

Briefing – 28 June 2023

The historic environment & the Agriculture Bill

Scotland's landscape has been shaped by people for over 9000 years. The legacy of human habitation and cultivation of the landscape surrounds us, with present day farmers and land managers acting as stewards of our heritage.

- Over 80% of Scotland's 8200 scheduled monuments are located on agricultural land.
- Across virtually every farm, a tapestry of mostly undesignated historic features, field boundaries, routeways, buildings, sites, and monuments visually tell the story of Scotland's past.
- The condition of many of these sites is deteriorating as a result of natural processes like erosion or scrub damage, or as a result of agricultural processes, like grazing or ploughing.

Although scheduled sites are protected from most forms of deliberate damage under the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, most of these heritage assets are not subject to any system that can provide monitoring, protection or management, with few, or no options for funding or support available through the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS).

The Agriculture Bill represents a vital opportunity to rectify this omission from AECS. **The Bill should lay the foundation for the replacement to AECS to enable the management of land or water in a way that maintains, restores or enhances the cultural and natural heritage of the landscape.**

A scheme that embeds a more holistic appreciation of landscape and heritage would be beneficial for farmers and communities, protect our historic environment, and further the delivery of environmental goals on biodiversity net gain and climate action.

Key points

- The majority of rural heritage is currently **unprotected**.
- Scotland is being **left behind** by other UK nations.
 - In England, 40% of scheduled monuments are under active management as a result of agri-environment schemes. In Scotland, it is less than 1%.
 - Both the Westminster *Agriculture Act* (2021) and *Agriculture (Wales) Bill* include cultural heritage on the face of the legislation as one of several areas which Ministers are empowered to fund through conditional payments to farmers.
- Inclusion would deliver **cross-cutting benefits for nature & culture**.

- There are many cross-cutting benefits from investment in heritage; for example, historic field boundaries are habitat assets which benefit biodiversity targets.
- Subsidy that funds other environment benefits can also benefit the historic environment, for example, grassland and peatland restoration can help restore conditions necessary for the preservation of buried archaeological remains.
- In order to identify opportunities for benefit, and build in measurement of outcomes, the historic environment would need to be considered as part of proposed Whole Farm Plans.
- **Improve knowledge of the historic environment**
 - Including the historic environment in Whole Farm Plans would provide a mechanism to inform farmers about the assets on their land, identify opportunities for conservation or public benefit, and obtain data to help in the monitoring of the condition of assets, and improve the quality of data held in historic environment records.
- **Historic environment options are good for farmers**
 - Providing remuneration for good stewardship would help to reward farmers for sustainable management choices, like choosing appropriate cultivation methods for sensitive sites.
 - In other parts of the UK, schemes provide popular options that enable the maintenance or re-use of traditional farm buildings, which can have economic benefits.
- **Historic environment options are good for communities**
 - Agri-environment scheme funding can provide opportunities to engage communities in activities and help to support traditional craft skills like dry stone walling,
 - Providing remuneration to farmers who work to improve access to heritage assets also helps to build more positive outcomes relating to Outdoor Access Code responsibilities.
- Inclusion of the historic environment will **help the Government meet its commitment to alignment with the ten European Union agricultural objectives**, which include the preservation of landscapes.

What could be achieved?

There are many ways that public benefits resulting from the integration of the historic environment into the future agriculture support framework, some of which would cost very little.

The inclusion of heritage in Whole Farm Plans alone would enable farmers to map historic features and heritage assets on their land. Light touch reporting requirements (eg to provide photographs of historic features) could improve Historic Environment Records and create a new resource condition monitoring.

Funding options could be levered to ensure the protection of field boundaries, maintain heritage assets in favourable condition, or increase access to and interpretation of sites. Larger capital investment could target the re-use of historic building as economic assets, or heritage-led business opportunities.

All these options rest on the scoping for agricultural support that will be set out in the new Agriculture Bill.

Our asks:

1. Include a reference to the historic environment on the face of the Agriculture Bill, following the example of the Agriculture (Wales) Bill and Westminster Agriculture Act.
2. Begin discussions with Historic Environment Scotland and relevant sector bodies to scope opportunities to develop appropriate inclusion of the historic environment as part of Scotland's new approach to the future agriculture support framework.