



Photo by Iain Macleod-Jones

Interpretation Design Brief

Vicars' Close: A Medieval Street Singing Through the Centuries



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**WELLS
CATHEDRAL**

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1. Introduction

Vicars' Close: A Medieval Street Singing Through the Centuries is a once in a lifetime opportunity project to save a site of internationally significant architectural heritage. It will create a legacy that will not only safeguard the future of Vicars' Close, but also deliver brand new, innovative engagement programmes and interpretation that will be co-created with groups across the county.

We are now looking to appoint a design consultancy to develop the specifications for key elements of our interpretation. This brief gives some background to the project and details the scope of work that we are looking to commission.

2. Background

2.1 The Heritage

Vicars' Close is the oldest intact medieval street in Europe (1348) still used for its original purpose: to house the Cathedral's adult choir. Surveys have shown the pressing need to rectify the seriously deteriorating condition of each of the 27 historically significant Grade I listed houses, the Chapel, Vicars' Hall and Treasury rooms. Our project will repair and conserve the envelope of the Close's buildings, to halt the water ingress and damp that is causing considerable and accelerating deterioration to the building's fabric. Without these urgent works there is an imminent danger that Vicars' Close is added to Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk Register'. Two of the properties will also be opened to the public as interpretation spaces where the stories of the Close's social, architectural and musical history and heritage will be told for the first time.

2.2 Reaching Out

Using our unbroken (1348-1936) and previously unseen archive of the Cathedral Choir as a starting point, we will work in partnership with our community to co-produce new content celebrating the heritage of the Close. A series of artist-led workshops, events and residencies delivered in partnership with local organisations, will give contemporary relevance to the stories of the Close, dynamically reinterpreting the history of Vicars' Close for future visitors.

Somerset has pockets of significant deprivation and disadvantage. Our project will include activities that reach out and deliver within our more isolated and disadvantaged communities whose needs have been exacerbated by COVID and current economic hardship. We will also bring people together, supporting them to work collaboratively. We will seek to give a wide variety of causes and groups a voice within our project through our co-production activity. In addition, our work placement programme, apprenticeship scheme and volunteering opportunities will offer more focused opportunities for individuals to learn new skills and build confidence.

Wells Cathedral is fortunate to have over 300 active volunteers. The volunteer team, supplemented with new recruits from different walks of life, will be professionally supported to undertake research to inform interpretation, support a wide-ranging programme of activities and contribute to our environmental and biodiversity activity. Volunteers will also sit on advisory groups to inform project development. With a focus on young people and access, they will actively support the delivery of the project so that it is as inclusive and representative as possible.

Formal and informal learning will be built into our project, from engagement with local schools on specific strands of work, such as transatlantic slavery to structured placements for university students to support our research and development. Our aim is to both support curriculum learning but also develop opportunities outside formal learning via work experience, special projects such as takeover days and co-produced activities. We will also offer lifelong learning opportunities for adults with few or no

qualifications by partnering with organisations to deliver traditional skills training sessions across the project for all ages including carers, people with dementia, homeless people and people with mental health concerns.

Our Access Advisory Group will include volunteers with a range of different needs and interests, they will actively inform and guide the development and delivery of the project so that it is as inclusive and representative as possible. All our activities will be run in conjunction with partner organisations who bring specialised skills and experience and have the trust of their clients or members.

3. What we want to achieve

The vacancy of two houses, numbers 12 and 22, has opened up a unique opportunity to re-think and develop a new visitor experience, together with providing access to key collegiate buildings, currently not open to the public. We also want to explore the options for a multi-layered, self guided, digital tour of the Close.

We want to develop the visitor experience with a structured offer that enables people to engage with Vicar's Close at different levels and to accommodate individual preferences, focussing on social history of the Close and the Cathedral's music heritage. Developing the narratives and testing the interpretative offer with target groups will form an important aspect of this project.

Some areas are difficult to access; in particular, the Vicars' Hall, Muniment Room and Treasury, having narrow newel staircases. Digital media and guided interpretation are likely therefore to form the core offer. Authenticity in interpreting the Vicars' Close is important, drawing on evidence of buildings research and the extensive Cathedral archives.

None of the original furnishings have survived in Number 22 but the property is one of the least altered from its original layout. The initial concept is that this property should enable visitors to 'step back in time' to understand how the Vicars Choral would have lived when Vicars' Close was built. Research is underway to identify the original residents of Vicars' Close, which may offer an opportunity to accurately tell the story through an historic individual. Authenticity in approach is key and further research will identify period interior décor, furniture and household items which could be commissioned using traditional techniques of the period. The implementation of this may offer opportunities to share the creative process with our audiences, contemporary reinterpretations and for people to learn new heritage skills. The property is very small so visitor access, flow and orientation will need to be carefully considered.

This light touch approach to physical interpretation is also proposed for the significant historic interiors that will be open to the public for the first time (Vicars Hall, Chapel, Muniment Room and Treasury). In these spaces we are looking to install the infrastructure that will enable more transient and flexible interpretation approaches, using light, sound and projection over more traditional 'hard copy' solutions.

Number 12 is larger and offers more flexibility for interpretation due to later structural alterations. It is envisaged that some spaces will focus on key themes including people, buildings, musical heritage and the garden, whilst others will remain more flexible to accommodate outputs from community engagement and more temporary activities. The Cathedral does not have a collection of objects to support interpretation but the archives do contain important Charters, historic photographs and other records relating to the Vicars Choral and the Close. The Library holds an original copy of William Turner's "A New Herball" from 1568 which will be a key reference point in the development of the gardens.

The aim is that co-production, developed through partnerships established in the Activity Plan, is integrated into the Interpretation scheme. Therefore, spaces should be designed with appropriate M&E infrastructure (sockets, lighting, projectors, speakers etc) to enable future flexibility of content.

The Wells Cathedral Interpretation Master Plan provides the framework for developing the visitor experience at the Vicars' Close. The focus on musical heritage, choral and instrumental, is important here and its connection with the Cathedral through the Vicars' Choral and resident Cathedral Organists.

Self-guided and in person guided tours and access to numbers 12 and 22 and other buildings within the Close will be ticketed. An assessment and recommendation on the most appropriate location for the reception point/ ticket sales is part of this brief.

3.1 Other related work

- Surveys and capital plans – the Design Team (comprising architect, structural surveyor, geotechnical surveyor, quantity surveyor, conservation plan consultants, and ecologist) is in place and will be producing detailed surveys and plans of all properties. The M&E brief is pending and the Interpretation Consultants will be expected to inform this area of work.
- Activity Plan – Consultants are developing the Activity Plan to meet NLHF requirements. Detailed consultation with new and target audience groups is key to the development. The Interpretation Consultants will be expected to inform and participate in this process to test themes and ideas for interpretation. Co-production will be a key output which will provide content and resources for incorporation in the Interpretation Strategy.
- Market Research – interpretation themes and visitor interest will be tested through online and face to face surveys. Again, the Interpretation Consultants will inform this process, using it as a mechanism to test interpretation themes.
- Historic Research – the Conservation Management Plan will be the key document describing the development of the Close, its historical and social context. In addition to this a team of volunteers will be researching different aspects of the history of the Close to inform content for the interpretation strategy. There are also various reference books and reports which have been written about the Close.

4. Interpretation strategy & design consultancy

This tender is to produce:

- (a) an overarching strategy and options for an interpretative scheme for the Vicars' Close informed by consultation and collaboration with the activity planning process
- (b) a costed interpretation plan detailing themes, audiences, objectives and outcomes and including concept visuals and an implementation plan.

Interpretation should be legible to a wide range of audiences, recognising that people engage at different levels, including people with limited mobility. Appropriate use of multimedia products and presentations that provides a multi layered and stimulating visitor experience should be considered.

4.1 Interpretation Design Outputs

Development Phase

- Drawing on narratives and key storylines develop a structured interpretative scheme and content (a) for individual buildings open to the public and, (b) as a self-guided tour of the Vicars' Close. This will be informed by and tested through the consultation process.
- Work closely with the Activity Plan consultants to identify opportunities for the presentation of co-produced content and the infrastructure requirements to allow flexibility of content in the future.
- Recommend interpretative treatment of interiors that will be open to the public that respects their architectural value and historic integrity.
- Recommend how best to integrate the heritage of church music into the visitor offer in a way that is engaging, creative, atmospheric and reflects a sense of place.
- Recommend any architectural interventions to the interiors of buildings open to the public that would improve access and the visitor experience.
- Recommend the most suitable location for the visitor reception point/ticket sales. Consider visitor orientation and flow around the Close and the properties open to the public. Develop a signage scheme to support this.
- Identify M&E requirements for interiors open to the public and to support the self-guided tour.
- Recommend interpretative and digital media for individual buildings open to the public and as a self-guided tour.
- Advise on website content and structure for pre and post visit information.
- Consult and test proposals with target groups and propose a methodology for doing this.
- Produce a cost plan for the agreed interpretative scheme, including a costed maintenance schedule.

Delivery Phase

- Prepare tender documents for suppliers/installers of equipment and agreed content.
- Support the Project Manager and client team in the tender process for suppliers/installers.
- Work collaboratively to ensure coherence and integration of outputs across the project.
- Manage the interpretation contractors and all aspects of the delivery of new interpretation in liaison with the project team.
- Ensure interpretation is delivered to the agreed brief and specification, to cost and time and in line with National Lottery Heritage Fund requirements.

4.2 Reporting Structure

Reporting to the Project Manager the consultant will:

- Work in close liaison with the design team on capital requirements to support the proposed interpretation scheme.
- Work in close liaison with Conservation Management Plan consultants and historic research working group to ensure historical accuracy and authenticity in approach.
- Work in close liaison with the consultants appointed to write the Activity Plan to ensure the interpretation reflects our audience engagement plans and related consultation.
- Produce an interpretation strategy for the Vicars' Close, following an initial assessment of the site, and when agreed by the Client Team, deliver a full written report that delivers the stated project outputs.
- Following a successful round 2 application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, deliver the proposed interpretation to agreed specification, within an agreed timeframe to an agreed cost.

Both the Project Manager and the Project Board are ultimately accountable to the Cathedral Chapter. Unless agreed in writing, all reporting and other communication will be carried out electronically. The Consultants will submit regular reports as required by the Project Manager, particularly to fit with the reporting requirements of the Cathedral and NLHF. The Consultants will be expected to attend meetings as required.

5. Project Timescales

An outline and draft Project Programme is attached alongside this brief.

The Interpretation Strategy and Design work, including consultation and trials, should be completed in time for approval by the Cathedral Chapter by September 2023, ahead of the Midterm Review, with a final draft for the NLHF round 2 application in early March 2024. The successful Consultant should be available for comment in the weeks leading up to the submission and again for the assessment meeting with the NLHF.

The Interpretation Strategy and Design Consultancy will span the Development Phase and up to four years of the Delivery Phase, with a break clause between. The Delivery Phase contract extension will be contingent on a project review and successful round two application to the NLHF.

6. Tendering Details

The submission date for tenders is **9.00am Monday 19 December** and should be submitted to Crystal Johnson, Project Manager, by email: VCProject@wellscathedral.org.uk

Tenders should include:

- Details of at least two previous and relevant contracts undertaken and client contact details to be approached for references
- A proposed methodology and work plan
- A quotation including VAT if chargeable and payment schedule
- A brief CV and contact details, (or CVs if more than one person) who will be undertaking this assignment
- Fixed price fees for the Interpretation Strategy and Design Consultancy, the later split between the Development and Delivery Phases. Please note the figures stated in 5.4 are maximum figures

- Copies of public indemnity and third-party insurance certificates

Any tenders received after the deadline will be immediately disqualified from the process.

All proposals should be a maximum of 5 pages in length – preferably shorter – excluding appendices.

Short-listed candidates will be notified week commencing 19 December. Interviews will take place on **Monday 9 January** in Wells.

As part of the interview, short listed candidates will be required to give a short presentation outlining how and why they are best suited to the work tendered.

6.1 Tender Evaluation

The criteria for the appointment is as follows:

Selection criteria	Weighting
Quality and experience	40%
Methodology and approach to commission	30%
Tender Price	20%
Interview	10%
TOTAL	100%

The award of the contract will be based on the most advantageous tender in terms of the stated criteria. The Cathedral Chapter will not pay for any costs of any tenderer. The Cathedral Chapter reserve the right not (a) to make an appointment or (b) to accept the tender with the lowest price and may take other factors into account in assessing the tender responses received by them. The successful consultant will be required to enter into a contract with the Cathedral Chapter in a form to be agreed.

6.2 Fee Base

The Interpretation and Design Consultancy has a fee budget of up to £29,500 in the Development Phase and £38,500 in the Delivery phase of the project.

The budget for delivery of the interpretation is up to £500,000 to include the range of interpretation outputs.

All figures quoted are **inclusive** of VAT.

6.3 Documentation to Support Tenders

Wells Cathedral’s draft Interpretation Masterplan is attached to this brief as an appendix. Applicants will also be provided with a copy of the NLHF round one application and the associated Business Plan.

APPENDIX 1 – Tender Information request

1.0 COMPANY INFORMATION AND RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

1.1 Name of Company:

1.2 Address:

1.3 Registered Address (if different to above):

1.4 Lead Contact Name for the work:

E-mail address: Telephone No (landline and mobile):

1.5 Type of Legal structure:

1.6 Name of parent company, if applicable.

1.7 Has the Practice been employed on similar projects similar e.g. community based projects integrating non-religious spaces within and attached to a church building? If yes please give details.

1.8 How long has the Practice been carrying out the types of work set out in the Brief

1.9 Provide CV's for key personnel, including qualifications, relevant project experience and number of years with the Practice

1.10 Total number of employees.

1.11 Provide details of the Practice professional indemnity insurance.

Cover for each and every claim (aggregated cover is not acceptable) £

1.12 Provide details of Public Liability and any other insurances.

1.13 Provide details of any claims made within the last five years against their professional indemnity insurance.

1.14 State any elements of work that you might want to sub-contract

2.0 PREVIOUS PROJECT REFERENCES

Please provide details of two major relevant projects with referees:

Project Name:

Location:

Scope of Work:

Value £

Client:

Contact:

Tel:

Project Name:

Location:

Scope of Work:

Value £

Client:

Contact:

Tel:

Thank you for providing the information requested.

APPENDIX 3 – Wells Cathedral Interpretation Masterplan



Interpretation Masterplan

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Executive Summary

Wells Cathedral is approaching its 850th anniversary of the start of its construction. The occasion is an opportunity to celebrate its past and present, and plan for its future. As part of a review of activity and engagement the interpretation of the Cathedral complex, from the Vicars' Chapel at the northern end of Vicars' Close to the Cloisters at the southern end of the Cathedral building, has been identified as an area for development to improve the visitor experience.

The Interpretation Masterplan will identify interpretative themes and the threads that hold them together, an interpretative approach and design principles that together act as a top line strategy, allowing a cohesive and coherent scheme of interpretation. The plan will set out the rationale for improvements to interpretation and the benefits of investment.

This document will act as a consultation tool to engage key internal and external stakeholders with a view to finalising a strategy and outcomes, signed off by the Cathedral Chapter for implementation.

- Interpretation needs to be considered on multiple layers: Physical, on-site and virtual through digital means
- Different methods of interpretation for different learning styles
- Self-guided and led
- Ticketed permanent exhibitions and tours
- Education programming and wider learning opportunities
- Concerts, events and touring or temporary exhibitions
- Connected interpretation with linked, external heritage organisations

With the breadth of activity and the scale of the site, coherence and consistency throughout all interpretation will be paramount.

The development of interpretation will begin around four core themes:

People – stories of lives at all levels through the Cathedral and across time. Exploration of social history to connect visitors on a personal level.

Buildings – the reason for, design, significance, highlights of all the buildings across the Cathedral complex, from the accommodation on Vicars' Close to the high parts of the Cathedral towers.

Music – Music is woven into the very fabric of the building and is an integral part of life in the Cathedral across the extent of its 850 years. Music is a great leveller and transcends social and language barriers to engage.

Context – The Cathedral and its complex is part of the wider medieval infrastructure of Wells, a monument in the Somerset landscape and part of the even wider network of the Church of England and the Christian church at large. The Cathedral is intrinsically tied to regional, national and international events through history.

I. Context

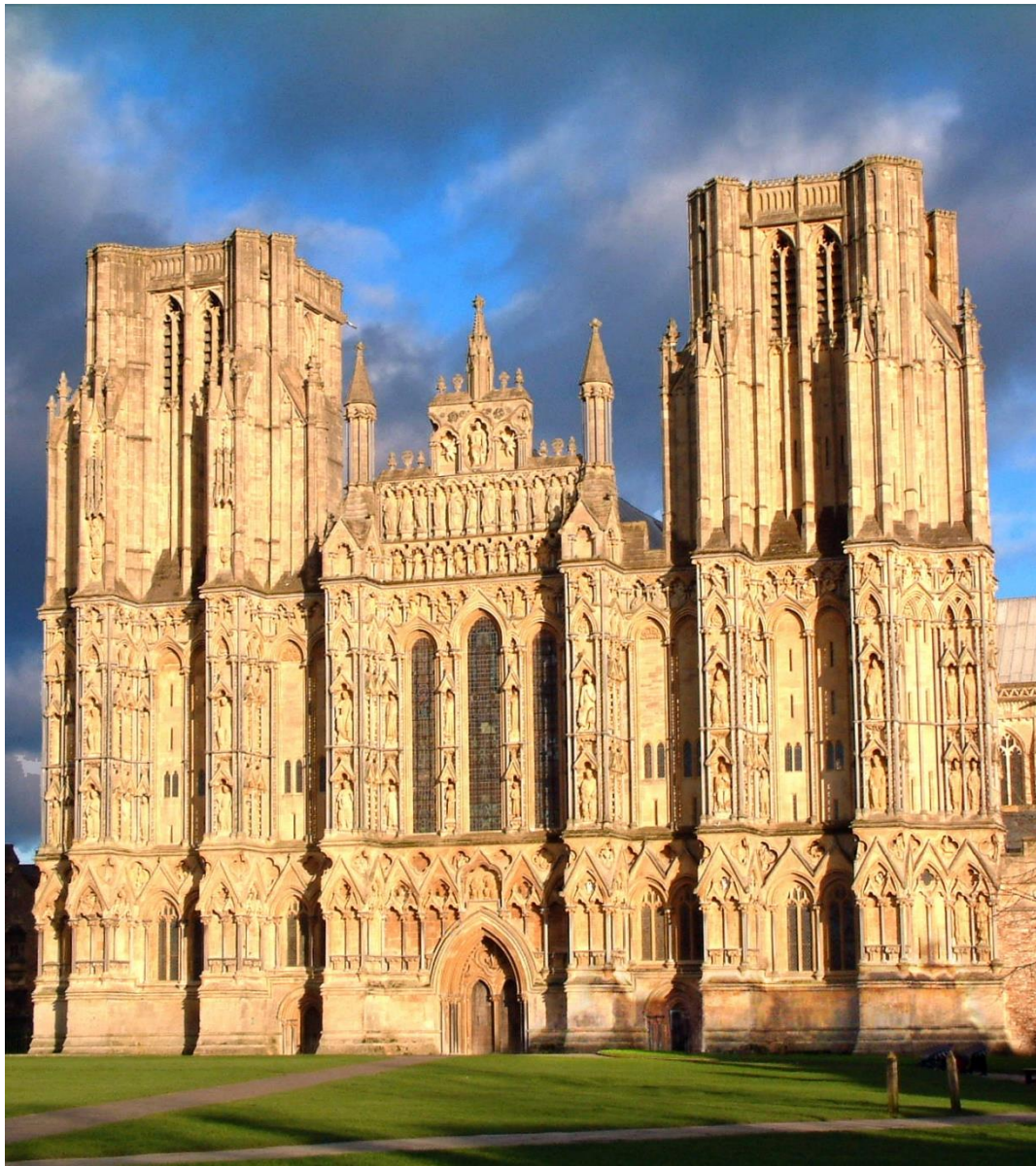
I.1 Wells Cathedral and its Complex

Wells Cathedral was built between 1175 and 1250, was consecrated in 1239 and is dedicated to St Andrew. The Cathedral was the first English Cathedral to be built in the Gothic style and was constructed on the site of a minster church dating back to 909. Wells gained its Cathedral status in 1245 when Pope Innocent IV renamed the diocese the Diocese of Bath and Wells and made Wells the official seat of the bishop. Since this point the Cathedral has become the heart of a community, a major landmark in the Somerset landscape and developed an international reputation for its incredible architecture and the quality of its music department.

Wells Cathedral may appear unchanging and timeless and at one level it is; for all the years the Cathedral has stood it has been and remains a place of pilgrimage, existing for the glory of God and as a sign of God's kingdom in the world. Yet the Cathedral is more: a thriving heritage attraction; a venue for concerts, exhibitions and new music; a community space; a centre for learning; a place for discussion and debate on sensitive issues of the day; a building where the city and county gather to commemorate and celebrate key occasions and milestones; and where so many are encouraged to be still for a moment, reflect and immerse themselves in an oasis of calm, peace and tranquillity in an otherwise frantic world.



The Cathedral, Cathedral Green and The Bishop's Palace



The West Front glowing in the setting sun

Wells is described as ‘the most poetic of English Cathedrals’. Journalist and historian Simon Jenkins voted Wells his favourite English Cathedral saying of it, “Its sculpted west front glows incomparably in the sunset, its giant scissor arches uplift its crossing, and its column capitals offer an encyclopaedia of medieval life”.

Vicars’ Close adjoins the Cathedral on the North side and is the oldest continually inhabited medieval street in Europe. Built between 1346 and 1424 to house the Vicars Choral, The Close is connected to the Cathedral by the ‘Chain Bridge’ that runs from the Vicars’ communal eating hall at the South end of Vicars’ Close to the Chapter House on the north side of the Cathedral. The Cathedral’s green and its two medieval archways through to Wells’ Market Square and Sadler Street all remain intact.

Neighbouring the Cathedral complex are The Bishop’s Palace (built c.1220), which remains the home of the Bishop of Bath & Wells as well as being run as a heritage tourism attraction, the Old Deanery (currently uninhabited), the Bishops Tythe Barn and the Wells & Mendip Museum. Each of these venues are part of the medieval core of the city and add significant potential for connected interpretation and engagement.

The Cathedral is the official seat of the Bishop of Bath & Wells and sits at the heart of the Diocese, which covers the full county of Somerset and a little of Dorset. The Diocese is largely rural and disparately populated. The three major urban centres are Bath, Taunton and Yeovil. At the time of the Cathedral’s construction the Bishop of Bath & Wells was a prestigious position within the Church and within the Court of England. A succession of Bishops of Bath and Wells held royal positions. Bishop Jocelin (Bishop 1206-1242) was a witness to Magna Carta and was a principal advisor to King John and crowned John’s son, Henry III. Since written records began, the Bishop of Bath and Wells has always stood on the left-hand side of the monarch at their coronation, with the Bishop of Durham on the right and the Archbishops York and Canterbury presiding over the ceremony.

1.2 Local Context

Outside of the City of London, Wells is the smallest City in England, with City status being granted by virtue of its Cathedral. Wells nestles into the Mendip Hills (AONB) and the layout of the city has not changed in any major way since the 1500s. The ecclesiastical complex of Cathedral, Bishop's Palace and Bishop's Deer Park form an area known as the Liberty that was established by Bishop Jocelin in 1207. The Liberty, or St Andrew Liberty, also contained Cathedral Green, the old Deanery and from 1365, Vicars' Close too. The houses on the north side of Wells Market Square were also built by a bishop, Bishop Beckington, who also provided water to the citizens of Wells via the conduit to be found in the Market Square. The wider city was formed around the Liberty and at one point was the largest settlement in Somerset.

Wells population was recorded at 10,536 at the 2011 census and is currently around 11,200. The percentage of the population aged 65 or over is higher than the national average (19.5% compared to 16.4%) whilst younger categories are the same as the national average. Wells population has a high level of education with 28% achieving at least a level 4 qualification. 38% own their own homes (National Average 31%) and only 3% of people live in social rented council accommodation (National Average 9%). The percentage of population claiming benefit is much lower than the national average with 1.6% claiming jobseekers' allowance, 2.1% claiming incapacity benefit and 10.8% claiming any benefit, including work benefit (respective national averages 3.3%, 2.4% and 13.5%).

Wells has a healthy population with 81.8% reporting good or very good health (81.4% national average) and only 4.8% reporting bad or very bad health (5.5% national average). Wells has active football, rugby, tennis and golf clubs and Mendip Cycling Club meets for regular rides in nearby Glastonbury.

The major tourism draws of the City are its Cathedral and the neighbouring Bishop's Palace. Approximately 450,000 visitors per year visit either or both of these medieval institutions. The City also contains well preserved Alms-houses, a medieval tithe barn and the parish churches of St Cuthbert's and St Thomas. Further cultural highlights are the annual festivals of literature, food, contemporary art, theatre and comedy.



The Bishop's Palace to the south of Wells Cathedral



The Bishop's Barn in Wells Recreation Ground

Transport to the City is limited to the road with bus services operating from and to Bath, Bristol, Taunton and Weston Super Mare. Approximately 79% of visitors to the City arrive by car. The nearest train station is Castle Cary, 14 miles away and without a bus connection. Wells used to be served by three train stations which closed between 1953 and 1969 under the Beeching Cuts.

1.3 Current State of Interpretation

Strengths

The highlight of the current interpretation is the programme of tours delivered by rigorously trained volunteer guides. A range of tours are offered and the knowledge behind them cover in some detail carvings, textiles, stained glass windows, architectural history, high parts, the West Front and Vicars' Close. This detailed knowledge, reinforced by the Cathedral's archive, will be critical in mapping out content for new interpretation.

The guidebook is popular and sells well from the shop.

Current methods of interpretation

Other than the tours, guidebook and information on the website there exists a range of signs around the Cathedral of varying quality and detail and an engraved panel at the south end of Vicars' Close. There are also a series of display tables in the Undercroft that tell the story of the Cathedral, but these have been removed from public display, largely by the requirement for storage and quarantine space through the 2020/21 pandemic taking over the Undercroft.

Opportunities for interpretation

Wells Cathedral has an international reputation for its architecture and its music department. Any coherent, cohesive, well-presented interpretation will be an improvement and will begin to engage more of the Cathedral's visitors with the building and its community's rich history.

There is scope for ticketed areas for exhibitions either permanent or temporary within the Cathedral and Vicars' Close to run alongside more general interpretation across the complex.

Vicars' Close provides an exciting opportunity to tell more of the Cathedral and Close's story outside of the Cathedral building, allowing for greater access unrestricted by the principal use of the Cathedral as an active church.

The Chain Library, archive, Vicar's Hall and Treasury rooms provide unique, awe-inspiring spaces that are currently inaccessible to the public.

The history of the Cathedral and Vicars' Close are well documented and the archive is a treasure trove of artefacts, documents, photographs and information. These assets provide a strong basis for content research and artefacts for digital or live display.



Considerations for Interpretation

Interpretation is needed to enhance the visitor experience of the Cathedral and its complex. However, interpretation within the Cathedral needs to be sympathetic to the primary use of the building as a place of worship, sacred space and tranquil environment.

The Cathedral also requires spaces to be multi-purpose to cover a variety of uses including weekly services and prayer, filming, concerts and catered events. Flexibility of interpretation and interpretation displays is paramount.

Interpretation should enhance the built environment rather than distract from it and improve visitors' understanding and enjoyment of the buildings and their heritage. The interpretation should introduce visitors to core themes such as stories of faith, social history - real life stories about key characters associated with the Cathedral and Vicars' Close, the history of the buildings and their uses over time, the wider context of the locality and connections across the City, County and Country.

2. Significances and Values of Wells Cathedral and Vicars' Close

As established previously, Wells Cathedral has an international reputation for its architecture and its music, areas which will be an integral part of interpretation. The completeness of the medieval complex and the continuity of use of Vicars' Close provide a unique and fascinating backdrop from which to explore key stories and to give visitors a real taste of living history.

Wells Cathedral Timeline

- 1175** Construction started
- 1209** Work halted after King John's excommunication
- 1213** Work resumes
- 1239** Cathedral Consecrated
- 1250** West Front complete
- 1306** Chapter House completed
- 1326** Lady Chapel added
- 1340** Retroquire added to join the extended Quire
- 1340** Jesse Window added
- 1346** Construction of Vicars' Close began with the Chain Gate
- 1430** Vicars Chapel and library added to the north end of Vicars' Close
- 1643** Damage and plundering of the Cathedral during Civil War
- 1936** Vicars' Choral incorporated into the Cathedral under the new Cathedrals Measure
- 2020** COVID 19 pandemic

2.1 Interpretative Themes

People

Stories of individuals that give a unique view of life at the Cathedral or within Vicars' Close, from real life examples of what life was like living on Vicars' Close at various points through its history, including today, to bishops responsible for commissioning building parts of the Cathedral.

Examples could include a view through the eyes of people such as:

Adam Lock, master mason - designing and building a cathedral. Incorporating the story of bringing the gothic style to England.

Vicars' Close Resident (research and identify) – life in service to the Cathedral and living on the Close. Real life/social history view for particular periods of history i.e. reformation, civil war industrialisation, world wars, today.

Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury – crenelated the Bishop's Palace and created Vicars' Close as an enclosed area for the Vicars Choral to live. Bishop during time of the plague. Implemented taxes for citizens of Wells. Paid the Pope to secure his promotion to Bishop of Bath & Wells.

Buildings

Describing context of why there is a Cathedral in a small rural town. Why Cathedrals are designed and built the way they are. What is the purpose of the different parts of the buildings (including Vicars' Close), what function do they serve? What does the West Front represent? What would the Cathedral have looked like before the reformation? Why did the Cathedral survive the reformation? Are all the houses on Vicars' Close the same and what are they like inside? How much living space did people have when they were built and how and why has it changed? What are the artefacts that survived from the Saxon church and are they still used? What is the Chain Library, why is it different? The spirituality within architecture. How did people worship over the centuries in the building (pews were not always a part of the cathedral, people came for a gossip as well as participating in the service, segregation of the people from the clergy, etc), how did the carvings and other elements of the building (eg stained glass windows, wall painting) educate people?

Music

The history of music within the church and the purpose it serves. Vicars' Close was built to house the Vicars Choral demonstrating the value put on the choir and music for the Cathedral. Vicars' Close has echoed with the sounds of music practice for its entire life, most recently not only the Vicars' Choral, but also Cathedral school musicians who use a number of the properties. Music transcends culture, social divides and language as a means to communicate and to resonate with life and lives.



The tomb of Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury



The Cathedral, Cloisters and Chain Gate Bridge



Choristers of Wells Cathedral

Context

Links to national and international events from excommunication of King John, slavery, world wars to Covid 19.

Context of buildings within wider city, links to the Bishop's Palace, Bishop's Barn, Market Square and wider diocesan parishes and churches. Context of Wells within the group of English Church of England Cathedrals.

Connecting people such as Bishops Jocelin and Beckington – Jocelin overseeing much of the construction of the Cathedral and Bishop's Palace and integral part of the court of King John. Beckington, built Penniless Porch, paid for and provided fresh water for houses on the north side of the Market Square and for the public via the conduit in the marketplace.

2.2 Interpretative Threads

Learning

Wells Cathedral is many things to many people and for this reason and because of its primary purpose, it needs to be a place of understanding. Cathedrals were built for people to learn, both about faith and much more. Novices came to Cathedrals to learn to read and write and the Cathedral retains this through its links with its school. People also used cathedrals and churches to hear and share local, regional and national news.

Spirituality

Whether Christian, of other faith or none, the Cathedral as a building has inspired a spiritual response for over eight hundred years. Whether the connection is through the people within, situations of a time and place or the very buildings themselves, the sense of awe and wonder that underpins spirituality is a constant presence within the Cathedral and its precinct.

Community

Cathedrals are built for community, the immediate community of clergy, the Christian community and the wider community of the Diocese which the Cathedral serves. Cathedrals are meeting places, venues for events, places of quiet contemplation and of exploration. They are for people of all ages, all abilities and all backgrounds. They are places to seek solace and places to seek support. Cathedrals provide space for civic events, secular events and for gatherings to celebrate and commemorate. Wells Cathedral is for all.

3. Interpretive Approach

3.1 Interpretation Objectives

The following objectives have been set for the interpretation with the overall vision for the Cathedral complex, its current and potential audiences and the Masterplan in mind:

- To inspire, enthuse, engage and immerse all visitors to the Cathedral complex with its rich heritage and significance, past present and future
- The Cathedral and its complex are as accessible as possible within the constraints of the statutory framework (Grade I listed) and all visitors are able to navigate their way around the complex
- To engender a sense of ownership of the Cathedral by the community that it serves
- To build on the potential of all aspects of the Cathedral and its wider complex as a learning resource for all ages and abilities
- To further enhance the Cathedral's function as a catalyst for heritage tourism that contributes significantly to wider economic regeneration. The Cathedral will draw visitors from further afield, encourage repeat visits, and provide opportunities for visitors to engage with the wider heritage and businesses of Wells and its environs.
- To be sustainable in the long term – socially, economically and environmentally.

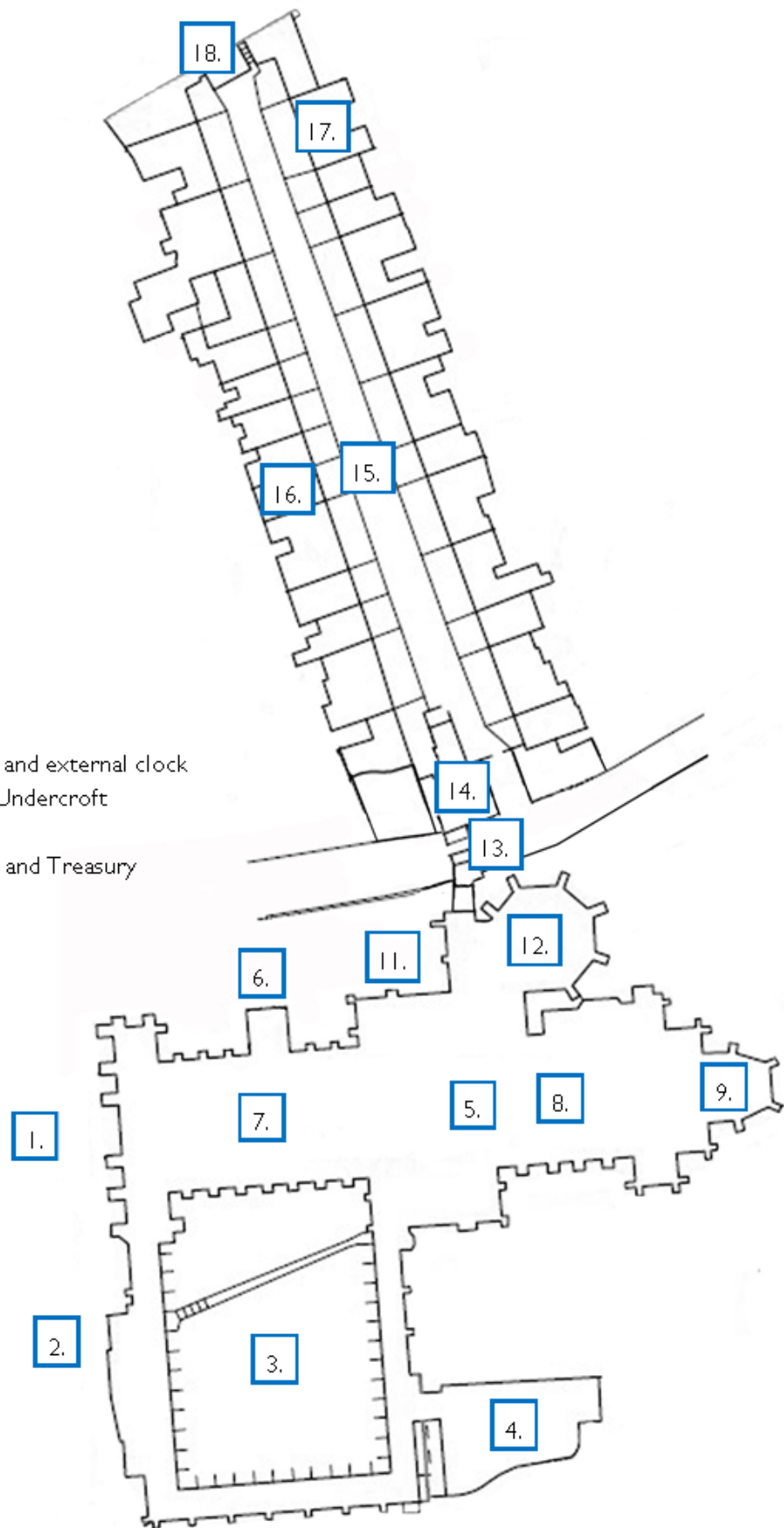
3.2 Design Principles

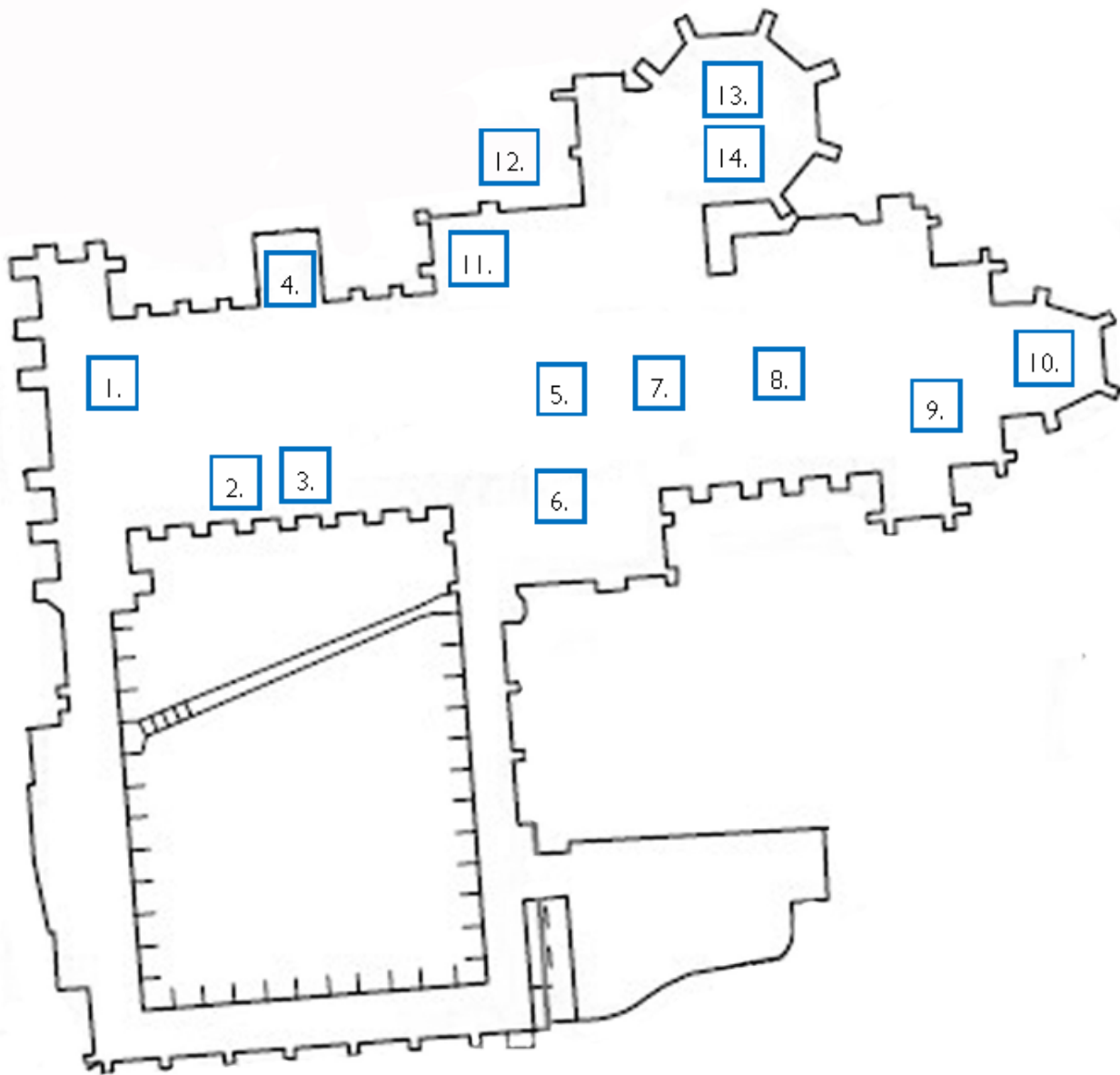
Understanding the objectives of the interpretation, the following principles will need to underpin its design. The design should:

- Be visionary, high quality, sustainable and cutting edge – communicating a sense of place, of great worth, and imaginatively embracing the Cathedral's legacy for 21st century users
- Be iconic whilst not overly intruding on the primary purpose and essence of the Cathedral, as a place for Christian worship
- Create appeal for regular visitors to the Cathedral and complex, whilst also satisfying visitors with specialist interests, by using a multi-layered approach, offering a range of opportunities and experiences through different means of delivery and utilising the different spaces available
- Be accessible, comply with best practice DDA guidelines and be available to all
- Complement, enhance and be woven throughout the Masterplan design, helping to integrate the Cathedral, its wider complex, the wider city and the national and international context within which the Cathedral sits
- Maximise multipurpose use of spaces to provide the widest possible opportunity for engagement and also to support the growth of financial sustainability

3.5 Interpretation Focal Points

1. West Front
2. Entrance
3. Cloisters
4. Education Rooms
5. Nave
6. North Porch
7. Organ
8. Quire
9. Lady Chapel
10. Camery Garden
11. Astronomical Clock and external clock
12. Chapter Room and Undercroft
13. Chain Bridge
14. Vicars' Hall, Kitchen and Treasury
15. Vicars' Close
16. No.22 Vicars' Close
17. No.12 Vicars' Close
18. Vicars Chapel





1. Carving of Cathedral Master Mason, Adam Lock
2. Original Organ Loft
3. Choir Balcony
4. North Porch (processional entrance)
5. Scissor Arches
6. Saxon Font
7. Organ
8. Quire, Retroquire and Jesse Window
9. Medieval Cope Chest
10. Lady Chapel
11. Astronomical Clock
12. 15th Century external clock
13. Chapter House Undercroft (ground floor exhibition space)
14. Chapter House

4. Management of the Interpretation

A central objective is for the interpretation to be sustainable. This is in a large part dependent on how it is managed and governed. Interpretation will need to be designed and managed with both environmental and financial sustainability in mind. Interpretation over its lifecycle will need careful planning and budgeting for:

- Replacements, repair and refreshing
- Design, print and replacement of maps, leaflets, props, costumes and other disposable elements
- Technical updates to any digital elements
- Electrical consumption, heat generation and space required for digital elements
- Futureproofing and evolution of displays

4.1 Ownership and Management

New interpretation should be of a level that the Cathedral Chapter and wider community are proud owners and supporters of it. In terms of direct management, overall responsibility will sit with the Chancellor of the Cathedral, who is responsible for education, the library, archive and outreach.

Operational elements of engaging visitors with the Cathedral will fall under the remit of the Commercial Operations Director. The Librarian, Archivist, Events Manager and Education Officers are key internal stakeholders.

It is likely that a Collections Manager/Interpretation Manager will be required to oversee the maintenance and development of interpretation, exhibition programmes and content.

5. Strategy for Delivery

Interpretation will need to be available and appeal to a wide range of people, from those who want to casually browse information, to those who want to be immersed in the history and heritage of their surroundings. The following areas capture a range of engagement styles and opportunities.

5.1 Welcome and Orientation

It is essential that all visitors feel welcome and are able to navigate the Cathedral complex. On arrival visitors should easily be able to identify what is available to them during their visit, what additional activities may be available and the scope of activity taking place that they may wish to come back for (future concerts or events). Interpretation points will provide an introductory level of information for visitors who are seeking a 'light touch' addition to their visit.

Deliverables

Pre-visit information and marketing materials available including an accessible, navigable website that contains (specifically for access and interpretation purposes):

- advice for visiting, including information for families with children and those with limited mobility, for example transport and parking information
- service times, general opening times and closures
- introductory historical information and more detailed information including access to digitised elements of the Cathedral's archive for those seeking greater learning opportunities
- promotion of events and exhibitions, including ticket purchasing
- downloadable self-guided audio tour, recommended route paper guides with different themes (light touch, detailed, history, architecture, families, stained glass etc) and activity trails

Prominent and coherently designed interpretation points that act as orientation and information points. Interpretation points include markers (i.e. QR codes) that link to digital/audio tours. New points are ideally portable to fit with the statutory constraints of Grade I listed buildings and ensure spaces can be used flexibly to meet the varying needs of the Cathedral's operation. Different routes identifiable pre-visit and on arrival for different demographics or interest groups.

- A coherently designed set of interpretation points that acts as interpretation and orientation, strategically placed to highlight areas of specific interest, as well as guiding visitors around the complex.
- Free to download 'recommended routes' on different themes for different interest groups (architecture, stained glass, sculpture, family trail etc), produced in a format that can be updated and replaced easily.
- A basic audio tour (free or small charge) that can be downloaded and used in conjunction with interpretation points.

5.2 Personal touch

Currently the Cathedral operates a donations desk at the entrance point in the New Entry Cloister run by paid staff. Volunteers are deployed in the main Cathedral building to engage with visitors. A further team of volunteers deliver a combination of free and paid for tours. Each of these roles are integral to providing a warm and hospitable welcome, a personal touch to visits and providing additional information and signposting as required. Additional roles will be required for interpretative areas and engagement on Vicars' Close when new spaces and resources are added. As the Vicars' Close work is likely to be the first phase of interpretation development, the introduction will provide an ideal opportunity for a review of customer facing roles, both paid and voluntary, and further or refresher training. As each element of new interpretation is added, training will be provided for all visitor facing staff and volunteers to ensure the highest standard of knowledge and customer service. Staff and volunteers will provide both a light touch approach and also be able to deliver more detailed information for those that want it.

Deliverables

- Assess the current entry point for the Cathedral against the criteria of clear access and welcome, remodelling accordingly. Take into account a potential second point of entry for attractions and activities on Vicars' Close, which could operate either as part of ticketed offer that includes the Undercroft in the Cathedral or independently when the Cathedral needs to close to the public for events or private hire.
- Review tour frequency, themes and times and expand if beneficial
- Review existing volunteer roles and training to ensure the highest standards of customer service are delivered.

5.3 Paid for extras

Opening up a number of buildings on Vicars' Close (two houses, treasury, chapel) and also utilising the Undercroft within the Cathedral building for interpretation and temporary exhibitions will be critical for income generation and contribution to financial sustainability. These spaces will be arranged to deliver high quality interpretation and temporary exhibitions providing a very different experience of the Cathedral.

Specialist tours such as the Cathedral High Parts tour and the Precinct tour, currently ticketed, could be extended to include new facilities on Vicars' Close, extending potential audiences and income and delivering a greater experience of the entire complex. In conjunction with specialist tours a new app will be available to download for a fee with multiple layers of interpretation including augmented, virtual and mixed reality elements.

The Cathedral's concert and event programme will align with interpretation and engagement themes and threads and will be developed in house to maximise income potential.

- Create interpretation spaces on Vicars' Close with temporary and permanent exhibitions and space for activities such as family workshops.
- Open up access to Vicars' Hall, the Vicars' Treasury and Chapel to make accessible hidden treasures across the complex
- Upgrade the interpretation in the Undercroft with temporary and permanent elements
- Draw concert and events programme into wider interpretation strategy with cohesive objectives
- Expand ticketed tours programme to incorporate new facilities in the Undercroft and on Vicars Close
- Create a marketing plan and ticketing offer for all new interpretation, tours and events

6. Funding and implementation

The first phase of the interpretation will be elements relating to Vicars' Close, developed through a National Lottery Heritage Fund project to open access and conserve the physical heritage. The project will include creating two interpretation spaces in two of the Close's houses and opening up access to the Chapel at the north end of the Close and the communal hall, kitchen and treasury block at the south end.

The second phase of interpretation will require a separate strategy for funding, with some elements created in house and others outsourced. Once the Vicars' Close project is underway, attention will given to the wider site, providing a costed plan for delivery and an accompanying fundraising strategy.

Global Interpretation Costs Estimates

Vicars' Close Interpretation and Engagement	£870,000
Cathedral App	£50-80,000
Enhanced website and extended digital footprint	£25-30,000
New permanent exhibits for Chapter House Undercroft	£350-500,000
Site wide signage	£35-50,000
Total	£1,355,000 - £1,530,000

7. Audiences and implications for interpretation

7.1 Current Audiences

Approximately 290,000 people per year visit the Cathedral across all its activities, slightly above the national average for Church of England Cathedrals.

Most visitors to the Cathedral (85%) visit without children, are over 55 years (59%) and are women (68%). They are predominantly tourists (74%), who are 'staying visitors' (59%) rather than 'day trippers' and travelled from holiday accommodation rather than home. Over half (53%) are visiting for the first time and the vast majority travel by car (80%) and travel more than 25 miles (72%) to visit.

Visitor household income is relatively evenly spread, with the highest concentration (c.40%) earning between £11,000 and £30,000pa. In terms of social grade, the profile of Wells Cathedral visitors is predominantly AB and C1. In the Mosaic Experian Consumer Segmentation model the three main groups represented in Wells Cathedral's visitors are Group B – Professional Rewards, Group F – Suburban Mindsets and Group D - Small Town Diversity.

7.2 Organised Learning Audiences

Approximately 4,800 school children participate in the Cathedral's education programme per year. The Cathedral offers, self-guided visits, bookable education sessions and themed days. In 2019 (last full year prior to Covid pandemic) the Cathedral launched a wellbeing day with the Diocese of Bath & Wells education department, to which 95 children from 10 schools attended. There is a desire to expand the education programme to incorporate outreach to schools and young people in the immediate community and across the county.

7.3 Target Audiences

Though programming, interpretation and outreach, the Cathedral is aiming to diversify its audience with particular focus on the following groups:

- Families and Young People
- The elderly
- People living with disabilities
- People living with rural and social isolation
- People in low skilled employment or unemployed
- People living in areas of digital poverty
- People not in education, employment or training, specifically young people

7.4 Implications for Interpretation

For all audiences interpretation has to be accessible in terms of language, presentation and method of delivery. Interpretation could be zoned by content for different audience groups.

Interpretation will need to contain enough appeal to generate repeat visits by regular visitors, either from a changing programme of temporary exhibitions or through interpretation or a feature of interpretation that connects with visitors enough to encourage repeat visits.

Sufficient variety of visit options will also promote continued repeat visits.

Interpretation will drive placemaking and a sense of community pride and ownership.

Interpretation will create learning opportunities, sparking intellectual connections between people, place, context and history.

Some interpretative spaces will need to be quiet, others could be designed to encourage conversation, debate and interaction.

The Cathedral aspires to working with apprentices during the design and build process, particularly those who would otherwise not be in education, employment or training.

A digital element of interpretation would be encouraged to help encourage visitors from areas of digital poverty to build digital confidence and awareness.

A prominent marketing campaign will be required to generate further, wider geographical engagement.

Interpretation will connect the Cathedral with other sites of interest locally, regionally and nationally.