



The National Trust
for Scotland

CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES

July 2003

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Approved by NTS Council 4 July 2003

Introduction

This statement expresses the principles of conservation which underpin the processes and practices of the Trust's work both at properties and in its broader activities. These principles aim to articulate a clear, common and integrated approach to conservation within the Trust and thereby deliver improved management of its properties. They will also be used to promote this approach effectively to external audiences. It is intended that in future other complementary strategic policies and principles will be developed focusing on other aspects of the Trust's statutory purposes.

The Trust's role in conservation has to date largely been carried out through the management of properties for the long term. However, the Trust's purpose is not just to carry out conservation but to promote it more widely, which it seeks to do by leading by example and through influence and persuasion. This paper sets out how the Trust will fulfil the broad conservation remit indicated by its statutory purpose of 'permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation'¹. The term 'conservation' is now used more generally than 'preservation' and is applied to both the natural and the cultural heritage. Since the 1930s, when the term conservation was not commonly used, the disciplines of conservation and its professions have developed greatly. 'Preservation' is now understood to have a more specific meaning. Preservation implies keeping an object or place in a static state (ie without restoration or adaptation or allowing the effect of natural processes). It is rarely applicable to living organisms. Preservation may be attempted in some instances by the Trust, but it is only one of many approaches to conservation that may be taken depending on circumstances.

The Trust interprets its role in conservation as 'to ensure that change is managed by negotiation² so that present and future generations may enjoy the benefits of places or features of significance'³. This definition is intentionally broad so as to incorporate all the conservation disciplines within the Trust⁴. Conservation conveys concepts of handing on assets to future generations, of dealing with dynamic situations and mitigating threats, and of making choices about the stewardship of finite resources.

The Conservation Process

Conservation is a skilled process common to several disciplines, rather than a discipline in itself. A clear standardised process for the delivery of conservation within the Trust is established, which in each case includes the following steps:

- Survey, research and understanding
- Analysis, evaluation and statement of significance⁵

¹ See Appendix 1 for fuller extracts from the Trust's Order Confirmation Acts.

² See glossary.

³ See glossary.

⁴ Different conservation disciplines use varying language to describe the principles, processes and standards prevalent in their discipline. Within some disciplines, 'conservation' is regularly used as professional shorthand for the whole discipline, eg 'building conservation' or 'nature conservation', whereas the Trust's integrated character requires it to use the term to refer to a whole range of processes.

⁵ See glossary.

- Development of policy and aims and objectives
- Management to an agreed plan and programme
- Monitoring and review

In the Trust the process is familiar to all working within cultural and natural heritage disciplines⁶. Conservation is a generic term used across disciplines and may, at the third and fourth steps involve several other processes, of which preservation is just one. The breadth of the Trust's conservation remit demands that all the above actions should be carried out in an integrated multidisciplinary fashion. The Trust's Conservation Principles guide decisions about managing change⁷ in order to maintain or reveal the essential character of the property, or the significance of one or more of its key features⁸. It is important that all parts of the Trust, including all Committees and staff in all Properties, Regions and Divisions, should follow the same agreed process to give consistency in decision-making. Monitoring is a fundamental element of conservation practice. Conservation is an ongoing responsibility, not a one-off project, and its success should be periodically evaluated.

The principles that follow guide all those who, on the Trust's behalf, provide advice, make decisions about, or undertake work to significant places, particularly those in the Trust's ownership. They are relevant across the spectrum of the Trust's work, not just for those directly involved in conservation work. All of the principles should be considered together when addressing specific issues, threats or places.

Conservation Principles

PRINCIPLE 1

Conservation is for the benefit of present and future generations.

Conservation is inherently about planning for the long-term rather than the short-term, as is emphasised in the Trust's statutory purpose by the use of the term 'permanent'. Benefits to current and future generations include access to and enjoyment of heritage assets, and the use of those assets, for example as a resource for education. Future generations in some ways are the most significant 'beneficiaries' of the Trust in terms of its conservation work. Some aspects of conservation, such as the maintenance of essential ecological processes⁹, are key to the fundamental survival of humankind, and the concept of intergenerational equity¹⁰ is therefore relevant. The developed world, however, is currently protected to some extent from such life or death issues, so other aspects of conservation which contribute to human fulfilment and development, to culture and to quality of life can be equally important. The idea of equity between generations can also be applied to these aspects.

The Trust interprets its statutory requirement to act 'for the benefit of the nation'¹¹ as inclusively as possible, but at the same time there is a real sense in which the Trust acts specifically for Scotland. Its properties show to the world those aspects of Scotland valued by past and present generations, thereby contributing to the international image of Scotland. In practice this means that the Trust aims to benefit, in the present generation, a

⁶ Specific guidance on the conservation planning process is available from the NTS Management Planning Team.

⁷ See glossary.

⁸ See glossary.

⁹ See glossary.

¹⁰ 'Intergenerational equity means that the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations'. Australian Natural Heritage Charter, 1996.

¹¹ NTS Order Confirmation Act 1935.

wide range of stakeholders¹² and communities of interest, including members, visitors (from the UK and abroad), tenants, donors, local communities and people of Scottish ancestry worldwide. It also aims to benefit those people who are not currently involved in the Trust's work, but whose interest could be awakened in the future.

The Trust's conservation work must reflect and address both national and international obligations. For example there are some things which are relatively common in Scotland but rare or restricted globally, such as blanket bogs or grey seals.

PRINCIPLE 2

All conservation decisions should be based on a systematic approach to evaluation of significance based on thorough knowledge and understanding, and a coherent policy framework.

The significance¹³ of a place is best understood by a rigorous sequence of collecting and analysing all relevant information and placing it in its wider context. Such research must provide an understanding of the significance of the place or feature to allow informed management decisions to be made. The Trust's 'evaluation of significance' methodology is being developed as part of its Management Planning and Property Statements processes¹⁴. As well as analysing significance, this methodology is designed to highlight any gaps in knowledge.

Evaluation of significance informs all conservation decision-making, and the results of the evaluation process must therefore be recorded carefully. Evaluation should be based on as complete as possible knowledge and understanding of the assets to be conserved and their value to different stakeholders, but where knowledge is less than adequate this should be clearly identified. The knowledge and experience of experts is usually required to assemble or analyse survey information and to propose specialist criteria for evaluation. The process should encourage mutual understanding between different disciplines and should consider which features may be significant in the future.

A coherent policy framework is being developed at both strategic and operational levels within the Trust. It is envisaged that each conservation discipline will develop its own more specific strategic documents which may include some combination of principles, policy, vision, strategy, standards and guidance. These should all be compatible with the Conservation Principles and with any other strategic policy level principles.

PRINCIPLE 3

Conservation should take into consideration all aspects of significance, both tangible and intangible.

The Trust takes an holistic approach to conservation. Many properties have many layers of values relating to cultural or natural heritage which can not always be clearly separated. All the different values should be considered during the evaluation process without unwarranted emphasis on any one aspect or point in time at the expense of others. Therefore, evaluation should be as inclusive as possible, involving the participation of and negotiation¹⁵ with all relevant communities of interest including experts. These stakeholders in a property could include national interest groups, members, visitors and local communities.

¹² See glossary.

¹³ See glossary.

¹⁴ For further information see NTS Management Planning Manual (working draft 2000) and Revised Guidelines for Property Statements (2002), available from the NTS Management Planning Team.

¹⁵ See glossary.

The evaluation process should consider the place or feature in a wider context (eg in relation to other similar places and comparing one example of a type with another) as well as evaluating different aspects of a property to enable priorities to be set. At the same time an holistic view should be taken, valuing the whole and recognising that relationships between part and whole are usually crucial to the 'spirit of the place'.

The intangible associations of places or objects can be as important as more easily measurable physical features, and should be considered alongside more tangible qualities when evaluating the significance of a place or feature. These associations may relate, for example, to history, spirituality, culture, myth, legend, communal memory or identity. People have attachments to places that are shaped by their own background and experience and which may conflict with those of other people. More than other aspects of significance, intangible associations are viewed from different perspectives by different individuals and communities, depending upon their personal knowledge, understanding, experiences and beliefs. Such associations may include feelings of awe, nostalgia, aesthetic inspiration, and spiritual refreshment. Some may be deeply personal emotional responses. Others may be perceived only by a small group of people, but are of overriding importance to that group. Values sometimes relate strongly to a particular place (eg the site of a battle), regardless of its physical characteristics at the present time.

In some cases it is the historical association rather than the fabric of the property itself which is fundamental to its significance. Historical associations, particularly if of iconic status, can give 'ordinary' places extraordinary importance, even if they have no other great significance. Such associations should be evaluated as impartially and objectively as possible, for example by not ignoring unpopular or unpalatable aspects of a place's history. If the Trust decides to present a selective version of this history, it should record the reasons for this and be open about why this has been done. The values placed on historical associations inevitably change over time, in response to changes and developments in external contexts and perceptions of significance.

Conserving intangible associations will usually involve protection of physical remains, interpretation and safeguarding of an atmosphere or a setting likely to evoke a particular response.

PRINCIPLE 4

Conservation should seek to protect cultural and natural diversity and local distinctiveness as well as features of national significance.

While local significance may necessarily have less influence than national when the Trust considers acquisitions or large conservation projects, the local dimension may be what makes a place special and will be important in day-to-day management. Additional benefits of protecting local distinctiveness may be in keeping each experience of a Trust property distinct and in gaining local support. Things that are important on a local scale are often key to the 'spirit of the place'.

Part of the Trust's role is to illuminate the distinctive aspects of the natural and cultural heritage of Scotland and ideas about nationhood, both at fixed points in the past and as they change through time. The Trust's properties, taken together, celebrate the distinctiveness of Scotland's land and history, in the belief that Scotland's national identity is deeply rooted in its natural and cultural heritage. Many of the properties contribute to an understanding of how the national character and distinctive culture of Scotland have developed. The Trust recognises that the cultural diversity of Scotland includes many distinctive but overlapping influences. These aspects have become more prominent with the resurgence of debate over national identity associated with the restoration of the Scottish Parliament, and may further increase in importance in the face of continued globalisation, as people seek stability in a sense of continuity with the past.

However, defining 'Scottishness' is not easy, given the layers of 'genuine' and 'reinvented' Scottish culture associated with, for example, Queen Victoria at Balmoral, Sir Walter Scott or the Trust itself. Different aspects of culture will have different value judgements placed upon them depending on the political, cultural and social background of the individual. The Trust seeks to conserve a rounded representation of the history of Scotland, and the whole history of the places it conserves. It is recognised that each place holds the potential for a multitude of histories, which if given space will allow for many different people to engage with aspects of the heritage resource. Conservation decisions should as far as possible not restrict these possibilities.

PRINCIPLE 5

Conservation processes and activity should be transparent and adequately recorded and monitored.

Conservation decisions and processes must be clearly recorded and open to scrutiny so that they are easily understood by those working in conservation both now and in the future. They should also be explained to the wider public, through education and interpretation, to encourage understanding and support.

In the future (ie with hindsight) the decisions made today will not always be deemed correct or ideal. However, work done as a result of the decision-making process should be recorded along with the set of current values on which decisions are based. This will help future practitioners to understand why things were done in the past, which should help them make better-informed decisions for the future. Monitoring should be an active process conducted to ascertain whether objectives are being achieved.

PRINCIPLE 6

Conservation activity should be reassessed as knowledge increases and values change.

Values ascribed to places and objects change over time both as society changes and as knowledge increases. This means that significance may also change and that evaluation must be an iterative process with regular review carried out. Knowledge and understanding of properties will never be complete, so conservation decisions will always be based on a degree of uncertainty, but the expansion of knowledge should always be sought.

Accepting that societal values inevitably change over time, the Trust may attempt to influence future thinking by defining, recording and promoting the values and significance it currently places on Scotland's heritage. This should ensure that future generations will be aware of these values even if they choose not to share them. Interpretation of the Trust's conservation work will be important in disseminating and passing on values for the future.

PRINCIPLE 7

Conservation processes should seek to resolve conflicts, but where irreconcilable differences between conservation aims and other aims arise, conservation will prevail.

The Trust's other aims, including its second statutory purpose of access and enjoyment, are generally complementary to that of conservation, and most conflicts between them can be resolved by good planning, management and negotiation¹⁶. However, where two aims prove irreconcilable, the Trust should always give greater weight to conservation where significant features are at risk, in line with the established 'Sandford

¹⁶ See glossary.

Principle¹⁷. As the Trust is empowered to hold its properties in perpetuity, their long-term conservation must take priority so that their significant features can be retained for the benefit of future generations. This principle places a shared responsibility on all involved to seek reconciliation where possible, and a particular onus on conservation specialists to be clear about the significance of places or features.

PRINCIPLE 8

Conservation of a feature or place within its context and setting is preferred.

In many cases the significance of a feature or a place is enhanced by its immediate context or wider setting. For example, period furniture and fittings were often designed or collected for a particular room or building, historic buildings often sit in a wider designed landscape, and countryside properties contribute to the landscape character of a larger area. Significance of a place is often greater than the sum of its parts. However, there are occasions where the option to conserve something in its setting no longer exists or is not viable. This may apply both to artefacts where the environmental conditions of their historic setting are unsuitable for their conservation¹⁸ and to endangered species where suitable conditions no longer exist in areas where they were known to exist previously¹⁹.

PRINCIPLE 9

Any action should have as little adverse impact on significant features as possible.

Change affecting Trust properties is inevitable, so decisions about intervention²⁰ in the processes of change are inevitable too, although a conscious decision not to intervene is always one option where some element of change has been accepted. Any actions should not undermine the significance of the property. If intervention is required it should be as much as is necessary to care for the place, but otherwise should change it as little as possible so that its significance is retained. The decision to intervene must be taken on a case-by-case basis with a presumption against deliberate, irreversible change. Even this 'minimal intervention' is only appropriate either once a full survey and associated evaluation of significance has been completed and clear objectives set, or in case of emergency. The primary purpose of any intervention must be to maintain or reveal the essential character of the place, or the significance of one or more of the key features²¹ which have already been identified. This principle should also be applied where it is necessary to resolve conflicts that arise between different conservation interests.

PRINCIPLE 10

Where there is a serious threat of damage to the significance of the place or object, lack of full information should not be used as a reason to delay preventative action.

In normal circumstances conservation decisions should be based on as full an understanding as possible, as described in previous principles (particularly 2 and 3). Thorough risk assessment procedures should be used to reduce the likelihood of damage to the significance of important places or objects. However, in exceptional circumstances, when there is a certainty or high risk of serious or irreversible damage, a decision on the action

¹⁷ The 'Sandford Principle' originated from the Sandford Committee which, in its 1974 *Review of National Park Policies* in England and Wales, recommended that legislation relating to National Parks should be amended to make it clear that the enjoyment of National Parks by the public 'shall be in such a manner and by such means as will leave their natural beauty unimpaired for the enjoyment of this and future generations'. The concept was endorsed as government policy and has since appeared in legislation. National Park legislation for England and Wales now also recognises that cultural as well as natural heritage must be embraced by the Principle.

¹⁸ For example the conservation of carved stones in museums rather than in situ.

¹⁹ For example the introduction of vendace into Loch Skene.

²⁰ See glossary.

²¹ See glossary.

needed to minimise the risk may have to be taken on the basis of best available understanding, acknowledging that this action may be based on less than full understanding of either problem or consequences. Deciding on a course of action should not be delayed due to incomplete information or lack of certainty if the threat is clear and major, or when the consequences of delay would be more harmful than the likely (predicted) consequences of the proposed action. In some cases doing nothing may be the option least likely to lead to harm, but this will not always be the case. In all cases there is an obligation to find out if something significant is at risk.

PRINCIPLE 11

Openness and honesty are essential in the presentation of conservation work, especially where issues of authenticity are raised.

The Trust conserves and presents 'real' places and artefacts, but these have usually been much altered over time by previous owners or users and often by the Trust itself. The evaluation process must reveal the significance of different stages of alterations. However, when alterations have taken place or assumptions have been made, for example about the original layout of a room or the extent of a natural habitat, the Trust has a duty not to mislead over the extent to which a feature may be or is 'original' or 'authentic'. In many cases these terms are difficult to define and the terms should be used with care. However, the word 'original' is apt in some scenarios, eg in terms of a house's original contents as opposed to items introduced by the Trust.

A balance must be found between conserving original fabric or condition and retaining 'the spirit of the place'.

PRINCIPLE 12

The management and implementation of conservation activity requires appropriate knowledge, skills and expertise and the provision of adequate resources.

Successful conservation requires a combination of practical, technical skills, in-depth knowledge of particular specialist disciplines and effective project management. Practitioners, whether staff or volunteers should follow accepted national or international standards for best practice, which exist for many conservation skills or professions. The Trust should make others aware of its approach to conservation processes where this will help take forward best practice. Adequate funding must be secured to allow successful conservation to be carried out both in the short and long term.

Further Information

Additional information is available from:

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EXTRACT FROM THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND ORDER CONFIRMATION ACT 1935

The National Trust for Scotland shall be established for the purposes of promoting the permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of lands and buildings in Scotland of historic or national interest or natural beauty and also of articles and objects of historic or national interest and as regards lands for the preservation (so far as practicable) of their natural aspect and features and animal and plant life and as regards buildings for the preservation (so far as practicable) of their architectural or historic features and contents so far as of national or historic interest.

EXTRACT FROM THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND ORDER CONFIRMATION ACT 1938

The purposes of the National Trust for Scotland shall be extended so as to include the promotion of

- (a) The preservation of buildings of architectural or artistic interest and places of historic or national interest or natural beauty and the protection improvement and augmentation of the amenities of such buildings and places and their surroundings;
- (b) The preservation of articles and objects of any description having artistic or antiquarian interest;
- (c) The access to and enjoyment of such buildings places articles and objects by the public;

And all such purposes shall be deemed to be purposes of the Order of 1935.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- **Ecological processes** are all those processes that occur between organisms and within and between populations and communities, including interactions with the non-living environment, that result in existing ecosystems and bring about changes in ecosystems over time.
- **Intervention** can cover many different types of action (including adaptation, alteration, conversion, enhancement, maintenance, preservation, rebuilding, reconstruction, reinstatement, repair, replication and restoration) and many different scales at which they can be used. The primary purpose of any intervention must be to maintain or reveal the essential character of the place, or the significance of one or more of the key features which have already been identified.
- **Key features** are central elements which the Trust is trying to conserve or manage on a property. They are identified by holistic evaluation of a property, intended to explain what makes it important, significant or special and presented as a **statement of significance** for the property. The evaluation involves identifying the specific features of the property which contribute to this significance. These are the 'key features'.
- **Managing change** emphasises that conservation deals with dynamic situations. Change may include deliberate management-instigated change, environmental change (whether incremental or large-scale and

sudden) and changes in external influences, eg legislation or funding sources. Management in response to change, or in anticipation of it, must be flexible depending on circumstances and may involve deciding to do nothing.

- **Negotiation** implies that conservation involves people, often with different sets of values from each other. Conservation actions are arrived at through discussion and consideration with relevant experts and stakeholders. This process may involve consensus-building between different disciplines and different interest groups. It also implies that each place must be considered holistically, and all the different significances attached to it weighed up, before a decision is made that might affect any of them. Finally the term further emphasises that the conservation response to change is not fixed but flexible depending on circumstances.
- **Significance** represents both the meaning of a place in the Trust's perception and how the Trust ascribes value to that meaning. The significance of a place or feature is assessed using the Trust's own process of evaluation, with or without prior external recognition. As an indication of the importance of a place or object it can include many different types of values including cultural and natural heritage value, aesthetic, historical, scientific or social value. These are not mutually exclusive. Usually the significance determined by the process of evaluation is acknowledged in some way, by an authority in the field, by designation (eg *Red Data Book species, Listed Buildings, Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*) or is recognised by other means. While this idea of acknowledged significance is useful it must also be remembered that this may only be the view of a person (or a few people), even if well-informed or expert, at a particular point in time.
- **Stakeholders** are all those with an interest in a place or a process.
- **Statement of Significance** is a document relating to a particular property, or part of a property, which aims to provide a clear statement of its value, ie what it is about the property that the Trust considers important to conserve.

SUMMARY OF NTS CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES

The following summary is intended only as an aide memoire. Each of the Principles is supported by explanatory text in the main document and these should be read together.

1. Conservation is for the benefit of present and future generations.
2. All conservation decisions should be based on a systematic approach to evaluation of significance based on thorough knowledge and understanding, and a coherent policy framework.
3. Conservation should take into consideration all aspects of significance, both tangible and intangible.
4. Conservation should seek to protect cultural and natural diversity and local distinctiveness as well as features of national significance.
5. Conservation processes and activity should be transparent and adequately recorded and monitored.
6. Conservation activity should be reassessed as knowledge increases and values change.
7. Conservation processes should seek to resolve conflicts, but where irreconcilable differences between conservation aims and other aims arise, conservation will prevail.
8. Conservation of a feature or place within its context and setting is preferred.
9. Any action should have as little adverse impact on significant features as possible.
10. Where there is a serious threat of damage to the significance of the place or object, lack of full information should not be used as a reason to delay preventative action.
11. Openness and honesty are essential in the presentation of conservation work, especially where issues of authenticity are raised.
12. The management and implementation of conservation activity requires appropriate knowledge, skills and expertise and the provision of adequate resources.