



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Dear Christina,

**Delivering on the priorities of Our Past, Our Future: The Strategy for  
Scotland's Historic Environment**

The Committee has recently concluded a short piece of work focused on delivering on the priorities of [Our Past, Our Future: The Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment](#). Thank you for your contribution at the evidence session on 7 December.

We covered a range of issues across our evidence sessions, such as the partnership approach to delivery, monitoring progress, and potential risks to delivery. We also discussed how the strategy will be mainstreamed, how to overcome the shortage of key skills, and how the maintenance of heritage assets will be prioritised. In relation to Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and its portfolio, we considered the progress of the high-level masonry work on its sites, the acquisition and release of Properties in Care, and the importance of additional income generation.

A summary of the issues raised in the evidence is provided below at **Annexe A**.

It is clear from the evidence received that there will be challenges in the delivery of the strategy, and the Committee in particular notes the concerns of witnesses regarding the shortage of a skilled workforce to maintain, repair and retrofit historic assets; and on the impact this may have on Scotland's historic environment and on communities.

The Committee also, however, notes that the implementation of the strategy is understandably at an early stage, and many of the issues we discussed are expected to be taken forward as the strategy moves into its delivery phase.

We heard that a refreshed version of the Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment will be launched in Spring 2024, and that a newly appointed National Strategy Programme Team will publish a detailed delivery framework by early Summer 2024 and the first performance reporting in June 2024. Greater flexibility in HES' operating model will also be introduced from 2024-25.

The Committee is therefore keen to continue our scrutiny of the strategy in 2024, in particular to consider the progress made on delivering the priorities and actions, and on addressing the concerns raised in recent evidence. We may schedule further evidence sessions to revisit this work in the next six-to-twelve months. In the meantime, we would welcome being kept abreast by correspondence of relevant updates on the above areas of interest.

Yours sincerely,



Clare Adamson MSP, Convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Cc: Alex Paterson, Chief Executive, Historic Environment Scotland

## **Annexe A**

1. A number of the stakeholders the Committee took evidence from expressed their support for the priorities for the sector as set out in the strategy—Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) said that “the strategy has the right priorities”; National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) “very much welcomes the priorities”; and Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS) noted that there is “ambition in the priorities and actions”.
2. The Committee also heard that how the strategy is delivered and monitored would be key to its success. NLHF identified that “because of the breadth of mission...we will need to think very carefully about how we monitor its impact and how we measure the change that it makes over its lifespan”. MGS added that “deliverability will depend on a number of things in the wider context such as resource”.

### **Partnership approach to delivery**

3. The strategy sets out that it is a “collaborative” strategy, “owned and delivered by everyone.” HES outlined that while it would have a “a major role in its delivery”, there will be a role for other stakeholders within and beyond the sector in delivery.
4. However, BEFS warned that “when something is everyone’s job, then it quickly can become no one’s”, and suggested therefore that “specificity, and rapid action will

be essential to delivering against outcomes.” The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) also considered that there is “a lack of recognition that organisations need support” to “input into the delivery process”.

5. On collaboration with local authorities in delivery, HES noted that “the previous strategy tried to engage local authorities, with not an awful lot of success” but that it had “learned lessons” from this. It did, however, note that it works with local authorities—who are “integral to delivering the historic environment strategy and everything to do with the historic environment”—“day in and day out”.

### **Mainstreaming beyond the historic environment sector**

6. The Committee heard that there was a need to ‘mainstream’ the strategy beyond the historic environment sector, and that the priorities reflected how the sector is delivering against wider government outcomes.
7. Members noted that the three priorities could be applied to any public sector strategy. HES considered that this “shows that the historic environment is not left field of mainstream Scotland or mainstream priorities, but centre stage.”
8. NTS considered that “one of the main things that was not quite achieved” by the previous strategy was “being seen as relevant to a lot more people than just the sector—it did not manage to become mainstreamed.” It said this had “undermined its ability to deliver against its objectives or address the challenges to the sector”. However, BEFS said that the new strategy “has developed and enhanced from the previous strategy the expression of cross-sector and cross-portfolio delivery against national outcomes”.
9. HES outlined that the “priorities are aligned to Scottish Government strategies, policies and plans with the aim of encouraging collaboration and partnership outside of the sector and to support the mainstreaming of the historic environment across policy areas.” However, it considered that to “deliver those centre stage priorities”, it needs “first, more recognition of that and, secondly, a joining up of the resource across Government and across organisations.”
10. BEFS agreed that “there is concern that the historic environment; whilst demonstrating it is pivotal to meeting net zero aims, central to communities and place-based thinking, and a significant cultural contributor to Scotland’s tourism economy; could be tasked with doing a lot of the ‘heavy lifting’ against nationally important outcomes, without the support to deliver appropriately due to the necessary skills and resource not being in place”
11. HES said it was “anticipated” that the approach of aligning the priorities with wider Scottish Government aims “should address funding and resourcing in the sector by unlocking for them more opportunities and potential new funding streams from different parts of government and industry.” It suggested that “if the strategy is not to be delivered by the sector only, the funding should not be constrained within the culture portfolio.”

12. The Minister viewed that “mainstreaming across many parts of government is not just desirable—it is necessary”. She added that “we can do more to mainstream” the strategy “across other areas of government, and we will”, noting that she had “taken that up as a personal action”.

### **Skills shortage**

13. The strategy acknowledges that “we face an acute shortage of key skills”, and the Minister also noted that “the need to address skills shortages in the historic environment sector has become even more important and pressing.”

14. The skills shortage was illustrated by NTS, which commented that “even if the NTS had the finances to deliver large-scale capital works across Scotland, I do not think that we would have the skills available in Scotland to do so”. It said that “the pool is very shallow of the traditional skills required to achieve good-quality maintenance and repair, let alone robust retrofit.”

15. Overcoming the sector’s skills deficit was identified by all stakeholders as being key to the deliverability of the strategy. NLHF said that “making sure that we resource and plan for developing the skills we will need” to the strategy’s aims will be “essential”. HES agreed that “skills, skills, skills will be a key issue” in delivery.

16. The Committee heard that the skills necessary to maintain the historic environment were also necessary to meet net zero targets, and therefore there is a wider interest in the skills deficit being overcome.

17. HES commented that “Scotland cannot achieve its net zero targets without having the right number of skilled people to do that” and that it is therefore “important to find the mechanism, funding route, or qualifications framework that will enable that to be delivered.” NTS noted that there needed to be a “narrative shift” to view jobs required for maintenance and retrofitting, as “green jobs”, including “for any associated funding support programmes”.

18. A [Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment](#) (SIP) was developed in 2019 by HES in collaboration with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and sector stakeholders. HES told the Committee that a refreshed version of the Skills Investment Plan would be launched in the first quarter of 2024.

19. NTS estimated that “only 30%” of the SIP actions had been delivered, with “the majority of objectives” likely “to have been missed due to lack of resource”. SDS judged that “the reason why some of the actions did not happen came down to funding for certain projects”, with “such a change in the funding landscape” over the last five years “that those projects have not been able to happen.” HES, on the other hand, considered that “about 59%” of the actions have been delivered.

20. NTS said that SIP being “reviewed comprehensively” is “lifting the carpet on a lot of issues” and expected a “great deal of action” to come out of the review. It said it would be beneficial to put some investment behind it”.

21. SDS commented that “with the demand across Scotland, there is absolutely no question about the fact that we need that skilled workforce”, however that there was a “lower demand from employers” to, for example, take on apprentices, which “has a knock-on effect on the skills provision”. It elaborated that “with low demand, it becomes very difficult for colleges and other centres to run the classes”.
22. On stonemasonry, HES noted the views of employers that the qualification is “not fit for purpose and does not meet the needs of the industry.” The Minister informed the Committee that work is underway on the “qualification framework and whether it reflects professionalism and the way in which we want to hold those skills in our training formats”, with the Scottish Qualifications Authority having agreed “to look at how we develop that professional framework”.
23. HES stated that the skills “issue is bigger than the sector and it requires the education and skills sectors to be on board and to work with us”. The Committee heard that the Minister had met with the Minister for Higher and Further Education to discuss the skills deficit and “address all the concerns that have been raised”.

### **Monitoring progress and measuring success**

24. Another area the Committee explored was how progress on the actions would be monitored and how success would be measured. HES said the strategy differs from its predecessor “by being published with high-level actions and measurable outcomes that were informed by extensive consultation and engagement with stakeholders.” NTS said it had “some concerns over the lack of detail and specificity of the measures of success” and considered that “development of these must be prioritised”.
25. NTS also considered that “establishing how actions will contribute to final objectives is important”. It said it was “notable” that while the previous strategy had “mostly achieved its objectives”, for example in “delivering working groups and reports”, “the overall condition of the historic environment—a more objective measure—had declined during this period.”
26. BEFS had noted there had been “concern that monitoring and delivery could become caught-up in complex KPIs which are not measurable against by a range of organisations”. However, HES said the strategy “has been designed to be scalable in the way its priorities, activities and outcomes are approached”, able to be “adapted to work for large national or regional public bodies or smaller, community-based organisations.”
27. BEFS told the Committee that the previous strategy having a “high number of KPIs” had been “a challenge”. Indeed, HES said it had “learned an awful lot from the previous strategy”, including that “having 13 key performance indicators was too many and that there was a challenge with acquiring the data from the sector”.
28. BEFS considered that “collaborative data is essential” and viewed that “too much reporting” on the previous strategy had “relied on HES’ data which does not either reflect the full breadth of sector involvement in supporting the strategy nor give the

opportunity for the sector to fully see themselves supporting the strategy outcomes and delivery”.

29. The Minister referred to a data analyst recently employed as part of the National Strategy Programme Team as being crucial to supporting the measurement and monitoring of the strategy’s delivery, noting that she will “put a lot of stock in the new person who is doing the data analysis”.

### **Maintaining heritage assets**

30. The strategy acknowledges that “we will not be able to protect every heritage asset” and therefore “will need to make difficult choices about the historic places we invest in and which elements of our heritage we can maintain for the future.”
31. HES stated that “there will never be enough resource, financial or otherwise, to do everything that everybody wants to do” and therefore “it was important that we reflect in the strategy the fact that there will be difficult choices”. However, NTS said the strategy “does not set out a framework for making these tough decisions.”
32. HES considered that with the launch of a [Sustainable Investment Toolkit](#), an output from the previous strategy, “we are getting to an agreed methodology for helping to make the decisions that will be the reality, given the financial and wider environment in which we operate.”
33. The Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland (AHSS) noted its concern “that there was not enough emphasis” on what it referred to as “the day job, which is looking after Scotland’s historic buildings”. However, HES suggested that the priorities of the strategy would support the maintenance of heritage assets. It said that by achieving some of the priorities, “such as achieving net zero, we will be looking after the historic environment”.

### *Closures to HES sites*

34. The Committee asked for an update on the ongoing high-level masonry inspections being undertaken by HES on their sites, and the timetable for re-opening sites which are closed or have restricted access.
35. The Minister noted that “seventy buildings were impacted by high-level masonry issues”, while “at this stage, 53 have now opened or partially opened”. She said that HES “expects all the inspections and work to be finished by March” 2024. HES considered that it was “making good progress on inspections”.
36. AHSS expressed its view that HES is “working through” the inspections “methodically, but it is not doing it quickly enough”. However, NTS said it was “very sympathetic to the position in which HES finds itself”, given “the resources that are required to inspect and undertake regular maintenance of any large estate are substantial”. Likewise, the NLHF said it had “sympathy” with HES “over the challenges that it is facing”. It noted that it is an “organisation that is resourced and expert enough to identify where the risk areas are”, while “the same climate change impacts are being felt across the built environment”.

### *Properties in Care*

37. Members also asked about whether the numbers of Properties in Care (PiCs)—which form a portfolio of sites managed by Historic Environment Scotland on behalf of Scottish Ministers—would expand.
38. HES said it had developed an acquisition-and-release policy which sets out a “clear approach and methodology” for considering applications for property to be taken into, or out of, care. It noted that this includes consideration of “the historical and cultural significance” but also the “practical implications”.
39. The Minister acknowledged that if HES “took more properties into its care, it would mean more responsibility, including financial responsibility” which, “in tight circumstances”, is “a difficult thing to do.”

### *Community asset transfer*

40. The Committee previously considered that “community ownership cannot always be the answer to protecting assets subject to closure, but where this is a viable option, communities need to be provided with ongoing support and advice.”
41. The strategy notes that “around one third of all community asset transfers since 2015 have involved a heritage asset”. NLHF highlighted that community ownership of heritage assets brings unique challenges, as the “specific built environment skills that people need to maintain historic assets are few and far between”.
42. NLHF said it would “support further consideration of longer-term support for community groups which take on heritage assets through community asset transfers, beyond support for the acquisition and immediate set up”.
43. HES said it was “open” to community asset transfers, including of properties in care, however noted that inquiries in recent years had “come to nothing, largely because the financial obligations that are taken on in looking after historic properties are significant”.
44. The Committee heard that HES and NLHF had aligned their grant schemes so that it is “easier” for organisations to approach them for capital and revenue funding.

### **Income generation**

45. The Committee asked about how additional revenue could be generated to invest in the historic environment, within the challenging financial environment.
46. HES told the Committee that if it was to “push the boat out on commercial activities”, it would “want to be able to retain that income and reinvest it in the historic environment”. However, the Minister explained that “the way in which HES is set up creates some challenges”, given that “if it raises additional revenue, that has an impact on the grant that it gets from Government.” She updated that HES would have “some flexibility” in its operating model from 2024-25.