

AHF Scotland Programmes 2019-24 Evaluation Report

*"It's hitting all of those targets.
For a relatively small amount of funding, AHF are delivering a huge amount."*



*"It's small amounts of money very carefully targeted
... out of that grows all this really big scale impact."*

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Figure 1 – A Cat. C listed derelict house, in a top 20% decile SIMD data area, on the Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland, now restored to use as a family home by Heritage BPT in Stevenston. AHF supported the project with a viability grant in 2022 to help to establish the costs involved.

Facts and Figures – The Last Five Years

644 Project Enquiries Received	332 Grant Applications Received & Assessed	£3.6M Grant Funding Requested	£2.4M Grant Funding Offered	£5.8M Total funding directly leveraged by AHF investment (leverage of 240%)
262 Grant Offers Made	201 Different Projects Supported	193 Different Organisations supported	30 Out of 32 Local Authority Areas were funded	15 Football fields worth of vacant space will come back into use thanks to these projects (90,000 m2)
		AHF Scotland Alba		
68% Projects in top 30% SIMD / Assisted Areas	54% Grants to Organisations New to Heritage	funded by HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA WILLIAM GRANT FOUNDATION	69% Projects with Cat. A or Cat B listed buildings	35% Projects on Buildings at Risk Register
698 Activities or services are or will be delivered from historic buildings supported	497 Opportunities for skills development & employment in supported projects	137 Organisations are enabled to adopt climate change response measures	130 Organisations in deprived areas supported in developing regeneration projects	125 Organisations helped to gain control of historic building assets
64% Projects in towns or cities	36% Projects in rural or island communities	2019 - 2024	15 Loan offers made	£3M Of loan offers to Scottish projects

Executive Summary

The Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF) provides grants, loans and other non-financial elements of support for sustainable community-led heritage regeneration projects in Scotland. This work is made possible thanks to funding from Historic Environment Scotland (HES), the William Grant Foundation, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

During the spring and summer of 2024, we appointed RF Associates to assess our grants and loan programmes in Scotland during the five-year period from April 2019 to March 2024. This report summarises the findings of this evaluation, along with data collected via our 2020-2023 Evaluation Framework (underlying data is available upon request¹). This evaluation indicates **sector stakeholders and project beneficiaries believe if AHF support did not exist, less regeneration activity would be happening in Scotland, and many more important buildings would remain disused or be lost entirely.**

Impact and Reach

The AHF is considered “*small but mighty*”; despite having only two dedicated staff members in Scotland, its work reaches across the country supporting heritage-led regeneration projects - many of which have varied end uses creating real economic impact. Between April 2019 and March 2024, we offered £2.4M of grant funding across all parts of Scotland, to a total of 193 different non-profit organisations, supporting 201 different built heritage regeneration projects, and made loan offers totaling more than £3M to 15 organisations. Our funding directly leveraged over 240% of further external funds totalling £5.8M.

Exceeding Delivery Targets

We exceeded all ten HES delivery targets in 2023/24, delivering impact in relation to the three key themes of *Heritage and Society*, *Heritage and Environment*, and *Heritage and Economy*. During this period 54% of grant offers were to ‘new’ organisations who had not previously applied to the AHF. Around one-third (35%) of projects are on the Scottish Buildings at Risk Register. Just over two-thirds (68%) of projects are in areas of deprivation (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 30%/UK Assisted Area Status).

Increasing Demand, Limited Budgets

Demand for community-led heritage regeneration support in Scotland is high compared to other parts of the UK, outstripping the available funds that we can provide. Demand for AHF support, and the costs of the type of work projects need is increasing, while core grant budgets have remained static over the five-year period, and the value of individual grants has gone down in real terms.



Figure 2 - Isle of Kerrera School – now a community hub – AHF supported with 2 development grants in 2020-21.

¹ [Full Report Data Link](#)

Stakeholders and beneficiaries alike state that AHF provides important early-stage funding that can be difficult to achieve otherwise; acting as a catalyst, enabling projects to develop and leverage further funding.

Responsive and Targeted

Both stakeholders and beneficiaries noted our role in preventing organisational crisis; our grants and loans being sometimes used to help bridge financial gaps. Both described the AHF as an approachable and supportive funder and that it is flexible and understanding to changing circumstances and the limited capacity of small organisations.

Beneficiaries reported increased confidence to move forward with projects, especially for those who may have enthusiasm but lack specific knowledge about how to develop projects involving regenerating heritage assets.

Long-term Partnerships

Stakeholders saw the involvement of the AHF in projects acting as a reassurance or 'seal of approval' for larger funders. They saw us playing an important role in building a pipeline of projects across Scotland, which other funders can then respond to. It must be noted that given our involvement at the earliest stages, the longer-term impact of projects was difficult to attribute solely to us.

Stakeholders positively perceived our often long-term commitment to communities and organisations, providing ongoing support, advice, and additional grant/loan funding, helping projects remain to viable and resilient during challenges.

Sector-wide Impact

Stakeholders reported that the AHF helped promote partnerships within the heritage and regeneration sector. In this way we help to provide more resources for community-led heritage regeneration. Stakeholders considered the AHF to have a key role to play going forward in delivering the new Scottish Historic Environment Strategy: *Our Past, Our Future*, and that we play a significant role in the sector in addition to our role at individual project level.



Figure 3 - Above Adventure, Kilmarnock – Cat. B listed former church turned accessible climbing centre, in a top 20% SIMD area. AHF supported this with three grants and two loans, between 2015 and 2020, to help develop and deliver the project.

Scotland Programmes Analysis

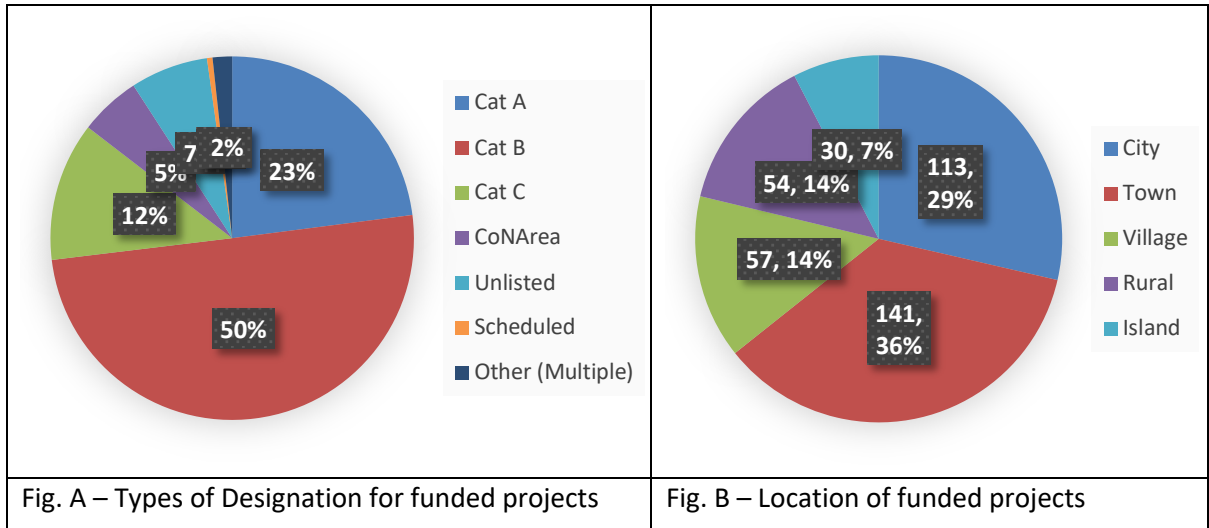


Figure 4 – Cat. B listed Former East Church Inverness, located in one of the top 10% most deprived deciles in Scotland, now the new home of Cultarlann Inbhir Nis Gaelic Language centre. AHF supported with multiple viability & development grants.

Our priority is to support communities to help them find sustainable new uses for the historic buildings that matter to them. This comprises early-stage grants, including Project Viability and Project Development Grants, social investment in the form of loans, and advice at all stages in the project lifecycle of community-led heritage regeneration projects. AHF grants are designed to help with early-stage costs as groups explore the feasibility of re-using redundant historic buildings and undertake project development work, in readiness for a capital project. AHF loans help organisations to purchase buildings, undertake capital works, and/or provide cashflow as organisations launch their operational business.

The review by RF Associates aimed to independently assess our programme delivery, measure successes, and identify improvements for future initiatives. Although the long-term impact of our grants and advice often unfolds over years, the evaluation focused on understanding both the immediate effects of these interventions and their role in the broader Scottish heritage ecosystem of community ownership, regeneration, and the sustainable reuse of historic buildings.

In the last five years, over 70% of grants were provided to support buildings that are either Category A or B listed (Fig. A). Support also extended to buildings of lesser architectural significance but of high historic and social values for the local community. Support reached communities across Scotland; roughly a third each in cities and towns, and the final third in rural, village or island locations (Fig. B). Nearly two-thirds of projects were located in areas of recognised deprivation.



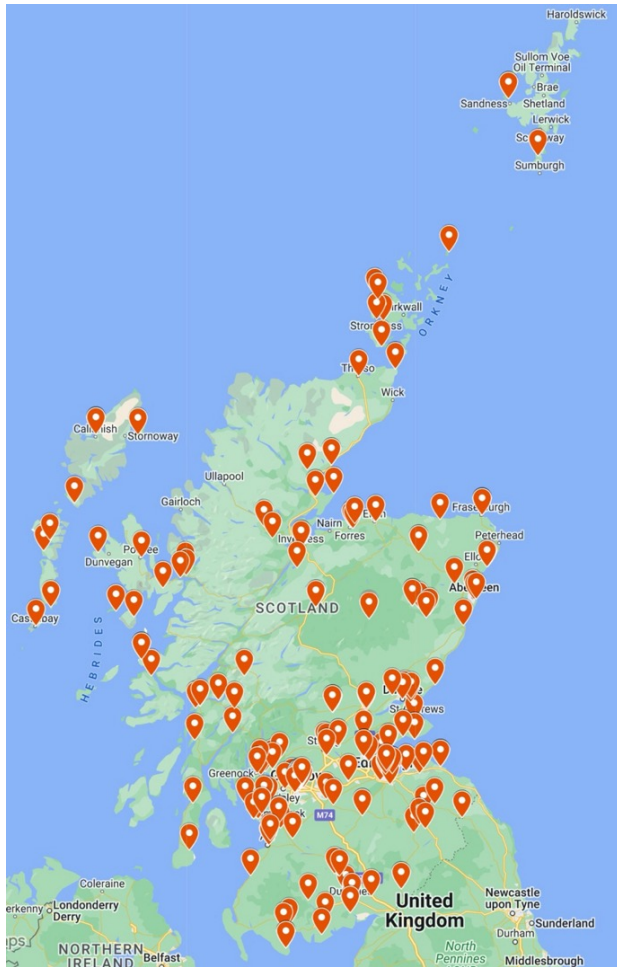
70% of projects involve asset transfers of historic buildings. A typical AHF-funded project involves more than three different end uses; plans to develop over 1,000 square metres of new useable space; and is anticipated to generate seven new FTE jobs. Proposed new uses range from affordable housing, community and creative workspaces, to local archive storage and wellbeing centres.

A catalyst for community-led heritage regeneration

Our role was described by both stakeholders and beneficiaries as a catalyst for enabling community-led projects to develop their plans and leverage funding for projects. They believe we have a key impact in the way we provide advice and promote partnerships, and they perceive we are helping to provide more resources for community-led heritage regeneration.



Figure 5 - John O'Groats Mill - currently onsite after multiple years of AHF support to develop the project.



Map 1- Location of AHF supported projects across Scotland 2019-2024

The AHF’s annual grants budget in Scotland has remained roughly static for the last five years (with the exception of an additional one-off grant of Covid emergency funding in 2020/21). The 2024/25 grants budget is £425,000 (made up of £325,000 from HES and £100,000 from the William Grant Foundation). The 2019/20 budget was £400,000; growth in line with inflation would have put the 2024/25 budget at approximately £500,000. Equivalent funding from other UK nation funder partners has increased over time – notably in Wales, where for the first time the budget exceeds the Scottish equivalent. AHF funding over the period has enabled grant beneficiaries to directly leverage more than 210% of additional monies. Scotland, with just 8% of the UK population, was responsible for around 27% of all applications to AHF UK-wide in the last five years.

However, over the five-year period, the AHF was able to meet just under 61% of the total financial ‘ask’. Demand dropped dramatically immediately post-pandemic but has now almost regained the pre-Covid level high (as shown by blue line - Fig. C). The proportion of new clients – groups who had not previously engaged with a heritage asset regeneration project – increased annually; new clients are now in receipt of over 54% of offers. The current growth in enquiries, applications and offers means the gap between demand for funds and what our grants budget can meet is widening (as shown fig. D). With the additional factors of rising costs and inflation this means there is a risk that grants are becoming less impactful over time, which is something the AHF is giving careful consideration to going forward. Even among projects we did fund, we were only able to afford to offer 80% of what was requested overall.

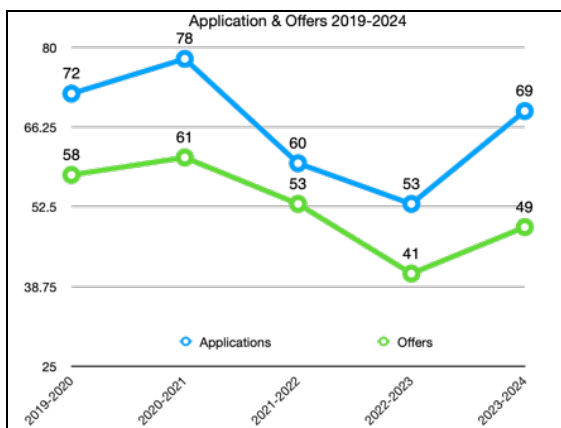


Fig. C – Number of applications and offers

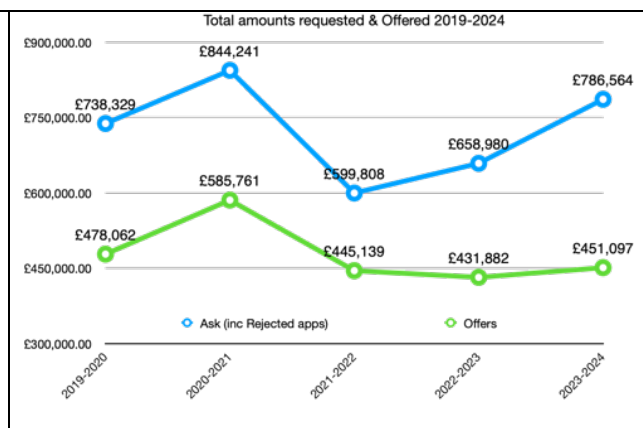


Fig. D – Amount requested and amount offered

Key Findings from Advice, Grant & Loan Beneficiaries

“Without the [AHF support] it is difficult to see how [we] could have reached this stage... Their support, help and advice ... has assisted us to meet deadlines and overcome ... to transfer the site to our ownership, prepare for its future regeneration ... AHF's involvement with our project has been exemplary” (Beneficiary 1)



Figure 6 - The AHF Scotland and Investment Teams visit the West Boathouse, Glasgow – supported with several development grants and a loan helping with the capital project cash flow.

Beneficiaries talked about being more confident in their ability to lead and sustain their projects thanks to the comprehensive support provided by us, which included financial assistance, expert advice, capacity building, and enhancing their credibility with other funders. The AHF support helped beneficiaries unlock larger grants by assisting with project viability and development work like surveys, feasibility studies and business plans. This was seen as critical in the context of growth in community-led projects since the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

For some beneficiaries, we provided critical financial lifelines during crises caused by delayed payments from other funders, including with loans. Some beneficiaries reported that the AHF contributes to economic regeneration by enabling job opportunities and volunteering roles through their funding and advice. Groups provided examples of the way in which our support at early stages (and at other times via loans) is helping develop buildings which will result in providing critical social infrastructure.

The AHF, along with other funders and organisations involved in delivery, plays a critical part in achieving economic and civic regeneration. It was perceived that the associated benefits of transforming derelict buildings into functional spaces has helped to boost local economies.

Analysis of responses from Viability Grant, Development Grant and Loan beneficiaries revealed that each group highlighted different aspects of the support that were particularly beneficial for their projects:

Grant beneficiaries

Alongside the financial assistance, the advice and guidance at this stage provided by the AHF team was considered invaluable; this included help with application processes, strategic planning and navigating challenges. The funding not only helped assess project viability but also boosted organisational confidence. Our early support is seen as crucial in attracting match funding from other sources. Funding support for essential personnel, such as project officers, was considered vital since many projects depend heavily on volunteers. Support from us facilitated greater community involvement, helping to foster a sense of ownership among local stakeholders and contributing to stronger community development.

Loan beneficiaries

The loan beneficiaries interviewed emphasised that loans were crucial for maintaining project momentum during financial difficulties, enabling them to leverage additional resources, improve governance, build teams, and secure further investments. The familiarity and understanding our team has shown towards their specific situations has made us a trusted partner in navigating these financial challenges.

All types of beneficiaries praised the AHF for being approachable and supportive, and transparent. Beneficiaries attributed this to the fact that our team is small and therefore personable in a way that larger funders were less so. They value the understanding we demonstrate regarding their organisational capacity. Some beneficiaries value the local Scottish perspective and specialist knowledge that our local team brings to their projects.

We are considered easy to communicate with, friendly and efficient; nimble and responsive in comparison to larger funders which beneficiaries perceived to have at times opaque funding application processes. Projects also reported that we helped them resolve issues promptly, and they valued the ongoing and flexible support provided throughout project delays or challenges. We are seen as understanding of the delays and challenges faced during project development and delivery.

“I would say very, very high impact. It's small amounts of money, in the big picture because these projects always cost so much, but it's small amounts of money very carefully targeted at points when we certainly would really have struggled to move things forward, but then out of that grows all this really big scale impact.” (Beneficiary 3)

“... you're bringing a building back into productive use. You know, as I say, if we approached them for the mausoleum, they would have said, no, we can't fund that, ... but if it's changing a derelict book shop into a hotel, then that's right up their street, and there's about eight to ten staff employed [now] and it's boosting the economy of the town centre.” (Beneficiary 7)

Case Study 1: Old School, Thornhill

Thornhill, Dumfries & Galloway, Scotland - Old School Thornhill Trust - Category: C Listed



Figure 7 - Thornhill Old School before and after capital works.

Designed by architect Edward Dakers, this former school was built in 1909 and occupies a prominent position on the edge of Thornhill, a rural village north of Dumfries. Latterly the village primary school, the building closed in 2010 as schooling transferred to a modern building nearby. The vacant school was subject to vandalism and arson.

In 2016 local residents came together to form Old School Thornhill, which would go on to develop the building as a community asset with strong creative and entrepreneurial focus, with flexible spaces for events, co-working, wellbeing activities, as well as a dedicated space for high school students to manage and use for creative activities.

The AHF supported this project from an early stage, initially awarding a Project Viability Grant in 2017 towards business planning and community engagement, which led to a successful Scottish Land Fund application and in turn enabled the group to acquire the building. Subsequent Project Development Grants in 2019 and 2020 contributed towards staff costs and professional fees, helping the project to secure the majority of its capital fundraising costs. A further Project Development Grant was awarded in 2022 to help support a shortfall in design team costs in advance of the start on site.

The building, beautifully repaired to high conservation and environmental standards, opened in April 2024. Old School Thornhill is now a community hub offering a variety of services and activities, including a café, event spaces, and rooms for hire. It hosts educational workshops, social events, and local initiatives, providing a welcoming space for the community to connect, learn, and engage in cultural and recreational activities.

<https://www.oldschoolthornhill.com>

AHF Support

Project Viability Grant - £3,942 (2017)

Project Development Grants - £20,000 (2019), £15,000 (2020), £6,501 (2022)

Key Findings from Sector Stakeholders

This section covers findings from interviews with sector stakeholders. Stakeholders had varying levels of specific knowledge of the work of the AHF; some knew more about our work than others, but this generally aligned with how much engagement they had with us.

“At a sector level in Scotland as well, they're very effective with the resources they have, that is two members of staff funding available to them. They do, you know, they pack a punch.” (Stakeholder 6)



Figure 8 - Govanhill Baths, Glasgow. AHF has supported this project over the long term as it has been developed by its local community - with 11 different grant or loans since 2005.

Stakeholders talked about our funding and support as providing communities with increased confidence to move forward with projects, particularly in circumstances where groups lack specific knowledge about Listed properties. They see us as helping project initiators think through their project, develop possible ideas, and build their confidence over time to take the project forward. Larger funders noted that because of this they can direct projects to the AHF that they are unable to help because projects are at too-early a stage of development.

We are seen to enable projects to receive professional support which helps them to develop their skills and knowledge to lead and sustain projects. Stakeholders identified that as other funding in the sector has reduced over time, this aspect of our role has become more vital.

Stakeholders reported that our involvement in projects acts as a reassurance or ‘seal of approval’ for larger funders. They noted that we build a pipeline of projects across the sector, which other funders can then respond to. They commented that projects that AHF funds would struggle to achieve funding elsewhere, not because they are not worthwhile but because they have work to do to develop their project along with their capacity to deliver it. We are recognized as being distinctive in supporting projects that would appear too risky for other organisations. This also means that in

some cases we help project initiators decide that they do not have a viable project, which was also considered as an important outcome of support.

Stakeholders perceived that our often long-term commitment to communities helped projects remain viable and resilient during challenges. They discussed the importance of leveraging more resources as part of building financial resilience and perceived our loan offer as part of our distinctive offering, along with flexibility afforded in grant-making activity. We are considered visible across the sector to both funders and projects: attending events and raising the profile of the organisation, making connections as well as providing advice and financial support at a project level. There was a clear sense from stakeholders that the AHF 'punches above its weight'. Some noted that we have continued to expand and increase our impact despite the challenging economic context. Stakeholders considered us a highly supportive organisation, shepherding and supporting projects through various stages of development. Our staff team is recognised for the way we help make processes as simple as possible.

Stakeholders and beneficiaries alike considered the AHF to be a trusted partner, effective in supporting the sector in Scotland which are led by community organisations which may be largely staffed by volunteers.



Figure 9 - North East Scotland Preservation Trust highlighting new jobs & training opportunities created as part of the AHF-funded John Trail Bookshop project, located in a top 20% SIMD decile area of Fraserburgh.

"It's the kind of exploratory funding package ... catalyst funding, helping groups get going at the beginning and just ... seeing if they have a sensible project on their hands and seeing if it's viable. They really help a huge number of projects get off the ground when they wouldn't be able to access any other funding yet. ... it's really key in that there aren't really others funding that point." (Stakeholder 6)

"...All of the confidence, that kind of helping people frame their projects, all of that type of stuff ... there's something about the way that they're able to move communities forward on heritage projects that's quite unique ... There's something about just giving people bite sized chunks that they can kind of manage and take things forward. So capacity building." (Stakeholder 3)

"It is about demystifying the whole package of taking on a heritage asset from a community perspective, and I think they make it manageable and accessible and they're just both very approachable." (Stakeholder 3)

Case Study 2: Broadway Cinema, Prestwick

Prestwick, South Ayrshire, Scotland - Friends of the Broadway Prestwick - Category C Listed



Figure 10 -The Broadway, Prestwick – main façade and foyer interior on ownership handover day.

Dating back to 1935, the Broadway Cinema is a surviving example of Scotland's golden age of cinema. To this day, the Art Deco building retains some unusual and important features, including timber panelling in many areas, decorative stepped panelling to the auditorium, and a unique camel design on the air vents. The projection room also appears as a time capsule, with reels and equipment remaining in the same spot as when they were last used. The last film was shown in 1976, and after that the building was put to many uses, including a leisure centre, amusement arcade, and squash courts.

The local Friends group was set up to try to find a way to bring it back to meaningful use for the local community. The plans have developed to include a cinema, multi-purpose entertainment venue, and inclusive dementia-friendly space that will benefit the whole community.

The AHF has supported the group with a number of small grants to test and explore ideas of how best to use the building and enable them to make the case to the Scottish Land Fund to allow them to purchase it from the private owner. Two Historic Environment Scotland-supported Project Viability Grants were made in 2018 and 2021, as well as a William Grant Foundation Tailored Support Fund grant in 2023 towards emergency roof repairs.

The Broadway Cinema was successfully brought into community ownership in December 2023. Further, thanks to additional funding for a Project Development Officer, the next phase of planning and development can also begin, bringing the project to restore this iconic building one step closer to reality.

<https://www.friendsofthebroadwayprestwick.com>

AHF Support

Project Viability Grants - £4,721 (2018), £5,000 (2021)

Tailored Support Fund Project Development Grant - £5,000 (2023)

Project Development Grant - £12,375 (2024)

Counterfactual: What if AHF support wasn't available?

A key question asked of both sector stakeholders and project beneficiaries was whether projects would still have progressed if AHF support had not been available to them? What difference would it have made if the AHF was not able to provide the types of support that are currently available?

Stakeholders commented that if the AHF was not around, larger funders would have to spend more time on smaller projects, and that smaller projects themselves would be less able to navigate the heritage funding landscape. The result would be that smaller (and what are sometimes perceived as 'riskier') community instigated projects would be less likely to be developed and delivered.

"I would say if we didn't have the AHF, an awful lot of our smaller, more interesting, more quirky, more risky projects would simply not happen. ... we would lose out on the little churches or the bothies or the boathouses or all these kind of small little ones that are driven by community's love of a particular asset." (Stakeholder 2)

Beneficiaries considered that without the AHF's support the following consequences would likely occur:

- **Projects would not happen:** many successful projects would not happen, or would stall, for example, for example developing appropriate governance and achieving relevant consents.
- **Less community engagement:** there would be less engagement work with communities to shape project vision, with less input into determining viability.
- **Delays and increased difficulty in securing funding:** securing further funding for a project would be more challenging and time-consuming.
- **Risk of community groups over-extending:** community groups might take on more than they can handle potentially leading to difficulties.
- **Risk to more complex projects:** organisations such as the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust, which handle complicated building projects, would face significant difficulties in both early project development and cash flow funding during critical stages when other funders are often unable to provide support.
- **Buildings would remain unrestored:** more historic buildings would be neglected/left to deteriorate or remain unused.

"I would think that quite a few projects, successful projects that have ended up with a restored building brought back into use, wouldn't have happened without that early support. And I think there'd be a real risk that community groups would take on more than they can handle and, you know, potentially get into difficulty without the advice." (Beneficiary 7)

Lessons Learned & Recommendations

What can the AHF improve about the current programme offer?

“It's not a problem they can solve, but they obviously need more money.” (Beneficiary 7)

Beneficiaries expressed mixed feelings about the adequacy of the scale of grant funding received from the AHF, with several suggesting that the amounts available should be increased to reflect rising costs. There was consensus that increased funding would better address the rising costs associated with heritage projects and enable more comprehensive project development and completion.



Figure 11 - Former Royal High School, Inverness - now Inverness Creative Academy

Beneficiaries made a range of arguments for increasing grant amounts; these were largely associated with:

Rising cost of living / project costs: the increasing costs of projects pose significant challenges for projects. While our grants are recognised to be helpful, they are often not sufficient to cover all expenses for feasibility and viability work and represent a decreasing percentage of what is needed for project development. This is limiting scope to progress projects; it is also meaning elements of work are being postponed while groups search for additional funding elsewhere.

Complex project management: having fewer funders would help make project management less onerous and more efficient. Higher grant levels that reflect the importance of AHF's early-stage funding would allow for deeper involvement.

“I think that the input is so important that figures should reflect that, and allow them to be more involved in projects, even more involved than they already had, because I find that their experience and their input is the most valuable.” (Beneficiary 4)

“I think there's a point where because of the costs of everything have gone up so much, then maybe allocations perhaps need to be a little broader.” (Beneficiary 1)

Beneficiaries suggested other areas where AHF could consider improvements:

Simplify grants application process: for new applicants from volunteer led organisations, the application process could sometimes seem ‘fiddly’, simplifying this process further could help volunteer organisations who may not have experience with funding mechanisms.

Proactive outreach outside of heritage sector: The AHF could be more proactive in promoting itself outside of the heritage sector. It was suggested it may be beneficial if for us to engage more with building owners involved in conservation area regeneration schemes.

Greater visibility to general public: while our impact is felt to be significant, our contributions might not always be visible to the general public. Some beneficiaries suggested we should strengthen our efforts to communicate the role we play in supporting projects..

Our Past, Our Future

Looking forward, stakeholders considered that we have a key role to play in delivering the new Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland: *Our Past, Our Future*. Stakeholders identified the three OPOF priority areas - *Delivering the transition to net zero, Empowering resilient and inclusive communities and places, and Building a wellbeing economy* - as areas where we are to an extent already contributing, but felt that there will be ways in which we can contribute further, especially with regard to climate change; also by working more directly with other partners, including the Scottish Government itself.



Figure 6 – Cat. B listed Ukrainian Prisoner of War Chapel, near Lockerbie. The AHF has supported with grants and advice since 2019.

Case Study 3: High Mill, Carluke

Carluke, South Lanarkshire, Scotland - Carluke Development Trust - Category A Listed



Figure 12 -The High Mill, Carluke – main windmill and exterior activity.

Dating from the 1790s, High Mill is the most complete windmill in Scotland, and a rare survivor. It was first in use as a wind-powered grain mill and converted to steam power in the 1830s. As industrialisation advanced and more efficient milling methods were developed, the use of traditional windmills declined. By the early 20th century, the mill ceased operations as a working windmill. The site includes the partially collapsed circular mill tower, a brick kiln and loft, a brick chimney with boiler house, and the miller's house and stable block.

Carluke Development Trust, which took ownership of the site in 2018, is undertaking a huge restoration and redevelopment that will restore the High Mill and other buildings to create a new visitor attraction and community facilities. The land around the mill is already well-used by the community, as the site of a much-loved community growing and learning garden, community hub and outdoor classrooms used by a nearby school.

The AHF has supported the High Mill project over the long term, initially with viability and development funding, starting back in 2012. In 2023, the AHF offered the Trust a Heritage Impact Fund loan of £100,000 to help the Trust manage cashflow for the major capital project, which is being funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic Environment Scotland, and the Scottish Government.

<https://www.onecarluke.org.uk/>

AHF Funding

Options Appraisal Grant - £7,211 (2012)

Project Development Grant - £7,940 (2014), £17,500 (2018)

Heritage Impact Fund Loan - £100,000 (2023)

Conclusions & Future Plans

*“I think essentially they tick all the boxes. It's that thing of the work they do, supporting projects, both with grants and with the advice, as well as the loans as well. You know, it's hitting all of those targets. **For a relatively small amount of funding, they're delivering a huge amount** because they're enabling all the groups they're working with to deliver on all of those things.” (Stakeholder 6)*



Figure 13 - Cat. A listed Portsoy Harbour Buildings – now owned by NESPT and being supported by AHF grants and the new NLHF funded Heritage Development Trust programme.

From the feedback, it is clear that the current AHF support programmes are valued by their beneficiaries as well as by colleagues across the sector. They are considered to be working well, are fit for purpose, and flexible enough to respond to changing needs, as far as they go. We plan to continue to offer these core Scotland programmes in their current form, subject to securing funding.

As projects face rising costs there is clear demand to increase the available funding level for individual grants to ensure grants remain impactful, but this would require additional resource so as not to result in a reduction of the number and range of projects we can currently support.

We see potential to improve on the current offer in two main areas. Currently we already have to turn away a number of promising projects that are eligible. This is especially true in areas of low community capacity, and high deprivation, where groups are often seeking more support than we are able to offer. We hope to offer more targeted support to these areas in the future.

Secondly we are seeing a large number of organisations seeking support to better adapt their existing in-use historic buildings for the climate crisis. At present, this sort of work is not supported and adding it would allow us to better align with one of the three priority areas identified under *Our Place, Our Future*, but again this would require additional resource to be able to deliver.

Our priority now is therefore to focus on using this growing, evidenced demand in Scotland for these programmes to help make the case for additional funding, and ensure that Scotland's communities can continue to increase the social and economic benefits from their local historic environment in an increasingly sustainable and inclusive way.

Appendix I - Evaluation Methodology

RF Associates (RFA) focused their work for this report on three main areas:

Stakeholder Interviews

RFA interviewed eight key stakeholders (including one paired interview) between 22 and 29 April 2024. AHF provided a list of ten stakeholders, and interviews were conducted using an agreed discussion guide. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analysed. To ensure candid feedback, interviews were anonymised, and we do not know which stakeholders provided specific comments.

Beneficiary Interviews

RFA interviewed seven project leads from a sample of 28 beneficiary projects, which included town, rural, city, and island-based projects across Scotland, between 19 May and 3 July 2024. This sample included projects with varying grant histories and those receiving both loans and grants. Interviews focused on beneficiary satisfaction, the role of the AHF in securing additional funds, and potential impacts on historic buildings without AHF support. We do not know which organisations were interviewed.

Programme Feedback Data

RFA analysed data for all grants and loans provided in Scotland from 23 March 2020 to 11 March 2024, including exit surveys from Project Viability Grant (PVG) and Project Development Grant (PDG) recipients.

This methodology ensures a comprehensive and objective evaluation of the AHF's interventions and their effects.

Appendix II - Delivering Against HES Outcomes

Every quarter, we report to Historic Environment Scotland (HES) against a set of agreed outcomes. These are summarised below for the most recent four of the last five years (the earliest year used a different reporting mechanism that is not directly comparable).

Full details have been provided in regular reporting to HES, but in summary, for the three key categories, over the last four years:

Heritage & Society

- 130 organisations in deprived areas were supported in developing heritage-led projects
- 125 organisations were supported to obtain control of historic buildings
- 698 different activities/services were delivered by community groups from historic buildings

Heritage & Environment

- 99 organisations have directly advanced projects towards capital redevelopment
- 186 historic buildings have viable early plans in place for repair and re-use
- 137 organisations are enabled to adopt climate change response measures

Heritage & Economy

- 240% additional investment was directly leveraged towards developing heritage-led projects by AHF grants²
- Viability grants (no match funding required to encourage new organisations to apply) – 196%
- Development Grants (match funding requirement) – leverage of 275%
- Overall, £2.4M of grant offers leveraged £5.8M total funding
- 90,165m² total estimated vacant space to be repurposed and re-used to support thriving places – about 15 football fields of space³
- 497 opportunities for skills development and employment in AHF supported projects

Summary

- AHF exceeded all 10 HES targets set in 2023/24
- AHF exceeded 8 of 10 HES targets in 2022/23, with 2 targets mostly achieved
- AHF exceeded 5 of 10 HES targets in 2021/22, with 5 targets partially achieved⁴
- AHF exceeded 9 of 10 HES targets in 2020/21, with 1 target partially achieved

² Leverage based on planned direct expenditure and match funding listed at the time of grant application, relating only to elements AHF funding was supporting directly.

³ Estimate of vacant space being brought back into use based on floor areas of projects provided at grant application stage

⁴ This specific year was affected by changes to typical application type and volume caused by the pandemic, and target outcomes were not adjusted to account for that. Targets in subsequent years were adjusted accordingly.

Appendix III – Quotes from Beneficiaries & Stakeholders

Quotes – Beneficiaries

*“I would say **very, very high impact**. It's small amounts of money, in the big picture because these projects always cost so much, **but it's small amounts of money very carefully targeted at points when we certainly would really have struggled to move things forward**, but then out of that grows all this really big scale impact.”*

(Beneficiary 3)

*“It's very much that enabling, you know, for people to get to a point where they can do the next thing. I mean, that's a huge step ...And those **people aren't necessarily experienced at applying for grants and necessarily known a great deal about the funding landscape**. So that's where I think they really top everybody else.”*

(Beneficiary 1)

*“The AHF **were one of the first funders to support this development** which subsequently led to other funders supporting us - the **first funder is always critical to give confidence to others** to support and we are truly grateful to the AHF for early stage support.”*

(PDG Beneficiary)

*“Having AHF as a funder has also been a key factor in **securing match-funding and building confidence** both within the community and with funding partners.”*

(PDG Beneficiary)

*“The Project Development Grant allowed us to **bring in a professional fundraiser** who played a very important role in our recent fundraising campaign. Prior to COVID 19, AHF provided a **much needed working capital loan allow us to invest in the business** for the future. AHF **provided support when we needed it the most.**”*

(PDG Beneficiary)

*“AHF is an absolutely integral part ... it's one of these things where, you know, one funder in particular, **a credible funder like AHF, can really leverage other funds** and persuade them in. So absolutely essential in that. And the impact for us is that we're being able to save [buildings].”* (Beneficiary 3)

*“In terms of community impact, because the building is delivering a variety of different things, they're **all things which are missing in the town and the impact will be high.**”*

(Beneficiary 1)

*“They're very involved now with a lot of community groups, and again, **I don't think those community groups would be able to progress with their projects without both the financial support and the advice that they're getting**, because they're not project management professionals in most cases ... we have seen a switch over the last 10 years, I suppose, to more support for community groups to take over historic buildings and try to develop them. And so, I think **AHF has a crucial role to play** there in supporting those groups, **both with advice and with funding.**”*

(Beneficiary 7)

*“**AHF has been absolutely instrumental** in phases of those projects which were very hard to generate funding for otherwise.”* (Beneficiary 3)

*“Their impact **has really helped us to unlock larger grants** from other organisations.”*

(Beneficiary 2)

“AHF is a top player in supporting community initiatives.”

(Beneficiary 7)

*“It comes over **that they care about their clients and how it's going**, and it's that personal relationship that makes a huge, huge difference. You know, we've had funders that say, ‘Well, yes, you can have the money’, but they're so distanced you'd be scared to death to ring them up! Yes, **I would ring [AHF], you know, and have a chat** ... and that helps both of us, because if you've got funding and something does go amiss, you need to be able to phone and have that relationship and they understand where you're coming from, you know where they're coming from and how to resolve any issues. So it's incredibly important ... they're marvellous for that.”*

(Beneficiary 1)

*“It would be **the level of knowledge and support available [from] them** ... the highest level I probably had from any funder of that level of funds. So when I think of the Heritage Fund for example they are giving us about [several] million quid. So the level of support we're getting from them is fantastic. But for AHF who are given relatively lower grants **the level of support that you get is probably higher than you get from any other funder** of that kind of level.”*

(Beneficiary 2)

Quotes – Stakeholders

*“Delivering development funding ... **they are early-stage encouragers**. They **help build capacity** of organisations who may well come [to funders] and others within the sector for capital funding further down the line ... I kind of broadly speak about them as funders of development activities.” (Stakeholder 2)*

*“It's the kind of exploratory funding package ... **catalyst funding, helping groups get going at the beginning and just ... seeing if they have a sensible project on their hands** and seeing if it's viable. They really **help a huge number of projects get off the ground** when they wouldn't be able to access any other funding yet. And they also help a number of groups figure out that they don't have a project and it's not going to work ... So it's really key in that there aren't really others funding that point.” (Stakeholder 6)*

*“...All of the confidence, that kind of helping people frame their projects, all of that type of stuff ... there's something about the way that they're **able to move communities forward on heritage projects that's quite unique** ... **There's something about just giving people bite sized chunks that they can kind of manage and take things forward**. So capacity building.” (Stakeholder 3)*

*“It's having someone to speak to who understands that environment, in particular, the early stage viability **grants that they're able to offer to complement our funding** and another grant funder's funding and **get community groups thinking about a new end use** for an existing building and **also the gateway into other funding partners**.” (Stakeholder 7)*

*“I think they are, they're friendly and approachable, and that is extremely important to community groups, extremely helpful ... actually going and **making people feel valued and that their projects are interesting and important** and giving them that really early key stage advice as to what they should do next in a friendly and approachable way because they're, they're not handing out £4 million, so people don't need to kind of be scared and concerned about speaking to them. And I think **they give off such a nice friendly kind of vibe that it makes groups feel comfortable in having conversations with them**.” (Stakeholder 6)*

*“I think there are probably two really consistent and valuable things about them. One is, I think, that openness and accessibility to responding to enquiries or approaches from people at the early stages of thinking about heritage asset, community asset projects ... My sense is they have a sort **of reputation and a profile as being a good first port of call** if, you know, if you've got an inquiry about, you know, what your group might be able to do*

with a building in your community. And, you know, my sense is that they're very **accessible, responsive and supportive** ... that feels important to me. I imagine if you're community group member, not got a lot of experience with this, approaching the lottery or Historic Environment Scotland might feel a bit intimidating.” (Stakeholder 4)

“I think **they're quite visible** ... As well as they seem to come along to a lot of sector events as well and stuff, and I think that's really important ... so they're sort of **engaging in the sort of wider strategic issues** as well.” (Stakeholder 1)

“It's been a pretty challenging five years. .. My sense is that **they've grown their impact**, I think, over the last few years.” (Stakeholder 5)

“AHF has a **big impact in projects, communities**, that area, that building, that area, those people, but also in the sector. **They attend events, they contribute, they take part and they really do help connect people.**” (Stakeholder 6)

“If it's clear that [that a community groups has] engaged with the Architectural Heritage Fund, there's almost a degree of confidence that we already have about that organisation's understanding of what a project is, how it works, what they should have, how they should think, who should be on it. So that really **adds a level of comfort in what we then assess as a capital project going forward.**” (Stakeholder 2)

“(If) a project comes in front of us and we haven't been able to [visit it] yet, and you're sort of not sure whether it's a runner basically or not, that **gives you a bit more confidence if they've been involved** and they've seen it on site ... if we haven't had as much involvement up to that point, if AHF have been involved. Yeah, it definitely gives more confidence that. And, you know, that it could be of interest to us as well.” (Stakeholder 5)

“The confidence with which they work, you know, there's not a lot of doubt. It's born out of years of experience ... And just those years and years of experience give ... depth of knowledge about the sector, which is very useful ... They are an excellent source of historical information about projects. They also have great early stage awareness of projects that may be coming to us down the pipeline.” (Stakeholder 2)

“it's more the ones around the edges and frankly, the ones that are slightly more interesting because they tend not to be large public buildings, they tend to be very community interested buildings and that they are able to bring forward and support in ways that everybody else just isn't interested in doing or isn't able to do ... **it's the little buildings that bring flavours to smaller places that they have really supported in developing and the riskier ones.**” (Stakeholder 2)

“**Their appetite for risk is really refreshing.** They are prepared to take a risk on a project or an organisation, to test it, to do that options appraisal and come up with ... the best option is not what anybody thought.” (Stakeholder 2)

“[Loans are] a **massively helpful element and I think it does make them unique.** Not that people couldn't get loans elsewhere, but I suspect the organisations that they loan to and the comfort. It's not even the terms, because I think the terms are they can be quite pokey, but **those loans make those projects happen.** And those organisations wouldn't necessarily be getting loans easily elsewhere. And I think that's another element of risk there that they're prepared to take. But actually, it's really worthwhile for the heritage sector and the historic environment ... as a funder they would be far more sympathetic if something went wrong ... obviously [project don't plan to default], but just having that **comfort of knowing you could borrow from somebody who was working otherwise in the sector who had already funded you in other ways just [makes it] more palatable for a group of volunteers.**” (Stakeholder 2)

This report is based on research and interviews performed by RF Associates.

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Company Number:1150304

Charity Number: 266780

Scottish Charity Number: SC043840

Financial Services Register number: 707421



Figure 14 - The AHF staff and board at Collective Gallery, Calton Hill, Edinburgh, 2022.