



Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

21 February 2022

Mr Neil Gray MSP
Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

Dear Mr Gray

I am writing on behalf of the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland to congratulate you on your appointment as Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development. This will mean that you are responsible for the historic built environment, the protection and understanding of which is the chief object of our Society. We have been pleased to work with your predecessors and look forward to working with you.

The current matter that we should like to ask you and your departmental staff about concerns the responsibility and oversight you have for the work of Historic Environment Scotland (HES). We are very worried about the apparent direction of travel in relation to HES's approach to Properties in Care, the large number of properties currently closed to visitors, and the headlines about "Crumbling old ruins could be left to 'die gracefully'" (the Times, 31 January 2022).

Could we ask you if the Scottish Government has given direction to HES to spend less on the actual physical conservation of the assets it cares for on behalf of Scottish Ministers? We are concerned by this statement from the HES Asset Management Plan which gives an indication of the change in emphasis:

'Our asset management objective is to deliver economic, social, and environmental benefits to the people of Scotland, without compromising the cultural significance of the assets.'

We would suggest that the last part of the statement is open to wide interpretation regarding the actual physical conservation of the assets in its care. Financially, this seems to be the case. Of an annual budget of £90-100 million per year, only £5 million is allocated to conservation. While the combined investment for sites was projected to increase over the years from HES's creation, from £11.5 million to £13.3 million in 2021/22, the conservation sum remained constant at £5 million. This concerns us greatly. The annual allocation of £14.5m for grants is also being eroded by HES who now deduct an administration charge. We know Covid-19 has affected HES's income but as the country emerges from the pandemic we would welcome a re-examination of the basis of HES's maintenance programme for Properties in Care and a consultation as to how this will be done in the future.

AHSS National Office | 15 Rutland Square, Edinburgh EH1 2BE
0131 557 0019 | nationaloffice@ahss.org.uk |
www.ahss.org.uk



Speaking for Scotland's Buildings

We would like to suggest that a review of HES's budget is required to ring-fence funds for physical conservation work, which would not be for visitor facility improvements; that more Scottish Government funding be allocated to re-open closed properties as soon as any remedial work has been carried out; and that community consultation is required in relation to which assets are left to 'die gracefully'.

We do understand the arguments put forward about climate change and the natural decay of buildings that are unroofed or ruinous. However, we would urge the Scottish Government to recognise the unique importance these buildings have both to the national character of Scotland and to the tourist industry and all the economic benefits that arise from that.

Thank you for your help with this and we look forward to working together in the future.

Yours sincerely



Martin Robertson
Chairman