



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 23 November 2023

Session 6



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CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
32nd Meeting 2023, Session 6

CONVENER

*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- *Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)
- *Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
- *Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
- *Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
- *Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

- Lucy Casot (Museums Galleries Scotland)
- Caroline Clark (National Lottery Heritage Fund)
- Jocelyn Cunliffe (Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland)
- Bryan Dickson (National Trust for Scotland)
- Elaine Ellis (Skills Development Scotland)
- Ailsa Macfarlane (Built Environment Forum Scotland)
- Caroline Warburton (VisitScotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

James Johnston

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 23 November 2023

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Historic Environment Strategy

The Convener (Clare Adamson): Good morning, and a very warm welcome to the 32nd meeting in 2023 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. Our only agenda item today is evidence taking on “Our Past, Our Future: The Strategy for Scotland’s Historic Environment”, which was published in June.

We are delighted to be joined by Bryan Dickson, head of buildings conservation, National Trust for Scotland; Caroline Clark, director for Scotland, National Lottery Heritage Fund; Ailsa Macfarlane, director, Built Environment Forum Scotland; Lucy Casot, chief executive officer, Museums Galleries Scotland; Jocelyn Cunliffe, acting chairman, Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland; and Elaine Ellis, skills planning manager, Skills Development Scotland. We are joined remotely by Caroline Warburton, VisitScotland’s destination development director for central and north-east Scotland. A warm welcome to you all, and a huge thank you to those who have put in written submissions for today’s session.

This round-table session is intended to be slightly less formal than our usual meetings, and I hope that everyone will have a chance to participate in the discussion. Caroline Warburton, if you indicate online that you want to come in on any points, the clerks will let me know.

Our main focus will be your views on the sector’s three priority areas: the role of stakeholders in supporting the delivery of the strategy’s aims; monitoring progress and measuring success of the strategy; and potential blockages, risks to delivery or other concerns that you have. Are the priorities for the sector, as set out in the strategy, the right ones? Do you consider that the actions that are due to be undertaken will deliver against the priorities in the strategy?

First of all, I will go round the room and ask the witnesses to say, very briefly—because we will run out of time; we always do—a little bit about their organisation.

I come to Caroline Clark first.

Caroline Clark (National Lottery Heritage Fund): The National Lottery Heritage Fund supports a broad and diverse range of heritage organisations across the whole of Scotland, ranging from built and natural heritage to intangible cultural heritage. We expect organisations applying to us to tell us about the heritage that they care about, and we work with them to help them celebrate that. We provide funding from community grant level up to major capital projects across the country, and we have been very involved in the built environment over the decades that the lottery has been in existence.

We very much welcome the priorities laid out in the strategy. The way that they seek to empower communities to engage with their heritage in a meaningful way is something that we are keen to see, and we are keen to identify mechanisms and structures to support that. However, because of the breadth of mission in the strategy, 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.

Lucy Casot (Museums Galleries Scotland): I represent Museums Galleries Scotland, the national development body for the museums and galleries sector. We support the 450 museums and galleries in Scotland.

Interestingly, we developed the strategy for Scotland’s museums and galleries in parallel with the development of this strategy. Our strategy came out in February, so it was slightly ahead, but it very much works in the same context, and we worked closely with Historic Environment Scotland to share some of that experience in the consultation.

One thing that struck me from reading all the responses was how much commonality there was between the strategies. That is natural and positive, and such synergies will be helpful both in how we deliver the strategies and in the framework of the wider culture strategy. We all work in the same wider context, so that is good.

The strategy has the right priorities. I agree with Caroline Clark that the centring of people in the strategy is important and a step beyond the previous strategy.

Are the actions up to the challenge? We are all grappling with that question. The strategy has to provide a framework within which we can work. Given that the context is changing rapidly, more detail will be useful as we get into the strategy’s delivery phase. Broadly, they are the right actions to try to deliver that, but deliverability will depend on a number of things in the wider context such as resource and so on.

A number of us were part of a chief executives forum that supported the previous strategy, “Our

Place in Time: The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland”, and we were involved in the development of the new strategy. I am therefore very supportive of what has come out in it.

Jocelyn Cunliffe (Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland): Apart from the National Trust for Scotland, which receives funding for specific projects, I think that we alone among the stakeholders present do not receive any funding from the Scottish Government or Historic Environment Scotland. In the past, we received Historic Scotland grants, but not now.

As the summary at the beginning of our submission says,

“The remit of the Society is to encourage the protection of Scotland’s built heritage.”

It then goes beyond built heritage to talk about settings and place, but that is our focus.

We are pragmatic, but we are very conscious that Scotland’s heritage is not a niche interest—it belongs to us all. We are a campaigning organisation, but we are also an educational organisation. For example, people are welcome to respond on our website to requests for support in dealing with contentious planning applications.

One of the things that concerned us in the strategy was that there was not enough emphasis on what we call the day job, which is looking after Scotland’s historic buildings. As you will see, I have put a lot of focus on maintaining buildings in our submission—well, I say that I have put a lot of focus on that, but I should point out that the submission was collaborative. It was not just me who wrote it; the national conservation committee and others had input into the submission, too.

It is critical that buildings and the public realm be properly maintained, but we do not see that happening.

Elaine Ellis (Skills Development Scotland): I am conscious that I am here in a slightly different role than the other participants. As a representative of Skills Development Scotland, I am not directly part of the historic environment sector, whereas other participants are. However, we do play a strong role with the sector and work in great collaboration with it.

The development of the strategy was a very collaborative process. Colleagues in Skills Development Scotland, including me, were part of the process and took part in the consultations. The consultations went not just to stakeholders in the historic environment sector but those across the public sector, too; indeed, they reached out across the Scottish landscape. All of that was taken into consideration.

Two main priorities connect into our space, one of which is the net zero goal. We recognise and make connections across the challenge of how we retrofit and move our buildings to net zero. When we developed the climate emergency skills action plan in partnership with other agencies and the Government, energy efficiency in the construction sector was one of our priorities. At the time, we did not use the language of retrofit, because it was not so commonly used then, but I am sure that, if you were to develop that plan tomorrow, that language would be used throughout it.

We captured all that, and we are currently working on a pathfinder project. We have done a deep dive into retrofit skills across Glasgow and Shetland. The challenges relating to the historic environment are part of that; they are not the only thing in that landscape, but they feed into it.

Part of the structure for the climate emergency skills action plan includes a heat decarbonisation sub-group. That might change as we move forward; however, we have as part of that group partners from the historic sector, including Historic Environment Scotland colleagues. Therefore, we absolutely recognise those challenges. We also recognise the goals on developing an inclusive and diverse workforce; indeed, that sits across our entire remit.

We are just one partner in the skills landscape. We do play an important role, but we work only in set areas. We worked directly with Historic Environment Scotland and across the sector on developing the “Skills Investment Plan for Scotland’s historic environment sector”, which was published way back in 2019 and is currently being updated. That is an on-going process that Historic Environment Scotland is leading on; as one of its partners, we are working with it on the update, which is due to be published early next year. Conversations have been on-going to reflect the major changes in the world since 2019 and to feed into the new strategy.

Moreover, we currently fund around 14,000 live apprenticeships that are directly related to the construction sectors, tourism and the creative industries, and we have many other apprentices and fields that link across the sector. Not every construction apprentice will go on to work in Historic Environment Scotland or tourism, but they will have a very important core skill that makes them ready to move into the sector. They are ready and able to go. We have done work to promote careers, and we also have on-going development work relating to apprenticeship frameworks.

I am conscious that I am not directly involved in the sector, but I can see how, in the strategy, people are looking at how to use historic environment tools in order to make things more

active. The strategy seems to be a very active one, and the fact that people are looking at how to use it for net zero and how to benefit communities can be only a good thing.

Ailsa Macfarlane (Built Environment Forum Scotland): Good morning, everybody.

Built Environment Forum Scotland is the third sector intermediary for organisations working within the existing built environment. We draw on the extensive expertise in our membership to inform debate and to advocate for strategic issues across the sector.

During the formation of the strategy, we were the lead for sector-wide engagement. We worked exceptionally hard with the small team at Historic Environment Scotland to reach out across the breadth of the sector to gather views. However, I will not dwell on that, as others have already mentioned it.

Ultimately, the priorities that we saw come through very much reflected what we heard across the engagement piece. More important, they reflected a step change in thinking from the previous strategy, which was, understandably, quite inward looking and very much cemented the historic environment, due to circumstances at the time.

These priorities reflect an outward-looking sector, and they and the actions demonstrate how the sector is delivering across a wide range of areas. Their purpose is not just to have something that the sector can deliver against; they very much demonstrate the sector's place in working across directorates and Government portfolios. It should not necessarily be considered in a silo. That is one of the key aspects.

The actions also reflect the breadth of work that exists in the historic environment. I appreciate that a number of people who work in the built environment, including me, are present today, but the strategy obviously has a much broader reach than that. I think that everybody involved was keen to get that balance across.

It is fair to say that there is ambition in the priorities and actions. Everybody was keen to avoid easy wins, because this should not be a strategy that reflects what we already do. It is very much about pushing further with the sector and ensuring that these things are recognised more widely than just in the sector itself.

09:45

Bryan Dickson (National Trust for Scotland): Thank you for inviting the National Trust for Scotland to the meeting.

We are Scotland's largest conservation charity and we own and manage about 130 sites across Scotland. We have a big built portfolio; we look after and manage about 1,200 built things, and we are quite engaged in the maintenance activity that Jocelyn Cunliffe mentioned.

On the development of the strategy, we recently launched "Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone: A ten-year strategy", which looks ahead to the National Trust for Scotland's 100th anniversary in 2031. The timing of our creation of that strategy and our feeding into the development of the historic environment strategy has been really good. As we see a lot of great alignment in both strategies, it is, from that perspective, a positive thing, and achieving it has been a very collaborative process.

In our submission, we have highlighted a number of challenges. Some relate to our activity with regard to the previous strategy, "Our Place in Time", which was created in 2014. That strategy succeeded very well in bringing the sector together and produced a number of useful outputs.

Activity on those outputs has been affected by a number of things. Covid had quite a big impact at a time when a number of those working groups were making inroads into certain areas in the sector. However, one of the main things that was not quite achieved was the strategy being seen as relevant to a lot more people than just the sector—it did not manage to become mainstreamed. That is why we welcome the change in the language in the new strategy.

What is also important is that we have managed to make the narrative shift to talking about how caring for the built environment helps us achieve net zero. It has been a really useful thing for our sector's strategy to try to articulate that.

However, we still face a great number of challenges. We believe that a well-maintained building is a positive attribute and gives civic pride, but when I look at our estate and the challenges that we face, I can see that achieving that will be very challenging, from both a financial resource perspective—our estate is very stretched—and a skills perspective. The work that Elaine Ellis mentioned is absolutely vital to achieving the strategy. 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. As we tend to be a contracting organisation, we do not directly employ a large volume of labour, and the pool is very shallow of the traditional skills required to achieve good-quality maintenance and repair, let alone robust retrofit. If there is ambition to deliver the strategy, there needs to be a considerable focus on that.

The Convener: We will move online to Caroline Warburton.

Caroline Warburton (VisitScotland): Good morning, everybody. Thank you for the invitation to join the panel today, and thank you for accommodating me to go online at the last minute. It is much appreciated.

I represent VisitScotland, which is the national tourism organisation. We are very focused on ensuring the sustainable development and growth of the visitor economy, which means ensuring that tourism plays its part in building the wellbeing economy, as outlined in the national strategy for economic transformation. That also aligns very clearly with the national tourism strategy, “Scotland Outlook 2030: Responsible tourism for a sustainable future”. The three priorities in the historic environment strategy align very strongly with both of those strategies and with the work that we are doing as an organisation.

We are hugely supportive of the strategy, the priorities and the outcomes, which I suspect we might talk about later. This is perhaps an obvious statement, but the historic environment is a key part of the tourism industry, and we recognise that. Perhaps I can give you some figures; research that we undertook in 2019 showed that almost two thirds of international visitors saw history and culture as a key driver for their visit to Scotland. We recognise the importance of the historic environment in all its forms, right the way across the country. Indeed, it is the interplay between tourism, the visitor economy, communities, our built and natural heritage that makes Scotland special.

However, we also recognise that the built environment and the historic environment are not just for tourists and visitors; they have to be relevant to communities, too. Therefore, we look forward to playing our part where we can in the tourism industry, both as VisitScotland the organisation and in helping to engage the tourism industry in the strategy’s development and delivery.

I understand that the delivery plan and the actions are still being worked up. Again, we will be involved in that and will be happy to play our part. We already partner with many of the organisations in the sector, and we look forward to partnering with more as the strategy is developed and implemented.

The Convener: Thank you all for those opening statements. I will move to questions from the committee. I invite Donald Cameron to start.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Welcome, everybody. I would like to focus on the specific issue of closures of sites and restricted access, which I think will be well known

to everyone here. I think that every MSP round this table will have experience of a closed site in their constituency or region. To be fair to HES, there has been improvement. According to its website, however, 22 sites are still fully closed and more have restricted access, which has a negative impact on the local economy and on tourism. I ask for the panel’s general view on the status quo. In particular, how do we get more sites open?

Looking to the future, I note that there is talk of what is called managed decline of various sites. I would welcome views on that and, more widely, on the effects of climate change and the transition to net zero, which is a key plank of the new strategy. Perhaps Bryan Dickson will start, as he is on my right.

Bryan Dickson: I am very sympathetic to the position in which HES finds itself. The resources that are required to inspect and undertake regular maintenance of any large estate are substantial, and all organisations struggle to fund those activities. Generally speaking, the Historic Environment Scotland estate is quite different to ours. I often say that an easy way to think about that is that ours have roofs and theirs do not. I have to say that it is a great asset to have a roof, because it is a lot easier to maintain the structure, although it is still very challenging.

One thing that we experience with regard to subtly changing climates is the fact that our maintenance programmes have to be more robust and more active, which involves more cost. It is often difficult to argue for maintenance, when it is not really a sexy thing to talk about. People like to talk about capital projects and what they achieve, but the topic of achieving good and robust maintenance does not tend to feature at the top of agendas—it is probably at the bottom.

Aligned to the issue of looking after the built estate is the issue of craft skills. As you might know, in Scotland now, one college delivers stonemasonry apprenticeships. I often say that Scotland is a nation built of stone, so I do not think that having one college to produce apprentices is sustainable.

In summary, I am sympathetic. There are great challenges facing everybody in looking after their built estate, and I am slightly thankful that we do not have a great deal of roofless ruins across our estate.

Jocelyn Cunliffe: The AHSS has written a number of letters on the topic. On behalf of the AHSS, I ask the committee to explore matters of risk with Historic Environment Scotland. I think that I am right in saying that, when HES was established, the act of Parliament transferred the responsibility for properties and care from the Scottish Government to HES. The problems that

HES has been facing with properties and care go back much further than 2014 and 2015. Repairs have been building up from way back in time, but I think that we will find that part of the closure is the point at which the bar was set.

HES is risk averse. I am not saying whether it is right or wrong to be risk averse; it is about how to judge where the bar is set. If the Scottish Government had liability for the risk, the view might be different. It is a bit like the Covid inquiry in that the damage that has been done to the economy by the closure of sites might be balanced out. For example, stonefall into a moat where people do not go is not a high risk, whereas stonefall at a gatehouse where people do go is a high risk.

There is a lot of talk about the climate emergency. We know that rainfall is a lot heavier, that the storms are much more intense and that there are temperature changes. I remain a bit unconvinced that the temperature changes in Scotland are so dramatic that it is a big problem, but the rainfall is, and it has an impact on old pointing and building methods. Anything that the committee can do to encourage greater investment in the high-level inspections that are taking place would be good.

Ailsa Macfarlane and I were at a meeting of the BEFS historic environment working group when we heard from Craig Mearns, the director of operations at HES, about its programme to reopen sites. It is working through it methodically, but it is not doing it quickly enough. I do not know whether that contributes to the discussion.

Donald Cameron: It is all very helpful. Does anyone else want to come in?

Caroline Clark: Like Brian Dickson, I have sympathy with Historic Environment Scotland over the challenges that it is facing. As Jocelyn Cunliffe said, risk is something to be considered, and safety has to come first on a publicly accessible site.

The bigger picture to think about in terms of the strategy is that we have an organisation that is resourced and expert enough to identify where the risk areas are, but the same climate change impacts are being felt across the built environment in all of our building stock. I feel that HES is more of a canary in the coalmine; we are seeing impacts now because it can see them. However, there will be a lot of challenges in estates owned by private individuals, by the national health service and by the Ministry of Defence and so on. The impacts of climate change will be severe in future years.

Again, as we are at the start of feeling the impacts of climate change in a tangible form, it would be sensible for us to try to future proof against it, and that comes down to skills and

identifying how to manage the change that we need to see happening in our built environment well, so that we can preserve and conserve the historic building stock as best we can while making the necessary adaptations.

I want to flag that we are supporting RSPB Scotland to do some interesting work on the climate Forth project, as part of which we are looking at adaptation planning for the natural environment as sea levels rise, and we are also doing some piloting on the impact of that on the cultural and built environment in the Forth area.

10:00

It would be very sensible to do more innovative testing now—early—on what we are going to do in areas that are at particularly high risk of flooding or which are being impacted by other aspects of climate change, so that we can begin to implement planning for that for the duration of the strategy.

The Convener: We have some supplementary questions on that topic. Mark Ruskell, do you have a supplementary question, or is your question on a new topic?

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): It is on a new topic.

The Convener: Okay. I will go to Kate Forbes, because she has a supplementary question

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): This question is the inverse of Donald Cameron's one. It is about new sites that are identified but which have perhaps been forgotten about, or which are becoming "roofless"—to use the word that Bryan Dickson used. Obviously, Historic Environment Scotland is not the only organisation that owns historic buildings. Where there are other properties—I do not want to name check any in particular, although Kinloch castle on the Isle of Rum is an obvious example—that are a key part of our historic environment but are not being treated as such right now, what should be the process for identifying those key assets and ensuring that they are part of a collection, irrespective of who the owner is? Where does responsibility ultimately lie for identification and ensuring that they are not lost? Maybe that is a question that is better directed to Historic Environment Scotland, but I would like to get the views of those on the panel.

Bryan Dickson: Ailsa Macfarlane might want to talk about the work that we have done in the built environment working group on the sustainable investment tool, which is used when considering heritage.

The sector has probably been guilty for quite a while of looking at objects through the lens of their cultural value. However, some interesting work

has been undertaken by one of the previous OPIT groups to develop a toolkit to consider a much broader range of values, including economic, environmental and social values. That tool helps to articulate the values of a particular site. It would be great if that could be used more widely.

The National Trust for Scotland has just finished its portfolio review, and we used some tools that were developed to help to do that. When we are asked to consider new acquisitions, we will now apply a lens that is much broader than one that considers only cultural value. Interestingly, in looking at our portfolio, we have been able to determine things that our portfolio is perhaps not representative of, such as industrial heritage and buildings that are modern in their construction, so we are beginning to develop a view as to what our portfolio should or could look like, and we would welcome conversations with Historic Environment Scotland on that.

I point the panel to that tool, which has been worked quite hard by the sector, and I encourage its further use.

Ailsa Macfarlane: The tool that Bryan Dickson is talking about started perhaps in relation to a previous question, because it is about prioritisation and the initial conversations. Through that, a series of values were worked through by the sector very extensively over a number of years. The tool considers any site or asset by looking at a variety of different economic values or looking at what investment in a site could bring. It also looks at social and community values, and looks at it from an environmental perspective, including how net zero changes can be supported. One quarter—it is a circle, and there are quadrants—relates to cultural value. Those aspects are embedded in the tool.

Fortunately, the tool will be launched for public access next week. It is being provided on behalf of the built heritage investment group, which is one of the last groups relating to the previous strategy, “Our Place in Time”. The tool is not owned by anybody; it is for the sector. We will look after it as a beta tool, so we are looking for people to use it, comment on it and tell us how they are using it. It is very much designed to be used by everybody, in the broadest sense—people with an interest in the area as well as community groups and professional organisations. There is a lot of explanation of language and terms. We have made the tool as accessible as we can while making sure that it is accurate and reflective of the sector. As you can imagine, that is a difficult balance to strike.

On Ms Forbes’s question about acquisitions, following on from what Bryan Dickson said, it is important to ensure that new sites—and, to an extent, old sites—tell the breadth of the story of

Scotland. In relation to new sites, we need to think about the stories that we are not telling and what we need to bring into our portfolio, regardless of where ownership sits, to help to express what matters currently. I think that we have quite a good handle on things that have mattered—we have quite a reflective picture from that perspective—but, when we consider new acquisitions, we should ensure that we tell a breadth of stories. For example, there might be more gaps in industrial heritage onwards.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): Inevitably, we have already heard comments about the scarcity of resources to allow people to do the things that they need to do to look after what we currently have. However, in relation to potential new sites, I might have missed this, but I did not hear any reference to economic regeneration.

I know that we can all list various sites, so I will mention a couple. Scotland’s first industrial production site for whisky, which was all taken down to London, was in Kennet, near Kincardine. In fact, the slip that it used to go down is still there. It is a roofless building that has trees growing up through it. The national lottery would not touch it because it thought that it was a magical building. Not far from that site, at the back of the council buildings in Alloa, there is the grave of John Jameson—he was Scottish, not Irish—who worked at the former site.

Outwith my constituency, there is the birthplace of Alexander Graham Bell in Edinburgh. In Canada, there are, I think, two visitor centres for Alexander Graham Bell, and there is one in the United States. We have his birthplace, but we do nothing with it.

Might economic regeneration and an entrepreneurial helicopter view of new sites help to produce revenues for different organisations? Does the toolkit factor that in?

Ailsa Macfarlane: The toolkit considers potential economic and social benefits, as well as the cultural knowledge that can come from that. I would add a note of caution by saying that the economic regeneration from smaller sites can be less than is imagined, given the number of visitors who come through the door and how much it takes to run the building and the related services. It can seem like a very good option, but it is surprisingly difficult to strike that balance.

The issue links back to what has been said previously to the committee about communities taking on sites or having a desire to run a small museum or something that is culturally important and relevant to those people in that place. It is incredibly difficult to strike the balance to make that sustainable in the longer term. I very much

appreciate the desire for new sites, but that balance must be taken into account for the longer term so that people like us do not come back to committees in 10 or 20 years to say that such sites have resourcing problems.

Bryan Dickson: In the National Trust for Scotland, we have about 3,500 volunteers who are loyal to us. Without our volunteers, we would not be able to operate our sites, so they are absolutely the life-blood of the organisation. On our books, there are a number of sites that are profitable, but they are balanced by the number of sites that are not, so the organisation constantly operates within a deficit that is safe and we can tolerate. I reiterate Ailsa Macfarlane's point that the tool allows for conversations on economic benefit.

The Convener: We have talked about skills. Neil Bibby has some questions on that.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): We have heard how important the skills shortage is when it comes to reaching the goals in the strategy. I was struck by the National Trust for Scotland's evidence on the Historic Environment Scotland skills investment plan—SIP—which was produced in conjunction with SDS. It said that only 30 per cent of the targets in the action plan had been delivered. There are concerns about Covid and a lack of resource. Can any other lessons be learned in relation to failure to deliver on those targets? If there is a skills shortage, what work has been done to quantify the number of apprenticeships that are needed? If there is a funding black hole and funding is the reason why we are not achieving the action points, what level of funding is required to address the skills shortage?

It would make sense for Skills Development Scotland to answer, but the National Trust for Scotland and anyone else who has input on that can respond.

Elaine Ellis: There are two different questions in that. I will start with the first one.

When the SIP was created—it was just before I started work at SDS, so it was about five years ago—some SMART targets were put into it right at the end column. The 30 per cent to which the NTS referred is the SMART goals. On the broader actions that were connected to the SIP, a lot of work was undertaken that achieved the goals and ambitions of the plan but did not necessarily hit the SMART targets. The reason why some of the actions did not happen came down to funding for certain projects, some of which sat with Historic Environment Scotland and other bodies. They might have expected to have the funding five years ago, but there has been such a change in the funding landscape that those projects have not been able to happen.

On the development of the current skills investment plan, a lot of lessons have been learned. Historic Environment Scotland has brought in dedicated resource that was not there before. A lady called Catherine Cartmell is leading on the plan, and she has a team that is working on it. When the actions are set for the new plan, the experience of the previous one will be taken into account. A lot more thought will go into what actions go into it and ensuring that, when Historic Environment Scotland sets SMART targets, the resources are available to meet the objectives. However, the agency is working towards broader ambitions as well.

Many different things are in play in the wider skills shortages in the sector. Stonemasonry was mentioned, and it is a good example to use as a case study that might tie across some of the other areas.

Stonemasonry is incredibly important to the sector. Historic Environment Scotland and other bodies advocate for the need to employ more stonemasons. With the demand across Scotland, there is absolutely no question about the fact that we need that skilled workforce. However, there is sometimes a mismatch in the demand across Scotland. At the moment, the mismatch is with the employer demand to bring in those skills.

There is only one route to becoming a stonemason in Scotland: a modern apprenticeship. It is a four-year commitment for an employer. In relatively recent time—I think that it is the past decade or so, although it might go back about 15 years—there have been major shifts in the demographic of the companies that support the stonemasonry sector. The companies have never been huge, but there were a lot of medium-sized and bigger small companies, which took on more apprenticeships. The businesses that support the sector have changed and have become even smaller, with more microbusinesses, and they do not necessarily want to commit to taking someone through an apprenticeship.

10:15

That is not a criticism; it is a valid business choice. Taking on an apprentice is a four-year commitment in which you have to find wages for someone. It is not just about finding wages and being an employer; you also have to support them through that process. Apprenticeships are partly done in colleges or centres, but a lot of it involves a personal relationship within a business, where the apprentice gets one-to-one training, which is a major commitment.

We have only one pathway. It is industry-designed, but there have been issues with it. At the moment—I got the figures before coming

today—there are 83 apprentices in stonemasonry across Scotland in only three centres. We are now down to one college, which is City of Glasgow College. Historic Environment Scotland has centres in Elgin and Stirling, so we have other locations for people to go to, but the numbers there are not high.

The numbers are very small. In the construction building framework, which stonemasonry sits within, there are about 1,800 other apprentices who are not doing stonemasonry. If the demand was there, there would be absolutely nothing to prevent people from doing stonemasonry. First and foremost, demand is the biggest blocker. There is a mismatch between what we mean when we talk about the demand as a country and the demand from employers. The lower demand from employers has a knock-on effect on the skills provision. With low demand, it becomes very difficult for colleges and other centres to run the classes. We need a skilled workforce to do the training, and it is not the cheapest course to run, because stone and other equipment are not cheap. There are major blockers that all play in because the demand from employers is lower.

It would be remiss of me not to mention funding. If the colleges and the centres were here, they would argue that they need greater funding than is available. However, they certainly use what is available, and a lot of it tends to be done on a person by person basis.

Is that more information than you needed?

Neil Bibby: No—that is helpful. Does anyone else have any comments?

Jocelyn Cunliffe: I endorse what Elaine Ellis has said. When she talks about employers, she is talking about the contractors—the owners of the building firms that are employing the apprentices. They, too, are looking for work. They need building contracts through which to employ those skills. One way that that can be stimulated is with grant-aided projects.

I remember probably 10 or 15 years ago attending a meeting in Glasgow that was chaired by Alex Neil. I cannot remember the context, but I remember a contractor saying that Historic Scotland had stopped grant-aiding church work, which was a sure line of work for his labour force. That is absolutely the case. Although grant-aiding is something that you do not want to do, because you do not have the money to give out, you should think about it in terms of stimulating the economy and the demand for skills.

The Convener: It is a chicken and egg scenario. Which comes first?

I do not want to stop the discussion on this line of thought, but I want to say that we had a

showcase outside the Parliament in which apprentices demonstrated slatework and stonework. Many of my colleagues will have been at that. It was interesting and wonderful to meet so many of the passionate apprentices in those areas.

Lucy Casot: The skills investment plan is very broad. There are very specific issues around stonemasonry, which have been well addressed, but that is not the only skills area for the sector. Importantly, Museums Galleries Scotland is a collaborator in the skills investment plan. Particular skills are relevant to the historic environment and to the museums sector, which we tackle separately.

More generic skills are also relevant across the heritage and culture sectors. We have a skills academy, and we run an apprenticeship in digital marketing and are looking at developing one in leadership. We, together with BEFS and Greenspace Scotland, run a programme across the heritage sector, which is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, on business skills, financial planning, governance and all those issues. Many third sector organisations that look after our heritage need those skills to be able to operate sustainably.

It is important that we support those organisations with those skills. The skills investment plan looks across the wider area. The programme that I mentioned has been successful. We have had two lots of funding from the heritage fund for that, but that is coming to an end. We would very much like to continue that programme, which takes individuals from an organisation and supports them with a peer network, as it has proven to be a success.

There are other opportunities, but it is important that we consider the breadth of skills needed in the sector and not just specific issues that need specific solutions.

Caroline Clark: I will build on Elaine Ellis's points. One challenge for our smaller heritage organisations across Scotland is that, coming out of the pandemic, young people need a greater level of support to access apprenticeships, training and skills development.

Organisations such as The Ridge in East Lothian do pre-apprenticeship work with young people out of school. Some rethinking is needed about how we support young people into work, whether it is a four-year apprenticeship or some other shape, and how they can physically access those places. It would be more appropriate to have locally based skills development that enables young people to stay in the support network of their home environment.

Giving broader thought to that area would be beneficial, to make sure that we are successful in supporting young people to have a long and thriving future once they get the skills that they need.

Bryan Dickson: I have a couple of points on the targets in the old SIP. It was launched around a week before we went into lockdown, and it struggled to gain any momentum after that.

The tone of the investment plan was very collaborative, which was good, but it was difficult to engage private owners or other large estate owners on mainstreaming the strategy. No money was available to deliver any of the actions, hence why it was collaborative. It achieved some successes that could be looked at.

The new SIP is being reviewed comprehensively, which is lifting the carpet on a lot of issues. I suspect that a great deal of action will come out of that. If we are to mainstream it, it would be beneficial to put some investment behind it, which might attract a much wider audience to support the actions.

Elaine Ellis: I am conscious that I am talking a lot about the construction side in my answers, so I apologise for not covering the other sides. In relation to mainstreaming, we are reviewing apprenticeships that are relevant to the sector. A carpentry and joinery apprenticeship review is ongoing, and there is one on interior building fit-out that crosses over into subjects such as traditional plastering.

We have had discussions about how best to incorporate that work. Getting the time to do it is a balancing act. We are not just training plasterers or joiners for the historic environment sector—we are training them to be ready to work in any part of the economy. It is about how we fit that into the existing teaching space in a way that works. We have had those conversations, and representatives from the historic environment sector have been part of those conversations. We are actively working on where best to place mainstreaming. It might become part of the knowledge base or the learning rather than part of the core qualification, but mainstreaming will be there.

There are questions for the sector about what is next. Could people do additional qualifications while they work in the sector? Work is being done on how we embed that in the part that we play.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): You have identified that there is a skills shortage. However, we have a wealth of talent among volunteers at, for example, men's sheds, where they bring together individuals who have skills from having worked in a wide range of sectors in the past, which they can pass on to

others who come and join them. Have you tapped into the third and voluntary sectors to see what skills they can add to the existing base and hand over to others? Those individuals might have stopped being in the working environment that they were in earlier in their lives, but they still have a skills base that they can hand on to the next generation, which could support many of your organisations.

Elaine Ellis: Colleagues from the organisations that work directly in the historic environment sector could probably answer that question a lot better than I can. I do not doubt that they should consider such resources and that they will have had opportunities to connect with them.

For our part, the focus is very much on skills that relate to specific occupations and qualifications. In my job, examples would be the skills that people require to become qualified carpenters, joiners, bricklayers or electricians and similar occupations. When we consider how they can best get such skills, we go out into industry to get feedback. We consult widely, and we work closely with industry leaders and employers, but we also ensure that we speak to apprentices who are currently going through the system or have just come out the other end. Therefore, I approach the issue from a slightly different angle.

Mark Ruskell: We are in a climate emergency, and some of your comments so far have focused on that. However, I want to consider the Government's strategy, the first priority in which is delivering the transition to net zero. The focus here is primarily on our historic environment assets. Has there been enough embedding of the historic environment sector's views in other Government strategies that push towards net zero?

I was particularly struck by AHSS's submission, which mentions pre-1919 buildings in Scotland. Many of us, including myself, live in such buildings and recognise the challenges that they present, but also the importance of their design features. What are your thoughts on housing, retrofitting and skills development, and whether the historic environment sector could be a driver for a wider transition in housing?

On a related point, do you see tensions within climate policy more generally? I put this question to Caroline Warburton of VisitScotland. If the objective is to grow tourism in Scotland, would that come with increased use of aviation? If it would, that would take us backwards as regards climate change. There is also the historic environment sector's role on designations. Does that create a brake on renewable energy development, such as the use of wind farms or conservation areas, or restrict the roll-out of embedded renewables such as solar panels?

There are tensions, but there are also opportunities. Could the historic environment sector be a real driver on skills and achieving progress?

Bryan Dickson: The net zero topic is absolutely fundamental to how we consider our built estate. By that I mean not only the National Trust for Scotland's estate but the historic environment that we all see when we are out on our high streets. Much of that has been tinkered with in the past. Back in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, work was often done with materials that were used with the best of intentions but which were deleterious to the fabric's operation, as we are seeing now. The committee will probably be aware of the introduction of cement renders on gable walls, for example.

When you retrofit a building—that is, upgrade its energy efficiency—if you do not take a fabric-first approach, you are almost wasting your money, because the building has to operate at an equilibrium that allows for the transition of moisture and better thermal performance of the fabric.

10:30

The scale of that issue across our high streets and individual estates is substantial, so there is a real opportunity to ensure that our fabric is fit for purpose first; if that is the case, you will get effective retrofit. Therefore, to answer your point, yes, the historic environment strategy can lead on those topics.

Mark Ruskell: That is a good reflection. I will aim to chip away at the cement-based render on the side of my house—over a number of years.

I suppose that the question is whether you think that that is sufficiently reflected in Government strategies. We have a heat in buildings strategy coming, we talked about skills earlier, and we have a historic environment strategy, but that is very much focused on the historic environment, and we know what needs to happen. Should your sector not be embedded in other strategies?

Ailsa Macfarlane: Thank you very much for that question. As an organisation, we work extensively in that area. I agree whole-heartedly that the historic environment is not embedded well enough across other strategies. We work a lot with the heat in buildings team and my understanding is that, for the past six months, within that, there has been a new team for historic and listed buildings because there is finally—I stress the word “finally”—an understanding that those buildings account for an awful lot of our existing environment and our housing. As the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland's report said, housing is part of our infrastructure, but it is

gently pushed to the side while we think about other things.

These buildings are not difficult; they are just different, and they have to be considered differently. It is fantastic that there is now some energy—pun unintended—in that area, because there are specificities that need to be considered, which makes things trickier. It is not as easy as saying, “You just do this,” because there are different typologies and different types of buildings.

Work is also being done on tenements and tenement maintenance. The working group on tenement maintenance has worked hard in that area. Work is on-going, but it has been incredibly slow, and that is not just due to Covid. Because of where priorities sit across portfolios, it has been difficult. When it comes to meeting net zero, the historic environment is not appreciated for its embedded carbon and existing value, which is a continual challenge.

Work is being done across the sector and beyond on how that is measured. We can spend a lot of time trying to unpick the exact measurements rather than knowing that these structures are stone built and have inherent value from a carbon perspective and a social and cultural perspective. That is not fully represented across a range of policies, and that is particularly the case in relation to net zero and heat in buildings, where we will see significant change in future.

Historic Environment Scotland has produced a significant range of documents on managing change, whether in relation to conservation areas, retrofit or many other things. Over recent years, great pains have been taken in those documents to talk about what is possible. It is not that designation puts a stop on work; it is just that more thought, consideration and detail might go into that work. It is not about what is not possible; it should very much be about what is possible.

Lucy Casot: I will make a related point on the question about opportunities. In a sense, that goes slightly beyond the outcomes of the strategy. We know that climate change requires culture change and behaviour change.

There is an opportunity for buildings that are in the public realm and those in the charitable sector to act as exemplars on engaging the public with the stories. Museums and galleries are trusted institutions, and we work with them a lot on communicating the possibilities. They can act as demonstrators and talk to people about even the small actions that they can take. We should not overlook the possibility of using our historic environment assets and estate to support the

wider transition for the private sector. It is an opportunity.

Jocelyn Cunliffe: I just want to wave this book around and commend to you all the work that Historic Environment Scotland has done. It is its “Guide to Energy Retrofit of Traditional Buildings” and it should be required reading, because it explains what is possible.

Elaine Ellis: Some of the right conversations are now definitely happening on that subject. An energy efficiency skills matrix was created that included a reference to a qualification that Historic Environment Scotland created on traditional buildings, and it highlighted the importance of contractors who already mainly have good baseline skills. However, a small amount of upskilling is needed, just to make sure that contractors focus on the right area.

The conversations are also happening with national construction partners. Because of the retrofit agenda, there is probably a greater awareness now than there ever has been of the importance of not only the fabric-first approach, but suitable measures and making sure that partners have the right skills in the workforce to make the choices.

Some work has been done on building databases in different places—other people can pick up more detail on that. The right conversations are definitely happening, but how that is translated is another question.

Caroline Clark: I have a related point, although it does not precisely answer the question. It is about work that we have been doing with the natural heritage sector that is very much tied to our historic built environment. We have been developing a green finance model with NatureScot, which involves innovative ways of supporting new natural adaptation and natural capital programmes. Interestingly, quite a few of the urban programmes look at things such as rivers running through towns, the cost of flooding and how that is managed. They are looking back at how those things were managed historically and reinstating that. There are opportunities for a number of historic buildings and the estates around them to take advantage of green finance more in the future.

When we talk about mainstreaming, we should talk about what is going on in the natural environment and how that can be applied to the physical built environment estate. We are focusing very much on buildings today, but they sit in a place, and that place has an impact on not only carbon capture but biodiversity growth. Of course, those things are the two different sides of the crisis, so we should try to think in a holistic way

about what the built environment can contribute on those fronts.

Caroline Warburton: I will come back to Mark Ruskell’s comments on tourism in particular. Obviously, we recognise that aviation is a significant emitter of carbon. The challenge that we have is that the UK is an island, and visitors have a requirement to get to us. They will do that by air, but there needs to be a balance and we promote other options as well. We focus on the UK as a key market for us, and we are interested in overland travel opportunities for people.

At the moment, we feel that we can make the biggest difference around the quality and the impact that people have while they are here. That is about travelling over land, longer stays, and making sure, if you are flying in from overseas, that you make the most of your trip while you are here.

Coming back to the historic environment, I want to highlight that we are aware that a number of attractions are struggling with the challenges of energy costs due to the fabric of the building. An example in my region is Discovery Point, which is a key asset for RRS Discovery. The fabric of the building—the actual visitor attraction—is very poor, because it was built, I think, in the 1980s, with little insulation. There is a real challenge of upgrading the fabric of the building so that it can continue to provide the interpretation of the historic asset, which is the boat.

From VisitScotland’s perspective, I want to highlight the work that we are doing in a couple of areas. One is the destination net zero programme, through which we are working with the three enterprise agencies and the Scottish Government to look at the tourism industry as a whole to consider how we can start to make the transition towards net zero as an industry, and to consider what advice we can provide to businesses. Some of that is around climate action planning. We are working with destination organisations to help them to understand what they can do in destination as well.

A huge range of activity is going on that feeds into the historic environment. The “Our Past, Our Future” strategy has interlinkages with the transition to net zero, and it shows how it is interlinked with the national strategy for economic transformation and all the other plans. There is real alignment, which helps to focus our attention on things such as climate change and the transition to net zero.

Keith Brown: I want to come back to the previous question, but I will ask it in a different way. Yesterday’s autumn statement is now being read, and one of the implications is a further crunch on public services, especially in 2027-28.

Given the pressures that are being talked about, how rigorously are we examining other options?

I understand Ailsa Macfarlane's point that, if you open an attraction, there can be long-term costs, and it might not attract the numbers that you want. However, just around the corner from Alexander Graham Bell's birthplace, there is the Johnnie Walker visitor centre, which has just been established and is going great guns. It has taken over the entire House of Fraser building. It shows that that sort of thing is possible. Are we properly exploiting—if that is the right word—some of the assets that we have?

I have two quick examples that perhaps relate to what our papers call "intangible cultural heritage". First, the Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum discovered that it had the world's oldest football. Instead of keeping it on a dusty shelf, the people there brought it out; when they did so, there were international satellite news feeds from around the world at the Smith, and the football then went to Hamburg for the world cup—even though Scotland was not at it—and appeared at the start of the competition. It had a huge influence.

Secondly, we took William Wallace's sword over to New York and had a huge response to that. The Wallace monument visitor figures went through the roof.

Are we rigorously examining other opportunities? The question might relate to museums in particular, although I would point out that, when we had an evidence session with library representatives, I mentioned the fact that the central library in Edinburgh sits next to where witches were executed as well as to Greyfriars Bobby and suggested that the library could try to exploit that. Given the pressure on public services, are we sufficiently and rigorously looking at alternatives to generate funds that will allow us to do the other things that we want to do? My fear is that public resources will just not be there to the same extent in future.

Maybe Lucy Casot could go first.

The Convener: I will just add a supplementary before I bring in people to answer. Our predecessor committee had tourism as part of its remit. We do not have that now, but we still have major events, which fall under the cabinet secretary's remit, and we also have the Scottish Government's diaspora strategy, which has been talked about in terms of reach. Could we hear a little about how people are looking to that strategy? I know that the session is on the historic environment strategy, but how are those things being linked up?

Lucy Casot: There is a lot in there. Organisations—certainly museums and galleries, but others, too—have been really creative and

innovative over the years in thinking of different ways of unlocking wider audiences. There is something about the storytelling that you can do. The football at the Smith is a brilliant example of the stories in our collection that enable us to engage audiences in different ways. That is absolutely core to the mission of museums and their energy.

At the end of the day, though, this is still a resource question, because looking after a building and its displays is a challenge in itself. We absolutely need to animate, change and update those displays; we need to keep refreshing them to tell new stories, as visitor expectations change and as expectations change around what is represented in our museums. There is a lot of passion with regard to the creativity of the process of looking for ideas about what might engage people.

10:45

Your mention of the intangible cultural heritage side of things was interesting. That refers to the culture, the traditions, the craft skills, the language and all the other things that bring museum objects to life—in other words, the living practice and so on that goes on around those objects, tells those stories and keeps them alive.

I am excited to say that a lot of new discussions are taking place around intangible cultural heritage. We hear that there is new activity around the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization convention on safeguarding such heritage. Museums Galleries Scotland has been very active in that space; we were the first accredited adviser to UNESCO in Scotland—and, indeed, the UK—on intangible cultural heritage. It is an exciting area where we can bring together current practice and activity, living tradition and so on to create new activities and new stories. By doing so, we can bring things to life again in new ways and, in turn, bring in new audiences.

I think that museums are very good at looking at these kinds of opportunities. The storytelling aspect represents one such vibrant opportunity; indeed, the year of stories was a really good example of that. As well as the larger events that were run with support from the Scottish Government, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Museums Galleries Scotland, a lot of community organisations engaged through the year of stories community stories fund. Communities were invited to tell new and lesser told stories about their communities and their places, and it had a huge impact for quite small levels of investment. Small grants were given to communities to help them bring those things to life. There is a huge amount of appetite for that,

and it does not always take large amounts of resource to support such volunteer effort.

That is one strong example. The evaluation of the year of stories shows that it had a powerful impact, and it is a good seam that we should continue to tap into and to support.

The Convener: Both Carolines would like to comment. We will go first to Caroline Clark, who is in the room.

Caroline Clark: One of the requirements for the projects supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund is that they be financially viable not just during the delivery phase but in the longer term. We spend a lot of time looking at the longer-term sustainability of the projects that come to us.

We have seen some really interesting examples of the entrepreneurship that was mentioned earlier. An example that springs to mind is Paisley museum, which I will take Neil Bibby around tomorrow. It has looked at its textile heritage collection, which includes the most beautiful collection of pattern books. As well as working with the fashion industry to monetise that in some restricted and carefully curated instances, the museum has looked at how the relationships that are built can benefit local art students and artists and can help them develop connections with and knowledge of the fashion industry.

Museums need to do more of that kind of thinking about what is sitting in their collections, but they also need support in that respect. It is critical that museums work collaboratively with the likes of Scottish Enterprise and VisitScotland to exploit their collections and to bring in the expertise that will enable them to do that well and appropriately.

Ailsa Macfarlane touched on the small community heritage monuments that might not immediately seem to exhibit the same level of financial viability. However, there are great examples that can be highlighted. I am thinking of the Skye Ecomuseum, which is a landscape in which a number of interesting assets have been strung together in a trail that draws in visitors and encourages them to dwell there and to spend a greater amount of time learning about locally interesting and intriguing stories. Collating such things generates enough interest for a tourist to make that journey and do that route.

I think that there is also potential in relation to Scotland's rural churches, pilgrimage tourism and spiritual wellbeing. That is an area that could be looked at in greater detail.

There are some great examples of entrepreneurial creativity in the built environment sector. It is just a case of making sure that the

support is there to ensure that it is done well and done appropriately.

Caroline Warburton: This is all about telling the story and looking for opportunities to tell it well. Yes, we might have an historic building, but there are numerous stories that we can tell about it, and that will often come down to the people running the building. Organisations such as VisitScotland are always looking for hooks—for example, the oldest football—that help put Scotland, or a place or community in Scotland, on the map.

Themed years, for example, give us the opportunity to get everybody talking about the same subject, whether it be stories, the coast and waters or history and heritage. They are an opportunity for us to really shine a light on, say, the historic environment.

The other opportunity is people, particularly our historic people. Take Andrew Carnegie—the fact that he was born and grew up in Dunfermline presents a unique opportunity to link that to the diaspora in America, particularly to John Forbes and Pittsburgh. We can create all of these kinds of opportunities that have a cultural element and are a way of encouraging people to visit. Indeed, Burns is another excellent example in that regard.

We can also use anniversaries to tell a story and as a way of refocusing on a particular building or event. One example is the declaration of Arbroath, which is a piece of intangible cultural heritage—well, a piece of paper—and whose anniversary gave us an opportunity to look again at Arbroath abbey and, indeed, to encourage people to visit that part of Angus. We use such events to shape our work.

Finally, I just want to mention screen tourism. Using places in Scotland as locations brings its own opportunity. “Outlander” is the obvious example to mention in that respect; it is not only encouraging people to visit Scotland but rejuvenating and providing an income to the screen sector, which is enabling some of our built heritage to continue to be used and valued.

Your question is an excellent one. There are numerous ways in which we can retell the stories of our built and intangible heritage to help remind people of the quality and depth of the stories that we have here in Scotland, as well as their value. I hope that the examples that I have provided are helpful.

The Convener: That is another example of the screen industry's success in Scotland at the moment. The fact that it all requires carpenters, builders and electricians, however, places a squeeze on the sector.

Kate Forbes: I just want to pick up on some of Caroline Warburton's comments on telling stories

and Lucy Casot's comments on intangible cultural heritage. I have long campaigned for Gaelic to be recognised as intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO. What role does language, and Gaelic in particular, have in the stories that we tell? I often get very frustrated about there being a tokenistic, tick-box approach to this instead of an approach in which Gaelic is embedded in the stories and how you tell them. I suppose that that sort of thing—that is, the need for Gaelic speakers—points to another skill that you need to develop in your teams. I am just curious as to where you think that an intangible asset such as language sits alongside the stories that you tell about buildings.

Caroline Warburton: I will come in on that one. We are in the process of developing a Gaelic tourism strategy, which I understand is due to be launched shortly, and which I hope will indicate our commitment to ensuring that Gaelic and tourism are joined together.

I have recently been working on the city's tourism strategy in Glasgow, and we have had a conversation about how Gaelic can be woven into that, including into Celtic Connections. After all, there are a huge number of Gaelic speakers in the city. I should also say that I stay over on the east coast in Fife, and a lot of work is going on there, for example, on looking at the links between place names and Gaelic.

There are opportunities to make sure that Gaelic is embedded in our culture, which it is, and to make more of that. From a visitor perspective, new products are coming forward, as people are looking—*[Interruption.]*

The Convener: Can you hear us, Caroline? We have probably lost you for the remainder of our time—I am sorry about that. If you want to give the committee feedback in writing on Ms Forbes's question, that would be really helpful.

Does anyone else want to come in on that question?

Lucy Casot: Some really interesting practice in that regard is happening in museums. In relation to redisplay, those who are able to are putting Gaelic first when dual-language interpretation is provided. In recognition of the individual character of a place, we should bring in anything, whether it be Gaelic or Scots, that adds colour to the storytelling and represents unique places. Increasingly, there is an appetite among visitors to understand that all places are different. That identity is often captured in a museum, a gallery or another historic site, and visitors recognise the special nature of that. We promote that as much as we can.

Again, there are resource questions. However, I would note that, as part of a really interesting project, a number of Highland museums came

together and we provided funding for a joint Gaelic development officer. It might not be possible for one small museum to afford such an officer, but, by coming together, the museums have been able to appoint a Gaelic development officer to support a number of museums around a regional forum. That quite useful model involves a partnership approach to sharing resources in order to promote that kind of activity, and such demonstrations can inspire others to do something similar.

Alexander Stewart: You have all talked about the ambitions of the strategy, and it is clear that there are ambitions in each of your sectors. However, those ambitions will be realised only if we have the appropriate actions, framework and delivery. In your written submissions, you identify that we have a skills shortage, that there are funding support issues and that investment is required. It all comes down to the plans that each of your organisations has for future investment based on the financial support that is provided over the medium to long term. Squaring that circle is the only way to achieve the ambitions.

You all want to survive and thrive, but it appears that you are at a crossroads. For many of your organisations, the next step could be a challenge. We know that there are already challenges, but the challenges could be bigger, depending on where you take your organisations and where you want them to be. For me, the issue is about financial support and investment in the medium to long term, and what you need to ensure that you can survive and thrive based on the strategy that has been set.

Ailsa Macfarlane: That is a challenge for any organisation. We are a very small organisation—we have between three and four full-time equivalent members of staff. We support a wide range of members across the sector, and we are extremely reliant on funding from Historic Environment Scotland, which provides between 90 and 92 per cent of our funding. We are currently in a three-year funding cycle. Prior to that, we received funding year on year. As with many organisations across the sector, we are dependent on how larger agencies and non-departmental public bodies are funded. I will not go into the fine detail, because I appreciate that the committee examined the culture budget recently, but those challenges apply to us and to a number of other organisations.

We are keen to look to the future. As an organisation, we are 20 years old this year, and we have been funded through Historic Environment Scotland—which was previously Historic Scotland—for that entire time, but we are not complacent about that.

11:00

Recently, we received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to examine our operating model and to look at new ideas and innovations to see what is possible for us within the sector. However—a lot like funding maintenance—being a third sector intermediary is not that sexy. There are not that many people who fund third sector intermediaries, because our delivery is for and with the sector rather than for and with individuals or communities. That is our role, but it creates challenges.

Our organisation keenly plans for the future, but we are keen for long-term funding cycles across the culture sector, because we understand where the benefits would be felt.

Bryan Dickson: From a National Trust for Scotland perspective, ultimately, we look at the growth of our membership. Our members help to sustain the organisation, and our 10-year strategy includes targets for achieving that. To do that, we must continually be relevant to audiences and we must grow new audiences—that is a critical part of our new 10-year strategy. That relates to the points that were made about storytelling. We need to work hard to look at our assets in different ways so that we can tell stories that are relevant to a range of people in the population and then engage them in conversations on the benefits of membership. That is one of the bedrocks of our growth strategy.

We have a conservation deficit on the estate, and we need to invest in the estate, so we are looking to approach a variety of grant providers for funding for that. We have a fundraising department that works incredibly hard, here and overseas, to tap into all sources of funding. Again, it is question of thinking about what stories we can tell that might engage new audiences that might be prepared to give.

However, one of the key issues is simply looking after the built estate and maintaining it in good condition. We need to improve our cyclical maintenance as a result of the challenges that we face with regard to climate change. That is a real financial challenge for the organisation, as well as a skills challenge. The area that you raise is one that we work hard on.

Lucy Casot: As Ailsa Macfarlane said, the committee has looked at the issue long and hard, but although we are the national development body for the museums and galleries sector and we are the lead body for the seven-year strategy that we have just launched, we are in a one-year funding cycle, so we do not yet know what our budget will be for next year. That is an enormous challenge, which has been explored before.

We are an organisation of about 40 people, but there is almost no role on which we have more than one person working. I have been with the organisation for a bit more than four years, and in that time we have been asked to do more and more, and we want to do that work. We have taken on responsibility to support the sector in fair work and in a move to net zero. It feels as though what is asked of us and what the sector, which is very fragile, needs from us are increasing, and we are struggling to manage to do all of that. However, the ambition is there, and we know how important it is to work in partnership and to collaborate to be as smart as we possibly can be with the resources that we have. We put a lot of effort into that, and we are very committed to it, but one-year funding cycles are very challenging.

Caroline Clark: As a funder of heritage, investment is our bread and butter; that is why we are here. Our funding has to be additional to Government funding—that is enshrined in the National Lottery etc Act 1993—which means that we can provide project funding for things that are above and beyond core Government responsibilities.

In recognition of the issues that been flagged today, this time we have tried to lay out a much longer-term strategy. For the first time, we have launched a 10-year strategy, and we hope that having clarity about our strategic objectives over that time will enable partners to see how they can hook into funding and access it.

The pandemic required us all to work much more collaboratively, and that approach has remained. We are collaborating as much as we can and are working as efficiently as we can. It is challenging to maintain that, but it is important that we do so. In my submission, I cited a couple of examples of situations in which, by working with Historic Environment Scotland to align the timing of our funding, we were able to channel significantly greater resource into priority areas. It would be good to see that happening more often as we move forward. The staffing that Historic Environment Scotland is bringing to the strategy will enable that to be done in a way that has not happened before, and I am optimistic about that.

However, from our position as a funder that can put forward a five-year package, there is no getting away from the fact that the sector's annualised funding makes it very difficult for bodies to take advantage of the investment that we want to put in. In some ways that puts a constraint on the sector's being as ambitious as it could be and accessing the other pots of funding that are out there. For us, it would make a tangible difference if there were some way of dealing with the short duration of the commitment.

The Convener: I think that Caroline Warburton's sound might be working again. Perhaps she would like to pick up on the points that were discussed earlier.

Caroline Warburton: It is okay, thank you. The sound does seem to be working but, in the interests of time, perhaps we could put something in writing.

The Convener: Thank you. Donald Cameron has a question.

Donald Cameron: I have a rather specific question about community asset transfer, which picks up on aspects of what Caroline Clark has said and what is in her submission. The "Our Past, Our Future" strategy document estimates that around a third of all community asset transfers since 2015 have involved a heritage asset, which I was both pleased and surprised to read, as that proportion seems high.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund's submission proposes providing longer-term support for community asset transfer beyond simply acquiring property and transferring it to the community. The committee heard similar evidence during our inquiry into culture in communities when Volunteer Scotland said that people often feel obliged to take on a heritage asset for fear of it being lost to them. There are then considerable challenges to do with maintenance and so on. Would you like to expand on that aspect, given its importance?

Caroline Clark: It is so impressive that community groups have the appetite to take on assets, which demonstrates their passion for and emotional connection with historic places. Sometimes, though, they can be unaware of the challenges, the financial burdens and the expertise that is needed to manage such places in the long term. Although capital works can be challenging, it is more straightforward to pull together funding for those, but longer-term management, maintenance and financial management can present real difficulty. It would be helpful for people to think more about those aspects in the early stages and to ensure that both skills and longer-term resourcing are in place to enable them to happen.

Many community asset transfers happen in places where there is not easy access to the financial and architectural skills that are needed to maintain the assets. Projects in the central belt, for example, are quite spoiled. I am not saying that they do not have their challenges, but more architects and volunteers are available there, whereas in more remote and rural areas people often volunteer for a whole host of different organisations, including as part of the asset transfer.

The specific built environment skills that people need to maintain historic assets are few and far between anyway—we have just been discussing all the skills that are needed to maintain such structures. However, people also need to know what to do about that. There is a cash issue, but there is also a skills issue. Perhaps there could be a skills bank or a centre of excellence that asset transfer communities could dip into, to pull out the knowledge that they need when they need it.

Because of the impacts of community asset transfers, we should consider providing a longer-term safety net to ensure that they are successful. The reason for places being the subjects of such transfers is that, because of their importance, they really perform a function for their communities. We need to ensure that that functionality and that activity can be maintained and that we do not just have an empty shell that is not delivering all the benefits that communities want to see. Do not get me started on that subject. [*Laughter.*]

Donald Cameron: Thank you very much.

The Convener: I bring in Mark Ruskell. I am sorry—I forgot who was next.

Mark Ruskell: Before I ask my question, other witnesses might want to answer Donald Cameron's question—if we have time—because it was a good question that raised an interesting issue.

Jocelyn Cunliffe: I want to talk about future proofing, which, in a sense, builds on what Caroline Clark has just said. I am a trustee of Historic Churches Scotland, which used to be the Scottish Redundant Churches Trust. At the moment, we are responsible for eight churches. We regard it as a success story that we have repaired with grant aid several of our churches. They are used for different things. We have a major project under way at the former Episcopal church St Margaret's in Braemar, which recently had a pilgrimage visit from the Hungarians.

Our problem is that each church has a friends organisation, but those organisations have to keep being refreshed. The issue is where those skills come from and the time commitment involved. That tends to fall on one or two locals, whereas you hope that it will fall on the many. The most recent church that we have taken on in Orkney has an active friends organisation, which is made up of members of the next generation, who are immensely enthusiastic and are raising money. The issue is how we mobilise members of the next generation to bring their governance skills, time commitments and fabric knowledge to the benefit of—in this instance—churches, but it could be any community asset.

The Convener: As soon as you started talking about volunteers, I reflected on our visit to Orkney,

where the message was that everybody wears 10 hats. There was volunteer fatigue and issues with capacity, because it tended to fall on the same people over and over again.

Bryan Dickson: I will reiterate some of the points that have been raised. We are often approached by organisations to give advice on running an asset that might be sitting in the community. A range of skills are required to do that, including skills to do with marketing, fundraising, compliance, daily operation and long-term maintenance. Those skills are not easily at hand, particularly in rural environments.

I point you to the Heritage Trust Network, which tries to connect communities that want to take more ownership of a redundant building with expertise. Such networking organisations are positive.

Building preservation trusts are often useful when an asset is of interest to a community but requires investment or adaption. However, they are a fragile resource at the moment. They tend to live through limited Historic Environment Scotland funding on a year-to-year cycle. There is probably something there about making those organisations more robust.

Mark Ruskell: I have a very specific question about world heritage site designations. We have a range of world heritage sites in Scotland, but I am interested in the potential for further designations. Do the witnesses have any reflections on that? I know that St Andrews has been discussed in the past, but there might be other candidates.

The Convener: Caroline Warburton, do you want to come in on that?

Caroline Warburton: I am not able to comment specifically on new sites, but I will mention the UNESCO heritage trail that VisitScotland developed with UNESCO and many other partners. Scotland is unique in the fact that we have 13 sites, but nowhere in the world had they all been brought together in one trail.

That was another example of where we could tell the story of Scotland's natural, cultural and built heritage. The heritage trail has been hugely useful with regard to the reach not only in Scotland, but in the UK and internationally, and it has won awards. Scotland is good at looking at things differently. At some point, Perth will join the trail when its UNESCO designation as a city of craft comes through, so there is an opportunity to bring that on board. I know that Forsinard is waiting for its status as well.

We are looking at how we can tell the story better around things such as world heritage sites. Other people will probably have views on new sites and their management, but I hope that that

provides an example of where, in tourism, we are using our assets to help with the diaspora story.

11:15

The Convener: I have a final question for Bryan Dickson. In your submission, you said that the strategy was quite vague on metrics to measure success. Could you expand on that? In particular, in our previous work and everything that we are doing as a wellbeing economy, embedding wellbeing into cultural activity has been a theme. Are there also metrics around the wellbeing key performance indicators?

Bryan Dickson: Our comment was in response to the previous OPIT strategy, which on paper achieved a great number of its outcomes, but many of them were around stakeholder engagement and collaboration. I think that the outcome relating to an improved condition of our built environment remained at red.

Therefore, with regard to future KPIs, we need to make sure that we keep our eye on bigger prizes. For example, we do not have any condition indicator for the nation's A, B and C-listed buildings. We have anecdotal evidence to say that the condition of them might be deteriorating, but we do not really have any transparent information. Sharpening some of the new KPIs in the new strategy along those lines might be of benefit.

I will use a parallel. It is very difficult to talk about the built heritage in emotive language, because it surrounds us all the time. However, if we look to the natural world, where species are on endangered lists, it is very easy to articulate that risk. As a sector, we do not yet have the tools to do that, so we might welcome something like that for developing KPIs.

Ailsa Macfarlane: The previous strategy had a high number of KPIs, and that was seen as a challenge. My understanding of where the current development is around measuring success for this strategy is that there was a desire to ensure that we were not making a long list of things to measure against, because that takes time and resource, which can be difficult.

What we measure and how we measure it must be a collaborative process. Previously, there have been challenges in relation to the fact that, because of time and resource, some of the measures have come directly from Historic Environment Scotland, which is understandable in certain aspects regarding its estate. However, we must ensure that the measures that are put in place are suitable for organisations of all scale. The range of scale of organisations across the sector is perhaps something that we have not quite emphasised yet. We have spoken about communities and the challenges for community

groups, but the number and scale of organisations is incredibly variable. All of them need to be able to see themselves reflected in the strategy, the outcomes and the measures. Some work needs to be done to narrow those down, but I am aware that the team that is involved is mindful of that, and I am optimistic.

The Convener: I thank everyone for their involvement in what has been a long but really helpful session. I again thank the witnesses not only for their attendance, but for the submissions that they sent in beforehand.

Meeting closed at 11:19.

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