



24<sup>th</sup> March 2026

Dear Volunteers

As Easter fast approaches, I thought I'd drop you all a line to mark the beginning of the "season".

It has been wonderful to meet some of our new recruits in recent weeks, and it is always humbling to know that there are so many people who are kind enough to give up their free time to help us out here at the Palace.

The first few months of 2026 have been very busy, starting with the opening of our new Visitor Reception, and the restoration of the Cafe to the full expanse of the building. As always with a new project, there is a steep learning curve and Jeremy and his excellent team have been instrumental in observing how visitors have been using, understanding, and even mis-understanding the flow of the space. We think we've now got things almost perfect, and there will be an update of the automated door sensors coming soon.

I know that the new layout has meant a significant change in how our Welcome Volunteers operate, and I thank those of you it who have adapted your roles to accommodate this. We have had a huge amount of positive feedback from visitors, and our retail takings have doubled since launch.

In April, we will also launch our new Splash Play Zone in the Dragon's Lair, and we are using our new Open Day to do this.

I hope you are all enjoying seeing the gardens coming to life – I think that the daffodils in the outer gardens are particularly splendid this year, and to see the magnolia blooming at the same time as the tulips in front of the Palace last week was a real treat. A huge thank you to our garden volunteers for all their hard work throughout the horridly rainy winter season.

We are currently in the process of undergoing our annual audit, but subject to the final results, we look to have finished 2025 on track for our budgeted surplus of £80k. This is excellent news for the Trust in a challenging operating environment, and essentially completes our replenishment, along with last year's result, of our reserves, having suffered losses in 2022 and 2023. I am extremely thankful to you all for everything that you have done to help achieve this.

I hope that you have a wonderful Easter and I look forward to another successful and joyful year working with you.

**Merryn Kidd**  
**Chief Executive**