

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE01721](#)

Main Petitioner: John Hanks on behalf of Friends of Geilston

Subject: National tourism strategy for Scotland and the role of the National Trust for Scotland

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to meet with the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) to discuss the role the NTS can play in the context of the national tourism strategy, Tourism Scotland 2020 and, within that, the future of any Trust property under threat of closure, such as Geilston Gardens near Cardross.

Background

The petition is submitted by John Hanks, Treasurer of the Friends of Geilston Gardens. Although it is primarily about the broader topic of National Trust for Scotland's (NTS) involvement in the development of a national tourism strategy, much of the background information accompanying the petition focusses on the specific case of Geilston Gardens.

Geilston Gardens

Geilston Gardens in Cardross, Argyll and Bute, was bequeathed to the NTS in 1991, and it has been open to the public since 1998. The award-winning gardens are over 200 years old and attract approximately 12,000 visitors per year (11,000 NTS members and 800 "paying visitors").

Geilston is an important example of a small laird's house from the 18th century that was expanded by subsequent owners connected to Glasgow's tobacco trade, then by military and businessmen in the 19th century, and by middle class Glasgow professionals in the 20th century.

The NTS announced in June 2017 that it was reviewing the future of the gardens because of increasing and "unsustainable" losses, estimated to be between £85,000 and £90,000 each year. The Trust therefore commissioned an economic appraisal of the property, with findings due to be published over the next few months.

According to [The Times](#), the preferred option of the NTS is for a community trust to be established to run the gardens. However, campaign group Friends of Geilston (FoG) are less enthusiastic, believing that the wholesale disposal

of the property by the NTS represents a dereliction of duty. They highlight a legacy from the previous owner of the estate to the NTS which is now worth in the region of £2.5 million.

Scottish Government and the tourism industry

Tourism support is a devolved policy area, with ministerial responsibility sitting with Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop. Visit Scotland is the national tourist board, with responsibilities for marketing, quality assurance and tourist information. Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise also have roles in helping tourism related businesses grow, with the industry considered one of six “key” or “growth” sectors identified by the Scottish Government.

The current national tourism strategy for Scotland, [Tourism Scotland 2020 \(TS2020\)](#), was developed by the Scottish Tourism Alliance (STA) and launched in 2012. STA is the representative body of the Scottish tourism industry. The Scottish Government works with STA to help deliver the strategy’s outcomes, encouraging its public, private and third sector partners to align their activities with the strategy. The NTS is [not specifically mentioned](#) as one of the Government’s partners in this regard.

The Scottish Tourism Alliance is currently working on an [updated strategy](#) for the industry post-2020, due to be launched in autumn. Responsibility for developing the new strategy and creating a supporting action plan will lie with the recently formed Strategy Steering Group (SSG), which includes representatives from industry, Scottish Government and various public agencies. The NTS is not included in the [list of participating organisations](#).

National Trust for Scotland

The National Trust for Scotland is an independent charity set-up in 1931 for the preservation and conservation of Scotland’s natural and human heritage. The Trust has become Scotland's largest membership organisation and considers itself a leader in “conserving and promoting the nation's treasured places and collections so that they can be enjoyed by present and future generations”.

Total income and endowments received by the NTS in [financial year 2017/18](#) amounted to £57 million. Of this, £12 million came from membership subscriptions, £14 million was from commercial activities and £7 million was from legacies. Only £1.4 million was received in the form of grants, of which £180,000 came directly from the Scottish Government (representing 0.3% of total NTS income).

When asked in a [Parliamentary Question](#) early last year about NTS’s planned restructuring, including the potential loss of 79 jobs across Scotland, the Scottish Government responded:

“The National Trust for Scotland is an independent charity. As such it is for the organisation’s Trustees to make judgements about its operational

structure. The Scottish Government is aware of the proposed changes and we understand that the Trust will be engaging with its stakeholders as its local and national operations develop.”

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