



Russborough

HOUSE ART PARK

STRATEGIC PLAN

2023 - 2028





# INTRODUCTION

Russborough is one of Ireland's great country houses, and one of the finest and most complete Palladian estates in the country. The 200 acre demesne is home to an irreplaceable landscape, outstanding architecture and one of Ireland's finest collections of art. It is owned and operated by the Alfred Beit Foundation, a private charitable organisation which ensures continuing public access and engagement.

Speaking at the launch, of the Conservation Management Plan for Russborough in early 2023, Minister Simon Harris T.D described the estate as 'dripping with significance'. He was referring to the designed landscape, but this significance also extends to the lovingly restored interiors, and the painstakingly curated fine art collection.

Significant work remains to be done to fully realise the potential of this incredible estate – both in restoring and conserving the historic fabric of the demesne, and in developing and enhancing the services Russborough provides to the Irish public and International visitors alike.

In support of this work, the Board of the Alfred Beit Foundation has developed this five-year strategy, which sets Russborough firmly on course to achieving our tercentenary goals.



CONTEXT

## **Tercentenary Ambitions**

In 2016, Russborough published its Tercentenary Masterplan, a vision of the organisation as it will be in 2041. This bold look at the future of Russborough imagines a fully restored House and Estate with full museum accreditation, in which visitors can access the entire Russborough collection. This strategy is designed to bring us closer to that vision.

## **Building on Strong Foundations**

Russborough has been well served by a series of assessments, reviews, and strategic plans, which have stood the organisation in good stead for many years. This is the second strategy to align to the Tercentenary Vision, and it is complemented by several detailed, expert assessments of the architectural and natural assets on the estate. The purpose of this strategy is not to re-write first principles, but to refine the short to medium term focus of the organisation.

## **The Alfred Beit Foundation - an Independent Charity**

As a standalone charity, it is vital this strategy has financial stability at its heart. A key objective for the Alfred Beit Foundation over the course of the next five years will be to maintain financial resilience whilst continuing to invest in preserving our most important assets. Ongoing support from the Apollo Foundation is gratefully received and the Board will continue to consider new income streams and investigate the possibility of increased state funding and support.

With this challenge in mind, the requirement for financial security – and diversity of income streams – is critical to the delivery of this new strategy.

A black and white photograph of a man in a suit, seen in profile from the chest up, looking towards the left. He is standing in a field with a line of trees in the background. The image has a grainy, halftone texture.

# VISION

Russborough's vision is to be a leading place where art, architecture, landscape, culture and learning are accessible to all.





# MISSION

The mission of the Alfred Beit Foundation is to promote and further the advancement of education in the fine arts in Ireland. At Russborough it achieves that by:

- Maintaining, restoring, protecting, developing, conserving, improving and permanently preserving the historic fabric, collections, character and atmosphere of Russborough and its parklands, together with its environment and amenities for the benefit of the public.
- Aspiring to become a centre of excellence for education, research and public engagement with fine art in Ireland.
- Developing, preserving, cataloguing and making accessible the collections of the Alfred Beit Foundation.
- Interpreting and promoting Russborough to the research community and the general public.



# VALUES

## HONESTY

We commit to transparency, integrity and respect for everyone who engages with Russborough.

## CREATIVITY

We provide an environment that fosters imagination, inquiry, discovery and inspiration.

## INCLUSIVITY

We are part of the community around us, we thrive by involving others in what we do and through positive interactions, we are open to ideas and participation by all.

## CARING

We have a responsibility to protect Russborough's stories, values, collections, and environment for future generations; as well as protecting our people and helping to support our community.

## COLLABORATION

We will work with organisations and communities to maximise our impact and increase our interaction at local, national and international level.



# SUSTAINABILITY

At Russborough, we are committed to a sustainable future and, as we advance our strategy, we will work with our staff, visitors, commercial partners and funders to minimise our energy footprint, seeking out green and carbon-neutral solutions wherever possible.

In practice this means we will set a leading national example in nature restoration for an historic country house parkland by:

- Being an active partner in National Biodiversity Week
- Ensuring that landscape restoration work is undertaken with due focus on best practice relating to sustainability, biodiversity and protection of natural habitats
- Exploring and seeking to advance opportunities to establish renewable sources of energy – both within the estate and through external procurement
- Working with our partners, suppliers, and visitors to reduce our carbon footprint – to include renewable packaging, sustainable products and organic sourcing into our shop and restaurant
- Exploring and seeking to advance sustainable transport objectives designed to enhance bus and cycle access to Russborough



# ORGANISATIONAL EXCELLENCE

The ambitious objectives we have set out in this strategy will only be achievable through the efforts of our staff, volunteers and supporters. We want to do everything possible to honour that commitment through our actions as an employer and non-profit organisation.

The Board of Directors and Senior Management Team will strive to:

- Support our staff to develop both personally and professionally through tailored Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
- Focus on the health and wellbeing of our team, through the provision of flexible working options, mental health and wellbeing support, and a focus on open and collaborative management
- Adhere to the highest standards of corporate and charitable governance at all levels





**OBJECTIVES**



# OBJECTIVE 1

## RUSSBOROUGH'S DIVERSE AUDIENCES CAN FULLY ENGAGE WITH ITS MULTIPLE STORIES

The collection and landscape of Russborough contain a wealth of stories encompassing centuries of people, places and politics. By focusing on this abundance of material, we can bring to the fore what makes Russborough unique, and inspire in our growing number of visitors the love of fine art and landscaped beauty which sits at the heart of the Alfred Beit Foundation's mission.

We will achieve this by:

- Identifying the unique stories of Russborough and setting them in their historic, social and artistic context
- Ensuring Russborough's narrative standards are consistent, regardless of the visitor's entry-point (in-person, website, audio tour etc.)
- Digitising 50% of Russborough's main collection and setting it in context
- Establishing an over-arching educational programme to encourage and facilitate the broadest possible range of people to engage with Russborough's collection



# OBJECTIVE 2

## RUSSBOROUGH PROVIDES A RICH, AUTHENTIC AND INCLUSIVE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The visitor experience is critical to the successful delivery of the Alfred Beit Foundation's mission. To optimise that experience (and thereby grow visitor numbers) we must enhance Russborough's ability to welcome guests – presenting a cohesive, accessible and enjoyable experience for all. In doing so, we must ensure that visitor numbers peak at a level which the historic fabric of the estate and its landscape can sustain.

We will achieve this by:

- Attaining a positive/very positive visitor feedback rating of 90%
- Providing public-facing staff and volunteers with customer-focused training to support their work, which will include diversity awareness
- Growing annual tour numbers by 50% on 2023 figures
- Improving accessibility through the implementation of the National Disability Authority's Accessibility Toolkit



# OBJECTIVE 3

## RUSSBOROUGH'S BUILT HERITAGE AND COLLECTIONS ARE RESTORED, MAINTAINED AND PRESENTED TO A LEADING INTERNATIONAL STANDARD

Russborough House, its art, and collection sit at the heart of the Alfred Beit Foundation's mission. Painstaking attention has been paid to restoration work – to great effect – but much more remains to be done. We must commit to ongoing funding and resources for the most critical restoration efforts, and regular review of the way the collection is presented to visitors. These incremental enhancements must be underpinned by robust policies and procedures which embed maintenance, security and preservation into the day-to-day business of Russborough.

We will achieve this by:

- Completing all priority conservation projects for the house and buildings
- Completing all priority status conservation projects for art and the collections
- Creating new experiences of Russborough by continuing to improve the presentation of the house through the development and enhancement of the current display
- Ensuring Russborough's policies and procedures are modern and compliant – with all relevant staff suitably trained – including risk mitigation; safety and security; salvage planning; and fire safety



# OBJECTIVE 4

## RUSSBOROUGH IS A DESIGNED LANDSCAPE AND GARDENS RESTORATION PROJECT OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Conservation Management and Action Plan for the Russborough Parklands (2022) recognises the Russborough Demesne as being of international significance. The plan meticulously lays out the steps we need to take to fully restore the landscape and gardens, distinguishing between short-term (5 year) and long-term goals. To be ready for the Tercentenary, the restoration work must begin now.

We will achieve this by:

- Sufficiently restoring the Walled Garden and Glasshouses to become a functioning part of the visitor experience
- Completing 90% of the 5-year targets in the Conservation Management and Action Plan (2022).
- Receiving significant endorsements by key individuals/organisations (National press coverage, state and independent organisation recognition)



# OBJECTIVE 5

## RUSSBOROUGH WORKS IN CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC BODIES

We must collaborate with those who share our values and our vision, to ensure we keep pace with the interests and expectations of our public. Through partnership, we can further refine and enhance the presentation of Russborough's unique collection, and share our resources with a wider audience.

We will achieve this by:

- Agreeing and documenting the shape and scale of the long-term partnership with the National Gallery of Ireland
- Achieving full Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI) accreditation
- Participating in three significant collaborative events or projects with major cultural institutions
- Being part of an accredited tourism route, working in partnership with other local and regional attractions to drive visitor numbers



# OBJECTIVE 6

## RUSSBOROUGH HAS THE SECURE, LONG-TERM FINANCIAL RESOURCES IT NEEDS TO ACHIEVE ITS AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

As a standalone charity sitting outside the State-funded historic property portfolio, the Alfred Beit Foundation cannot rely on any one income source to maintain and enhance the Russborough Demesne. We also have an obligation to preserve and grow our endowment fund. Notwithstanding the vital generosity of The Apollo Foundation, the ambition of this strategy can only be met by diversifying income generation and engaging with Wicklow County Council and the State for ongoing subventions. We must urgently build on the excellent work of the recent past, to embed broad-based long-term financial security.

We will achieve this by:

- Showing year-on-year net positive cash generation in the Foundation's accounts
- Securing multiple income streams including significant grant funding, and long-term philanthropic commitment to support both ongoing projects and endowment fund growth
- Establishing dependable core income for a three-year horizon

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chair, Directors and former directors of the  
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Russborough Staff  
The Apollo Foundation  
National Gallery of Ireland  
Wicklow County Council  
West Wicklow Festival  
Sheehan & Barry Architects  
Newbridge House & Farm  
Irish Georgian Society  
Stride XM  
Royal Irish Academy of Music  
Killruddery House & Gardens  
Christopher Gallagher – Historic Landscape Consultant  
National Library of Ireland  
Association of Visitor Experiences & Attractions  
Blessington Greenway Committee  
Wicklow Naturally  
Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage  
Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland  
Tulfarris Hotel & Golf Resort  
Fuel Events  
Tenants of Russborough  
Community representatives, supporters and neighbours

We are deeply grateful to those who  
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The listed individuals and  
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[RUSSBOROUGH.IE](http://RUSSBOROUGH.IE)