

Answers to questions raised at the 2008 Volunteer and Supporter Group Conferences

We have endeavoured to answer all questions submitted. Unfortunately we do not have the resources to field further correspondence around these questions. You are, of course, always welcome to raise queries about your role or activity with your manager. General points and questions about National Trust policy should be directed to the Membership Department, PO Box 39, Warrington WA5 7WD, or email enquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk

For practical reasons, we have combined similar questions and removed additional context. The answers to the questions were provided by the relevant departments at central office.

You can navigate to areas of particular interest by holding down the Ctrl key and clicking on the relevant underlined text.

Any question preceded by an * was answered at one of the conferences.

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Access for disabled visitors

Questions were raised by Gilbert Reid and Ken Paton.

What more can be done for disabled visitors?

We have access audits of our sites and also a variety of options for staff and volunteers to take part in disability awareness training and workshops. These give lots of ideas for improving the visit for disabled people and for increasing confidence and knowledge in staff and volunteers to develop the welcome for disabled people. Involving disabled people in ideas for making changes to a property can help make sure that accessibility is considered at the start of any developments and so a better experience can be provided for disabled people. Making contact with other properties to find out what ideas they have implemented can also help. There are access groups and disability organisations across the regions who are keen to help us develop our ideas.

The use of deep gravel on paths makes progress difficult for wheelchair users. Why not use Hoggin?

Deep gravel is a difficult surface for many people to negotiate. We have access audits of our sites which identify areas where access is difficult and provide ideas for solutions. Properties then take forward these recommendations and have to find the funding to complete them. Hoggin is a suggested solution for deep gravel, along with other options, and properties will continue to raise funds to make improvements.

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Benefits and discounts

Questions were raised by Colin Deeley and David Hinmers.

Could consideration be given to 'rewarding' volunteers after, say, 20 years continuous volunteer service? I suggest a life membership (like you give to retiring staff).

This question has been raised on numerous occasions in the past but the idea has always been rejected for financial reasons. If the position were to change, the Volunteering Team would only support it for 30 years service. In the current financial situation, the Volunteering Team has no plans to pursue this issue.

Can we have better meal facilities for volunteers and could they be free of charge?

The Volunteering Team has been more successful in seeking free meals and was pleased to accept Enterprises decision to introduce a 20 per cent discount for volunteers in our restaurants, tearooms and cafes. In the current financial situation, the Volunteering Team has no plans to pursue this issue.

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Broadening our appeal and encouraging visitors and volunteers from diverse backgrounds

Questions in this section are a combination of those raised by a number of volunteers, including Bob Illingworth, Philip Jones, Angela Stocks, Dorothy Taylor, Helen Wain, Jo Elliott, Mike Bean, Belinda Fletcher, Neil Hepworth, Ron Pidgeon, Ian White, Jason Warren, and John Buttifant.

*** The Trust has a traditional image that has obvious appeal to middle class, older people. What is being done to encourage people from ethnic minority backgrounds and young people generally, either as visitors or volunteers?**

We have an enormous diversity of properties but we don't often reflect that in what we do and the stories that we tell. There is a lot of work going on at properties to increase our relevance to different communities. The 'Whose Story?' work in the West Midlands, with a focus on black and minority ethnic communities, and 'London Voices' are two examples of large projects but there is an increasing amount of work going on at other sites. This work will help us identify and work to remove the barriers which make some people feel like we do not provide a welcome for them. We do have some way to go to embed the learning from these activities into the organisation so that it creates real culture change and more people see the Trust as relevant to them. This work is beginning through the development of training and workshops to help build understanding and confidence in staff and volunteers about ways to provide an inclusive welcome. We are making sure that we are more representative in our use of images and we are also looking at different opportunities to encourage more people from different backgrounds to volunteer and work for us, whilst ensuring that we have the infrastructures in place to support this.

Our work with young people focuses around supporting them through their transitions in life with targeted programmes that focus on their learning, skill development (both technical and softer life skills) and employability. This is done through a mix of fun activity based at properties but also through national projects run centrally. We also work with several partners such as the Prince's Trust, Scouts and Guides, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Raleigh International to extend our reach and ensure our offer is relevant to young people's lives

*** In what ways are people with learning difficulties involved in our properties?**

We're involving all in a variety of ways. Some of our sites have involved learning disabled people in volunteering roles for a number of years. We have a strong relationship with Mencap, which has increased since 2005 when we joined with Mencap and other disability charities to lead Disability Month in the Year of the Volunteer. Since then, Mencap has acquired Home Office funding from the 'Volunteering for All' fund and used this to support people with learning disabilities in volunteering roles at properties in Cheshire and also to provide learning disability awareness training for staff and volunteers. People with learning disabilities are also employed or have been involved on placements in different roles, for example, in enterprise and administration teams. These experiences are also helping us to assess our recruitment procedures for staff and volunteers to understand how accessible they are and any developments we can make. Some of our properties are also involved in particular projects with learning disabled people. An example of this is Speke Hall

and their partnership with Mencap Liverpool in their Access to Heritage project to develop a sensory trail.

Will we forge partnerships with other community groups/associations to support our campaigns, e.g. Allotments Association to support local food?

Yes, there is a strong desire to involve others in our food campaign. There is a great deal of expertise and enthusiasm outside our property boundaries and it is important that we help them to be involved. Each property will have a range of potential partners with whom they could engage, so they need to consider what the mutual benefits are for the groups involved and the level of desire take part.

Do events and initiatives take place only on our properties or do we take them out to where people are?

Both methods are valid and it really depends on what the staff on the ground feel would be the most effective way of engaging with local people. Outreach work can be highly effective and helps to build up trust prior to any visit to the property itself, but it does take time. Events on site are often easier to manage but, of course, you still have to encourage people to visit. A mixture of good communication, marketing and face-to-face engagement will yield the best results.

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Centres and Associations

Questions in this section are a combination of those raised by a number of volunteers, including Katherine Welchman, Alan Clegg, Andrew Cluley, Brian Harper, M Burgess, E Peachey and Alyson Brown.

*** Many Trust members seem unaware of the existence of Centres and Associations. It is difficult to recruit younger members and to find people willing to help with the running of the associations. How are they promoted and what more could be done?**

Centres and Associations are promoted in a number of ways:

National Trust website The supporter group's pages are now only three clicks from the home page and there are plans to further update and improve the content of these pages. Over the next couple of years the website itself will be undergoing changes to provide better information for people visiting the Trust website.

Web sub-sites These are now available to every group who wishes to participate, and allows them to upload information to their own pages as part of the main National Trust website. This has the facility to provide information about the group's main activities, contact details and a link to either the current programme or the group's independent website. This new format dramatically cuts down the waiting times that groups were experiencing and gives groups greater control over how their group is publicised.

Web-based design templates These are templates for various types of printed publicity materials for all groups to access, enter their own content and pictures, and

get the printed copies delivered directly to them. This will provide a shortcut to high quality, professional publicity materials, the type that is required for optimum effect at properties and other locations. This will be piloted this year.

National Trust publicity materials The promotional 'What Next?' leaflet is revised annually to provide the best picture of the different types of supporter groups, and the 2009 version clarifies the welcome to volunteers. A whole suite of supporter group publicity materials (such as posters and leaflets) are available from the Trust's Literature Distribution Scheme.

Access to members details We are pleased to have been able to reinstate the mailing of address labels for members who are new to a group's local area. These are *all* new members who have signed up to pay by direct debit, representing 83 per cent of our membership base. There remains the ongoing ability to request details of those who have moved into the locality and have been members for three years or more.

Publications Each region has a newsletter which goes to every member in that region. Supporter group articles appear regularly in these regional newsletters, and most regions publish listings of their local supporter groups at least once a year. *Active* magazine, distributed to all our 52,000 volunteers, often includes an article about supporter groups and the next edition has a full page dedicated to a 'Year in the Life of' the new North Leicestershire Association. There is a great deal of competition over space in printed materials issued by the Trust, including the member's *Handbook*, however we will continue to push editors for publicity and are constantly looking for new opportunities to promote our supporter groups.

In 2008, at the regional Centre and Association conferences and the three Volunteer and Supporter Group Conferences held towards the end of the year, concern was raised a number of times about the difficulty groups face when recruiting committee members. At the latter events, time was set aside in the Supporter Groups workshops to share experiences and ideas on this subject. A summary of these discussions will be seen in the forthcoming Conference communications, and in the meantime we encourage groups to speak to colleagues in other committees around the regions for advice on the best ways to recruit. Keep an eye on other Associations' newsletters to find those who have recently successfully filled vacancies and speak to them about successful methods. Alternatively contact your regional office to get the contact details of other local groups who may be able to share some ideas with you.

As you know, National Trust volunteers are now eligible to join Centres and Associations. We are aware that groups are not yet seeing an influx of enquiries from volunteers about becoming members so we have put together a paper entitled 'Recruiting Volunteers to your Centre or Association' which can be found as an insert in the March edition of the Supporter Group Newsletter.

Must Centres and Associations use a bonded agency when they organise holidays for their own members?

It is best practice for Centres and Associations to arrange, book and purchase all their holidays through a travel agent or tour operator which is fully bonded or has other arrangements in place to protect members' interests. There is no insurance cover in place for groups who arrange their own holidays.

However, groups **must** use a travel agent or tour operator which is fully bonded when holidays **include air travel**. In such cases members must also be billed directly by the travel agent or tour operator to ensure that the contract for travel is between the individual traveller and the travel agent or tour operator. This is necessary for members to have the full benefit of protection under the *Package Travel Regulations 1992*.

For more information, please see the 'Notes on holiday organisation for National Trust associations' issued by the Supporter Group Liaison Office in May 2004.

Do Centres and Associations need to individually register with the Data Protection Registrar in order to hold members' details, or is this covered by the Trust's national registration?

There is no requirement for groups to register individually. However, under the Data Protection Act 1998 the National Trust is required to enter into written agreements with third parties that process personal data controlled by the National Trust. All supporter groups come under this 'third party' category. In light of this requirement, the Supporter Group Liaison Office has recently issued guidance around this entitled 'How to use the National Trust mailing label scheme' so please see this piece of guidance for more information.

Can we prioritise the Centres and Association wish list and/or allow property managers to prioritise it?

Information on regional projects that require financial support is sent to groups on an annual basis by their individual regional offices. Updated information on that project list is also available on request from your regional contact at any time throughout the year.

If a list that has been prioritised across the property or region would be of help to you when allocating your support then please speak to your regional contact.

Could the properties that receive money from their local members' centre acknowledge the gift on a notice board at the property or in some other way?

Properties receive funding from multiple sources and it would not be feasible for properties to acknowledge all gifts received on their notice boards. Some of the larger properties do have a 'gifts register' in the form of a bound book and would, if requested, add group gifts to that record but this is not available everywhere. This book is not always able to be publicly displayed, owing to lack of space or other local reasons.

What are the different types of National Trust supporter groups?

The term 'supporter groups' covers three main types of group:

Centres and Associations These are groups open to National Trust members and volunteers. Centres and Associations promote the work of the National Trust and make membership and volunteering more enjoyable by allowing their members to share their interests with like-minded people in their area. Through an organised year-long programme of talks, outings, holidays and social events members make friends, learn more about the National Trust and its properties and support its work. There are

now around 200 such groups in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as in Belgium. Centres and Associations are affiliated to the National Trust and have a common constitution. Independent local groups are also run by members and volunteers for members and volunteers; they have a small subscription charge to cover administration costs.

NTV Groups Around 40 National Trust Volunteer (NTV) Groups carry out practical conservation work at properties in their area, and sometimes further a field over a weekend. Conservation days and weekends range from footpath and step construction, planting and coppicing, to creation of habitats and dune restoration work on coastal properties. Courses may be held where members can acquire new skills and learn traditional country crafts, such as hedge-laying and dry-stone walling. Many NTV Groups also have an active social programme.

Friends and property-based groups We also have many 'Friends' and other property-based groups, which adopt and support a Trust property through voluntary work, helping with events and fundraising. These tend to attract a wider age range than NTV Groups. Groups may also help out at events such as property open days, rallies and concerts and members learn about conservation and other aspects of the management of National Trust properties. Many of our Friends and property-based groups also have an active social programme.

For more information on the different types of groups, please see the National Trust website www.nationaltrust.org.uk/supportergroups.

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Clothing

Question raised by Mandy Hamilton-Winger.

What is the policy for providing volunteers with clothing, e.g. fleeces, jackets, etc?

We have a range of branded work wear with the supplier Dimensions. This range of clothing has been produced for use by Trust staff and volunteers when they are working. The decision to buy clothing is made at a property/office/department level as all costs need to be paid by them through our purchase order system.

Since the launch, we know that many individuals have contacted Dimensions to order clothing for themselves and have asked to pay using their own money. Those orders cannot be accepted but properties have been advised that, at their discretion, they may accept monies from volunteers or staff wishing to purchase branded clothing, pay it in to petty cash and then raise a purchase order in the normal way to complete the clothing order form. Because clothing orders will only be accepted with a Trust purchase order number, any individual orders are simply returned to the contact on the order form.

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Communication with volunteers

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who included Marilyn Bradley, Stella Hyland, Anthony, Valerie Glass, Jane Allsop and Charlie.

*** It would be helpful to understand the Trust organisation and responsibilities, particularly at property level. Who do we discuss particular issues with?**

The person responsible for the property is the Property Manager and reporting to this person are the heads of various departments, who have their own teams that report to them. If in doubt and you do have a question then go to the property manager who can direct you to the appropriate department.

Who can volunteers give feedback and contribute their ideas/opinions to?

In the first instance, volunteers should give feedback to their manager or supervisor at their property, who will be able to forward the information to the relevant person or signpost the volunteer to the appropriate channel. Some properties also have volunteer forums and volunteer representatives and this provides a route for people to feed in their ideas/opinions on a range of matters. Speak to staff or other volunteers at your property to see if this exists where you volunteer. Conferences both locally, regionally and nationally give volunteers the opportunity to put forward their views and also articles in *Active* encourage volunteers to comment on particular issues and its content.

How can we take all these comments (*raised at the conferences*) back without offending fellow volunteers?

We would suggest that when you are feeding back to fellow volunteers that you take the opportunity to open up a discussion rather than simply 'off loading' information onto people. That way you can encourage other volunteers to discuss the same topics as were discussed on the day e.g. who do they feel our supporters are, how do they find their volunteering experience? This approach will enable volunteers to share their ideas and experiences and learn from each other rather than simply being provided with information that they may feel they already know.

Another suggestion would be to keep your feedback personal e.g. '... we spent the morning talking about who Trust supporters are and it really opened my eyes. I'd never thought before about people just walking by when I'm leading a working holiday as being Trust supporters. It made me think about what I can do to start a conversation with them in the future.'

Why does the National Trust not canvass views from the volunteers, particularly about the new opening times when their experience could be of value?

We would hope volunteers were consulted and informed about extended opening hours (or any other key issues for that matter). Decisions on opening hours, while sitting within a national picture, were ultimately local, i.e. it was for each property to say how it could manage opening for longer so any consultation would also have been local, not national. We recognise the knowledge and expertise volunteers have and it's important that we do involve them in decision-making processes. Volunteers are encouraged to share their views if for any reason they aren't been asked for them direct.

Could the 'strategy' message be disseminated to volunteers using a video clip on a DVD and/or website?

Good idea - this is also being looked at for staff with Fiona Reynolds doing her spring conference speech on DVD - something the digital media team are aware of so under consideration for the future. In the post-conference DVD one of our key messages is what the strategy is and what it means for volunteers.

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Conservation work and talking to visitors

Question raised by volunteer who opted to remain anonymous.

Engaging with visitors whilst doing conservation takes time - how do we manage this?

Volunteers have an important role in ensuring that conservators' time is used to the best purpose both in terms of achieving conservation and engaging visitors. We need volunteers with the interest, skills and training needed to mediate between visitors and the conservator doing Conservation in Action. This will require training in delivery, briefing using the conservator to give information about what they are doing and why, and to answer commonly asked questions. We would suggest having condition survey and treatment reports on hand for visitors to look at, perhaps also samples of materials and equipment with which the conservator is working. The work usually takes place in rooms which are stewarded anyway - so can be managed by training preparation, and planning the visitor route around the activity to avoid bottlenecks (which may also risk damage).

If routine collections care work is the subject of Conservation in Action, many houses are developing the skills of conservation assistants to talk about the work as the rest of the team gets on with it, e.g. dusting, inspecting, surveying. Information on this can also be put into room stewards' folders. Conservation for Access toolkits identify the number of staff needed to care for an historic interior depending on its size, fragility, complexity, significance, and numbers of hours it is open to the public. A business case can be made for recruiting any additional collections care staff required by also ensuring their role has an engagement/interpretation dimension, and should be a reinvestment from increased visitor income that should arise from extending hours of visitor access

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Countryside sites

Question raised by volunteer who opted to remain anonymous.

What opportunities are there for engaging with people on non-manned countryside sites?

The Trust has many unmanned outdoor sites although there is always a warden who will have responsibility for the upkeep of it and to ensure that it is in good heart. There are several opportunities for face to face engagement that could be taken such as

building up a team of local volunteers who would act as the sites eyes and ears - our regular dog walkers often alert us of any issues they find. Often onsite information is provided which helps the visitor to appreciate the place. Events, such as guided walks, are held on these places and volunteer work parties undertaking practical work provide another engagement opportunity.

We have a programme running at present of putting our outdoor spaces online - over 350 of them, more than our houses and gardens!! Many of these sites have downloadable trails associated with them. This helps those who like to plan their visits to the countryside to see what you can do on NT properties. Being active on these spaces is engaging, I would argue, in its own right and that the Trust has just enabled people to feel confident that they can access and enjoy these landscapes.

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Direct Mailing

Question raised by volunteer who opted to remain anonymous.

Is there a way to speed up the mailing label process?

These are quite complicated to produce, but we'll have a look at it.

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Environmental matters

Questions were raised by Mandy Hamilton-Winger and Trevor Johnson.

Does the National Trust monitor wastage - paper, food, leaflets etc?

We don't currently measure any of our wastes as all our properties currently buy in their own waste services and we have no mechanism to record centrally the waste generated on the properties. However, we are trialling a waste broker who will enable us to make sure we are minimising the waste we send to landfill, and maximising the amount we recycle. They will also help us to set some baselines in place for waste. We are monitoring our spend on waste across the Trust based on budget codes but at present, this analysis does not give us the level of detail to identify spend on specific waste streams.

Despite this somewhat negative response to the question, there are lots of things going on in relation to the waste streams identified in the question.

Paper We want to buy all our paper for the magazines, handbooks and direct mail from recycled sources. The *Handbook* for the last three years has been printed on v-green paper which is made from 100% post-consumer waste. We are, however, faced with the problem that the number of paper mills processing a usable quality print from post-consumer waste is reducing. Recycled photocopier paper is on the stationery supply list.

Food NT Enterprises, our trading arm, are keen to reduce food wastage in order to save money. We have a small but growing number of properties that are now

composting their food waste. We should like to have more, but have to be aware of the animal by products regulations and the requirements of the composting regulations.

Leaflets When ordering leaflets via the Literature Distribution Service, staff are asked to record how many unwanted leaflets from previous year's stock need to be recycled. They are then requested to take this amount into consideration when placing new orders. We are working to identify and address wastage and to reduce over-ordering.

The Environmental Practices section are working closely with colleagues in Wales to trial an environmental management system - Green Dragon - and the property audits for these will give us the tools to better manage our environmental impact.

If anyone has any specific waste issues, or is aware of any particular examples of interesting practice that they would like to share, or problems for us to investigate, then please contact any of the Trust's Environmental Practice Advisers.

*** Where does the Trust now stand re wind turbines given the likelihood of energy shortages as old nuclear and coal-fired stations are closed down?**

In principle we support a major expansion of renewables, which the Government's Renewable Energy Strategy proposes, but any individual project needs to factor into the decision the full range of environmental considerations, including the protection of valued landscapes, biodiversity, the historic environment, and peoples' well-being.

We recognise that wind turbines, especially large ones, are not appropriate in many landscapes, but are in some. We have objected to a number of schemes which were felt to compromise Trust interests unacceptably, but not objected to many others, and even supported a few.

There are potential economic benefits, and greater energy security, if the Trust also installs more renewables on its own property. The Trust's Senior Management Team have approved that in principle, subject to resources, though there are unlikely to be many Trust sites where large-scale wind turbines would be appropriate.

To summarise our Energy Policy (2007):

- We aim to be an exemplar of responsible energy management. We will reduce our dependency on fossil fuels and the National Grid. We will minimise our energy use and assess the potential of our estate for renewable energy and carbon storage. We will review our procurement policy to favour low embodied energy materials; and favour alternative fuels wherever possible.
- Any energy-related development that would affect our properties needs to be compatible with our statutory duty to promote the conservation of places of historic interest and natural beauty, and public access to them.
- In conserving energy, in generating appropriate renewable energy, and in storing carbon on our land, the Trust is supporting its core conservation purpose, since this will help reduce the damage to our properties from further climate change.

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Finances

Questions in this section are a combination of those raised by a number of volunteers, including Philip Charnley, Jacqueline Rae, Veronica Swinburn, Ron Pidgeon and Anthony Pick.

*** In view of the impending recession, what provisions are being made for falling income from shops, appeals and membership?**

We have prepared carefully for the forthcoming year in the context of the challenging economic climate. We have used external research about market trends to shape our strategies and are reviewing those on a monthly basis.

Whilst in the country at large, consumer confidence has fallen dramatically, the recession has taken effect and people are adjusting their spending accordingly, research shows that the area least affected is holidays because people consider this as a necessity rather than a luxury, almost more so in a time of difficulty. Nevertheless, for membership, our pricing has been carefully based on research and we have held family membership costs at their 2008 levels. Our promotional strategies have also been adapted to promote the value for money of membership and we'll be promoting strong, positive 'quality of life' messages to combat the pessimism that the recession has induced. We believe that our properties are exactly the sort of places where people will be able to relax and unwind. In addition, we have a number of contingency measures in place ready to be deployed. So our income budget has been set realistically and can be adjusted according to how the year develops.

The current recession is having an effect on disposable income and expenditure across many retail businesses in the UK. It is a difficult market and this is unlikely to improve in 2009 and may continue into 2010.

In response to this, a comprehensive marketing plan has been prepared in order to maximise the effectiveness of our promotions. Most of these concentrate on value-for-money offers, including link-selling and discounts for multiple purchases. Greater emphasis is also being placed on the need to up-sell and the importance of great customer service, with a number of training programmes available to support these.

If, despite all of these measures, sales do not meet expectations then good cost control will be of paramount importance.

Likewise for appeals, income is expected to be under pressure. So whilst donor recruitment will continue, our priority will be on retaining our existing donors, adjusting the 'asks' to maximise effectiveness in the current economic climate. Donor relationships will, of course, be key, so the established Benefactor, Patron and Quercus (major donor) programmes will provide an important foundation. Community events and local fundraising may well increase, as well as e-fundraising linked to the ongoing development of the National Trust website. Our donors may well get more demanding as to what they want back from us and they will be especially unhappy if they see us being lavish with our (donor) events, so we will work harder to do smarter events at lower costs and/or secure sponsorship.

What influences the range sold in Trust shops and what scope is there for shops to sell local or property-specific items?

We'll take this opportunity to clarify that shop sales at the end of January were in line with visitor numbers and that the average transaction values (the amount the customer spends in the shop) has increased on last year so it would be wrong to assume that the product offer in our shop is less than successful. However, the outcome of the recent retail review looked at some of the specific areas highlighted in the question - in particular how to differentiate each shop and get a closer fit to the property (for more details of the retail review and the changes that are being planned to shop ranges please see the March '09 issue of Trust You). During 2009 the new approach for retail will be piloted in seven shops around the country and the results reviewed later in the year - if this proves successful with customers then the aim will be to roll out to more shops from 2010 onwards.

*** With particular reference to Seaton Delaval, Northumberland, should the Trust be taking on more properties while there is such a large maintenance backlog? And why are we trying to buy Croome Court, Worcestershire, when smaller properties are managing on a shoestring and tenants properties are in need of maintenance?**

Always a difficult question. We do look at acquisitions carefully, at the threat to the property in question and whether we can afford it. They do have to be self-funding in any case, as somewhere like Seaton Delaval would take around 20,000 new memberships to sustain it otherwise. In the current economic climate we are looking to reduce the asking price of Seaton Delaval.

There have been phases of acquisition, e.g. in the 1980s, and phases of retrenchment. It is impossible to be dogmatic, and we can only look at the individual circumstances at the time. There must be an unwritten law which says that new properties need rescuing just when we have the least funds!

*** Will the recession delay property investment plans? Like the new visitor facilities at Sheffield Park Garden?**

No, at this stage we have no plans to cut our investment in new visitor facilities, for example. Regions/countries and properties are, however, revisiting what they plan to spend time and money on in 2009 to ensure we are focussing on the right things in what could be a challenging year. We are looking to ensure we get the best prices we can for the works we do commission in the current market place. We are also looking to prioritise works that will directly benefit our supporters this year - at a time when we really want them to take the opportunity to come and enjoy what the Trust has to offer them, the simple pleasures in life. There is no indication that plans for Sheffield Park Garden will be put on hold due to the recession.

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Full-time volunteers

Questions in this section were raised by a number of volunteers, including Mandy Hamilton-Winger.

Full-time volunteers need more help in dealing with benefits offices. The Trust has been good in providing standard information but it needs improving. Does the Trust work with other conservation bodies on this?

We have been working with organisations like Volunteering England to lobby for further support clarity on guidance. The Government has just produced a booklet – [‘Volunteering while receiving benefits’](#) in response to this - which demonstrates that they understand the need for further support to people on the ground, particularly benefits office.

How many full-time volunteers get jobs with the Trust?

We do not hold central records of full-time volunteers. It is therefore hard to say how many of them move to employment with the Trust but anecdotally it seems as if the proportion securing employment is fairly high.

Does the Trust work in partnership with other conservation bodies to develop training/work experience programmes for full-time volunteers?

Currently the Trust is working with a number of other environmental agencies to provide training for volunteers. These organisations include BTCV, National Parks and local authorities.

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Historic House Hotels

Question raised by Pat Jenkinson.

What are the Trust’s plans for the Historic House Hotels (Hartwell House, Bodysgallen Hall and Middlethorpe Hall) and will they offer special rates for Trust volunteers?

Although wholly owned by us as they were given as a gift to the National Trust, these three hotels are being run as a separate company. We shall make enquiries about volunteers receiving a discount.

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Issues affecting staff or employment

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who included Brian Smith, Neill Irwin, Diana Kershaw and Andy Whiteley.

Are only graduates considered for the post of property manager?

No. When assessing the suitability of candidates for any role we always look at a combination of both qualifications (not necessarily a degree) and experience. The Trust's competency framework reinforces the importance we place on the skills and experience our managers possess and it is envisaged in time that the framework will also be used as an aid to recruitment.

*** Should the Trust introduce a scheme to enable managers to work for a month at another property? This would benefit both managers and properties.**

We don't have a formal job swap or shadowing scheme within the Trust but we do encourage local arrangements, particularly for new managers as part of their induction. More formally, where the opportunity arises, secondments offer an ideal opportunity for managers to gain new skills and experience, and many of our short-term roles, e.g. covering for maternity, are offered on a secondment basis. We will shortly be issuing a revised Secondment Policy highlighting the benefits and processes involved in such arrangements.

I understand that there is a 'freeze' on recruitment, and difficulties with budgets caused by economic down turn. Many of the new posts were targeted at engagement and support for volunteers. Will these posts be the first not to be filled? Will regions cut budgets supporting volunteers?

As you are aware, we have decided that in the current economic climate we must look to work within our existing staff headcount over the coming year, rather than continuing to increase it. This headcount 'freeze' is a freeze on growth across the Trust as a whole, rather than a direct cut in numbers. We are looking for the organisation to have the same number of staff in October 2009 as it did in October 2008. However, rather than set the same level of freeze across the whole Trust, and reflecting our commitment to put properties at the heart of all we do, we are looking to shift our staff resources more towards properties, and to roles directly supporting properties. We have thereby asked central and regional offices to freeze a number of vacancies in the coming year to enable us to continue to invest in our properties. Decisions about exactly which posts will be frozen rest with the relevant regional or country director.

Should staff be housed by the Trust in expensive areas to save on their commuting time and green footprint?

There is no reason why a member of staff should not apply for a tenancy of a National Trust house/cottage. Any letting would be at the prevailing market rental for the area. That may address the issue of commuting (and green footprint) but the Trust is not able to let its houses at a discount.

Some properties set a limit on the amount that may be claimed on volunteer mileage expenses in order to keep within budget. Are staff mileage expenses similarly capped?

The amount employees can claim is subject to the Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs guidelines. Unlike volunteers, employees can't claim any mileage for going to and from their usual place of work. However, when travelling on business away from their usual place of work they can claim 40p for the first 10,000 miles and 25p thereafter if they are using their own vehicle. We would expect managers to also monitor budgets for regular staff and look to reduce costs and mileage, perhaps through the use of lease or short-term hire schemes or preferably using public transport and ultimately looking at alternatives to travel.

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Learning

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who included Mary Camp and Bob Illingworth.

Many younger people today appear to know little of their historical heritage. Could this have an impact on future visitors?

We recognise that we will have to keep working hard to make sure that our properties are relevant to the next generation. Many properties are doing fantastic work in this area (e.g. Beningbrough, Workhouse), but we need to generalise this activity. We have identified families and young people as the top priority for the learning team in 2009.

*** How much contact does the Trust have in schools - promoting visits for families; project work within school especially primary schools?**

We run school visits for 500,000 children a year, mostly for primary schools. This is nearly ten times as many as English Heritage, so it is a significant stream of work for us.

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Membership

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who included Elizabeth Capper, Jacqueline Rae and Martin Webster.

Pensioners are getting a poor deal in the National Trust. Why isn't the reduction from full to reduced rate automatically allocated? I think that the over 70s should get a significant reduction. Many are giving up driving and can hardly visit a single property.

The pensioner rate is promoted in the *National Trust Handbook* and on renewal letters. We can't offer it automatically because we do not have birth dates for all of our members. Bear in mind that there is also a financial aspect to be considered: member support for the National Trust, not free entry to properties, is the principle and we need to be careful that we don't accidentally make it the other way round!

Why has the Trust decided to finish special rate membership for those living at the same address as a Life Member?

Our central administration system can no longer support 'additional' members who pay for their own membership but share mailings with their partner member. Only a small number of people are affected and we have written to everyone individually to explain the circumstances. There may be other options in particular situations - do contact our Membership Department (0844 800 1895).

Why don't you promote the idea of Life Membership as a retirement gift to companies for their staff and include volunteer info in the pack?

Great idea. We have tried this a couple of times in the past, both with membership and volunteering information, but well worth having another go.

Would it be feasible to give membership for July and August to encourage family visits?

Agree with the sentiment but full membership would not be the right route. It could be feasible to offer admission vouchers or another visiting incentive.

*** Would it be possible for someone like me (OAP Life Member) to bring two grandchildren to a property for whom I would pay and two others for free? I can't afford to pay for four, so choose an English Heritage day out where I can take up to six children free as a member.**

This merits thinking about, thank you. We'll feed this into a year-long review of membership categories and associated aspects which is currently underway. One possibility, if you accrue enough hours to be offered a volunteer card, would be to take in one child as the additional guest on your volunteer card and one as the additional guest on your life membership card - this would then achieve the desired result.

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The National Trust

Questions in this section are a combination of those raised by a number of volunteers, including Dinah Wilcox John Allen, Angela Robinson, Frank Galbraith, Mandy Hamilton-Winger, and Joyce Helliwell.

How do you see the future of the National Trust? [This question was put to Fiona Reynolds, Director-General.]

An organisation that is loved as well as admired for the wonderful work we do, providing physical and spiritual refreshment for the nation through promoting and looking after our beautiful, diverse properties.

*** The Trust cannot possibly be 'everybody's thing' so why not concentrate on what you do best rather than spreading yourself too thinly?**

This question was answered briefly at the conference by Fiona Reynolds who quoted Simon Jenkins saying everyone is a Trust member - they've just not paid yet. Beauty is for everyone so we do have a complete appeal.

How democratic is the Trust able to be?

We have over 3.6 million members and more than 52,000 volunteers. We have successfully combined commercial flair with activities rooted in conservation and the upkeep of beautiful properties and places, whilst recognising the vital role that our volunteers in particular play. One excellent way to help people feel involved in what is happening is to work with over 200 senior governance volunteers, who take part in the activities of the National Trust through participation in advisory panels, regional/country committees, the Board of Trustees and our Council of 52 members. Whilst these bodies are non-executive in nature, they have a considerable influence

on the strategy and direction of the National Trust, and enable us to maintain a democratic aspect to the organisation that is important and relevant. As well as the Board of Trustees, we also have Board Committees that scrutinise in detail our investments, risk management and the processes involved in governance appointments. We continue to review these arrangements to ensure that these senior governance volunteers feel valued and are engaged in the most meaningful ways - and we are tremendously grateful for all the hard work and commitment that all our volunteers provide.

*** How are trustees selected and appointed?**

This question was answered at the conference by Hugh Mattheson, himself a Trustee, who explained that appointments are made on merit rather than location, and that the Trust encouraged volunteers to stand for election, as John Farley, a current trustee did. The question has since been answered in more detail, as follows:

We have a very rigorous process to select trustees, both because these roles are critical to the organisation and also because of our strong commitment to transparency and good governance. As a charity, we take our responsibilities very seriously, and the Board of Trustees play a vital role in helping to make sure that the National Trust demonstrates public benefit, protects donors and beneficiaries, and maintains public confidence. When new trustees are required, a Nominations Committee with 2 or 3 Council members plus one external member is specifically set up for the purpose. In order to ensure the widest possible pool of high calibre applicants, advertisements are taken in all major publications. From this, the Nominations Committee interviews a short-list of candidates against a set of criteria that have been agreed with the Council, and make a recommendation to the Council on appointing new trustees. The Council will then review the recommendations and once satisfied will approve the new trustees.

What value does Trust put on conservation?

Conservation lies at the heart of the Trust. Conserving wonderful properties, for ever for everyone, is what the Trust exists for. We carry out conservation for the benefit of people, so that they can get as much enjoyment as possible from visiting, understanding, and participating in the care of them. Which is why volunteers are so hugely important to the Trust - the life blood of so much of what we do. The value that the Trust attaches to conservation, and its relationship with people, is reflected in the fact that these form two of the four key elements of our Strategy.

*** The decision-making process in the Trust is famously long. What can be done to speed it up?**

Many processes are actually quite straightforward and not long at all but we do recognise that sometimes decision making can be slow because we often deal with very complicated issues.

The focus we are taking to address this is in a number of areas:

Firstly we are investing in the training and development of Property Managers so that individuals in these posts not only know what they are able to make decisions about but also have the confidence and skills to do so.

Secondly, we recognise that this issue is often about the way that the functional staff work with Property Managers and so we are working to develop the consultancy skills of staff in these areas

Thirdly we are looking at some of the key processes and where practical we are refining these processes so that they are simpler. We are also putting some processes in place where none existed before; (paradoxically, putting a clear process in place can often make getting a decision easier than not having one at all). Improving the processes often involves taking out a lot of consultation and this is what takes a lot of the time in the Trust - a lot of people are passionate about the Properties and want to be involved in any changes.

What is the relationship between the Trust and English Heritage?

English Heritage is a non-departmental public body of the UK Government sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The National Trust is an independent charity. Both undertake property management and have a large number of historic and archaeological sites and monuments in their care. English Heritage also has a statutory role in relation to listed buildings and provides conservation advice.

There is obviously a large overlap in the work being undertaken by both organisations, and we work closely together on matters of mutual interest, e.g. energy saving and the impacts of climate change. There are also some properties that are managed jointly by both the Trust and English Heritage, such as Stonehenge, Housesteads Fort on Hadrian's Wall and Fountains Abbey.

*** Would it be possible for the Trust to be involved in the care of some attractive, remote redundant churches, in conjunction, perhaps, with the Redundant Churches Trust and other similar bodies?**

Fiona Reynolds answered this question briefly at the conference: The suggestion has been discussed and the conclusion was that we wouldn't take on redundant churches as specialist organisations exist to do this. Once we step in, the community can step away and churches should be part of their community. A number of Trust properties do have churches which we are, of course, involved in caring for.

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Offering services as a chaplain

Question raised by Rosalind Graham Hunt.

How can I use my skills as a chaplain in the service of the Trust staff and volunteers?

You could offer your services to volunteers through the National Trust Volunteers group on Facebook or the Yahoo email group which allows you to send and receive emails to the group from your usual email address; details of both were in the delegates' pack and are in every issue of *Active*.

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Online networking and the web

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who opted to remain anonymous.

When can volunteers have an online network?

There is already an online network for volunteers in the form of the Facebook group which is administrated by [Rachel Clark](#), Volunteering Adviser (Recruitment & Communications, 01793 817659). It currently has 101 members and if you would like to join it, do visit the National Trust Volunteers group at www.facebook.com. There is also a Yahoo based email group that allows you to send and receive emails from your usual email account once you have a Yahoo ID. Again contact Rachel to find out more.

As far as our own website is concerned, we're planning to enable the Trust's volunteering team to create and maintain a much more user-focused section that meets their needs better than the current site. The new site will have flexible templates including more functionality (blogs, comments, user-generated photos etc); which the Volunteering team will be able to add and edit themselves. Timescales for this are still to be finalised, but will be January 2010 at the latest.

Although this will result in a more inclusive user experience on our website for volunteers, these plans do not include a separate volunteer community (or extranet) as such. Timescales for this are being finalised this week, but it will certainly not be created before the back end of 2010.

How web savvy are our potential members?

'Potential members' is a very wide group - this could include pretty much anyone in the UK. As a rough guide, 16 million households in Great Britain (65 per cent) had internet access in 2008 (www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=8). Many more people have access from their workplace or place of study.

Different age ranges and demographics have different levels of online expertise - many of the younger generation spend more time online than watching TV, and undertake a wide range of activities, whereas other demographic groups are more likely to use the internet for basic activities such as researching a holiday or shopping for a book.

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Opening hours

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who included Gillian Morgan, Jo Elliott, Marilyn Bradley, and Peter and Barbara Proffitt.

*** Please explain the thinking behind the decision to open Trust properties in February 2009, regardless of local conditions and circumstances.**

Research has told us that our complicated opening times - season, days and hours - are a barrier to people who would otherwise visit. With regard to the 'engaging supporters' bit of our strategy, we have worked on a gradual three-year programme of

a more comprehensible system, of which 2009 is the culmination. The actual rules are not as prescriptive as the whole of the February, but more to full opening in March - but this does vary according to local conditions and circumstances. See Killerton's and Hardwick Hall's opening times in the 2009 Handbook for examples of how complex this still is!

*** How have the increased hours worked?**

The shift to extended opening hours only completes in 2009 i.e. it is still very early days to know how well this initiative has worked. We are measuring the effects carefully but it has been difficult to tell due to generally lower visitor numbers in 2008 and local variations between properties e.g. at one property, we've had numbers increase in the morning but reduce in the afternoon; which was a very unexpected outcome.

*** With conservation in mind, how can we take care of our large properties with the extended opening days and hours, considering the high visitor numbers we have been experiencing? When can we 'rest' the house?**

How we conserve our properties and the items within them is of real interest to many of our supporters. We used to carry out much of our conservation work either over the winter or at the start and end of a day while visitors weren't on the property. We now carry out much of this work in front of visitors and see it as an excellent way of engaging them more deeply in our work. Built properties do still have a closed season when they can be rested while many properties are running guided tours during the extended hours rather than operating on a 'free flow' basis – this puts less pressure on the houses and collections.

*** Is there any truth in the rumour that Trust properties will close at the end of August 2009 to save money in the economic climate?**

No. It's a rumour. Opening properties through the winter months has been beneficial; we would not do it otherwise. There are no plans to close any properties - quite the opposite as properties are at the heart of our work to involve people more deeply with our work. We are looking at our structures and monitoring opening hours as much as possible.

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Planning

Question raised by volunteer who opted to remain anonymous.

We concentrate very much on the interface with visitors quite rightly; however there are 'back room' jobs which are often overlooked. How can we save long-term projects, such as compiling inventories, from short-term planning?

We recognise the importance of long-term planning to ensure we always continue to operate effectively. Taking the example of inventory management, we shall be launching the Collections Management System from mid April 2009. This will provide:

- a brand new web application specially tailored for the National Trust;
- a unified inventory made up from all migrated data;

- access to information for all Trust curators, conservators and property staff;
- better collections management – which is essential for museum accreditation by the Museums & Libraries Association;
- improved accountability, audit, data standards and security controls;
- a developing online National Trust catalogue, for everyone to use and enjoy.

The project team will be providing a full training programme for 300 staff and volunteers to achieve the Audited Inventory Standards at all properties.

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Promotion/Marketing

Questions in this section are a combination of those raised by a number of volunteers, including Brian Homans, Helen Cameron, Jacqueline Rae, Keith Burton, TH, Tricia Ferguson, Peter Osorio and Mandy Hamilton-Winger.

Why are there not more Trust leaflets in motorway service stations and tourist information centres?

Most regions/countries use professional leaflet distribution companies, which target the places thought most likely to generate visits. In some cases this will include service areas and tourist offices, in some not.

Why does the marketing budget relate to visitor numbers?

We spend more on properties that can contribute more, financially and in terms of public benefit.

The Trust always appears rather worthy and humourless. Should we relax a little more?

Agreed! Our strategy has as one of its four aims, to 'engage better, with our supporters'. The right tone and style is part of this. Look out for changes in this direction over the next twelve months. See also this year's Handbook cover.

Why is the Trust encouraging/allowing cold calling? I received a call from a 'chugger' (despite being in telephone preference service). As these people/organisations take a large cut of any money given I would never donate that way anyway.

Only in the fundraising department do we use the services of the leading operator in this line of work, Pell and Bales, and income far outweighs cost. Telephone preference service people should not be being contacted. If this happens to you let us know and we'll deal with it (contact our Membership Department on 0844 800 1895).

How much co-operation exists/is allowed between Trust properties and local tourist sites/museums/organisations etc? I have heard that Trust properties can only 'promote' other Trust properties.

It varies - there is almost always good co-operation between neighbouring National Trust and non-National Trust sites, and also at regional and central levels. Yes, we

promote ourselves first but almost always there's a section for information devoted to nearby attractions in our visitor receptions.

In the opinion of two marketing directors and visitors, the Trust is poor at presenting and promoting its products. What is your response to this?

Some sites are more difficult than others at which to get this right. Some of our shops are real top performers, and the presentation ('merchandising') is very good. We do provide training in this area but feedback is always welcome.

The Trust is seen by many as an 'elite' or 'upper class' organisation. Is a PR exercise necessary?

In an interview in The Times Simon Jenkins (The National Trust Chairman) mentioned that the Trust has an elitist, risk averse and samey image. What might we see that will address this image?

On risk averseness: We need to give properties more autonomy to deal with questions of risk with a guarantee that they will be backed up by management at the centre. We are currently in discussion with the Health and Safety Executive to see whether they might not be able to agree that the National Trust was a good operator and that we do not require constant form filling etc if we are using trained professionals to address risk problems.

On 'sameyness' the Chairman feels this is a legitimate area for concern. We need to play down the corporate/bureaucratic nature of the Trust and play up each place's local significance. This means involving local communities with their properties and allowing them to use them as a community resource, for events etc.

On elitism: Dealing with great houses and their fine contents as we do there are bound to be some feelings about 'class', simply by association. But countryside and coastal visitor numbers dwarf those at the mansion properties which must speak volumes for our inclusivity! Our properties need to move to become local community resources as many of them were in the pre-18th century where everyone in the village was familiar with the 'Great House' and used it in various ways. The house should be restored to the heart of the community.

Have 'free entry days' produced an increase in membership?

Typically, these events cover their costs - or close to it - by means of extra catering and retail spend and a certain amount of new members, but their purpose is about enabling access for those who otherwise would not/could not visit.

I find the National Trust to be quite introspective. What, if anything, could be done to change this point of view?

Good call and we must always be alert to spending too much time gazing at our navels and not enough focussing on our customers, be they visitors, members or any other kind of supporter.

Why do TV stations use RSPB and Natural England instead of Trust?

The challenge that we face when it comes to generating media coverage has always been the breadth of our work. The RSPB is known for birds, the Woodland Trust for trees and English Heritage for historic buildings and castles. This makes it easier for the media as they are known for a specific area of expertise. For the National Trust, we cover all of these areas and much more.

In the last few years we have seen a steady increase in broadcast coverage (TV and radio) for our work around nature. Much of this coverage has been proactively generated by the National Trust with 2008 figures showing a rise of more than 130 per cent on 2007. We have seen more coverage on programmes such as Countryfile (BBC1) and the national news. And this just covers the national media: our regional and country press teams are also working hard to increase the amount of coverage on TV and radio.

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Publishing

Question raised by volunteer who opted to remain anonymous.

Why isn't *Properties of the National Trust* - last published 1997 - published anymore?

We are hoping that we might be able to produce an updated version at some stage this year (albeit potentially in an electronic format with printed copies run off to order) but the undertaking is quite a significant and costly one. The complexity has arisen from having to update the information from a variety of sources, and having to cross-reference this against, amongst other things, boundary changes that have taken place over the last decade. All this needs to be looked at against the fact that, aside from internal use within the Trust, there's probably a demand for no more than a couple of dozen copies a year. Having said that, we are endeavouring to get an updated version of this running some time in 2009.

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Room stewards and guides

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who opted to remain anonymous.

We know that room guides/stewards are important to the houses. How seriously does the Trust take supporting their role?

Room stewards have always played an important role in our houses. Initially focused on security and safety, the room steward role developed naturally into one that is crucial to welcoming visitors into our houses. It is this shift in emphasis that is enshrined in the revised room guide role, placing a stronger focus on visitor enjoyment and welcome without losing the importance of caring for our collections. Given this evolution, clearly the Trust needs to support the development of existing stewards into room guides. Therefore the new room guide workshop, created and tested by a group of property staff and volunteers, throws more light onto how the role has evolved and provides participants with activities and ideas on what they can do to help visitors have an enjoyable time. In the long term, we expect the workshop to become an

induction tool for new room guides and to provide the basis for ongoing development and support of the room guide role.

*** Can the profile of room stewards be raised in volunteer literature, e.g. recruitment leaflets or *Active* magazine, as they seem under-represented at present?**

The role of room guides is central to the experience visitors receive at properties. Over 12,000 people are involved in such roles and play a part in welcoming visitors as well as supporting the property team on matters of health and safety and security. There was a specific recruitment poster produced last year (Bring History to Life) that focused on visitor-facing roles in our built properties and were designed to explain the room steward (and other roles like it) to potential volunteers and encourage them to get involved. Also as part of Heritage Open Days an issue of *Active* was dedicated to volunteers in visitor facing roles with room guides featuring throughout. More is planned and the work underway to support the change from room steward to room guide will provide more opportunities to raise the profile of such key roles.

Does the Trust have a policy of listening-in to volunteers as they steward a room?

Not presently. In the long term, what we may consider are ways that guides could support and mentor each other.

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Running the volunteer programme

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who included Alan Fletcher, Roger Starr, Sue Crofts, Penny James and Maxine Courage.

What can be done to improve the management of volunteers at the properties?

We are looking at a range of ways to improve the management of volunteers at properties. This includes updating the current Working with Volunteers course and developing further volunteer management training and development opportunities for those working with, leading and managing volunteers. Many properties are also involving volunteers to manage other volunteers to help enhance their capacity to support and develop volunteers in their role. We have also just updated our Essential Volunteering Standards and Practice checklist, which provides a quality framework for volunteer involvement, for all Trust teams to aspire to. In addition, we are currently developing guidance material to enhance the selection and induction of new volunteers, which should assist managers of volunteers.

How do you envisage the concept of volunteer-volunteer managers working?

In essence, Voluntary volunteer management (VVM) is the concept of volunteers managing other volunteers. In many areas of the Trust's work and for many years, volunteers have been involved in managing or leading other volunteers. Rather than this being an ad hoc approach, the Trust is looking at developing roles for volunteers to manage other volunteers in all aspects of their volunteering experience.

This is the approach that other national volunteering organisations such as the Samaritans, the Scouts and Citizens Advice Bureau use to manage their volunteers effectively.

The exact role of a VVM will depend on the property but they will be involved in all or parts of the volunteer management process and will work alongside the property staff team. We are not proposing a 'one size fits all' approach.

VVMs will be responsible for key aspects of volunteer management such as;

- developing new volunteering roles
- promoting National Trust opportunities and dealing with enquiries
- recruiting and selecting new volunteers
- induction
- organising rotas
- learning and development
- support and supervision
- communication
- organising socials

The VVM role does not remove staff from involvement in managing and supporting volunteers. Volunteers will still have regular contact with, and support from staff. The VVM role adds capacity at properties to ensure the volunteering experience is as positive as possible.

Is there an explicit part of the professional Trust career structure which recognises and rewards the management of volunteers?

The Trust is currently looking at ways to offer accreditation, training and development opportunities for those leading and managing volunteers. This includes accreditation in volunteer management and the Management Development Programme for staff managing other staff and volunteers. This provides those managing volunteers with something that demonstrates their knowledge and competence in managing volunteers and should support future career progression.

What is the financial cost to the National Trust of using volunteers?

We do not know the current full cost as this would include analysis of staff time, costs at a local level to recruit, run social activities, pay expenses etc and not all of this info is readily available. When we last undertook a more detailed analysis it was estimated that for every £1 invested in volunteering the Trust received £3 in return. The ratio is 1:2 for Working Holidays - but this does not take into account the social and environmental benefits of volunteering.

Is there any follow-up of volunteers that leave? Do you know why they leave?

This is something we need to work on. We know many of our volunteers stay year on year and are very satisfied with volunteering with us. Through previous surveys we know that about 12 per cent of volunteers leave each year. We have guidance to support properties in learning from those who leave and also keeping in touch - promoting ways to still be involved - but we know that many properties struggle with their time to follow up and put this into action. So it is an area we hope to address through initiatives such as Voluntary Volunteer Management - together with improved

guidance and questions. The main reason for leaving is the change in motivations and no longer being able to do the role - though change in own circumstances (health, location, time, etc).

There appear to be differing policies for mileage rates, induction, health and safety, Criminal Records checks, etc. Are there plans to standardise these?

There is a standard policy which stipulates mileage rates but there is local discretion on any limits set. We are improving our guidance on volunteer induction on top of which there will always be a need to bring in the local context. Health and safety and Criminal Record Bureau checks shouldn't be open to as much local interpretation and there are central policies. Centrally there is work underway to identify areas where compliance is needed and then putting in place appropriate communications and tracking. The latter two areas are both topics that are being considered by the group taking this forward.

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Supplies

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who included D. G. Parratt.

What is your policy on compact fluorescent (CFLi) lamps? These were criticised in the *Lighting Journal* in December 2008.

The article was well-informed but did give a poor impression of CFL lamps, underplaying their very considerable energy saving. The reality that the Trust has to work with is that the higher wattage tungsten filament lamps are being phased out and we need to find suitable replacements. Our policy has been to first put CFLs into working areas, staff and holiday accommodation and new buildings. We are taking a measured approach to putting them into historic showrooms, as we must consider each light fitting and room for their suitability for the new lamps, both aesthetically and physically. Thus you may find some CFLs in showrooms where curators and conservators consider them acceptable, but you will also find energy efficient tungsten halogen lamps similar to the types mentioned in the *Lighting Journal*, where a more traditional type of light source is required. Whilst giving a 30% energy saving these new halogen lamps do not match the 60-70% saving of CFLs. We continue to use large numbers of the traditional 25W tungsten filament candle lamps in showrooms as there is as yet no halogen lamp equivalent in terms of light output.

We are watching the development of new lighting technologies such as LEDs, closely. In the future these may be deployed in Trust properties, but at present the types of LED lamp available for traditional bayonet/screw-fitting lamp holders are not considered suitable on aesthetic grounds. We do have a number of architectural installations of LED lighting.

With the credit crunch why does the Trust not shop around for items instead of one source, which is an expensive option?

A single source is typically a cheaper option as we can negotiate a volume discount. There is, of course, a balance to be made between proper contract management to maintain discount levels and our desire for local sourcing.

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Talks Service

Questions in this section are a combination of those raised by a number of volunteers, including Peter Riley, Terry Frazier and Jim Osborne.

What are the plans for developing the Talks Service and when will we hear about them?

The Talks Service project officer, Linda Coode, was appointed in September 2008 and all speakers should already have been contacted about her appointment. A key outcome of the project is to ensure that volunteer speakers are consistently well-supported, both in the regions and from the centre. This transition to a common standard will be done in consultation with regions and nominated speakers who are willing to represent the views of their peers. If you have not received any information about this project, please contact your regional co-ordinator.

Will 35mm slides still be available and will the range be updated?

Slides will no longer be available from the centre and updated talks will be provided from the centre in digital format only. However, your region may be able to provide you with these images in slide format - please contact your regional co-ordinator to discuss your requirements. The project aims to ensure that all speakers are provided on a regular basis with up-to-date information about facts and figures relating to the Trust.

How will the Talks Service be promoted?

As part of the Talks Service project, the promotion of the Talks Service will be considered with each region – from using the website, to articles in Trust magazines, leaflets and word-of-mouth recommendations. Improved promotion of the Talks Service and regular communication with speakers will be part of the common standard.

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Volunteer conferences

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who included Audrey McKinnon, Barbara Mitchard, Ian Vincent and Susan Stephens.

*** It was difficult to contact/speak to all volunteers who attended the conference - could there be a listing of those who want 'to opt in'?**

We are keen to see volunteers communicating with one another, sharing ideas, taking forward pieces of work, etc., and so are keen to look at ways we can support volunteers to do this. The complexity of data protection legislation means that sharing contact details, even with permissions, is overly complicated. The good news is that we already have in place a couple of mechanisms for you to contact other volunteers

(and that's potentially all volunteers rather than just delegates). We have a National Trust Volunteers group on Facebook and a Yahoo email group which allows you to send and receive emails to the group from your usual email address. We would encourage all volunteers to join these groups and get a dialogue started on the things that interest you. (Details of both these groups were included in your delegate pack and are repeated in every edition of *Active*.) If there was someone particular from the delegates list that you wanted to contact, why not drop them a line c/o their property group or let us know who they are and we can try and facilitate contact.

If these conferences are deemed to have been a success (and I'm sure they will!) are there plans for any future sessions? Any chance of using Manchester as a venue?

As you will see from the analysis of the evaluation forms in the final report, delegates are certainly interested in attending other volunteer conferences with 84 per cent of delegates saying that they would prefer to attend a regional conference. It will now be up to individual regions to consider how they respond to this level of interest. If the North West were to organise a conference then Manchester would seem to be a logical location to use.

Now that we have given you our experiences and information, how shall we see it used?

As you will have seen from the interim and final reports we have analysed all your hard work at each of the conferences and used your feedback and ideas to generate a set of recommendations. Many of the improvements you want to see in your volunteering experience will take time to implement; there are very few 'overnight' fixes that we can put in place in such a large and complex organisation. We are keen to find ways of involving conference delegates, and other volunteers, in finding and implementing the solutions. We would love to hear more from you about your ideas and what actions you can take either locally or working regionally or nationally.

Will you be feeding back outcomes of this conference to all attendees? Including a plan to implement any changes?

Yes. An interim report on findings and 'what next' was sent to all delegates at the end of January. A final report will be provided at the start of March which includes, as far as possible details of how we are going to bring about change.

*** Why are there no holiday brochures on display?**

At the time of the conference, our supply of brochures was low as there was only a few weeks before the new brochure became available. We did include a Working Holidays flier in all delegate packs which informs people about the programme and how they can get a brochure.

*** Why did you use the Holiday Inn at Borehamwood instead of a Trust property? It has very poor public transport.**

The only Trust property large enough, and with enough workshop rooms, to host an event like this is Heelis (our central office) and we used this for the third conference. We had a limited budget on which to run the conferences which meant a central London venue was out of the question. A hotel close to Watford was felt to be a

suitable compromise but we do now recognise that the public transport links were not as good as they could have been. We did try and limit these effects by offering lifts from the stations.

Why won't the Trust pay overnight hotel accommodation for volunteers who live too far to travel in one day? By only paying part of the travel and no overnight stays, the Trust is attracting the volunteers who can afford to come.

The three conferences were run on a limited budget which meant we had to make some difficult decisions about the level of expenses we could cover. Whatever limit we set on time/distance to venue, it would never have worked for everybody. The number of volunteers who could attend the conferences was always going to be limited by the number of places available. It was for this reason that we have always made it clear that we would like delegates to feedback to volunteers unable to attend and we also encouraged volunteers to feed in their ideas via delegates and for delegates to gather other volunteers thoughts/ideas before attending.

Would it not be a good idea to place amplifiers half way down this long room?

The conference was the first time Heelis had been used for such an event. We were advised that the speaker set-up we had would be adequate for the size of the room and the number of people taking part.

The signage to Heelis was not very good.

Thanks for this feedback which we have passed to the property team so that they can improve the instructions.

Why was there inconsistent literature provided for the conference?

We're not sure what this question was particularly about and would welcome further feedback in an email or phone call from the enquirer. The conferences were promoted via a number of routes but the messages we were circulating were all essentially the same. We tried to ensure that all delegates received the same information whether we were contacting them via email or the postal system.

My property manager did not feel involved in this conference. Who is attending from the properties and why?

We made a decision early on in the organisation of the conferences that we wanted volunteers to nominate themselves to get involved in a conference rather than people being selected to represent a property/group. This meant that most of our communication was aimed at volunteers rather than members of staff. We did this to ensure that delegates really wanted to be there and would be willing to share their experience with others after the events. We have had several pieces of feedback that suggest property staff felt 'out of the loop' in terms of what the conferences were about and what volunteers would be doing and why. If we organise conferences again, we will review how we communicate the events to staff. This feedback has already been taken on board by the Community, Learning and Volunteering Manager in the East of England who is organising a volunteer and supporter group conference at the start of April. All volunteers wishing to attend have to be nominated by their property so that staff know which volunteers are attending and everyone has clear expectations around feedback etc.

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Volunteer recruitment

Questions in this section are a combination of those raised by a number of volunteers, including Annette Townsend, Dorothy Taylor, Angela Stocks and Tim Robertson.

*** More and more professionals are retiring early and have the energy, enthusiasm, skills for challenging roles. What plans are in place to identify skills and to tap this resource for the benefit of the Trust and the volunteer?**

We are very aware of such a change - brought even more to the fore due to the current economic climate. We need to support a culture where volunteer skills are acknowledged and supported and this starts with our existing volunteers, not just new people. Having said this we do need to address three areas - our approach to developing new opportunities in line with changing motivations, managing the initial interest through good selection/questions and promotion of the opportunities to targeted audiences - particularly to businesses through pre-retirement packages, etc. We have some really good practice in this area but it is not consistent. Examples include regional survey teams, funding managers, trainers, photographers - but these are currently limited to specific locations/regions.

What is the Trust's strategy for recruiting new volunteers, particularly younger people?

We do need to diversify our volunteering base to keep up with the changing age profile of our current volunteers and the changes happening in society as a whole. There are two elements to our approach:

1) Using projects to trial approaches and ideas that can then be rolled out across the organisation. An excellent example of this is the V Project in the South West, a partnership project with English Heritage designed to encourage young people (16-25) to volunteer in the heritage sector. The team ran training programmes to support young people in room guiding and also organised a volunteering festival. There is also the 'Get Into...' programme we are running across the country with the Prince's Trust that gives young people the opportunity to develop relevant skills experience so they can then find work in that sector.

2) Creating a culture change in the way we think about involving volunteers. Young people aren't necessarily able to volunteer all year round but could make a huge contribution in the summer. We know 'baby boomer' volunteers want more of a say in how they volunteer rather than just taking on a limited role where they simply follow instructions. We know though that we aren't always good at responding to diverse needs and we do need to improve in this area.

*** What is the Trust's strategy for recruiting new volunteers, particularly younger people?**

Our current primary focus is ensuring that volunteers are well managed. There is no point putting effort into recruiting volunteers if they leave after a short time as they don't feel supported. Volunteer recruitment is primarily carried out locally with support from regional volunteering teams. From the central volunteering team's perspective, the materials we produce always carry images of diverse volunteers and any media

work we carry out is targeted mainly at those people who have time available during the day - this means students and young parents just as much as retired people.

When will the volunteer registration form be revised?

*** How is the Trust going to improve its follow-up of potential volunteers after the initial contact?**

We have just undertaken a review of our guidelines on selecting and inducting volunteers as we know they weren't as fit for purpose as they could have been. The new guidance makes it much clearer to those managing volunteers what they need to do to ensure the right volunteers are selected for the roles we have available and that their relationship with the Trust gets off to as strong a start as possible. As part of this work, recommendations have been made on improving the registration form and we hope to update it later in the year.

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Volunteer training

Questions in this section were raised by volunteers who included Annette Townsend, Mandy Hamilton-Winger and Jane Allsop.

Would the Trust consider increasing the opportunities for accredited training for volunteers, such as professional training in tour guiding, customer care and interpersonal skills?

We have opportunities for accreditation of volunteer training at a number of properties and in a number of disciplines. These include, among others, tour guide training at the Back to Backs, Young Heritage Leaders across the organisation and Advanced Volunteer Management in Wessex. Also there are opportunities for full-time volunteers in the countryside to gain vocational qualifications in topics such as chainsaw and brush cutter operation, all-terrain vehicle and minibus driving, and first aid, depending on the nature of the tasks they undertake and the property requirements.

I hear the Trust is going to standardise training for full-time volunteers throughout the organisation. Can you tell us more?

Our aim is to provide a consistent training experience to all volunteers across the organisation and this is what we are working towards. As yet we don't have standard full-time volunteer training but should soon have a standard outline for training for Voluntary Volunteer Managers, which we have achieved by working through a Trust-wide project group.

Some charities have volunteer appraisal systems. This is always a good opportunity to recognise and value a volunteer's contribution. Or should we have a self-appraisal system?

Some properties are looking into the possibility of bringing in annual reviews for their volunteers. Reviews give volunteers an opportunity to discuss their volunteering with their manager or supervisor and identify any development or additional support they may need. This may be done as a one-to-one or in a group and reviews should

complement not replace the ongoing informal dialogue between a volunteer and their manager/supervisor. Feedback from properties that are carrying out reviews has found that volunteers have welcomed the opportunity and found it useful.

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Working Holidays

Questions were raised by Diana Kershaw and Neil Fox.

What can be done to improve the standards in basecamps?

We are working with property staff to introduce minimum standards for the presentation of basecamps and the facilities on offer. We are also working to identify sources of funding and support to assist with the necessary works where possible. Basecamp wardens and managers are keen to promote their basecamps to wider audiences and they are sharing examples of marketing and advertising which have proved successful for colleagues.

Where are Working Holidays advertised and what sort of press coverage do they receive?

We have a very limited budget for the promotion of Working Holidays but it's enough to enable us to attend the Outdoor Show at the NEC every year as part of a wider National Trust team. We also advertise in a few national travel and activity magazines. Apart from that we aim to maximise coverage through our Press team. This has been very successful over the last few years and we have had many articles in both national and local papers in the travel, life style and environment sections, both in tabloids and broadsheets. Since the start of this year (2009) articles on our Working Holidays have appeared in *The Observer*, *Telegraph* (paper and travel on-line), *Guardian*, *Sunday Mirror* and *Sunday Times*. We have a journalist taking part in a holiday this week with a view to writing a piece for us. We also, through the Press team, focus articles in long-lead magazines with special interests and have so far covered wildlife, country walking and gardening to name a few. We distribute the brochure to all volunteer centres and student volunteering offices at the start of the year. We are, however, always keen to explore other promotional opportunities and would welcome any other ideas.

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