

CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

34th Meeting, 2023, Session 6

7 December 2023

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

1. The Committee agreed to undertake work on the historic environment sector, with a focus on the priorities of the new historic environment strategy for Scotland, [Our Past, Our Future](#).
2. The strategy identifies three priorities as the focus for delivery over the next five years—
 - Delivering the transition to net zero;
 - Empowering resilient and inclusive communities and places; and
 - Building a wellbeing economy.
3. The Committee agreed to hold a series of evidence sessions focused on delivering on the priorities of the strategy. At recent meetings, it has held a roundtable session with key stakeholders, and taken evidence from Historic Environment Scotland.
4. At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from—
 - Christina McKelvie MSP, Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development
 - Callum Grigor, Team Leader of Sponsorship and Historic Environment, Scottish Government
 - Penelope Cooper, Director of Culture and Major Events, Scottish Government
5. A SPICe briefing is attached at **Annexe A**.

**CEEAC Committee Clerks
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Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

7 December 2023

Historic Environment Strategy

Introduction

This week the Committee will be hearing from Christina McKelvie, Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, whose portfolio includes responsibility for the work of Historic Environment Scotland (HES).

As a non-departmental body, the HES [Board of Trustees](#) are appointed by Scottish Ministers following an open process. Chair and Board member appointments are regulated by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland. The HES Chief Executive, Alex Paterson, who the Committee heard from last week, reports to the Board and is the designated Accountable Officer to the Scottish Government.

While HES leads on the delivery of the historic environment strategy, the Scottish Government is responsible for decision-making on policy, and the Minister attends the [Strategic Historic Environment Forum](#) (SHEF). The strategy highlights the role of the Scottish Government in delivering the priorities, stating:

“The Scottish Government has a vital role to play in enabling the delivery of the strategy, and we will need collaboration within and between government departments and agencies if we are to realise our mission, just as we need cross-sector working and knowledge sharing. Historic Environment Scotland, as the public body for Scotland’s historic environment, will have a leading role to play in delivering the strategy, and in helping to facilitate such a joined-up approach.”

Background

HES was formed in October 2015 following passage of the [Historic Environment Scotland Act 2014](#). It was created through a merger of Historic Scotland with the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland

(RCAHMS). HES is a non-departmental public body with charitable status, and it was established as the lead public body to investigate, care for, and promote Scotland's historic environment.

The funding for HES relies on both grant in aid from the Scottish Government and earned income. The 2023-24 budget showed the anticipated running costs of HES for the year were £110m. The budget modelled the commercial income in 2023-24 as £50.8m and provided funding of £72.7m from the Scottish Government, including capital and non-cash items.

Our Place in Time

Scotland's first historic environment strategy, [Our Place in Time](#) (OPiT) was published in 2014, setting out a 10-year vision for Scotland's historic environment. An [evaluation of the first five years](#) of Our Place in Time was published in 2019 by DC Research. The aims of the evaluation were to assess what progress had been made through the strategy, as well as to make recommendations on whether the stated priorities were still fit for purpose.

Some of the key findings of the evaluation were:

- there was a clear consensus that at the time of the evaluation there was good progress with OPiT. Progress around OPiT was limited, or slow in the first couple of years of the strategy, however the improved rate of progress since the review of governance arrangements that took place in 2017 was recognised.
- OPiT provided a framework through which a collective approach could be taken by the historic environment sector to a wide range of issues. There was active political leadership and involvement through the role of the then Cabinet Secretary as the Chair of Strategic Historic Environment Forum and OPiT enabled the sector to work more closely with a wider range of organisations.
- there was acknowledgement from the consultations that there is a lot more to be done around 'mainstreaming' – one of the key crosscutting aims of OPiT, and something that was well recognised as a key priority.
- The Performance Framework arrangements were appropriate and working well.
- One key issue that cut across all the OPiT governance arrangements was about the effective engagement (or lack of effective engagement) with the local government sector. This was identified as an issue for OPiT that had not yet been resolved.
- Any future amendments to OPiT could better reflect priorities/challenges around aspects such as: the well-being agenda; the communities/community

empowerment agenda; the climate change emergency; and intangible heritage.

Our Past, Our Future

In February 2022, Historic Environment Scotland was commissioned by the Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, Neil Gray MSP, to conduct a review of Scotland's historic environment strategy.

HES was asked to work with stakeholders to prioritise activity that supports economic recovery and renewal, focuses on creating a more resilient and sustainable historic environment, and helps to communicate the contribution that the historic environment makes to the nation.

In April 2023, HES published a new strategy for the historic environment. [Our Past, Our Future](#) identifies three priorities as the focus for delivery over the next five years. Under each priority sit three outcomes. The priorities and outcomes are—

- Delivering the transition to net zero
 - Outcome 1: Reduced emissions from the historic environment
 - Outcome 2: The historic environment is more climate resilient
 - Outcome 3: Improved pathways for historic environment skills
- Empowering resilient and inclusive communities and places
 - Outcome 4: Organisations that care for the historic environment have the right skills and are more resilient
 - Outcome 5: Communities have more opportunities to participate in decision-making about the historic environment
 - Outcome 6: The historic environment is more diverse and inclusive
- Building a wellbeing economy.
 - Outcome 7: The historic environment makes a responsible contribution to Scotland's economy
 - Outcome 8: The historic environment provides Fair Work
 - Outcome 9: Increased engagement with the historic environment with a focus on activities that enhance wellbeing

Some of the themes picked up in the strategy echo those of the earlier strategy, such as a focus on skills, engagement with communities and collaboration. However, other elements that have been included reflect the changing focus of the sector,

such as the inclusion of aims around net zero and wellbeing. These link up with the recommendations put forward by the evaluation of Our Place in Time.

At the roundtable evidence session, the Committee heard that the priorities and aims identified by the strategy were broadly supported by those present. It was also noted that there were a lot of commonalities between the priorities of the historic environment strategy and the strategies of the National Trust for Scotland and Museums Galleries Scotland.

In their [submission to the Committee's pre-budget 2024-25 call for views](#), HES highlighted their new strategy and told the Committee that the:

“Scottish Government can help us to meet these challenges and realise the mission and priorities of the new historic environment strategy by:

- Providing appropriate levels of funding
- Supporting a multi-year funding model for the sector
- Promoting the integration of the historic environment in key government policy initiatives across the national performance framework as part of a holistic national response to national priorities
- Recognising and promoting the ongoing need for capital maintenance of traditionally built stock across all sectors over the coming decades that is likely to expand rather than shrink
- Increasing funding aimed at repair and retrofit of historic buildings and corresponding investment in skills pipeline to enable delivery
- Supporting innovation, including opportunities for reform such as financial incentives and freedoms and revenue raising, and helping the sector to support itself better by enabling partnering, including dedicated practical support that provides expertise to smaller organisations.”

Themes

The Committee to date has heard evidence relating to the historic environment strategy that can be collated under various themes.

Mainstreaming and Cross-sector working

One of the key findings of the evaluation of OPiT, the first strategy document, was that there was significantly more work to be done to ensure the aim of mainstreaming the historic environment was met. In this context mainstreaming has two facets. It refers to both collaboration within and between government departments and agencies, as well as cross-sector working and knowledge sharing.

Last week Alex Paterson stressed that the success of the strategy requires shared ownership and shared responsibility to deliver its aims. The new strategy notes that:

“This strategy is therefore a collaborative one, owned and delivered by everyone. All of us – the public sector, business, the charitable and third

sectors, private owners, and communities across the country – have a role to play. So, when this strategy talks about the things that “we” can do, it refers to everyone in Scotland. The public sector – led by Historic Environment Scotland – will work to facilitate, enable, and drive delivery of key elements of the plan, and to co-ordinate monitoring and reporting on delivery.”

The importance of cross-sector working is restated throughout Our Past, Our Future, including in the section on delivery of the strategy. It identifies the fact that HES will need to engage a wide range of stakeholders in order to be successful in delivering the specified outcomes. The stakeholders listed include homeowners and landowners, local and regionally based organisations, as well as national institutions and public bodies. Flexibility and adaptability in delivery are highlighted as requirements in order to reach all of these groups, although the strategy does not go into detail regarding how HES expects to reach all stakeholders.

Our Past, Our Future also sets out the strategic drivers that have been considered as part of the creation of the strategy. It lists a number of Scottish Government policy documents and how they align with the three priorities identified in Our Past, Our Future.

The issue of embedding the interests of one sector across Scottish Government portfolios is not specific to the historic environment sector. The work of the Committee to date has repeatedly highlighted the need to ensure that culture more generally is mainstreamed across Scottish Government portfolio areas, which reflects the ambitions of the Culture Strategy. This mirrors the priority given to the aim of greater mainstreaming in the historic environment sector. One of the aims of the 2020 Culture Strategy was to—

“Place culture as a central consideration across all policy areas including: health and wellbeing, economy, education, reducing inequality and realising a greener and more innovative future”

In the [Cabinet Secretary’s response](#) to the Committee’s report on Budget Scrutiny last year, he discussed this theme stating:

“As I have said in my previous evidence session to this Committee, we have been working to develop closer cross-portfolio relationships, including with health and social care services. We will continue to prioritise that.”

The [First Minister’s recent mandate letter to the Cabinet Secretary](#) said that the Cabinet Secretary will—

“Collaborate with Ministerial colleagues across Government to mainstream culture in policy making. This will recognise the transformational power of culture as a medium to contribute to the achievement of the Government’s key priorities.”

Skills

The Scottish Government’s [Future skills: action plan](#) talks about the need to transform Scotland’s skills system to ensure that the changing needs of individuals,

businesses and the economy are met. Alex Paterson said that having the skilled workers available underpins the aims of the strategy.

There is a specific [Skills Investment Plan for the Historic Environment](#) which sets out the sector's action plan for Scotland's historic environment sector. It was developed by HES in collaboration with [Skills Development Scotland \(SDS\)](#) and sector stakeholders such as the [Our Place in Time Skills and Expertise Group](#). The plan aims to ensure Scotland has the skills it needs to promote, manage, and protect the historic environment.

[On 23 November](#), the Committee heard evidence regarding a skills shortage in the historic environment sector, especially in regard to retrofitting historic buildings. Elaine Ellis, from [SDS noted it is](#) "reviewing apprenticeships that are relevant to the sector".

Bryan Dickson, Head of Buildings Conservation Policy, National Trust for Scotland expressed the view that while the review of the skills investment plan should create some positive action, there needed to be more investment in this area. He also argued that the concerns of the historic environment sector need to be more mainstreamed to ensure that areas like skills training have enough support.

Alex Paterson said that the new Skills Investment Plan will remain ambitious and that ministers across portfolios are meeting to discuss how to support the aims across portfolios.

A recent PQ, [S6W-21989](#), addresses the issue of stonemasonry, and the answer from Christina McKelvie noted:

"Historic Environment Scotland ran a stonemasonry consultation in early 2023 to inform understanding of the size, shape and resilience of the stonemasonry sector in Scotland. The stonemasonry working group have since provided their report of findings and recommendations to Ministers for their consideration.

"The Minister for Higher and Further Education and Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development met recently to discuss the report and will also meet with HES and key stakeholders in due course to discuss the report's findings and proposals for sustainable provision of a Stonemasonry apprenticeships and traditional skills in Scotland."

[On 23 November, Elaine Ellis from SDS](#) said—

"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."

Mr Paterson said that there is a need to update the stonemasonry qualification and to better align the funding to meet the needs of the small companies that make up

the sector. He also said that HES is one of the largest training centres for stonemasons in Scotland. However, he suggested that its work is the equivalent of a “finger in the dyke” and that more could be done if there was greater resource available.

HES told the Committee that it is supporting the fair work agenda through its procurement and grant conditions. It also said that it is seeking to lead the sector on fair work practices.

Local government interaction

The evaluation of OPiT included recommendations on improving engagement between the historic environment sector and local authorities. Our Past, Our Future does not include details on how this challenge is expected to be addressed. The evaluation stated that:

“One key issue that cuts across all the OPiT governance arrangements is about the effective engagement (or lack of effective engagement) with the local government sector... There is no straightforward solution to this challenge – with previous attempts (such as establishing a Local Authority Historic Environment Group) having proved unsuccessful. However, given the important role of local government within the historic environment sector it is something that should be addressed.”

The strategy does note that “local authorities will also be key delivery partners, especially through their decision-making responsibilities,” but it does not go into detail regarding how HES intends to improve the collaboration between the historic environment and local government sectors.

A similar concern was raised during the Committee’s [Culture in Communities Inquiry](#). The [final report](#) noted that:

“The Cabinet Secretary... told the Committee that national and local government have “co-responsibility” for delivering on culture and that he wanted to work in partnership with local government “to underline the importance of mainstreaming culture and arts priorities in local decision making”, noting that there could be more done to protect local cultural provision... The Committee recognises that while there is an appetite for a more joined up approach between local government and national agencies, and that this vision has been supported by the culture strategy and the Place Principle, the evidence we received would suggest that further progress is required to improve collaboration.”

Alex Paterson said that Local Authorities are critical to the strategy and there are lots of ways that HES engages with them, including through planning guidance and working with local authorities both through forums and bi-laterally.

Dr Adam Jackson said that HES had learned from the issues in engaging with Local Authorities previously. He said that at the level of regional and local actions and specific projects, there would be more engagement between HES and individual

local authorities. This involves engaging with local authorities on a “common goal”, that is translating the strategic goals into concrete goals locally.

In [June this year, the Scottish Government agreed the Verity House agreement with COSLA](#) that set out a “vision for a more collaborative approach to delivering our shared priorities for the people of Scotland”. The Verity House agreement does not cover how public bodies and local authorities are expected to work together.

Finance

Last week, Mr Paterson said that strategy seeks to balance being ambitious with a pragmatic approach given the financial constraints. He noted that prior to the pandemic around 60% of HES’ revenue was from earned income with the remainder from grant in aid. This was impacted by the pandemic but he said that there has been progress in returning to the pre-pandemic levels of the contribution of earned income.

Mr Paterson said that supporting the sector will require tough choices. He highlighted that the Built Environment Scotland has developed a [Sustainable Investment Tool](#) which is a framework to help inform decision-making for existing buildings and heritage sites by considering the Economic, Cultural, Environmental and Social outcomes of potential action across a range of categories.

Mr Paterson explained that HES is seeking to improve its fundraising and earned income. He said that he hoped that in the future that this would include work to better engage with the Scottish diaspora.

He also said that given the strategy intends to support wider outcomes, HES is seeking additional funding from outwith the culture portfolio, for example to support work in achieving net zero.

HES said that it wants to change its business model before the current financial year to allow HES to benefit from improved income generation and reinvest this. Key to this would be that HES would be able to retain and carry forward funds where income has been higher than expected. As an NDPB, HES is currently limited in how it carries reserves across financial years. It is not clear whether HES is able to retain earned income when this is higher than expected or whether the Government consequently reduces the grant in aid, or how the budgets are managed if the income lower than expected.

The Committee explored whether the portfolio of properties under the care of ministers (and managed by HES) would change. Mr Paterson noted that the current collection of properties in state care has not changed recently but there may be a demand for more sites to be included in the portfolio in the future.

Net-Zero

The [update to climate change plan 2018–2032](#), sets out the Scottish Government’s pathway to the new targets set by the Climate Change Act 2019. Chapter 2 sets out

plans for emissions from heating buildings to reach zero by 2045, linking to the historic environment strategy aim to transition the sector towards the net zero target.

Ailsa Macfarlane from Built Environment Forum Scotland noted that a significant amount of Scotland's housing, high streets and built environment fall under the historic environment definition. [She told the Committee on 23 November](#)—

“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.”

However, a recent PQ, [S6W-22415](#), on retrofitting traditional and listed buildings was answered by Patrick Harvie, who said:

“following a series of stakeholder workshops held in 2021, an expert Tenements Short Life Working Group was formed. A specific workshop looking at traditional and protected buildings was undertaken as part of this process and Historic Environment Scotland were a key participant in this group. The Final Report and Recommendations of the Tenements Short Life Working Group will be published shortly.

“We are committed to continuing to work closely with HES to shape our future proposals on a Heat in Buildings Standard to ensure the best outcome for traditional and protected homes and buildings and the people who live and use them.”

On 23 November the roundtable witnesses agreed that embedding the historic environment sector into Scottish Government net zero strategies was fundamental to the work of the sector. The witnesses noted that HES produces good quality guidance on retrofitting and altering historic buildings.

On 28 November 2023 the Scottish Government published [Delivering net zero for Scotland's buildings - Heat in Buildings Bill: consultation](#). It is asking individuals and organisations to comment on proposals to make new laws around the energy efficiency of our homes and buildings and the way we heat those buildings. This would include buildings within the historic environment sector.

Alex Paterson explained last week that some of the work he undertakes to support sustainable travel to HES' visitor attractions, including [its Responsible Tourism Framework](#). He also said that working in partnership is important and gave the example of the car park at Stirling Castle and explained that HES is working with the local authority to support more options for sustainable transport and tourism.

Closures and risk

Between November 2021 and January 2022 HES had to put in place access restrictions at 70 of their sites as part of a process [of high-level masonry safety checks](#).

[Alex Paterson from HES told the Committee in September 2022](#) he had followed legal advice to restrict access after a pilot of a more hands-on approach to high-level masonry inspections had identified issues. He said that the decision to restrict access to sites was taken following legal advice in relation to risk of injury. Mr. Paterson said that the issues with masonry were due to “a lack of investment over decades and ... the exposure of some of the sites to climate change”.

Mr Paterson said last week that 66 of the 70 sites where there are issues have been inspected. 53 of these sites have either been re-opened or partially reopened and around 20 sites remain closed, for a variety of reasons.

Jocelyn Cunliffe from Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland [told the Committee on 23 November](#)—

“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.”

However, last week Mr Paterson suggested that if ministers had more responsibility for liability, this would not change the attitude to risk.

Community assets

The Committee’s report earlier this year on Culture in Communities noted that “successful community ownership of assets requires expertise within the community as well as the time and resources of volunteers, and that there are often high costs associated with the management and maintenance of these spaces.” The Committee recommended that the Government explore what further support or advice could be provided to communities. The Government’s response stated—

“The Scottish Government also provide support to the Community Ownership Support Service (COSS) to work directly with community-based groups in Scotland take a stake in or ownership of previously publicly owned land or buildings. This includes expert advice, training courses on the asset transfer and asset development process, signposting to other support agencies and produce good practice guides, toolkits and case studies.”

[Caroline Clark from the National Lottery Heritage Fund agreed](#) that there are challenges in sustaining community assets and said, “because of the impacts of community asset transfers, we should consider providing a longer-term safety net to

ensure that they are successful.” Alex Paterson said that HES had aligned its grant making to allow greater flexibility of application for funding from both the National Lottery Heritage fund and HES to support community ownership of older buildings.

Accountability and delivery

The performance framework that is used to measure delivery of the strategy has been updated in Our Past, Our Future to reflect the changing aims. This will be based on a Red-Amber-Green (RAG) approach to monitoring performance, using analysis from a range of data sources.

The strategy notes that for most of the outcomes it is not possible to monitor delivery using only one source of data, and that instead a mix of numeric data and narrative case studies will be used. Reporting against the strategy will include data compiled for Scotland’s Historic Environment Audit (SHEA), which reports on a series of facts and figures used by the historic environment sector.

Mr Paterson said that measuring success of the strategy has been built into the strategy from the start. He said HES has developed a team to analyse data on progress on the strategy. Dr Adam Jackson said that the outcomes are designed to be both scalable and flexible so that small or large organisations can visibly contribute to the outcomes. He suggested that this should allow for better quantitative and qualitative data on progress.

The performance framework looks at the performance of the sector as a whole against the stated strategic aims. While HES is the lead body for the sector, the strategy states that:

“This strategy is therefore a collaborative one, owned and delivered by everyone. All of us – the public sector, business, the charitable and third sectors, private owners, and communities across the country – have a role to play.”

It is not clear how or whether the Scottish Government will monitor the performance of HES in delivering the strategy and supporting the wide range of outcomes expected from this work.

Laura Haley and Ned Sharratt, SPICe
4 December 2023

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