

# **Woodchester Mansion Trust**

## **A Strategy for Change 2020**

### **2014-2020**

#### **About the Woodchester Mansion and its Trust**

Woodchester Mansion is a 19th Century Victorian Gothic Masterpiece mysteriously abandoned mid-construction in 1873. Hidden in a secluded Cotswold valley, it is untouched by time and the modern world. This Grade 1 Listed Building has been saved from dereliction, but will never be completed.

Set within a historic and spectacular parkland owned and managed by the National Trust, the mansion is an integral part of the wider SSSI, notified particularly for its bat interest.

Visitors walk through an extraordinary architectural exhibit in which the secrets of the medieval Gothic builders and masons are laid bare. The carvings in Woodchester Mansion are among the finest of their kind in the world.

The Woodchester Mansion Trust was founded in 1989 when the Mansion had been derelict and neglected for a number of years. With support from English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and other grant-giving trusts, Woodchester Mansion Trust set about rescuing the Mansion from potentially catastrophic decay, with the aim of repairing it to the condition in which building work was abandoned in the late 1870s and opening the house to the public.

The Trust is the pioneer of the Living Classroom model of heritage skills training, becoming the first heritage site in the UK to provide hands-on training to student stonemasons and running courses for the lay public in a variety of traditional building skills. The Trust played a key role in the revival of the Lime Method of repair and maintenance which is vital to the survival of our heritage of limestone buildings.

As a masterpiece of the Victorian Gothic Revival and perhaps the highest expression of a purism not matched by any other British domestic architecture of the period, abandoned in mid-construction but with much of its spectacular detail complete, the Mansion is unique in the heritage world as a window on construction methods that link directly to our medieval Gothic heritage.

Woodchester Mansion represents a moment suspended in history, offering visitors a time-travel experience in three dimensions expressing the vision of a precociously talented and ambitious young Victorian architect, Benjamin Bucknall, and an idiosyncratic and devout client, William Leigh, whose wealth was to prove in the end unequal to his ambition of combining the spiritual and material dimensions of daily life in one unique building.

## **This strategy - who is it for and what's its purpose?**

This is a working discussion document and sets out the important areas for development for the Trust over the next seven years that will become its Strategy.

This first draft is designed to elicit responses and input from the internal constituencies within the organisation (trustees, staff and volunteers) and key partners and stakeholders (Stroud District Council and the National Trust). It asks questions around direction of travel and seeks comment on the relative priority of the actions described.

**It is not designed to be read by external audiences or the public and is therefore, confidential.**

Subsequent drafts will clearly state the outcomes of the discussions and reflect the decisions taken by the Trustees on strategic direction and associated actions.

It is expected that the final strategy will be completed by year end 2013 ready for implementation through its first corporate plan period from January 2014.

This is a first step on the road to a strategy - the text below outlines what we'd like to achieve, but does not, except in a few circumstances, give answers to how. That will come later. However, getting things right at this, object setting, stage is critical to subsequent success.

### ***The aims of the Trust for this strategic period.***

- To restore the mansion to the state it was when abandoned in the late 1870s, but also make it weather and bird proofed.
- To provide a welcoming, enjoyable and learning experience for an increasingly diverse range and number of visitors; commensurate with that aim, develop first class visitor facilities and access within and around the Mansion.
- To develop, implement and maintain a business and funding model that ensures a sustainable future for operations as well as immediate and further capital needs.

## **The strategy**

There are six broad areas for development within this strategy period i.e. Governance; volunteers and staffing; visitor experience and learning; conservation, restoration and access (capital development); communications and fundraising; finances and business planning.

### **Governance**

Aims for the strategic period

1. To have appointed and retained a fully engaged team of Trustees willing and able to deliver the leadership required to deliver this strategy, and it's associated plans (operational, capital and supporting services).
2. To have reviewed and implemented any changes required to the Memorandum and Articles of Association, so as to ensure that the governance of the organisation is fit for purpose.

## **Staffing and volunteers (Operational development)**

Aims for the strategic period

1. To have created an operational management structure and staff complement skilled in delivering this strategy and its associated plans. This will include the shift of operational and managerial cover to include all days when the Mansion is open to the public.
2. To have retained existing, and recruited new, volunteers fully equipped to deliver a first-class visitor experience to the full range of audiences visiting the Mansion.
3. To have delivered all necessary training and development for all people involved in the governance and delivery of first class services at the Mansion.

## **Visitor experience and learning (Operational and capital development)**

Aims for the strategic period

1. Initially, to review all core interpretative services provided to the public on open days and through events, and then create and implement a comprehensive interpretation/visitor experience plan for the Mansion (this to include training and development planning for both capital and operational programmes). Subsequently, to monitor and keep under constant review, the quality of interpretative services provided to the public.
2. Initially, to develop and implement an education and learning plan targeting groups visiting the Mansion. This to include formal education and heritage skills training.
3. To provide core services to all visitors to the Mansion commensurate with first-class visitor service i.e. welcome/reception; toilets and washrooms; catering (including kitchen); retail opportunities; dedicated training/education facilities. ,

## **Conservation, restoration and access (Capital development)**

Aims for the strategic period

1. Initially (2014), to have created a phased master plan for the conservation and restoration of the Mansion to include the improvement of the access track and provision of visitor parking at the Mansion itself.
2. To have fund-raised and be ready to deliver Phase 1- access and welcome improvement, and Mansion weatherproofing - by end 2015.
3. To have fund-raised and be ready to deliver Phase 2 - full interpretative and activity associated with a fully repaired Mansion - by end 2018.
4. To deliver a fully repaired, conserved and accessible Mansion by 2020.

## **Communications, PR, marketing and fundraising (Support services development)**

Aims for the strategic period

1. Initially, create a comprehensive Communications Plan for the Mansion to include public relations and marketing activity - subsequently implement the plan. This plan will require the identification and prioritisation of key audiences, the creation of a suite of key messages and narratives for each audience, and the identification of media and the processes to deliver the communication. This plan will need to evolve and be reinvented as each phase of development (see Conservation/ Capital above)
2. Create and implement a fundraising plan that supports both the operational and capital programmes of the organisation. Initially seek funding for organisational development - a start-up fund - to support the detailed development of this strategy.

## **Finances and business planning (Support services development)**

Aims for the strategic period

Year one business planning (2014)

1. Carry out a full cost-effectiveness review of current operations to include all commercial and income-generating activities. Alongside this review, discuss and investigate other potential commercial activities (new enterprise). From the review prioritise activity and investment to 2016.
2. Carry out a full appraisal of the 'visitor growth' model that is implicit in the capital development programme above. If this is shown to have potential to fund the operations of the Trust into the future, pursue the model as a priority over all others.
3. Develop business plan 2015 onward based upon results of review and appraisal.

Throughout

4. Develop and implement robust systems of financial, support services (HR, estates management, health and safety, etc.) and operational control (customer care, bookings, etc.) throughout the organisation.

Questions:

1. Do you agree with the list of aims in each section?
2. If, yes, are there other aims we should consider?
3. What would be your priorities - within each section and between sections?
4. If you disagree with the aims, what alternatives would you suggest?
5. Where should we aim to be in 3 years - half way through this plan period?