

Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS) is an umbrella body for organisations working in the built environment in Scotland. Drawing on extensive expertise in a membership-led forum, BEFS informs, debates and advocates on the strategic issues, opportunities and challenges facing Scotland's historic and contemporary built environment. BEFS is a member of the [Climate Heritage Network](#) steering group.

**Full name or organisation's name:** Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS)

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**Does your response relate to a specific sector?** Built Environment and historic environment sectors.

**What do you see as the main economic opportunities and challenges associated with meeting Scotland's climate change targets?**

Scotland's Government and Parliament have shown support for the New Green deal, the Wellbeing Economy agenda, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The benefits the built environment can provide towards both a post-COVID economic recovery and a just transition in our journey towards net zero are many. However, without investment the sector will not be able to play its key part as:

- central to a potentially expanding skilled workforce, maintaining and appropriately adapting our environment for the long term economic and environmental benefits to people and place; a chance to provide fair work which supports the provision of apprentice places – providing skilling opportunities and sustainable work for our young people.
- a growing employment market – where repairing, reusing and adapting our built environment is central to economic recovery.
- an important link in the materials supply chain – supporting a wide range of related industries.
- a factor for ensure more warmer homes exist within Scotland, and putting more homes into use, as empty homes are returned to their purpose.
- a key resource, essential to Scotland's tourism offer (when the situation allows) – further energising local economies and securing future employment across a wide range of industries and employers.
- a focal point of regenerative strategies (particularly in relation to High Street decline, and Town Centre Regeneration) enabling a sense of place – whilst providing skilled employment, places designed to promote wellbeing, and adaptive buildings suited to new futures.

Our existing built and historic environment is an agent of economic recovery – but it is also central to our sense of place and our sense of nation. Our built and historic environment deserves to be protected, cared for and enhanced as it has sheltered us economically and socially before; we need to invest in its ability to do so for the future.

**Challenges** include our existing built environment being fully recognised as part of our infrastructure, as recommended by the Infrastructure Commission [key findings report](#).

A challenge in scale, but the greatest **demonstration of need** for the maintenance and repair of our existing built environment can be found in the data from [Scottish House Condition Survey](#).

Data from 2018 shows:

- 57% of all of Scotland's homes have disrepair to critical elements, an increase of 7% from 2017

- 73% of traditionally built homes (pre-1919) have disrepair to critical elements, an increase of 5% from 2017
- Traditionally dwellings constructed before 1919, make up approximately 20% of Scotland's building stock
- In 2018, 41.5% of all dwellings failed to meet Scottish Housing Quality Standards
- 30% of homes in Scotland failed the SHQS due to Energy Efficiency, while 13% failed due to not being Healthy, Safe and Secure properties

Without action in this area Scotland will not be able to transition to net zero. Each of these percentage points represents people's homes. Homes which are not fulfilling their potential to provide warm, environmental, and at times, even safe environments. Post-COVID we may see more people working from home – putting ever greater focus on the ability of these places to fulfil their potential.

### **What do you think are the wider social (health, community etc.) opportunities and challenges associated with meeting Scotland's climate change targets?**

Our places can provide multiple opportunities to work towards a Wellbeing Economy, providing fair work, skilled work, which benefits our places and supports warm homes, with reduced environmental impact and better health and economic impacts (ie reduction in fuel poverty) for their inhabitants.

Maintaining our places also engenders a sense of civic pride and feeling of collective betterment. Individuals not just told how to act (behaviour change plays an important part in this transition) but feeling the benefits of transition on a daily basis.

Stewardship of place is part of the [Public Health Scotland](#)'s aim to enable the betterment of public health. Their organisational support of place based approaches demonstrates how great a part our daily environments play in the health of a nation.

Improved housing conditions improve our ability to meet net zero targets. But these changes also improve the environment of the individuals within the buildings. Enhanced environmental factors can improve individual physical health, educational attainment, as well as a raft of mental health factors impacting further on individual chances of being a productive part of a sustainable society.

### **What would a successful transition to net-zero emissions look like for your sector/community?**

BEFS has previously issued responses detailing the role the existing built environment can play in a sustainable circular economy. The embodied energy present, and the potential for positive interventions is huge. Policies which enable the effective adaptation, repurposing, and reusing our current building stock would be an enormous opportunity to provide skilled employment, carbon solutions, and more homes. Successful solutions providing benefits to economy, people and place.

Success would include implementation of recommendations associated with [The work of the Cross Party Working Group on Tenemental Maintenance](#). Tenemental properties of all ages can be found in every local authority in Scotland.

Whilst BEFS would promote maintenance, retention, and reuse primarily there are also mechanisms which help to promote circularity of building materials. [Material Passport](#) schemes are being considered in various countries and the arguments for sustainability and circularity could suggest this is a path worthy of exploration – from suppliers, through procurement to building managers and those designing and building adaptations.

The mechanisms above can also be tied into a local economy agenda. North Ayrshire council have published a [Community Wealth Building](#) strategy (based on the [Preston Model](#)). BEFS would support further exploration and implementation of such models.

Success would be implementation of recommendations previously made by the [Built Heritage Investment Group](#), and approved, during the last meeting of the **Strategic Historic Environment Forum (SHEF)**, Chaired by Fiona Hyslop, MSP – Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work & Culture, including:

1) Changes to taxation structures for traditional buildings

The Scottish Government to consider using existing powers, or where appropriate to lobby for change in relation to:

Incentivisation for use and reuse of traditional buildings through income tax powers. A previous example being the HMRC, Business Premises Renovation Allowance (2007-2017).

Enabling, through conservation and continued use, the full potential of Scotland's built heritage asset by removing unequal application of taxation and VAT on restoration, maintenance and conservation works, whether through graduated relief or other fiscal incentives.

[...]

2) New Policies and Standards for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation for the built heritage including development of appropriate measures for carbon, embodied energy and energy efficiency emergency:

The climate emergency demands careful stewardship of our precious resources.

**The Scottish Government to consider introducing policy to incentivise a culture change, driving maintenance, retention, reuse and repurposing of existing heritage assets rather than the current default to ignore, replace or dispose of them.**

**Recognise and develop a measure for the embodied energy in our existing built environment when considering development and repurposing options.**

Recognise the unique challenges and limitations of the current assessment for energy efficiency improvements to traditionally constructed properties; energy efficiency is rarely assessed in ways which reflect the true benefits of these construction techniques. Review how built heritage assets are assessed and develop more appropriate assessment EPC tools for traditionally constructed properties.

**What actions do you think the Scottish Government should take to manage the opportunities and challenges referenced above?**

BEFS would reiterate that not only valuing the embodied energy in our buildings, and assessing full-lifecycle considerations, but that considering policies to support a circular economy which incentivise a culture change: driving maintenance, retention, reuse and repurposing of our existing built environment – will be key to meeting Scotland's ambitions for: transition, a circular economy recovery, meeting established climate targets, and positively intersecting with societal responsibilities.

One of the key findings of the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland was to recommend that the

*Scottish Government should require all public sector infrastructure asset owners to develop asset management strategies containing a presumption in favour of enhancing, re-purposing, or maintaining existing infrastructure over developing options for new infrastructure*

This step-change could be applied beyond publicly owned assets to meet the greenhouse gas emissions targets accepted by Scottish Government; from an economic perspective the skilled work provided through these measures would be positive for national and local economic recoveries.

Further rapid developments supporting the ongoing work and recommendations of the **Scottish Parliamentary Working Group on Tenement Maintenance** (which included suggestions for: mandatory Owners Associations, Building Reserve Funds and Building Surveys) would further enable skilled employment within the built environment sector – and better maintained warmer homes – benefiting people and climate targets.

In BEFS response to [Housing to 2040 Consultation](#) it was noted that aspects such as ‘latency’ for the skilled workforce were mentioned, but there was a lack of expressed urgency as to how many of the constraints could be turned around within a 20 year timeframe.

The current COVID19 emergency exacerbates the seriousness of reconsidering these timescales. Fully considering the labour market with the education system – will be essential to producing skilled workers within the relevant sectors. Many of the issues mentioned are noted within the [Skills Investment Plan](#) for the Historic Environment, a framework with solutions exists within the document. Resource in this area could pay dividends across the retrofit, regenerative and maintenance agendas – supporting economic regeneration and providing greater long-term benefits.

Funds have previously been made available to enable communities to buy land and certain assets, but it could be questioned whether the resources and skills necessary to run, maintain and sustain some of these endeavours have been as equally supported. Communities need to be genuinely empowered, not burdened by default.

Embracing opportunities for empowered decision making and engagement with and from communities and their environments will be central to successful, just, economically sustainable, transitions. Mechanisms for these processes can be enhanced through NPF4, and resourced Local Place Plans – ensuring that people are well represented and involved with decisions about their places, and what they value about their environment is cared for, enhanced and protected.

Just as the Just Transition Commission states in the interim report: *the just transition cuts across Cabinet portfolios; our existing built environment does not sit cleanly within one portfolio. Cutting across portfolios, departments, and existing briefs will be key to the success of a just transition enabling the greatest benefits for people and place.*

**Are there specific groups or communities that may be, or feel that they may be, adversely affected by a transition to a net-zero carbon economy? What steps can be taken to address their concerns?**

Rural communities can often feel ignored, left behind, and misunderstood in relation to climate measures which can foreground district heating, mass transport systems, electric vehicles, and appear to preference new-build structures.

Enabling our existing environment to be harnessed for its potential environmental benefits (including embodied energy); highlighted as a source of skilled employment; essential to the places people live in, work in, and appreciate, across the whole of Scotland, will be part of successfully bringing those who feel their experiences and places are marginalised on the journey to net zero.

If included and well expressed, all should see the benefits their places provide, and the part they actively play in the transition.

Those in older homes can also feel that their domestic dwellings are not championed; these buildings can be considered ‘difficult’, ‘inefficient’, and ‘old’ with the negative connotations associated with those terms. Investment in maintaining and adapting these homes will grow new skilled employment opportunities, with an understanding of appropriate interventions (both modern-technology and traditional) making them not only a key part of the local and national economic recovery (particularly relevant to SME businesses) but also supporting the transition to net zero.

**Please provide here any other information, evidence, or research you consider relevant to the work of the Commission:**

The work of the Scottish Parliamentary Working Group on Tenement Maintenance:

<https://www.befs.org.uk/policy-topics/buildings-maintenance-2/> Particularly the [final report](#) on which the Scottish Government [responded](#), and the latest [research report](#) by Dr Douglas Robertson. BEFS also [responded](#) in relation to the Infrastructure Commission.

[BEFS response to the consultation on Developing Scotland’s Circular Economy](#)

BEFS response to the consultation on [Energy in Owner Occupied Homes](#) (Part of a series of responses made in relation to consultations around Energy performance in Scotland’s buildings.)

[BEFS response to AGER](#)

Work of the [Scottish Traditional Building Forum](#)

BEFS briefing to MSPs issued in relation to the debate on the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) debate.

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## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

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Responding on behalf of an Organisation - **BEFS** (Built Environment Forum Scotland)

The Commission may wish to publish your response at a later date and would like your permission to do so. Please indicate your publishing preference: **Publish response with name**