



National
Trust

Our conservation approach



Godrevy Lighthouse from the cliffs at Godrevy, Cornwall.

Re-framing our conservation practice: seven principles

Future facing

The choices we make play an active part in creating the future. We value and learn from the past to make thoughtful choices in support of a resilient and sustainable future for our shared cultural and natural heritage.

Informed

We put people and nature at the heart of our conservation practice. We value evidence and understanding, research and innovation to differentiate and support good decisions based on relative significance and our commitment to maximise public benefit.

Dynamic

Our conservation practice is dynamic and adaptive. We seek to understand and respond to a changing world, caring for the fragile and finite, managing loss where necessary and embracing evolution where appropriate, recognising that new opportunities will emerge.

Inclusive

We conserve with and for everyone. By embracing diverse voices and needs, we ensure that conservation reflects shared values and delivers access, engagement, and well-being for the changing communities and nations we serve.

Connected

We collaborate and celebrate the bigger picture. Our places are part of wider systems – ecological, cultural and social. We work across boundaries and disciplines to deliver joined-up, lasting outcomes.

Creative

Conservation can be creative and bold. We embrace good design and imagination to enhance places, making space for new ideas and meaningful experiences.

Rooted in story

We conserve not just things and places but the intangible heritage they embody – the stories, skills and identities that shape places. Through the decisions we take, they too are conserved, and the National Trust itself becomes part of the story.

Informed

Conservation comes from understanding. We make decisions based on current knowledge, our understanding of relative significance and a consideration of public benefit, shaped by what matters for people and nature and what we understand about the way things are changing.

We value professional expertise, and our conservation practice is evidence based, relying on good data and sound research. We welcome opportunities to experiment and innovate, exploring new solutions, tools and techniques where appropriate. When we are at the forefront of new thinking we share our learning with others for wider benefit. We take the time to record, document and publish our actions to support future understanding.



Conservator carefully handling an 18th century Italian casket at The Vyne, Hampshire.

Future facing

Conservation is for the future. Conservation is an inherently future-facing and future-making activity as it asks us to take considered choices about what we carry forward into tomorrow, often for others we will never meet.

Our conservation practice values and learns from the past, considers the needs of the present and seeks to deliver a better, more resilient future.

We recognise that some of the things we care for are fragile and finite, endangered and vulnerable, and so we consider our responsibility to future generations in how we care for and record cultural and natural assets. We also understand that our actions must be viable today and sustainable tomorrow – environmentally, socially and economically. Our choices are therefore proportionate. We recognise resource limitations and we future proof as far as possible, acting with pace and purpose to build resilience and adaptability.



Ecologist at work during the first mass planting of marsh violets aiming to change the fortunes of rare butterfly species at The Hollies Nature Reserve, Shropshire Hills, Shropshire.

Dynamic

Conservation is dynamic. We seek to understand the changing world around us, making purposeful choices and deliberate provision for day-to-day and long-term care, recognising the urgency for action.

We understand that not acting is a choice that will impact assets in our care. We also know that changing contexts may bring challenging circumstances and difficult decisions, so we make these consciously and well, seeking the opinions of others, balancing options and evolving our practice. Where we face loss, we seek to make as good a record as possible so we can transfer knowledge and understanding to future generations.

We embrace evolution where appropriate, recognising that new forms of significance and new values for nature and culture will emerge, and that change can bring new opportunities.



Fort Henry, only 4m from the cliff edge, Isle of Purbeck.

Inclusive

Conservation should be with and for everyone. We care for places so that people and nature can thrive. This means we have a responsibility to ensure that diverse voices, perspectives and needs are considered in what and how we conserve. We accept that as we bring in more voices our understanding of what is valued will change.

Together, we prioritise conservation investment based on public value, recognising this will be different to different communities. We take equality of access and engagement seriously and prioritise opportunities to deliver both physical and intellectual access to our places. We encourage public participation in conservation activity where possible, recognising the well-being benefits this brings.



Live performance of *The Secret Garden* at Cliveden, Buckinghamshire.

Connected

Conservation is collaborative. We take an integrated approach to conservation recognising that none of our assets exist in isolation but are all part of broader systems and places. We celebrate this connected world and recognise the contribution of individual man-made and natural assets to the beauty and function of individual places, regions, countries and global contexts. We therefore consider our choices in the context of their wider impact, and we work together to share the skills and expertise needed to care for multifaceted places.



A view of the ruins of Corfe Castle surrounded by mist and in the low grounds are headstones from the nearby cemetery.



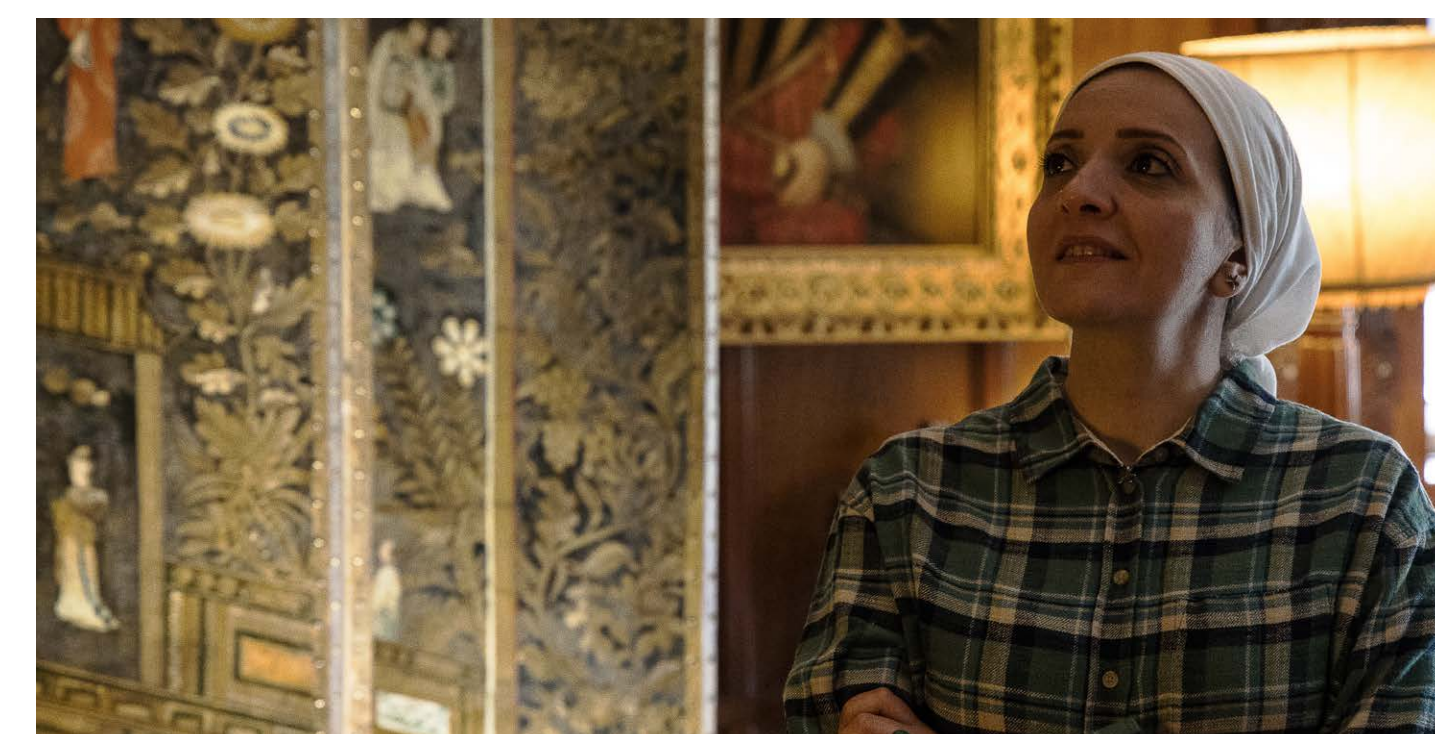
Aerial view of the renewed orchard at Brockhampton, Herefordshire.

Creative

Conservation can be creative and bold. We understand that it sets the scene for experiences and adventures, whether through exploring the lost worlds of the past or connecting with nature. We know that we care for living places and recognise the value of evolution and positive change. We make space for new design, new approaches, and new interventions where they benefit people and place, and we ensure that our actions enhance the places in our care through good design and appropriate materials.

Rooted in story

Conservation of buildings, landscapes and objects is about both protecting and sharing the stories they hold, and allowing new stories to emerge. Our work is rooted in the understanding that everything we care for has been shaped by people – the myths they swapped, the names they gave places, the ways they worked the land, the skills they passed down, and the memories they made. These are expressions of culture, connecting generations, bridging communities, and transcending boundaries. Culture keeps evolving and new stories will be written at places in our care by current and future generations. The National Trust itself is part of this, and the choices we make will help shape the future.



Twinning between Bayt al-Razzaz, Cairo and Blicking Estate, Norfolk brought opportunities to share knowledge about climate adaptation and heritage crafts.

Our principles in practice

Divis and the Black Mountain

Connecting a landscape and its stories

For the people of Belfast, Divis and the Black Mountain used to be a place they could see every day, but couldn't visit, and so, often seen as a symbol of division and exclusion.

Locals often talked about 'living in the shadow of the mountain.' Over the last 20 years, the National Trust has worked alongside local communities and organisations to make it a more accessible landscape, bringing a brighter vision for Divis to life thanks to the local people who care about it so deeply.

As Belfast's largest urban green space, access to these hills plays a crucial role in the health and wellbeing of local communities. Together with our partners, we're making Divis more connected by creating walking routes directly to the city for the first time, so more people can engage with nature and heritage.

We're also improving the way we manage the land and creating new facilities by repurposing structures already on the mountain. And we're collaborating with local community groups and our community advisory panel to improve how the space serves local people, opening it up for everyone to use and enjoy.

Together with our community partners, our vision is to create one of the most accessible upland urban green spaces in these Isles, where people and nature thrive together in a healthy, wild landscape.



Child having a drink whilst on a walk at Divis, County Antrim, Northern Ireland.



Views from Divis Mountain at Divis and the Black Mountain, Northern Ireland.



Playing in the activity area in The Children's Country House at Sudbury Hall, Derbyshire.

Making space for play and imagination

The 17th-century hall at Sudbury has long welcomed curious young visitors. Recently, it was re-presented to create a more interactive and playful experience that truly celebrates the spirit of childhood, making it the first heritage attraction of its kind cared for by the National Trust.

Now known as The Children's Country House, the space has been thoughtfully transformed to be even more welcoming, engaging and accessible for families and children. Over a two-year collaboration with a team of child ambassadors, the National Trust team reimagined the interior, guided by the ideas and imagination of the children.

By embracing a flexible approach to conservation, we encourage exploration, while maintaining our core focus on carefully protecting our historically significant collection. This balance allows children to interact with the space in joyful, meaningful ways, bringing history to life through play.



Clay crafting activity in the Kitchen at The Children's Country House at Sudbury, Derbyshire.

Holnicote

Helping nature take its course

Like many lowland rivers, the River Aller at Holnicote had been straightened, deepened and separated from its floodplain in all but the biggest floods. As a result, water rushed towards Allerford and Bossington, threatening houses with flooding, while wildlife struggled to gain a foothold in the fast-flowing stream.



Holnicote River Project, Holnicote Estate, Devon.

Inspired by a new approach to river restoration, we helped the river find new routes across the valley bottom by infilling 1.2km of stream. The resulting seven-hectare wetland has many small, slow-flowing channels which store water and sediment, helping to minimise flood risk downstream. And because the river can now create its own pathways, the channels have created a habitat where wildlife can thrive.

This approach to river restoration recognises that we can't predict the future climate or river flows. But with this work now in place, the river should be able to respond without the need for further human intervention. The video case study shows just how lush and green the river area is now, compared with the surrounding land after a long, dry summer.

There have been lots of organisations involved in this project. Delivering it has tested all our abilities to apply traditional permissions and processes to a dynamic system, by simply allowing nature to take its course within a valley bottom inside a National Park. It's marked a significant shift in how we manage land in the context of the wider landscape.



National Trust ranger monitoring the grounds at Holnicote Estate, Somerset one year on from the completion of the river restoration project.

Dinas Dinlle



View from the ramparts looking out to Irish Sea from Dinas Dinlle.

Reimagining a changing landscape

The coastal hillfort at Dinas Dinlle is a late-prehistoric settlement that's gradually eroding. In 2017, we started work alongside CHERISH – who provided the funding for the project – to investigate the evolving landscape and get more people involved with the history that's buried here, before it's lost to the sea.

Thanks to an army of volunteers, community excavations have explored hidden secrets and helped to record the area's rich heritage. After exploring the hillfort interior close to the eroding cliff-face, the teams unearthed prehistoric roundhouses buried deep beneath the sand.

At the heart of our approach is the biggest reveal of the excavations: a large roundhouse, which we've fully excavated. It's now exposed for visitors to experience for themselves, along with



new digital interpretation telling the story of the site from the Ice Age through to the Second World War. Instead of backfilling the site to preserve archaeological remains under the soil, our perspective has shifted to think about how our conservation work can benefit people today, ensuring they can experience the history here before it's lost, and so the site was consolidated and left exposed.



Local volunteers carrying out excavations on their local heritage at the Dinas Dinlle hillfort, Gwynedd.

Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal

Looking back to move forward at a World Heritage Site

At Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal, the team has secured planning approval for a contemporary extension to a 19th-century lodge overlooking the lake and grounds of this World Heritage Site. In creating the space, we've looked back to understand the intention behind the original function of the building, and how it fits into the wider 18th-century landscape.

The entrance here has often fallen short of visitor expectations, mainly because of the building's design and the position of the café behind the pay barrier. The remodelled building and extension feature an improved and more accessible welcome area for visitors, particularly important for the 80% of visitors who are halfway through their visit.



An illustration of the re-opened sightlines and planting towards the new Studley building.



An illustration of the new entrance to the building from the water garden – Studley Revealed project.

The work has removed 20th-century interventions, more than doubled the footprint of the original building and crucially, now includes space to change. It's restored lost garden features and removed a temporary fence that fragmented views within the space. The project has also considered carbon footprint and includes a green roof and an air source heat pump.

As well as looking to the past, the project also focuses on the present. We want to deliver a better, more resilient future for the building, with climate impact and sustainability front of mind.

The new layout delivers both physical and intellectual access through new interpretation spaces and accessible design, recognising that everything here needs to work together as one integrated, sustainable space. Importantly, this project represents a bold, design-led approach using quality materials, helping us evolve the story of the landscape in a way that's appreciative of its historic significance.

This document has been produced as a refresh to our organisation's conservation principles. The content is designed to give a clear rationale and explanation for this updated approach to the preservation of places of historic interest and natural beauty, recognising the connection between these elements, their relationship to people, and how we conserve them for the benefit of the nation.

Co-authors:



Dr. Tarnya Cooper
Conservation &
Curation Director



Prof. Rosie Hails
MBE Nature &
Science Director



Dr. Ingrid Samuel
OBE, Placemaking
& Heritage Director

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Arnhel de Serra/Imogen Wood/Feilden Fowles/Barry Edwards/
Gareth Jenkins



British Birds (Pair of Chaffinches; Goldcrest; Woodlark;
Kingfisher; Long Tailed Tits; Stonechat and a Wagtail)
by Charles Collins (c. 1680 – London 1744).