

22 September 2025

TRUST TAKES NEXT STEP IN MACKINTOSH ILLUMINATED PROJECT WITH ARCHITECT APPOINTMENT

Conservation charity the National Trust for Scotland has appointed LDN architects to deliver the next phase of works at the Hill House in Helensburgh, following a rigorous procurement process.

As part of its ***Mackintosh Illuminated*** project, which has received £1.1 million in development funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the charity sought tenders for an architect-led team to develop comprehensive plans that will tackle longstanding conservation issues at its Hill House in Helensburgh, transform visitor facilities there and contribute to a wider objective to help make Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald better known and appreciated, internationally and at home.

Through this contract which runs until late 2026, LDN will support the National Trust for Scotland with the development stage of the project. This will include creating a comprehensive programme of external and internal conservation works and redecoration at the Hill House which has been afflicted by damp since it was completed in 1904. It has been drying out gradually under the pioneering chainmail Box, installed in 2019. LDN Architects will also lead on planning for the removal of the Box in 2028 and creating designs for new visitor facilities, including a café, shop and toilet facilities at the site. Thematically, the project will create and develop strong links with the Trust's Mackintosh at the Willow which has championed extensive outreach and engagement through its exhibitions and activities.

Mackintosh Illuminated Project Director Elizabeth Davidson said: "We were very impressed with the quality of those who came forward to tender for this project and are incredibly grateful for all the hard work and preparation that goes into a process like this.

"We are excited to be working with LDN Architects on this critical development stage, during which we will create detailed plans for the next steps in the conservation of the Hill House, the removal of the pioneering Box, and designs for updated visitor facilities at the site.

"They will also be critical in the development of our wider plans, through the ***Mackintosh Illuminated*** project, to join up the stories we tell about Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald, both in Helensburgh and at Mackintosh at the Willow in Glasgow, and bring these to even more people by creating an online learning resource and an expanded programme of property-based community and education work at both sites.

“This is a very exciting stage in the project and we are very grateful for the support of The National Lottery Heritage Fund in enabling us to progress to this point. We expect that on successful completion of this development phase we will secure up to £7.3 million in support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, to enable our plans to be delivered in full, together with a major fundraising campaign and the Trust’s own resources being invested.

“LDN bring a wealth of experience and a long association with the Hill House, as they already won, through a competitive tender process in 2016, a major research contract to record all previous works to the building and providing guidance on the imminent render removal works. While this background is clearly valuable, they still had to compete with some of the finest conservation and design practices in the country to prove their fit with the ***Mackintosh illuminated*** project.”

LDN was appointed through a full tender process that began in March with a pre-qualification and concluded with interviews in September. They have worked on a wide range of projects, including the Scappa Flow Museum on the Island of Hoy, Orkney and Abbotsford, the home of Walter Scott in the Scottish Borders, and the National Trust for Scotland’s Newhailes in Musselburgh.

Mark Hopton, Partner, LDN Architects said: “The Hill House is one of a select few buildings in Scotland that are world-famous. It is Mackintosh’s most important domestic design and is one of Scotland’s most important contributions to 20th century world architecture. Our challenge is to solve the problems of water ingress that have plagued the building throughout its life and recover the design authenticity and artistic integrity of Charles Rennie and Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh’s original design intent. We look forward to working closely with the National Trust for Scotland to deliver a project that will demonstrate what 21st-century conservation can be: technically excellent, philosophically rigorous, publicly inspiring, and environmentally sustainable.”

Work to remove the roughcast at the Hill House is planned to begin in October 2025.

The National Trust for Scotland cares for the Hill House, Helensburgh and Mackintosh at the Willow in Glasgow, which are widely regarded as two of Mackintosh and Macdonald’s most important surviving, publicly accessible masterpieces of design. The ***Mackintosh Illuminated*** project is an ambitious project to preserve, protect and promote the built heritage of Mackintosh and Macdonald, as well as their legacy. Delivered in two stages, the project will:

- Tackle the urgent conservation needs of the Hill House
- Transform public understanding of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Macdonald
- Inspire new communities through learning, engagement and community work.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. About the Hill House - the house was constructed in Helensburgh between 1902–04 based on a commission given to Charles Rennie Mackintosh by publisher Walter Blackie. The radical design of the house was a great influence on German and Austrian architects, including Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus movement, and in turn can be said to have been pivotal in the direction of modern architecture in the 20th century. Blackie lived in the Hill House until his death in 1953 and it was eventually acquired by the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) in 1972 (having been Grade A listed the year before) and the National Trust for Scotland in 1982. The Getty Foundation awarded the National Trust for Scotland £95,000 in 2015 to come up with a solution to the water ingress that had been damaging the Hill House for decades. A 'containment' interim solution was arrived at in 2017 through a proposal to build a sheltering box over the property; ground was broken to construct a 165-tonne steel frame and chainmail structure in December 2018 and it was then opened to the public on 7 June 2019. Surveys conducted in 2022 and 2023 have shown that the box is doing its job in drying out the Hill House and work is progressing to complete the process and employ a solution to water ingress with the box due to be removed by 2028. Generous donors gave to the Box the Hill House campaign enabling its construction and supporters will have the chance to contribute to Mackintosh Illuminated too.

2. About the Mackintosh at the Willow – Mackintosh at the Willow formally became a part of the National Trust for Scotland's portfolio of properties on 19 January 2024. This followed a generous support package from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to enable the transfer, in addition to assistance given by the Royal Bank of Scotland, Architectural Heritage Fund, Celia Sinclair Thornqvist and her husband, Rolf Thornqvist and Glasgow City Council. Mackintosh at the Willow re-opened to the public on 7 September 2018 after an extensive restoration by the Willow Tea Rooms Trust. The original Willow Tea Rooms Building was initially opened by Miss Cranston and designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh with significant design input from his wife, Margaret Macdonald in 1903. Mackintosh first worked for Miss Catherine 'Kate' Cranston in 1896, designing murals of her new Buchanan Street tearooms. In 1898, he then worked on her existing Argyle Street tearooms designing the furniture and interiors and by 1900 Miss Cranston commissioned him to redesign an entire room in her Ingram Street tearooms (the restored Oak Room from which is now on show at V&A Dundee). This ultimately led to a commission for the complete design of the proposed new tearooms in Sauchiehall Street in 1903. Mackintosh for the first time was given responsibility for not only the interior design and furniture, but also for the full detail of the internal layout and exterior architectural treatment. The resultant building came to be known as the Willow Tearooms, now known as Mackintosh at the Willow, and is the best known and most important work that Mackintosh undertook for Miss Cranston.

3. The National Trust for Scotland is the conservation charity that over 90 years has saved, cared for and shared many of the country's most loved places, rich with history, heritage, nature and culture. The charity celebrates Scotland's heritage and with more than 100 places in its care, there's a place for everyone to love. The National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage that people from Scotland and across the world all love, ensuring its future for everyone to enjoy. Support the National Trust for Scotland and help them protect the places we all love. Become a member at www.nts.org.uk.

4. About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

*Grant applications over £250,000 are assessed in two rounds. Mackintosh Illuminated has initially been granted round one development funding of £1,159,091 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, allowing it to progress with its plans. Detailed proposals are then considered by the Heritage Fund at second round, where a final decision is made on the full funding award of £7,340,909.

Our vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future. That's why as the largest funder for the UK's heritage we are dedicated to supporting projects that connect people and communities to heritage, as set out in our strategic plan, Heritage 2033. Heritage can be anything from the past that people value and want to pass on to future generations. We believe in the power of heritage to ignite the imagination, offer joy and inspiration, and to build pride in place and connection to the past. Over the next 10 years, we aim to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to make a decisive difference for people, places and communities. heritagefund.org.uk

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