

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 supporting member of the [Climate Heritage Network](#).

BEFS champions outcomes for people, place, and planet, amplifying the understanding that the targets to achieve net zero cannot be met without utilising our existing built environment appropriately.

As a strategic intermediary body, BEFS briefing is in two parts. The first will directly address the request from the Committee in relation to our priorities within the Committee's remit. The second will bring in responses from BEFS Members and the wider sector, in answer to the question raised by the Committee in relation to pandemic working practices, especially *examples of innovative practices arising from necessity over the last 18 months which should continue beyond the pandemic*.

BEFS Priorities in relation to Local Government, Housing and Planning

BEFS supports sustainable solutions for our existing built environment, noting the **Infrastructure Commission's** proposals to *prioritise making the most of existing infrastructure* (including homes) *ahead of building new assets*.

Tenement Maintenance

BEFS is delighted to see **Tenement Maintenance** highlighted within [SPICE's Key Issues](#) briefing for the sixth session of Parliament.

BEFS has been at the centre of this work for several years, being secretariat (previously shared with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, RICS and now with **Under one Roof**) for the [Scottish Parliamentary Working Group on Tenement Maintenance](#) and strongly supports the Scottish Government [workplan](#) in relation to this ongoing activity.

At the start of June 2021 BEFS [wrote](#) to Ms Robison in her capacity as Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, supporting the research projects ongoing as well as the work on the Universal Housing Standard – both of which support the long-term changes being sought. BEFS are also eager to hear information on the progress of the Scottish Law Commission in relation to the law reform portion of the workplan. This valuable work will need continued support from MSPs to enable timely progress.

BEFS re-iterates that the proposed changes to tenemental property will enable constituents to more easily maintain their homes, supporting appropriate adaptations to meet net-zero (decarbonising heating), providing skilled local employment opportunities, and enabling a vital piece of our infrastructure to continue providing high-quality, warm homes for the future.

Traditional Building Health Check Scheme

However, these pieces of work are acknowledged to be longer-term and BEFS wishes to draw the committees attention to the current **Traditional Building Health Check Scheme** ([TBHC](#)) run by BEFS Member [Stirling City Heritage Trust](#), with funding from Historic Environment Scotland. The Traditional Building Health Check is a proactive maintenance scheme to assist owners in: inspecting, getting impartial advice, and appropriately maintaining their traditional buildings. The successful pilot scheme ran from 2014-2018 and had a full [review](#).

The scheme is designed to improve understanding and condition of traditionally built buildings – homes and business, public and community; and was open to all buildings, not just those that were listed or in conservation areas. Training was a key part of the initial scheme – enhancing understanding of traditional building techniques and repair within the local construction sector. Within the pilot area almost 300 Members joined, and 120 properties had repairs commissioned, which resulted in £1.3Million invested by members on repairs.

Additional findings highlighted that money was being spent more effectively with the right repairs being made in the right order – not only providing assurance for building owners, but making the spend more efficient with greater benefits.

The pilot scheme was so successful that Historic Environment Scotland have continued to provide funding. There is real scope for the scheme to be run in partnership with local authorities and it provides an essential stepping-stone, and potential “carrot” for tenement owners prior to legislation around tenement maintenance coming into place.

The possibility for match funding arrangements between local authorities and other partners is huge – this would maintain buildings, enhance local skills, and meaningfully informing buildings owners about appropriate and well scheduled repairs. Several Councils are already working with the scheme and hope to be able to roll it out. Operational developments to enhance the scheme sustainability are already underway. However, greater awareness and encouragement for local authorities to consider this approach from the Committee would be appreciated.

The recent [research](#) commissioned by the Construction Industry Corona Virus (CICV) Forum from the Fraser of Allender Institute, in relation to the economic benefits of maintenance to the local economy helps to support a maintenance-first approach to our places.

Economic Recovery

Building on the points above, BEFS previously [responded](#) to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery focusing on the benefits the built environment can provide towards economic recovery. However, without support 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 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 putting more homes into use, as empty homes are brought back into use.
- 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.

BEFS wishes to highlight that our existing built and historic environment is an agent of economic recovery. Our built and historic environment deserves to be protected, cared for and enhanced as it has sheltered us economically and socially before, and we need to ensure investment in its ability to do so for the future.

Such economic recovery will need a joined-up approach, working across portfolios and departments. An approach already suggested with the [Position Statement](#) for the National Planning Framework 4. BEFS and Members representing professions across the built environment, landscape and infrastructure professions (RTPI, RIAS, RICS, LI-S, ICE) released a [joint statement](#) clearly supporting and requesting policy direction, prioritisation, and support for professions in this regard.

Planning

BEFS [responded](#) to the NPF4 Position Statement Consultation and was supportive of the acknowledgement that planning needs to work with building standards/building control. To reiterate: *BEFS is aware that building control can be an impediment to plans for retrofit being achieved. Further indicative policies are needed in this area. Technology will change (sometimes at speed) so these policies need to be model policies around latest-best-practice – rather than prescriptive. HES has much high-quality research in this area which could help inform policy.*

With regard to resilient communities, BEFS stated that: *The principle of Maintenance appears built into greenspace. BEFS would strongly advocate that this principle be widened to all of our designed and built environment.*

The continued development of regulation in relation to Local Place Plans remains more problematic, with questions around resource for local and planning authorities unaddressed. BEFS full response in relation to the recent consultation can be accessed [here](#).

Returning to NPF4, BEFS stated previously that - *there appears to be good historic environment representation. And BEFS Membership understand the desire for streamlining. There is a renewed desire to ensure the future NPF document can provide the necessary, robust, framework; including reviewed and refreshed information from SPP – drawing across what best performs and is fit for purpose, now and in the future.* In regard to heritage protection, and specifically the robustness of policy language: When every penny is rightly counted by all parties concerned within development planning, the instruction that specific policies “should” be taken into account may not be considered to financially stack-up. Only where such policies “must” be taken into account, will our existing environment (built, historic, and natural) receive the proper regard and protection.

For planning to be at the core of a just, green recovery adequate resource will be essential. BEFS draws the Committee’s attention to two publications by BEFS Members, RTPI – one which demonstrates the continued [resourcing](#) challenges in relation to planning, and their [manifesto statement](#) which highlights the place of planning within recovery.

EPCs

BEFS has responded to a number of consultations in relation to EPCs previously and notes the currently open consultation on Domestic Energy Performance Certificates Reform. Many previous consultations have not taken into account that the EPC as currently calculated fails to correctly assess traditional built buildings in a number of ways (wall thickness being only one example). This failure of assessment means many buildings are

starting from an incorrect base line, and advice in relation to net zero *based on EPC assessment* could involve costly, unnecessary, and inappropriate interventions all in the name of energy efficiency; where the outcomes may then not realise the carbon efficiency sought. This could be greatly damaging to both consumer confidence and understanding; as well as not promoting conditions for occupant health (many buildings need ventilation to maintain healthy living conditions), or delivering expected cost savings. An overview of BEFS work in this area can be found in the [Energy Efficient Scotland Consultation of 2018](#), particularly highlighting points around the importance of embodied energy and current EPC assessment.

Data

Underpinning all aspects of work with the existing built environment is a need for accurate data in relation to building condition, age and ownership. BEFS has raised this issue before and appreciates that work with ScotLIS has not been as rapid or expansive as initially intended. BEFS believes that work in this area will pay dividends for the potential to map materials requirements, as well as skills gaps, and growth employment opportunities in regard to maintenance, retrofit and subsequently contribute to net zero targets.

Pandemic working practices and innovation

BEFS heard from those working within **Local Authorities** – having asked the specific questions:

1. *Whilst there have (and continue to be) many struggles - there will be working practices where you've thought "why haven't we done that before"? or seen a system usefully streamlined. Any examples of this would be useful.*
2. *I would also be interested in any working practices and systems which are beneficial to your work, but perhaps need a little more investment to deliver the full benefits.*

Responses to the first question were in the main positive and related to virtual working practices.

A sample of responses can be found below.

- a. *It is obvious, but virtual meetings save time and sharing photos and reports can obviate the need for a site meeting or meeting in person which can now be prioritised.*
- b. *Customer consultations are down in number due to phones being less manned no walk-in desk enquiries have been possible, but emails are up which slow us down although a written record is useful.*
- c. *From my perspective our ability to work remotely was something in place before the start of the pandemic, with the main change being the ability/need to undertake virtual site visits though this has recently been more embedded within Development Management. Given the impact this has on freeing up staff time, reducing travel and therefore carbon footprints, this is a working practice set to continue long after Covid.*
- d. *Such working also extends to the virtual meetings for working groups etc which had traditionally been hosted largely in Edinburgh. Again, the cost, time and carbon saving for local authorities has been significant, and the preference for virtual meetings to largely replace physical ones will continue.*
- e. *I think these tools have also helps foster better internal relationships with planners etc – seeing a face (virtually) and discussing a matter has improved relationships and brought the wider team together.*
- f. *We have also seen an increase in developer team to archaeologist face to face (online) meetings. With small to medium schemes there is often just not the time to bring people together (geographical*

constraints etc) but having regular round the table discussions at an early stage in the process has helped us steer the dialogue on heritage matters and explain the remit of planning archaeology and how it can be best managed to those who perhaps haven't dealt with it before.

In relation to question two – positive examples, and initiatives which could be expanded were provided by several respondents:

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CPD, education and training on videos have come in and will be a useful tool in the future to complement in person and hands on training. This has been useful as part of the Erasmusplus traditional building skills project and in various activities run by the Inverkeithing heritage Regeneration project (Fife Historic Buildings Trust). However, there would be scope to do create more videos and podcasts for regular training and education topics if funding was available.

BEFS Members **ALGAO – Association for Local Government Archaeology Officers** Raised a pertinent point about further investment. *There has been the marked difference between those local authorities whose data has been available online during the pandemic (specifically the Historic Environment Records), and the handful of those whose data isn't. The difference it makes for contractors, developers and even the general public is huge, and investment in bringing the last handful of LA HERs online would be a welcome improvement with a long-term positive impact.*

This was backed up by a further Local Authority report that: *we have also noticed a shift of increased public interest in the historic environment, with more people exploring their local area and taking pride in their heritage assets – often asking us questions about them or using the online HER resources (where available). ... [HER] availability is a key tool in engaging an appropriate responsibility for managing our historic environment. Investing in and supporting the HERs to ensure similarly levelled access across the Local Authorities has really clear benefits to both the planning system and the communities it supports.*

This opinion was echoed by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists - **Cifa**, who added that HERs being placed on a statutory footing, as they are in Wales, would be of great benefit to being able to direct resource towards that work.

BEFS also works across the heritage sector, and reached out to Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) in relation to information pertinent to Local Authority museums.

MGS reported on the financial implications of the pandemic The museums sector is gradually reopening after lockdown, with 61 of 125 local authority/ALEO museums open (as of 21/07/2021). However, there are ongoing concerns about the financial sustainability of the sector. A survey by the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions found that 90% of attractions that have reopened are making a loss.

Glasgow Life is the largest organisation within the civic museums sector in terms of visitor footprint. The organisation is set to cut 500 jobs across its services and there remains uncertainty over the long-term future of some venues. This has led to demands from Glasgow City Council for national funding for their museums service, supported by a campaign by The Herald.

New Working Practices: Museums embraced the opportunities to embrace new ways of working in many ways. The move towards digital can have a lasting legacy. Museums are becoming increasingly comfortable in providing digital access to their collections, which has enormous potential in supporting learning at all levels, including through the National Digital Academy. This can however be a time intensive endeavour and maximising the reach of these resources will require resourcing.

MGS also provided the following Case study:

The McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery & Museum launched 'Reconnect', a six-month remote learning and engagement project to help combat isolation heightened by the pandemic.

'Reconnect' enabled the museum to continue to provide cultural engagements, resources, and experiences for community groups with long term health conditions and families groups. This ensured that isolated and shielding participants could still benefit from the rich experiences the museum has to offer.

An integrated team of museum educators, curators, cultural partners, and freelance artists were brought together to support those most in need. Participant groups involved are from Alzheimer Scotland, Home-Start Dundee and Tayside Healthcare Arts Trust.

All project activities are designed to spark imagination and support shared remote learning experiences, utilising the museum's new temporary exhibitions.

New ways of working, particularly in relation to access to documentation, reports, and meetings appear to be here to stay; providing efficiencies to staff time, reductions to budgets, and carbon savings. However, for the greatest benefits there are areas where investment will need to be directed. And this may prove challenging when jobs remain at risk, sites are not profitable, and there are concerns that restrictions may return.

BEFS appreciates the Committee reaching out to stakeholders across the sector and looks forward to being able to discuss topics further with the Committee in due course.

BEFS thanks all those Members and sector organisations responding to the requests for information.

BEFS responses to a number of Consultations in relation to the Built Environment can be found at:
<https://www.befs.org.uk/resources/consultations/>

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Link for the Scottish Government workplan may not open on all devices so is provide in full here:

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2019/12/tenement-maintenance-report-scottish-government-response/documents/tenement-condition-workplan-2020/tenement-condition-workplan-2020/govscot%3Adocument/Tenement%2BMaintenance%2BWorking%2BGroup%2BWorkplan%2B2021.pdf>