

Data & Evidence in the Historic Environment Sector: Summary Report

Background

As part of the delivery of [Our Past, Our Future](#) ('OPOF'), Scotland's National Strategy for the Historic Environment, a dedicated Data Workshop was held on Tuesday 9 September 2025, at Linlithgow Burgh Halls. This workshop was organised and facilitated by Marjorie Perotto, the Data Analyst for the National Strategy Team, hosted by Historic Environment Scotland ('HES').

The workshop aimed to bring key stakeholders together to explore how historic environment data is currently being gathered, used, analysed, shared and reported; and to collectively identify gaps, challenges and potential solutions. The session built on the work of the [Our Past, Our Future Baseline Report](#) (published in 2024) to seek to develop a shared understanding of how the sector can improve its ability to evidence activity and impact, in line with the strategy's three priorities and nine outcomes.

Attendance

Around 20 participants representing a wide range of organisations attended, including local authorities, city heritage trusts, national bodies and funders, archaeology, museums, tourism and the built environment (see list in Annex A).

The workshop was structured to support open dialogue and collaborative thinking towards finding practical actions or solutions that could be implemented in the following six months.

This report is a summary of key insights from the day, including sector strengths, recurring challenges, realistic ideas for improvements as well as recommendations on future opportunities for coordination and shared infrastructure.

Workshop Output

What data do we have?

Across the sector, many organisations are collecting valuable data, including:

- Heritage Asset Data
- GIS-based historic environment records (ALGAO)
- Building condition inspections (Glasgow City Heritage Trust ('GCHT'), Stirling City Heritage Trust ('SCHT'))
- Drone and feasibility surveys
- Community and Audience Engagement

Our Past Our Future

- Volunteer numbers and demographics
- Event attendance, feedback, and community impact (qualitative & quantitative)
- Community surveys linked to SIMD and wellbeing
- Annual Survey Data: multiple contribute valuable annual data, including long-term datasets (5–10 years) that are comprehensive and public
- Economic and Skills Data
- Economic leverage (GCHT)
- Projects related to traditional skills, climate change, and placemaking
- Staff/volunteer data and skills development reports
- Qualitative and Sentiment Data
- Heritage crime impacts, community sentiment, informal narratives
- Wellbeing and loneliness metrics tied to engagement with place
- Oral histories and anecdotal data valued locally
- Museum Sector Strategy Data
- Grants Application Data: HES receives detailed application data from organisations like the Architectural Heritage Fund and others; useful for longitudinal tracking
- Historic Environment Record Data

What's Working Well?

- Strong localised data ownership and place-based knowledge
- Consistent use of feedback loops, especially in funded projects
- Recognition of the value of qualitative and emotional data
- A growing desire to share, standardise, and align
- Positive examples of evaluation maturity emerging (GCHT impact evaluations)
- Longitudinal data practices: some organisations are tracking impact over time, with insightful trends emerging from 20+ years of data (e.g., re-use of buildings)
- Many organisations working in line with OPOF outcomes even without direct coordination
- Experimentation with methods: examples of piloting different methodologies (like surveys for youth engagement, carbon calculators)

What's Missing / Where Are the Gaps?

- **Outcome Data:** What change did heritage engagement lead to? Funders struggling to track long-term impact beyond delivery. Analysis and learning from funded projects are under-resourced or deprioritised
- **Continuity:** Gaps between project delivery and long-term tracking
- **Accessibility:** Data stuck in legacy systems or paper formats
- **National vs Local:** National datasets lack local nuance; local data is often siloed

Our Past Our Future

- **Demographic and Equalities Data:** Patchy, inconsistent, or collected without clarity on use
- **Visitor Impact:** Who is visiting? What do they value? What is the social benefit?
- **Post-Acquisition and Long-Term Impact:** Data on sites after community take-on is weak
- **Qualitative Data Sharing:** Stories and sentiment aren't widely shared or archived
- **Data for Decision-Making:** Evidence to support fair work, wellbeing, and community wealth building is underused

What's Not Working?

- **Siloed and fragmented data systems** across the sector
- **Survey fatigue:** especially for small orgs with low capacity
- **Lack of standards:** inconsistent data quality, incompatible formats
- **Lack of clarity of purpose** in data collection: why are we collecting?
- **Duplication:** multiple orgs collecting the same data without coordination
- **Resource constraints:** small teams struggle to manage or analyse data
- **GDPR and governance barriers:** make sharing difficult
- **Disconnect between data and strategy:** lack of leadership in aligning datasets with sector priorities. Questions remain about who should lead on data definition and strategy

Solutions Offered

Organisational / Cultural

- Lead by example: big orgs modelling good data practices
- Embed outcome thinking from the start
- Foster senior buy-in around data purpose, not just process
- Reduce asks, but make them more strategic and transparent

Technical / Structural

- Sector-wide methods hub: templates, Key Performance Indicators, demo datasets
- Shared data infrastructure: mapping layers, qualitative archives
- Use AI cautiously: sentiment scraping, trend analysis (but ethical and transparent)
- Audit & signposting: Develop a data audit and signposting system so organisations know what is out there
- [Scotland's Historic Environment Audit](#) ('SHEA') is already an official, structured resource that brings together national-level data about the historic environment

Our Past Our Future

which is publicly visible and policy-relevant: use it to promote data expansion and show clear value and national alignment in addressing gaps

Strategic

- Align reporting to sector priorities (OPOF, [National Planning Framework 4](#) ('NPF4'), [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) ('UN SDGs'))
- Match-make across the sector: signpost existing data and good practice
- Centralise shared learning (Data Hub with qualitative + quantitative case studies)

Recommendations

- Data maturity is growing, but unevenly across the sector.
- There is a strong appetite to collaborate, but standardisation and leadership are needed.
- Environmental data¹ is the next big gap: we have tools, but not alignment or accessibility
- The sector wants a “clean house” for data: a trusted, well-supported space for connection, reuse, and learning.

Short-term:

- Continue collating feedback and insights post-workshop
- Use findings to shape a sector data hub proposal

Medium-term:

- Broaden sector mapping of existing datasets and owners
- Run further workshops on data maturity and specific priorities (net-zero)

Long-term:

- Explore viability of a Sector Data Hub (fundings, ownership etc.)
- Advocate for shared standards and outcome-led evaluation
- Work with Scottish Government and HES to support evidence-based policy

Conclusion

The workshop confirmed broad interest in pursuing a shared commitment to improving how we collect, use, analyse, gather, share and report data involving the historic environment. While challenges around resources, continuity and standardisation persist the discussion showed a real willingness to collaborate and find collective solutions. Insights gathered will directly inform Our Past, Out Future National Strategy

¹ Environmental data includes carbon impact, green and travel emissions data, climate change /resilience impact and sustainability practices.

Our Past Our Future

Team's approach in its delivery ensuring that the sector's impact is better evidenced, communicated and understood.

The OPOF Team will also now prioritise sharing this feedback with key stakeholders, including the National Strategy Steering Group and Scottish Government, with a view to acting on the solutions and recommendations offered. Similarly, the team will continue this conversation with participants towards exploring opportunities to support data leadership, infrastructure and skills development across the sector.

Marjorie Perotto
National Strategy Data Analyst
September 2025

Annex A – Workshop participants

- The Architectural Heritage Fund
- Keep Scotland Beautiful
- Development Trusts Association Scotland
- Glasgow City Council
- Historic Environment Scotland
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Dundee City Heritage Trust
- Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) Scotland
- The National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Scottish Community Tourism (SCOTO)
- Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
- The National Trust for Scotland
- Heritage Trust Network
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Stirling City Heritage Trust
- Archaeology Scotland
- Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS)
- Scottish Civic Trust
- Glasgow City Heritage Trust
- Museums Galleries Scotland