



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

26 February, 1982.

Dear Lord Brownlow,

Thank you for your letter of 8 February about the future of Belton House, its contents and the estate. I was very sad to hear that you were thinking of selling Belton. Your family must have lived there for more than three hundred years.

Without knowing a little bit more about your problems, I cannot give you any definite answer to your offer, even though Belton is obviously of outstanding importance. But I would not want to raise your hopes unduly. Our policy is to do everything possible to encourage the retention of historic houses in private ownership. It is almost always the best way of securing their future. With that in mind we have made a number of specific changes in tax law. For example the Finance Act 1980 makes maintenance funds easier to set up and allows them to be applied to land of outstanding interest and to the contents of outstanding historic houses. I know that you are reluctant to sell more land in order to endow a maintenance fund, but it may be that it is still possible to sell some outlying land, or perhaps a work of art, in the same way as the Chatsworth Poussin, or the Luton Hoo Altdorfer.

/ In addition,

In addition, there is of course scope for obtaining conditional exemption from capital taxation in respect of outstanding historic houses and their associated land and contents. You might also offer certain chattels in lieu of capital tax on condition that they remain at Belton.

Another possibility is that financial assistance could be available, on the recommendation of the Historic Buildings Council, towards the cost of the programme of repairs to the house. I understand that the Department of the Environment are awaiting further information from your solicitors which would enable them to process an application for grant. I know that an application for a small grant was refused in 1980, but I think the Council might take a more sympathetic view if you gave them some information about the scale of repairs necessary at Belton, as part of a programme of works. In addition to any historic building grants which might be available for the house, the local authority might be able to give you grants for the modernisation of the estate cottages.

You may well have looked at all these possibilities already, and if you would like to come and talk about your offer, I would be happy to see you. You know how grateful I am for all the beautiful things you have lent me.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Belton

The Lord Brownlow.

either here - or at Chequers
one weekend.