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TRUST READYING FOR NEXT STEPS TO SAVE THE HILL HOUSE

Almost four years on since the opening of the pioneering box around the Hill House in Helensburgh, conservation charity the National Trust for Scotland is preparing for the next steps needed to protect the house.

The house which was designed and decorated by Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife Margaret MacDonald in the early 20th century for the Blackie publishing family, has always had issues with water finding its way into the fabric of the House. Over the years, its owners, including the National Trust for Scotland have sought solutions for the issue.

Newly-appointed Project Manager for the Hill House Liz Davidson explains: “Water has penetrated the concrete roughcast covering of the house for decades, breaking down the sandstone substrate which lies beneath. This was exacerbated by Mackintosh’s design, which did not feature details that most buildings, especially in the West of Scotland, would have had, such as projecting eaves, caps to wallheads and parapets and chimney stacks.”

In 2019, the conservation charity created a chainmail structure over the house to protect the house from the elements. With its steel loops has kept the rain off and allowed the house to slowly dry out.

Liz continues: “The Box was opened up to the public on Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s birthday in 2019, and since then the fabric of the building has been steadily drying out, thanks to the protection it provides. We regularly monitor this with the digital and science team at Historic Environment Scotland with whom we have an ongoing partnership. As well as allowing us to monitor and protect the House, its interior and the artefacts within it, the Box has allowed an entirely new perspective on the House itself for visitors and experts viewing the building in its landscape.”

Liz started in her new role in December 2022, and has started work on the next stage of this conservation project to protect one of Scotland’s most important buildings. Previously Liz worked at the Glasgow School of Art as a senior project manager involved in the Mackintosh Building restoration project.

Liz has already started working with the local community and stakeholders to scope out the next steps for the project. One of her first tasks is applying to extend the planning permission for the Box and the application is being submitted to Argyll and Bute Council in the next few weeks. Liz says: “The Box has a limited design life and our original

planning application was for 5 years - the Pandemic interrupted this programme so we need to apply for an extension. There is no intention to keep the Box any longer than necessary, but it's doing an important job for us right now."

One of the biggest challenges ahead is finding the right finish for the building. Liz explains: "On the roughcast itself, we will soon do testing to assess the condition of the core of the wall, which will then steer our planning for removal and replacement of existing defective roughcast, including decision-making on the techniques for its renewal. The local community, stakeholders and public will be kept informed of all steps, including the detailed timelines for the work."

Given her career background, Liz is very clear about the importance of the Hill House and why it must be protected. She says: "The Hill House is considered around the world to be a gem of Scottish architectural history and a masterpiece of design. In order to protect it for Scotland and for art and design history, we have embarked on a pioneering conservation project. We are very grateful for the support of everyone from the local community, the Mackintosh community, descendants of the Blackie family and the donors and members who have got us to this point where we can start planning the next practical steps needed to conserve this treasure for everyone."

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Editor's Notes:

About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.