

Response to a Query from a National Trust Member.

“Silence at the proper season is wisdom, and better than any speech.” – Plutarch

(Greek platonist philosopher, historian, biographer, essayist, and priest at the Temple of Apollo - c.46 – c120).

I note that Mr. Afra Raymond’s query to the National Trust on his site is gaining some public traction and so I thought it was a good opportunity to clarify some misconceptions that others may also have on the role of the National Trust with respect to heritage properties.

The National Trust has a Heritage Asset Inventory of over 450 sites throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Any member of the public can nominate a site for consideration to be registered. The next level is to become a Property of Interest which is how we refer to properties that have been ‘Listed and protected by law. We have 43 such Properties of Interest and are currently in the process of listing a further 17 properties in 2021. This is a very long and detailed process guided by the National Trust Act which involves research and the creation of a full dossier, before the site goes through an approval process which culminates in the approval of the Minister – in this case, the Minister of Planning and Development, before being Gazetted twice. During this process, the owners are notified, providing them with information as to the specific parameters that define their property. Listed sites are the only ones that come under legal protection of the National Trust Act even though they remain under the management of their owners.

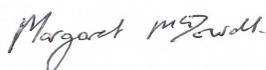
As part of our stakeholder engagement, the National Trust has decided to have individual consultations with each of the 17 property owners before the Notice of Gazette, as a courtesy and that is what we have been doing for the past few months. Woodford Square is one of the heritage sites we propose to list and as a result, we held a consultation with the Port of Spain City Corporation as the manager of this property. These consultations offer the owners an opportunity to understand the obligations, responsibilities and privileges of owning a heritage site and we find this a useful exercise as do they.

The Nelson Mandela Park, while on the Heritage Asset Inventory is not being Listed at this time. However, the National Trust provides guidance and advice to the owners of many heritage properties and attempts to intervene strategically when it becomes aware that there is a threat to the integrity of the site. For this, it depends for the most part on the diligence and interest of the public, to bring issues to its attention and in some cases advise on the best approach to conserve the sites. As Mr. Raymond said, the National Trust is a membership-based organization and we welcome volunteers in every aspect of heritage protection and awareness. However, not every action can or should be conducted in the full view of the public and I am sure that most persons will appreciate the need for quiet, sensitive intervention in some situations. In this particular case however, the National Trust has seen no proposals for the Park and as far as we are aware, this proposal has effectively been shelved by the decision makers.

We have a lot of urgent work to do, so we prefer to **“Work Hard in Silence and let our Success make the Noise”** (Paraphrased from Frank Ocean). We are indeed increasing our focus on natural sites and open spaces and considering appropriate management approaches and partnerships which ensure that they are sustainably operated, for the benefit of the public. Hence our very successful webinar on the Public Private Partnership Model used for the Central Park Conservancy.

I must thank Mr. Raymond for his comments, for although he could have just made a call to one of the many persons he knows at the National Trust to get the information he sought, he has in effect, made a plea for even more public awareness sessions. Perhaps a workshop on the Listing Process and the public’s involvement in the development of the Inventory of Heritage Assets could assist in this regard and I will suggest to our Education and Outreach Department that we prepare a public seminar on this topic.

I am glad that Mr. Raymond made haste to stress that he was not attributing any corrupt intent of any member of the National Trust. However, I think he should regret the general insinuation, especially as he knows me personally and can attest to my belief that smiles and silences can also be most powerful tools.



Margaret McDowall,
Chairman