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## **THE FUTURE OF ENGLAND'S GRANDEST COUNTRY HOUSE**

### **PROPOSAL FOR WENTWORTH WOODHOUSE IN YORKSHIRE**

A race is on to raise funds to preserve Wentworth Woodhouse, one of the grandest stately homes in Britain, by placing it in a new charitable trust which will open it to the public. So far £3.4m has been pledged towards an acquisition target of £7m. SAVE Britain's Heritage which initiated the successful campaign to rescue Dumfries House is now urgently seeking a matching sum to enable the purchase to go ahead.

By agreement with the Newbold family, SAVE and its partners have helped initiate the new Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust (WWPT) to serve the following purposes:

1. To preserve the house and grounds on a long term sustainable basis with extensive public opening;
2. To find sustainable and sympathetic uses for those parts of the property not open to the public;
3. To raise funds both for acquisition and repairs and other essential works.

Wentworth Woodhouse is a marvel of English architecture, one of the largest and most impressive of all 18<sup>th</sup>-century country houses, the seat of a great political dynasty and the home of a Prime Minister. In size and splendour it matches Stowe, with an even more magnificent parade of state apartments and a landscape studded with temples, monuments and follies.

The proposal is that the magnificent Baroque and Palladian mansion, which in many European countries would be called a palace, and the 83 acres which run with it, are placed in a new charitable trust. The purpose of the trust would be to give this great building a secure future with regular access to the public and viable uses for substantial parts of the building to contribute to the costs of repair and maintenance.

In discussion with the Newbold family a target figure of £7 million for acquisition was set. This comprises everything purchased by the Newbold family - buildings, land and protected contents, including statues in the house. As of now, SAVE and the WWPT have raised pledges of £3.4 million and are continuing to raise further funds to achieve acquisition. These pledges come from the Monument Trust, Sir Siegmund Warburg's Voluntary Settlement, the J Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust, and the Art Fund.

The SAVE plan has been drawn up by Marcus Binney, SAVE's Executive President, with leading country house experts and entrepreneurs, including Mr Kit Martin, well known for his country house rescues and transformations, Roger Tempest who has pioneered the use of estate buildings for office purposes at Broughton Hall in North Yorkshire, Martin Drury former Director-General of the National Trust, and Merlin Waterson former Regional Director of the National Trust. Financial advice has come from Timothy Cooke, who is Co-Chairman of the commemorations of the 200th anniversary of Waterloo.

The National Trust has agreed to help the new WWPT by offering to take on responsibility for the public opening of the magnificent interiors of Wentworth Woodhouse as well as its gardens. A detailed business plan commissioned by the National Trust has shown projected income and expenditure for the WWPT over twenty years. This has been prepared by SQW Consultants and their forecasts show the WWPT will come into a surplus in the sixth year of operation.

Detailed figures for the cost of repairs and associated building works have been prepared with the help of architects Purcell Miller Tritton and Ian Rex Proctor and Partners, construction consultants. Detailed surveys of particular problem areas have also been carried out for English Heritage, notably the roof of the east portico and the ceiling of the Marble Saloon. These show that a sum of £42 million needs to be spent on the fabric of the house over the next twelve to fifteen years to meet the backlog of repairs and subsidence damage. While this is a large sum, it is comparable to the sums needed for other houses of this scale such as Stowe or for cathedral restorations.

Wentworth Woodhouse is currently subject to a major claim against the Coal Authority for subsidence damage. The Claim has been lodged by the Newbold family and the new Trust is ready and willing to take over the claim on acquisition, using the Newbold family's team of specialist advisors and lawyers who have carried out an enormous amount of survey work on the damage.

In addition the WWPT has agreed, subject to contract, to allow Mr and Mrs Clifford Newbold to remain in part of the house for their lifetimes.



**The east front of Wentworth Woodhouse.  
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**Julie Kenny, chair of the Wentworth Woodhouse Presentation Trust** says: “Wentworth Woodhouse is a property of great national importance and its descendants have played such an important role in the history of the United Kingdom and South Yorkshire. It is vitally important that Wentworth Woodhouse is saved for the future. The proposed scheme is a viable plan that is intended to be sustainable in the long term and will play an important part in the regeneration of Rotherham, South Yorkshire and the North, promoting regeneration, tourism and community use.”

**Marcus Binney, SAVE’s Executive President** says: “At SAVE we have been involved with looking for a solution for Wentworth Woodhouse for 30 years. Undoubtedly this is the most important historic building at risk in Britain today. Our plans will open the house both to National Trust members and the general public. The scheme will also bring back all the listed buildings into regular use, for events of many kinds, with holiday lets and apartments for rent and the stables sensitively converted for use by enterprising businesses on the successful model of estate buildings at Broughton Hall. All these uses are to a tried and tested formula which has worked at other major historic houses, and are intended as a major new attraction to the 1.7m people living in the Sheffield Region, providing jobs and access to the extensive gardens as well as the mansion. The new trust’s plans do not involve enabling development and the now derelict university buildings will be demolished and the sites grassed over and returned to garden and parkland.”

**Kit Martin** says: “This can be the most important regeneration scheme of its kind in the north of England and a pioneering example of the way great historic houses can make a major contribution to the local economy, providing employment and amenities, the more important as Wentworth is on the edge of Sheffield and Rotherham which will benefit hugely from inward investment of this kind.”

**Sir Simon Jenkins, Chairman of the National Trust** says: “This is far and away the most important historic house currently at risk. It is unthinkable that it should be allowed to fall into serious decay or not be open to visitors on a regular basis.”

The scheme for Wentworth Woodhouse proposed by the WWPT has four main elements:

1. Public opening of the main interiors and gardens, run by the National Trust.
2. Catering and events. This would be situated in the north wing using the former student refectory as a dining hall/events venue. The associated catering kitchen would be brought back into use and the arcaded courtyard behind as a breakout space. This area has its own secluded access with parking for vans out of sight in a back courtyard.
3. Workspaces in the stables. The idea of offices for small businesses is based on the very successful model established by Roger Tempest at Broughton Hall in Yorkshire. The buildings around the stable court are one and two storeys and can be fitted out at relatively little cost. In the long term the office model could give way to using some of

the space for arts, crafts, educational, community and voluntary uses, depending on the success of the office lets and the need for extra space for other activities. The office lets will nonetheless still provide a very useful income stream.

4. Residential. In all, some 15 residential units are proposed in the south wing, the upper floors of the main mansion and the side courtyards of the stable court. Undoubtedly all these units, which provide a very attractive and varied offering, would make for desirable places to live. The preferred model would be to let the various houses and apartments either as holiday lets or on shorthold leases to provide an income stream for the new Trust.

For more information please contact Marcus Binney on 07973 802648 or Mike Fox at SAVE on 0207 253 3500/[mike.fox@savebritainsheritage.org](mailto:mike.fox@savebritainsheritage.org) or Julie Kenny on 01709 535218



**The Marble Saloon at Wentworth Woodhouse**  
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**Notes to editors:**

Press release issued by SAVE Britain's Heritage in conjunction with the Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust.

Wentworth Woodhouse is a Grade I listed country house in South Yorkshire, with the longest façade of any country house in England. It stands in 83 acres of gardens and grounds and has

extensive views over former parkland including a deer park and lakes which are vested in the Fitzwilliam Wentworth Amenity Trust.

Wentworth Woodhouse was built for the 1<sup>st</sup> Marquess of Rockingham from c.1735, the work continuing over four decades, and then passed to the Fitzwilliam family. During World War II the mansion was taken over for use by Military Intelligence and after 1945 the onset of open cast coalmining in the garden and park made it impossible for the family to return. The greater part of the house was let in 1947 to West Riding County Council, on a long lease, shortly before the death of the 8th Earl Fitzwilliam in a plane crash in 1948. The house was used as a Training College for PT teachers.

Following local government reorganisation in 1974 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council became the lessee and the property was taken over as a student campus for Sheffield Polytechnic College (now Sheffield Hallam University). Faced with mounting costs Rotherham paid to surrender the lease in 1988. The house and 83 acres of grounds and parkland were sold to Mr. W.G. Haydon-Baillie in 1989. In 1995 Haydon-Baillie charged the property to Bank Julius Baer (BJB) which took possession in 1998.

The property was bought by the Newbold family in 1999 who continue in residence.

The Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust has been established to secure a long term future for Wentworth Woodhouse. The trustees of the new WWPT are: The Duke of Devonshire, Lady Juliet Tadgell, Sir Philip Naylor-Leyland, Julie Kenny (Chair), Timothy Cooke, Martin Drury, and Merlin Waterson.

SAVE Britain's Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

SAVE Britain's Heritage, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ

Registered Charity 269129

Tel. 020 7253 3500 Email [office@savebritainsheritage.org](mailto:office@savebritainsheritage.org)

[www.savebritainsheritage.org](http://www.savebritainsheritage.org)

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