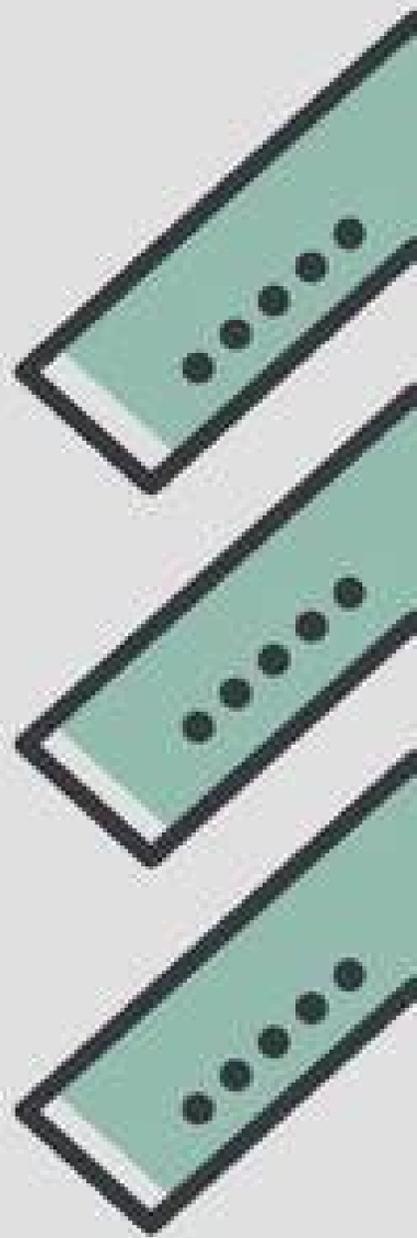


STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2030+

CONFIDENTIAL. DO NOT SHARE ANY OF
THE CONTENT WITH ANYONE OUTSIDE
OF THE ORGANISATION

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The Story so far

The Palace's story began in 1206, when King John gave Bishop Jocelin permission to build a new palace to the South of Wells Cathedral. Over the subsequent 800 years the Palace has been home to 62 bishops and countless others who have worked on the site in support of its primary resident. The Palace remains, to this day, the home of the Bishop of Bath & Wells as well as being managed as a heritage tourism attraction by The Palace Trust.

2025 saw the end of a five-year strategy conceived in 2019 and begun in 2020. Due to the pandemic, delivery of many elements of the strategy was delayed, and some key parts were altered. However, by the end of 2025, the majority of the key actions will either have been fully delivered, or in their final implementation stages. Only one key ambition was dropped; the creation of a High-Level Walkway around the Great Hall. The achievement of the former strategic aims is impressive, especially given the entirely unimaginable impact of Covid, and in light of the fact that the period from 2020-2025 saw three different Chief Executives of The Palace Trust, a new Bishop, and a new Chair of Trustees.



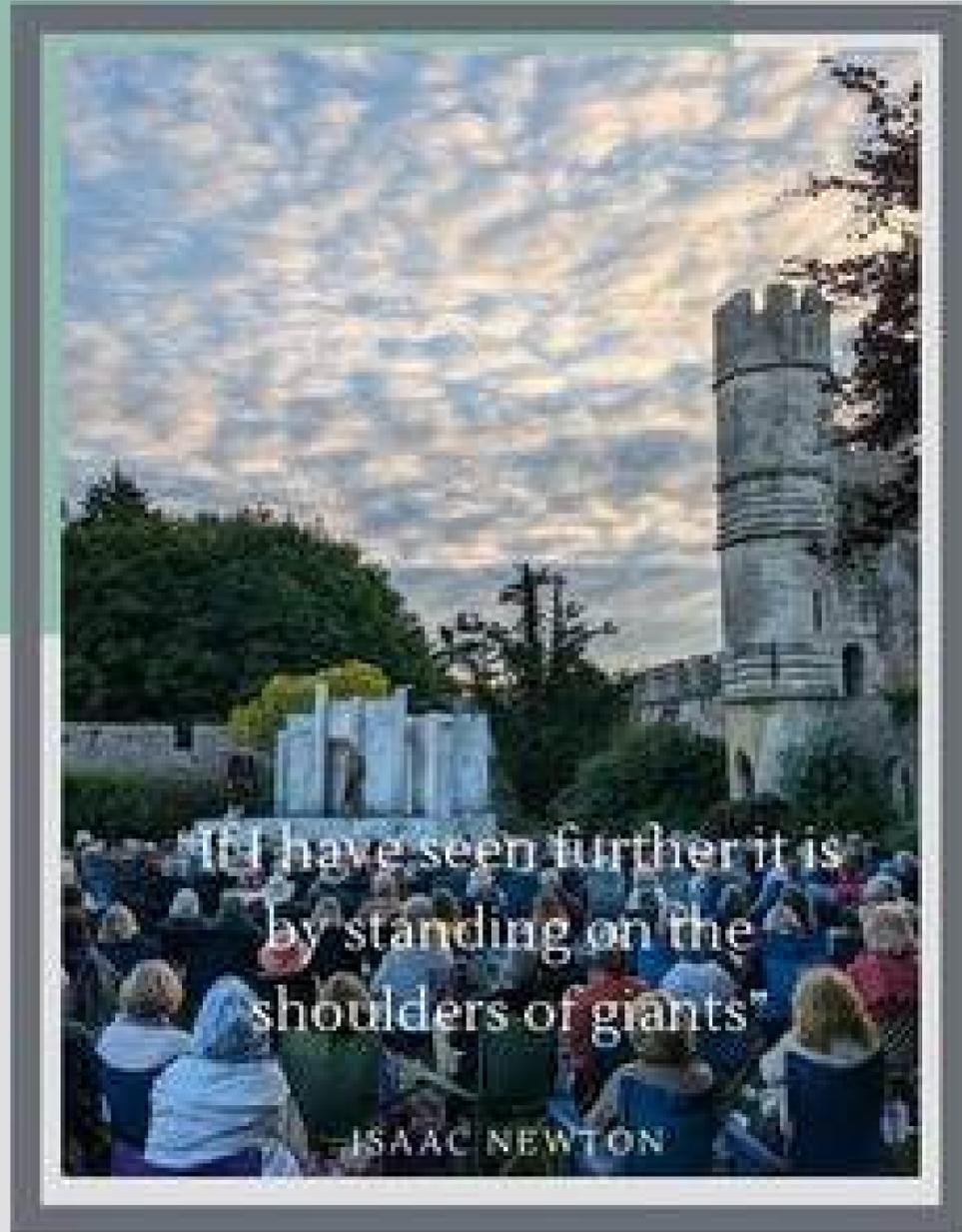
Context of new Strategic Plan



As the final year of the former strategic plan began, the pathway towards a new strategy was conceived.

An Away Day with SMT and Trustees was held, led by an external adviser. The objective was to envision the future of the Palace in 2036, share thoughts on winning outcomes and ideas, and come together to understand what might form some of the key strategic priorities to achieve this. This creative session was followed by distillation of the themes, concerns and ideas into a working set of principles and questions by the Chief Executive, and focus sessions with SMT further refined the likely five areas of priority. These were then taken, with a range of questions and activities, to internal consultation groups, offered to all team members in person and online, along with subsequent sessions for Volunteers. It was particularly striking and indeed heartening that certain themes and suggestions were repeatedly raised by different and unconnected groups and individuals.

The ideas and work gathered from this period led to presentation at the May 2025 Trustee Board meeting of five new Strategic Priorities, along with key aims for each priority, and an overview of the main activities planned to achieve these. The current draft has been developed by the Chief Executive, in consultation with SMT to present to the August 2025 Trustee Board Meeting.



"If I have seen further it is
by standing on the
shoulders of giants"

—ISAAC NEWTON

Operating Environment and Future Trends 2026-2036

This strategic plan has been created with consideration of an overview of the general economic, social, and environmental trends likely to influence tourism in Somerset, and consequently The Bishop's Palace in the medium term (5 -10 years).

The following trends have been identified as the most relevant to our organisation and operations.

Economic Trends

In the coming years, economic pressures will significantly shape Somerset's tourism landscape. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis and persistent inflation may lead domestic tourists to reduce non-essential spending, especially on heritage or leisure day trips. Visitors may increasingly seek better value - turning toward free or low-cost attractions, shorter breaks, and localised experiences. At the same time, tourism and hospitality businesses will face rising operational costs, particularly in energy - which is consistently affected by international conflict -, staffing, and maintenance.

For heritage sites, this creates a significant future challenge: maintaining high standards of conservation while remaining commercially sustainable.

If interest rates fall, consumer confidence may rise, offering a modest lift to discretionary spending. However, the sector shows no signs of an improvement in its struggle with recruitment, especially for seasonal and customer-facing roles - a lingering effect of Brexit. These workforce shortages risk undermining service quality unless addressed through local training, apprenticeships, and volunteer programmes.



“Success is where
preparation and
opportunity meet”

BOBBY UNSER

Social Trends

Growing awareness of health and wellbeing is influencing travel behaviour, with visitors increasingly drawn to peaceful, natural settings like Somerset's gardens, countryside, and spiritual heritage sites. The trend towards experiential tourism continues to rise, with a preference for immersive, meaningful activities such as storytelling, hands-on workshops, and community-based encounters.

Somerset's aging population represents a growing segment of the tourism market. Older visitors often seek comfort, accessibility, and slower-paced experiences - preferences that will become more important as the global population aged 60+ is expected to double by 2050.

Meanwhile, younger generations such as Gen Z and Gen Alpha are typically drawn to interactive, tech-enabled experiences. Features like augmented reality, gamified tours, and mobile-based storytelling can attract this demographic - though recent research by the Historic Houses Association suggests younger visitors still value authentic, unmediated experiences in historic spaces, appreciating sites for their peacefulness and contemplative quality.

Nonetheless, high ticket prices and in particular, travel costs, remain barriers to youth participation, especially for those travelling independently or still in education.

Digital discovery plays a growing role in decision-making, with tourists increasingly relying on social media, reviews, and influencer content. Somerset's destinations will need a strong digital presence, including social media, voice search, and peer review (e.g TripAdvisor) visibility, engaging video content, and shareable behind-the-scenes experiences.

Operating Environment and Future Trends 2026-2036

Environmental Trends

The impacts of climate change pose a growing threat to tourism in Somerset. More frequent floods, storms, and heatwaves could disrupt operations, damage infrastructure, and shorten peak seasons.

Attractions will need to invest in physical resilience; from shaded visitor routes to flood mitigation and cooling systems, to ensure comfort, safety, and sustainability.

Climate pressures will also intensify competition for natural resources, while displacing populations; it's estimated that climate migration could affect up to 1.2 billion people by 2050.

Reaching net zero is already a goal for many destinations, but it may soon become a legal obligation.

Attractions must demonstrate real progress on reducing emissions, supporting green transport, cutting waste, and promoting sustainable sourcing or risk falling out of favour, and for many demographics, learning and education around this subject are key desires on their tourism wish list.

The demand for low-impact tourism continues to rise. Visitors increasingly favour "slow" travel; walking, cycling, and nature-based experiences, that align with the region's rural charm and environmental values. Protecting Somerset's biodiversity and landscapes will be critical to maintaining its tourism appeal in the decades ahead.



AI

Artificial Intelligence is likely to reshape society on a scale we cannot yet fully grasp. As AI becomes more integrated into daily life, cultural and real-world experiences may be valued even more highly, offering vital spaces for humans to disconnect, reflect, and reconnect with nature. These human-centred, analogue experiences, including heritage interpretation, storytelling, and wellness in nature, may become tourism's most powerful assets.

There are also warnings of "digital colonialism" by large tech firms, which may monopolise access to information and services, reinforcing the need for ethical and human-led visitor experiences.

Diversity, inclusion, and representation are becoming baseline expectations. Visitors increasingly want to see themselves reflected in the stories and staffing of the places they visit. Cultural sensitivity, accessible facilities, multilingual signage, and inclusive programming will be essential – as will ensuring internal teams reflect the diversity of the communities served.



Tourism-specific Trends

In addition, research has been carried out into the overarching key tourism market trends, both domestic and international, which are likely to affect tourism in Somerset in the medium term (to 2035):

Domestic Tourism Trends

- Staycations are likely to remain strong due to cost-saving and convenience (but will also be increasingly value-driven)
- Cost of living pressures will mean many UK residents are still opting for holidays closer to home.
- However, travellers are more selective and looking for affordable, meaningful, and sustainable experiences.
- Shorter, more frequent trips are becoming more popular, especially weekend breaks and day trips.
- Somerset's accessibility from London, Bristol, Bath, and the South West positions it well for this trend, although Wells' lack of train station is a drawback to eco-travellers
- Experience-Driven Travel: Domestic visitors want immersive and 'slow' experiences, not just sightseeing – think craft, food, wellness, history, walking, and storytelling.
- Intergenerational & Family Travel: Travelling with grandparents and children together is growing – locations with accessibility, flexibility, and a range of age-friendly experiences are favoured.
- Wellbeing & Nature: Rural escapes, peaceful settings, gardens, and spiritual heritage still appeal strongly post-COVID.
- Somerset's countryside, coast, and Wells' tranquil heritage offer significant opportunity.

Inbound (International) Tourism Trends

- Return of International Travel (Slower in Rural Areas)
- UK inbound tourism is recovering steadily, especially from the US, Europe, and Australia – likely to be 2027 for full figures to return
- However, rural and heritage destinations must work harder to market themselves to international visitors.
- Heritage, culture & authenticity drive visits in this market
- International travellers seek authentic, local, and story-rich experiences.
- Somerset can capitalise with its cathedrals, castles, folklore, and historic landscapes.
- Rise of Independent & FIT Travellers (Free Independent Travellers)
- More travellers are avoiding large tours and planning their own, flexible itineraries.
- This boosts demand for good digital information, local guides, transport options, and flexible ticketing.
- International travellers, especially from Europe and Scandinavia, are increasingly seeking low-impact, sustainable tourism.
- Somerset's green credentials, if better promoted, could be a draw.
- Language and Infrastructure Gaps: Rural areas like Somerset may miss out due to a lack of multilingual resources, clear signage, or international marketing presence.

OUR PURPOSE

To inspire and touch the lives of many by offering joy, healing, hope, and wellbeing

OUR VISION

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

OUR VALUES

Authenticity, Inclusivity, Hospitality, Spirituality, Generosity, Sustainability

WHO ARE WE?

OUR CHARITABLE OBJECTS:

To preserve for the benefit of the public the fabric of The Bishop's Palace (as a place of historic and architectural interest) in order to facilitate access to The Bishop's Palace by the public for their education and interest, and To promote such charitable purposes as will advance the religious and other charitable work of the Church of England.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

DEVELOPMENT & CONSERVATION

Elevate the conservation of our historic fabric while boldly developing the site into a visionary space that maximises our charitable impact.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE & INCLUSION

Ensure an unforgettable, outstanding welcome and experience, where visitors feel included and personally connected to our offering.

COMMUNITY & CHARITY

Enrich lives through our charitable work both on-site and off-site, ensuring everyone in our community has the chance to discover something meaningful and beneficial.

GARDENS & ENVIRONMENT

Enhance our gardens so that they remain breathtaking, sustainable, and resilient to climate change. Achieve and maintain net zero carbon emissions.

FINANCE & INVESTMENT

Employ careful guardianship of our reserves while reinvesting surplus to create a thriving, self-sustaining site that secures our future and expands our impact.

Our Vision is:

To inspire and touch the lives of many by offering joy, healing, hope and wellbeing

Our Purpose is:

To conserve and share the Palace and its story as a place of enjoyment and reflection for the benefit of all



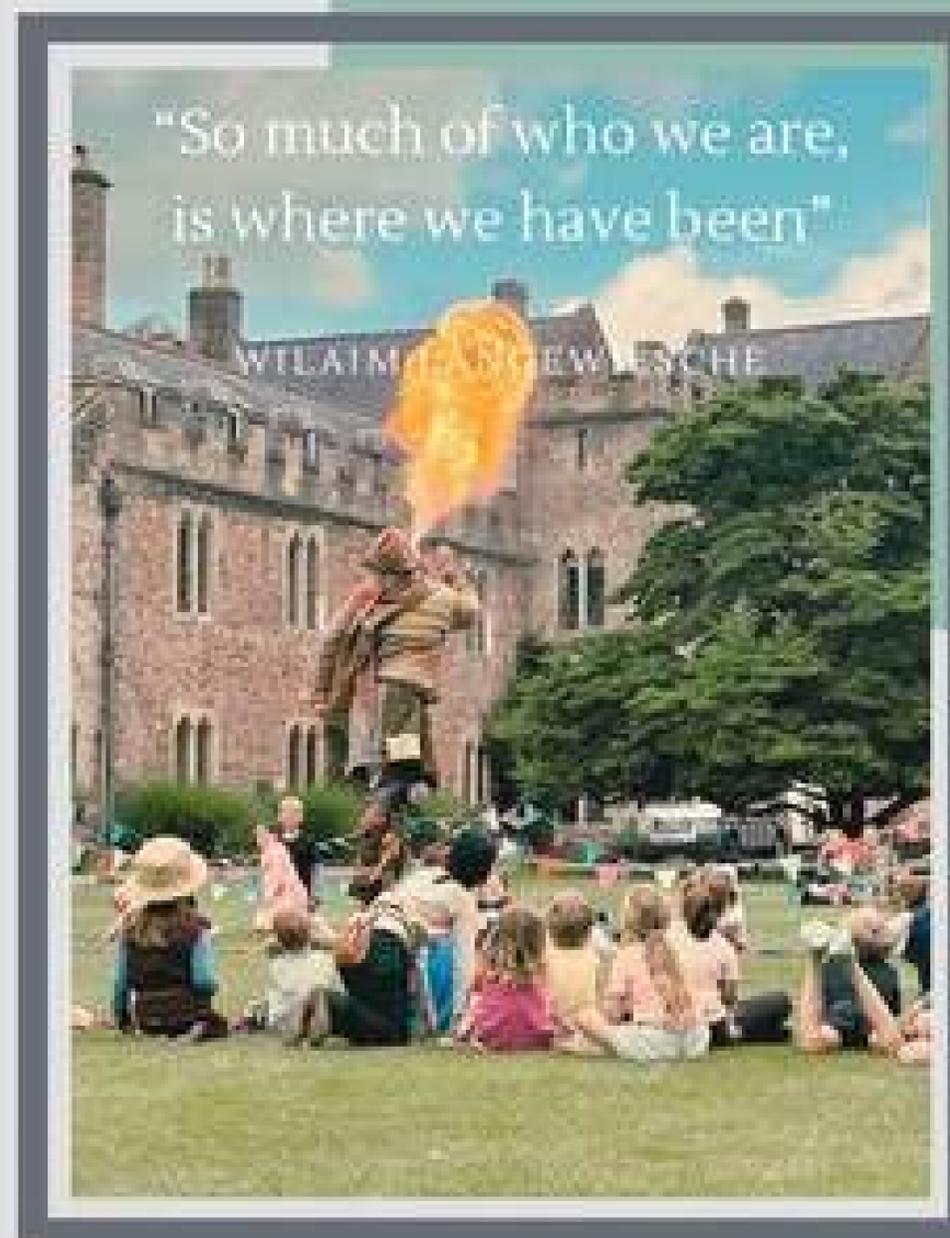
1. Visitor Experience & Inclusion

Strategic Priority:

Ensure that visitors who cross our drawbridge have an outstanding experience, feel completely welcome, fully included, and find deep personal resonance with some element of our offering.

Context

Over the past ten years, from 2014-2024, annual visitor numbers at the Palace have nearly doubled; growing by 90%, from 73,755 in 2014 to 140,170 in 2024. The increase has not been equally distributed year on year, and some of the initial increase is most likely due to the effects of the 2011 Assuring the Future development project. Additionally, in 2021 there was a large jump to 144k visitors in the Covid period where UK residents were unable to holiday abroad. However, if we use this data to assist a forward projection, we could reasonably outline an ambition to increase visitor numbers to 250,000 over the next ten-year period if the site continues to add to its offer. Current examples of places with 250k visitors include Dyrham Park, RHS Rosemoor, Bletchley Park, and Corfe Castle. Whilst considering what a 'visitor' consists of, we must also remember that residents of Wells are an ever-growing group, with hundreds of new homes being built annually. The objectives below also underline our intention that growing our visitor numbers is not our only aspiration; we are committed to elevating the visitor experience so that visitors to the Palace feel a personal connection to the site and our work, and that we are able to accommodate and welcome visitors whatever their individual needs and background.



Visitor Experience & Inclusion

To achieve our objectives* for this priority, we will:

**numbered-sections related to each objective on previous page*

1:

- Recruit and train living history volunteers and/or staff members to welcome our visitors.
- Create a "Living Drawbridge" an interactive experience to intrigue visitors and inspire curiosity, setting the scene for the visit
- Review and improve the visitor journey from marketplace to ticket office
- Empower the visitor-facing team with 'treat cards' to use at their discretion (e.g. free coffee, discount on next purchase, discount in shop, free return visit/theatre ticket)
- AI powered assistant on website to quickly answer common visitor enquiries, provide trip planning help, with ability to personalise and recognise areas of interest
- Use natural language AI to provide real-time Q&A during tours.

2:

- Create emotional and inspirational touch points throughout the site to engage with all types of visitor profile.
- Prompt and encourage capture of picture-perfect views
- Create educational/historical/scientific/environmental messages which are captivating, easily assimilated and accessible
- Meet our audiences with the right technology for each demographic to inspire and engage. Consider partnerships like Aardman app (Lloyd of the Flies) to add to nature inspiration, and development of immersive experiences.
- Create AI 'pocket guide' tool which is personalised and responsive - allow conversations with AI animals (ask Swans questions etc)

3:

- Aim to represent the audiences we serve in our workforce, volunteer team, Board, and exhibitions
- Regularly review physical barriers to access, and invite periodic 'mystery shopper' assessments of site
- Create multi-lingual, braille, text etc versions of all on site information
- Use Historic England's "Disability Access to Heritage" report as guide to future planning

4:

- Hold an annual free Community Day, advertised widely to encourage "try it once" visits. (See Community Engagement for other community objectives)
- Increase range of activities, including rowing boats on the moat, occasional wild swimming and/or water walkers/inflatable assault course, whilst also following a site-wide events and festivals strategy to pique interest from different audiences
- Work in partnership with Wells Cathedral, the Museum and other key attractions to create a seamless "Wells Experience" using Wells' size ("Tiny City, Huge History"/ "Pocket-Sized, attraction-packed city break") as an USP. Potential to create a round walk /weekend experience of Wells on a single ticket.
- Use regular evening opening in summer months to encourage those who cannot visit between 9:30am-5:30pm to try us out.
- Hold a series of celebration events in 2028 for 60th anniversary of The Palace Trust. 1960's day with roll back to 1960's price etc.
- Use AI to analyse insights from visitor data, e.g. footfall, dwell time, visitor routes, and sales to make better decisions about signage, layouts, events, and shop stock.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE & INCLUSION AIMS

1.

The Palace is no longer just a historical site, it becomes a living, breathing, deeply personal experience for every person who visits.

2.

As they leave over the drawbridge, visitors don't just leave with memories, they feel part of the Palace's ongoing story

3.

To create unbreakable inclusivity, so that every visitor, regardless of background, ability, beliefs or language feels fully included

4.

Vision – That everyone who lives in Wells has visited the Palace & Gardens at least once

Ensure that visitors who cross our drawbridge have an outstanding experience, feel completely welcome, fully included, and find deep personal resonance with some element of our offering.

2. Community & Charitable Work



Strategic Priority:

Enrich lives through our charitable work both on-site and off-site, ensuring everyone in our community has the chance to discover something meaningful and beneficial.

Context

The past ten years have seen a huge change in the Palace's commitment to its community. In 2014 there was a part time Community Gardener and four regular groups coming to the garden. In 2015 we appointed a Volunteer Coordinator who subsequently took on the role of Community Engagement Manager in 2020, a move which underlined our ambitions to concentrate on this area of the organisation's activities. There are now three part-time team members, and the activities that take place both on and off site have dramatically increased.

We now work to identify and offer free visits for local people on low incomes as well as our targeted outreach work across the area with more vulnerable groups. Each year we have built on our reputation and on the regard in which we are held in the community. A typical year might now include: 300 free annual passes, 60 community membership passes, 1200 free school pupils, 150 vulnerable people reached by Museum2You outreach visits, and 150 on site community group visits. No two years are exactly the same as we endeavour to respond to the needs of the community, especially by working in partnership with established local groups who are experts in their fields.

The objectives following will add to what has already been achieved, building and rooting further according to our experience of what may be required in the years ahead.

COMMUNITY & CHARITABLE AIMS

1.

The Palace Trust will bend and reshape, responding to serve the needs of the community, within and beyond the Palace walls.

2.

Self-Reinforcing Change – Those who benefit from our work are empowered to continue the positive cycle of change, so that the impact lasts for generations

3.

Proactive Transformation – The Palace doesn't wait for people to ask for help, but by working in collaboration with the community it can anticipate needs and deploy resources effectively.

4.

A Lasting Legacy of Service - The Palace's role as a force for good is permanently embedded in the community, ensuring its mission lasts for generations.

Enrich lives through our charitable work both on-site and off-site, ensuring everyone in our community has the chance to discover something meaningful and beneficial.

Community & Charitable Work

To achieve our objectives* for this priority, we will:

**numbered sections related to each objective on previous page*

1. Respond and React

- Create a travel bursary scheme to enable community and school groups to visit
- Continue to develop our contacts with local schools within 20 minutes drive, offering one free class visit per school per year
- Keep an annual 'reserve' sum in the community engagement budget to allow agile response to community need

2. Cycle of Change

- Create actions to promote a ripple effect of good from peoples' interactions with us, for example, Kindness Week, hiding free bunches of flowers around the city, promoting and using Happy to Chat benches
- Develop ideas for participants to "pay it forward" in their own lives and communities

3. Proactive and Adaptive

- Continue to develop on our working relationships with local and national partners, in order to make the most of resources, and to share knowledge and expertise.
- Develop staff team (hours) to be able to resource initiatives, be proactive, and respond to developing needs

4. Force for Good

- Develop as a centre for learning to create opportunities for all ages, including funded internships, workshops, school visits, community gardening, and supported volunteering
- Hold an annual free community day so that all who are curious can have the chance to visit unimpeded by pay barriers
- Implement sensory and auditory trails around the site, create braille signs, and offer Quiet Time visits
- Encourage regular visitors to buy a visit for someone who can't afford it, creating an easy add on product at the till to support our community programme



3. Development and Conservation

Strategic Priority:

Elevate the conservation of our historic fabric to preserve its magnificence and explore development of the site to become a ground-breaking, visionary space that maximises our charitable impact for generations to come.

Context

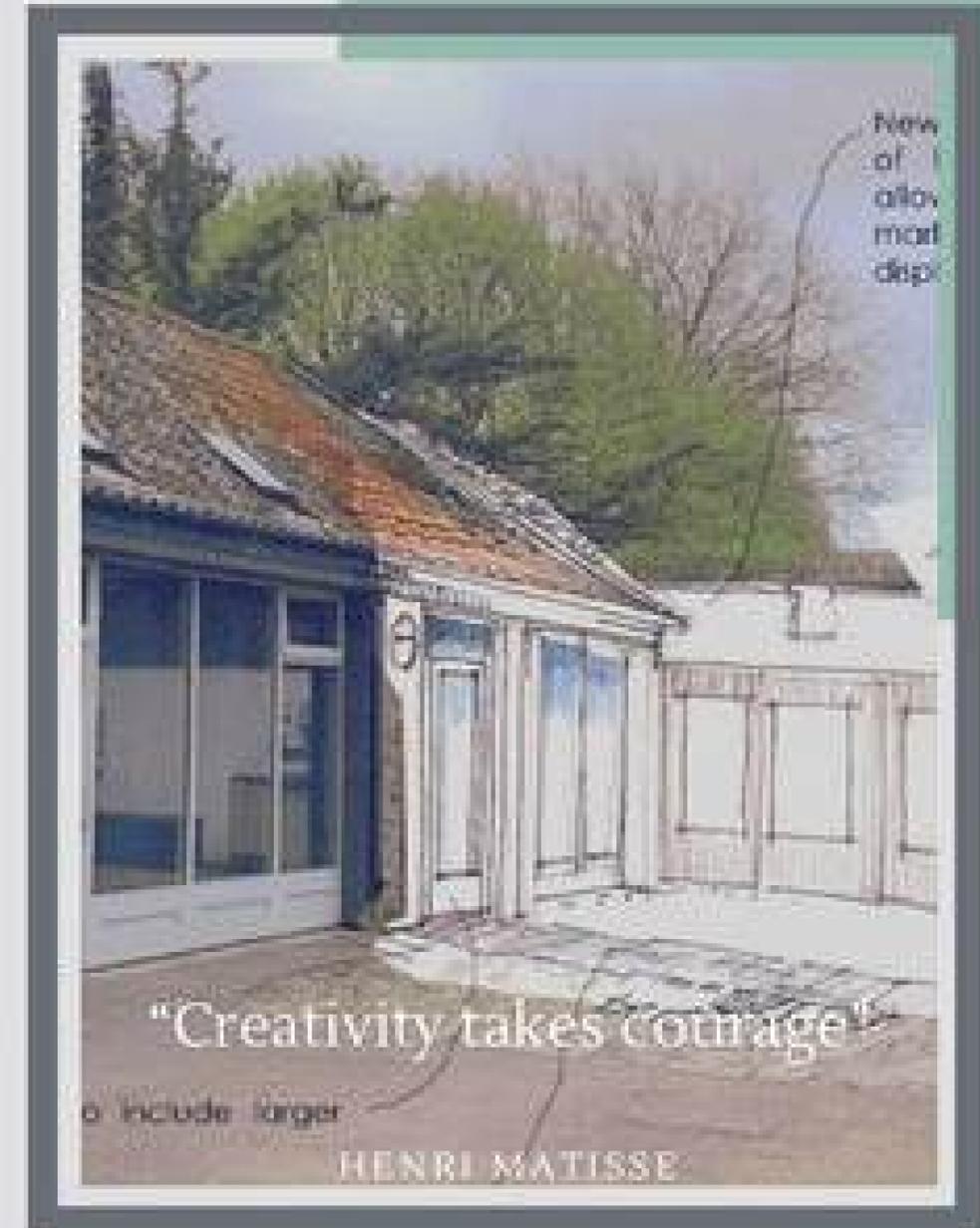
Ten years ago the Palace Trust had no dedicated Property or Conservation team. The site was overseen by the Operations Manager and Head Gardener, and maintenance and conservation were led by the Chief Executive, and work took place as and when noticed and when funds allowed.

From 2014 to 2024, several major conservation works took place, including significant work on the Great Hall, and segments of the curtain wall and bastions, but this programme ceased in Covid times and did not return.

By 2025 we had a Property Manager, and Buildings and Facilities Assistant, and work had taken place to identify maintenance and conservation issues that were urgent, along with reviews of the quinquennial surveys held by ourselves and the Church Commissioners to align and agree on a path forward.

Over the past ten years several Interpretation plans were created, particularly with a focus on the inside of the Palace. From 2023-2025 changes were made to most rooms inside the Palace resulting in a much more engaging offer, completed by the launch of the multi-media devices in January 2025. At the time of writing this Strategic Plan, development projects planned for 2025, subject to planning consent, include a new Visitor Reception, expansion of the cafe, replacement of the Willow Bridge, a new Splash Play area in The Dragon's Lair, and solar panels on the Palace and Chapel.

The objectives for the next ten years underline our intent to take another step forward in the holistic physical makeup of the site, committing to housing our staff team appropriately, generating income from underused areas, creating structures and attractions which underline our purpose, values and vision for the site, and caring for this exceptional place in the manner it deserves.



DEVELOPMENT & CONSERVATION AIMS

1.

The Palace will no longer be just a place to remember history - it will become a living, evolving centre for growth, education, science and sustainability that every visitor can experience.

2.

Our site will become a timeless refuge, where history, nature, and humanity grow together, an historic site which thrives without harming the earth, and engages with the future of creation.

3.

The buildings will be cared for and used wisely to house the team appropriately, and to generate new income streams in vacant spaces.

4.

The Palace Trust will have gained the right to occupy the site for a longer term

Elevate the conservation of our historic fabric to preserve its magnificence and explore development of the site to become a groundbreaking, visionary space that maximises our charitable impact for generations to come.

Development & Conservation

To achieve our objectives* for this priority, we will:

**numbered sections related to each objective on previous page*

1.

- Use neglected Poustinia to create a 360-degree projection space and Planetarium, by adding a white dome, with infrastructure for projection, and flooring, to seat 50.
- Use space of colour garden adjacent to the Poustinia to install a 6m diameter Biodome with a focus on growing hydroponic plants in a covered space. With its position within the grounds (next to community garden, pond and greenhouse), this could turn the quadrant into a centre for learning, focusing on creation, science and the environment.
- Extend the Rampart Walk to the wall between the Great Hall and the current Rampart Walk, a project which would both conserve further parts of the walls, and give additional access and high parts views to the public.
- Enlarge entrance to outer gardens (blue door) to recreate original arch and allow better access

2.

- Install environmentally friendly energy generation to power Palace and Chapel and become self-sufficient for energy needs for the historic building
- Automate sluice gate systems to maximise control, reduce human error, and monitor water levels; futureproofing the site, and ending reliance on 24hr site supervision
- Begin climate adaptation programme for the historic fabric of the site, investigating new technologies and materials suitable for our changing world, whilst committing to superior maintenance of the whole site.
- Continually work to maintain and conserve all parts of the buildings and curtilage to ensure that the site is kept in an excellent condition to prevent any deterioration and guarantee it survives to be enjoyed by current and future generations.

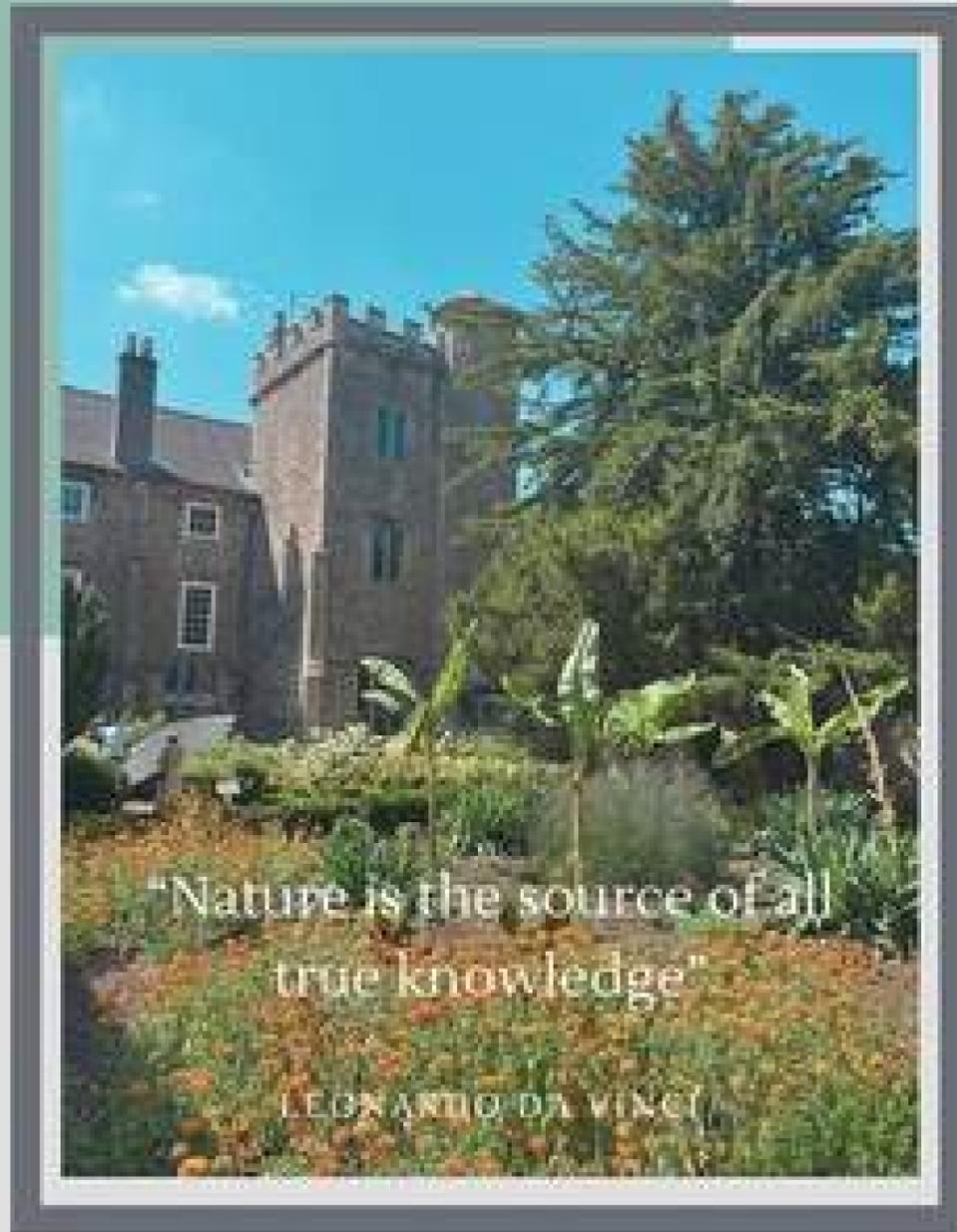
3.

- Move the offices into the current Top Floor Flat of the Palace. The four large rooms would be adequate for all staff. Those needing to be based near Visitor Reception will be housed in the adjacent office. Staff would access the staircase via the Palace public rooms (1st floor), giving more day-to-day staff visibility, and ensuring the Bishop's offices are not disturbed.
- Create a comfortable break room in Brewhouse with gallery sofa area, benches out by the moat, and a space to relax away from the public.
- Use the Gatehouse rooms to create luxury accommodation to be let to the public. 3-4 rooms with four poster beds could be created, and the layout lends itself to versatile options, including at least one self-catering unit.
- Add compostable loo in science and nature area.
- Create immersive light experience in the Conference Room to engage audiences in our stories
- Create 10-year Collection Conservation programme focusing on paintings, chairs, copes etc.

4.

- Work with the Church Commissioners to agree on the best outcome for the Trust's long-term occupation of the site, allowing us to access the relevant funding, investment and care plans going forward.

4. Gardens & Environment



Strategic Priority:

Enhance the gardens so that they remain breathtakingly beautiful, endlessly fascinating, and completely sustainable, thriving in a changing climate for generations to come. Eliminate our carbon footprint to reach net zero and stay there.

Context

2026 will mark the ten-year anniversary of becoming an RHS partner garden, and since that accolade, the gardens have developed and diversified in many ways. Our gardens are the jewel in the crown of our site, and are still considered the biggest draw for our visitors. New developments in the last ten years include the tropical bed and the grasses bed outside the Apple Store, the Winter Border, the St Andrews Well borders, the stumpery, the 3,000 red tulips in the Quiet Garden, the 10,000 yellow tulips on the ramparts, and continuous updating and replanting to ensure year round interest. As a response to the climate crisis, our gardens must look to develop and adapt to ensure that they are sustainable and suitable for the future. 2021 saw the beginning of a new plan to enhance our environmental work and reduce our carbon footprint, with a baseline measurement taken, and science-based targets set in accordance with the Paris Agreement. We committed to halving our carbon footprint by 2030, and to reaching net zero by 2050, and a long-term project to achieving this was begun. Progress has been good but there is more work to do. It is possible that it will become a legal requirement to reach net zero over the next 20 year period. The changing climate has repeatedly impacted on our work and our site over the past ten years with frequent examples of extreme weather causing damage to the gardens (drought, wind, rain), and event cancellations. The historic fabric of the building is also affected by this, and our duty to respond is now more significant than ever. It is likely that we are the first species to understand what will make us extinct, and it is our duty to play whatever part we can in altering this alarming fact.

GARDENS & ENVIRONMENT AIMS

1.

Our environmental work is seen as a leading example of how to protect and cherish creation, and we become a hub for science and education.

2.

The gardens are designed as a living legacy; future proofed, designed to evolve, self-sustaining and thriving for centuries to come

3.

The gardens offer a multi-sensory, year-round experience – engaging visitors in new and immersive ways throughout the seasons

4.

The gardens are no longer simply beautiful and historic, they become a climate proof masterpiece, a living force of nature, a sanctuary that will inspire and flourish forever

Enhance the gardens so that they remain breathtakingly beautiful, endlessly fascinating, and completely sustainable, thriving in a changing climate for generations to come. Eliminate our carbon footprint to reach net zero and stay there.

5. Finance & Investment

Strategic Priority:

Employ careful guardianship of reserves, alongside re-investment of surplus to create an unstoppable, self-sustaining site, that secures our future, expands our impact and transforms our work

Context

The past ten years have seen enormous change and turbulence both in income levels and in surplus, or deficit levels. From an income of just over £0.5m in 2014 to nearly £2m in 2024, and a surplus of £25k to £120k (via some years of deficit) the financial stability of The Palace Trust has not remained stable or linear.

The Trust now holds an excellent level of reserves and is duty bound to consider how best to disburse these for the good of the future of the site and our charitable objectives. Current investments in infrastructure must be complemented by future plans to develop and invest in the site, and into honing the themes in which we can be uniquely successful in appealing to our audiences and meeting their needs.

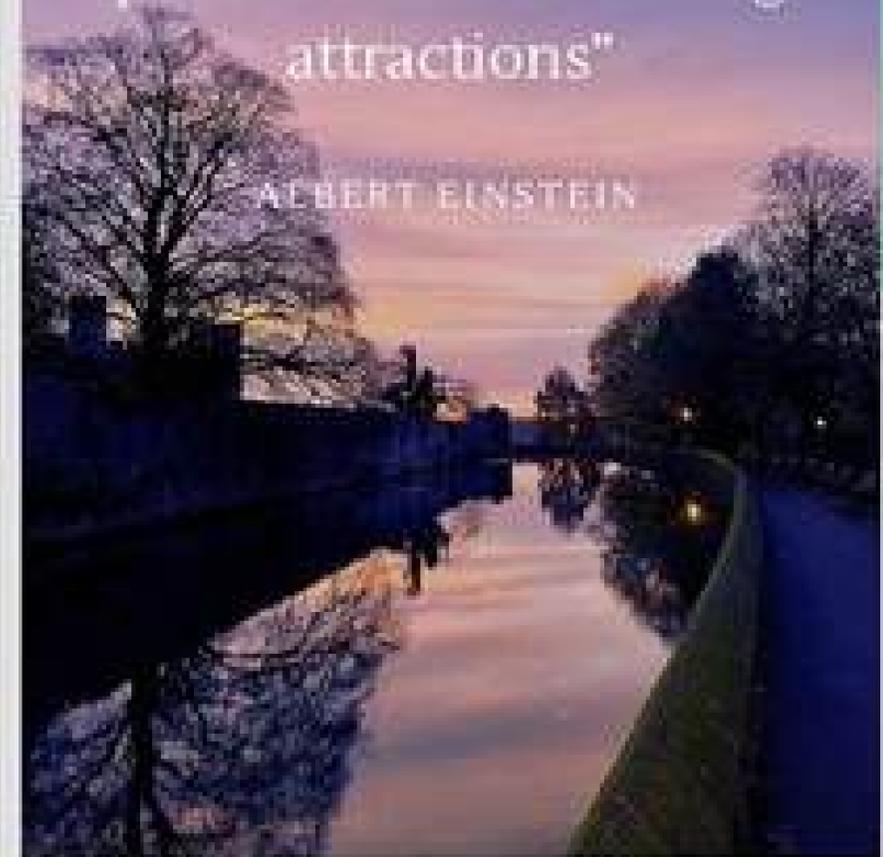
Investing in producing our own energy is an area that fulfils both our own vision, alongside our need for financial resilience, and our desire to care for creation.

In 2025 the Trust will spend c£90,000 on electricity, gas and refuse.



“Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions”

ALBERT EINSTEIN



Gardens & Environment

To achieve our objectives* for this priority, we will:

**numbered-sections related to each objective on previous page*

1.
 - Create a science and nature quadrant as mentioned above, to include a biodome and hydroponics.
 - Enhance and enlarge the nature pond area to become accessible to all, and encourage learning about our aquatic life, newts, frogs, plants etc
 - Extend the Greenhouse to allow for more planting, potting, experimenting, sheltering of groups
 - Investigate further extension of the Water Source Heat Pump to meet more of our energy needs
 - Increase Solar PV installation as above, and anywhere else viable on site
 - Develop our AI building climate control system
 - Act as if sustainability will be legally binding by 2050.
 - As an institution, develop a move towards becoming a provider of energy to the community and a conservator of creation
 - Trial window heat screens, and heat pump air conditioners in cafe
 - Put in glass door at entrance to Palace building
 - Become an "advocate for nature and creation"
2.
 - Develop our strategic climate-proof planting in the gardens
 - Harvest more rainwater around the site for use on the gardens
 - Develop irrigation pipe network for inner gardens to water flowerbeds from our moat
 - Instigate plans to develop the Croquet Lawn, replacing grass with alternatives that don't require regular watering or constant mowing. The space should be beautiful but multi-functional to also accommodate larger events

3.
 - Trial ideas for immersive and sensory experiences; Wind Song Path, Sensory Trail, Scent Maze etc
 - Create a Physic Healing Garden to educate and immerse, promoting nature and historic knowledge
4.
 - Investigate re-siting of some or all of the allotments to allow us space to develop.
 - Consider potential use of Palace Fields and Tor Woods to deliver larger scale ambitions or to house activities which have outgrown our gardens.
 - Implement labour-saving, battery charged devices for gardens (such as robo mowers, rechargeable hedge cutters/tractors etc)
 - Use chippers to replace bonfires
 - Eliminate chemical gardening methods entirely
 - Ethically, speak truth to power, ensure education of science and nature to mitigate against ignorance and dangerous politics

1.

Become a financially secure, future-proofed institution, where our mission to engage and motivate funds itself, grows in impact, and never runs out of resources

2.

No longer just a historic site, but a living, breathing, interconnected cultural powerhouse, woven into the fabric of the city, and thriving for generations to come.

3.

An energy-independent, cost-efficient site, generating our own power and water, forever, and reducing operational expenses permanently

4.

A centre of excellence for conservation, education and innovation which ensures the Palace stays relevant and inspires future generations

Employ careful guardianship of reserves, alongside re-investment of surplus to create an unstoppable, self-sustaining site, that secures our future, expands our impact and transforms our work

FINANCE & INVESTMENT AIMS

Finance & Investment

To achieve our objectives* for this priority, we will:

**numbered sections related to each objective on previous page*

1:

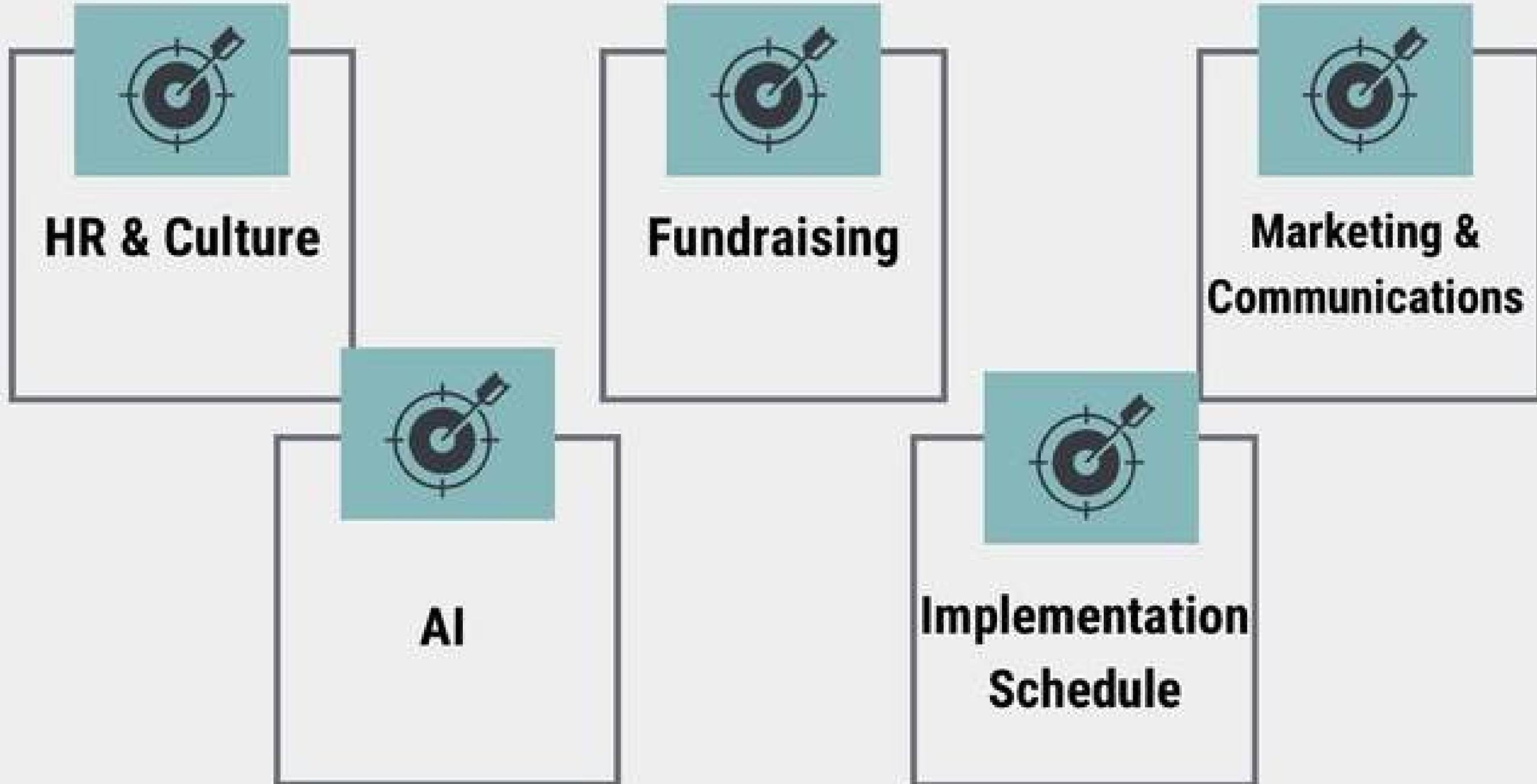
- Use innovative digital solutions throughout site to meet our audiences where they already are. Create excitement and generate income without disrupting our historic fabric. Examples are use of VR/AR to recreate the Great Hall, recreation of gardens through the centuries, birds eye flying over/through Palace.
- Create an holistic digital pathway for the back office of the site, uniting ticketing, catering, finance, marketing, fundraising, and customer service to streamline processes, and save time and money
- Develop our fundraising function to assist the Trust to adequately resource all future projects and site investment, looking to match fund each project, rather than fully investing our reserves
- Harness AI thoughtfully to enhance the visitor journey, support heritage conservation, deepen community impact, and create a more sustainable, efficient organisation. (*See suggested AI strategy below)
- Develop robust reserves policy to ensure both investment income generation, resilience in unforeseen circumstances, and wise investment in sustainability initiatives
- Search for opportunities for additional F&B outlets both on site and off site, meeting the needs which develop following new site developments and increased footfall. Potential areas include the Dragon's Lair, the new Science and Nature quadrant, Palace Green or the Moat, and The Bishop's Barn.
- Take advantage of the trend for exclusive experiences to innovate and offer unique and high-end opportunities (e.g Sleep on a four-poster bed in the Long Gallery for the night. Glamping on the South Lawn, exclusive private dinners etc)

1.cont

- Continue to grow the business for weddings and private events whilst respecting the limitations of the site. Growth to a maximum of 20 weddings per year with well-resourced processes to protect the historic fabric, alleviate staff burdens and ensure smooth transitions from private event to public opening.
- 2.
- Invest in using our gardens after hours in creative ways to the benefit of our community and those who cannot visit during standard opening hours
 - Enter into management agreement with Wells City Council to operate the Bishop's Barn as a commercial entity to complement our existing offer, with particular emphasis on catering, weddings, community free events, and alternative event space
- 3.
- Continue to invest in our net zero journey, facilitating cost saving, creation care, self-sustaining, income generation, and preservation of the site for future generations. Look to remove reliance on sole water, gas and electricity suppliers.
 - Research possibilities of visitors paying for their entry by creating energy (kinetic generation, cycling electricity-generating bike etc), rather than by actual currency.

Plan for Support

To support the above priorities and actions, we have also created overarching strategies or plans for the following key functions:



HR & Culture Support Strategy

1. Strengthening Organisational Culture & Values

- By 2030, all staff and volunteers will feel aligned with The Bishop's Palace's vision, as measured by an 80%+ positive response in engagement surveys.
- A structured values-based induction program will be in place for all new employees and volunteers.
- A culture of collaboration and inclusivity will be fostered through team-building initiatives and cross-departmental projects.

2. Investing in Workforce Development

- At least 25% of staff will complete annual training in heritage conservation, visitor experience, customer service, or leadership.
- All teams will have been offered access to digital skills training, ensuring effective use of AI and modern engagement tools and operational software.

3. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

- The workforce and volunteer base will reflect the diversity of the local community, with at least a 25% increase in underrepresented groups by 2035.
- Inclusive recruitment practices will be embedded, with all hiring managers trained in DEI best practices.
- Move from level 2 to level 3 (leadership) as a "Disability Confident" employer by 2027
- Accessibility and inclusivity audits will be conducted annually, ensuring The Bishop's Palace remains welcoming for all.

4. Enhancing Volunteer Engagement

- Volunteer sessions filled will grow by 20%, with a structured strategy to attract, train, and retain volunteers.
- A volunteer reward and recognition program will be formalised, improving engagement and retention rates.

5. Employee Well-being & Work-Life Balance

- 100% of employees will have access to well-being resources, including mental health support, medical care and alternative therapies
- Work-life balance policies will be in place, with an annual survey showing at least 80% satisfaction in this area.
- Professional development plans will be available to all staff, ensuring continuous growth and job satisfaction.
- Take up of paid volunteering days will increase by 30% by 2030

6. Performance & Impact Measurement

- A comprehensive HR dashboard will be created to track staff and volunteer engagement, retention, and productivity.
- Annual engagement surveys will maintain at least 80% participation, ensuring employee and volunteer voices shape future improvements.
- HR performance metrics will align with organisational strategy, with regular Board-level reviews of progress.

7. Leadership & Governance

- 100% of managers and senior leaders will receive development training, ensuring strong, future-ready governance.
- Internal communication channels will be enhanced, with increased team consultation and transparent reporting on organisational decisions.
- Decision-making processes will prioritise a people-first approach, ensuring all staff and volunteers feel valued and heard.

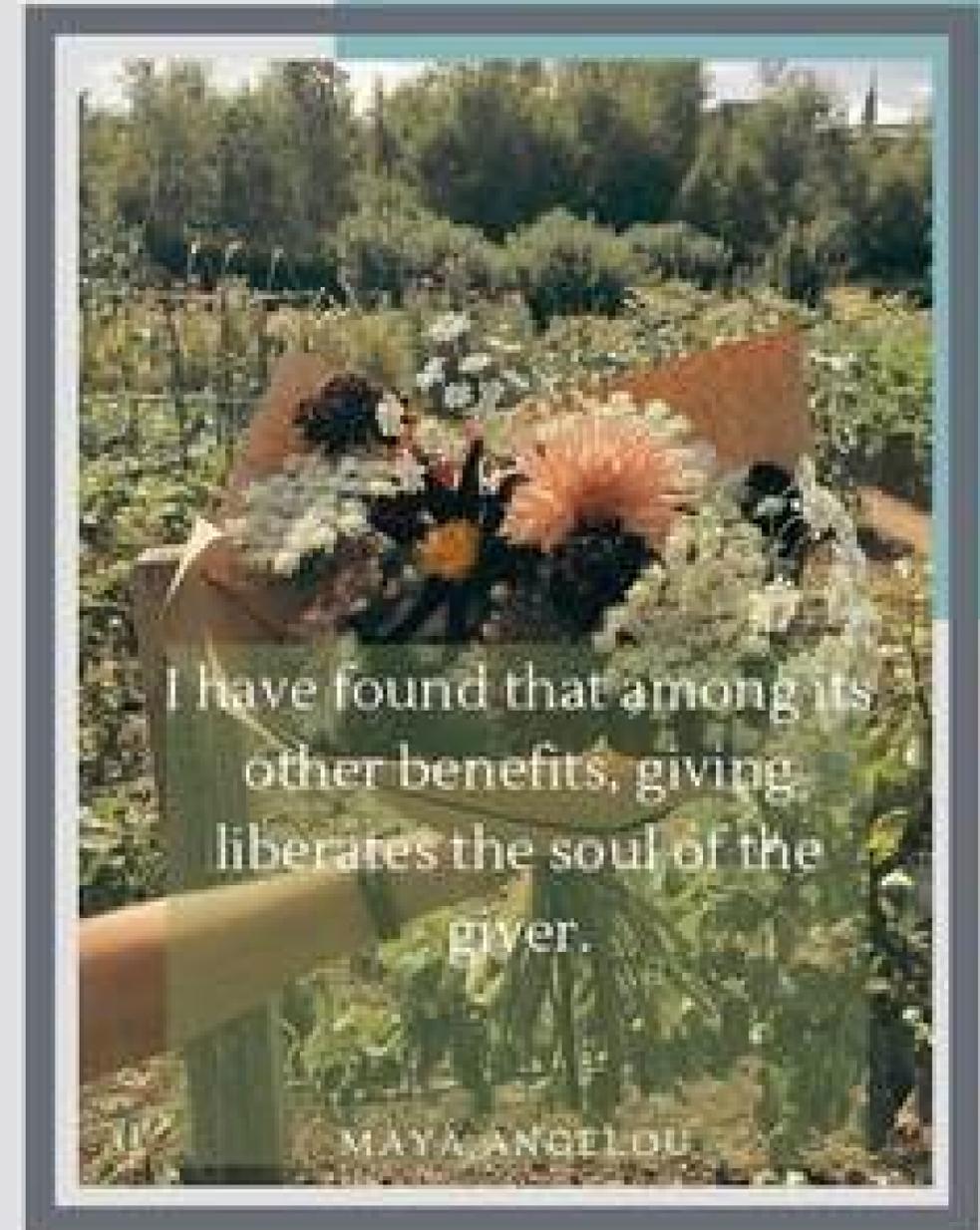
Fundraising

In Spring 2025, Development Partners were commissioned to create a feasibility study for The Palace Trust to assess the potential for future fundraising.

The objectives below are one of the outcomes of the study delivered in August 2025:

1. Establish fundraising within the organisation including admin processes and stewardship programme
2. Build strong relationships with potential funders – new and past – and Friends
3. Secure funding for capital improvements and organisational development – not revenue costs
4. Build endowment/future fund

The objectives are designed to lay the pathway to a future of fundraising at the Palace, and are envisaged for the first three to five years. Alongside this, it is suggested that many of the projects planned for the first two years of this strategy be grouped into one larger project, and a bid for NHLF funding, along with other minor funders, be created to the value of c£400,000. This bid will to some extent dictate the order of implementation of these projects for the first two years of the strategic plan. The advice is that if this were to be successfully delivered, The Palace Trust will then be seen as a reliable partner for future major funding from 2028 onwards.



Marketing & Communications

Vision: To aid audience growth, brand reputation and income generation by building a strong, distinctive brand; embracing digital innovation and deepening community and visitor engagement through creative, inclusive and data-informed marketing

1. Brand Development and Positioning

A strong, consistent brand builds trust, loyalty and recognition. This becomes especially important when competing for attention in our busy tourism and cultural landscape.

We'll determine how we want our brand to be perceived in the face of our new initiatives and ensure it is consistently represented across all marketing channels, online and offline.

A consistent visual and written tone will strengthen recognition across all channels, with messaging tailored to different audience groups while remaining rooted in our values.

2. Audience Development

Our marketing will deepen relationships with current visitors and reach new audiences by:

- building lasting relationships and fostering a loyal community.
- using research and social listening to gather insights into our target audiences' preferences, motivations and behaviours.
- putting the audience at the heart of our activities with personalisation and engagement.

3. Digital and AI-Driven Innovation

We'll embrace AI opportunities and digital tools to reflect our forward-thinking organisation and illustrate our responsiveness to changing visitor behaviours and trends by:

3. cont

- Using AI to personalise communications tailoring emails, website content and digital ads.
- Applying predictive analytics to understand behaviour and measure success.
- Using AI tools to aid content creation (captions, blogs, translations).

4. Campaigns and Channels

We'll follow a campaign-led approach, tied to seasonal highlights, school holidays, events, capital development projects and new initiatives. Channels will prioritise digital (social media, email, SEO, video and paid search) supported by traditional media where appropriate.

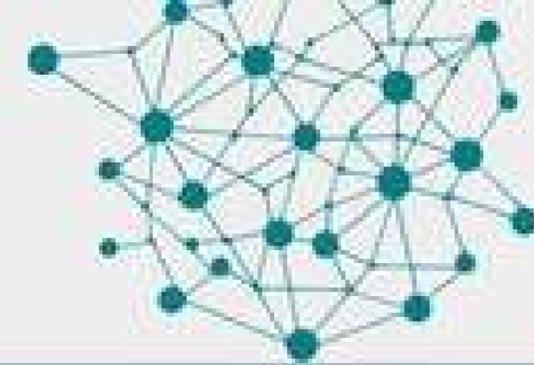
An annual campaign calendar will guide delivery.

5. Partnerships and Collaboration

We will strengthen our reach and impact through partnerships with tourism bodies, the RHS, local and cultural networks.

6. Inclusion, Sustainability and Evaluation

Our marketing will be inclusive, accessible and environmentally responsible. We'll monitor key performance indicators such as audience growth, engagement and return visits to shape ongoing improvement and ensure long-term impact.



AI Support Strategy

Vision: To harness AI thoughtfully to enhance the visitor journey, support heritage conservation, deepen community impact, and create a more sustainable, efficient organisation.

We will abide by the following principles for Ethical AI Use

- **Privacy-first:** Comply with GDPR, respect visitor data.
- **Transparency:** Clearly explain when AI is in use.
- **Accessibility:** Use AI to break down barriers, not create new ones.
- **Human in the Loop:** AI will support people - it will not replace them.

Phase	Year	Focus
1. Foundation	2026	AI chatbot, data cleanup, website upgrades, digital accessibility, SEO best practices
2. Engagement	2027	Smart guides, email personalisation, begin to develop VR experiences
3. Conservation & Sustainability	2028	Predictive maintenance, emissions tracking
4. Optimisation & Growth	2029-30+	Fundraising AI, dynamic pricing, advanced analytics

Top Level Proposed Implementation Schedule

Year One 2026	Year Two 2027	Year Three 2028	Year Four 2029	Year Five 2030+
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit NLHF application for water/science/ nature project • IF positive response, permission to start in May • Develop drawings and plans for other initiatives (with Planning Consultant and Architect). Submit planning applications. • Additional plans for changes of use, gatehouse designs • August-December delivery construction phase of water/nature project • Deliver PV Palace & Chapel project • Deliver Willow Bridge project • Take over Bishop's Barn with management agreement with WCC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch all capital elements of project • Activity plan to deliver for project • Upgrade security alarm systems • Move offices to Top Floor Flat • Begin work on Gatehouse • Launch Gatehouse for summer season • Adopt allotment management from Wells City Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Source Heat Pump extension • Irrigation pipe network implementation • 60th anniversary of Palace Trust events • VR Great Hall project • AI pocket guides and natural language Q&A • Sensory and immersive experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living Drawbridge project • Glass door to Palace Entrance • Additional net zero actions ready for 2030 • Planning for Rampart Walk, and Croquet Lawn projects • Begin moving allotments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rampart Walk project • Kinetic energy generation for entry project • Full organic garden • AI climate control for buildings • Croquet Lawn Changes • Net Zero achieved

n.b Individual project implementation schedules will feature in annual business plans along with smaller tactics and activities

...AND FINALLY

A few 2035 Key Performance Indicators to inspire us:

- 250,000 visitors per annum
- £250,000 surplus per annum
- Keep Staffing Cost Ratio to 55% of turnover
- Net Zero by 2035