

## For immediate release

### Hearts of Oak: Britain's great estates pledge trees to help rebuild Notre Dame

British oaks from some of the UK's most famous estates could contribute towards the rebuilding of Notre Dame cathedral, following an offer from members of Historic Houses, the association for independently owned historic homes and gardens.

So far more than one hundred donor estates, including Belvoir Castle, Hutton-in-the-Forest, Scone Palace, Castle Howard, Holkham Hall, Powderham Castle, and Firle Place (named after the Anglo-Saxon word for 'oak woodland'), have volunteered valuable trees, planted for timber centuries ago, as a gift from the UK to France for the restoration of the iconic landmark's roof, destroyed by fire earlier this week.

It's not the first time Britain's great houses have rallied round to help with a major heritage restoration project. After the devastating York Minster fire in 1984 more than forty Historic Houses member places pledged eighty oak trees for the reconstruction efforts, joining donations from the Queen and the Prince of Wales.

Given that the construction of the original roof in the twelfth century is estimated to have required 1,300 mature oaks, the donors are well aware that their contribution could only provide a fraction of what's needed, but they hope the gesture will inspire others.

**James Birch**, owner of Doddington Hall, one of the estates that has pledged timber, and President of Historic Houses, said, 'The fire at Notre Dame is a terrible tragedy. It is also a reminder of how our great buildings provide a cultural back drop to everyday life that is often only recognised when they are threatened. Some of our members have first-hand experience of the damage and destruction of catastrophic fires. It's fitting that we would offer to help restore such an important part of the world's heritage.'

The trees, from sustainable forestry and already destined for use as commercial timber, are estimated to have a combined market value of well over £100,000. But the donors are keen to emphasise that the timbers used in buildings like Notre Dame are about something that money alone can't buy.

'Anyone who lives in an old building knows there's something special about the way it was built and the materials used,' said the **Duke of Rutland**, who first suggested the idea to his fellow members.

'The trees in the original roof at Notre Dame probably started growing over a thousand years ago. We're able to donate replacements because my great-great-grandfather had the foresight to plant trees that would only be valuable long after he died. And in turn we'll replant every tree we fell – someone will need them for something in another few hundred years. It's a reminder of how important it is to both look after and renew our heritage resources. In our business you have to plan in centuries, not years.'

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## **Notes for editors**

**Historic Houses** is the UK's largest collection of independent heritage.

We represent more than 1,600 historic houses and gardens, many with open doors waiting to be explored. Most of our member places are still lived in, telling fascinating and distinctive stories that are not over yet. We are here to ensure these historic homes stay alive and accessible for generations to come. Many open their doors for day visitors, tours, weddings, conferences, events and accommodation. Hundreds more play a vital role in the local economy as businesses and employers. Between them they welcome more than twenty-six million visits each year, generate £1 billion for the economy and support 33,000 full-time-equivalent jobs

We advise owners on anything from rising damp to hosting festivals, and we make representations to government on their behalf. We award those houses that have completed exceptional restorations, have wonderful gardens, and work tirelessly to excel in educational innovation. We work to further research into historic houses and their collections, and to ensure that our 55,000 general members enjoy free access to more than 300 of our member places that operate as tourist attractions.

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