

THE BISHOPS PALACE & GARDENS 2025 VOLUNTEER ANNUAL BRIEFING

Welcome and thanks from Roger Hawes, Chair of Trustees

Merryn Kidd, Chief Executive, Briefing

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2025 Goal

Continue the journey to establish The Bishop's Palace & Gardens as a diverse, welcoming, sustainable, and financially sound attraction

Focussing on: Visitor Experience, Events, Community Engagement, Environment and Financial Growth

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In the 5-year Strategy we outlined that by the end of 2025, we will:

- Be an example in the South-West for inclusivity and diversity in our operations, events, interpretation and welcome.
- Have transformed the interpretation of the historic interiors and be sharing the captivating stories they hold.
- Put learning and education at the heart of all we do with programmes of structured and informal learning activities for a broad range of audiences.
- Optimise our continued status of RHS Partner garden by offering a range of horticultural courses and workshops.
- Have maximised all revenue streams and significantly increased surplus.
- Have implemented improvements to The Dragon's Lair area.
- Have proceeded with or rejected a new Visitor Reception
- Have installed an accessible loo, and completed works to the Community Garden area to create adequate facilities for user groups
- Be fully engaged with the local community, offering high quality employment, volunteering opportunities, and pathways to employment across all our work.
- Have improved our environmental performance in energy consumption, on-site production and storage.

2025 is the final year of our current five-year strategic plan, and planning for the subsequent strategic cycle will begin in March 2025 with an Senior Management Team and Trustees Away Day.

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Strategic Objectives 2025

1. Audience Expansion: Build a diverse, inclusive visitor base.
2. Wellbeing & Community: Enhance visitor health and community connections.
3. Visitor Experience: Upgrade site facilities and visitor flow.
4. Sustainability: Achieve environmental and financial sustainability goals. £80k surplus.
5. Excellence in Horticulture: Strengthen reputation as an RHS Partner Garden.

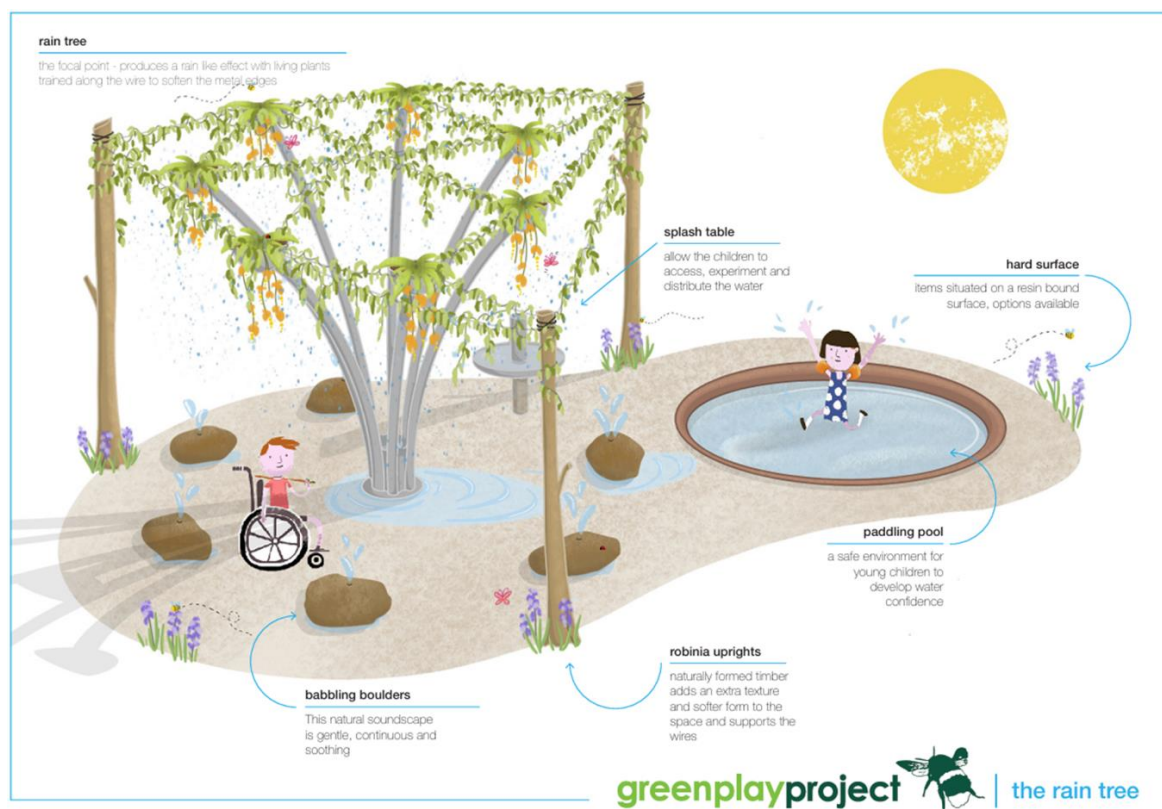
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2025 Key Initiatives

- Pricing: New day tickets, revised annual pass, and premium “Friends” membership.
- Flagship Events: Garden Fair, History Fayre, Party at the Palace, and "Sparkle".
- Visitor Experience Upgrades: Convert SRY to new Reception entryway, Interpretation - digital interpretation tools, added family-friendly spaces - Dragon's Lair, Willow Bridge.
- Community Engagement: Outreach programs, volunteer expansion, partnerships with local schools.

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Project Plans



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Financial and Environmental Goals

Financial: Increase income to £2.2 million via new offering of ticket sales, flagship events, improved retail, and consolidated food offerings

Environmental: Renewable energy investments, zero-waste goals, continue to work towards 50% carbon reduction by 2030

Horticultural: Maintain gardens as exemplary visitor attractions with increased sustainable practices

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Conclusion

I expect our 2025 plans to set the foundation for a second year of surplus, along with a foundation for future continued growth, community engagement and sustainability. I look forward to us all working together to achieve amazing things again in 2025. Thank you for all that you do.

Siobhan Goodwin, Community Engagement Manager, Briefing

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Community Engagement

Continue with:

- Wellbeing Walks
- Free tickets to local children on pupil premium
- Groups in community garden (STEP, Growing Roots, Slow & possibly others)
- Nature Connections Courses
- Oral History project
- Museum to You Outreach
- Christmas Eco Art Exhibition
- Stalls at local events

Introduce:

- Arts Project
 - Expansion of community garden facilities
 - Better connections with local schools (including community gardener visits)
 - Young people's ideas
 - Pack of Playing Cards featuring photos from a photography competition to be run
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Volunteering

Continue:

- Family Volunteering days
- Annual training programme
- Pathways to employment
- Coffee Meet Ups & socials
- More supported volunteering
- Volunteer recruitment
- Staff 2 days pro rata
- Quality Standard – Investing in Volunteering (IiV)

Introduce:

Investing in Volunteering scheme and implement recommendations

Rachel Harrison, Head of Catering Briefing

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Goals for 2025

- With a target to reach in 2025 of £826.200 (£738.119 in 2024) our primary focus is to maximise all outlets throughout the year to create as many sales as possible.
 - Increase our takeaway offering further in the Horsebox ie: Salad Bowls, Sandwiches, Ice Cream, Pastries, Savouries
 - Offer Cream/Afternoon Teas in the Apple Store, with the option of extending to the Juliet Balcony seating area
 - Create a successful Spring/Summer Menu
 - Focus on Sunday Lunches in the Undercroft – Become known for our food offering
 - Liaise with Adam to utilise the Mobile Bar and BBQ for events
 - Offer a Mother's Day Afternoon Tea in the Undercroft.
 - Focus on staff training within the kitchen and front of house.
 - Increase our offering for Christmas 2025 to coincide with the increased planned illuminations
 - Trialling evening events within the Café ie: wine & cheese tasting
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Adam Saunders, Visitor Experience Manager, Briefing

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New for 2025

- Day tickets available in Ticket Office
 - Changes to the Annual Pass – now includes the Rare Plant Fair
 - Introduction of Friends of the Palace – replacing the old membership scheme
 - New products in the gift shop including the bespoke wallpaper range launching in the summer
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Events 2025

An ambitious new plan which will make the palace an award-winning events venue

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2025 Theatre Programme

- Weds 3rd July - The Pantaloons - Sense and Sensibility
 - Sun 20th July – The Lord Chamberlain’s Men – Twelfth Night
 - Sat 2nd August - Illyria – HMS Pinafore
 - Weds 13th August – 3 Inch Fools - The Most Perilous Comedie of Elizabeth I
 - Weds 3rd Sept – The Pantaloons – Hamlet
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The Palace Garden Fair

- A 1-day garden and country themed event across the site with highlights including:
 - Dog Show
 - Plant Sales area
 - Music
 - Have-a-go archery and axe throwing
 - Speakers Tent
 - Petting Zoo
 - Rural Craft Displays and stands
 - Flower arranging, baking and craft competitions
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The Palace History Fayre

This two-day event will see the palace grounds filled with re-enactors from different historical periods from Iron age to WW2

- Living History Camps
- Talks and combat displays
- Have a go children's sessions
- Storytelling
- Medieval Music

The Saturday evening the Undercroft will host our Medieval Banquet with live historical entertainment

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Live Music Event: Party at the Palace

- Seth Lakeman, The Wurzels, Mad Dog Mcrea, and more
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Sparkle – Christmas Lights

For the first time our Christmas Lights become a chargeable ticketed event as they expand out to cover the whole site including the outer gardens and arboretum

- Double the illuminated area to explore
 - New and exciting light features
 - Music every weekend in the Chapel
 - Dynamic Pricing with bookable time slots
 - Improved catering offer
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James Cross, Gardens and Property Manager, Briefing

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- The Phelps Garden will be emptied, double dug and replanted, keeping a very similar planting theme and making it more tolerant of climate change where possible.
- The new Exotic border will have lots of colourful Coleus 'Kong hybrid' added to make it even more exotic, replacing the Heuchera which have not done so well. The plant Pseudowintera colorata will be added.
- The garden team will start planning to improve the Scotland area and particularly the areas either side of the boardwalk which will be replanted using more shade and damp loving plants to the right and dry to the left (cathedral side). It will be planted with a tapestry effect, so lots of ground cover with swathes of plants dotted with larger plants like the Cardiocrinums. It will need lots of compost.
- The colour garden will be planted with wild flowers again following their success last year

Katy Love, Property and Collection Manager, Briefing

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Key Developments 2025

New ticket office in Stableyard: The visitor reception and shop space will move to the stable yard room. A new doorway will be created in the back wall of the SYR going through to the gardens. The area directly behind the cafe will be fenced off giving more privacy to the cafe store area.

Dredging of the Moat: This is due to take place in the autumn and will take approx.. 8-10 weeks to complete.

Community Garden: The community garden building will have a sheltered outdoor area added to it, providing more cover for our groups working up there in rain or sunshine. New doors to the mess room and an outdoor sink will also be installed.

Coronation Room: This will have the addition of exhibition display walls so we can display more of our Coronation material from the archive

Other projects include a new willow bridge, solar panels on the palace and chapel rooves, new flooring in the SY gents toilets, decorating the conference room.

Jon Allen will be starting on the 1st May in the role of Building and Facilities Assistant. He will be supporting with maintenance tasks as well as undertaking conservation and building remedial activities across the site.

Hollie Peppard, Head of Finance and People, Briefing

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Finance 2025

2024 budgeted surplus £60k – Now forecast for improved position of c£120k subject to Audit

2025 Budget

- Income 2025 £2,211k, Expenditure £2,131k budgeted surplus £80k.

Main Changes

- Visitors Income increase, shift in mix of ticket purchases, new pricing and reintroduction of day ticket.
 - Café Income – Higher sales volume, seasonal offers full use of outlets.
 - New Events Program.
 - Weddings – Higher bookings confirmed for 2025
 - Continue to be a Real Living Wage provider.
 - Capital Investments in the projects highlighted.
 - Increased expenditure in key areas.
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Human Resources 2025

The Palace Trust

Values, Purpose and Vision

We Value: Authenticity, Inclusivity, Hospitality, Spirituality, Generosity, Sustainability

We will be: Authentic, Inclusive, Hospitable, Spiritual, Generous, Sustainable

Our purpose is: To conserve and share the Palace and its story as a place of enjoyment and reflection for the benefit of all.

Our vision is: To inspire and touch the lives of many by offering joy, healing, hope and wellbeing.

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Marketing and Communications

- Campaign Management
 - Press & PR
 - Brand Management
 - Print & Design
 - Website Management (not tickets/Merac pages)
 - Digital Comms inc:
 - Social Media (Facebook, Insta, TikTok)
 - Meta ads paid social
 - Google pay per click
 - Search Engine Optimisation
 - Digital reviews/TripAdvisor
 - YouTube
 - Offline/print ads
 - Partnership marketing (RHS/Visit Somerset/Visit Wells etc)
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UK Media Trends

- Ofcom's Online Nation report tells us that Google remains the highest-reaching search engine, reaching 86% of UK online adults in May 2023
 - YouTube is now the most popular social media service among UK adults, taking the top spot from Facebook with more than nine in ten visiting it in May 2023
 - And short-form video will continue to dominate generally in 2025 with platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts and Facebook Reels leading the charge.
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2025 opportunities

- Digital First: we'll continue to run campaigns using a 'digital first' strategy
 - Over 50% of our web traffic comes from mobile so we'll ensure our website is optimised with fast loading times and an intuitive route to purchase.
 - We'll use video and social content to highlight the diverse stories of people who benefit from visiting the Palace showing how we serve a broad audience through our activities.
 - We'll target visitors within a one-hour drivetime using local search engine optimization and geo-targeted Google Ads with keywords like "family days out near me" or "local events [city name]".
 - We'll prioritise building the Palace's email list
 - sending regular updates on our year-round events and activities.
 - We'll also continue to refine our leaflet distribution strategy to Tourist Information Centres, hotels, B&Bs, cafes to maximise exposure at a competitive cost.
 - Weddings: We'll use visual storytelling; behind-the-scenes looks at weddings in progress; social proof testimonials; tagged photos and re-share social posts.
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Christmas at the Palace 2024

- Christmas at the Palace web page views increased 67% from 2023 at 14,873
- Meta Ads reach increased: 40,593 (2023) versus 182,423 (2024)
- Meta Ads link clicks increased: 2620 (2023) versus 11,991 (2024)

Results: £32,466.00 revenue from Evening Tickets

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Thank You

Here's to an amazing 2025