



# BEFS RESPONSE: DRAFT INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY 2027-2037

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 existing built and historic environment.

This is a response from BEFS to all set questions in the Scottish Government's [2026 consultation on the planning and delivery of infrastructure](#). The purpose of the consultation is to inform the development of a ten year infrastructure framework, running from 2027-37, to deliver long-term public value with respect to public asset use, place-making support, and generating private investment.

Other relevant consultation responses from BEFS can be seen below, as many issues overlap and demand associative consideration:

- [Draft Climate Change Plan](#) (Jan 2026)
- [Future of Scotland's High Streets](#) (Dec 2025)
- [Industrial Transition for Scotland](#) (March 2025)
- [Rural Delivery Plan](#) (March 2025)
- [Protecting Built Heritage](#) (Feb 2025)
- [Infrastructure Investment Plan](#) (Nov 2020)

## PART ONE: ROLE OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

### Q1) Do you agree with the scope and role of the Infrastructure Strategy?

Yes, with one important caveat. As a general concept, a national government taking a thoughtful and holistic approach to the planning and delivery of infrastructure, is welcome. It aligns with the five core themes identified in consultations with Members and stakeholders towards the [2026 BEFS Manifesto for the Built Environment](#), and with an admirably wide range of National Performance Framework indicators.

The long-term, interlinking and overlapping themes highlighted in the BEFS Manifesto, are calls for further action in the realms of achieving net zero, investing in repair and maintenance, increasing skills and employment capacity, promoting culture and heritage, and supporting planning and place-making. These are usefully referenced in the Strategy. The Strategy and the BEFS Manifesto both share a strong awareness of the massive

potential and the major challenges ahead for wide-ranging cross-portfolio policy change to deliver better outcomes for Scotland's infrastructure and places.

The caveat is that BEFS Members and stakeholders have reported that building safety considerations should feature in the Strategy. Chapter 1 of the consultation paper only mentions ensuring public safety with regard to transport infrastructure. Examples of recent project outcomes the Strategy intends to replicate in the transport sphere are improving road safety on sections of the A9 and A77, and addressing safety concerns with the Markle Level Crossing Bridge Replacement.

The consultation paper rightly identifies that much of Scotland's infrastructure provision and needs take the form of buildings, such as housing, health facilities, public service hubs, colleges and universities, museums and galleries, and business and office space serving growth sectors including manufacturing, life sciences and digital technology. Yet there is no mention in the consultation paper of the [Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry](#) and its recommendations on building safety for government, regulators and industry. The scope and role of the Strategy should be expanded, or clarified, to encompass building safety.

**Q2) Do you think the proposed framework, linking the 30-year Needs Assessment, 10-year Infrastructure Strategy, Spending Reviews and annual Budgets will support improved strategic planning and delivery? Are there any further improvements you want to suggest?**

As a broad plan, the Infrastructure Framework appears well-considered in linking bigger picture aspirations with the practicalities of budget-setting, project delivery and review cycles. As the extensive list of key infrastructure types and delivery vehicles on pages 18-19 of the consultation paper notes, this is a particularly complex and long-term national Strategy. It is notable that many of the infrastructure and asset classes are dependent upon the existing built and historic environment across urban, rural and island Scotland.

The five year 'refresh' approach is useful in acknowledging the reality that parliamentary cycles and any associated changes in Scottish Government administrations, mandates and priorities will shape its medium-term direction. The Strategy also recognises that flexibility is required in the context of the wide range of unknown knowns, such as the future cost of building materials and maintenance services, that will affect its delivery. Any comment on how successful the Strategy can be in practice, is also contingent on those variables.

The connection between the wider aims of the national Strategy, and the regular decision-making and investment activity in so many parts of Scottish society, from harbours and forests to castles and colleges, requires strong oversight, consistency and alignment across and far beyond the Scottish Government and its agencies. As BEFS pointed out in its 2026 Manifesto, to take just one area of concern and potential, there are complex, long-standing and deep-rooted challenges in training and skills capacity in the built environment.

BEFS Members frequently report that accessing the contractors they need to maintain their buildings and assets, including workers skilled in traditional building, construction, conservation engineering and heritage project management, is difficult. Specialists like stonemasons are often booked up months in advance and unavailable in some parts of the country. This makes it hard for building owners to get the quotes or repairs they need, sometimes causing entire projects to fail. The lost opportunities for economic growth

here, regionally and nationally, are considerable, and run directly counter to Programme for Government prioritisation of sustainable economic development.

Alongside traditional building and retrofit skills, BEFS Member Landscape Institute Scotland argue the Strategy should recognise the need for landscape architecture capacity in local authorities and public bodies. Without early landscape expertise, opportunities to integrate natural infrastructure, improve public realm and design for climate resilience can be missed.

As skilled experts become harder to find, built environment infrastructure becomes at greater risk of deterioration, dereliction, vacancy and demolition. Training is an essential service needed for the health of infrastructure and buildings and for preventative maintenance. Action to support Colleges and training centres to deliver these courses is vital.

The consultation paper briefly recognises the challenge of an ageing construction workforce and the need to work with the Scottish Construction Leadership Forum on skills and supply chains. The framework could be further improved by additional consideration and commitment on skills and training, and building a pipeline of new workers to help ensure that skilled traditional building workers and other built environment experts are made available in the right places at the right time to maintain and enhance Scotland's infrastructure. The current approach does not draw a clear link between the pipeline of projects and the skills base required to deliver them.

Further clarity on how the various delivery vehicles and regulatory bodies under the Scottish Government's control will be changing their approach once the new Strategy is adopted would also be helpful in understanding the likely impact.

## **PART TWO: INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES**

### **Q3) Do any elements of the infrastructure lifecycle need to be strengthened to promote more effective infrastructure planning and delivery?**

Yes. Recognition of major challenges in the age and condition of asset base is welcome. BEFS acknowledges the pressure that maintenance, and the ensuring of reliability, safety, value for public money and functional utility, places on limited budgets. The 2026 BEFS Manifesto features 15 practical policy recommendations that we believe will create the long-term conditions for a well-resourced, dynamic and effective built and historic environment sector. This will deliver strong value for public money as preventative spend, providing substantial progress as part of a holistic approach to greatly enhance the nation's infrastructure and built environment - and ensure it is well-maintained.

BEFS readily supports the intention to link evolving procurement practice with aspirations to achieve net zero, support skills development and job creation, progress community wealth building and improve local supply chains. An investment hierarchy that places a strong emphasis on maximising use of existing assets over new-build also aligns strongly with BEFS Member views that we have far too much vacant and derelict land and buildings in Scotland, and we should be making their productive reuse even more of a public policy priority in a climate and housing emergency context [note: the illustration on p26 has a typo, 'exiting' for 'existing'].

One area of the lifecycle that we believe needs more thought is evaluation. Given the focus on different types of improvement, this section of the consultation paper provokes a major open question: how will improvement be measured? What indicators, for example,

will the Scottish Government be using to measure improvement in whether overall delivery of infrastructure is strengthening supply chain resilience, reducing climate disruption, providing best value for public health, and supporting economic transformation?

The two-line reference to, “Capture lessons learned through post project evaluation to inform future planning and improve outcomes,” is vague. It also refers to discrete projects rather than the overall approach.

BEFS event discussions on the general topic of evaluation indicate that the Scottish Government, as a funding body, calls for a high level of detail on monitoring and evaluation from applicants to its grant programmes. These discussions suggest the Scottish Government could usefully follow its own guidance to others by providing additional clarity on how it will evaluate its own initiatives and strategies.

BEFS Member SURF - Scotland's Regeneration Forum argue that the collaboration principles could benefit from further development. The Strategy should set out in more detail how it intends to support effective long-term collaboration between public sector providers, and between those providers and the communities their projects serve.

#### **Q4) In what areas could changes to governance or planning processes across the public sector improve the impact of the investment hierarchy?**

On behalf of its diverse Members and stakeholders, who care for, celebrate and promote the value of Scotland's historic buildings, public spaces and infrastructure, the 2026 BEFS Manifesto calls on policy-makers to make a series of changes across policy portfolios, from environmental sustainability, skills and economic development to housing, poverty and health.

Scotland has pressing challenges and varying economic disparities across high streets and town centres its urban and rural regions. The BEFS Manifesto features 15 practical policy recommendations to address these, and in doing so maximise the impact of the investment hierarchy, including:

- Commit to investment in, and enabling pathways to, bring vacant and derelict land and buildings back into use at scale;
- Scale up built environment and heritage investment programmes, leveraging value across portfolios;
- Invest in a national programme for training delivery across a variety of traditional building and wider construction skills.

BEFS has engaged with several Scottish Government representatives who are interested in learning more about the background to the BEFS Manifesto and discussing the potential implementation of recommendations. We will be pleased to continue to promote the BEFS Manifesto outcomes to all stakeholders with a remit for applying the investment hierarchy to decision-making across the public sector.

BEFS agrees with Creative Scotland that the investment hierarchy can provide an opportunity to ensure that cultural and heritage assets are given equal consideration in infrastructure planning alongside other critical infrastructure such as health and education facilities.

## PART THREE: INFRASTRUCTURE THEMES AND ENABLERS

**Q5) Do you agree that enabling net zero and environmental sustainability, driving economic growth, and building resilient places continue to be the right outcomes to guide infrastructure investment over the next decade?**

Yes, with one important caveat. There is good alignment with BEFS long-term asks of built environment policy, and we agree with the consultation paper that a robust Infrastructure Strategy can deliver major positive outcomes across climate change, housing, economic development, place-based improvement, blue and green infrastructure - and much more.

To expand on a recurring message in this response, the caveat is no recognition of building safety as an infrastructure theme. BEFS agrees with assessments by the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, the Scottish Futures Trust and others, that building safety should feature among the core outcomes.

Systemic failure in the procurement and tendering of building projects caused by the prioritisation of low-cost bids, misunderstanding of guidance and responsibilities, and inadequate regulation, was described by Dame Judith Hackitt in the foreword of the [‘Building a Safer Future’ Grenfell Report](#) as:

*“...a ‘race to the bottom’ caused either through ignorance, indifference, or because the system does not facilitate good practice. There is insufficient focus on delivering the best quality building possible, in order to ensure that residents are safe, and feel safe.”*

This demonstrates governments have a major responsibility to challenge any possibility for compromising building safety in public procurement processes. The Scottish Government could do more to recognise and prioritise this in the Infrastructure Strategy.

The Scottish Futures Trust recommend moving away from a focus on separate project transactions and towards the embedding of a long-term, whole-system approach. A whole-system approach would help ensure that construction skills capacity and expertise, project investment levels and robust regulation are all geared towards the prioritisation of safety, and avoiding any risk of a ‘race to the bottom’ in building quality and project delivery standards.

**Q6) Are the three proposed enablers, public assets, place-making and private investment, sufficient to deliver the Strategy’s outcomes? Are there other enablers we should consider instead/additionally?**

BEFS particularly welcomes the Strategy’s prioritisation of, “optimising what we have.” As the consultation paper notes, this is a pragmatic approach that recognises the massive pressures on public finances and the under-realised potential in existing buildings, structures and other infrastructure assets. From BEFS perspective, this approach also provides many other benefits: improving environmental sustainability, easing housing pressure, promoting heritage and tourism, preserving natural capital, improving places through alignment with 20 minute neighbourhoods and living well locally, and providing more attractive and economically vibrant town centres and high streets.

For BEFS Members and stakeholders, more could be done to protect and make full use of historic buildings, which need to be managed appropriately. They have major national importance, contributing much to the visitor economy, and are invaluable to the communities who live, work, and spend their leisure time within and around them.

Historic buildings, including but not limited to those with listed status and/or located in conservation areas, regularly become at risk of demolition through redundancy, deteriorating condition, and other factors. To highlight the scale of the challenge, of the 47,639 listed buildings in Scotland, there are 2214 buildings on the currently paused [Buildings at Risk Register](#) (BARR) managed by Historic Environment Scotland.

Historically, 22% of buildings that have been listed on BARR have been demolished, which statistically suggests that around 500 buildings are at risk of demolition in Scotland today. BEFS actively campaigns for the productive reuse of vacant buildings, and points to case studies such as the Edwardian Perth City Hall, which became vacant in 2005 and was served with a demolition order in 2012. It has since been refurbished and restored to house Perth Museum and the Stone of Destiny, welcoming more than 250k visitors in its first year of reopening in March 2025.

BEFS Members believe there are myriad opportunities to capture positive outcomes from a quicker approach to reuse of vacant buildings, including some of Scotland's biggest and most prominent buildings like castles and churches, as well as the many shopfront 'voids' in our villages, towns and cities. The Infrastructure Strategy can help encourage more of this, and BEFS and its Members will be keen to support these efforts where we can.

[The Vacant and Derelict Land Task Force](#), a collaboration of 30 cross-sector bodies led by the Scottish Land Commission and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, investigated the key contemporary challenges inhibiting progress, especially in smaller sites, and produced a recommendations report to the Scottish Government in 2020. As the Task Force noted, there is 11,000 hectares of vacant and derelict land and buildings in urban Scotland - almost twice the size of Dundee (the Dundee City Council boundary contains 6,300 hectares).

The challenge of repairing and bringing existing buildings back into productive use is considerable given the scale, but reducing this total will create major added value for our people, places, economies and environments. A wider application of the Task Force's recommendations, utilising learning outcomes from their research and pilot testing, will undoubtedly support the Strategy's ambitions on this.

Another enabler is learning from other countries. The Strategy does not make any clear references to reviewing transferable lessons from international approaches to infrastructure. Exploring how some comparator nations approach infrastructure planning and delivery could add further value to the ten-year framework for Scotland.

Two examples of international models with transferable learning are [Romania's Ambulance for Monuments](#) and a similar [Pro Monumenta initiative in Slovakia](#). Both emphasise the connectedness of co-operative maintenance and skills training in protecting and reusing the historic environment.

**Q7) What mechanisms or approaches should the Infrastructure Strategy adopt to ensure that critical cross-cutting priorities, such as housing delivery, regional economic development, and natural infrastructure are systematically embedded in investment planning and decision making?**

One of the relevant policy initiatives that has strong general support in the BEFS network is effective implementation of Community Wealth Building. The built environment is a focal point of regeneration strategies enabling pride of place, sustainable economies, good quality of life, and adaptive buildings and structures suited to new futures. There are

further gains to be made in aligning the spheres of tourism, heritage and infrastructure through improved collaboration and holistic, cross-policy strategy.

Well-maintained, active and accessible heritage buildings enhance a place's distinctive identity and tourist offer. This includes the creation of jobs at visitor attractions, and other economic benefits to the many local high street businesses, including hospitality and retail, that benefit from tourism. There is a clear line of influence between Community Wealth Building, heritage, tourism, infrastructure and economic resilience. The local procurement of maintenance contracts for historic buildings can reduce costs while upskilling contractors, supporting local economies and reducing carbon emissions.

As noted elsewhere in this response, there are significant barriers to progress with regard to vacant, derelict, vulnerable or under-utilised historic buildings, including access to funding for refurbishment and maintenance. There is a reality that many local and community-led organisations do not have the capacity, governance or resources to purchase a long-standing empty building that is often in pressing need of repair and effectively manage all of the capital and operational needs.

With many public bodies developing their own Community Wealth Building Action Plans as part of the [Community Wealth Building \(Scotland\) Act 2026](#), the Infrastructure Strategy can play a valuable role in bridging shared interests and benefits between local infrastructure project development and Community Wealth Building activity.

One of the five sections of the 2026 BEFS Manifesto is 'Planning and Place-making', which refers to a range of other policy initiatives with considerable potential to support Infrastructure Strategy priorities. These include town centre living, explicitly highlighted in the Scottish Government's Fourth National Performance Framework and the 2022 Town Centre Action Plan Review, and supported by the work of the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership and Existing Homes Alliance. There is agreement that converting vacant high street buildings into homes will be helpful in generating increased population density and a renewed purpose for high streets and town centres.

Other recent and emerging policy developments, including Local Place Plans, the Place Principle, 20 minute neighbourhoods, living well locally, community asset ownership, , Townscape Heritage Initiatives, community led tourism, town boards, the Pride in Place programme, and public/voluntary coproduction hubs, also align well with aspirations to make better use of existing assets.

Scotland's built environment has been shaped by human and natural processes over thousands of years and encompasses our buildings and public spaces: ancient monuments, sites and landscapes; historic buildings; townscapes; parks; battlefields; gardens and designed landscapes; and our marine heritage. BEFS Members also point out that much of what we consider natural spaces in the rural countryside, has been shaped by human activity, and remains highly relevant to discussions on built environment and infrastructure.

With regard to natural infrastructure, BEFS Members want to see a holistic approach to the protection of rural heritage, and ensuring heritage aspects are not lost in considerations around planning, development and land use change considerations. Enhancing heritage provisions in land use, agri-environment and related elements of the policy and funding landscape is one channel through which positive change could be made.

As Scotland's climate changes, the use of nature-based mitigation, such as managing freshwater habitats and resources for enhanced flood defence measures, also become increasingly important to infrastructure plans.

BEFS Member Landscape Institute Scotland has called for a [landscape led approach to development](#), as an integrated approach to shaping beautiful places. The approach takes the current rural context into account, while delivering wider policy objectives for climate adaptation, nature restoration, economic growth, housing and health.

**Q8) Are there any findings from the Scottish Future's Trust Needs Assessment (perhaps from drivers of change, cross-cutting themes or enablers) that we should more fully integrate into this 10-year Infrastructure Strategy?**

BEFS welcomes the undertaking of a systems-wide approach to the Needs Assessment, its level of detail and use of case studies, and the identification of cross-cutting thematic priorities including climate resilience, data and technology, place-based approaches, and capacity building to support asset maintenance.

As previously stated, alignment with the investment hierarchy, which proposes consideration towards maximising the useful life of existing assets above building new, is also welcome. BEFS welcomes some references to building safety and large-scale retrofitting in the Needs Assessment, which the Infrastructure Strategy could do more to recognise and incorporate.

BEFS notes concerns from Member The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland about some aspects of the Needs Assessment, including inadequate consideration as to how the 'race to the bottom' described in the ['Building a Safer Future' Grenfell Report](#) could be avoided through procurement reform, and whether approaches that include "opportunities for aggregation of smaller scale investments" may unduly favour centralised procurement models.

## **PART FOUR: PLACE BASED APPROACH**

**Q9) Do you support the proposal that infrastructure investment is more directly driven by the priorities of places across Scotland?**

Yes. To reiterate the main messages in our response to Q7 and Q10, improved alignment between place-based approaches, retrofitting older buildings for energy efficiency, community empowerment, and investment decisions in buildings and infrastructure, will be warmly welcomed by BEFS.

The role and potential of Local Place Plans, Community Wealth Building, the Heat in Buildings Bill, and Fourth National Planning Framework themes, among other policy drivers, should be considered carefully as part of the considerations of a renewed approach towards infrastructure investment.

**Q10) Are the proposed principles, national spatial priorities and place partnerships, the right ones to guide a place-based approach? Are there other principles we should consider?**

One area that is referenced but underdeveloped, concerns energy efficiency. The policy foundations referenced here include: conserving and recycling assets; delivering economic growth and employment; delivering regeneration by supporting disadvantaged communities, place-based sustainability and wellbeing; and enhancing resilience to the future impacts of climate change.

The Strategy states buildings are a key of Scotland's infrastructure. It rightly asserts that we need to invest in the maintenance and future-proofing of our existing infrastructure; and we need to do more to reuse assets that are currently vacant, derelict or underused.

Tying these objectives and the policy foundation together, is retrofit delivery. As argued in the 2026 BEFS Manifesto, the retrofit of older properties to increase residents' and visitors' comfort, reduce fuel poverty, improve energy efficiency, and reduce carbon emissions is not happening quickly enough, and at the quality and scale required. A practical response to this situation is under active consideration by [the Retrofit Roundtable](#), a group of key built environment sector stakeholders including BEFS.

Through regular meetings and Parliamentary gatherings, the Retrofit Roundtable, which is facilitated by the Chartered Institute of Building, investigate and promote solutions to the retrofit challenge emerging from the sector. Its [Meeting Scotland's Retrofit Challenge](#) report highlighted the urgent need for stepping up action on retrofit to meet fuel poverty, building maintenance and Net Zero commitments and targets. While being realistic on the cross-policy complexity of retrofit and the varied effectiveness and costs of new technologies and processes, the report identifies a need for improved joined-up policymaking to overcome barriers and capitalise on opportunities to make serious progress.

To break down policy silos, the Retrofit Roundtable call on the Scottish Government to create a Ministerial Oversight Group on Retrofit. This Oversight Group will have the authority and remit to work across the full range of relevant policy directorates, Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries, to develop the resources and programmes to meet the retrofit challenge in the short and longer term.

The Retrofit Roundtable also wish to see the Oversight Group devise and implement a Retrofit Delivery Plan, to provide: clarity of funding across public sector portfolios and external funders; retrofit solutions tailored to the needs of particular building types long-term targets driven by evidence; measurement tools to track progress; and consideration on meeting the challenge on workforce capacity and skills, and the quality of retrofit works.

A Retrofit Delivery Plan could set a robust framework for appropriate and effective solutions. It is not difficult to find examples of inappropriate or poor quality retrofit works, which may lead to severe problems such as poor air quality, damp and mould emerging years after installation, and which may also have negative implications for building deterioration. The Delivery Plan could usefully promote the following of the retrofit hierarchy - highlighted in the 2023 Retrofit Roundtable report, from which the below diagram is taken - in delivering appropriate solutions.

The 895k properties defined as tenements, around one third of which were constructed before 1919, are a major proportion of Scotland's housing infrastructure stock. These properties have been the focal point for the [Tenement Maintenance Working Group](#). The Scottish Parliamentary Working Group, formed in 2018, brings cross-party MSPs and leading housing, property and heritage organisations together to find solutions to aid, assist and compel owners of tenement properties to maintain their buildings. BEFS shares secretariat duties with Under One Roof.

Since publishing [a recommendations report in 2019](#), the Working Group has been lobbying for the implementation of three central policy proposals, and has been busy researching and exploring how they will work in practice, advocating that putting these

recommendations into practice will significantly enhance and improve the maintenance of tenement housing across Scotland.

BEFS also works with the [Existing Homes Alliance](#), a coalition of housing, environmental, fuel poverty, consumer and industry organisations that share a mission to improve existing homes. The Alliance is calling on the next Scottish Government to maintain and build on Home Energy Scotland and [support the growth of locally-based retrofit services](#) to support people with in-depth planning and coordination of home upgrades.

Also in relation to housing, BEFS Member Landscape Institute Scotland emphasises that the spaces between buildings are fundamental infrastructure. Green and blue spaces, Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, trees, biodiverse planting, play, public realm, access to nature and places for communities to meet are central to whether new homes become liveable, resilient and healthy places.

In addition, BEFS Member Scotland's Towns Partnership is appreciative of the recognition of the Town Centre First Principle, and points out that the development of transport connectivity and digital infrastructure in towns currently underserved, is a vital part of the place-based approach. Considerations of wider alignment to retrofit strategy, and practical project delivery support, would therefore be an important addition to the policy foundations and initiatives that the Infrastructure Strategy is seeking to draw added value from.

**Q11) Do you agree with the Scottish Government's proposal to empower communities to play a more active role in infrastructure decision making? What mechanisms would best support meaningful community involvement and help to maximise local social benefits?**

Yes. BEFS Members and stakeholders are supportive of public bodies working more closely with communities to maximise positive outcomes for people and places. One relevant point that is regularly raised in BEFS event discussions is that genuine community consultation does not go hand in hand with public service priorities for best value and efficiency. It often requires a significant investment of staff time and organisational resource in relationship-building and communications, undertaking consultation activity in a range of accessible formats, making change on the back of feedback, and providing updates to communities.

The inclusion of a rounded community consultation process into development of an infrastructure project will likely increase the impact of that project and the confidence that it will be meeting local needs. Consultation will also increase the cost of that project and delay its delivery. Factoring this into pre-project planning, and considering it a necessity rather than an optional add-on that can be eliminated, reduced or simplified in the face of budgetary and time pressures, is important.

There are regular reports in the BEFS network, that much of what is labelled community empowerment by public bodies, often despite good intentions, tends to be tokenistic and focused on the provision of information and plans, rather than meaningful enquiry about community needs and concerns, and being prepared to significantly change plans in response to consultation activity outcomes. BEFS regularly hears concerns that communities do not factor into many public sector consultation processes in a meaningful way, and that the views expressed by communities tend to show little alignment with the outcomes of decision-making processes.

Early stage consultation to learn more about a place's infrastructure priorities and the impact of new project and investment activity with all affected local stakeholders, including the heritage sector, as opposed to late stage reporting on project plans that are already in motion, is vital if meaningful community involvement is the objective. The use of language can also be helpful in setting expectations.

The [Regional Energy Strategic Plan](#) Methodology has demarcated community engagement types into “tell”, “ask, listen and consider” and “work with”, with guidance on how each type can work in practice. BEFS also supports the good practice as set out in guidance such as the [National Standards for Community Engagement in Scotland](#), which could be reviewed and followed to help ensure actions and outcomes line up with good intentions.

BEFS Member Planning Aid Scotland welcomes the community engagement focus, but states that the route to increasing community engagement in infrastructure project delivery does not appear to be articulated clearly in the Strategy. Further information on how this would be achieved would therefore be a valuable addition.

BEFS Member Scotland's Towns Partnership highlight the wide range of local actors, including residents, community anchors and local businesses, that should be involved in co-design of place and infrastructure development, a process that goes beyond a one-off consultation exercise. BEFS Members also have concerns about the ‘numbers game’ of consultation activity in large population centres holding more weight over those in smaller communities. More densely populated urban centres will provide higher numbers of responses to consultations on their local infrastructure, possibly to the detriment of decision-making around projects and assets in smaller towns and rural regions.

BEFS Members, including professional bodies, national charities, funding agencies, community groups, heritage trusts and public bodies, have pointed to community consultation processes across Scotland that often feature at or near the top of wish-lists a desire to bring a significant empty local building, or several, back into use. This demonstrates strong alignment between a key Infrastructure Strategy aspiration and the demands of local communities.

Mechanisms and tools that can support effective community empowerment and consultation include [the Place Standard Tool](#) and its [Climate Lens](#), [Local Place Plans](#) guidance, the [Understanding Scottish Places tool](#) developed by BEFS Member Scotland's Towns Partnership, [the Felt of Experience of Place resource kit](#) hosted by BEFS Member the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and interactive digital mapping tools used by local authorities, community groups and other actors to capture community views on specific localities.

**Q12) Do you believe the current landscape of local and regional partnerships (e.g. Community Planning Partnerships, Regional Economic Partnerships, HubCos, Regional Adaptation Partnerships) provides an effective framework for delivering place-based infrastructure investment? Please explain your answer, including any suggestions for improvement of existing structures.**

Don't know. In consultations towards the production of BEF6 2026 Manifesto, Members and stakeholders spoke generally of a cluttered policy and practice landscape that can hinder and complicate policy aspirations in the built environment including to reuse vacant and derelict land and buildings, improve urban design of town centres and public spaces, and retrofit historic buildings.

There are standard challenges for large public agencies in progressing activity through external partnerships and even between different internal departments, in the context of disruptions caused by limited capacity, cost saving measures, reorganisation, shifting priorities and rising statutory demands.

The BEFS discussions did not specifically single out infrastructure agencies and partnerships, but providing clarity on roles, responsibilities and decision-making timelines could help avoid problems around cooperation and delivery.

BEFS Member SURF - Scotland's Regeneration Forum believe that the voice of communities does not have enough influence in the current partnership landscape, which presents an inaction risk to the Strategy's intention to enhance community engagement.

## **PART FIVE: ENABLING PRIVATE INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Q13) Are there additional sectors or opportunities that should be considered for strategic investment to support economic growth and maximise opportunities for longer-term growth?**

BEFS again feels two areas with major value for money and effectiveness potential are underplayed in this section of the Strategy - building safety and retrofit project delivery.

Getting both of these right will provide major boosts to local economies, employment markets and supply chains. They will also increase market and consumer confidence that we are making maximum use of existing infrastructure assets and maintaining safe, comfortable homes and buildings across Scotland.

**Q14) To make the most of the strategic opportunities in renewables, housing, and natural capital, what will the economy need from our infrastructure to grow and thrive up to 2037?**

Two relevant maxims are regularly highlighted in BEFS activity:

- The greenest building is the one that already exists;
- Approximately 80% of Scotland's buildings in 2050, have already been built.

As previously argued in this response, and the 2026 BEFS Manifesto, BEFS would like to see more policy attention given to vacant and derelict building reuse, retrofit project delivery, repair and maintenance, training and skills, heritage project funding, climate change mitigation, tenement law reform, planning system improvement, and place-making.

Scotland has pressing challenges and varying economic disparities across its urban and rural regions. Ultimately, the 15 policy recommendations investments called for in the BEFS Manifesto, will help build a better Scotland by delivering the infrastructure required to reverse decline and improving quality of life across all of our places.

BEFS Member Landscape Institute Scotland state that private investment in renewables, housing and natural capital should be planned in ways that respond to land, landscape, communities and long-term management. Early landscape input can help identify where development can be accommodated well and how projects can deliver wider public benefits.

BEFS Member the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland further highlight the benefits for public health, energy efficiency and the supply of jobs available in cross-cutting, longer term action to renew and regenerate existing housing stock and to enhance

involvement of small and medium sized local businesses in infrastructure project supply chains.

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

## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

Name: Derek Rankine, Head of Policy and Strategy

Email: [derekr@befs.org.uk](mailto:derekr@befs.org.uk)

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

Address and Postcode: 133 Lauriston Place, Edinburgh, EH3 9JN

The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference: Publish response with name

Are you content for other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise? YES

Date of submission: 5 May 2026



Reg. Address 133 Lauriston Place, Edinburgh EH3 9JN | 07842 114680 | [info@befs.org.uk](mailto:info@befs.org.uk) | [www.befs.org.uk](http://www.befs.org.uk)  
Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee No: SC 250970 | Charity No: SC034488 | Supported by HES