

Building a Heritage-led Recovery



Dunvegan Castle

For our world-famous historic houses, castles and gardens, 2020 was a year like no other. The coronavirus pandemic has devastated our heritage tourism industry – causing severe damage to the fragile rural economies where strong local businesses such as historic house visitor attractions, businesses and events venues are so vital.

Historic Houses Scotland represents 250 independently-owned historic houses and gardens across the country, including some of Scotland's most iconic and historic places. It works to conserve, enhance and promote these unique heritage sites in order for them to continue to be an important part of the vibrant communities they are situated in.

Historic Houses places in Scotland would normally welcome over 6 million visits each year, support over 4,000 FTE jobs and generate over £300 million for the Scottish economy from visits alone. But the significant difficulties of the past year have meant major events have been cancelled, venues have been closed and, with the unfortunate cancellation of many wedding plans,

personal journeys postponed. Scotland's historic houses already had a backlog of repairs totalling over £200 million before the pandemic – that figure has unfortunately risen significantly since.

The Scottish Parliament elections in May 2021 present an opportunity for political parties to recognise the public value of our irreplaceable historic houses and gardens, and ensure that they can continue to play a significant role in future years.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Protect heritage from unintended consequences
2. Promote renewable and sustainable energy use
3. Expand support for struggling weddings businesses
4. Stimulate investment in repair projects at heritage attractions
5. Make Scotland a regionally competitive tourism destination



Blair Estate

Protect heritage from unintended consequences

The survival of our country's world-famous heritage sector relies on a supportive regulatory framework. Changes in the regulations in areas such as heating efficiency and short-term lets have the potential to have a significant impact on fragile historic houses, and can make the difference between a viable visitor attraction and an insolvent business forced to close its doors. The new Scottish Government should ensure it considers the potential impact on fragile heritage – and works with the sector – when considering changes to its environmental and regulatory framework.

Promote renewable and sustainable energy use

For the heritage sector to play its part in addressing the climate emergency will take more than expert advice: significant support will be needed to implement sensitive energy efficiency measures for owners in a way that protects Scotland's unique stock of valued traditional buildings. The outcome of the 2021 review of EPCs must also be tailored to accommodate rural and traditional buildings, recognising the need to raise conservation standards whilst also lowering energy use. This should be accompanied with greater investment in renewable energy sources in off-grid rural communities, decreasing their carbon footprint, lowering renewable fuel costs, increasing self-sufficiency, and integrating the heritage sector with green energy projects in their communities.

Expand support for struggling weddings businesses

Historic house wedding venues have been hit particularly badly by the pandemic, as persistent restrictions on weddings have increased the likelihood of job losses, business failures, and insolvencies. Existing Scottish Government funding schemes place limits on which venues are eligible to apply, preventing a variety of venues from accessing support. Without an expansion in eligibility criteria, historic venues may face collapse, despite huge demand for future bookings. If Government were to deploy targeted measures to support devastated historic house weddings businesses, they would be able to begin re-employing local people, supporting local supply chains, and preparing to welcome tens of thousands of wedding guests safely through their doors.



Dumfries House c. Iain Brown



Stimulate investment in repair projects at heritage attractions

Building on existing positive partnerships across the heritage sector, the Scottish Government should make a commitment to expanding partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sector to maximise the value of Scotland's heritage through progressive modernisation. By engaging the sector in conversations around planning and providing greater flexibility in bringing traditional buildings up to modern standards in a sensitive way, valuable new living and working spaces can be created through investment in repair and restoration. With heritage disappointingly excluded from the 2019 Planning Bill, future conversations must recognise the role of traditional buildings in preserving the character of the local area, and as sustainable alternatives to demolition and new build.

Make Scotland a regionally competitive and sustainable tourism destination

Creating a sustainable, vibrant tourism market is vital to both our members and rural communities, but there is also a need for clear guidance and public education about responsible access to the countryside to prevent littering, livestock worrying, dirty camping and fly tipping. In addition to encouraging domestic tourism, the Scottish Government should aim to attract visitors from within the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. As part of this, the Scottish Government should co-ordinate with other UK administrations to facilitate the re-opening of tourist attractions across the UK at similar timescales, so that the industry has clarity on when bookings and reservations might be made and Scotland's historic houses are not placed at a competitive disadvantage.



Now is the time to give our country's unique historic houses and gardens the tools they need to support people, places and prosperity.

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