

Scotland's Historic Environment Forum (SHEF) Event Report

Symposium Building, Surgeons Quarter, Edinburgh 11 June 2025

Introduction

Hosted by Historic Environment Scotland and the Scottish Government, Scotland's Historic Environment Forum (SHEF) was held in person at the Symposium Building, Surgeons Quarter in Edinburgh. There were 140 attendees on the day from 70 organisations, who came together to champion and promote the role of the historic environment in supporting national challenges and interests. A full list of attending organisations is provided in Annex A.

Taking place during the second year of delivery of *Our Past, Our Future– the Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment* (OPOF)– the focus of the event was to consider actions on topics related to the priorities of the National Strategy. The full day agenda included plenary sessions with speakers, panel discussions and workshops, as well as a connection space to engage with current historic environment interests.

Event Framework

Allan Lindsay (Participation & Co-Design Director, Young Scot and member of the OPOF Steering Group) welcomed attendees to the venue and introduced **Alison Turnbull** (Director of External Relations and Partnerships, Historic Environment Scotland) who provided the formal welcoming address for the day. **Angus Robertson** (MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture) spoke to highlight the role of the historic environment in delivering national priorities, and was followed by **Jilly Burns** (National Strategy Programme Manager, Historic Environment Scotland) who presented an update on activity under OPOF since SHEF 2024 and set the context for the following workshop sessions.

Morning workshop discussions focused on Net Zero (Retrofit/Heat in Buildings) and Community and Place. Attendees also had time to explore the Connection Space which showcased a variety of organisations and activities of relevance to the delivery of the National Strategy.

After lunch, a provocation to attendees was provided by **Irene Mosota** (CEO, Knowledge Bridge) who presented attendees with a series of questions designed to provoke reflection on the inclusivity of the historic environment as a sector.

Afternoon workshops focused on Demonstrating our Impact, Wellbeing Economy – Multiple Deprivation and Traditional Skills.

SHEF 2025 concluded with closing remarks from **Hazel Johnson** (Director, Built Environment Forum Scotland) and **Gavin MacGregor** (Director, Archaeology Scotland), in their role as members of the OPOF Steering Group, and focused on drawing together key themes and calls to action from the day.

A recording of the talks given by Alison Turnbull, Angus Robertson, Jilly Burns and Irene Mosota are available at [Our Past, Our Future – Delivery](#).

The full event programme can be found in Annex B.

Summary of Speakers

Welcome by Alison Turnbull (Director of External Relations and Partnerships, Historic Environment Scotland)

Alison welcomed all attendees and highlighted the importance of SHEF as a space for sector leaders to facilitate collaboration and meet the challenges of the future within the context of the priorities of the National Strategy. In outlining the programme for the day, Alison identified that breakout sessions engaged with key topics essential to the future of the historic environment sector, and acknowledged the role of the National Strategy Steering Group in taking forward the calls to action that emerged from discussions. A full list of Steering Group members can be found on the [OPOF website](#).

Alison highlighted [Historic Environment Scotland's Corporate Plan \(2025-28\)](#) with its focus on investigating, caring for and promoting Scotland's historic environment for the benefit of people and communities everywhere, as well as the organisation's ongoing commitment to collaboration.

Alison concluded by acknowledging the sad passing of Christina McKelvie MSP in March 2025 and celebrated her role in the development and launch of OPOF when she was Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development.

Opening address by Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

Mr Robertson acknowledged Alison's words regarding the death of Ms McKelvie and recognised the impact she had had on the historic environment sector in Scotland.

Mr Robertson celebrated the range of organisations represented at SHEF and the importance of the event for collaboration. He noted the role of the historic environment in delivering national priorities, specifically focusing on net zero, traditional skills, community empowerment and collaboration, economic growth, the embedding of cultural significance and in allowing the strengthening of international connections.

Mr Robertson welcomed Historic Environment Scotland's Corporate Plan. He acknowledged the challenges for the sector, including funding pressures, financial resilience, climate impacts, skills gaps and widening inclusion, but also noted the opportunities for innovation, reform and new models of collaboration and partnership.

Mr Robertson reinforced that the Scottish Government remains committed to supporting and enabling the historic environment sector as a key contributor to national goals. He acknowledged that the Scottish Government could strengthen collaboration between departments to ensure the historic environment is more embedded in conversations, policy and decision-making and gave commitment to that role in ensuring cross-sector working and knowledge sharing to realise the priorities of the National Strategy.

Mr Robertson's address concluded by acknowledging the progress that has been made to deliver OPOF and expressed gratitude to the National Strategy Steering Group for their role in shaping activity, as well as to Forum attendees for the commitment and contribution they make to the historic environment in Scotland.

Update on *Our Past, Our Future – the Strategy for the Scotland's Historic Environment* (OPOF) by Jilly Burns (National Strategy Programme Manager, Historic Environment Scotland)

Jilly provided a progress update on OPOF since SHEF 2024. She noted the role of the National Strategy team in highlighting ongoing activity across the sector and helping to address delivery gaps through collaboration and discussion.

Jilly addressed each of the three OPOF priorities in turn. For 'Delivering the Transition to Net Zero' Jilly acknowledged the progress that had been made, including new reporting, investment streams and training offers, and highlighted the next step to develop a co-ordinated Route Map in consultation with the sector.

Jilly acknowledged strong progress towards the second OPOF priority, focused on supporting community and place priorities. She acknowledged the variety of actors and work in this area and noted the future role of OPOF in bringing activity together through round-table discussions to amplify impact. She also noted that Historic Environment Scotland (HES) is starting consultation to update the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS).

The third OPOF priority focuses on the economic and social value of the historic environment. A Short Life Working Group was convened whose recommendations will guide a new Heritage and Place Investment Group. Tools to measure travel emissions, sustainable procurement and Fair Work are being explored as well as planned discussions on wellbeing.

Jilly highlighted that all activity was underpinned by a need to co-ordinate sector data and evidence. She highlighted the importance of the discussions and connections at SHEF to further future activity to deliver the priorities of OPOF.

Morning Breakout Sessions

Net Zero (Retrofit / Heat in Buildings)

Panellists:

- **Moses Jenkins:** Historic Environment Scotland (HES) (Chair)
- **Jocelyne Fleming:** Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)
- **Scott Restrick:** Scottish Government
- **Mark McArthur:** Energy Saving Trust

The Net Zero panel explored how the traditionally constructed built environment can meet the challenges of a low-carbon future, drawing insights from policy, funding, and skills perspectives.

Moses Jenkins (HES) opened the panel with a stark warning: every traditionally constructed building will be affected by the net zero transition, positively or negatively, depending on our response. He urged the sector to engage early and actively in consultations and policymaking. Jocelyne Fleming (CIOB) echoed this, advocating for a whole-system approach that reflects how people live, how buildings perform, and Scotland's future needs. Scott Restrick (Scottish Government) emphasised the need for cross-portfolio working and shared evidence to inform decisions. He also shared information on upcoming changes to [RdSAP-10 EPC assessment](#) standards (published w/c 16.06.2025). Mark McArthur (Energy Saving Trust) outlined current and future funding schemes, noting a shift toward private finance and investment-led models.

Key discussion points arising from the Q&A portion of the panel included:

- The urgent need for clear, impartial advice for homeowners and communities. There is confusion over regulations and funding, and a gap in guidance, especially in rural and remote areas.
- A demand for accessible information, case studies, and hubs to share best practice and demystify key concepts, particularly around retrofit and EPC reform.
- A need to embrace long-term thinking to strengthen the skills pipeline and make conservation a viable and attractive career path.

- A need for funding to become more strategic, realistic, and responsive to the actual and ongoing costs of maintaining and adapting older buildings, with recognition that many current funding streams end in March 2026.

The panel called for the sector to be proactive and vocal, treating net zero and retrofit as core to the sector's work, not a separate agenda. Discussion also emphasised the pressing need to break down silos, joining up funding, skills, community regeneration, and policy, and to argue more effectively for targeted investment backed by robust evidence. Crucially, the session highlighted that the sector must be equipped and ready to have potentially tough conversations about equity, priorities, and what matters for Scotland's future.



Jocelyn Fleming (CIOB) offers some introductory thoughts to attendees at the Net Zero (Retrofit / Heat in Buildings) breakout session. © Crown Copyright HES.

Community and Place

Panellists:

- **Nick Wright:** Nick Wright Planning (Chair)
- **Margaret McSporran:** Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)
- **Craig Wilson:** Historic Environment Scotland (HES)
- **Audrey Dunn:** Community Ownership Support Scheme, Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS)
- **Rikki Payne:** National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF)
- **Carron Tobin:** Scottish Community Tourism (SCOTO)
- **Mike Staples:** South of Scotland Community Housing (SOSCH)

The Community and Place panel considered the role of the historic environment in empowering communities and contributing to place resilience.

Margaret McSporran (HIE) showcased HIE's work focused on visitor, social and economic impact, challenging attendees to consider how we can make the most of ongoing activity and what blocks additional actions. Audrey Dunn (DTAS) highlighted the role of the Community Ownership Support Service and the Former Places of Worship Programme as well as providing an overview of the purposes for which communities use the assets they are looking to take over. Rikki Payne (NLHF) highlighted that for successful and resilient places we need energy, growth and 'vibeyness'. Mike Staples (SOSCH) considered the opportunities and funding challenges for town centre living options and celebrated the importance of collaboration and sharing learning. Craig Wilson (HES) focused on how wealth circulated within places, recognising both that Fair Work can be challenging for some organisations to comply with and the role of assets to galvanise activism, challenging public sector bodies to direct spend where it was most needed. Carron Tobin (SCOTO) acknowledged that the data we measure impacts future activity and highlighted the activity of the [Press Pause programme](#) in providing a framework for communities to focus on how they market themselves.

Key discussion points arising from the Q&A portion of the panel included:

- The importance of ensuring a broad definition of heritage, that extends beyond buildings, and includes recording stories and safeguarding collections.
- At what stage heritage is best considered during placemaking discussions.

- How meaningful engagement and co-production with communities can be utilised, particularly to ensure all voices are heard.
- The role of skills training as an enabler.
- How we utilise available research most effectively.
- How we gather future evidence on topics that can be challenging to quantify, such as 'felt experience'.

Discussion highlighted the breadth and variety of what the term 'place' can mean, as well as noting that there are many actors operating within an individual place. There was an emphasis on ensuring communities and their needs were centred and that the time was given for effective engagement through methods including co-production and creative practice. Panellists identified the need to adopt an enabling and empowering approach to communities, which included planning for the long-term, focusing on community voices for tourism marketing and centring decision making on evidence from the community. There were calls to utilise our existing research and public sector spend effectively to deliver for communities throughout Scotland.



Attendees at Scotland's Historic Environment Forum engage with panellists in the Community and Place breakout session. © Crown Copyright HES.

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. Similar in format to a marketplace, the Connection Space had an emphasis on stallholders showcasing a particular project or practical activity, linked to the historic environment, and the priorities of OPOF.

Stallholders included:

- [Our Past, Our Future](#) (specific focus on data)
- [West of Scotland Regional Equality Council](#) (WSREC)
- [Grants](#) (Historic Environment Scotland)
- Updating [Historic Environment Policy for Scotland](#) (Historic Environment Scotland)
- Craft Your Career Programme (Historic Environment Scotland)
- [Deaf Action](#)
- [Keep Scotland Beautiful](#)

Provocation by Irene Mosota (CEO, Knowledge Bridge)

Irene framed her provocation around a series of questions which encouraged attendees to reflect on the ownership of heritage within Scotland, and the structures of power embedded within the sector's decision-making processes. She highlighted that heritage is not just the physical evidence of past human activity but how people connect to those spaces, particularly through memory, and questioned whose past is currently visible in Scotland.

Attendees were asked to consider how accessible the routes into the heritage sector are, and who is currently missing from decision-making spaces. Irene encouraged attendees to consider the historic environment not as a static legacy to protect but as something shared and contested within communities. She challenged the sector not to act as gatekeepers for heritage but to invite others to contribute to shape the narrative moving forward through participation and co-curation. Irene advocated for honest conversations to ensure a flexible, more people and community focused approach to heritage and a future in which historic buildings could act both as cultural treasures and sites for community action and dialogue. She noted that people as well as buildings are required to sustain the historic environment into the future.

Irene concluded by asking attendees to consider who holds power within the sector, noting the work that has been done to open up discussions but challenging attendees to reflect that there is always more that can be done.



Irene Mosota shares her Provocation with attendees at Scotland's Historic Environment Forum (SHEF). © Crown Copyright HES.

Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Demonstrating Our Impact

The Demonstrating Our Impact session was an interactive workshop facilitated by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS), which considered whether the current structures within the historic environment sector are appropriate to maximise contributions to national interests.

In this session, groups were asked to envision what it would be like if the historic environment sector was successful in speaking with a clear voice and valued for its contribution to society. Groups were then asked to identify what actions would be needed to achieve this and to put these actions into a timeline.

The visions set out by the groups can be summarised as: the historic environment is well funded; its impact and value are clearly understood; there are more levers for looking after or legislating for the core of the historic environment; we are working across government portfolios and local authorities; communities are empowered; and there are changed structures through learning from others, for example European and international models.

The groups then identified a variety of actions needed to achieve these visions. These ranged from targeted support for local authority services, more opportunities for knowledge sharing, mapping what everyone is doing across the sector and why, harnessing wider investment in the historic environment, providing more opportunities for community groups to network, ensuring that the sector is demystified and that people can find information easily, defining the value of the sector and ensuring that this is clearly articulated.

Key points, which were in common across all groups, were that the sector needs to work towards a more long term and sustainable funding framework to better articulate its value (financial and otherwise) across policy areas, enhancing cooperative working across the sector to maximise current resource and expertise, as well as working co-operatively and shifting to even more collaborative work with communities to empower them in decision making.



Attendees at the Demonstrating our Impact breakout session share their reflections on the current structures in the historic environment sector. © Crown Copyright HES.

Traditional Skills

Panellists:

- **Ian Baxter:** Historic Environment Scotland (Board Member) / Heriot-Watt University (Chair)
- **Douglas Morrison:** Built Environment Smarter Transformation (BE-ST)/ South Lanarkshire College
- **Chris Kelly:** EKOS / EDAS
- **Scott McGibbon:** Ptotal Consultancy

The Traditional Skills panel considered the opportunities for support and development of traditional skills in Scotland to deliver for Scotland's long-term societal and economic needs.

Ian Baxter (HES Board / Heriot-Watt University) set the scene for discussions by noting the variety of existing plans and strategies focused on Skills. Douglas Morrison (BE-ST / South Lanarkshire College) acknowledged that the skills gaps is growing and suggested that small specialist providers, rather than colleges, are the most viable custodians of traditional skills developments at present. Chris Kelly (EKOS/EDAS) highlighted the role of skills training in driving productivity in regeneration, the need for longer-term funding with targeted and integrated planning, supported by better sector data and evidence. Scott McGibbon (Ptotal Consultancy) called for organisations to come together, and for the training model to be innovative, focused on short, sharp training and life-long learning careers.

Key discussion points arising from the Q&A portion of the panel included:

- Revising the current role of colleges in training. There was a desire expressed by panellists to move towards innovative models that simplified the current system, and reflected the industry ask e.g. online training modules combined with on-the-ground training in the workplace.
- The role of the sector in advocating for traditional skills through evidencing the wellbeing and cultural, as well as the economic, impact of activity.
- The importance of collaboration to reduce siloing, and to tackle topics such as housing that extend across multiple Government departments.

There was a recognised need for targeted collaboration to drive innovative thinking, pool funding and use foresight to identify key needs and future gaps. The importance of data to evidence value and support advocacy, and the need to listen, and respond, to the asks of the industry in delivering skills training were also emphasised. The work of HES in this area was recognised but also the need for alignment between all actors if we are to achieve a Sustainable Traditional Skills System for Scotland.

Wellbeing Economy – Multiple Deprivation

Panellists:

- **Diane Gray:** National Lottery Heritage Fund (Chair)
- **Douglas Westwater:** Community Enterprise
- **Desi Gradinarova:** Historic England
- **Lynn Morrison:** Leith Theatre
- **Aileen Strachan:** Paisley Museum, Renfrewshire Council

The session on Wellbeing Economy – Multiple Deprivation focused on where, what and how heritage can make a real contribution to people experiencing multiple deprivation.

Diane Gray (NLHF) opened the session by providing a snapshot of multiple deprivation within Scotland. Douglas Westwater (Community Enterprise) opened the panel responses by highlighting that currently funding does not reach all areas and that policymakers and practitioners should tailor support strategies to address the unique challenges of [cold spots](#). Desi Gradinarova (Historic England) considered the role the historic environment can play in improving wellbeing in deprived areas, particularly through health and wellbeing initiatives such as social prescribing. Lynn Morrison (Leith Theatre) noted how heritage and creative

industries, such as Leith Theatre, can create a platform for community regeneration. She highlighted the range of services that are offered by the theatre, beyond those which might traditionally be associated with the space, to meet the needs of the community. Aileen Strachan (Paisley Museum) discussed the transformation of Paisley Museum, with a focus on accessible design and the space as a resource for the community.

Key discussion points arising from the Q&A portion of the panel included:

- what more could be done by the historic environment sector to support individuals experiencing multiple deprivation.
- the support that organisations would need to improve an offer to people experiencing multiple deprivation in Scotland.

The importance of fore-fronting listening, engagement, co-production and collaboration was recognised, as well as the time required to ensure this takes place. There was discussion of how funding and resources could be reallocated to maximise benefit, while the role of partnering with non-heritage organisations that already work in this area was also highlighted. There was also a desire to share good practice, toolkits or case studies to learn from others and advocate for this work.

Close: Looking Back/Forward – Hazel Johnson (Director, Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS)) & Gavin MacGregor (Director, Archaeology Scotland)

Representing the National Strategy Steering Group, Hazel and Gavin reflected on each of the breakout sessions and the calls to action that had been heard in each workshop and which are captured above. Common threads across the day included the need for collaboration, the interconnectedness of many of the topics discussed, and the importance of data to evidence impact.

Hazel and Gavin noted that the National Steering Group would be meeting the following week to review the calls to action from the day, and to reflect on how these could best be incorporated into the delivery of the National Strategy over the next year.

Appendix A: Organisations attending SHEF 2025

1. ALGAO: UK
2. Archaeology Scotland
3. Architectural Heritage Fund
4. Architecture & Design Scotland
5. Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland
6. BE-ST
7. Built Environment Forum Scotland
8. Chartered Institute of Archaeologists
9. Chartered Institute of Buildings
10. CITB
11. Community Enterprise Scotland
12. Creative Scotland
13. Culture and Business Scotland
14. DCMS
15. Deaf Action
16. DTAS
17. Dundee Historic Environment Trust
18. Edinburgh World Heritage
19. EKOS Ltd
20. Energy Saving Trust
21. Glasgow Building Preservation Trust
22. Glasgow City Council
23. Glasgow City Heritage Trust
24. Heritage Alliance / Historic Environment Forum (England)
25. Heritage Network
26. Highlands and Islands Enterprise
27. Historic Churches Scotland
28. Historic England
29. Historic Environment Scotland
30. Historic Houses Scotland
31. ICON
32. IHBC Scotland
33. Inverness City Heritage Trust
34. Keep Scotland Beautiful
35. King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer (KLTR)
36. Knowledge Bridge
37. Leith Theatre
38. Local Energy Scotland
39. Museums Galleries Scotland
40. National Library of Scotland
41. National Lottery Heritage Fund
42. National Museums Scotland
43. National Trust Scotland
44. New Lanark World Heritage Site
45. Nick Wright Planning
46. Paisley Museum
47. Perth & Kinross Heritage Trust
48. Planning Aid Scotland
49. Ptotal Consulting
50. Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland
51. Scotland's Churches Trust
52. Scottish Civic Trust
53. Scottish Community Tourism (SCOTO)
54. Scottish Council on Archives
55. Scottish Government
56. Scottish Traditional Building Forum
57. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland
58. Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Scotland
59. South of Scotland Community Housing (SOSCH)
60. South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
61. Stirling City Heritage Trust
62. The Ridge
63. Traditional Arts & Culture Scotland
64. University of Edinburgh
65. Verture (Adaption Scotland)
66. Visit Scotland
67. War Memorials Trust
68. William Grant Foundation
69. WSREC
70. Young Scot

Annex B: Programme for the Day

09:30 – 10:00	Arrival & Registration		
10.00 – 10.05	Welcome – Allan Lindsay (Participation & Co-Design Director, Young Scot)		
10:05 – 10:20	Welcome – Alison Turnbull (Director of External Relations and Partnerships, Historic Environment Scotland)		
10:20 – 10:35	Address – Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture		
10:35 – 10:50	Update on <i>Our Past, Our Future – the strategy for the historic environment</i> – Jilly Burns (National Strategy Programme Manager, Historic Environment Scotland)		
10:50 – 11:10	Travel to sessions		
11:10 – 12:10	Breakout Session Block 1		
	1. Net Zero (Retrofit/Heat in Buildings)	2. Community & Place	3. Connection Space
12:10 – 13:00	Networking lunch		
13:00 – 13:30	Provocation – Irene Mosota (CEO, Knowledge Bridge): <i>Future thoughts on the historic environment sector in Scotland</i>		
13:30 – 13:45	Travel to sessions		
13:45 – 14:45	Breakout Session Block 2		
	4. Demonstrating our Impact	5. Wellbeing Economy: Multiple Deprivation	6. Traditional Skills
14:45 – 15:00	Travel from sessions		
15:00 – 15:30	8. Close: Looking Back/Forward – Hazel Johnson (Director, Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS)) & Gavin MacGregor (Director, Archaeology Scotland)		