



The Chartered
Institute of Building

From Ambition to Delivery

A manifesto for the next Scottish Government

The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) is the world's largest and most influential professional body for construction management and leadership. Our members, over 2,600 of whom are in Scotland, work worldwide in the development, conservation, and improvement of the built environment. Our status as a chartered professional body means we act in the public interest and develop policy positions, recommendations, and research based on evidence and best practice.



Introduction

Scotland does not lack ambition. Across housing, climate change, fuel poverty, and the Just Transition, successive governments have set out bold objectives and rightly recognised the scale of the challenges ahead. The problem for successful governments is not intent. It is delivery.

Scotland's construction sector is integral to achieving many of the nation's objectives, including reaching net zero, tackling the housing emergency, and ending homelessness.

Further, the construction industry is a crucial contributor to Scotland's economy; it accounts for **7.4% of the country's total economic output¹** and **employs 207,000 people nationally²**. Imperatively, construction is a growth sector: the industry is **forecast to expand by 1.8% annually for the next five years³**. However, the industry is not without its challenges and barriers to meeting increasing demand. Construction faces ongoing skills shortages, with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) estimating that **3,590 extra workers will be needed in Scotland each year from 2025-2029⁴**.

This manifesto sets out the priorities CIOB believes the next Scottish Government must adopt to support the nation's construction and built environment sector to turn ambition into action.

As the world's largest professional body for construction management and leadership, CIOB acts in the public interest to improve Scotland's built environment for all who use it. As such, this manifesto advocates for the system-wide changes needed within the next term of government to improve the quality, safety, and performance of Scotland's buildings and places.

This manifesto identifies three key policy recommendations across three priority areas where we believe urgent, cross-portfolio action is needed from the next Scottish Government. Together, they provide a practical route to take the next Scottish Government from ambition to implementation.

1. Skills Development Scotland, 2025. [Sectoral Skills Assessment - Construction](#).
2. Construction Industry Training Board, 2025. [Construction Workforce Outlook - Scotland](#).
3. Skills Development Scotland, 2025. [Sectoral Skills Assessment - Construction](#).
4. *ibid.*



Systems, not siloes: improving Scotland's built environment

Scotland approaches this election facing profound and interconnected challenges: a formally declared housing emergency; ambitious climate change targets; and the need to deliver a Just Transition that works for people and communities across the country.

Each of these objectives depends, fundamentally, on a well-functioning built environment and a construction sector that is properly supported to deliver.

Too often, policy is developed and implemented in siloes, by portfolio, by programme, or by individual funding stream, without sufficient regard for how decisions in one part of government affect outcomes elsewhere. In the built environment, this fragmentation has real-world consequences. Well-intentioned policies fail to land, delivery slows, costs rise, and households are left dealing with the fallout.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in efforts to improve the quality, safety and energy performance of Scotland's existing buildings. Retrofitting homes, maintaining ageing stock, addressing fuel poverty, responding to safety risks, and delivering net zero cannot be treated as discrete challenges. They are deeply interconnected. Policies on heat, housing supply, skills, building standards, local government capacity, and funding design all interact, and when they are misaligned, progress stalls.

Though not without its own challenges, industry is not the limiting factor. The construction sector is a willing and capable partner. The challenges stem from the absence of a coherent, system-wide framework that enables delivery at pace and scale.



Too many initiatives are implemented without sufficient attention to how change will be delivered. New standards are introduced without aligned funding. New assessment regimes are proposed without the workforce to implement them. Skills shortages are acknowledged, but responsibility for addressing them remains fragmented and under-resourced. The result is a widening gap between policy ambition and delivery reality.

If Scotland is to tackle the housing emergency, meet its climate change objectives, and protect the safety and well-being of people in their homes, this approach must change. Government must move beyond piecemeal interventions and adopt a whole-system, cross-portfolio approach that reflects the complexity of the built environment and the realities of delivery on the ground.

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"If Scotland is to tackle the housing emergency, meet its climate change objectives, and protect the safety and well-being of people in their homes, the current, siloed approach to policymaking must change."

Priority 1

Retrofit and energy efficiency

Fixing the system to deliver at pace and scale

Retrofitting Scotland's existing buildings is central to meeting climate targets, reducing fuel poverty, improving health outcomes and preserving housing supply. It is also one of the most complex delivery challenges government faces.



Retrofit and energy efficiency

(continued)

Retrofit spans across housing, net zero buildings, planning, local government, skills and education, and finance. Yet policy continues to be developed and implemented largely within portfolio boundaries. The result is fragmented funding, short-term programmes, misaligned standards, and delivery models that struggle to work, especially in mixed-tenure and tenement buildings.

This fragmented approach risks worsening Scotland's housing emergency. For example, CIOB's research with housing associations found that problems with the current funding landscape, particularly programme design, significantly limit their ability to retrofit housing at the pace and scale required to meet increasing standards, decarbonise their stock, and prevent properties from becoming unlettable.⁵ Annual competitive funding rounds, cost-matching requirements, restrictions on blending public funds, late-stage approvals, and overly prescriptive parameters all undermine long-term planning, neighbourhood-scale delivery, and supply chain investment.

The consequence is that money goes unspent, projects are scaled back or delayed, and the opportunity to achieve value for money through place-based retrofit is lost.

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What the next Scottish Government should do

Establish a Ministerial Oversight Group on Retrofit

Retrofit is a cross-portfolio challenge and cannot be delivered effectively in siloes. The next Scottish Government should establish a Ministerial Oversight Group on Retrofit, bringing together those with oversight of finance, education and skills, housing, climate, business, and employment to provide clear ownership, remove barriers and drive delivery.

Develop a National Retrofit Delivery and Resource Plan

Through the Oversight Group, government should develop a long-term National Retrofit Delivery and Resource Plan. This plan should set out:

- a simplified, multi-year funding framework that provides certainty to households, landlords, and the supply chain
- delivery models that support neighbourhood-scale, mixed-tenure retrofit
- a workforce and skills plan aligned with delivery need
- metrics that move beyond narrow EPC scores and reflect fabric performance, quality, and occupant comfort

Without this system-level reform, Scotland will continue to set the right ambitions but fall short on delivery.

5. Chartered Institute of Building. 2023. [Harnessing Scotland's Social Housing Expertise](#).

Priority 2

Skills in the construction sector

Treating skills as national delivery infrastructure

Scotland cannot deliver its housing, climate, or building safety objectives without a sufficient supply of skilled people. The construction sector continues to face worsening labour shortages, with Skills Development Scotland reporting increased recruitment challenges and the Construction Industry Training Board estimating that Scotland will need more than 3,500 new entrants each year over the coming years to meet demand.⁶



6. Construction Industry Training Board. 2025. Construction Workforce Outlook - Scotland.

Skills in the construction sector

(continued)

Encouragingly, perceptions of construction careers are improving. CIOB consumer research found the majority of young people (aged 16-24) and parents (aged 31+) in Scotland hold positive views of the sector.⁷ However, almost half of young people reported in the same survey that construction was not covered in the careers advice they received. At the same time, employers face significant barriers in accessing and navigating fragmented apprenticeship and training funding.

Despite widespread recognition of the problem, responsibility for addressing it remains dispersed. Industry groups can coordinate and provide insight, but they cannot reform education policy, redesign funding systems, or provide long-term certainty.

Scottish Government has already recognised that critical sectors require government-led skills planning. The commitment to an Offshore Wind Skills Action Plan in the Programme for Government is a clear example. Construction, which underpins delivery across housing, net zero, and infrastructure, requires the same level of strategic focus.

What the next Scottish Government should do

Develop a Construction Skills Action Plan

The next Scottish Government should commit to developing a government-led Construction Skills Action Plan, equivalent in ambition and status to that for offshore wind. This plan should:

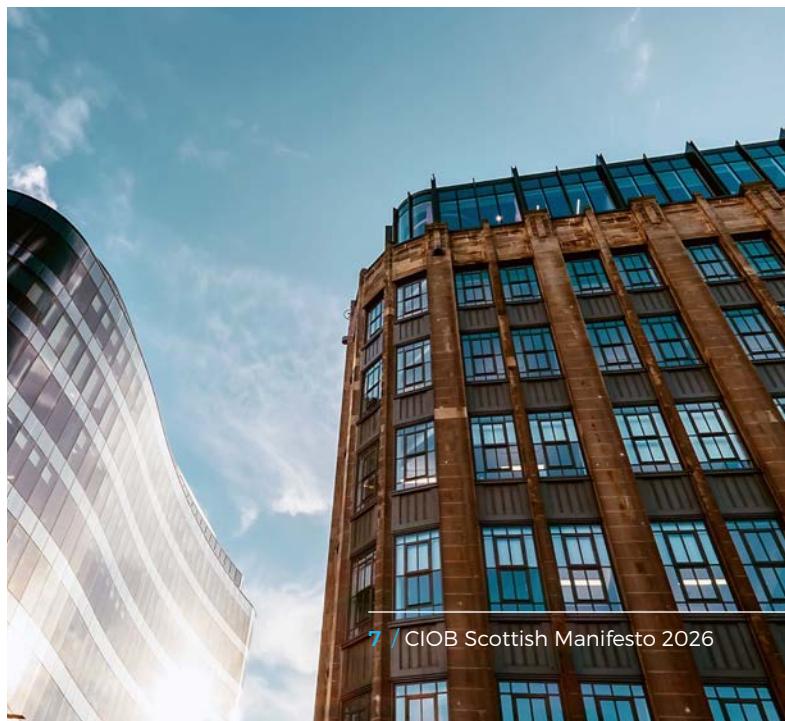
- take a long-term, demand-led view of skills needs across the built environment
- identify, based on the current and future needs of Scotland's homes and buildings, priority job roles and training pathways to support these roles
- align education policy, funding, and curriculum provision with delivery requirements
- address barriers to apprenticeships for both employers and learners
- support upskilling of the existing workforce, including green and retrofit skills

Training skilled people takes time. Without a coordinated, properly resourced strategy, Scotland's policy ambitions will remain aspirational rather than achievable.

7. Chartered Institute of Building, 2025. [Attitudes to Construction in Scotland Briefing](#).

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“Despite widespread recognition of the skills shortages in the sector, responsibility for addressing them remains dispersed. Industry groups can coordinate and provide insight, but they cannot reform education policy, redesign funding systems, or provide long-term certainty.”

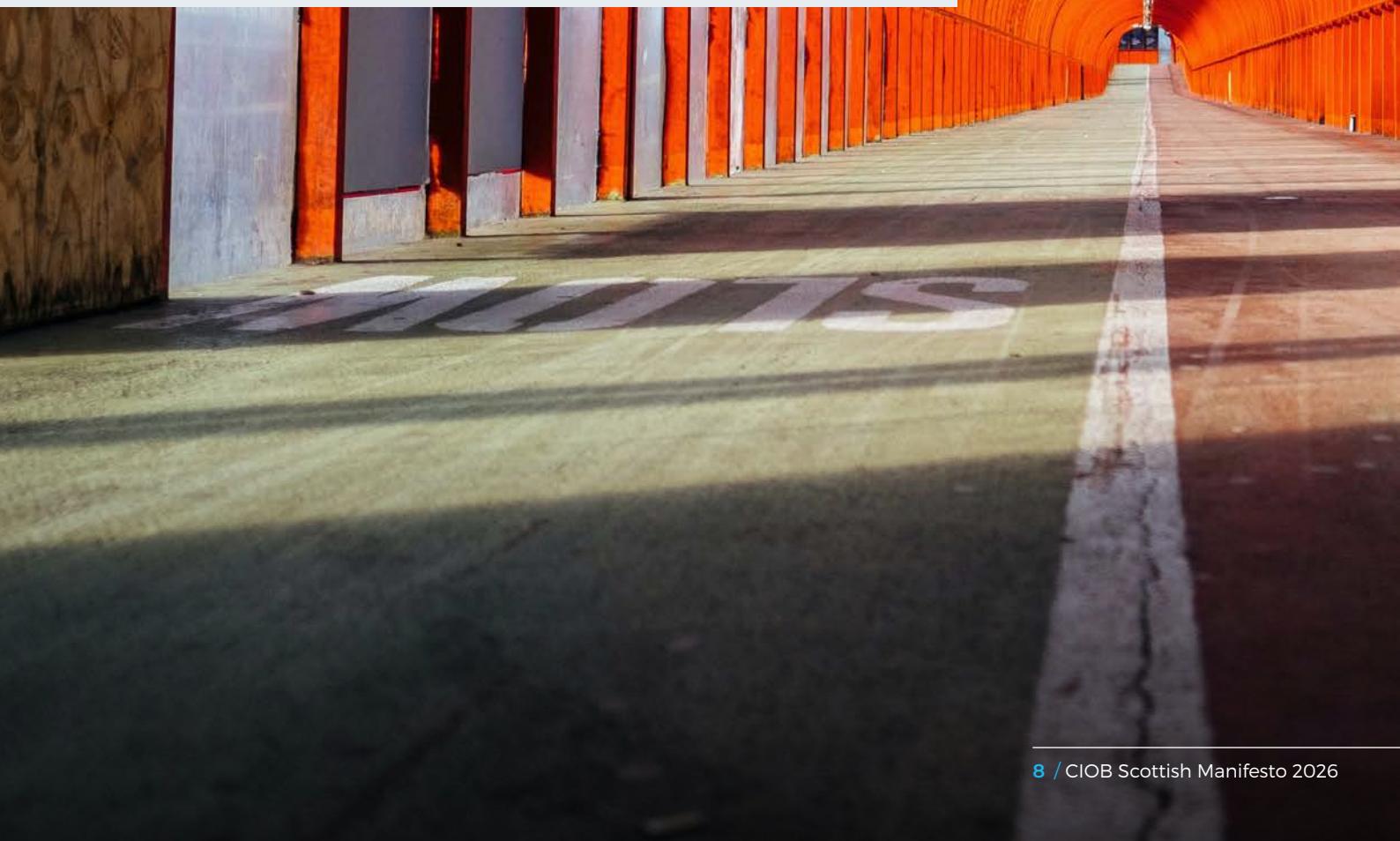


Priority 3

Building quality and safety

Fixing the foundations of Scotland's existing buildings

Scotland's existing buildings are ageing, complex, and increasingly exposed to safety and maintenance risks. Issues such as Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC), damp and mould, and legacy defects have exposed a deeper systemic problem: the absence of clear governance, funding, and decision-making frameworks for maintaining and safeguarding existing buildings, particularly in mixed-tenure and tenement stock.



Building quality and safety

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These gaps undermine not only safety, but also retrofit delivery, housing supply, and public confidence. Identifying defects without clear routes to action can leave homeowners unable to sell, insure, or finance their homes. Proposals for regular building condition inspections will fail unless they are matched with governance structures, access to advice, and fair funding mechanisms.

CIOB's engagement with industry and policymakers has consistently shown that Scotland lacks the systems needed to act quickly and effectively when risks are identified.

What the next Scottish Government should do

Establish clear frameworks for building safety and maintenance

The next Scottish Government should prioritise reform of the governance and financing of existing buildings by:

- accepting and implementing the Scottish Law Commission's⁸ recommendations on Compulsory Owners' Associations, and implementing the recommendations from the Tenement Maintenance Working Group⁹ on building reserve funds and five-yearly maintenance reports
- ensuring that these systems of regular building inspections are accompanied by clear routes to action, guidance, advice, and, imperatively, funding
- establishing funding mechanisms that allow costs for repair and maintenance to be met incrementally and fairly, avoiding undue hardship

Fixing these foundations is essential. Without it, policies on safety, retrofit, and housing supply will continue to work against one another.

Explore a demolition levy to fund urgent safety and maintenance works

Alongside governance reform, new revenue sources will be needed to fund essential repairs. Public funding is limited, yet the scale of building safety challenges continues to grow.

CIOB's research report, *Levelling the playing field, not Scotland's built environment*,¹⁰ sets out the case for exploring a demolition levy as a devolved revenue-raising tool. Applied to demolition activity, such a levy could generate a dedicated funding stream to support: urgent safety remediation works; essential maintenance in tenements and mixed-tenure buildings; and support for low-income households facing major repair costs.

In addition to addressing the long-standing challenges to widespread retrofit posed by the current VAT structure, a demolition levy would provide a practical mechanism to help fund the maintenance and safety works that are currently being delayed due to lack of resources, while also supporting Scotland's wider retrofit ambitions.

8. Scottish Law Commission, 2025. [Report on Tenement law: compulsory owners' associations](#).

9. Built Environment Forum Scotland, 2025. [Scottish Parliamentary Working Group on Tenement Maintenance](#).

10. Chartered Institute of Building, 2022. [Levelling the playing field, not Scotland's built environment](#).



CIOB's research report, *Levelling the playing field, not Scotland's built environment*, sets out the case for exploring a demolition levy as a devolved revenue-raising tool.

Conclusions

Scotland's challenges in housing, climate change, and building safety are not the result of a lack of ambition. They are the result of systems that are not designed to deliver complex change at pace and scale.

The next Scottish Government has an opportunity to move beyond fragmented interventions and fix the underlying systems that enable delivery. By taking a cross-portfolio, whole-system approach to retrofit, skills, and building safety, government can create the conditions needed to turn ambition into action.

CIOB stands ready to work with ministers, Parliament, and partners across the sector to support the development and delivery of these reforms.

This report was written by Dr Jocelyne Fleming
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