



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA

Alison Turnbull

Director, External Relations and Partnerships
Longmore House
Salisbury Place
Edinburgh
EH9 1SH

18/09/2025

Dear Deputy Convenor,

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence at the Pre-budget scrutiny session of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee on 11th September 2025. During the session, there were a number of points on which that I had promised to provide follow up information for the Committee. Please find those points below, along with the additional information.

If you require any further information, or if we can provide any other help, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Turnbull

Director | External Relations and Partnerships

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs & Culture Committee pre-budget scrutiny 2026-27 – evidence session 11/09/2025 - follow up information

Topics

Mainstreaming culture through working with other public bodies, namely the NHS

Project working with NHS

HES has undertaken some work focusing on enhancing connectivity between heritage assets, working with Network Rail, Scottish Canals and local authorities to identify strategic partnerships that can deliver multiple place-based solutions. This includes accessibility and active travel routes to enable safe and easy movement between destinations, supporting healthier choices for travel, reducing carbon emissions and providing opportunities to access nature. This work focuses on the connections between travel hubs such as stations, heritage assets and town centres.

We are also working with NHS Scotland to identify collaborative opportunities to partner on operational requirements, reuse of vacant buildings and relationships with the wider community. This again aims to support healthy choices for travel and the reuse of heritage assets to contribute towards the wellbeing of local communities.

Social prescribing, Health and Wellbeing and Heritage

HES is represented in a nationwide Community of Practice on Heritage and Social Prescribing, convened by Historic England. This role enables HES to identify and share best practices, expand a network of valuable contacts, and deepen our understanding of relevant research in the field. This work will directly inform the development of a social prescribing pilot, currently planned for 2026.

In 2024, HES launched a self-referral programme of free Health Walks at Bothwell Castle, in partnership with Walking Scotland. Led by a trained HES staff member, the walks support less-active individuals in the local community by combining gentle physical activity with engaging local heritage interpretation, promoting both physical and mental wellbeing.

We are currently running a national campaign, '*Historic Place, Breathing Spaces*', encouraging people across the country to connect with heritage to boost their wellbeing and quality of life. It comes after a recent HES survey found 60% of people reported improved wellbeing because of visiting a HES site, and 74% of people felt a sense of connection to the sites after visiting.

HES is working with wellbeing organisations, influencers and communities across the country to encourage more people to visit heritage sites and discover the benefits it can bring for mental, physical and emotional health. '*Historic Places, Breathing Spaces*' is the latest action from HES to encourage community participation in heritage to help support wellbeing.

Performance of the new financial model

The new business model that Scottish Government (SG) and Historic Environment Scotland (HES) adopted in 2024/25 is currently in its first year of implementation. With this being the first full year of the new model, we have not had sufficient time to demonstrate the full range of benefits that we expect it to deliver over time. With that in mind, the new model does provide HES with clarity surrounding future baseline GIA budgets, which is enabling us to plan and prioritise more effectively and over a longer time frame.

The current economic and geopolitical climate, and the impact they have had on tourism through 2025/26 to date, has placed a pressure upon HES, as have additional staff costs, however it is worth noting that HES is still achieving record levels of commercial income, which it is able to utilise in the most appropriate fashion under the new business model. It should be noted that the aspiration of the new business model is not simply to offset the £2 million per annum cumulative reduction in GIA, it is to generate commercial surplus beyond that point that can be reinvested into the organisation.

For 2025/26, we set an ambitious net commercial income target of £74.9m, against which we are currently forecasting £71.9m; while this does represent an in-year shortfall against the target, it compares against a full year 2024/25 outturn of £65.8m and as such still represents a strong performance.

Rationale of budgeting for 2% increase in staff costs, when Scottish Government had already announced a 3% increase

For 2025/26, HES budgeted a 3% annual cost of living pay increase, in line with Scottish Government Pay Policy.

Detail on pay and grading process

As a public sector body, HES is committed to fair pay that is comparable with other Scottish public sector organisations.

The new framework was based on job evaluation outcomes and independent salary benchmarking, adjusting salaries where gaps existed and maintaining them where already comparable. 80% of the investment targeted the three lowest pay bands, with 9% allocated to senior roles.

The revised framework, endorsed by our three recognised trade unions, is fair and transparent. Following negotiations, all three trade unions recommended the framework for member acceptance. The investment, which was approved by the Scottish Government, is separate from upcoming cost of living pay deal negotiations.

How many sites which were open pre-pandemic are still to re-open?

We take safety very seriously. The High Level Masonry (HLM) programme was launched in April 2022 to inspect over 200 sites with masonry above 1.5 metres and was a proactive response to climate-driven deterioration and safety risks. To address site closures related to HLM issues, we initially prioritised 70 key sites for inspection and have now completed assessments at over 140 sites, including 68 of the 70 priority sites. Of the sites in our care, 95% have either partial or full access, with 64 out of the 70 priority HLM sites now reopened. Around half of the remaining 5% of sites that are closed are due to HLM related issues, with the rest shut for other reasons, including conservation work. The HLM inspection programme is progressing well and we expect it to complete by Easter 2026.

We are one of the first heritage bodies facing up to a challenge we will inevitably see impacting the historic environment more broadly.