

The Bishops Palace & Gardens 2026



For presentation at the Volunteer Annual Briefing.
26 Feb 2026, 2pm



Merryn Kidd
Chief Executive

2026 Vision

Vision: To secure the Palace's future as a living, inclusive, and sustainable heritage site at the heart of Wells.

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



Strategic Objectives 2026-36



Five new Strategic Priorities for 2026:

1. Visitor Experience & Inclusivity
2. Community & Charitable Work
3. Development & Conservation
4. Gardens & Environment
5. Finance & Investment

Project Plans

- Solar Panels on Palace Roof
 - Awaiting LBC
 - Bats :(
 - Complicated Fixings
 - C£40k
 - ROI v.good

2. The Living Waterscape

Theme: Water – Source, Spirit, Sustainability, Science

- Automated sluice gates (£100k)
- Discovery Dome: 360° immersive water experience
- Biodome: hydroponics & education
- Expanded pond & accessible landscaping
- Drought resistant garden
- Double width Willow Bridge
- Compostable loo & digital infrastructure

Aligns with all 5 Strategic Priorities

Possibility to achieve fundraising as total project could be £400k+



The Palace in 2026

A Living Heritage for Wells and the South West:

- Thriving, inclusive visitor destination
- Proactive community hub for learning, wellbeing, kindness
- Model for sustainable heritage management
- Financially secure, environmentally responsible, future-ready
- Ensuring inspiration, inclusion, and endurance for generations



Conclusion

I expect our 2026 plans to result in a third consecutive year of surplus, along with a foundation for future continued growth, community engagement and sustainability. It will be another busy year of significant projects, some disruption, and investment into the future of our site.





Siobhan Goodwin

Community
Engagement
Manager

Continue with:

- Wellbeing Walks
- Free tickets to local children on pupil premium
- Groups in community garden (STEP, Blue School Gardening, Slow & CAMHS)
- Oral History project
- Museum to You Outreach
- Christmas Eco Art Exhibition
- Stalls at local events
- Outreach sessions for schools
- Heritage Connectors

Introduce:

- Travel Bursary Scheme
- World Kindness Week in Nov
- Parish visits
- Pancake Race
- Fun and Games Exhibition



Volunteering

Continue:

- Annual training programme
- Pathways to employment including 15 students on work experience and 2 interns
- Coffee Meet Ups & socials
- Supported volunteering
- Volunteer recruitment (welcomers)
- Staff 2 days pro rata





Rachel Harrison

Head of Catering

- Goals for 2026

- With a target to reach in 2026 of £887,000 (£826,000 in 2025) our primary focus is to again maximise all outlets throughout the year to create as much revenue as possible.
- We will continue to utilise the Horsebox to ease the queue in the Café and to offer food & refreshment for events.
- Serve Cream Teas in the Apple Store, with the option of extending to the Juliet Balcony seating area
- Work with Lola, Phil & Mark to create a successful Spring/Summer Menu for 2026.

- We will be purchasing an Ice Cream Bike to Increase sales around the site throughout the summer and during theatre nights.
- Increase our Cream Tea Group Bookings.
- Liase with Chris to utilise the Mobile Bar and Cafe for events
- Offer a Mother's Day Afternoon Tea in the Undercroft.
- Review our offering for Christmas 2026 to include advertising the Café for Office/Work Parties and offering a Festive Menu.





Chris Heffernan

Events Manager



Main Events

Palace Garden Fete
6th June

Party at the Palace
3rd, 4th, 5th July

Artisan Christmas Market
14th & 15th November

Christmas Illuminations
28th Nov – 3rd Jan



Wardour Garrison (1600s)
2nd & 3rd May

Britain at War
1st & 2nd August



Bowlcore (Medieval)
29th, 30th & 31st August



Knights' Tournament
20th June

Vikings
12th September

History



Hound of the Baskervilles
The Pantaloons
25th June

King Arthur & the Holy Fail
Three Inch Fools
13th August

Theatre

The Big Bad Wolf
The Plandits
24th July

Othello
The Lord Chamberlain's Men
19th July

The Pirates of Penzance
Illyria
11th September



Private Events

11 Weddings

5 Private Events



JO
STEVENSON
Community
Gardener



**MEGS, JESS AND TRACEY BUSY WORKING
PRUNING THE QUINCE TREES AND ROSES**



**CUTTING AND CLEARING THE LONG GRASS IN THE
ARBORETUM**



OUR FANTASTIC VOLUNTEERS |

WINTER





**ANNA CUTTING THE LONG GRASS ON THE RAMPART
BANK**



SPRING |



SUMMER |



DROUGHT PROOF SUMMER



BRIGHT AUTUMN COLOUR AND INTEREST |



REJUVINATING THE PHELPS GARDEN |



SPRING AND AUTUMN COLOUR FROM THE CHERRY TREE!



MORE SUMMER DROUGHTS



THE SOUTH LAWN LAST SUMMER



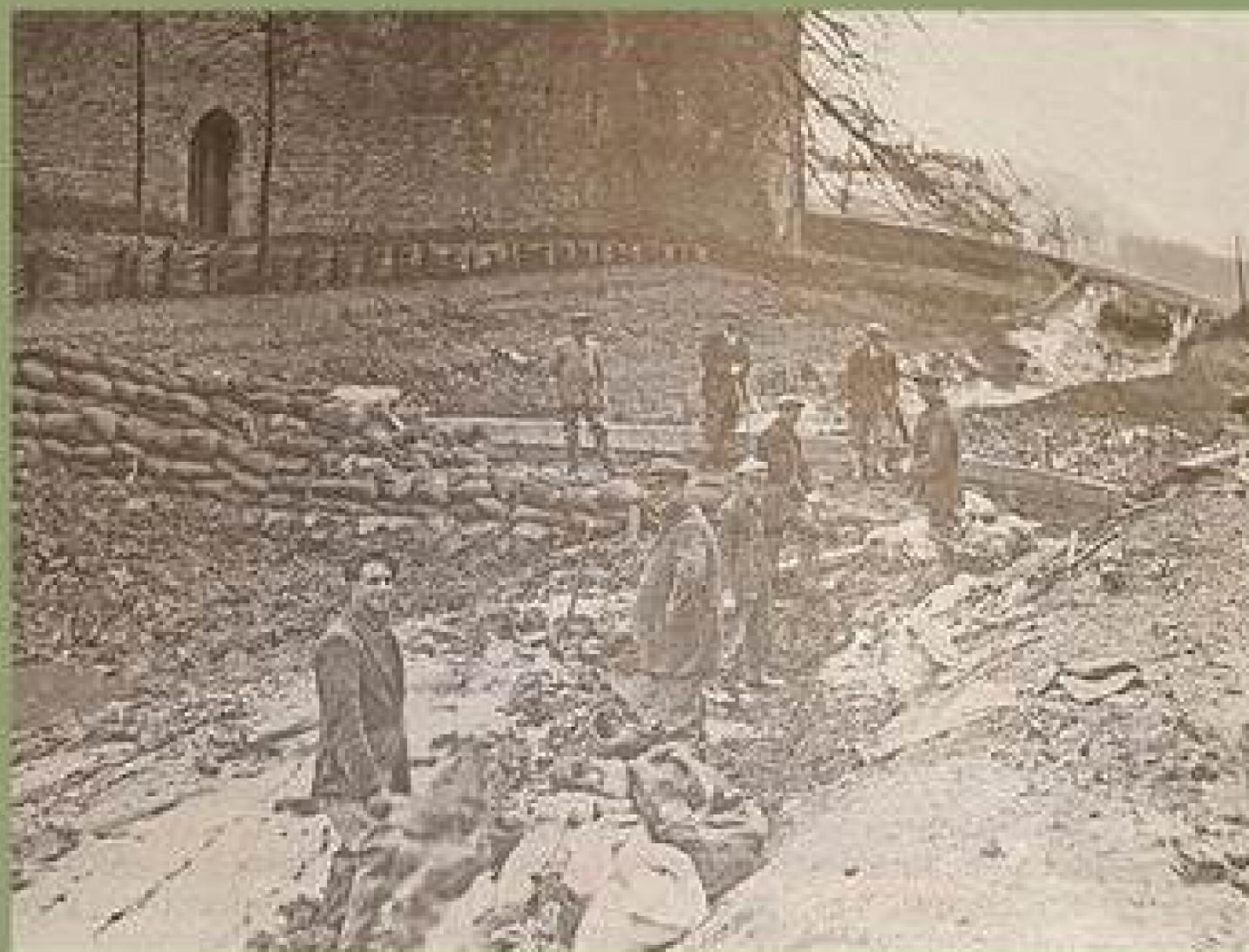
THE COMMUNITY GARDEN

The background is a dark teal color with several abstract white line art patterns. These patterns consist of overlapping circles and curved lines, resembling stylized leaves or organic shapes. The patterns are scattered across the page, with some appearing in the top left and bottom right corners.

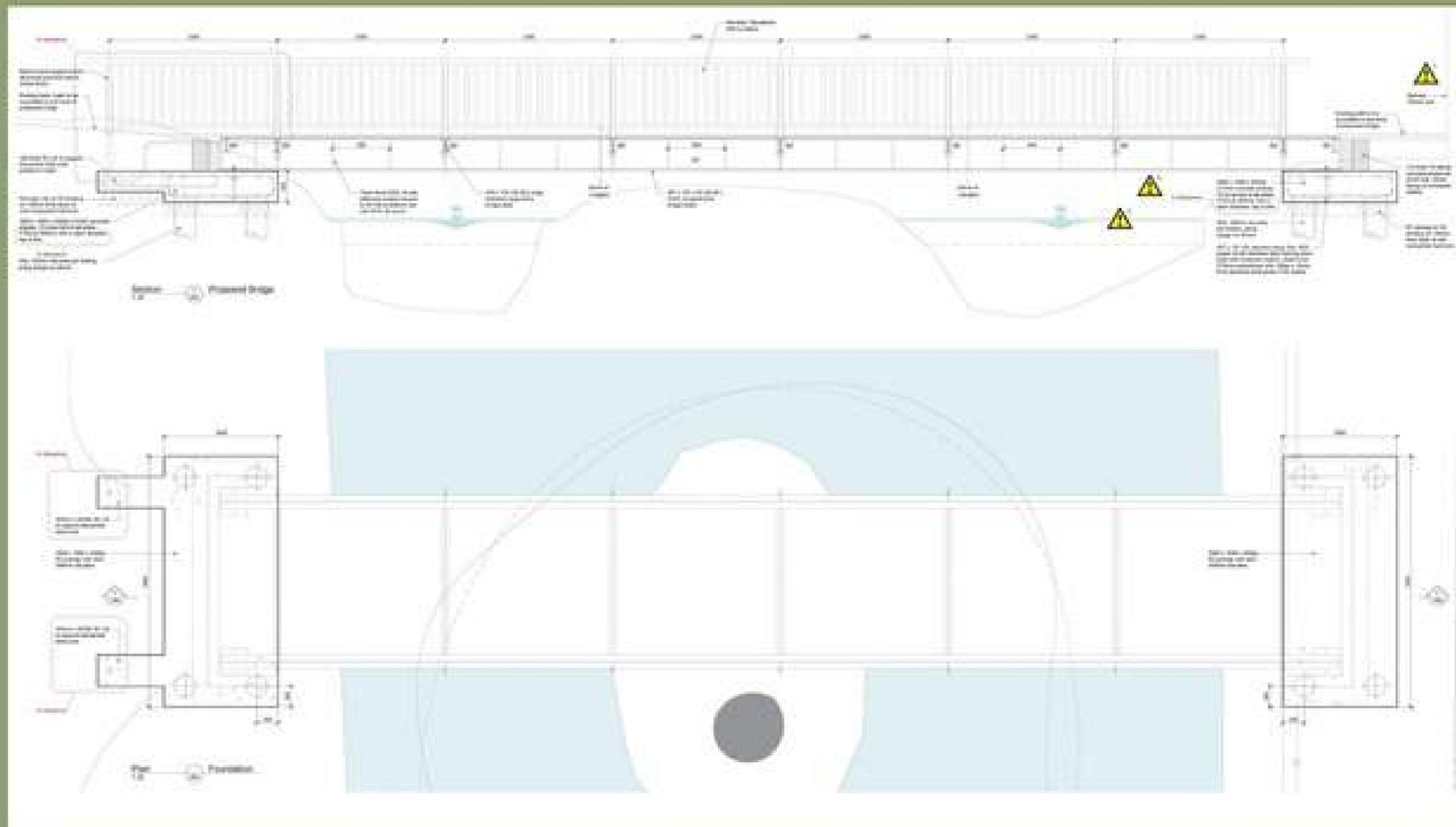
Katy Love

Property & Collection Manager

Moat Dredge



Willow Bridge



Collection Care



Conservation & Maintenance

- Restoration and repair work to the exterior walls
- Repair of Undercroft and Long Gallery ceilings
- Repair of garden paths
- Reviewing and possible upgrading of fire and security alarms
- Electrical works across site following on from Electrical Survey Report
- New changing room facilities in Dragons Den
- Roof work on the Gatehouse



Ali Longstaff

Financial Controller



Finance Headlines

- 2025 budgeted surplus £81k – Now forecast to hit budget given the final 2 months of 2025 hit hard on the weather front which reduced visitor numbers from expected levels.

2026 Budget

- Income £2,365k, Expenditure £2,264k budgeted surplus £101k.

Main points

- Income from visitors planned to increase by £61k
- Café income, higher volume by £39k from more covers
- Retail shop income, higher volume by £38k from new space
- Continue to be a Real Living Wage provider
- Planned cash to be invested in the projects highlighted
- Increased expenditure in the planned property work
- Public and Private events income are budgeted to remain at 2025 levels, but don't let that hold you back!



IT Headlines

- We continue our partnership with Three Cherries for the provision of our main IT support, along with our system providers
- Investment in upgrading cabling, networks and equipment is continual as technology only moves one way for cost and performance
- Cyber security is high up on the list for managing how we lower our risk
- The Café till system is the next major IT project to undertake in the next few months and ensure this is done with minimum disruption!
- *How we integrate AI into our working lives, safely and purposefully*
 - *You are all the most important people on site, when it comes to understanding "PAIN POINTS" of how we operate, so we want your help for how to make the best use of AI to support us*





Lindsay Mann

Marketing & Communications Manager

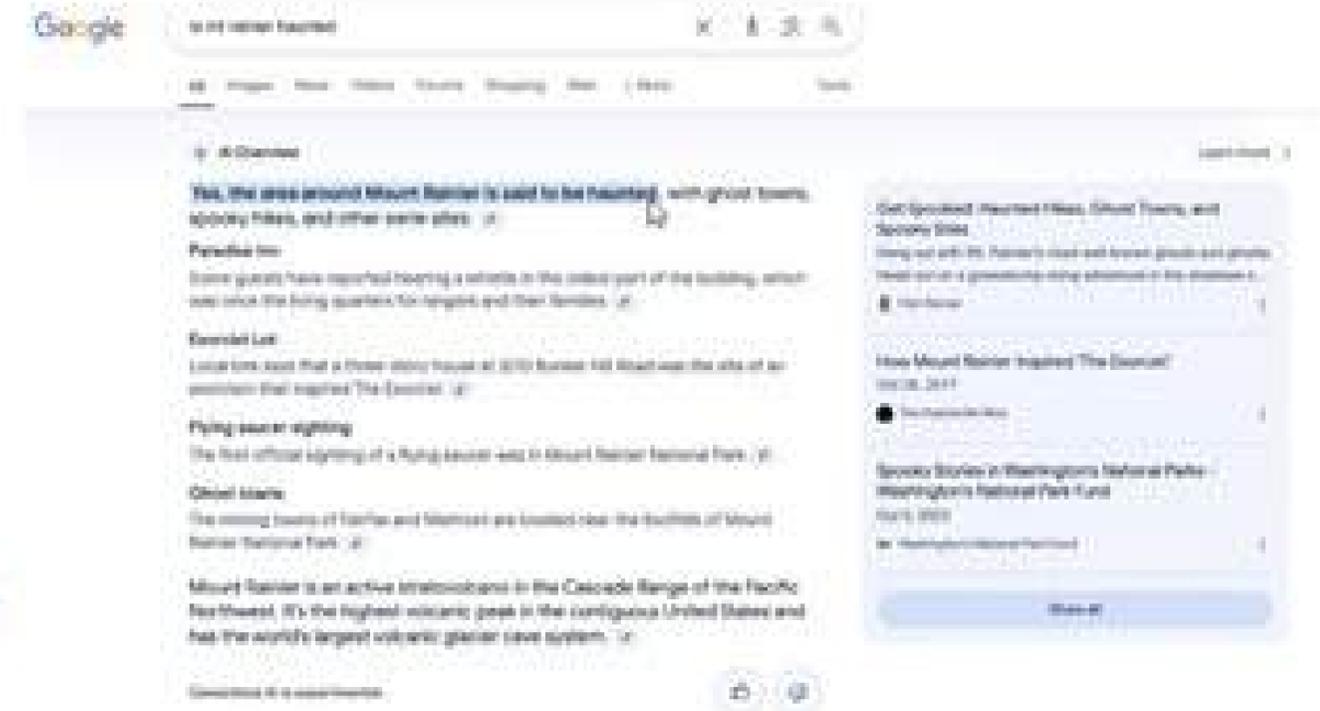
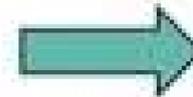
Marketing & Communications



- 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)

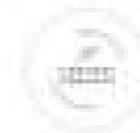
2026 MARKETING TRENDS

- AI-powered search is becoming the first stop for ideas and recommendations, so we need clear content that explains what makes The Bishop's Palace special and why we're worth visiting.
- Visibility in AI Answers matters
- Producing practical content such as visit planning guides, seasonal highlights and FAQs is essential.
- AI tools favour trusted sources, so we will continue building credibility through partnerships, press coverage, external event listings and tourism platforms.
- Structured, well-written content is critical



2026 OPPORTUNITIES FOR US

- Digital First: we'll continue to run campaigns using a 'digital first' strategy
- Complemented by traditional comms (eg PR/print media)
- With consistent 'value for money' messaging throughout
- Over 77% of our web traffic came from mobile and tablets in 2025 so mobile-optimised website content and visitor journey in 2026 is crucial
- We'll prioritise building the Palace's email list; creating Friends email marketing schedule and flagship event-specific email marketing comms.
- We'll create content that's great for AI search



The Content Compass: SEO and AI Search Strategist

By The Bishop's Palace and Gardens

An SEO expert focused on search and AI discovery for a UK visitor attractions and heritage sites.

Keyword discovery:
Research high-value keywords an...

AI search optimisation: Help me optimise a...

Page optimisation:
Analyse a page (to be specified) and...

Editorial ideas:
Suggest blog, video or social media...

The background features a dark teal color with several overlapping, semi-transparent circles of varying shades. Some of these circles contain a white grid pattern, while others are solid or have faint outlines. The overall effect is a modern, layered geometric design.

Jeremy Coles

Visitor Team Manager

Visitor Experience Team

- Welcome each and every visitor
- Look after our welcoming volunteers (general / palace / drawbridge)

Sales:

- Day tickets (palace & joint)
- Annual passes
- Friends of the Palace
- Events sales

- Open & close the site
- Keep everyone & everything safe

- (Yes, we can also have fun!)





New Visitor Reception

Opened January 2026

Barcode scanner for quick access to gardens with current pass / Friend

Personal touch with A-board (upgrade offer working well)



New Retail Lines

- Copper-plated small garden tools
- Wooden church mice
- Meg Hawkins range (kingfisher etc)
- St Justins jewellery (from Cornwall)
- Existing best sellers, such as cuddly swans, magnets etc



The Future

- Seasonal
- Keep it fresh and exciting
- Event led
- Adding more new lines
- Buying in plants as of March



THANK YOU!

Here's to an amazing 2025