

BEFS | BUILT ENVIRONMENT
FORUM SCOTLAND

Advocacy Toolkit

Championing
Scotland's Built
Environment



Built Environment Forum Scotland | Scottish Charity No. SC 034488 | Company No. 250970

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Who is BEFS?

Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS) is Scotland's strategic intermediary membership organisation for the built environment. BEFS unites practitioners, campaigners, community groups, and organisations that care for and promote Scotland's built environment for people to use, appreciate and enjoy. We support practitioners in addressing strategic sector issues, provide advocacy support, facilitate knowledge sharing, and build capacity to ensure Scotland's built environment thrives.

What Is the Built Environment?

Scotland's built environment is the physical evidence of human activity: historic and contemporary buildings, landscapes, monuments, towns, streetscapes, and infrastructure. It shapes communities and connects us to traditions, stories, and aspirations.

Value of the Built Environment

- **Economic Driver:** £6 billion annual economic impact. Heritage attractions received 16 million visits, supporting 81,000 FTE jobs. (SHEA 2024)
- **Tourism Magnet:** 68% of Edinburgh visitors come for heritage, generating £1.16 billion annually. (EWH 2016) 16 million people visited heritage sites in 2022 (SHEA 2024)
- **Social Capital:** 86% report wellbeing benefits (OPOF 2023); 17,100+ volunteers contribute 121,000 days annually. (Volunteering & Historic Environment 2016)
- **Climate Action:** £1.93 billion spent in 2023 on historic building maintenance (SHEA 2024); £6.6 billion needed for low-carbon conversion. (OPOF 2023)

Why Advocacy Is Vital

Scotland's built environment faces unprecedented threats:

- **Budget Cuts:** Historic Environment Scotland's budget projected to decrease from £63 million (2023-2024) to £48 million (2026-2027)
- **Local Authority Pressures:** £54.9 million cut to core capital budget for local authorities in 2024/2025
- **Asset Condition:** 49% of dwellings in disrepair; 32% of pre-1919 buildings need urgent repairs
- **Climate Impacts:** Many buildings unprepared for climate change despite representing significant embodied carbon.

Without active advocacy, we risk losing irreplaceable built heritage and the jobs, skills, and economic benefits they provide to Scotland's communities.

Who Can Advocate?

Anyone who values heritage: professionals, volunteers, community leaders, educators, activists, residents. Specialist expertise is not required; passion and commitment are key.

Whether you're a busy director, enthusiastic heritage worker, community volunteer, or member of the public who uses Scotland's buildings and historic sites, you have something valuable to contribute.

How This Toolkit Works

BEFS toolkit enables anyone to advocate through multiple approaches:

- **Direct Political Engagement:** Writing to and meeting elected representatives
- **Digital Advocacy:** Social media campaigns, video content, online organising
- **Community Mobilisation:** Grassroots organising and coalition building
- **Media Communications:** Press campaigns and public awareness
- **Evidence Building:** Data collection and impact measurement

All guidance is accessible for complete beginners to experienced campaigners.

Getting Started

Four Simple Steps:

1. **Learn the landscape:** Identify local heritage issues and relevant decision-makers.
2. **Build your story:** Use toolkit statistics and real local examples.
3. **Map allies:** Find potential collaborators and coalition partners.
4. **Start small:** Begin with one letter, post, or conversation.

Finding and Engaging Elected Representatives

Use Write to Them to locate your representatives:

- **Councillors (typically 3-4)** - influence local planning, budgets, and services
- **MSPs (8 total)** - 1 constituency MSP and 7 regional MSPs who shape national policy
- **MP (1)** - represents your area in UK Parliament

Research their interests, committee roles, and previous positions on heritage issues. Always be courteous and professional. Politicians have many demands on their time but depend on constituents to inform them about local priorities.

Writing to Politicians

Key Principles:

- Be clear, concise, and locally relevant
- Use evidence from this toolkit and your own community stories
- Include specific requests for action
- Always provide your postcode (essential for MP letters) and contact details
- Follow up if no response within 2-3 weeks

For Organisations:

- Describe mission and quantify local impact
- Explain funding sources and challenges
- Share success stories demonstrating community benefit
- Research politician's interests to tailor examples

For Individuals:

- Explain personal connection to the issue
- Provide specific local examples
- Connect to broader community concerns
- Suggest concrete actions they could take

Following Up and Measuring Impact

Track Your Advocacy:

- Record contacts, responses, and commitments
- Document policy changes and funding outcomes
- Share positive results with BEFS and on social media

Measure Success Through:

- **Qualitative indicators:** Stories, testimonials, relationships built
- **Quantitative measures:** Policy changes, funding secured, media coverage
- **Long-term impact:** Buildings saved, projects completed, skills developed

Does Advocacy Work?

Yes - and the evidence proves it. Coordinated community advocacy has transformed Scotland's built environment landscape, securing millions in funding, changing policy, and saving irreplaceable heritage assets. Here are verified success stories that demonstrate advocacy's power.

Major Funding Wins

Rothesay Pavilion Project

- **Challenge:** Grade A-listed 1930s Art Deco pavilion facing closure after years of deterioration
- **Advocacy Action:** Multi-year community campaign highlighting architectural significance and economic potential, including parliamentary lobbying events with 145 attendees
- **Result:** **£14 million** total project funding secured from multiple sources including Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Environment Scotland, European Regional Development Fund, and Scottish Government
- **Impact:** Building being transformed into cultural hub expected to employ 30+ people and attract 70,000+ annual visits

Perth City Heritage Fund

- **Challenge:** Historic city centre requiring regeneration investment to address building deterioration
- **Advocacy Action:** Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust coordinated sustained advocacy for heritage-led regeneration funding
- **Result:** **£1.85 million** in grants committed (2012-2022), contributing to over **£7.7 million** total investment in repairs
- **Impact:** 78 grants supporting high-quality repairs to historic buildings, bringing empty shops back into use, and revitalising city centre

Policy Innovation & Climate Action

Cowal Churches Energy Project

- **Challenge:** Six remote church buildings struggling with energy costs while respecting heritage constraints
- **Advocacy Action:** Church of Scotland framed energy efficiency as heritage preservation, securing funding from Augusta Lamont Fund and multiple sources
- **Result:** *Second place* winner in prestigious European Roman Juriga Award 2018 for environmental action
- **Impact:** Successfully installed Air Source Heat Pump technology in historic churches, creating replicable model across Scotland for heritage energy efficiency

Landscape-Scale Conservation Success

Inner Forth Landscape Initiative

- **Challenge:** 202 km² landscape requiring coordinated heritage conservation across multiple local authority boundaries
- **Advocacy Action:** Eight-organisation partnership secured Heritage Lottery Fund support through collaborative advocacy
- **Result:** *Nearly £4 million* funding (2014-2018) for 54 interconnected projects
- **Impact:** Four historic buildings consolidated, 500+ people trained in heritage skills, 100+ guided heritage walks delivered, landscape-scale climate resilience now continuing through Climate FORTH project (£1.6 million)

National Programme Success

Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS)

- **Challenge:** Scotland's conservation areas facing decline and deterioration
- **Advocacy Action:** Coordinated sector advocacy led to establishment and continuation of national heritage-led regeneration programme
- **Result:** *£48 million awarded* to 69 schemes across Scotland since 2007
- **Impact:** 1,206 historic buildings repaired, 44,000 m² of vacant floorspace brought back into use, *£120 million additional investment leveraged*

Recent CARS Successes:

- **Fraserburgh 2021:** Won 'Most Improved Place in Scotland' and RTPI Scotland Planning Excellence Award
- **Forres Conservation and Heritage Scheme:** *£1.8 million* secured (2025) for heritage-led town centre revitalisation
- **Stirling CARS:** *£3.1 million* programme running until 2027



What Makes Advocacy Successful?

Evidence from these verified cases shows:

1. **Clear Value Proposition:** Using concrete economic data (£6 billion heritage economy, job creation potential)
2. **Multi-Partner Coalitions:** Bringing together councils, heritage organisations, communities, and businesses
3. **Persistent Professional Engagement:** Maintaining contact with decision-makers over multiple years
4. **Strategic Timing:** Aligning campaigns with policy priorities (climate action, economic recovery, tourism)
5. **Evidence-Based Cases:** Detailed proposals with realistic budgets and timelines
6. **Community Leadership:** Local voices driving campaigns with professional support
7. **Cross-Sector Benefits:** Demonstrating heritage's contribution to economy, climate, and wellbeing goals

The Multiplier Effect

Each successful campaign creates momentum for others. Rothesay Pavilion's breakthrough helped justify Perth's continued funding. Cowal Churches' innovation influenced national energy policy for historic buildings. CARS programme success led to Heritage & Place Programme expansion. These victories prove that heritage advocacy transforms how Scotland values and invests in its built environment.

Your advocacy matters. These campaigns started with individuals and small groups who refused to accept heritage loss as inevitable. Every letter written, meeting attended, and social media post shared contributes to this growing movement of documented success.

Digital Advocacy: Video, Social Media & Beyond

Why Digital Advocacy Matters

Digital platforms are essential for modern advocacy. They reach diverse audiences, build momentum, and connect advocates with decision-makers where they spend time. Video content receives 48% higher engagement than text and images.

Platform Strategies

Instagram

- **Reels (15-90 seconds):** Heritage site showcases, restoration before/after, advocacy messages
- **Stories:** Event updates, behind-the-scenes content, polls
- **Best for:** Visual storytelling, younger audiences, local community engagement

Tiktok

- **Short videos (15-60 seconds):** Quick heritage explanations, dramatic transformations, trending sounds
- **Hashtags:** #HeritageAdvocacy #MyScottishHeritage for viral potential
- **Best for:** Reaching younger audiences, creative storytelling

YouTube

- **YouTube Shorts:** Quick virtual tours, heritage facts, campaign spotlights
- **Longer content:** Detailed explanations, politician interviews, virtual events
- **Best for:** In-depth content, professional presentation

LinkedIn

- **Professional videos:** Sector insights, policy discussions, campaign updates
- **Best for:** Reaching decision-makers, B2B advocacy, thought leadership

X/Twitter

- **Quick videos:** Real-time updates, news sharing, policy discussions
- **Spaces:** Live audio conversations about heritage issues
- **Best for:** Political discourse, direct politician engagement

Facebook

- **Video posts and live streaming:** Event coverage, community discussions
- **Best for:** Older demographics, community groups, local issues

Video Content Ideas

Quick Impact (15-60 seconds)

- Time-lapse building deterioration or restoration
- “Did you know?” heritage facts about local areas
- Before/after transformations
- Personal testimonials

Longer Form (1-5 minutes)

- Virtual tours of threatened buildings
- Community member interviews
- Planning process explanations
- Successful project case studies

User-Generated Content Campaigns

Campaign Ideas:

- **#MyScottishHeritage:** Share photos/videos of favourite historic buildings
- **#HeritageMemories:** Personal stories connected to heritage sites
- **#SaveOurBuildings:** Document threatened buildings across Scotland
- **#HeritageSkills:** Showcase traditional building crafts

Management Tips:

- Create clear guidelines and hashtag instructions
- Feature best submissions on official accounts
- Engage with all contributions
- Consider recognition for outstanding content

Crisis Communication

When heritage sites are suddenly threatened:

1. **Quick assessment:** Gather facts within 24 hours
2. **Stakeholder alert:** Notify network immediately
3. **Urgent content:** Create time-sensitive videos showing what's at risk
4. **Direct contact:** Reach out to relevant politicians immediately
5. **Media outreach:** Issue press releases and offer interviews



Event Engagement

Planning Political Events:

- Invite relevant officials well in advance (minimum 1 month)
- Match themes to politicians' interests and constituency priorities
- Offer photo opportunities and media coverage
- Provide briefing materials about your organisation

During Events:

- Designate hosts to welcome and guide politicians
- Prepare key messages and talking points
- Facilitate introductions with community members
- Document attendance and conversations

Follow-up:

- Send personalised thank-you notes within 48 hours
- Share photos and coverage on social media
- Include any commitments or next steps discussed
- Invite continued engagement

Sharing Successes

Social Media Amplification:

- Post results, photos, and testimonials
- Tag BEFS (@TheBEFS) and use #HeritageAdvocacy
- Tag supportive politicians
- Cross-post to local community groups

Documentation:

- Take high-quality photos and videos
- Collect participant quotes and testimonials
- Record concrete outcomes and commitments
- Create compelling impact narratives

Network Sharing:

- Submit updates to BEFS for bulletins and social media
- Share successful strategies with other advocates
- Present at conferences and sector meetings
- Write about your experience

Key Messages (2026 Edition)

Economic Impact

- £6 billion annual contribution to Scottish economy
- 81,000 jobs supported by heritage sector
- 16 million heritage site visits annually

Community Wellbeing

- 86% of people report wellbeing benefits from heritage engagement
- 17,100+ volunteers contribute 121,000 days annually worth £14.7 million
- Heritage connects communities to place and identity

Climate Action

- Historic buildings represent significant embodied carbon
- £6.6 billion needed for low-carbon heritage building conversion
- Traditional skills essential for sustainable retrofits

Regeneration Success

- Heritage-led regeneration creates lasting economic and social benefits
- Conservation Area schemes have leveraged £120 million additional investment
- Community advocacy saves buildings and transforms them into community assets

Facts & Figures (2025)

Indicator	Latest Data
Historic Environment Economic Impact	£6 billion/year (2023)
Heritage Site Visits	16 million/year (2022)
Jobs Supported	81,000 FTE (2024)
Volunteers Engaged	17,100+/year
Energy Efficiency Investment Needed	£6.6 billion for historic buildings
Dwellings in Disrepair	49% (2022)
Wellbeing Benefit	86% of population
Protected Heritage Sites	55,932 sites (2024)
Visitor Spending on Heritage Trips	£3.2 billion (2019)
Conservation Area Investment	£48m awarded, leveraging £120m additional
Traditional Dwellings (pre-1919)	18% of Scotland's building stock
Urgent Disrepair (pre-1919 dwellings)	32% (2022)
Homes Failed Energy Efficiency Standards	29% (2022)
Scheduled Monuments in Optimal Condition	90% (2023)
Total Scheduled Monuments	8,078

Case Studies & Model Campaigns

Successful Heritage Advocacy

Rothesay Pavilion Project

Challenge: Iconic 1930s Art Deco pavilion facing closure

Advocacy: Community campaign highlighting cultural and economic value

Outcome: Secured funding for restoration and transformation into cultural hub

Keys to Success: Local community leadership, clear economic case, persistent engagement

Perth City Heritage Fund

Challenge: Historic city centre needing regeneration investment

Advocacy: Coordinated campaign by local organisations and businesses

Outcome: Major funding secured for heritage-led regeneration

Keys to Success: Cross-sector coalition, evidence-based proposals, political engagement

Cowal Churches Energy Project

Challenge: Historic churches needing energy efficiency improvements

Advocacy: Community groups bridged heritage and climate concerns

Outcome: Support secured for sympathetic energy upgrades

Keys to Success: Innovative framing, community leadership, technical expertise

Inner Forth Landscape Initiative

Challenge: Landscape-scale conservation across multiple local authorities

Advocacy: Collaborative campaign across boundaries

Outcome: Significant conservation funding and policy support

Keys to Success: Partnership approach, shared vision, sustained engagement

Letter Templates

Template 1: Organisation Introduction

Subject: [Organisation Name] - Supporting Scotland's Built Environment in [Local Area]

Dear [Councillor/MSP/MP Name],

I am writing to introduce [Organisation Name] and our work promoting Scotland's built environment in [local area].

[Organisation Name] [brief description of activities and mission]. We directly benefit your constituents through [specific local benefits - employment, tourism, community activities, skills development].

Our impact includes [quantified benefits - visitors, volunteers, buildings maintained, people trained]. However, we face challenges including [specific issues - funding cuts, planning difficulties, maintenance costs].

This connects to your interests in [research their known interests]. I would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss how you might support the built environment in [area]. We would be delighted to invite you to [specific event/site visit].

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely, [Name and title] [Contact details including postcode]

Template 2: Individual Citizen Letter

Subject: Concerns About [Specific Building/Site] in [Your Area]

Dear [Councillor/MSP/MP Name],

I am writing as your constituent (postcode: [postcode]) to raise concerns about [specific heritage issue] in [location].

[Building/site] is important to our community because [explain significance].

I am concerned that [specific threat] will result in [specific consequences].

This matters because:

- [Economic impact on local area]
- [Social impact on community]
- [Cultural significance]

I urge you to [specific action requested]. I would be happy to arrange a site visit so you can see the issues firsthand. Many local residents share these concerns and would appreciate your support.

Thank you for considering this important local issue.

Yours sincerely, [Your name] [Your address including postcode] [Contact details]

Template 3: Event Invitation

Subject: Invitation to [Event Name] - [Date]

Dear [Councillor/MSP/MP Name],

I am writing to invite you to [event name] on [date] at [venue] in [location].

This event will [description] and is particularly relevant to your constituency because [local relevance]. We expect [key attendees]. This would be an excellent opportunity for you to [specific benefit].

There will be opportunities for photography and media coverage if helpful. Please confirm your attendance by [date].

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely, [Name and title] [Contact details]

Template 4: Thank You and Follow-up

Subject: Thank You for [Visiting/Supporting/Meeting]

Dear [Councillor/MSP/MP Name],

Thank you for [specific action]. Your [visit/support/engagement] was valuable because [specific impact].

Following our discussion, you mentioned [specific commitment]. We will [your follow-up action] and look forward to [next steps].

Please contact us if you need further information about our work or heritage issues in [area].

Yours sincerely, [Name and title] [Contact details]

Inclusive Advocacy Guidelines

Language and Communication

Use Simple Language

- Avoid jargon and explain technical terms clearly
- Place community needs and lived experience at the centre
- Ensure content is accessible to diverse educational backgrounds

Accessible Formats

- Provide content in multiple formats: large print, easy-read, audio
- Include translations where possible
- Use clear visual design with good contrast

Widening Participation

Identify Barriers

Common barriers include:

- Trust and confidence issues
- Physical accessibility challenges
- Communication and language barriers
- Time and financial constraints
- Lack of awareness about involvement opportunities

Provide Solutions

- Offer multiple participation methods (online, in-person, flexible timing)
- Create beginner-friendly entry points
- Provide childcare or transport assistance where possible
- Use diverse communication channels
- Partner with community organisations reaching different audiences

Event Planning

Before Events:

- Choose accessible venues with good transport links
- Provide clear accessibility information
- Offer hybrid participation options
- Consider family-friendly timing and childcare
- Share materials in multiple formats

During Events:

- Use clear signage and wayfinding
- Provide hearing loops and interpretation services
- Create welcoming, respectful environments
- Allow multiple contribution methods
- Document learning for improvement

Building Diverse Coalitions

Reach New Audiences

- Partner with schools, businesses, community centres, faith groups
- Value different perspectives on heritage and place
- Create leadership opportunities for people from different communities

Share Power

- Support community-led campaigns
- Provide resources without controlling outcomes
- Recognise diverse forms of expertise and contribution

Further Resources

Heritage and Advocacy

- [Heritage Alliance Advocacy Toolbox](#)
- [Museums and Galleries Scotland: Advocacy Guidance](#)
- [Historic Environment Scotland Case Studies](#)
- [BEFS Resources](#)

Digital Advocacy Tools

- Platform-specific content creation guides
- Video editing tools: CapCut, InShot, iMovie
- Scheduling tools: Hootsuite, Buffer, Later
- Accessibility tools: automatic captioning, alt-text guides

Heritage and Advocacy

- [Our Past, Our Future - Scotland's Historic Environment Strategy](#)
- [Scottish Historic Environment Audit \(SHEA\)](#)
- [Heritage Counts](#)

Inclusive Practice

- [Inclusive Events Toolkit](#)
- [Inclusive Engagement Resources](#)

Scotland's built environment shapes our communities, economy, and future. Advocacy ensures its survival and enhancement for everyone; now and for generations to come.

This toolkit is for everyone who cares about Scotland's places and stories. Whether taking first steps or building on experience, your voice matters and your actions create change.

Contact BEFS: info@befs.org.uk

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