

# POSITION STATEMENT

## The Historic Environment

### Introduction

The historic environment comprises not only historic buildings and landscapes and other physical survivals of our past, but also the history of all the communities who have made their home in this country. It is our physical and cultural heritage.

The historic environment is central to how we see ourselves and to our identity as individuals, communities and as a nation. It reinforces our sense of local and regional identity. It helps to enhance the quality of our lives, improve our sense of well being and is a catalyst for social and economic change.

As an independent charity, the National Trust cares for an incomparable range of historic environments in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from landscape, coastline, wildlife habitats and historic buildings to art collections, archaeological and industrial sites, parks and gardens and entire villages. Its purpose is to make them accessible, enjoyable and relevant to everyone.

### Current issues

The National Trust hailed the Government's first ever statement on the historic environment (*Force for our Future*, published on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2001) as a "good first-step", but is calling on Ministers to move "further and faster" in recognising the value of heritage. The statement was a response to *Power of Place*, which was the culmination of a review of the historic environment involving an unprecedented range of organisations from within the sector and also more widely, and set out a clear agenda for action for the Government and for the sector.

### What the National Trust would like to see

The Government must show firm commitment to strengthen and support the historic environment by:

- improving the championship and understanding of the historic environment at all levels in Government by:
  - recognising the real importance of the historic environment, how it permeates so many aspects of modern life and is relevant to a wide range of public policy objectives.
  - establishing an annual heritage summit of key ministers to emphasise the cross-departmental impact of the historic environment
  - ensuring the joint sponsorship of English Heritage by DCMS, DEFRA and DTLR
- signalling that DCMS and other sponsoring departments will bid for the increased resources that are needed to deliver effective protection and long term management of the historic environment
- playing a leading role in Europe to press for the extension of discretionary powers for Member States to differentiate VAT rates on repairs and appropriate developments to

- heritage assets which currently stands at 17.5% compared with the zero-rated VAT charged on new-build properties
- ensuring better protection of the historic environment in the current review of planning policies. There is widespread concern that the reviews of planning process and policy as well as moves towards streamlined consent mechanisms will weaken protection for the historic environment.
- recognising the historic environment as an educational resource by improving and developing education initiatives which enable people of all ages and backgrounds to experience the historic environment
- recognising the essential role the non-Government sector has to play in preserving the historic environment and promoting partnership working

### **What the National Trust is doing**

- The National Trust is working closely with other voluntary heritage organisations to set up a new network. The aim of the network is to:
  - act as an advocate for the promotion and conservation of heritage and the historic environment
  - review and develop policies relating to heritage and the historic environment, consider and respond to the relevant strategies of other bodies
  - act as a consultative group on heritage and historic environment issues and to co-ordinate responses to proposals as necessary
  - share information on the plans of individual organisations and take advantage of opportunities for collaboration in the future
  - share best practice in the management and conservation of heritage and the historic environment
- The historic environment is not only valuable in its own right, for what it offers people in the way of culture and enjoyment, but also how it makes a significant contribution to the economy, creating jobs, urban and rural regeneration, education and lifelong learning, helping rural businesses and providing attractive places where new businesses can thrive. The National Trust recently commissioned a series of reports into the economic value of the environment in South West and North East England, Cumbria and Wales, which revealed that 40% of the tourist economy depends on high quality, well maintained natural and cultural assets. The study represents the first comprehensive attempt to measure the economic importance of the historic environment. The Trust also intends to commission research into the value of the historic environment to social regeneration in both urban and rural areas.
- In 1999, the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies together with 12 other organisations including the National Trust commissioned research to establish the true impact of VAT on historic buildings. It revealed that the total cost of building repairs on listed properties in the UK in 1998 was almost £6bn with VAT costing a further £195. The JCNAS argued that current VAT rules were 'complex and manifestly unjust' and that a reduction in the VAT rate on building repairs from 17.5% to 5% would cost the Treasury an estimated £92m which could be used for building repairs.
- The National Trust is a major provider of educational visits and is working on a vision and strategy for learning. The study of the historic environment contributes not only to learning about cultural roots, social and environmental change but also general education, life-long learning, enjoyment and health