

FAQs

Project:	Save Mavisbank: Pioneering approaches to heritage and communities
Purpose:	To establish a consistent public message about some of the basics of the project at this point. It is envisaged that the FAQs will be updated as the project progresses.
Date:	Wednesday 6 th October 2020

What's going on at Mavisbank today?

Historic Environment Scotland (HES), are working in collaboration with The Landmark Trust to develop a fresh approach to saving the landscape and buildings at this important historic site.

A Project Board has been set up comprising representatives from HES, The Landmark Trust and a local Trust. External advisors have also been appointed to provide independent advice and support.

Haven't you already tried that?

This is a new partnership between HES and The Landmark Trust. An application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund was submitted by the Mavisbank Trust in 2013 but this application was unsuccessful. The National Lottery Heritage Fund provided feedback on the 2013 bid which confirmed the importance of the site and the need to save it. It also provided some constructive suggestions on areas to consider to make a more compelling proposal.

What's changed?

The failure of the previous ambitious bid has allowed all those with an interest in the future of Mavisbank to take stock of the current funding environment, reflect on the feedback from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and to think about what could be achieved today.

In parallel, Historic Environment Scotland was formed in 2015 as a Non-Departmental Public Body with charitable status. Since then HES has worked to better prioritise management of its assets and those properties it manages for Scottish Ministers such as the Mavisbank Policies. HES's view is that the time is now right to enter into partnerships with others such as the Landmark Trust who can help it to deliver ambitious projects such as at Mavisbank in Midlothian.

HES has focussed in recent years in developing skills to support all aspects of managing and caring for the historic environment. Mavisbank represents an opportunity to develop skills locally to support the sustainable future of the site but also to boost skills locally to support the sector.

We believe that the urgent need to save the landscape and buildings at Mavisbank, combined with the fresh impetus of the organisations now at the table presents a great opportunity to find a long term sustainable future for the site.

What happened to the Mavisbank Trust?

The Mavisbank Trust is still actively engaged at Mavisbank and is very supportive of the current initiative by the Landmark Trust and Historic Environment Scotland. We are liaising with the Trust and exploring ways in which they can be part of the future of the site regardless of whether our plans come to fruition.

Over recent years the Trust has continued to fund and undertake work at Mavisbank and in 2014 was able to create a new riverside footpath and pedestrian access into the grounds, in addition to carrying out improvements to drainage, stabilisation work on the house and signage. During 2018-19 the Trust completed laser and drone surveys of both the house and grounds, as well as archival research into Mavisbank's construction. This has provided a wealth of historical information which has enabled the Trust to produce digital reconstructions and visualisations of the house, interior rooms and grounds as they might have appeared circa 1750.

Who are The Landmark Trust?

The Landmark Trust is one of Britain's leading building conservation charities. With the help of individual supporters and grant-making bodies, it saves historic buildings in danger of being lost forever. The charity sensitively restores such 'Landmarks' and offers them a vibrant future by making them available to everyone for self-catering holidays. They also host regular public open days and outreach programmes to make sure that the local community can also experience and enjoy their buildings, as well as delivering craft training and employment. Holiday lettings income supports the maintenance and survival of precious buildings, such as Mavisbank, our culture, society and landscape. In Landmark's care are 203 buildings, 19 of which are located across Scotland. It is currently fundraising to save the crumbling Fairburn Tower in Muir of Ord near Inverness; built in 1545 and now deemed one of the most significant at-risk tower houses in the country.

Why bother?

Mavisbank is Scotland's first Palladian villa designed and built by Sir John Clerk (1676-1755), and architect William Adam (1689-1748) between 1723 and 1727. It was the first villa to be built outside Edinburgh as a cultural retreat according to the Renaissance ideal. Given how important Classical architecture became in moulding Scotland's buildings and national spirit, this makes Mavisbank one of the most important survivals in Scotland.

Mavisbank Policies are a property in the care of Scottish Ministers managed by HES on their behalf. Their design was conceived alongside that of the house to complement and accentuate its design and philosophy. The Policies today are a valued local asset used by walkers and local residents. It is important their future is safeguarded.

The main buildings at Mavisbank are Category A Listed and the Policies are a designated Landscape, in recognition of their supreme importance to Scottish heritage.

We love Mavisbank as it is, can't you just leave it alone?

The landscape or 'Policies' at Mavisbank are publicly owned and maintained. They have the potential to become a wonderful place for everyone to enjoy. To protect the historic layout of the landscape, will disappear unless careful work is required undertaken to protect it. We therefore need to improve access for the local community and to provide opportunities to learn about this incredible place.

The buildings at Mavisbank are in a critical condition; if we don't act now there is a very high risk of them simply falling down and being lost forever.

We know that people value the wildness of Mavisbank as it is today. 'Mavisbank' was actually named after the Song Thrush and the way that nature has reclaimed large parts of the site is something we want to maintain for the benefit of wildlife and for people's quiet enjoyment. Therefore, any interventions we need to make to ensure the site is accessible to all such a small car and cycle park will be as light-touch as possible and designed to avoid any impact the environment and community.

How can I get involved?

It is still very early days for the project; information on the project will be posted on the HES and Landmark Trust's websites including opportunities to get involved. Coronavirus has meant that we are having to adapt our approach to consultation and engagement but we will do what we can whilst prioritising the health and safety of the public and our team. Any queries can always be addressed to developmentandcommunity@hes.scot

So, when will it all be done?

Projects of this scale and complexity take a number of years to plan and deliver. If we are able to proceed with the project, we would hope to begin work on restoring the buildings in the mid-2020s to coincide with the 300th anniversary of when the house was originally built.

How much will it cost?

We won't know the level of investment required until we have finalised what our approach to the development of Mavisbank will be.

Efforts to save Mavisbank have failed before, what are the chances this time?

The new partnership between HES and The Landmark Trust creates an experienced and influential team that can build on all the work done by the Mavisbank Trust to deliver a realistic, pragmatic project that is inclusive of the community in which it sits. We hope this will put the project in a strong position to succeed.