

Introduction

The Wiltshire Historic Buildings Trust was formed in 1967 to celebrate the remarkable legacy of historic buildings in Wiltshire, and to promote their conservation and reuse. At that time there was a significant loss through demolition and neglect and the objective of the Trust was to rescue such buildings and provide them with a sustainable long-term future.

The aims and objectives of the Trust, as set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association, are "to preserve for the benefit of the nation property and buildings of architectural and historic interest in Wiltshire."

In 1967 the role of the Trust was defined by the circumstances prevailing at that time and the Trust fulfilled its objective by the revolving method of acquiring, restoring, and selling historic buildings, with the proceed of one scheme being used to fund the next.

Listing building resurveys in Wiltshire towns were undertaken in the early- to mid-1970s with a resurvey of the parishes carried out in the period 1983-86. Also, since 1967 over 250 Conservation Areas have been designated within Wiltshire. This, together with changes in legislation, has brought more buildings under statutory control and reduced the number of buildings being demolished. Simultaneously the public appetite for conservation was greatly enhanced and many buildings have been, and still are, lovingly repaired by their owners. Historic buildings are especially sought after particularly those in the towns and villages that are recognised as attractive places to live.

The future for historic buildings in Wiltshire has greatly improved since the Trust was formed in 1967 and the threat which existed at that time has largely disappeared. There remains a shortlist of important buildings for which new uses have not been found because these are the most difficult cases to resolve, examples being the Mechanics Institute, Swindon and two former WW1 aircraft hangars at Yatesbury Airfield, Cherhill. The "at risk examples" that are included in the Historic England register are where costs exceed values and where economic solutions have yet to be found.

The other major change in recent years is the means for obtaining grants where the policies of the National Lottery Heritage Fund have been the most influential. The Funds' current focus is on securing community benefit and it is directing support to those heritage projects where public benefit is a priority.

Review

Issues that are high on the conservation agenda today are:

- Climate change and energy conservation
- Economic considerations – especially the cost of housing
- The ageing population
- Community aspirations and services (community pubs etc.)
- Historic buildings that are in part use or underused that may be at risk and in particular churches that face declining congregations
- The changing high street - problems and opportunities

Generally, the revolving fund approach, used to good effect by many building preservation trusts in the past is no longer effective in that grant aid is not now available simply for heritage rescue. Grant funders now seek to ensure that projects they support will deliver wider social, community and economic benefits or meet a specific sector of society.

Across the UK public sector funding is under considerable strain and many authorities are looking to close community facilities and dispose of heritage buildings to reduce costs. Where possible and where the community is active there can be scope for community asset transfer although it may well be that in economic terms the asset is indeed a liability.

Future Strategy

1. WHBT will seek to raise its profile across the whole of Wiltshire. A mechanism to achieve this has not been determined and needs further consideration.
2. The form and content of the WHBT website is to be reviewed to align with the content of this strategy and to be used as a source of information and advice.
3. WHBT will host an annual talk by a high-profile guest speaker. This would focus on the value of heritage and the work of Building Preservation Trusts. The venue should be in an historic building and easily accessible.
4. WHBT will seek to encourage and support communities that wish to acquire or use heritage buildings for community or socially desirable activities. Reference to be made to other sources of help including the Community Ownership Fund, established by the Government, which is providing £150 million over 4 years to support community groups in the UK to take ownership of assets and amenities at risk of being lost. "Voluntary and community groups can bid for match funding to acquire important assets and run them for the benefit of the local community. The Fund will run until 2024/25. We intend to run 3 bidding windows each year for applicants to submit a full application to the Fund."
5. WHBT will put together a compendium of Wiltshire conservation/community projects to provide up-to-date information on how historic buildings can be used creatively by local communities. Case studies will be selected where they can be used as a source of knowledge and inspiration for others.
6. WHBT recognises that churches, including those that are redundant or under-used and under-resourced present special and nationwide problems but will be willing to offer help where seen to be appropriate for heritage reasons.
7. WHBT will investigate the possibility of working with a housing co-operative or Housing Association to look at repurposing a suitable redundant historic building to provide for local needs. This may apply in particular to town centres and other locations where there is good accessibility. WHBT will not compete with the private market.
8. WHBT to consider ways of providing a Wiltshire focus on the range of information available on the internet and set this out in a simple and linked form as introductory guidance on its website.
9. WHBT will seek to involve a younger generation to build on the legacy of the Trust and develop a trust model for the future. Approaches will be made to the Cultural Heritage Centre in Swindon and to Bath Spa University to examine the possibility of developing links with students including the option of inviting co-operation on the development of this strategy.
10. WHBT will continue each year to examine the Historic England Heritage at Risk annual report covering grade I and II* buildings as a source of potential future projects.
11. Ways will be investigated to find information on grade II buildings at risk in the county. Information needs to be gathered at a local level and an approach to Parish /Town Councils will be considered.
12. WHBT will keep its options open and will look to develop new ideas and methods of working as circumstances change.

Strategy agreed in principle by the Governing Board 12 01 2023

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