



BEFS RESPONSE: UK COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT TOURISM INQUIRY

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 three questions in a 2026 UK Parliamentary Committee inquiry into tourism. The [Culture, Media & Sport Committee inquiry](#) sought evidence on domestic and international tourism, including views on tourism policy, the appeal of culture and heritage to visitors, and collaboration between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Scottish Government and other devolved administrations and tourism bodies.

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

- [HES Properties and Collections Strategy](#) (Jan 2026)
- [Future of Scotland's High Streets](#) (Dec 2025)
- [Protecting Scotland's Historic Places - HES Designations Strategy](#) (July 2025)
- [Protecting Built Heritage](#) (Feb 2025)
- [Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2025-26: Funding for Culture](#) (Aug 2024)
- [Visitor Levy \(Scotland\) Bill](#) (Sept 2023)

Q6) How can tourism better support regional growth, community prosperity and wider Government objectives?

6.1 BEFS undertook in-depth consultations with cross-sector Members and stakeholders across Scotland to produce a [2026 BEFS Manifesto for the Built Environment](#). Many of the comments and exchanges indicated that tourism and heritage linkages are generally under-played with regard to wider aspirations for the sustainable growth of local economies, improved health and wellbeing, more vibrant town centres and high streets, and other public policy aspirations.

6.2 There is a great deal of potential to be realised from enhanced heritage investment and cross-policy alignment, although BEFS Manifesto consultees readily pointed out the

scale of barriers to progress. The BEFS Manifesto argues that a robust, sustained and holistic approach is required to overcome these barriers.

6.3 The BEFS Manifesto recognises 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 tourism sector, local economies, and places. The 15 policy recommendations presented in the BEFS Manifesto include the following:

- 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.

6.4 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.

6.5 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 businesses, including hospitality and retail, that benefit from tourism. 48% of visitors to Scotland state that cultural heritage is a key motivation, according to [the most recent VisitScotland survey](#).

6.6 There is a clear line of influence between heritage, tourism and economic resilience. The local procurement of maintenance contracts for historic buildings, for example, can reduce costs while upskilling contractors, expanding the local skills base and sustaining tourism.

6.7 The historic environment, and Scotland's heritage more broadly, is a key attraction and driver in bringing visitors to our towns and cities. The historic environment can be directly impacted by tourism; the economic, cultural, environmental, and social value of Scotland's places, sites, and landscapes being appreciated by visitors comes at a price.

6.8 Our places can suffer from a lack of appropriate infrastructure and related amenities to facilitate the best experiences for those local to, and those visiting, our cultural heritage. Mechanisms such as visitor levies that are reinvested in heritage and culture can be utilised to recognise and respond to this reality.

6.9 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.

6.10 An enhanced provision of capital funding, guidance and support, would do much to unlock the potential of these buildings while contributing to sustainable local economic growth. Building on pilot project activity in the spheres of community led tourism and Community Wealth Building through supportive policy measures can support further progress for tourism and economic development while improving wellbeing.

6.11 BEFS Members also 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.

Q7) How can the Government and tourism sector maximise the potential of cultural heritage and creative assets to attract visitors?

7.1 As stated above, the [2023 Scotland Visitor Survey by VisitScotland](#) shows that history and culture is cited by 48% of visitors as their motivation to visit. This increases to 70% for those visiting Scotland from the USA, Canada and Oceania. In addition to the risk of losing economic value from existing cultural heritage highly valued by tourists through lack of maintenance, highlighted in our response to Q8, there is another dynamic in missing opportunities to create even more attractions for heritage tourism.

7.2 The cross-industry group Don't Waste Buildings has called on the UK government to incentivise the reuse of empty buildings. Their [The Reuse Dividend: Unlocking Economic Growth from Britain's Existing Buildings](#) report presents a landmark international study showing how other countries are unlocking billions from building reuse. The warning is that the UK is missing out on billions of pounds of potential economic growth.

7.3 The report findings are backed up by strong consensus in the BEFS Membership 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 challenging economic context. There is scope for national governments, and their economic development and tourism agencies, to do more to optimise what we have.

7.4 For BEFS Members and stakeholders, this is especially true for historic buildings, which have major national importance to the visitor economy. 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.

7.5 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 since reopening on 30 March 2024.

7.6 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 town halls, as well as the many small shopfront 'voids' in our historic urban settlements.

7.7 [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).

7.8 The challenge of repairing and bringing existing buildings back into productive use for tourism is considerable given the scale, but reducing this total will create major added value, and enhanced sustainability and resilience, for our local economies. A wider application of the Task Force's recommendations, utilising learning outcomes from their research and pilot testing, will undoubtedly support cultural heritage tourism.

7.9 The [Traditional Buildings Health Check](#), developed and promoted by Stirling City Heritage Trust, is one model that can be usefully widened to provide inspections, advice and grant funding support to support owners of historic buildings with repair and maintenance.

7.10 Another enabler is learning from other countries. Exploring how some comparator nations approach the refurbishment, management and maintenance of historic assets could drive further tourism to Scotland and the UK. 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, which has added relevance to our response to Q8.

Q8) What are the key issues facing the tourism workforce?

8.1 There are complex, long-standing and deep-rooted challenges in training and skills capacity in the built environment, which much of the tourism economy Scotland depends on. From the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Edinburgh, Orkney and New Lanark to castles, museums, designed landscapes and national parks, visitors learn about and understand Scotland's rich heritage through interacting with its buildings and public spaces.

8.2 Those buildings and public spaces require effective care and maintenance to retain their tourism value in a competitive international context for attracting visitors. BEFS Members, however, frequently report that accessing the contractors they need to maintain their buildings and assets, including workers skilled in traditional building, construction, and heritage project management, is difficult.

8.3 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 tourism and sustainable economic development, locally, regionally and nationally, are considerable. BEFS is aware from monthly discussions with its cross-UK heritage partners that a similar situation exists in the other UK nations.

8.4 Alongside traditional building skills, BEFS Members have pointed to shortfalls in conservation engineering, landscape architecture, archaeology and planning system capacity in local authorities and other public bodies. Without adequate expertise, opportunities to save and restore historic architecture, retain the unique character of conservation areas, integrate natural infrastructure, and improve public realm and urban design to support enhanced tourism, can all be missed.

8.5 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.

8.6 Action to support Colleges and training centres to deliver these courses is vital, and is just one of the policy recommendations BEFS Members would like to see taken forward in Scotland to reverse trends and ensure the nation's tourism infrastructure has the workforce it requires not only to survive, but to thrive.

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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The Culture, Media & Sport Committee would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference: Publish response with name

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

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