

The Chairman's statement

Delivering our core purpose

My first full year as Chairman of the Trust has been both a challenging and exciting one. I have learnt a great deal about the organisation during this time and have found an extraordinarily successful organisation caring for and providing access to many of the most beautiful properties in the world.

The Trust is an organisation that knows why it exists and where it is going and is confident about embracing change. We need to do things differently in order to continue to deliver our core purpose of looking after special places forever, for everyone in a changing world, and to respond to what is happening around us. We also need to continue to draw heavily on the wisdom and prescience of the Trust's founders.

This is particularly relevant for the Governance Review implementation. I am leading the Steering Group which the Council has appointed to oversee the implementation of our new governance structure. We are making major changes but we are also keeping certain elements of the current structure which were not only right for the Trust in the past but are right for the future. The detailed work is all on schedule for the Parliamentary Scheme to be laid before Parliament in the early part of 2005, but there is still an enormous amount to be done before the new structure can be put in place at the end of 2005. I am confident that the new governance arrangements will ensure that we can continue to command trust and confidence both in our decision-making and appointment processes.

We are also focusing on what is a considerable financial challenge. As you will see from the financial summary, we have increased our income and are continuing to work

hard on a number of fronts to increase income and reduce unnecessary expenditure. We are also now beginning to see the real benefits from our investment in the recent Organisational Review. It is perhaps inevitable, however, that because of the importance and highly labour-intensive nature of much of our work and because of external pressures faced by all organisations, we are struggling to contain our costs and continue to meet our wider obligations and aims. We are working closely with the Management Board to put in place a long-term strategic financial plan that will sustain the Trust into the future.

Much has been achieved over the last year. Equally we face some real challenges. We need to focus on our core priorities so that we can improve what we do and deliver real improvements throughout the organisation.

We are enormously grateful to our members, donors, sponsors, legators and the many organisations that support our work. We also could not achieve what we do without our tens of thousands of volunteers and the huge commitment of our dedicated staff.

During the year we have said farewell to several of our Council members. John Anfield, Ruth Blok, Wendy Bundy, Ian Heathcoat Amory, Tina Leslie, Eileen Meadmore, Malcolm Petyt, Christopher Rodrigues and David Scott have all given unstinting service to the Trust, some for as long as a quarter of a century, and we are immensely grateful to them.



William Proby
Chairman of the National Trust Council
1 July 2004