

# 5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE QUICK VOTE

An introduction to the controversial voting system that has put an end to meaningful democracy in the National Trust.



# The National Trust is a democratic membership organisation - or at least it's supposed to be.

Ahead of and at the Annual General Meeting (AGM), National Trust members are invited to elect a proportion of the National Trust's Council and to vote on matters of policy via resolutions. This is the members' opportunity to have their say on the governance of one of the country's largest membership organisations. However, in 2022 the National Trust introduced the Quick Vote, a move that radically changed the AGM, so that the National Trust can no longer be said to be a properly democratic organisation.

When casting their vote, members are now invited to use the Quick Vote at the top of the ballot paper or screen, with the Quick Vote presented as the first and easiest voting option. If members select it, their votes are cast in support of the Nominations Committee's preferred candidates for the Council and to vote for or against resolutions in line with the wishes of the Board of Trustees. In other words, the Quick Vote is used to back the preferences of the existing National Trust leadership.

**Why does this matter?** That's the subject of this pamphlet: five things you need to know about the Quick Vote.

## 1. The Quick Vote has made National Trust elections less fair...

The Quick Vote had made ballots in National Trust elections much less fair than they used to be. Why? Because by presenting the Quick Vote option first, and allowing endorsed candidates and resolution positions to be voted for as a block, it has become significantly easier to vote in the way the National Trust wants you to than to vote according to your own judgement.



National  
Trust

# 2023 Annual General Meeting

Voting services provided by Civica Election Services

## Election to the Council

The profiles of all the Council election candidates, including the Nominations Committee's recommended candidates, are in the 'Notice of Election to the Council' section of the [AGM booklet](#).

You can vote for up to five candidates in the 'Choose your candidates' section below. Alternatively, you can vote for the five candidates recommended by the Nominations Committee by selecting the 'Quick vote' option.

### Quick vote

To vote for the five recommended candidates, select this box.

### Choose your candidates

Please select the box next to your chosen candidate(s). You may vote for up to 5 (FIVE) candidates.

Candidates are listed in alphabetical order.

Name	Vote
Sid Bains	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adam Bray	<input type="checkbox"/>

There is an extensive academic literature that investigates ballot design and demonstrates how the way in which a candidate or issue is presented has a significant impact on voting behaviour. Sometimes referred to as the 'primacy effect', there is tendency among voters to prefer candidates and positions that appear at the top of the ballot. The top spot on the ballot paper confers an advantage and that is, of course, where the Quick Vote appears on National Trust ballots.

What's more, the Quick Vote offers only one set of candidates and resolution positions as a 'ticket' or 'slate'. Some elections allow straight-ticket voting in which the elector is given the option to vote for a whole slate of candidates in accordance with the endorsement of an organisation or group, typically a political party.

For example, in a US state practising straight ticket voting, the voter can cast their ballot for the entire slate of candidates put forward by the Republican Party or the Democratic Party. But, importantly, there are competing slates.

In National Trust elections, only one set of candidates and resolution positions is available to members as a slate, specifically those endorsed by the National Trust. Members who wish, for example, to support the candidates endorsed by Restore Trust must search for and select the candidates individually. For those members, there is no option to vote by slate, nor is there any indication on the ballot of who has been endorsed.

Taken together, these consequences of the Quick Vote have made the existing leadership's preferred votes more prominent on the ballot paper and significantly easier to cast. The Quick Vote has biased the ballot.

***The National Trust opted to make only one slate of candidates and resolution votes available to members as a slate, those endorsed by the National Trust leadership.***

## **2. ...and turned once competitive AGMs into a rubber-stamping exercise.**

A hallmark of healthy democratic organisations is competitive elections. However, since the introduction of the Quick Vote and its biasing of the ballot, no candidate who was not endorsed by the existing National Trust leadership, and no resolution which had not received their backing, has been successful at the AGM. Not one.

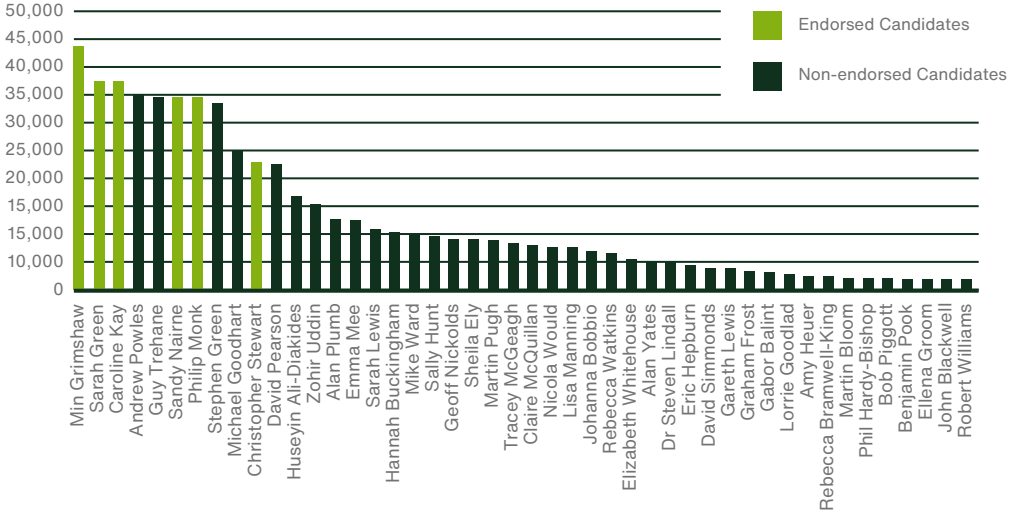
Prior to the introduction of the Quick Vote, strong candidates not endorsed by the National Trust's Nominations Committee stood a realistic chance of being elected. For example in 2021, the last year without the Quick Vote, only four of the six endorsed candidates were elected, with two non-endorsed candidates chosen by the membership to represent them on the Council.

However, in 2022, 2023 and 2024, only endorsed candidates were successful. Charts 1 and 2 compare the elections for the Council in the last year without the Quick Vote with the first year in which it was used. They show how difficult the Quick Vote made it for any independent candidate to get elected. This is a wholly new phenomenon in once competitive National Trust elections.

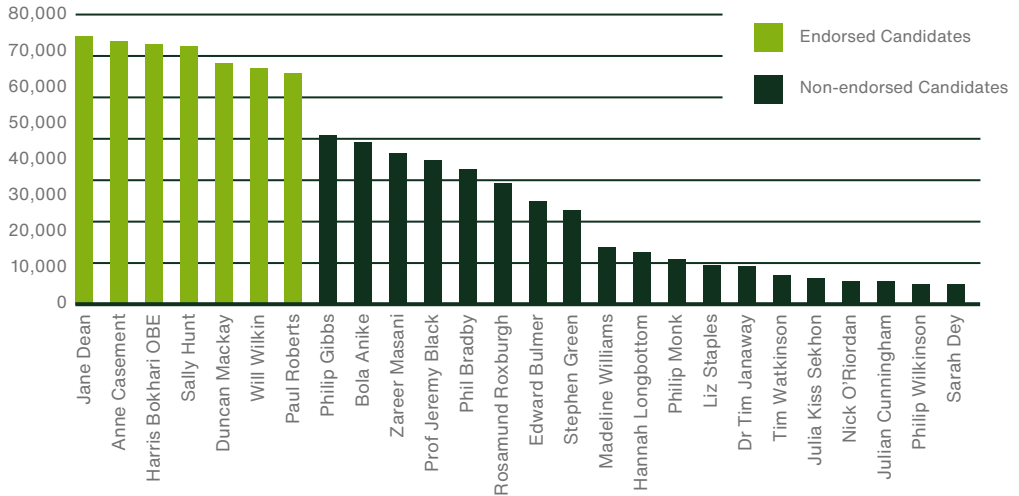
At the 2024 AGM, for the first time, a majority of votes were cast using the Quick Vote. In some ways, the increase in the use of the Quick Vote was unsurprising: with 127 candidates standing for Council, the advantage of bypassing the candidate statements and simply giving away your votes via the Quick Vote was greater than ever. The incentive to use the Quick Vote was compounded by the decision, taken by the National Trust, no longer to send paper ballots to members automatically, which meant that the overwhelmingly large amount of information about who was standing and why had to be negotiated by most voters on a screen.

Altogether, this meant that at the last AGM, with a majority of votes Quick Votes and all Quick Votes used for endorsed candidates, it was not possible for any non-endorsed candidate to get elected - no matter how strong their statement, how relevant their knowledge and experience, or even how many votes they attracted from the members who read about all the candidates and voted according to their own judgement. Many members commented that this rendered

the AGM a rubber-stamping exercise for the wishes of the existing National Trust leadership and not a genuinely democratic meeting.



**Chart 1: National Trust Council Election Results 2021, in which six candidates were elected and for which the Quick Vote was not used.**



**Chart 2: National Trust Council Election Results 2022, in which seven candidates were elected and for which the Quick Vote was used. Only endorsed candidates were elected at this AGM.**

*Since the introduction of the Quick Vote, no candidate who was not endorsed by the existing National Trust leadership, and no resolution which has not received their backing, has been successful at the AGM. Once competitive AGMs have turned into rubber-stamping exercises.*

### 3. The Quick Vote was introduced with no mandate from National Trust members.

The introduction of the Quick Vote was clearly a big deal. And historically the National Trust has recognised that major changes to the operations of the AGM should be approved by resolution of the membership. For example, in 2021 the Board of Trustees proposed a motion on 'Digital Futures', with important consequences for the AGM. At the time, the Board of Trustees noted in its resolution that 'these changes can only be approved by the members in a general meeting...' However, when it came to the introduction of the Quick Vote, the National Trust declined to put a resolution forward to the AGM. It did not widely consult, nor seek the support of, members. The Quick Vote was simply announced.

Many National Trust members believed that this fundamental change to the nature of the AGM lacked a mandate and a resolution was proposed at the 2023 AGM to abolish the Quick Vote. The leadership of the National Trust opposed the resolution and, as such and ironically, all Quick Vote ballots were cast against it. The resolution was therefore narrowly defeated (by 53.6% to 46.4%) thanks to the 41% of members' votes that were cast en bloc against it. More than three quarters of members who cast their ballots themselves (i.e. did not use the Quick Vote) voted for the resolution to abolish the Quick Vote.

There was no mandate from National Trust members for introducing the Quick Vote and when concerned members tried to rebel and get it taken away, the National Trust used the Quick Vote to stop them.

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## 4. The National Trust has provided no clear rationale for introducing the Quick Vote.

Why, you might ask, has the National Trust introduced the Quick Vote? Many members have been trying to find out. When pushed, the National Trust leadership said:

*The National Trust introduced a quick vote option last year in response to member feedback and having taken advice from [Civica Election Services] on arrangements at similar large member organisations.*

It's not clear what member feedback there was, especially as there was no formal consultation of members about the existing arrangements or the possible introduction of a Quick Vote. Furthermore, CES - the group cited by the National Trust - says they advised the National Trust on how to implement the Quick Vote, not whether it should be introduced. CES is clear that the decision remained ultimately one for the National Trust. Examples of other membership organisations using the Quick Vote have also not been forthcoming, with the principal exception of building societies which cannot be said to be 'similar' to the National Trust.

Many members have concluded that the National Trust introduced the Quick Vote because members, using their democratic rights, had declined to endorse the National Trust's full slate of candidates and resolution positions in AGMs prior to 2022. For example, in 2021 two candidates endorsed by Restore Trust were elected against the wishes of the existing leadership of the National Trust. The introduction of the Quick Vote biased the ballot to make this less likely in the future.

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## 5. The Quick Vote is harming the reputation of the National Trust.

The decline in competitive votes at the AGM poses a reputational risk to the National Trust and its claim to be a democratic organisation. Sir William Proby, a former Chairman of the National Trust, has branded the Quick Vote 'an extreme form of proxy voting' which makes the election process 'undemocratic.' For someone so senior to make such a claim should be a wake-up call for the current leadership. But so far, it has fallen on deaf ears.

The criticisms of the Quick Vote don't stop there. Professor Sir Vernon Bogdanor, Britain's most eminent constitutional expert, has said, 'the implementation of the Quick Vote has... undermined the integrity of the elections and diminished the voice of the members.' Lord Sumption, a former Supreme Court Justice, argued that National Trust elections have been turned into co-options, with the voting process rendered meaningless by the use of the Quick Vote.

And Professor Philip Cowley, one of Britain's foremost experts on elections, labelled the Quick Vote as 'pretty disgraceful' and said, 'We wouldn't accept it in any other organisation.' Yet we are told to accept it in the National Trust.

The threat to democracy posed by the Quick Vote has not gone unnoticed. It has been called into question by both members and experts, with the National Trust's reputation suffering from the introduction and continued use of the Quick Vote.

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## How you can help us restore trust in the National Trust and end the Quick Vote.

Restore Trust is the grassroots group that is working to keep the National Trust focused on its founding mission - to look after our nature and heritage - and to keep democracy alive in the National Trust. As such, we're committed to ending the Quick Vote and restoring the members' voice in the AGM. But we need your help to do it.

## Here are five things you can do:

1

### **SIGN UP FOR THE RESTORE TRUST MAILING LIST.**

We'll keep you informed on the campaign to end the Quick Vote. Visit [restoretrust.org.uk](http://restoretrust.org.uk) to sign up.

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2

### **SHARE A COPY OF THIS PAMPHLET.**

We're always trying to get the word out to more people about the Quick Vote. So please share a copy of this report with a friend - especially if they're a National Trust member!

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3

### **RAISE THE ISSUE WITH YOUR MP.**

The National Trust is here to serve both its members and the interests of the entire nation. Let your MP know about your concerns about the Quick Vote and please let us know what response you get.

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### **DONATE TO OUR CAMPAIGNS.**

We invest every donation we receive in trying to bring about positive change in the National Trust and return it to its founding purposes. You can make a donation on our website.

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5

### **STAY A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL TRUST.**

Some people have grown so frustrated with the National Trust that they have given up their membership. But we can only change the National Trust if people who agree with us stay as members and support our proposals for change. So, please, remain a member!



**RESTORETRUST.ORG.UK**  
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