

Updating the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS)

Historic Environment Scotland Consultation

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in Scotland. For information only England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

1. Executive Summary

Historic Environment Scotland is consulting on an update to the [Historic Environment Policy for Scotland \(HEPS\)](#), the national policy framework that guides decisions affecting Scotland's historic environment.

HEPS is used by decision makers across Scotland, including local authorities, to inform planning decisions, asset management, regeneration projects, and investment in the historic environment. The review seeks to ensure that the policy remains fit for purpose and reflects contemporary challenges, including climate change, community participation, sustainable development, and changing patterns of land use.

Local authorities have a central role in managing and protecting the historic environment through planning, conservation, regeneration and place-making responsibilities. APSE encourages member authorities to engage with the consultation to ensure that the revised policy reflects local priorities and practical delivery considerations.

Responses are due by **Monday 29th June 2026**.

[Click here](#) for further information and to submit your response.

[Click here](#) to read the full HEPS report.

2. Overview

The Historic Environment Policy for Scotland was published in 2019 and provides the overarching policy framework for decisions affecting Scotland's historic environment. It is intended to support consistent and informed decision-making across both the public and private sectors.

The policy applies to the broad historic environment, including buildings, monuments, archaeological sites, historic landscapes, and places of cultural significance. It is used by local

authorities, public bodies, developers, landowners, and communities when considering change and development.

The current review provides an opportunity to consider whether HEPS continues to meet the needs of decision makers and whether it adequately reflects emerging priorities and policy developments.

Policy context and rationale

The review of HEPS takes place against a backdrop of significant policy and societal change since its publication in 2019. In particular, there is increasing emphasis on climate adaptation, achieving net zero emissions, community empowerment, place-based regeneration, and sustainable development.

HEPS forms part of a wider policy framework for Scotland's historic environment, sitting alongside [Our Place in Time](#), Scotland's national strategy for the historic environment, and supporting national policies such as the [National Planning Framework 4 \(NPF4\)](#) and the [National Performance Framework](#) (also currently under review).

The current historic environment policy is built around six core principles covering cultural significance, stewardship, protection, sustainable development, and inclusive decision-making. The consultation seeks views on whether these principles remain appropriate and how they should evolve to meet future challenges.

Why local authorities should engage

Local authorities are responsible for many of the decisions that directly affect Scotland's historic environment and have a key role in balancing heritage protection with economic development, housing delivery, climate objectives, and community aspirations.

Engagement is important because:

- Local councils are responsible for planning and development management decisions affecting historic assets.
- They play a leading role in regeneration, place-making, and community development.
- They manage and maintain historic buildings, structures, and public spaces.
- They have a direct experience of implementing heritage policy within wider service and budget pressures.

The revised policy may influence future planning decisions, conservation priorities, investment strategies, and approaches to managing change within historic places. Local authority input will help ensure that the policy remains practical, proportionate, and responsive to local circumstances.

3. Consultation Questions

The consultation questions are categorised as follows:

Topic	Questions
Using HEPS	6
Understanding and Recognition of the Historic Environment	2
Managing Change in the Historic Environment	2
Working Together	2
Keeping in Touch	2

The consultation questions are available in full below:

1. How frequently do you refer to the Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) when making decisions related to the historic environment?
Never; Yearly; Monthly; Daily
2. How do you use HEPS? Use the textbox to explain how you use HEPS, or if there are any barriers to using it.
3. Are there any barriers that make HEPS difficult to use?
4. Can you provide an example of a recent decision where HEPS played a role?
5. Which policies in HEPS do you utilise the most in your decision-making? Rank the below options, with 1st being the most important and 6th being the least:
 - HEP1: Decisions affecting any part of the historic environment should be informed by an inclusive understanding of its breadth and cultural significance.
 - HEP2: Decisions affecting the historic environment should ensure that its understanding and enjoyment as well as its benefits are secured for present and future generations.
 - HEP3: Plans, programmes, policies and strategies, and the allocation of resources, should be approached in a way that protects and promotes the historic environment.
 - HEP4: Changes to specific assets and their context should be managed in a way that protects the historic environment.
 - HEP5: Decisions affecting the historic environment should contribute to the sustainable development of communities and places.
 - HEP6: Decisions affecting the historic environment should be informed by an inclusive understanding of the potential consequences for people and communities. Decision-making processes should be collaborative, open, transparent and easy to understand.

6. Are there any additions needed to HEPS to support good decision-making for the historic environment?
7. How clear is the 'Understanding and Recognition of the Historic Environment' section of HEPS in explaining how to understand and apply policies and principles on understanding and recognition of the historic environment.
Not at all clear; Slightly clear; Moderately clear; Very clear; Extremely clear
8. Are there any improvements that could be made to the information presented in the understanding and recognition section of HEPS, to enable better decision making?
9. How clear is the 'Managing Change in the Historic Environment' section of HEPS in explaining how to understand and apply policies and principles on managing change in the historic environment?
Not at all clear; Slightly clear; Moderately clear; Very clear; Extremely clear
10. Are there any improvements that could be made to the information presented in the managing change section of HEPS, to enable better decision making?
11. How clear is the 'Working Together' section of HEPS in explaining how to understand and apply policies and principles on working together in regard to the historic environment?
Not at all clear; Slightly clear; Moderately clear; Very clear; Extremely clear
12. Are there any improvements that could be made to the information presented in the working together section of HEPS, to enable better decision making?
13. What is your role and the name of your organisation, local authority, community group, or business?
14. If you would like to be kept in touch regarding this engagement and future consultation on the policy, please enter your email address below. All responses to this consultation are anonymised.

4. APSE Comment

APSE encourages all member authorities to engage with this consultation and provide evidence based on their experience of planning, regeneration, asset management, and place-based service delivery.

The historic environment remains an important contributor to Scotland's economy, identity, and communities. According to [Historic Environment Scotland](#), the historic environment supports employment, tourism, community wellbeing, and investment across Scotland, demonstrating that heritage is not only about protecting the past but also about supporting sustainable places for the future.

Local authorities are at the forefront of managing places and balancing conservation objectives with wider priorities such as housing delivery, climate adaptation, economic development, and community regeneration. As councils continue to face significant financial pressures, it is important that the revised policy provides clear and practical guidance that supports effective decision-making. Members are encouraged to share evidence and examples of local delivery challenges and opportunities.

Discussions on the way forward with historic environment policies and sharing of best practice takes place in APSE Scotland's Climate Change and Renewables as well as the Parks, Grounds and Streets Network. Network meetings are free to attend for APSE members. Previous presentations are available online [here](#) and upcoming meetings are listed [here](#).

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APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular networks, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE network meetings and would like to be added to our list of our contacts for your service area please email enquiries@apse.org.uk

Our national networks include:

- FM and Building cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Local Authority Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation
- Parks, Horticulture and Ground Maintenance
- Recovery and Renewal
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing
- Armed Forces and Veterans Network

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