

## **PE1721/C**

National Trust for Scotland's submission of 10 September 2019

Thank you for the invitation to respond to this petition.

### **The National Trust for Scotland**

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity established in 1931 to care for places of natural beauty and of historic interest, and to promote public access to, learning from, and enjoyment of our national heritage. Since our inception, we have grown to manage more than 100 sites, and some 1,500 structures. This includes some of Scotland's most iconic natural properties, such as Ben Lomond or St Kilda, famous gardens and designed landscapes, such as Inverewe and Arduaine, and a sizeable portfolio of built heritage from Burns' Cottage to Mackintosh's Hill House.

We are entirely dependent on the continuing support of our members, donors and visitors to maintain our properties and to keep them open to the public.

While we must carefully manage our finances to remain in existence, our charitable purpose is to help safeguard Scotland's cultural and natural heritage for the benefit of all.

### **Our contribution to the national tourism strategy**

The National Trust for Scotland is a member of the Scottish Tourism Alliance, the sector body that prepared the current national tourism strategy, *Tourism 2020*, and which is preparing its successor strategy. The Trust is also represented on the STA member council.

*Tourism 2020* is necessarily a high-level document, and does not address the role of individual operators or particular sites. The strategy does provide consensus on a vision for the sector, the priority areas and markets for growth, and how the sector can work with government on issues such as leadership and collaboration, environmental performance, quality and skills, and marketing. Priority areas for the strategy include areas where the Trust is directly delivering benefits, including nature, heritage and activities; destination towns and cities; and events and festivals. In 2018-19, NTS properties hosted some 4.1 million visitors, of which 1.8 million were to built properties.

The *Tourism 2020* strategy does not direct funding to individual properties or events, and much of the public investment in tourism is in areas where there is a perceived public need, such as skills and training, or marketing campaigns.

### **The National Trust for Scotland portfolio**

The Trust now operates more than 100 visited properties across Scotland, from Shetland down to Dumfries and Galloway. Our portfolio has developed over the years through gifts from donors, from properties accepted by government in lieu of tax and transferred to the Trust, and from direct purchases – usually paid for through fund-

raising appeals to supporters. In every case, these properties require ongoing investment to sustain them.

With the exception of a grant from Historic Environment Scotland for repairs to properties (some £440,000 a year), the Trust receives no on-going funding from the Scottish Government for its conservation work. In 2018-19, the Trust spent £8 million on conservation works. Similar to state operators such as Historic Environment Scotland or English Heritage, we estimate there is a backlog of repairs, which for the NTS portfolio amounts to some £46 million.

Our portfolio also changes over time, as new properties are added, or others go into alternative management or ownership. These changes reflect developments in wider society, in terms of public interest, of conservation significance, or in options for long-term management. For example, in recent years we have relinquished the management of the David Livingstone Centre in favour of the David Livingstone Trust, and taken on the ownership, as well as the management of Alloa Tower. We also look at the acquisition of new properties, where this can be justified on grounds of heritage significance and public benefit, and costs are judged to be manageable.

In addition to our visited properties, Our Little Houses Improvement Scheme has, over the years, seen dozens of properties taken into the care of the Trust, refurbished, and put back into private ownership, helping safeguard the local heritage and character of Scotland.

## **Geilston**

Within this portfolio, Geilston is a locally significant property gifted to the Trust on an unrestricted basis in 1983. We chose to open the garden to the public, and over the past decade it has averaged some 9,700 visitors a year, including NTS members, with around 900 paid admissions, putting it among the least visited of Trust properties.

We note the discussions that took place at the Petitions Committee on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2019, and would like to take this opportunity to enter the following facts into the discussion:

- The property at Geilston was gifted with no restricted endowment or maintenance fund.
- With the exception of a small number of legacies to private individuals, the estate of the donor, including Geilston House, was gifted to the Trust with no restrictions, and with the understanding that the property could be used, leased or sold as appropriate.
- In deciding to make use of the site as a visited garden, the Trust designated the residual monies from the donor for a period to support the property.
- In terms of operating costs, Geilston garden ran a deficit of £117,000 in 2018/19, and has run an annual deficit of around £90,000 for several years. This deficit is funded from the Trust's central reserves.
- Geilston House itself has never been open to the public, and is in need of significant conservation works.

- The Trust is currently considering all options in relation to Geilston, and is in ongoing contact with the Friends of Geilston group. Ultimately, the acquisition or disposal of a property is a reserved matter for the Trustees of the National Trust for Scotland.
- The Trust is continuing to invest in all of its properties, including its garden properties, and has no plans to close any sites.

In relation to the recent options appraisal carried out by EKOS, we would be happy to supply the Committee with a copy. We have already supplied the Friends of Geilston group with a copy, as part of our ongoing discussions with the Friends.

We agree with the petitioners that Geilston garden is an important local asset, providing amenity for residents and visitors, and our discussions are continuing on this basis.

### **Conclusion**

The National Trust for Scotland was established by the people of Scotland to help safeguard our historic and natural heritage, where private or public interest had proved insufficient. We work with our members, donors, and the wider community to deliver our charitable purposes. The Trust is entirely dependent on memberships, donations, and its visitor income to sustain the properties in its care, and we must manage our responsibilities and resources accordingly. However, we have no plans at present to dispose or close any of our sites.

Scotland's heritage – including its gardens – is also vitally important to the national tourism strategy, and a source of enjoyment for Scots and for visitors. As described above, we have ongoing discussions on the national tourism strategy, through the Scottish Tourism Alliance, and we would be happy to discuss this with the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament at any point.