

Great Thatch Island: Heritage, Conservation, and community revitalization

A Proposal for Institutional, Governmental, and Philanthropic Support

British Virgin Islands | 2026–2030



The "Lost Island" of Great Thatch: Minutes from Tortola, highly visible and historically rich. Yet largely undisturbed by modern development for over a century.

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The BVI National Parks Trust will oversee all management, development, and operations to ensure conservation standards are maintained, ownership is transparent, and governance is consistent.

1. Executive Summary

The Great Thatch Island Heritage and Conservation Project is an ambitious initiative. It will transform one of the Caribbean’s most culturally and ecologically significant—but long overlooked—sites into a flagship model of sustainable heritage tourism and environmental stewardship. There are currently no UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Virgin Islands, and Great Thatch would stand a very good chance of being the first.

Located less than a mile northwest of Tortola, Great Thatch Island is uniquely positioned: both highly visible and historically rich, yet entirely undeveloped in modern times. This juxtaposition presents a unique opportunity.

Great Thatch also carries the possibility of earlier Taino Pre-Columbian presence, with ruins identified in West End, Tortola and elsewhere in the area. For centuries, Great Thatch was a thriving outpost of agricultural, maritime, and social life, with archaeological evidence of plantation infrastructure, early Afro-Caribbean settlements, fishing industries, and rare sites of remembrance, including those tied to cholera epidemics and the island’s enslaved populations. Today, these ruins—untouched and largely undocumented—remain hidden under dense vegetation, at constant risk of loss due to erosion, decay, and human neglect.

Yet Great Thatch’s value lies in its uniquely interwoven cultural and natural heritage. It also hosts rare coastal ecosystems, including mangrove-bordered wetland habitats, seabird habitats, and some of the region’s most productive traditional fishing grounds.

Great Thatch is part of the BVI’s network of Tropical Important Plant Areas (TIPAs) and supports globally significant flora, including the vulnerable

Puerto Rican Bank Century Plant and Stahl’s Silverbush, as well as the endangered Puerto Rican Bank Cockspur (endemic) and Jost Van Dyke’s Indian Mallow.

It is an ecocultural heritage site—one that can anchor a new model of economic development for the Territory.



Very importantly, the BVI National Parks Trust will oversee all management, development, and operations to ensure conservation standards are maintained, ownership is transparent, and governance is consistent.

This proposal outlines a carefully phased, four-year plan to stabilize and restore key heritage sites, implement ecological protection strategies, and introduce minimal, eco-sensitive infrastructure that enables controlled public access. The vision is to create a low-impact, high-value visitor destination that supports local employment, educational outreach, and cultural pride. All planning has been grounded in extensive research—including an environmental assessment, international conservation experts and consultations with local historians, residents, and the National Parks Trust.

Backed by a phased budget, capped at \$5.0M, the project prioritizes partnerships with local communities and institutions. Each phase delivers a visitable, family-friendly attraction, ensuring early impact and sustained growth across the Territory. It integrates conservation science, oral history, and hands-on training programs to ensure long-term sustainability. Once complete, the restored Great Thatch will serve as a living classroom, a heritage sanctuary, and a new cornerstone of the BVI's evolving tourism economy—offering a culturally resonant alternative to cruise ships and beach bars.

Without intervention, the fragile ruins and ecosystems of Great Thatch will continue to degrade. With support from government agencies, private philanthropists, and international heritage bodies, we can protect and celebrate this remarkable island—and, in doing so, tell a story of resilience, regeneration, and local leadership that will echo far beyond the shores of the BVI.



2. Vision and Strategic Objectives

The Great Thatch Island project envisions a powerful and lasting transformation—one that positions the island as a beacon of heritage-based tourism, ecological renewal, and inclusive community development. Our ambition is to establish Great Thatch as a UNESCO level model for the wider Caribbean and small island nations globally: a site where history, nature, and local livelihoods are not just preserved, but activated in harmony.

Our Vision

To develop a world-class heritage and ecological reserve that revives the spirit of Great Thatch Island—preserving its rich, layered past while empowering its future stewards. We seek to create a destination that resonates deeply with both local communities and global visitors, offering education, reflection, and inspiration.

Our vision draws strength from a growing global desire for responsible travel and rooted cultural experiences—an opportunity for the British Virgin Islands to lead with authenticity.

Our Core Strategic Objectives

a. Celebrate and interpret the island's complex cultural history.

The island's history reflects Afro-Caribbean strength, borderland dynamics, and ecological adaptation. Through community-driven oral history, interpretive trails, and immersive signage, we will honour and elevate these narratives—placing the island's people, past and present, at the heart of the visitor experience.

b. Stabilise and restore historically significant features.

The island contains over 20 distinct archaeological features, including plantation ruins, church foundations, community buildings, sites of remembrance, traditional water systems, and historic pathways. Many of these structures are in critical decline. Restoration and conservation will be sensitive, selective, and led by experts in tropical archaeology and heritage engineering, ensuring longevity and historical fidelity.

c. Protect and rehabilitate the island's unique ecosystems.

From the wetland habitats edged with mangroves and seabird habitats to the turtle nesting beaches and endemic plant species, Great Thatch hosts a variety of fragile ecosystems. We will implement habitat restoration techniques, including the removal of invasive species, protection of endangered wildlife, and replanting of native flora, while restricting visitor access to high-sensitivity zones.

d. Generate sustainable and inclusive economic opportunities.

This project is a catalyst for employment and skills development. From trained heritage guides and conservation rangers to boat operators, craftspeople, and food providers, Great Thatch will provide tangible economic returns to neighbouring communities such as West End, Carrot Bay and Jost Van Dyke. All hiring, training, and enterprise development will be locally focused.

e. Reinforce and expand the BVI's cultural tourism offering.

The Territory is rightly known for its natural beauty—but cultural and historical tourism is still emerging. Great Thatch will diversify the tourism sector, complementing sites like the RMS Rhone, Copper Mine and Sage Mountain National Parks with a more immersive, educational, and emotionally engaging experience. It will also become a platform for school visits, international research, and cultural diplomacy.

f. Promote environmental and cultural leadership from within the Virgin Islands.

The long-term goal is not simply to protect Great Thatch, but to set a precedent for how heritage and conservation can be co-led by local communities, civil society, and youth. This project can stand as a regional exemplar—an initiative rooted in pride of place, shaped by local voices, and supported by global standards.



3. Historical Context and Resource Overview

Since the 1700s, a Legacy of Connection, Industry, and Ancestral Presence

Great Thatch Island holds a layered and powerful past—one shaped by its strategic position between Tortola and the former Danish territories of St. John and St. Thomas. By the mid-18th century, the island had emerged as a modest yet vital outpost within the regional plantation system. Archival evidence and oral tradition together paint a picture of a community deeply rooted in agriculture, faith, and maritime exchange.

Unlike larger sugar plantations on Tortola, Great Thatch developed as a mixed-use settlement—supporting livestock, food crops, and inter-island trade. Its inhabitants included both enslaved and freed Afro-Caribbean people who cultivated the land, fished surrounding waters, and built a self-sustaining settlement. A customs facility near the main landing and a small church or chapel suggest a community with both administrative and spiritual infrastructure. These structures speak to the island's dual function as both a working landscape and a point of cross-cultural exchange.

Population records from the 1800s suggest that over one hundred people once lived here. Family names connected to the island—still found in neighbouring communities such as Carrot Bay and Jost Van Dyke—attest to long-standing kinship and cultural memory. Yet, by the early 20th century, the island's population had dwindled, its buildings fell into ruin, and its stories slipped further into silence.

In 1997, the Government of the Virgin Islands purchased Great Thatch with the intent to protect and honor its heritage. Despite some promising early efforts, full designation as a national park remains incomplete. The result is a rare and fragile site—largely untouched in recent decades, yet profoundly expressive of the Virgin Islands' colonial, ecological, and communal histories.

Scattered across the island are the remnants of a once-thriving landscape: stone foundations overgrown with vines, sites of remembrance softened by time, traditional ovens built from brick and coral, and traditional water storage features that still catch water from the hills. These features are not just archaeological curiosities—they are markers of ingenuity, endurance, and adaptation in the face of systemic hardship.

Today, Great Thatch offers more than a record of the past. It offers a chance to illuminate untold stories, reconnect fragmented narratives, and invite a new generation to rediscover what was built, lost, and still lingers—quiet but waiting—beneath the canopy.

4. Conservation Urgency

Great Thatch is at a tipping point. The island's deep historical imprint—its stone walls, quiet sites of remembrance, and ancestral homesteads—is vanishing beneath layers of vegetation, erosion, and time. What remains today is fragile, largely unrecorded, and without intervention, increasingly irretrievable.

The structures that once formed the backbone of island life—homes, communal spaces, gathering points—now stand exposed to weather, roots, and the slow collapse of memory. Foundations are shifting. Walls are crumbling. Sacred sites, once marked and mourned, are now nearly indistinguishable from the earth that holds them. These spaces are not protected, and the absence of formal stewardship leaves them open to unintentional harm—from both nature and well-meaning visitors unaware of what lies beneath their feet.

Ecologically, the island is no less vulnerable. Unique coastal habitats—wetland habitats edged with mangroves, feeding grounds for seabirds, and marine shallows long prized by local fishers—are under stress. Invasive species and unchecked plant growth compete with native flora, altering delicate balances and shrinking the living space of species already under pressure elsewhere across the region. Climate volatility only compounds these threats: rising heat, shifting rainfall, and storm surges place new strain on an already weakened landscape.



But the most urgent loss may not be physical at all—it is generational. The stories of Great Thatch, held by elders in nearby villages, are passing with time. These accounts—of migration, hardship, resistance, and community—form a vital counterpart to the stone and soil. Without them, the island risks becoming an empty shell: visible but silent.

There is still time. With targeted care, grounded in humility and collaboration, we can halt this erosion—of structures, species, and stories. We can stabilize what remains and recover what's been hidden. But the window is narrowing. The choice before us is stark: reclaim a place of meaning and possibility, or watch it slip into obscurity.

“This is not simply about preservation. It is about belonging. It is about what is chosen to be carried forward—and who gets to tell the story.”



5. Financial Benefits Analysis: Great Thatch Island Heritage and Conservation Project

Summary

The Great Thatch Island project represents not only an ecocultural investment, but a high-return economic stimulus for the BVI and surrounding Caribbean region. By transforming an underutilized natural and historical asset into a low-impact, high-value heritage destination, this project will generate substantial direct, indirect, and long-term financial benefit.

Benefits will range from increased tourism revenue and job creation to regional investment in heritage infrastructure and cultural industries.

The window for mobilizing global heritage and climate finance is narrowing ahead of 2030 targets—this project positions the BVI to lead with immediacy and credibility



1. Direct Economic Benefits to the British Virgin Islands

A. Tourism Diversification and Increased Visitor Spend

- **Expansion of the Tourism Base:** The project positions the BVI to attract a new segment of responsible and sustainable visitors: cultural tourists, heritage travellers, conservation volunteers, and academic researchers. These groups statistically stay longer and spend more per capita than traditional beach holidaymakers.
- **Heritage Premium:** Guided tours, curated exhibitions, and local storytelling programs can significantly enhance per-visitor revenue.
- **Alignment with Global Trends:** Heritage and eco-tourism are among the fastest-growing segments of global tourism, projected to grow at >7% CAGR through 2030. BVI stands to become a regional leader in this space.

B. Job Creation and Local Enterprise Development

- **Short-Term Construction and Conservation Jobs:** The project will create immediate employment in conservation, masonry, carpentry, transport, and ecological management.
- **Long-Term Skilled Jobs:** Permanent roles will include site guides, maintenance staff, researchers, interpreters, educators, and community-based entrepreneurs (e.g., artisanal vendors, tour operators).
- **Local Supply Chain Activation:** Demand will increase for locally sourced materials, boats, construction services, signage, print/design, and catering—supporting a wide network of SMEs.

C. New Revenue Streams for Government

- **Site Fees and Concessions:** Controlled visitor access can generate sustainable revenue through entry fees, licensed guide services, and concession permits.
- **Land and Marine Use Licensing:** The structured management of moorings, trails, and events can be monetized through permits, creating predictable annual revenue.
- **Taxable Enterprise Growth:** Local businesses serving the site (transport, food, souvenirs, etc.) will contribute to the public purse through VAT and business licensing.

2. Spillover Benefits to the Wider Virgin Islands

A. Tourism Circuit Development

- **Heritage Trail Linkages:** The project creates natural synergies with other sites such as the RMS Rhone, Sage Mountain, Jost Van Dyke cultural heritage, and St. John's historic national park assets—encouraging inter-island travel and longer stays.
- **Shared Infrastructure Investment:** Improvements in transport, signage, security, and interpretation can benefit multiple islands, reducing per-island costs and raising shared standards.

B. Human Capital and Skill Sharing

- **Training and Certification Programmes:** Conservation, guiding, and restoration training based at Great Thatch can serve participants from across the Virgin Islands, building a regional workforce in heritage skills.
- **Academic Research and Exchange:** The site will attract universities, NGOs, and heritage bodies, facilitating shared studies, internships, and joint funding proposals across islands.

3. Regional Economic Uplift for the Lesser Antilles

A. Model of Replicable Sustainable Development

- Great Thatch can serve as a pilot model for similarly underutilized islands or coastal sites across the Lesser Antilles. As climate change and cruise tourism reshape the Caribbean economy, this project offers a replicable, community-first model to development.

B. Attracting International Funding and Partnerships

- A successful implementation will strengthen the BVI's and the region's eligibility for grants, debt-for-nature swaps, and climate resilience investments from major global institutions (UNESCO, World Bank, IADB, etc.).

C. Cultural Economy and Creative Industries

- Regional creatives—storytellers, musicians, historians, and visual artists—can use Great Thatch as a platform for pan-Caribbean interpretation and cultural revival. The economic multiplier for cultural tourism is strong, often stimulating growth in education, events, digital content, and crafts.



4. Long-Term Economic Resilience

- **Climate-resilient tourism:** Unlike beach-dependent mass tourism, heritage-based sites offer year-round, weather-independent appeal and lower carbon footprints.
- **Reduced Maintenance Costs:** Investment in preventative conservation now avoids significantly higher costs of reconstruction or emergency stabilization later.
- **Community Ownership and Retention of Wealth:** By involving local people in governance and operations, profits and employment remain within the Territory—reducing leakage to external contractors or offshore investors.

Conclusion

The Great Thatch Island project is a strategic, future-facing investment that offers wide-reaching financial benefits—directly to the BVI, indirectly to the wider Virgin Islands, and structurally to the Lesser Antilles. It marries cultural pride with economic strategy, ensuring that heritage is not merely preserved, but activated as a driver of shared prosperity and regional sustainability.



6. Social Benefits of the Great Thatch Island Project

Beyond its economic and environmental value, the Great Thatch Project offers profound and lasting social benefits to the British Virgin Islands, the wider Virgin Islands, and the Lesser Antilles. At its heart, the project is a platform for local leadership, cultural renewal, education, and social cohesion.

1. Cultural Identity and Collective Memory

Reclaiming Hidden Histories

- The project offers a historic opportunity to recognize and honour the lives of enslaved and free Afro-Caribbean communities who lived, laboured, and died on Great Thatch.
- Through interpretive trails, community-led storytelling, and commemorative spaces, the project restores dignity to those whose histories have been neglected or erased.
- Sites of remembrance, including those linked to the cholera epidemic and early settlers, will be protected and interpreted with sensitivity—offering descendants a tangible connection to their heritage.



Community Pride and Ownership

- Involving local residents in the stewardship through restoration and storytelling of the site builds cultural pride and reinforces a shared sense of purpose.
- Great Thatch becomes not just a tourist destination, but a **symbol of resilience, creativity, and ancestral strength** for the people of the BVI.

2. Education and Youth Engagement

Living Classroom for All Ages

- Great Thatch will serve as an open-air classroom where **local students can learn history, ecology, and cultural traditions in situ**—a dynamic alternative to textbook learning.
- Curriculum partnerships with BVI schools and H. Lavity Stoutt Community College can integrate fieldwork, service learning, and career inspiration into educational programming.

Youth Training and Empowerment

- The project will offer **vocational training in conservation, heritage interpretation, hospitality, terrestrial and marine ecology**, directly preparing young people for employment.
- Internships, mentorships, and apprenticeships with local craftsmen, ecologists, and historians will bridge generational knowledge and support youth development.

3. Community Health and Wellbeing

Access to Nature and Cultural Spaces

- Safe, managed access to Great Thatch will provide residents with new opportunities for **recreation, reflection, and connection to land and sea**.
- Nature exposure is proven to reduce stress, improve mental health, and enhance physical wellbeing—particularly important for island populations facing climate and economic pressures.

Healing Historical Trauma

- Acknowledging the difficult histories of slavery, disease, and displacement with **honesty and care** allows for healing and reconciliation.
- The project creates space for ritual, remembrance, and renewal—important processes for communities still carrying generational burdens of silence and loss.

4. Social Inclusion and Equity

Local Leadership and Representation

- The planning and governance of the project will prioritise the inclusion of **local voices, especially elders, youth, and underrepresented community members**.
- Decision-making power will be with Virgin Islanders through advisory councils, co-design workshops, and employment commitments.

Income Diversification for Vulnerable Groups

- By supporting a wide array of micro-enterprises—crafts, food services, storytelling, boat transport—the project provides **low-barrier entry points for women, youth, and informal workers** to earn income and build careers.

5. Regional Cultural Solidarity

- The themes explored at Great Thatch—colonialism, migration, resilience, resistance, and regeneration—resonate across the Caribbean.
- The project can host regional festivals, exhibitions, and educational exchanges that foster **solidarity among island nations**, particularly around shared histories and futures.

Key Outcomes for People & Communities

- Recognition of hidden histories and restoration of cultural pride
- Open-air classroom and training opportunities for young people
- Improved community health and wellbeing through access to nature
- Economic inclusion via micro-enterprises and local jobs
- Stronger regional solidarity through shared heritage programming

The social benefits of the Great Thatch Island project are profound, far-reaching, and deeply intertwined with the Territory's identity and future. By investing in this site, the BVI invests in its people: in memory, meaning, education, health, and opportunity. This is a conservation effort with deep social implications.



7. Call to Action: Join Us in Shaping a Legacy

The Great Thatch Island Heritage and Conservation Project is more than a preservation effort—it is a bold investment in the British Virgin Islands’ cultural identity, economic future, and global standing. This is a historic opportunity to transform a forgotten treasure into a flagship model for sustainable tourism, local leadership, and ecological resilience.

We are now ready to launch **Phase 1 implementation** and are actively seeking mission-aligned partners to help bring this vision to life.



We invite:

- Institutional funders and global heritage trusts to help safeguard an irreplaceable ecocultural landscape.
- **BVI and regional government departments** to lead in pioneering a new model of inclusive, heritage-based development.
- **Philanthropic investors and changemakers** to support a project that fuses memory with momentum, ecology with equity, and conservation with opportunity.

Your Support Will Deliver Tangible, Lasting Impact:

- Boost education-driven, sustainable tourism that diversifies the BVI economy and reduces reliance on cruise-based volume.
- **Create skilled local jobs** in guiding, restoration, interpretation, conservation, transport, and community enterprise.
- **Generate sustainable, locally retained revenue** from visitor access fees, heritage experiences, and small business development.
- **Reclaim and celebrate stories of resistance, community, and culture**—centering Virgin Islanders as stewards and storytellers.

With the government’s forward-looking 1997 acquisition as a foundation, this proposal offers the next vital step: activating that intent through a shared, financially responsible and community-driven vision

This project will establish the BVI as a **regional leader in regenerative tourism and cultural preservation**, attracting long-stay visitors, international research, and global media attention.

A living legacy. A regional catalyst. A story reclaimed.

Appendix A:

Phased Budget Overview (2026–2030)

Phase	Focus, Investment & Deliverable outcomes
Phase 1 Access & Early Visitor Offer	\$0.5M <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Safe access & wayfinding- Café/bar concession & school visits- Early interpretation and family activities
Phase 2 Core Infrastructure & Ecology	\$1.5M <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Eco-sensitive dock & controlled access- Off-grid utilities (solar, water, composting toilets)- Habitat restoration & ecological monitoring
Phase 3 Heritage & Interpretation	\$1.5M <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Restoration of historic structures- Durable interpretation (signage, storytelling, app)- Artisan & cultural enterprise support
Phase 4 Visitor Experience & Governance	\$1.5M <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Learning centre & family programmes- Community governance & training- Ongoing maintenance & marketing

Total Investment (2026–2030): \$5.0M

Each phase delivers a fun, family-friendly, income-generating attraction — with early returns from Phase 1 onwards.

Budget Rationale

This phased \$5 million budget has been designed to be both achievable and impactful. Rather than presenting an exhaustive cost breakdown, the approach focuses on clear investment milestones that deliver a real visitor offer at every stage. The phasing ensures that early access and revenue generation begin with modest infrastructure and interpretation, while later phases build capacity, restore heritage structures, and expand the visitor experience. The \$5 million cap provides a realistic ceiling aligned with comparable projects in the region, while still allowing for ecological restoration, heritage conservation, and sustainable tourism infrastructure to be delivered to international standards. This structure balances ambition with credibility, offering funders confidence that each stage will generate tangible outcomes for the Territory while keeping long-term costs under control.

The phased approach also spreads risk and allows funders to engage incrementally. Each phase will be a self-contained deliverable, with its own visitor experience and income potential. This ensures that benefits begin immediately and grow over time, while demonstrating transparency and accountability to investors.

Comparable precedents underline the realism of this model. On Sandy Island (Anguilla), phased investment in eco-sensitive access and interpretation has created a thriving, community-led tourism site without overwhelming its fragile ecology. The Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park (Jamaica) was built in stages, adding guiding, interpretation, and restoration over time until it achieved UNESCO World Heritage status. At Brimstone Hill Fortress (St Kitts & Nevis), phased conservation has allowed sections to remain open to visitors throughout restoration, maintaining both revenues and public engagement.

The Great Thatch project builds on this proven logic: progressive, phased investment that is both financially credible and locally transformative.

Appendix B: **Great Thatch Island: Visitor Infrastructure and Interpretation Plan**

1. Objectives

- To provide safe, fun, low-impact access to Great Thatch Island.
- To protect and interpret the island's ecological and cultural heritage.
- To foster public understanding, stewardship, and community involvement.
- To support local economic activity through sustainable tourism and educational programming.

2. Zoning and Visitor Flow

The island will be divided into distinct zones to manage ecological sensitivity and visitor experience:

- Arrival & Orientation Zone: Near the dock, this area will include signage, a shelter, and introductory interpretation.
- Heritage Zone: Focused on restored ruins, with guided routes and in-depth historical interpretation.
- Ecological Conservation Zone: Boardwalks and signage will allow viewing of mangroves, wetland habitats, and seabird habitats without causing disturbance.
- Recreation & Rest Area: A shaded picnic and rest area will be located at a distance from sensitive habitats and archaeological features.
- Restricted Access Areas: Highly sensitive ecological areas will be closed to unsupervised visitors but accessible via guided tours or scientific permits.

3. Visitor Infrastructure

3.1 Dock and Arrival Facilities

- Eco-sensitive Dock: Floating or pile-based dock using non-toxic, marine-grade materials.
- Orientation Shelter: Open-air structure with seating, maps, and introductory signage.
- Biosecurity Station: Footbrush stations and signage to prevent invasive species introduction.

3.2 Pathways and Trails

- Raised Boardwalks: Through wetlands and mangroves, designed to prevent compaction.
- Stabilised Trails: Gravel or mulch footpaths guiding visitors through heritage and ecological zones.
- Signage and Wayfinding: Trail markers, directional signs, and trail barriers.

3.3 Rest and Emergency Facilities

- Composting Toilets: Off-grid, odor-controlled, gender-neutral.
- Shaded Seating Areas: Built using local or reclaimed materials.
- Emergency Shelter: Discrete storm shelter with first-aid kits and emergency communications.



4. Interpretation and Educational Content

4.1 Thematic Framework

Interpretation will be organized around five main themes:

1. Ecological Richness
2. Cultural Layers
3. Rewilding and Restoration
4. Family Fun
5. Community and Stewardship

4.2 Interpretation Types

- Interpretive Signage
- Augmented Digital Content
- Exhibits and Installations
- Guided Experiences
- Curriculum-Linked School Materials

5. Accessibility and Inclusion

- Universal Design Principles: Braille signage, wheelchair access, rest points.
- Multilingual Materials: English, Spanish, French
- Community-Curated Content: Co-creation workshops with locals.

6. Visitor Management and Impact Monitoring

- Visitor Caps
- Monitoring Stations
- Feedback and Evaluation
- Adaptive Management

7. Maintenance and Operations Plan

- Scheduled Maintenance
- Community Involvement
- Training

8. Comparable Examples and Rationale

The proposed visitor infrastructure and interpretation strategy for Great Thatch is informed by a range of successful models across the Caribbean, where islands with fragile ecosystems and layered histories have developed infrastructure that balances conservation, education, and low-impact access.

- **Little Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago**: Known for its seabird colonies and dry forest habitat, Little Tobago has developed controlled access via guided tours only, interpretive signage, and boardwalks. These measures have helped prevent habitat degradation while supporting birdwatching ecotourism.
- **Sandy Island, Anguilla**: Managed by the Anguilla National Trust, this islet integrates an eco-sensitive dock, minimal signage, and strong community stewardship. Visitor flows are capped, and restoration efforts (funded by the Rockefeller Foundation) have included signage and interpretation to support invasive species removal efforts.
- **Guana Island, British Virgin Islands**: Privately managed with science-based conservation at its core, Guana uses extensive interpretation, monitoring, and controlled visitor access. A permanent scientific station supports research and conservation communications with visitors.
- **Brimstone Hill Fortress, St. Kitts and Nevis**: A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Brimstone Hill integrates historic restoration with sophisticated signage, museum-quality exhibits, and trained local guides. Its use of multimedia and layered interpretation techniques is a model for cultural storytelling in small island contexts.
- **Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park, Jamaica**: This World Heritage site integrates interpretation of biodiversity and Maroon heritage through trails, signage, digital resources, and community-led guiding.

The rationale for adopting similar infrastructure on Great Thatch is grounded in three key principles:

1. ****Minimizing Ecological Footprint****: Raised boardwalks, restricted zones, and limited facilities—as seen in Little Tobago and Guana—help preserve fragile ecosystems while still allowing access and appreciation.
2. ****Celebrating and Preserving Cultural Heritage****: As demonstrated at Brimstone Hill and the Blue and John Crow Mountains, robust interpretation—via signage, digital tools, and community voices—can make history accessible while deepening public respect.
3. ****Sustainable Community Benefit****: Local guide training and heritage enterprise support, like in Sandy Island and Jamaica’s national parks, ensure tourism revenue and engagement flow back to the community.

These examples demonstrate that modest but strategic investment in interpretation and infrastructure significantly enhances conservation impact, educational value, and visitor experience—objectives at the heart of the Great Thatch project.



9. Integration of UK National Trust Principles of Interpretation

The interpretation strategy for Great Thatch draws directly on the UK National Trust's guiding principles, which emphasize creating meaningful, inclusive, and engaging visitor experiences that support both heritage conservation and public understanding.

Key principles are reflected throughout the Great Thatch approach:

- *****Reveal Meaning, Not Just Facts*****: Rather than presenting static information, interpretation on Great Thatch will evoke emotional and cultural connections—linking visitors to stories of resilience, ecological change, and lived experience. This includes oral histories, place-based narratives, and indigenous knowledge.
- *****Provoke Curiosity*****: Tools such as augmented reality (AR), interactive signage, and digital storytelling will spark interest and reflection, encouraging visitors to explore deeper meanings and ask questions about the island's history and ecosystems.
- *****Relate to the Lives of Visitors*****: Interpretation will bridge global and local concerns—such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable livelihoods—showing how Great Thatch serves as a microcosm for broader environmental and social issues.
- *****Use Diverse Voices*****: The plan integrates multiple perspectives, especially those of local communities, scientists, and cultural practitioners. This reflects the National Trust's emphasis on inclusive, democratic storytelling.
- *****Layered and Flexible Engagement*****: Interpretation is designed for multiple learning styles and depths of engagement—from simple signage for casual visitors to in-depth content accessible via mobile devices and guided experiences.

- ****Encourage Stewardship****: Interpretation on Great Thatch will actively promote conservation action by providing clear opportunities for visitors to get involved, whether through volunteering, advocacy, or contributions to local initiatives.

By embedding these principles throughout the interpretive infrastructure, the project ensures that visitors are not only informed, but inspired to value, protect, and connect with the island's unique cultural and ecological heritage.



This proposal has been prepared by Justin T. Albert OBE, with extensive input from, and on behalf of the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands and the Trustees of the BVI National Parks.