

Scotland's Historic Environment Forum (SHEF) Event Report

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow, 10 June 2026

1. Executive Summary

Scotland's Historic Environment Forum (SHEF) 2026 brought together 188 attendees from 105 organisations to explore how Scotland's historic environment contributes to national priorities and where strengthened collaboration can drive greater impact.

The event highlighted the breadth of activity already underway across the sector, while also identifying shared priorities for the final phase of delivery of *Our Past, Our Future* (OPOF) – the National Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment.

Across all sessions, consistent themes emerged:

- The need to move from consultation towards **co-design and shared decision-making**, supported by aligned systems and sustained investment
- A requirement to strengthen the **skills pipeline**, including progression and retention across all career stages
- The importance of positioning the historic environment as **core infrastructure**, contributing to economic growth, regeneration and wellbeing
- A strong call for **systemic approaches to inclusion**, embedded in leadership, policy and funding
- The need to improve **evidence, data and articulation of value** to evidence the contribution of the historic environment and inform coordinated action, policy and investment
- The importance of **fiscal and funding systems**, including VAT and wider incentives, in enabling delivery

These priorities will inform the final phase of delivery of *Our Past, Our Future* and the development of the OPOF Delivery Plan 2026–2028, helping to align collective action across the sector and maximise the contribution of the historic environment to Scotland's national priorities.

SHEF 2026 – Summary of Key Themes and Action

The table below summarises the key themes and actions emerging from SHEF 2026. Further detail is provided in the session summaries that follow.

Theme	What We Heard	Why It Matters	Actions Identified
Participation & Community Empowerment	Move from consultation to co-design; participation is long-term but constrained by systems	Without change, participation remains limited	Align funding; support co-design; reduce burden; build capability
Skills & Workforce	Skills gaps and workforce retention challenges; need for lifelong learning	Workforce issues limit delivery and impact	Improve data; strengthen pathways; support retention
Heritage, Place & Economic Renewal	Heritage is infrastructure; weak investment systems	Limits investment potential and impact	Reform fiscal systems; strengthen evidence; embed heritage early
Inclusion & Representation	EDI activity not system-wide; under-resourced	Limits long-term change	Embed in systems; strengthen leadership; improve data
Future Readiness & Systems Change	Need long-term thinking and alignment	Influences heritage national positioning	Strengthen collaboration; improve policy influence
Collaboration, Evidence and Influence	Need stronger narrative and partnerships	Sector seen as peripheral otherwise	Build partnerships; improve articulation of value

2. About SHEF 2026

SHEF 2026 took place on 10 June 2026 at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. The event was hosted by Historic Environment Scotland and the Scottish Government, with invitations issued by the OPOF Steering Group. The event formed part of the third year of delivery of [*Our Past, Our Future*](#), bringing together partners to:

- Share progress
- Build connections
- Identify priorities for action

A full list of attending organisations is provided in **Annex A**.

3. Event Overview

The day was opened by **Mags McSporran**, who welcomed attendees and set the context. She highlighted current challenges including economic pressures, climate urgency and changing expectations of public institutions, while emphasising the contribution the historic environment makes to placemaking, wellbeing, skills and economic development.

A creative opening from **Hannah Lavery and Shasta Ali** explored themes of identity, belonging and memory, setting a reflective tone for the day.

Provocations from sector speakers explored why heritage matters now, followed by a **Ministerial address from Màiri McAllan**, who positioned the historic environment as central to Scotland's economic, social and environmental ambitions. This was followed by morning breakout sessions, including a Connection Space.

After lunch, **Alison Turnbull** re-opened the event and introduced **Sam Workman**. Sam highlighted challenges facing early career entrants,

including unclear pathways and limited support, and emphasised the importance of mentoring and accessible entry routes.

After afternoon sessions, the event concluded with a **National Strategy update from Jilly Burns**, followed by closing reflections from Alison Turnbull.

The full event programme can be found in **Annex B**.

4. Session Summaries

Welcome

Mags McSporran (Highlands and Islands Enterprise) welcomed attendees to SHEF 2026, noting that the event came at an important moment at the start of a new Parliamentary session. She also acknowledged the challenging backdrop of economic pressures, climate urgency, changing communities and rising expectations about the role public and civic institutions should play. She emphasised the contribution that the historic environment can make to Scotland's national priorities, including placemaking, wellbeing, retrofit and net zero, skills, tourism, local identity and inclusive growth.

Mags presented an overview of *Our Past, Our Future* as a strategy to draw together the sector around shared priorities of net zero, communities and places, and wellbeing economy. She also introduced the role and personnel of the National Strategy (OPOF) Steering Group, before outlining the programme for the day. A full list of Steering Group members can be found on the [OPOF website](#).

Inspiration Plenary: 'What does heritage mean to you?'

Hannah Lavery and Shasta Ali shared a powerful creative provocation of poetry, developed following visits to Edinburgh Castle as part of a wider piece entitled 'Disrupting the Narrative'.

Through themes of belonging, identity, memory and visibility within Scotland's narratives, the performances reminded attendees of the deeply personal and emotional connections people have with the historic environment.

The work was presented alongside visuals by Kat Gollock and soundscapes by Niroshini Thambar.

Provocation: 'Why the historic environment matters right now?'

Panellists

- Ieuan Rees, University of Stirling / University of Glasgow
- Cara Jones, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
- Aneel Singh Bhopal, West of Scotland Regional Equality Council
- Jocelyne Fleming, Chartered Institute of Building

A series of lightning provocations explored the role of heritage in contemporary Scotland, challenging attendees to reflect on the role of the historic environment and set the context for discussions that took place throughout the day.

Ieuan Rees encouraged participants to rethink heritage as a foundation from which communities can grow and flourish. He emphasised the importance of understanding local conditions, community knowledge and partnership working to create environments in which both people and places can thrive.

Aneel Singh Bhopal stressed the need for sustained engagement between institutions and communities. While recognising the positive impact already being achieved through community-focused work, he highlighted the need for heritage practice to embrace multiple perspectives and difficult histories, encouraging the sector to remain courageous in addressing challenging issues.

Cara Jones focused on pathways into the sector, challenging attendees to consider how heritage might redesign its routes of entry and create more accessible opportunities for new and diverse voices. She also challenged the sector to consider those further into their career and how they can be supported to grow and develop and not to leave the sector due to limited opportunities (the “leaky pipe”).

Jocelyne Fleming argued that heritage is too often positioned as separate from society and contemporary challenges. She emphasised that historic buildings and places were created to be used and should not be viewed as something protected from change, but as an active contributor to addressing issues such as climate change, regeneration and community wellbeing.

Ministerial Address

The newly appointed Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic, Màiri McAllan, set out the Scottish Government's vision for the historic environment within its wider ambitions for Scotland. The Cabinet Secretary characterised the historic environment as a living asset that tells the story of Scotland's people, innovation and resilience while continuing to support economic growth, creativity, learning and connections to landscape and place. She stressed that heritage should not be viewed as a luxury, but as a core contributor to economic prosperity, social cohesion and national wellbeing.

Acknowledging the financial pressures and growing demands facing both organisations and communities, she highlighted significant opportunities for the sector to contribute to national priorities, particularly in retrofit and decarbonisation, housing, regeneration and skills development. She reaffirmed the value of *Our Past, Our Future* as a framework for collective action, and emphasised the need to strengthen collaboration not only within the sector but across government portfolios and wider partners.

The Cabinet Secretary linked the historic environment directly to the Scottish Government's core missions, including economic growth, public service reform, climate action and stronger communities. She pointed to initiatives such as the proposed Culture Pass, the forthcoming Culture Bill, and Public Service Reform as opportunities to strengthen recognition of the sector's contribution. Concluding, she reflected that Scotland's historic environment represents a unique combination of past and future, and that only through collaboration and thoughtful decision-making can the opportunities ahead be fully realised.

Morning Breakout Sessions

Power and Participation

Panellists

- Oliver Escobar, University of Edinburgh
- Mags McSporran, Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- Gemma Campbell, Scottish Land Commission
- Sarah Boath, Scottish Community Development Centre
- Andy Cuthbertson, Rosemount Development Trust

This session brought together voices from across policy and practice to explore how organisations and communities can collaborate more effectively to deliver inclusive and impactful outcomes.

Oliver Escobar highlighted the opportunities presented by Scotland's community empowerment legislation and the proposals set out in [*Democracy Matters: Route Map to Reform*](#), noting that these signal a clear direction for strengthening community involvement in decision-making. He emphasised the need to design systems that genuinely distribute power, rather than simply invite participation within existing structures. Sarah Boath emphasised that meaningful engagement requires clearly understanding and defining communities and creating shared spaces where different perspectives can come together. Gemma Campbell reinforced that participation is inherently relational, requiring time, trust and a willingness to share power. Mags McSporran highlighted community asset ownership as both a democratic and economic issue, while Andy Cuthbertson stressed the importance of exchange, rather than extractive engagement, and the continued value of face-to-face relationships.

Discussion highlighted that participation is widely recognised as important but remains difficult to deliver in practice. Existing systems, particularly short-term, project-based funding and reporting requirement, were identified as key barriers to building sustained relationships.

There was strong support for moving from consultation and engagement towards **co-design and co-production**, with participants emphasising the need to move beyond listening to genuinely sharing decision-making and control. This requires a shift in organisational culture, particularly within public bodies, alongside increased confidence in managing risk and accountability.

Participants also highlighted that communities are willing to contribute time and expertise, but this must be meaningfully facilitated and supported. Consultation fatigue and administrative burden were identified as significant challenges, alongside a need to better recognise community expertise and provide clearer feedback on how input is used.

Key Themes

- Shift from consultation to **co-design and co-production**
- Participation is **long-term and relational**
- Systems (funding, reporting) limit meaningful engagement
- Need to build confidence within public bodies to share power
- Recognition and valuing of community expertise
- Consultation fatigue impacting community capacity

OPOF Alignment

- Increasing community participation in decision-making
- Strengthening inclusion and representation
- Building community capacity and resilience
- Supporting collaborative approaches

Actions

- Align funding, policy and organisational practice to support long-term participation
- Build capability within public bodies and lead support organisations for shared decision-making
- Reduce reporting burden and consultation fatigue
- Improve transparency in how community input is used
- Share learning and good practice across the sector

These actions align strongly with the priorities identified during the OPOF-hosted 'Collaborating for Communities' workshop. These priorities include:

- *Strengthening community leadership, capacity and decision-making*
- *Improving sector navigation, communication, shared learning and access to support*
- *Strengthening regional and cross-sector alignment for local impact*
- *Creating sustainable funding, evidence and enabling conditions*

This suggests both a clearly identified need within the sector, and a shared understanding of priority areas for future action.

Skills as Key Infrastructure

Hosted by:

- Hazel Johnson, Built Environment Forum Scotland
- Jocelyne Fleming, Chartered Institute of Building
- Robert Toomey, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
- Scott McGibbon, Pvoal Consultancy
- Catherine Cartmell, Historic Environment Scotland

In October 2025, the *Building Connections* event, developed through a partnership of Built Environment Forum Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Building, Historic Environment Scotland, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, and the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, proposed practical, actionable changes to tackle the skills challenges and build a sustainable workforce within the historic environment. The October event highlighted the importance of collaboration across employers, training providers, trades associations, professional bodies, skills agencies and Government. This session invited attendees to reflect on these recommendations through the lens of the role that heritage can play.

Robert Toomey set discussions within the context of the recent Scottish elections (May 2026) and what that could mean for skills and policy related to the historic environment, noting cross party support for tenement maintenance reform and ongoing concern around green jobs, construction skills shortages, and apprenticeships and reskilling. Scott McGibbon acknowledged existing skills gaps and challenges, and likened the skills crisis to a virus. He issued a call to action focused on stabilising the workforce pipeline, reforming training, revaluing skills and influencing policy. Hazel Johnson presented the findings from the [Building Connections event](#), noting both optimism and a clear need for change, with a shared

responsibility for delivery across the sector. She noted that the partnership delivering the event have published a [collective statement](#), which outlines actions the partnership is committed to and asks of others. These include exploring opportunities for joint training, collaborating on data and shared messaging, and building more cohesive working relationships across government departments. There is an opportunity for other organisations to sign the statement. Jocelyne Fleming set up discussions on the collective statement and how to enhance collaboration.

Discussion focused on the need to reform training, particularly through embedding a culture of life-long learning. There was a recognised need for greater collaboration on data and developing stronger links with industry and education. The importance of better understanding, articulating, and valuing the skills that are needed by the sector was noted, alongside a need to ensure the existing workforce feels supported and valued. Engagement with the Scottish Government was identified as essential, recognising that skills in the historic environment span multiple Government policy areas.

Key Themes

- Skills as critical infrastructure for delivery
- Need for lifelong learning across all career stages
- Gaps in workforce data and evidence
- Importance of collaboration across education, industry and government
- Workforce retention challenges
- Need to better articulate the value of heritage skills

OPOF Alignment

- Supporting skills development and workforce resilience
- Improving data and evidence
- Strengthening pathways into the sector
- Aligning with the Skills Investment Plan

Actions

- View and sign up to the [collective statement](#) on BEFS website
- Participate in consultation and discussions looking at practical actions to better collaborate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) delivery
- Deliver on commitments arising from the Building Connections event, including strengthening cross-government collaboration
- Focus on the promotion of lifelong learning by creating continuous professional development opportunities and supporting reskilling and upskilling across all career stages
- Seek opportunities to improve data sharing to better understand skills gaps, monitor demand, and inform coordinated action across the sector
- Continue initiatives to celebrate, and promote the value of, heritage skills

The workshop findings also strongly align with the areas of focus identified in the [Skills Investment Plan \(SIP\) for the Historic Environment](#).

Economic and Creative Renewal

Panellists:

- Marc Cairns, Scottish Futures Trust
- Niall Murphy, Glasgow City Heritage Trust
- Alex Wilde, Govanhill Baths Community Trust
- Becca Thomas, New Practice (Civic)
- Matthew Mckeague, Architectural Heritage Fund
- Kasia Smith, Glasgow City Region

This session explored the role of the historic environment in supporting economic and creative renewal, using Glasgow and the Clyde corridor as a primary lens.

Becca Thomas highlighted the importance of meaningful collaboration between communities and designers, and the need to reduce complexity and barriers within current systems. Alex Wilde reflected on the impact of short-term, fragmented funding on organisations and communities, emphasising the need for longer-term, co-produced funding approaches. Niall Murphy focused on the scale of the tenement maintenance challenge, advocating for civic stewardship models and localised solutions that build on community knowledge. Matthew McKeague highlighted the role of the [Heritage Development Trusts programme](#) in building long-term organisational capacity, and emphasised the importance of blended finance and full cost recovery. Kasia Smith highlighted the role of heritage in tourism, place-making and regional growth, and emphasised the need to embed heritage more effectively in strategic planning and investment decisions.

Discussion reinforced the importance of positioning the historic environment as **core infrastructure**, contributing to economic development, regeneration and wellbeing. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen economic literacy and develop stronger investment cases. There was also strong emphasis on funding and fiscal systems, including VAT, which were seen as barriers to retrofit and adaptation. Participants emphasised the need for coordinated advocacy and long-term system change.

Key Themes

- Heritage as **economic and social infrastructure**
- Need for stronger economic evidence and investment cases
- Importance of long-term and blended funding models
- Community capacity as infrastructure
- Need to embed heritage early in planning and investment
- Fiscal systems (including VAT) as barriers

OPOF Alignment

- Strengthening place-based approaches
- Building economic value of the historic environment
- Supporting organisational and community capacity
- Advocating for enabling policy and funding environments

Actions

- Advocate for reform of fiscal systems (including VAT and wider incentives)
- Strengthen economic evidence and investment cases
- Support long-term and blended funding models
- Embed heritage earlier in planning and infrastructure processes
- Recognise and invest in community capacity

The panel proposals also strongly align with the areas of focus identified by the OPOF Heritage & Place group, particularly a focus on building data & evidence on cultural infrastructure to contribute to Place discussions.

Connection Space

The Connection Space ran throughout the morning of the event and provided an informal opportunity for attendees to engage with some current historic environment interests. Stallholders included:

- [Our Past, Our Future](#)
- [Diversity Scotland](#)
- [Historic Environment Scotland \(HES\) Grants](#)
- [Architectural Heritage Fund](#) (AHF)
- [National Lottery Heritage Fund](#) (NLHF)
- City Heritage Trusts (joint stall)
- [Make Your Mark](#)
- [Climate Change Adaption Manual for Heritage Tourism](#) (resource developed in partnership between Historic Environment Scotland and VisitScotland)

- Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS), focused on [Community Ownership Support Service](#) (COSS)
- [Historic Environment Policy for Scotland \(HEPS\)](#)
- [SCVO](#): Growing Climate Confidence and Funding Scotland

There were also two facilitated discussion tables which were designed to gather specific, practical input to help shape the two final years of delivery of *Our Past, Our Future*. Reflections shared included:

Table 1: Where does the historic environment need to work more effectively with others?

- Need to be more closely involved with housing policy
- Need for increased engagement across government portfolios
- Desire to collaborate more closely across the sector, with a particular focus in sharing support resources, reporting and data to be able to better evidence impact
- Interest in supporting pathways into the sector, particularly practical engagement for students
- Asks for HES to retain the Buildings at Risk Register (BARR) and review the Dictionary of Scottish Architects

Table 2: What should the historic environment focus on now to maximise impact?

- Ensure heritage is visible in broader, national conversations, including utilising data to evidence impact, and being ready to share learning between sectors
- Widen engagement, with a particular focus on young people
- Look for opportunities to simplify processes
- Work more closely with Local Authorities to support engagement with historic environment skills
- Empower and listen to diverse communities, including localised heritage trusts, empowering participation
- Seek opportunities to integrate landscape and land use matters into wider heritage conversations

Post lunch Provocation: 'Why will the historic environment matter tomorrow?'

Alison Turnbull (Historic Environment Scotland and Chair of the OPOF Steering Group) welcomed attendees back from lunch, and introduced Sam Workman, as a representative of the Heritage Network Youth Forum, to share his reflections on 'Why will the historic environment matter tomorrow?'

In his provocation, Sam highlighted barriers to entering the sector, including limited pathways, unclear structures and jargon, and inconsistent support. Given this, he advocated for the importance of mentorship, noting that needs vary between individuals and across different ages, backgrounds and circumstances, and that even small interventions can have a significant impact on supporting and developing those in the early stage of their career.

Sam suggested developing targeted training to support mentors and creating clearer pathways to connect those entering the workforce with appropriate support. While recognising pressures on the sector, Sam stressed the importance of sustaining investment in mentorship to support the future workforce.

Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Are we Future Ready?

Facilitator: Steve Earl, Edinburgh Futures Institute

This session explored how the sector can better prepare for long-term uncertainty using futures thinking approaches. Participants examined current pressures and future drivers of change, reflecting on how the historic environment fits within wider social and economic systems.

A key message was that **long-term thinking is a responsibility, not a luxury**. Participants highlighted the need to move from reactive to proactive approaches and to position heritage as an evolving part of Scotland's future.

Discussion also highlighted the need for the sector to become more proactive rather than reactive, and to position the historic environment as a living and evolving part of Scotland's future rather than a separate or exceptional sector. By working through an exercise, considering different facets and potential futures, participants identified several priorities. These included strengthening collective action to improve policy influence, developing clearer frameworks for cross-sector working, and better understanding how investment can support areas experiencing greater social and economic disadvantage. Groups reflected on the difficulty of separating historic environment issues from wider economic and societal challenges and highlighted opportunities to use fiscal measures, including VAT reform, to better support the sector. The overall message was the importance of targeting investment to address inequality and exploring fiscal and policy tools to achieve this aim.

Key Themes

- Need for proactive, long-term thinking
- Alignment with wider economic and social systems
- Importance of addressing inequality through investment
- Role of policy and fiscal tools

OPOF Alignment

- An emphasis on the need for collaboration and collective action which underpins OPOF as a sector strategy
- The recognition both that the historic environment cannot be separated from Scotland's wider social and economic context, and, through investment, has the potential to support social and economic development. This emphasises the role that the historic

environment plays in making a responsible contribution to Scotland's economy

Actions

- Strengthen collaboration and collective action
- Improve policy influence
- Explore fiscal and system-level enablers
- Target investment strategically

Doing the Difficult Work

Session Leaders:

- Tony McCaffery, Diversity Scotland
- Raleigh Twigge, Historic Environment Scotland

This discussion-based workshop explored how to sustain momentum for inclusion work in the face of challenging external conditions, limited capacity and constrained funding. It built from the discussion at the OPOF-hosted [*Embedding EDI in Everyday Practice workshop*](#) that took place in October 2025.

The earlier workshop had identified key challenges to driving forward inclusion work in the sector, notably operational pressures, systemic issues, fear of backlash, funding cuts and competing priorities. These issues were echoed by SHEF attendees, who highlighted competing organisational priorities as the most significant constraint on progress.

While there was strong recognition of the need for the sector to show leadership and commitment to inclusion, it was also acknowledged that this work is frequently under-resourced and reliant on overstretched individuals.

Discussion focused firstly on what was working in the sector's inclusion activity and then on where participants are stuck. The same questions were asked at the Diversity Scotland table in the Connection Space and the answers shared at that table have been amalgamated below with summaries of the reflections shared within the workshop.

While recognising there is variation across organisations within the sector, responses to 'what is working?' included:

- A growing recognition that inclusion must be mainstreamed within organisations, and embedded across all aspects of work rather than treated as an add-on
- A range of existing programmes and funding streams that are committed to supporting inclusion activity
- Increased use of practical measures to reduce barriers, including covering travel and childcare costs and improving physical access. There is also increased awareness of the right to request reasonable adjustments in work and recruitment
- A number of diverse working groups, dedicated inclusion roles and an increased focus on community engagement, dialogue and trust-building

Attendees identified they were stuck with:

- The gap between stated commitments and action, which is often limited by risk-averse cultures, organisational structures and legacy practices
- Limited capacity and resources, with staff under pressure and at risk of burnout, and too much reliance on individuals rather than systemic change and organisation-wide learning
- Challenges in gathering robust, trusted data, or developing robust research, which makes it harder to evidence impact and secure funding
- Ongoing lack of workforce and volunteer diversity, with structural barriers and slow progress in recruitment pathways

- Inconsistent funder priorities, creating fragmentation and complexity
- Inclusion not being consistently embedded at the earliest stages of planning, funding and delivery of activity
- A wider political and cultural climate that can create fear, resistance and additional pressures, including impacts on wellbeing and retention
- Limited shared understanding of what meaningful community-led practice looks like
- A tendency to focus on standalone projects rather than embedding inclusion in systems and structures

There was a clear need to treat inclusion as an ongoing practice, requiring sustained investment and integration into organisational policy, systems and sector-wide funding approaches.

The workshop concluded by equipping participants with four practical approaches to sustaining momentum under pressure, highlighting the importance of making the case beyond values, knowing when to push and when to step back, working with the structures you have and sustaining yourself and others. There was a strong call to move from project-based approaches to **system-wide embedding of inclusion**, supported by leadership, funding and accountability.

Key Themes

- Inclusion not consistently embedded across systems
- Capacity and resource constraints
- Reliance on individuals rather than organisational systems
- Data and evidence gaps
- Workforce diversity challenges
- External pressures impacting delivery and wellbeing

OPOF Alignment

- Increasing diversity and inclusion

- Supporting wellbeing and participation
- Strengthening organisational resilience

Actions

- Advocate for embedding inclusion at the earliest stages of policy, planning, funding and programme design, rather than as a standalone activity
- Encourage a shift from project-focused inclusion activity and funding to organisation-wide frameworks, systems and governance that embed inclusive practice
- Strengthen leadership accountability to ensure commitments to inclusion are matched by action and resourcing
- Invest in sector/organisation-wide learning to reduce the burden on individuals
- Develop robust, trusted approaches to data collection, addressing issues of confidence, trust and accuracy
- Improve the sector's ability to evidence impact and outcomes, strengthening cases for funding and investment
- Share learning and good practice across the sector to build collective confidence and capability
- Support longer-term approaches to workforce diversification, aligned with skills, mentoring and progression initiatives
- Work with funders to improve consistency of priorities, expectations and reporting, reducing fragmentation
- Advocate for funding models that support long-term, sustained inclusion work, rather than short-term delivery

A number of these findings echo the themes that emerged from the OPOF-hosted Embedding EDI workshop that was held in October 2025, and indicate a consistent need and ask from the sector. The priority activities identified from the Embedding EDI workshop, subject to resourcing, were a national heritage EDI forum, which would be intended to develop a programme of support, provide leadership for inclusion activity and liaise

with sector funding bodies, and the need to establish a long-term plan to ensure adequate historic environment EDI data and evidence collection and reporting.

Outside Looking In

Panellists:

- Euan Leitch, SURF – Scotland's Regeneration Forum
- Shona Glenn, BiGGAR Economics
- Cherie Morgan, Planning Aid Scotland
- Barry Fisher, Keep Scotland Beautiful
- Manira Ahmad, Public Health Scotland
- Leigh Sparks, Scotland's Towns Partnership

This session brought together individuals who could offer external perspectives to consider where the historic environment sector is missing from key conversations and what it might need to do differently to be seen as essential within national conversations.

Barry Fisher highlighted the importance of accessible pathways into heritage. Manira Ahmad identified the role of the historic environment in tackling health inequalities through engaging with community wealth building practices and considering our own practices to support health improvement. Shona Glenn acknowledged the opportunity provided by retrofit and heritage investment and the need to champion the importance of the historic environment within this conversation to Scottish Government. Cherie Morgan challenged attendees by asking who decides on what constitutes heritage if they don't relate to the term. She noted that to protect the historic environment there is a need to engage children and young people. Leigh Sparks highlighted the importance of the historic environment to places, and the need to encourage an alignment of people and places to tell these stories and support the direction of spend.

Discussion focused on:

- The importance of championing heritage as an integrated, rather than an isolated, asset
- The importance of engaging children and young people with the historic environment
- The need to champion the importance of place to Scottish Government and the role of heritage in animating places
- An ask to champion the use of fiscal systems to protect heritage assets, including advocacy for investment in the historic environment to be considered on parity with business investment. For this, there needs to be clearer articulation of, and confidence in, the value of the historic environment, based on a shared understanding of value
- The need for bravery to advocate for a just approach, supporting people and places – the sector acting as an enabler with a more open risk appetite
- The role of community wealth building as a route for socially responsible investment

Key Themes

- Need to position heritage within wider national priorities
- Importance of cross-sector collaboration
- Need for stronger articulation of value
- Engagement with fiscal and policy systems
- Importance of engaging young and diverse audiences

OPOF Alignment

- Collaboration and place-based working
- Inclusion and participation
- Strengthening evidence and advocacy

Actions

- Work to more clearly articulate the historic environment as an enabler of national priorities, and build collaborations with non-heritage sectors
- Work to embed heritage within place-based approaches and partnerships
- Engage with community wealth building, articulating how the historic environment can contribute to support socially responsible investment
- Ensure diverse voices, specifically young people, shape decisions about the future of the historic environment
- Better understand wider fiscal systems and their potential to support increased heritage investment

Walking Tours

Two walking tours, led respectively by Niall Murphy (Glasgow City Heritage Trust) and Karen Shaw (Glasgow Life) explored the challenges and opportunities at the intersection of place, space and heritage in Glasgow.

Karen's tour focused on the Sauchiehall Street Culture and Heritage District, the first Scottish location to be funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Heritage Places programme in April 2024. The tour highlighted the area's evolution from one of Glasgow's most prestigious shopping destinations to a street undergoing significant change in response to the shifting high street market. Karen reflected on the decline of high-end retail and the growing number of vacant or underused units, alongside discussions about new developments and the potential impact of increased student housing, which could reshape the local community. There was an emphasis on the street's architectural heritage as well as an exploration of the tensions between historic character and modern interventions such as contemporary shopfronts. The Avenues Project and attempts to reintroduce historic landscape elements also sparked

discussion around the challenges of adapting heritage environments to modern urban needs.

Niall's tour took in a range of sites of heritage significance in central Glasgow, including the former BHS site, the site of the Union Corner Fire and the soon-to-be regenerated Watt Brothers Department Store. The tour showcased the remarkable diversity of architecture in Glasgow city centre, while also highlighting the challenges involved in maintaining such a wide range of historic buildings. It sparked discussion around the ownership of vacant properties and the types of uses needed to support a vibrant city centre. These conversations helped to illustrate both the barriers and opportunities associated with managing and revitalising historic urban areas.

National Strategy Update

Jilly Burns (National Strategy Programme Manager) reflected on progress three years into the delivery of *Our Past, Our Future* (OPOF): Scotland's strategy for the historic environment. She noted that discussions throughout SHEF 2026 had reinforced the relevance of the historic environment to many of Scotland's key national priorities, including participation, skills, economic renewal, inclusion and future readiness. She highlighted OPOF's role as a framework for connecting activity across the sector and ensuring that the contribution of the historic environment is recognised within wider policy and delivery systems.

Jilly reflected on the first phase of OPOF delivery, which has focused on establishing shared direction, building partnerships, aligning activity and funding, and initiating delivery against the Strategy's three outcomes. She highlighted examples of work that demonstrates how the historic environment contributes to Scotland's ambitions for net zero, thriving communities and places, and a wellbeing economy.

Looking across the work undertaken to date, Jilly noted that several themes consistently underpin delivery across all outcomes. In particular, skills, data and evidence, funding alignment, and place-based working have emerged as critical enablers of success. She highlighted ongoing workstreams focused on wellbeing, inclusion, community heritage and empowerment, skills, place-based delivery, funding alignment, data and evidence, and the development of a Route Map to Net Zero. These areas are being supported through a series of published recommendation reports and brought together through a National Strategy Delivery Plan overseen by the OPOF Steering Group.

Key Themes

- The historic environment has an important role to play in delivering wider national priorities, including net zero, community empowerment and the wellbeing economy
- Strong partnerships and collaborative working are essential to delivering the ambitions of OPOF
- Skills, data and evidence, funding alignment and place-based approaches are emerging as key cross-cutting enablers across all areas of delivery
- Recommendation reports and collaborative workstreams are helping to build shared evidence base and focus collective action across the sector
- The final phase of OPOF delivery provides an opportunity to strengthen impact, alignment and visibility

OPOF Alignment

This session reflected progress across all three outcomes of *Our Past, Our Future* and reinforced the importance of:

- Collaborative delivery and partnership working
- Building evidence to demonstrate impact and influence decision-making
- Supporting resilient organisations, communities and places

- Embedding the historic environment within wider policy and delivery frameworks

Jilly concluded that the final two years of OPOF delivery should focus on working in stronger partnership, aligning effort across the sector, and strengthening the systems that support collective action while creating clearer opportunities to demonstrate and communicate the difference the historic environment makes to Scotland's people and places.

Closing Address

Alison Turnbull drew the conference together, thanking attendees and reflecting on the key themes that had emerged in breakout sessions and which are captured above. She noted the common threads across the day including the centrality of people to the historic environment, the importance of connection and collaboration to achieve shared goals, and the need to advocate for and demonstrate the importance of the historic environment in responding to Scotland's national challenges.

5. Post Event Reflection and Next Steps

SHEF 2026 highlighted the significant contribution that Scotland's historic environment makes to national priorities, alongside a shared commitment across the sector to work more collaboratively in addressing current and future challenges. Discussions throughout the day reinforced a number of consistent priorities, including strengthening participation and community empowerment, supporting skills and workforce development, improving inclusion, building a stronger evidence base, and ensuring that the historic environment is recognised as a contributor to economic renewal, wellbeing and place-based delivery.

Feedback gathered from attendees, alongside reflections from session leads and contributors, has been reviewed by the OPOF Steering Group. The themes, actions and recommendations emerging from SHEF 2026

have informed the development of the final phase of *Our Past, Our Future* and will be incorporated into the OPOF Delivery Plan for 2026–2028.

Particular focus will be placed on inclusion, strengthening partnership working, aligning activity and investment, improving data and evidence, and supporting the systems and conditions required for collective delivery. Through this approach, the Steering Group will continue to use SHEF as a mechanism for identifying shared priorities, shaping action and demonstrating the contribution of Scotland's historic environment to national outcomes.

Annex A: Attending Organisations

Aberdeen City Heritage Trust	Edinburgh Futures Institute
Aberdeenshire Council	Edinburgh World Heritage Trust
ALGAO	Fife Historic Buildings Trust
Archaeology Scotland	Glasgow Buildings Preservation
Architectural Heritage Fund	Trust
Architectural Heritage Society of	Glasgow Caledonian University
Scotland	Glasgow City Council
Archives and Records Association	Glasgow City Heritage Trust
Scotland	Glasgow Life
ASVA	Govanhill Baths
BEFS	Heritage Network
BE-ST	Heritage South Australia
BiGGAR Economics	Historic Environment Scotland
Cairngorms National Park	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Authority	Historic Scotland Churches
CHARTS	Historic Houses
CiFA	Inclusion Scotland
CIOB	Industrial Museums Scotland
Clackmannanshire Council	Institute of Historic Building
Cockburn Association	Conservation
Community Enterprise	Inverness City Heritage Trust
COSLA	Keep Scotland Beautiful
Creative Scotland	KLTR
Culture & Business Scotland	Knowledge Bridge
Culture Counts	Making Rights Real
Diversity Scotland	Museums Galleries Scotland
DTAS	National Heritage Science Forum
Dundee Heritage Trust	National Lottery Heritage Fund
Dundee Historic Environment Trust	National Museums Scotland
Edinburgh Chamber of	National Trust for Scotland
Commerce	NatureScot

New Lanark Trust	Scottish Government
New Practice	Scottish Historic Buildings Trust
Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust	Scottish Land Commission
Planning Aid Scotland	Scottish Local History Forum
Public Health Scotland	Scottish Maritime Museum
Pvotal Consultancy	Scottish Traditional Building Forum
Qualifications Scotland	SCVO
Renfrewshire Council	Skills Development Scotland
RIAS	Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
RICS	SOSE
Rosemount Trust	Stirling City Heritage Trust
Royal Town Planning Institute	SURF
Royal Society of Edinburgh	TRACS
Scotland's Churches Trust	University of Edinburgh
Scotland's Housing Network	University of Glasgow
Scotland's Towns Partnership	University of Stirling
SCOTO	Visit Scotland
Scottish Castles Association	Volunteer Scotland
Scottish Civic Trust	War Memorials Trust
Scottish Community Alliance	West Calder & Harburn
Scottish Community Development Centre	Development Trust
Scottish Community Heritage Alliance	West Dunbartonshire Council
Scottish Council on Archives	West of Scotland Regional Equality Council
Scottish Futures Trust	YoungScot

Annex B: Agenda

09.30 – 10.00	Arrival & Registration
10.00 – 10.10	Welcome & Housekeeping
10.10 – 10.25	Inspiration Plenary: 'What does heritage mean to you?'
10.25 – 10.45	Provocation: 'Why the historic environment matters right now?'
10:45– 11.00	Ministerial Address
11.00 – 11.20	Break
11.20 – 12.20:	Morning Breakout Sessions: • Option 1: Power and Participation • Option 2: Skills as Key Infrastructure • Option 3: Economic and Creative Renewal • Option 4: Connection Space
12.20 – 13.20	Lunch
13.20 – 13.25	Post-lunch Welcome
13:25 – 13:30	Provocation: 'Why will the historic environment matter tomorrow?'
13.30 – 14.30	Afternoon Breakout Session: • Option 1: Are We Future Ready? • Option 2: Doing the Difficult Work • Option 3: Outside Looking In • Option 4: Walking Tour
14.30 – 14.40	National Strategy Update
14:40 – 14:50	Closing Address
14:50 – 15:00	Final Networking and Close