



The Palace Trust – Assuring the Future

Assuring the Future

Development Project



The Bishop's Palace and Gardens
Wells
Somerset
BA5 2PD



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Introduction

The Bishop's Palace is a site of recognised local, national and international significance. As the home to the Bishop of Bath & Wells for over 800 years it continues to function as a working building at the heart of the Diocese of Bath and Wells and the wider community. The site is an important element of the townscape of Wells and is an important tourist destination.

The Palace currently attracts approximately 40,000 visitors each year, most of whom are tourists who are drawn to the garden. Our research shows while both local residents and visitors value the site they also have a limited understanding of its historical importance and purpose, the effect that its position has had on the development of the City of Wells and the wider Mendip area, the significance of its buildings and the rich depth of history associated with the site.

Over the last few years The Church Commissioners and the Palace Trustees have been considering ways to assure a sustainable future for the Palace that improves access and understanding of the site for the widest possible audience without damaging the serenity of this special place. They have been supported by a Project Planning Grant from The Heritage Lottery Fund.

The proposals for the Palace may be summarised as follows:

- ◆ A New Welcome
- ◆ Improved Access to Historic Spaces
- ◆ New Activities
- ◆ Creating a Place of Opportunity

A New Welcome

We recognise that there are physical and intellectual obstacles that must be addressed in order to achieve our goal of improving access.

Palace Green, the area between Bishop's Eye and the Gatehouse, will be enhanced to provide an introduction to the Palace in the context of the City.

A new free welcome & orientation area at the west end of the Inner Courtyard will offer an insight into the rest of the Palace so that visitors may understand the special significance of the place. The shop and cafe will be relocated outside the pay point with a new ticket office near the Great Hall.

Improved Access to Historic Spaces

Our aspiration is access to this wonderful, nationally important site. We will assure the future of the Palace by ensuring that its significance in terms of buildings, landscape and archaeology are recognised and its place in the history of the county and local community



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is understood and made relevant to the widest possible audience in ways that are effective, exciting and thought.

Projects will include the following;

- ◆ Public access to the wells & Well House
- ◆ Refitting of historic spaces to provide space for interpretation
- ◆ New circuits around the gardens using previous pathways
- ◆ A new contemporary 'Garden of Reflection'
- ◆ A new role for the arboretum

New Activities

Our mission is to extend a welcome to all visitors and users, interpreting the site for as wide a range of audiences as possible, encouraging access, use and understanding while safeguarding the historic remains, spirit of place and current working environment of the Bishop.

We plan to do this by enhancing facilities in the Palace and establishing programmes of activities including the following;

- ◆ A new Activity, Creativity & Education Space
- ◆ Accessible toilet facilities in the grounds
- ◆ A learning programme in partnership with the Cathedral, the Museum and the Diocesan Office
- ◆ Programme of holiday and family activities
- ◆ Events programme
- ◆ Extended use of the conference facilities

A Place of Opportunity

The Bishop's Palace has the potential to be a very significant centre for opportunity in the community as well as a major historical and cultural site. We aim to realise this potential by developing a wide range of programmes that delivers a resource to the widest community including the following;

- ◆ Apprenticeship and work training programme
- ◆ Active volunteer programme
- ◆ Strong links with Diocesan churches
- ◆ The 'Church Treasures' Project
- ◆ Opportunities for allotment holders
- ◆ A venue for events
- ◆ Facilities which support activities
- ◆ A changing experience for regular users
- ◆ Commitment to use local businesses and produce
- ◆ A new 'Garden of Reflection'
- ◆ Community garden and orchard



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What Happens Next?

The Assuring the Future project is a £4 million scheme for which 25% of which is being sought from the Heritage Lottery Fund and 27.5% from the Church Commissioners.

After several years of careful planning we now have a clear plan of how the Palace should be developed to assure a sustainable future with the widest possible community involvement.

But this is just the beginning of the challenge to bring these ambitious plans to fruition. The Church Commissioners have offered significant financial support provided the remaining funds can be raised by The Palace Trust. The Trust has secured a Stage One grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for £114,500, and a further £878,225 has been earmarked for a Stage Two bid. Planning and development work has already started and members of the public will be kept informed of progress on the website and through the local media.