

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 environment. BEFS is a supporting member of the [Climate Heritage Network](#).

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

- [Industrial Transition for Scotland](#) (Mar 2025)
- [Climate Change Targets Bill](#) (Aug 2024)
- [Circular Economy \(Scotland\) Bill](#) (Sept 2023)
- [Role of Local Government in Financing and Delivering a Net Zero Scotland](#) (Jan 2022)
- [Climate Change Plan Update](#) (Jan 2021)
- [Green Recovery](#) (Aug 2020)
- [Role of Public Sector Bodies in Tackling Climate Change](#) (Dec 2019)
- [Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024](#) (Apr 2019)
- [Historic Environment Scotland Climate Change & Environmental Action Plan](#) (Jun 2019)

BEFS response to selected questions of the May 2025 [Climate Change Duties consultation](#) follow below:

2. With respect to inequality caused by socio-economic disadvantage, could the content of the Statutory Guidance be changed or added to, to strengthen any positive impacts or lessen any negative impacts as it is implemented by public bodies?

Yes

If so, how? Please give us your views.

BEFS would like to highlight a non-exhaustive list of examples of data and research that should be considered in tandem with this question:

- [Understanding the 20 Minute Neighbourhood: Making Opportunities for People to Live Well Locally](#) (University of Dundee, 2024)
- [Evidence Behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#) (Public Health Scotland, 2022)
- [Mental Health and Town Planning](#) (by BEFS Member RTPi, 2020)

BEFS has consistently advocated for recognition that the existing built environment can, and does, deliver across a wide policy spectrum. From its role in sustainable development and Scotland's journey towards Net Zero, delivering homes and infrastructure, to being an integral part of a holistic approach to place-making for people and communities, our existing built environment plays a key part in our wellbeing. BEFS would like to see a more nuanced understanding of socio-economic impacts, human rights and the work towards equality as inextricably linked to place-making, and thus the existing built environment.

Addressing inequality means investing in our existing built environment. It involves adapting and reusing our existing housing stock, and devoting resources to ensure we have the traditional skills capacity needed to maintain and adapt as necessary. When we invest in developing warm and sustainable housing, using a local and traditionally skilled workforce, alongside local repurposed materials as part of a circular economy, we invest in both stable housing and employment opportunities.

Housing and employment are key aspects of good health, drivers of place-based regeneration and central to the community wealth building policy agenda. This is recognised in the Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4), which states:

“Scotland’s rich heritage, culture and outstanding environment are national assets which support our economy, identity, health and wellbeing”.

To add to this, as BEFS stated in our response to [the consultation on Compulsory Owners’ Associations](#) on behalf of the [Tenement Maintenance Working Group](#):

“Warmer homes, safer buildings, and well-maintained and good places benefit people and communities, and raise awareness and move towards culture change towards maintenance and repair.”

The statutory guidance could therefore be strengthened by recognising the contributions of the built environment to reducing socio-economic disadvantage and positively benefiting Scotland’s economy and actively tackling the housing crisis and fuel poverty.

4. Does the guidance make it clear how public bodies should take future climate scenarios into account when making plans and investment decisions?

Partially.

Please provide comments below.

While the guidance illustrates ways to take future climate scenarios into account in decision-making, there is a structural issue of under-resourcing and a lack of specialist knowledge within some public bodies. These present considerable barriers to the public sector appropriately and adequately complying in a standardised way. BEFS would consider it important that the duty is not merely an exercise in administrative performance - in recognition of the administrative and financial burdens already placed on public bodies who have pointed to being financially stretched - but one which leads to meaningful outcomes and positive change.

BEFS has long highlighted the need for the appropriate skills and training within planning teams to enable appropriate consideration of the needs of communities, and a deeper understanding of the value and contribution of historic and existing buildings as assets towards outcomes, as set within NPF4 and Scotland’s National Outcomes. On this point, BEFS is in strong agreement with Historic Environment Scotland (HES), who state that:

“...good management of the historic environment and its component parts (including designated and undesignated heritage assets) is central to the delivery of economic, social, environmental and wellbeing outcomes, especially through place-based planning and action”.

Similarly, BEFS would amplify the view of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) that:

“...for local planning authorities to achieve high levels of performance it is imperative that they have a proper resourcing strategy in place ... as well as budgetary considerations, the resourcing strategy should also consider the skills, tools, and knowledge currently available to make the best use of what local authorities already have at their disposal,

and the potential for cross-departmental and cross-sectoral joint and collaborative working practices to be implemented”.

The Climate Change Duties guidance therefore needs to be fully cognisant of the existing policy landscape as well as the current reality of resourcing for many planning authorities in Scotland. To support delivery and application, the guidance should be delivered alongside appropriate funding and provision for specialist knowledge; regularly surveying planning authorities on the expertise needed that is currently lacking; and developing further training opportunities to meet the need of the sector skills gap.

5. Do you have any comments about the guidance provided in this chapter on complying with the first duty? Please give us your thoughts. For example, are there any gaps or are there ways that you think it could be improved.

BEFS acknowledges that one of the key outcomes of the first public duty will be to, “focus efforts on the material decarbonisation opportunities.” BEFS agrees on the importance of this, and is keen to ensure that the guidance adequately informs and equips public bodies with relevant knowledge from the current policy landscape.

As mentioned above, BEFS has previously highlighted the role that the existing built environment has to play as Scotland works towards Net Zero. The embodied energy present in our buildings, and the potential for positive interventions through adaptation, repurposing and reusing buildings are huge. Maintenance, retention, and reuse of the existing built environment are key ways to sustainably use the wealth of existing infrastructure and built environment assets across Scotland.

There are also mechanisms which help to promote circularity of building materials. BEFS has advocated for the exploration and development of the Material Passport schemes that are being considered in various countries. The implementation of this type of scheme would improve the quality and national standard of carbon management plans.

BEFS reiterates a point made in a response to the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill:

“not only valuing the embodied energy in our buildings, and assessing full-lifecycle considerations, but that considering national and local policies to support a circular economy which incentivise a culture change: driving maintenance, retention, reuse and repurposing of our existing built environment – will be key to meeting Scotland’s ambitions for a circular economy, climate targets, and social responsibilities”.

The guidance on developing a carbon management plan should emphasise these aspects of assets that public bodies may be managing.

With regards to data, BEFS has previously advocated for additional investment in both qualitative and quantitative data as a basis for sound, holistic decision-making. BEFS believes that a high-performing planning authority is one that is measured beyond internal targets, with a holistic, outward looking view, and that delivers against National Outcomes. BEFS echoes the RTPI’s view that:

“monitoring needs to take a whole-system approach that looks beyond simple numerical metrics of (for example) housing units delivered, towards the wider cumulative place-based and systemic outcomes of planning and the quality of these outcomes in delivering wider social, environmental, and economic benefits.”

Additionally, the national and collaborative collection and collation of data must be consistent across Scotland and between local authorities. This is needed to provide a cohesive national picture and a baseline to measure against. The Climate Change Duties guidance should make clear references to the existing policy landscape to ensure that public bodies are capturing and responding to a wide scope of relevant data. Carbon budget measurement and reporting alone is not enough, and the guidance should aid public bodies in identifying relevant areas of wider policy.

In terms of maximising co-benefits of mitigation actions, BEFS would like to see reference to the rich policy landscape that has made explicit the duties and pathways to improved public health, reduced inequalities, and enhanced biodiversity. Some of these policies are:

- Scottish Law Commission: Discussion Paper on Compulsory Owners Associations
- Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill
- Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill
- Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2025-26
- Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods
- Review of National Outcomes: Call for Evidence

More generally, BEFS has some concerns around the framing of the duty to public bodies to “undertake the above, giving due consideration to their physical assets, including buildings”. BEFS would here emphasise that it is not enough to just to give due consideration to physical assets, but rather that the existing built environment should be understood as a key medium to complying with the Climate Change Duties. BEFS is keen to see that the existing built environment is not unintentionally made into an afterthought or add-on, as this is to underplay and misunderstand its key role in the pathway to Net Zero in Scotland.

9. Do you have any other comments about the guidance provided in this chapter about complying with the second duty? Please give us your thoughts. For example, are there any gaps or are there ways that you think it could be improved.

Adapting and retrofitting the public sector’s built environment assets in response to Net Zero targets and the anticipated impacts of climate change is a key BEFS interest with regard to the second duty.

BEFS is closely involved with two ongoing policy development initiatives that promote a scaling up of retrofitting project and investment activity in the built and historic environment. While it is important to understand that traditional buildings function differently to new builds, appropriate retrofit is part of wider sustainable approaches for existing buildings, within the context of appropriate repair, maintenance and non-invasive energy efficiency measures.

One of these initiatives is a collaborative cross-sector group that produced the 2024 report [Meeting Scotland’s Retrofit Challenge](#), which recommended the development of a Ministerial Oversight Group on Retrofit and a National Retrofit Delivery Plan. A second collaborative initiative, led by the Existing Homes Alliance, is [campaigning for the establishment of regional Retrofit Agencies](#) across Scotland to support local development activity. The second duty could benefit from enhanced and more accessible policy and practice environment for retrofitting.

The Scottish climate is getting warmer, wetter, and windier, and public sector building repair and maintenance plans must reflect this reality. This applies both to ensuring resources are made available for public buildings to be adequately energy efficient, watertight and windproof in the face of growing environmental pressures, and that the public sector can take additional steps to protect people and places from heightened risks of flooding and storm damage.

A 2025 research initiative entitled [Living With Rain](#), undertaken by The RTPi Scotland with support from the University of Glasgow, suggests that public bodies with responsibilities for architecture, conservation, planning, public realm urban design, could be doing more to build considerations of their micro-local climates into their approaches, alongside wider national climate trends.

Ensuring public bodies give due consideration to their physical assets is a welcome complement to climate related risk assessments and adaptation plans, and the second duty could benefit further from additional insights into learning outcomes and best practice.

As with other Climate Change duties, there are myriad additional benefits in implementing this second duty beyond the lens of climate change, including in the realms of culture and heritage, town centre improvements, effective public service delivery and built environment industry and workforce development.

11. Do you have any other comments about the guidance provided in this chapter about complying with the third duty? Please give us your thoughts. For example, are there any gaps or are there ways that you think it could be improved.

With consideration to the existing built environment, the BEFS network believes more should be done to maintain, retain and reuse the built assets in existing public sector portfolios. The Vacant and Derelict Land Taskforce, led by the Scottish Land Commission and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, have highlighted that one third of all vacant and derelict land and buildings are in public ownership.

In their [2020 recommendations report](#), the Task Force called for reform to current approaches to public sector asset disposal, and for public bodies to take a more proactive approach to estate management in general, among other actions. Supporting further implementation of Task Force recommendations through Climate Change duty guidance, specific to increasing productive reuse of vacant and derelict public-owned buildings, could add further practical weight to the third duty, and to the general principle of public bodies acting in a more sustainable way.

BEFS would also draw attention to the underplayed potential in the built environment towards sustainable circular economies. Adapting, repurposing and reusing buildings contributes to Net Zero targets by making full productive use of their embodied carbon. It supports cross-policy alignment and progress across climate change, economic development, procurement, spatial planning and other key policy agendas linked to sustainable places. In addition, there is scope to improve reuse of building materials, where demolition is unavoidable, and new initiatives such as the [UK Net Zero Carbon Building Standard](#) are encouraging developers to consider the full life-cycle of buildings, including end of life disposal, in construction decision-making.

Moving to a circular economy in the built environment requires investment, skills training and a culture change in approaches to public procurement. It requires deep-rooted and long-term action plans in the supply chains for retrofit, repair, maintenance, construction and more. The guidance could usefully make additional reference to relevant frameworks, standards and case studies to encourage public bodies to explore how they could do more to align their built assets into circular economy processes.

BEFS contributions to the Scottish Parliament's Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee's second annual review of the [Fourth National Planning Framework 4](#) indicates there are some thematic tensions in the planning system with regard to how to act in the most sustainable way. BEFS Members reported that protecting historic assets, biodiversity, local living and rural development are areas in which planning hierarchies are unclear, and which are creating practical problems for building adaptation and refurbishment plans. This may be an area of investigation relevant to the third duty.

A final point is related to the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in March 2025. The proposed Bill obliges many public bodies to produce national or regional Community Wealth Building action plans. There is scope to align these obligations with the third duty, given the parallels between the aspirations to develop more sustainable public sector working practices in pursuit of more sustainable local economies. The prospective actions to enhance local supply chains and skills capacity in the built environment present a key shared objective for the wider aspirations in Climate Change Duties and Community Wealth Building.

13. Do you think that any other categories of scope 3 emissions should be included in the recommended baseline for reporting, where these are relevant and applicable. Please indicate which other categories of scope 3 emissions you think should be included, and provide an explanation.

- Purchased goods, works and services
- Capital assets
- Use of sold products
- Processing of sold products
- End-of-life treatment of sold products
- Downstream leased assets
- Investments

BEFS has previously advocated for appropriate reuse of materials in the Scottish construction and built heritage sectors to repair and maintain Scotland's existing and historic building stock in a way that aligns with our Net Zero goals. In our response to the consultation on [Scotland's draft Circular Economy and Waste Route Map to 2030](#) BEFS stated that:

“we consider regional hubs and networks supporting reuse of construction materials and assets as a potentially positive step towards ensuring that local – and suitable – materials can be recycled where possible. Whilst BEFS would promote maintenance, retention, and reuse of buildings primarily, there are also mechanisms which help to promote circularity of building materials. Material Passport schemes are being considered in various countries”.

BEFS would like to see the above categories included in the reporting baseline for selected scope 3 emissions. Reporting on purchased goods, works and services, and capital assets, could increase national accountability on how capital assets are managed by the largest and most influential estates in Scotland. Reporting on the use, processing, end-of-life treatment of sold products, and investments, could work to promote regional, national, and international partnerships that align with Scotland's Net Zero goals.

Including the listed categories for scope 3 emissions reporting would mean that [investing in a circular economy](#) would be a natural positive consequence. BEFS has advocated for incentivising a culture change here, and it is reasonable to expect that public bodies will be a leading partner in driving maintenance, retention, reuse and repurposing of assets and materials.

Public bodies can, and should, be key actors and collaborators in community wealth building and towards Net Zero goals. Expanding the scope of reporting can be an important way of mainstreaming this work.

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

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

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise? **YES**

I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy. **I CONSENT**