

House Letting Policy

1. The Trust's Houses and Cottages

- 1.1 The National Trust is the largest conservation charity in Europe. Our purpose is to look after places of historic interest or natural beauty for the benefit of the nation. We do this largely through the ownership and management of special places and we now care for nearly 250,000 ha of land in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Trust's properties include over 25,000 buildings and structures of which more than 5,000 are houses and cottages.
- 1.2 Many cottages have been acquired as part of larger rural estates. This has often included estate villages where dwellings had been provided to house estate workers. Small houses can therefore be of historic interest as part of the social fabric of rural estates as well as being of vernacular or architectural interest in their own right.
- 1.3 The Trust provides a substantial proportion of the housing in more than 40 villages and in some areas we are the principal provider of rural housing. In these situations the decisions the Trust makes in allocating and managing housing have a real impact on the local communities involved. Where the Trust owns individual dwellings or where they are more scattered this impact will be less.
- 1.4 About 1,000 of these 5,000 dwellings are occupied by staff and some 300 are let as holiday cottages, but the majority are let to private individuals as their main residence.

2. The Trust's Objectives for Housing

Overall Objectives for Housing:

- To safeguard the physical contribution our houses and cottages make to the historic built environment.
- To further the Trust's work in the locality through selection of tenants with suitable skills
- To generate rental income to support the Trust's purposes
- To help meet identified social housing needs where the Trust is a significant housing provider
- Where possible, to favour those making a contribution to the community

3. Management Principles for Housing

- 3.1 All National Trust properties are different. Each has its own character and individual circumstances. This is the very diversity and local distinctiveness that the Trust celebrates

and protects through its conservation work. It is not appropriate therefore to impose a central policy to be applied rigidly Trust-wide.

- 3.2 As a charity we are obliged to make the best use of the Trust's assets for the furtherance of our core purpose – to provide public benefit through our conservation work. We must therefore start from a presumption of a full market rent for all our lettings. Any discount from market rents must be justified in terms of a clear benefit it brings to meeting the Trust's purposes and must be proportionate to that benefit.
- 3.3 Decisions on housing must be made by staff on the ground and local judgement will have to be applied. However, in order to promote a more consistent approach the following management principles have been identified to provide a framework for local decision making. These reflect the Trust's overall objectives for its housing referred to above, and have been developed drawing on the feedback arising from the internal and external housing consultation process.

4. Rents

- 4.1 The Trust will adopt the general presumption that houses and cottages will be let at the prevailing open market rate ('market lettings'). This will reflect any inherent disadvantages or benefits of the property, and the terms of the tenancy. The Trust may limit the market by excluding uses, such as second homes or holiday accommodation, where we believe this is necessary to achieve our housing objectives.
- 4.2 The Trust will consider lettings at less than open market rents ('non-market lettings') in the following circumstances:
- Where it is in the Trust's interests to let to someone who brings skills needed for our work and for whom local accommodation would otherwise be unaffordable. Rental levels will be set locally to reflect the value of the benefit provided to the Trust; or in accordance with the Trust's staff housing policy as appropriate.
 - Where the Trust identifies itself as a significant housing provider.
- 4.3 Each region/country of the Trust will identify properties where we believe we are a significant housing provider. This will usually only be the case in the following circumstances:
- where the Trust owns a significant number of houses which are a high proportion of the available housing in a particular locality, **and**
 - where there is a reliance on Trust housing to meet the social needs of the community
- Judgements will be made by the Trust in consultation with our Regional or Country committees as necessary.
- 4.4 Where the Trust has identified itself as a significant housing provider we will establish the proportion of our housing stock which can contribute to the provision of social housing locally in consultation with local authorities and other local housing providers as appropriate. Rents for social housing will be set taking into account local assessments of affordability undertaken by the District Council and relevant housing associations. Both the proportion and rental levels will be kept under review as circumstances change.

4.5 Rent reviews will be undertaken in accordance with the terms of individual tenancy agreements. Where a proposed increase is particularly high due to the current rent being well below the appropriate rate, the increase may be stepped in order to reduce the impact. The period and phasing of the steps will be negotiated locally to reflect the circumstances of the letting and the tenant.

5 Selection of Tenants

5.1 In selecting tenants for vacant cottages we will first consider our need to house staff for operational purposes in accordance with our staff housing policy. We will also consider the needs of existing tenants who may wish to relocate to more suitable accommodation within the community.

5.2 The Trust will take the following factors into account in selecting tenants for all lettings:

- the ability of the person to pay the rent and the running costs of the property (determined through financial references and a credit check)
- the compatibility of the tenant with the nature of the property eg its location, size, number of rooms, accessibility, garage/parking, garden, etc.
- the need for tenants to be sympathetic to the nature and situation of the property and the Trust's aims to protect its character.

5.3 Where, for any particular letting (either market or non-market), the Trust has a choice of prospective tenants who meet the above criteria equally well, the following categories will generally be favoured:

- people in local employment or who provide important local services
- people who can demonstrate a commitment to the local community through support of local facilities, fulfilling community functions etc.
- people who have family living in the locality
- people who have family connections with the locality

5.4 These criteria may be varied or given different weightings according to local circumstances and local needs. Where this is the case the relevant criteria will be set out by the Region/Country or Property in Local Letting Policies and made available to prospective tenants.

6 Relationships with tenants

6.1 The Trust values the role of its tenants in the care of the buildings they occupy and we want to build lasting relationships with good tenants. This will reduce turnover of occupiers, minimise empty cottages and be of benefit to the property, the tenant and the community. Where appropriate the Trust will provide greater security to tenants where a good relationship has been established.

6.2 The Trust readily accepts a responsibility to be a fair and reasonable landlord and we will review the terms and conditions of our standard agreements in the light of contemporary practice to ensure that they reflect an equitable balance of rights and obligations.

6.3 We will adopt an open and transparent approach to the management of our residential property. We will establish clear and consistent processes for the letting of vacant cottages, encourage the provision of information to tenants and provide mechanisms for feedback and complaints.

- 6.4 We will aim to provide decent homes for people to live in and will set out the basic standard that we will strive to achieve. Improvements will not be imposed on tenants against their will but properties will be upgraded as opportunities arise and resources permit. Local arrangements for responding to defects will be improved where possible and we will aim to provide better information on the planning and prioritisation of repairs and maintenance.
- 6.5 The Trust will not seek to become a Registered Social Landlord, as we have to balance our social obligations as a housing provider with our core purposes and statutory responsibilities. We will, however, develop our own best practice for residential lettings to set out publicly how we will seek to perform as a fair and reasonable landlord. This will take account of the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code and Guidance but will also reflect the Trust's particular responsibilities and these management principles.

7 New Affordable Rural Housing

- 7.1 Where there is an identified local need for new social housing and the Trust's inalienable land comprises the only suitable site available, consideration will be given to making land available to an appropriate housing provider on a leasehold basis. Any such proposal would need to be considered locally on a site by site basis and would be subject to detailed design and environmental performance considerations. This would include an assessment of the significance of the site, environmental and traffic impacts and be subject to the negotiation of acceptable terms. Sites will only be made available if they are identified as suitable through the development plan.
- 7.2 Where the Trust has redundant buildings in suitable locations we will consider the potential to create units of affordable accommodation with the help of external funding through a housing association or similar body. The use of vernacular buildings for such schemes, however, is likely to be constrained by the need to protect the character of the building or its special features.
- 7.3 In situations where the Trust is involved in housing developments on land held for investment purposes we will require that a proportion of the scheme is devoted to affordable housing wherever possible. The Trust sees this as an integral part of the sustainable development it seeks to promote.

8 Holiday Cottages

- 8.1 Holiday Cottages provide a valuable opportunity for people to enjoy our properties but potentially could reduce the amount of accommodation available for local communities. Decisions on the use of individual buildings for holiday accommodation must take account of the following factors:
- The business case comparing holiday let income and expenditure with those for a conventional letting
 - The social implications of using a cottage that could be a permanent residence
 - The potential conservation benefits to the building through a less demanding use
 - The opportunity to enhance public access to Trust properties

As a general rule we should favour buildings or dwellings that would be less satisfactory as a family home.

9 Working with others

- 9.1 The Trust recognises that it is not alone in dealing with affordable rural housing. There are many authorities and organisations devoted to the issue and a great deal of external expertise to draw on. We will continue to nurture partnerships with our national and local tenants associations and with other organisations at national and local levels to help us fulfil our housing objectives.