



THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

Fiona Hyslop MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
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19 May 2020

Dear Fiona Hyslop,

Coronavirus impact - National Trust for Scotland announcement of emergency actions

Thank you for your letter (17 April 2020) in which you responded to the concerns expressed by the [Institute of Conservation](#) (Icon) in our letter (31 March 2020) on the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on cultural heritage conservation. We are pleased to note your continued commitment to developing support schemes in recognition of the important contribution that heritage skills will offer to Scotland's recovery from the crisis. As you may be aware Icon has carried on with its work to support the sector through this challenging time and has recently updated and expanded the [resources](#) we have made available.

However, we are aware that the full impact of the Coronavirus is only beginning to be revealed. Some of the issues were outlined in an [article](#) about the crisis faced by Scotland's independent museums posted by the Museums Association earlier this month, but we were seriously alarmed to read the position statement issued by the National Trust for Scotland last week. I am therefore writing to express our concerns over the National Trust for Scotland's proposed emergency actions and to urgently request that you and your officials take proactive steps to protect the organisation's future and Scotland's outstanding cultural heritage. As Sir John Stirling Maxwell said at the Trust's first Annual General Meeting in 1932: *'The National Trust for Scotland serves the nation as a cabinet into which it can put some of its valuable things, where they will be perfectly safe for all time, and where they are open to be seen and enjoyed by everyone.'*

Icon is a membership organisation and charity, which brings together those with a passion for conserving cultural heritage. We represent around 2,500 individuals and organisations comprising professional conservators, heritage scientists and many others with a commitment to ensuring the long-term survival of objects and collections, historic buildings and archaeology. Nearly 10% of our members are based in Scotland and directly supported by our [Icon Scotland Group](#); a significant number of our Scottish members are employed by the NTS or are contracted to work on NTS projects.

I know you will share our concern over the depth of the impact that the Coronavirus is having on the Trust and its decision to take drastic cost-cutting measures. The economic impact of the public health emergency is being felt widely by the cultural heritage sector. Many of our members have

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shared heartfelt stories of having to close doors to the public for the foreseeable future, placing the ongoing financial health and sustainability of their sites under question. Our recent [Coronavirus survey](#) indicated severe loss of work by the sector, across all UK nations. The joint statement issued by Industrial Museums Scotland, Museum Heritage Highland and the Scottish Community Heritage Alliance warning of imminent permanent closures and redundancies further demonstrates the gravity of the situation in Scotland.

I was encouraged by our earlier correspondence, in particular your letter outlining the Scottish Government's commitment to Scotland's heritage and its support for the cultural heritage sector, which I have shared with our members. However, in light of the Trust's announcement, more action is clearly needed. We therefore applaud your decision to set up a taskforce to help the organisation find a way forward and hope it will result in a solution that allows sites to open, crucial jobs to be retained and that respects the Trust's independence.

The taskforce's mission is of the utmost importance as the Trust plays a vital role in the preservation of some of Scotland's most significant and iconic sites and landscapes. The decline of a national institution as symbolic as the National Trust for Scotland would send a dangerous message undermining the value of cultural heritage at a time when we need to be promoting the potential of heritage to contribute to post-pandemic recovery and rebuilding. The wider cultural heritage sector also looks to the Trust for leadership in terms of sharing best practice, supporting skills and nurturing talent. The loss of staff through redundancies risks the sustainability of the nation's broader heritage workforce that regularly relies on the skills, knowledge and experience of the Trust's workforce.

I have written to Simon Skinner to draw attention to the importance of investing in conservation as a strategy to support the Trust's longer term sustainability. I encouraged his engagement with your taskforce and offered our assistance. We hope you will consider the concerns raised by Icon on behalf of the conservation profession as you work with National Trust for Scotland, your officials and Scottish Enterprise to develop plans for a feasible way forward.

However, broader and more longer term financial assistance for the entirety of the sector is needed. We echo the call made by Industrial Museums Scotland, Museum Heritage Highland and the Scottish Community Heritage Alliance for an immediate relief package for cultural heritage to complement the emergency grant funding from Museums Galleries Scotland, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Creative Scotland. While we are grateful for the existing support from these grant giving bodies, the funds are currently designed to provide relief in the short term. I encourage you and your colleagues to act urgently on developing additional support before sites are forced to permanently close.

We remain keen to support your work and would be happy to provide further assistance if needed.

Yours sincerely,



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Chief Executive