Draft Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS) 2026

Historic Environment Scotland Consultation

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

1 Executive Summary

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) is consulting on a revised Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS), the national policy framework guiding decisions that affect Scotland's historic environment. Originally published in 2019, HEPS is being updated to clarify its role in decision-making, improve accessibility and better reflect the climate and nature crises, sustainable development and people's relationships with historic places.

The draft provides a non-statutory national policy framework, organised around understanding significance and value, people and places, and managing change. It also clarifies the relationship between HEPS, National Planning Framework 4 (NFP4) and other planning policies and guidance.

The revised policy is relevant to local authorities through their responsibilities for planning, conservation, regeneration, asset management and place-making. APSE encourages member authorities to review the draft and respond to the consultation, drawing on their practical experience of managing historic places alongside wider financial, environmental, and service delivery priorities. Responses are due by **Thursday 3 December 2026**.

Click here for further information and to submit your response.

2 Overview

HEPS was first published in 2019 to provide overarching policies and principles for decision-making affecting Scotland's historic environment. It applies to a broad range of places and assets, including historic buildings, monuments, archaeological sites, landscapes and places of cultural significance.

HES undertook an earlier consultation to gather feedback on how the existing policy was used and where improvements were needed, which was covered by APSE in Briefing 26-30 in June. That

briefing encouraged councils to share their experience of applying HEPS, particularly in planning, regeneration, asset management and place-based service delivery. The current consultation represents the next stage of the review, inviting feedback on the draft revised policy itself.

HES states that the draft has been informed by feedback from the earlier engagement and its Talking About Heritage project, which explored public perspectives on the value of heritage and how it should be cared for.

2.1 The proposed policy

The draft aims to make HEPS clearer and more useful for decision-makers while retaining its role as an overarching framework. It identifies HEPS as a non-statutory national policy, providing enduring principles alongside detailed policies and guidance. It remains a material consideration in relevant planning and heritage conservation decisions.

The revised policy is organised into three parts:

Understanding significance and value: Decisions should be informed by an inclusive understanding of places, their cultural significance and the different values attached to them. This includes recognising local knowledge, community memories and the ways people experience and use places.

People and places: Decisions should consider the long term effects of change on communities, promote sustainable development, and recognise the relationship between heritage, identity, wellbeing and belonging. The draft also emphasises collaboration, transparent decision-making and proportional community involvement.

Managing change: Change should be managed to protect the historic environment, with opportunities for enhancement taken where appropriate. Where adverse impacts cannot be avoided, they should be minimised, with alternatives explored and mitigation measures put in place.

Seven overarching policies underpin the draft. These cover understanding cultural significance, securing benefits for future generations, contributing to sustainable development, considering impacts on people and communities, protecting heritage through plans and resource allocation, managing change and minimising unavoidable adverse impacts.

A key feature of the revision is its stronger emphasis on the relationship between heritage and the climate and nature crises. The draft recognises both the vulnerability of historic places to climate change and the need to consider how adaptation and reducing emissions can be delivered while protecting heritage. It also highlights the importance of access, public experience and the contribution of historic places to sustainable communities.

2.2 Relevance to local authorities

The revised policy is relevant to councils because HEPS informs decisions across planning, development management, conservation, regeneration, asset management and place-making. Councils must often balance heritage considerations with housing and infrastructure needs, economic development, climate adaptation, biodiversity, accessibility and the financial sustainability of local services. The draft's emphasis on understanding cultural significance, considering alternatives and managing impacts could help inform these decisions.

The stronger focus on community involvement is also relevant to place-making and regeneration, particularly where historic places contribute to local identity, public wellbeing and community use. The draft's recognition of social and cultural values may help councils consider impacts that extend beyond the physical fabric of a building or site.

However, the practical value of the revised policy will depend on how clearly its principles can be applied alongside existing planning policies and guidance, and whether councils have access to the expertise, information and resources required to implement them. Local authority feedback can help HES assess whether the proposed changes provide sufficient clarity and support for decision-making in practice.

3 Consultation Questions

The consultation questions are categorised as follows:

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Part 1 – Understanding significance and value	4
Part 2 – People and places	4
Part 3 – Managing change	4
Implementation	3
Final comments	1

The consultation questions are available in full below:

The draft policy contains the relevant background information for this consultation. You may find it useful to read or refer to while responding.

1. Do you consent to our Privacy Statement?

2. Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?
   As an individual; On behalf of an organisation, public body or charity; On behalf of a local authority; As a private business, such as an architect or developer; Representing a community

group; Other (please write below)

3. What is the name of your organisation, local authority, business or community group?

4. What is your name?

To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

5. The purpose of this document is clearly set out.
   Strongly agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly disagree; No view

6. It is clear when to use HEPS to enable good decision making.
   Strongly agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly disagree; No view

7. The status of HEPS in relation to other key policies and guidance is clear.
   Strongly agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly disagree; No view

8. The structure of the document ensures clarity and enables good decision making.
   Strongly agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly disagree; No view

9. The section "Understanding challenges and opportunities" provides a useful summary of some of the key factors currently affecting decision making in the historic environment.
   Strongly agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly disagree; No view

10. Do you have any overall comments on the scope of the policy and/or usability of the document?

Part 1 - Understanding significance and value

This section ensures decisions affecting the historic environment are based on careful consideration of cultural significance. It can be found on pages 6-8 of the updated policy.

To what extent do the following sections enable good decision making in the area of **"understanding significance and value"**? Please rate on a scale of 5 to 1, where:

- 5 = This section **strongly enables** good decision making
- 1 = This section **does not enable** good decision making

11. Principles
    1 (does not enable); 2; 3; 4; 5 (strongly enables); No view

12. Policies
    1 (does not enable); 2; 3; 4; 5 (strongly enables); No view

13. How to apply
    1 (does not enable); 2; 3; 4; 5 (strongly enables); No view

14. Do you have any comments on the "understanding significance and value" section?

Part 2 - People and places

This section highlights the importance of considering the long-term impacts of decision making in the historic environment on people and places. It can be found on pages 9-11 of the updated policy.

To what extent do the following sections enable good decision making in the area of **"people and places"**? Please rate on a scale of 5 to 1, where:

- 5 = This section **strongly enables** good decision making
- 1 = This section **does not enable** good decision making

15. Principles
    1 (does not enable); 2; 3; 4; 5 (strongly enables); No view

16. Policies
    1 (does not enable); 2; 3; 4; 5 (strongly enables); No view

17. How to apply
    1 (does not enable); 2; 3; 4; 5 (strongly enables); No view

18. Do you have any comments on the "people and places" section?

Part 3 - Managing change

This section recognises that places have changed over time. It ensures any future changes are considered carefully to sustain significance, access and public value over time and maximise opportunities for enhancement where appropriate. It can be found on pages 12-14 of the updated policy.

To what extent do the following sections enable good decision making in the area of **"managing change"**? Please rate on a scale of 5 to 1, where:

- 5 = This section **strongly enables** good decision making
- 1 = This section **does not enable** good decision making

19. Principles
    1 (does not enable); 2; 3; 4; 5 (strongly enables); No view

20. Policies
    1 (does not enable); 2; 3; 4; 5 (strongly enables); No view

21. How to apply
    1 (does not enable); 2; 3; 4; 5 (strongly enables); No view

22. Do you have any comments on the "managing change" section?

23. How confident are you in implementing the updated policies in your own work?
    Very confident; Somewhat confident; Neutral; Low confidence; Not confident; No view

24. Do you have any examples of decisions made about the historic environment where these updated policies would be relevant? Please give details below.

25. Do you have any extended examples that you think would make a good case study? If so, please feel free to share your email address so that we can contact you for further information.

26. Do you have any further comments or feedback on the policy?

4 APSE Comment

APSE recognises the importance of a clear and practical national policy framework for managing Scotland's historic environment. Historic places contribute to local identity, community wellbeing, tourism, regeneration and the character of the places where people live and work. Local authorities play an important role in protecting and enhancing these assets while supporting sustainable development and delivering essential public services.

The revised HEPS provides an opportunity to clarify how heritage considerations should inform decisions across planning, regeneration, asset management and wider place-based services. APSE particularly welcomes the recognition of climate change, nature, accessibility, and community experience within the draft. These issues are increasingly interconnected with councils' wider responsibilities for sustainable places and resilient public assets.

APSE encourages member authorities to review the draft policy and contribute evidence from their own experience. Feedback on the clarity of the proposals, their implications for service delivery and any barriers to implementation will help inform a policy that is both effective and workable for local government.

5 How can APSE help?

Discussions on the way forward with historic environment policies and sharing of best practice take place in our Scottish Climate Change and Renewables Network, as well as our Scottish 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.

All APSE members can access the APSE Scotland network, which provides updates, information, and opportunities to engage with colleagues across local government in Scotland. Members can keep up to date with regional activities, events, policy developments, and networking opportunities by visiting the Scotland members' area. You can access the network using this link: APSE Scotland

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Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular network meetings, 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 in-person meetings 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 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
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Waste Management, Recycling and Street Cleansing

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more details.

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