



BEFS Net Zero Activity Report

An overview of current progress, policy engagement, and sector leadership on the transition to Net Zero

Overview

Scotland's commitment to net zero by 2045 demands a transition that reaches every part of society, and the built and traditional environment sits at the heart of that challenge. There is still a great deal of mystery around what solutions are needed, how quickly they can be deployed, and how it can be done in a way that protects both the environment and people's jobs. The path exists, but the details of how to move at speed are still not fully understood. Scotland's existing buildings, heritage assets, and historic places represent an enormous store of embodied carbon, though they don't "store" carbon in the same way a forest stores carbon, they embody emissions already invested in creating them. This allows for an equally powerful opportunity.

Reusing and caring for what already exists reduces the need for carbon-intensive new construction, while thoughtful adaptation, better connectivity, and place-based regeneration support low-carbon behaviours. Net zero is inseparable from a just transition, decarbonising the built environment requires long-term planning, investment in green and traditional skills, and an approach that sustains the places people inherit.

For BEFS, net zero is therefore not an add-on, but a principle embedded throughout its work. Through policy engagement, countless consultation responses, research, and collaborative working groups, BEFS emphasises the role of heritage, planning, placemaking, and repair in delivering a low-carbon future. In doing so, BEFS supports the sector to understand the specific contribution that the built and historic environment can make to Scotland's transition.

Areas of Activity

Area	Net Zero Relevance
Working Groups	Convening expertise, sharing knowledge, and building collaborative approaches to support sector understanding of net zero challenges and opportunities.
Policy and Advocacy	Shaping policy discussions and promoting the role of the built and historic environment in delivering a low-carbon future.
Bulletin and Publications	Sharing information, evidence, and examples that help members and partners engage with the net zero agenda.
Strategic Context	Positioning heritage and the built environment within wider climate, policy, and economic priorities across Scotland.
Heritage and Culture	Highlighting how cultural and heritage assets contribute to sustainable places, community resilience, and long-term stewardship.
Skills, Maintenance and Retrofit	Supporting the skills, repair, and retrofit agenda needed to sustain existing buildings and reduce lifecycle emissions.
Planning and Placemaking	Promoting place-based approaches that reduce carbon, support adaptive reuse, and strengthen sustainable communities.
Future Opportunities	Identifying emerging areas where BEFS and the sector can strengthen leadership, evidence, and collaborative action on net zero.
Members and Engagement	Amplifying member voices and supporting organisations at different stages of their own net zero journeys.

Team Practice

BEFS' net zero activity is reflected not only in its external policy work, but also in the way the team operates. Staff work primarily from home, reducing the emissions associated with regular commuting and day-to-day office use. When meeting in person, BEFS prioritises public transport for bi-monthly in-person meetings and for other face-to-face engagements wherever possible. This approach supports lower-

carbon ways of working while maintaining the collaborative relationships that are essential to effective sector engagement.

BEFS is now also strengthening this commitment through the addition of a dedicated Net Zero Lead, helping to ensure that net zero considerations are prioritised consistently across the organisation's activities. This role supports a more deliberate and co-ordinated approach, embedding climate awareness across all activity. This role leads the sector by influencing organisations to incorporate a dedicated net zero professional into their own activity.

Sector Support and Policy Influence

BEFS helps the sector navigate a fast-changing policy and practice landscape by convening expertise, mapping activity, and building shared evidence on the relationship between the built environment and net zero. Whether informing national policy, supporting local authorities, convening sector knowledge, or amplifying the voices of member organisations beginning their own net zero journeys, BEFS plays an important intermediary role. By acting as a resource for the sector and encouraging a consistent, place-led approach, BEFS is helping to lay the groundwork for the built and historic environment's contribution to Scotland's net zero ambition.

One of the key recommendations in the [BEFS 2026 Manifesto](#) is a stronger focus on net zero as part of addressing the climate emergency. The manifesto argues that fully valuing the embodied energy in existing buildings and infrastructure, and integrating full-carbon lifecycle considerations, will complement wider national and local policies driving maintenance, retention, reuse, and repurposing. BEFS plans to prioritise net zero within future consultations and all political engagements alongside their primary focuses.

This reinforces BEFS' broader position that climate action, heritage, and placemaking are interdependent, and that long-term emissions reduction must be pursued in ways that also deliver heritage protection and a just transition for communities across Scotland.