to national priorities through delivery of Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Outcomes:

- **Outcome 3:** Improved pathways for historic environment skills
- **Outcome 4:** Organisations that care for the historic environment have the right skills and are more resilient
- **Outcome 8:** The historic environment provides fair work

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Wellbeing & Quality of Life



Participation in Scotland's historic environment delivers measurable wellbeing, social connection and learning benefits for individuals and communities.

Why This Matters

Scotland's public service priorities increasingly focus on prevention, wellbeing, social connection and resilient communities. The evidence shows heritage can make a meaningful contribution to each.

Evidence at a Glance

91%

of heritage volunteers surveyed in 2025 reported improved wellbeing

87%

report a stronger connection to place in 2025

76,548+

volunteer hours were recorded annually in 2024

£1.35m

in estimated annual value generated by heritage volunteers' contributions

What Heritage is Already Delivering

- Improved wellbeing and quality of life
- Stronger social connections
- Increased confidence and belonging
- Learning and skills development
- Volunteering opportunities
- Community pride and identity

Opportunity to Do More

- Strengthen links with health and wellbeing agendas
- Increase participation opportunities
- Improve measurement of wellbeing outcomes
- Expand opportunities for underrepresented groups
- Build stronger cross-sector partnerships

Contribution to national priorities through delivery of Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Outcomes:

- **Outcome 9:** Increased engagement with the historic environment, with a focus on activities that enhance wellbeing
- **Outcome 5:** Communities have more opportunities to participate in decision-making about the historic environment
- **Outcome 6:** The historic environment is more diverse and inclusive

Public Confidence & Participation



Public support for Scotland's historic environment remains exceptionally strong and provides a platform for future investment, engagement and public value.

Why This Matters

Strong public support creates opportunities to increase participation, broaden representation and strengthen the role of heritage within national and local priorities.

Evidence at a Glance

86%

agree Scotland's heritage
should be well looked
after in 2023

33%

visited a historic
place in 2023

30%

visited a museum
in 2023

21%

visited a gallery
in 2023

What Heritage is Already Delivering

- Public engagement and participation
- Learning and cultural discovery
- Civic pride and identity
- Social connection
- Increased awareness of local places
- Opportunities for volunteering and involvement

Opportunity to Do More

- Build on strong public support
- Remove barriers to participation
- Increase representation and inclusion
- Develop new audiences and partnerships
- Improve access and relevance for diverse communities

Contribution to national priorities through delivery of Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Outcomes:

- **Outcome 6:** The historic environment is more diverse and inclusive
- **Outcome 9:** Increased engagement with the historic environment, with a focus on activities that enhance wellbeing

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Regeneration & Community Wealth Building



Historic places are helping drive regeneration, Community Wealth Building and local economic resilience across Scotland.

Why This Matters

Scotland's ambitions for resilient places and inclusive local economies require long-term investment in existing assets, communities and places. Historic assets provide a platform for achieving these ambitions.

Evidence at a Glance

£6.1bn

direct economic
contribution to Scotland's
economy in 2024

84,700

jobs supported in 2024

£5.94

additional investment
generated for every £1 invested
through HES Grants in 2025

What Heritage is Already Delivering

- Town centre regeneration
- Reuse of underutilised buildings
- Community enterprise and ownership
- Local economic activity
- Place-based investment
- Long-term value creation

Opportunity to Do More

- Embed heritage within regeneration programmes
- Align heritage and Community Wealth Building activity
- Increase productive reuse of heritage assets
- Strengthen partnerships with economic development agencies
- Improve understanding of long-term social and economic value

Contribution to national priorities through delivery of Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Outcomes:

- **Outcome 7:** The historic environment makes a responsible contribution to Scotland's economy
- **Outcome 5:** Communities have more opportunity to participate in decision-making about the historic environment
- **Outcome 9:** Increased engagement with the historic environment, with a focus on activities that enhance wellbeing

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Heritage as Infrastructure



Scotland's historic environment is not only a cultural asset. It is a significant part of the nation's housing, economic, community and public-service infrastructure.

Why This Matters

Investment decisions often overlook the role historic buildings already play in supporting homes, businesses, communities and public services. The evidence demonstrates their importance as active infrastructure.

Evidence at a Glance

33%

of retail floorspace
(SHEA, 2026)

24%

of office floorspace
(SHEA, 2026)

41%

of public sector
floorspace (SHEA, 2026)

446,000

traditional dwellings
in 2024

1,553

organisations making up the Historic Environment (estimate, Mapping Scotland's Historic Environment Sector 2026). Out of those, **53%** are registered charities. **14%** are located in the Highlands and **20%** located in the four major Scottish cities.

What Heritage is Already Delivering

- Homes and housing capacity
- Business and commercial premises
- Public services and facilities
- Community hubs and assets
- Tourism infrastructure
- Foundations for sustainable reuse

Opportunity to Do More

- Recognise heritage as infrastructure in policy and investment decisions
- Improve maintenance and resilience of existing assets
- Align heritage with housing and infrastructure agendas
- Promote reuse before replacement
- Increase understanding of the wider value of historic assets

Contribution to national priorities through delivery of Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Outcomes:

- Crosscutting across all nine OPOF Outcomes

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Delivering Impact Through Partnership



The greatest progress is achieved when government, communities, funders, organisations and delivery partners work together around shared outcomes.

Why This Matters

Many of Scotland's biggest challenges, including climate change, workforce shortages, community resilience and inclusive growth, require coordinated action across multiple sectors.

Evidence of Progress

- Delivery of *Our Past, Our Future* through shared leadership
- Scotland's Historic Environment Skills Investment Plan partnership delivery
- HES funded City Heritage Trusts programme
- Growing climate and adaptation partnerships
- Community ownership and stewardship support networks
- Heritage-led regeneration programmes across Scotland
- Increasing collaboration beyond the heritage sector

What Partnership is Delivering

- Shared investment and resources
- Stronger evidence and learning
- Better policy alignment
- Greater reach and impact
- Innovation and problem solving
- More effective delivery at scale

Opportunity to Do More

- Align investment around shared outcomes
- Strengthen cross-sector partnerships
- Improve collective leadership and coordination
- Increase use of shared evidence
- Embed heritage within wider national priorities

Contribution to national priorities through delivery of Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Outcomes:

- Crosscutting across all nine OPOF Outcomes

Cross-Cutting Evidence Themes

Across all areas of the Baseline Refresh, six themes emerge consistently:

1. Heritage is infrastructure

Historic buildings and places continue to support housing, businesses, public services, tourism and community life. Traditional buildings account for a substantial proportion of Scotland's retail, office and public-sector space, demonstrating that the historic environment remains an active part of Scotland's built infrastructure.

2. Heritage contributes to national priorities

The evidence demonstrates growing contributions to climate resilience, economic development, regeneration, Community Wealth Building, skills development, wellbeing and community empowerment. Heritage outcomes are increasingly linked to wider public policy objectives.

3. Communities as custodians

Community ownership and stewardship have expanded significantly, with communities now responsible for hundreds of historic assets across Scotland. The long-term sustainability of these assets is increasingly dependent on access to skills, capacity, advice and investment.

4. Workforce constraint

Skills shortages, recruitment challenges and limited workforce capacity in the historic environment continue to affect conservation, retrofit, regeneration and climate adaptation activity. These workforce challenges increasingly affect delivery of wider housing, climate, and economic ambitions.

5. Traditional Buildings: opportunity and challenge

Traditional (pre-1919) buildings are a major economic, community and environmental asset, but persistently high levels of disrepair highlight the scale of the maintenance, repair and adaptation challenge facing Scotland's existing built environment.

6. Better evidence

The evidence base for Scotland's historic environment is stronger than at the start of the current OPOF National Strategy period. More consistent approaches to historic environment evidence measurement, reporting and evaluation would strengthen future policy, investment and delivery decisions.

Strategic Priorities for the Final Phase of OPOF

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

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

Conclusion

The evidence presented through the OPOF Baseline Refresh demonstrates that Scotland's historic environment contributes to far more than the conservation of historic assets. It attracts investment, supports economic growth, strengthens communities, contributes to climate resilience, develops workforce capacity and improves wellbeing.

The challenge for the final phase of *Our Past, Our Future* is not demonstrating that heritage matters. The evidence shows that it does. The challenge is ensuring that Scotland's historic environment is consistently integrated into the infrastructure, investment and policy decisions that will shape Scotland's future.

Realising this opportunity will require continued strategic collaboration, stronger evidence on long-term outcomes and greater consistency in data collection and impact measurement. Strengthening the evidence base will be critical to demonstrating collective impact, informing future decision-making and ensuring the historic environment's contribution is fully recognised across national policy priorities.



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