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Mottisfont Abbey — Secondary Spend Case Study



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Louise Govier, General Manager, Mottisfont & SW Hants Group, National Trust interviewed by **Jacqueline Haxton**, AMA Editor



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“If you can make your own unrestricted earned income you will be liberated — you will be free to do the core purpose of your organisation — to do the brilliant and creative work that you want to do with all communities.”



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Background

Mottisfont Abbey



Mottisfont Abbey is a National Trust property in Hampshire, England. Sheltered in the valley of the River Test, Mottisfont Abbey sits within a 1,600 acre estate, with 64 cottages that are rented out.

Originally a priory, this historic property was turned into a house in Tudor times. A medieval church is still visible at the heart of the property.

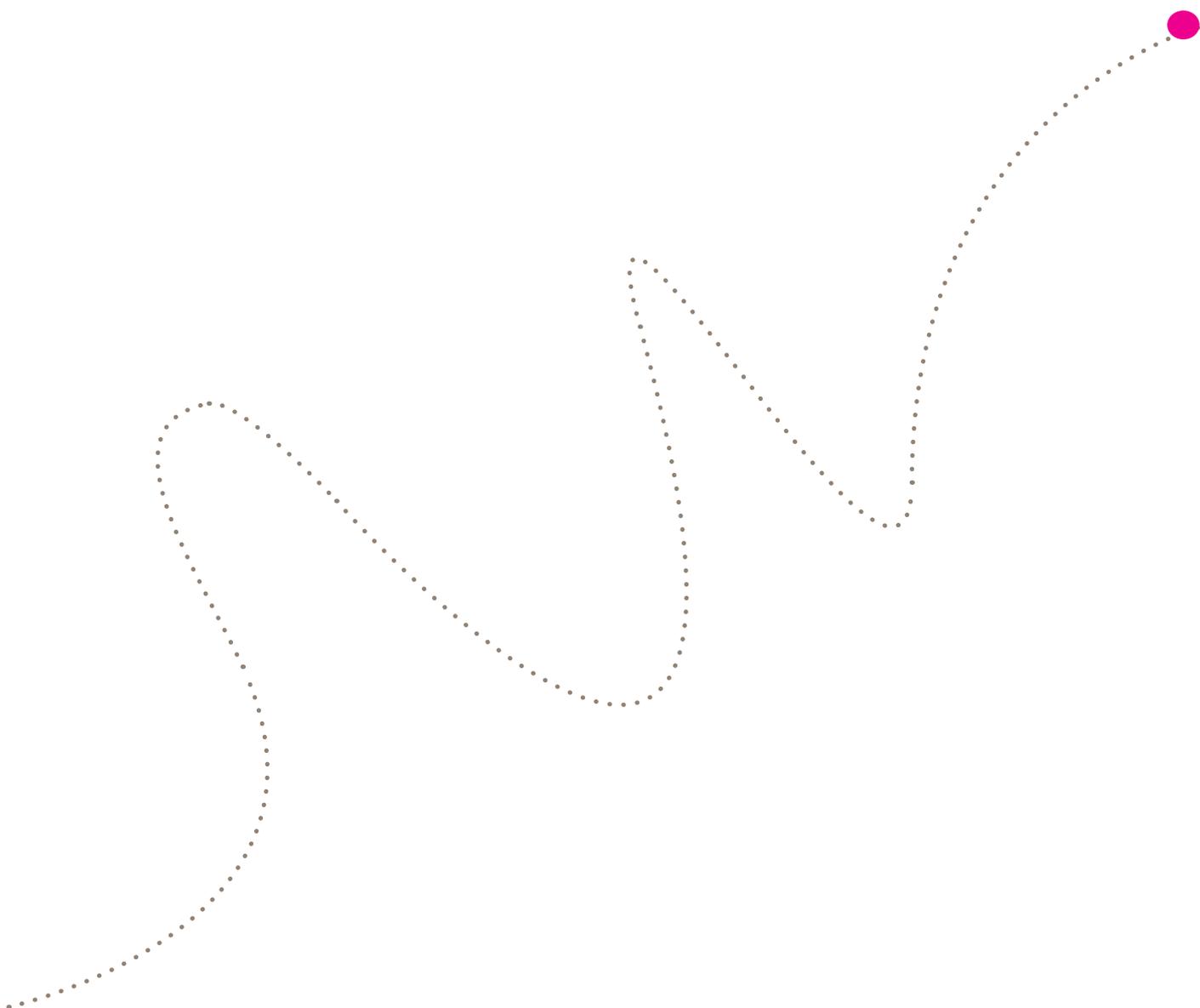
Mottisfont is home to the Derek Hill collection of early modern art, donated by one of the many artists who came to weekend parties hosted by the owner, Maud Russell, who lived here from the 1930s to the 1960s. Maud also commissioned Rex Whistler to cover her drawing room with illusionistic *trompe l'oeil* decorations.

There are lovely gardens and grounds, and a famous collection of old fashioned roses that flower for three weeks of the year in June. It's a beautiful place to visit.

Our visitors comprise of:

- **Adults visiting without children**
- **Family visits – inter-generational families of all shapes and sizes**

We focus on having a provision all the time for adults and young children, and we increase the family programme during school holidays and at weekends.



Funding

The National Trust is not funded by the government or any other central organisation. We are a self-supporting charity so we're always mindful of keeping money coming in and the relationship between income and expenditure.

Although we're a non-profit organisation we do want to make a surplus so that we can spend that money on looking after amazing places and countryside. Visitors often don't realise how much it costs to maintain grounds, ancient buildings and open countryside, and to make them accessible for large amounts of people.

We always need to make secondary income as we don't get regular grants and we need to make sure we make enough income to do the work that we want to do.

Mottisfont Abbey

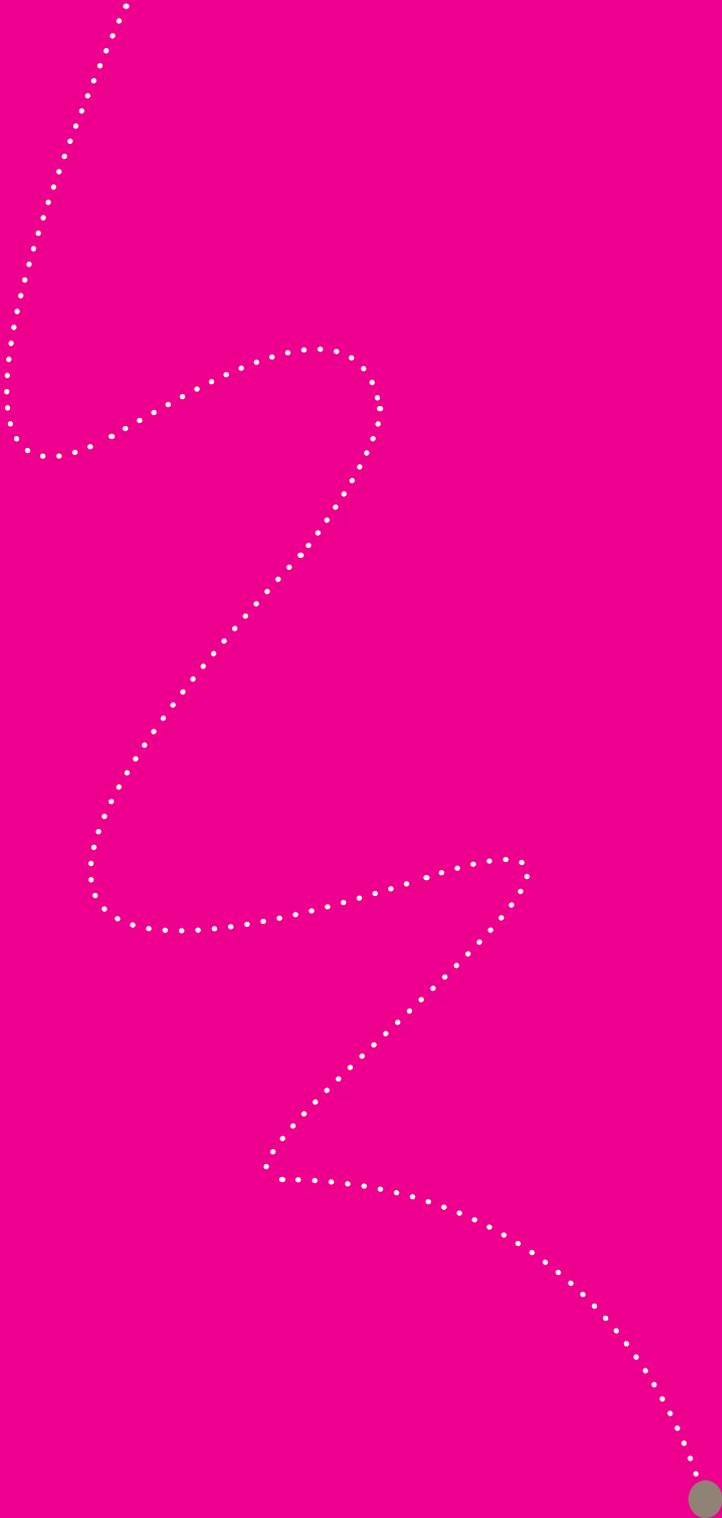
When I first joined Mottisfont the main focus of the business was the three weeks in June when our rose collection flowered. This was a fragile business model because if the weather was bad or it rained, visitor numbers would be down.

If a third of your visitors come during three weeks of the year that's a lot of under-used capacity the rest of the year when we could be generating income for the charity and for the conservation and engagement work that we want to do.

The questions we needed to address were:

- **How can we make this a sustainable year-round business?**
- **How can we maximise our income opportunities?**

Secondary spend



Secondary spend

— focus on the core business

At Mottisfont we've focused on our **core business**. We've been creative in our thinking around secondary spend but have tried to keep thinking about what we're actually set up to do well.

Mottisfont is a pay for entry site so secondary spend is everything that visitors spend when they're on site, which includes:

- **Retail**
- **Catering**
- **Membership sales**
- **On-site fundraising**
e.g. buying a raffle ticket or making a donation

The National Trust is a membership organisation and the majority of our visitors are members. If visitors are happy — they're having a good time, enjoying themselves — then they will spend more time here and are happy to spend money on an ice-cream, a tasty, homemade cake and a decent cup of coffee.

We make a profit on all of the secondary spend, so it's a form of income generation that's very important to us.

We've chosen to focus on secondary spend rather than front-loading admission prices, so that we maximise potential visitor numbers and also avoid annoying members with additional charges.

Instead at Mottisfont we've focused on visitors having a lovely time so that they come back several times a year, stay longer and feel like spending more on refreshments or buying a present in our gift shop. It's a virtuous circle that so far seems to be working.

Reasons to return

— improve and expand on what you have

Since 2010 visitor numbers to Mottisfont have more than doubled.

We achieved this by:

- Opening 363 days a year
- Improving our family trails
- Introducing wild play facilities
- Setting up a designated water-play area
- Opening an art gallery

We've enabled more secondary spend by investing in:

- Catering — created more indoor and outdoor seating
- New Welcome Centre with shop and plant centre, enabling better retail and membership sales performance

Outdoor play

As well as improving our family trails, we've introduced wild play facilities within our grounds. Guided by our playful, creative 'spirit of place', we worked with local families to co-create designs that an artist transformed into a climbing bog, using fallen trees from our woodlands. This helps protect our ancient trees by encouraging visitors to climb here rather than on the fragile boughs — and kids love the mud.

Our river is beautiful but it is also dangerous and it's where salmon and trout spawn — so we don't want visitors to wade about in there. We therefore introduced a designated water play area, where you can pump, paddle and dam the water.

Art Gallery



Mottisfont's last owner, Maud Russell, was an art patron who hosted many artists, writers and musicians at her weekend parties. This tradition of creative gatherings inspired us to make Mottisfont Abbey a house of art again, filling empty rooms with different exhibitions that appeal to a wide audience.

We took some unused space in the house and opened it up as an art gallery with five exhibitions a year.

A key question at the time when we were planning the art gallery was — do we charge an additional entry fee for these exhibitions? I felt strongly that we shouldn't.

It was about saying: we have one admission charge for Mottisfont and once you're in you can enjoy the grounds, the river, the house and the exhibition; then hopefully visitors would stay longer and engage more with the secondary spend options. They might even be persuaded to take up National Trust membership if they weren't already a member.

Eating and drinking

One of the barriers that we had was that we didn't have enough inside seating for the colder months. So, two years ago we built a new Welcome Centre at our entrance, which has a shop and plant centre. We converted our former shop in the stables into a second catering outlet with both indoor and outdoor seating — this has a lovely sheltered courtyard and is an ideal refreshment spot for families with children or visitors with dogs.



Image courtesy ©National Trust Images/Sophie Wilkinson

The original café is on the ground floor of the main historic house, and has a full range of hot foods served on china.

We've differentiated the catering offers to appeal to different visitor needs, and we put great emphasis on making our own food and cakes. You can smell the bakery in the mornings as you walk around the house, which is great advertising.

Now that we have two catering outlets we have the capacity for our visitors to come and spend more time in our cafés — we're no longer losing visitors at lunchtime to the local pub.

Welcome Centre and Membership sales

Our Membership sales team are now located in our new Welcome Centre. This enables the team to welcome visitors within a more spacious, relaxed environment and to talk to non-members about the benefits of National Trust membership and the difference that they can make to our heritage by supporting our cause. By making these changes we've found that membership sales have increased and profitability has gone up.



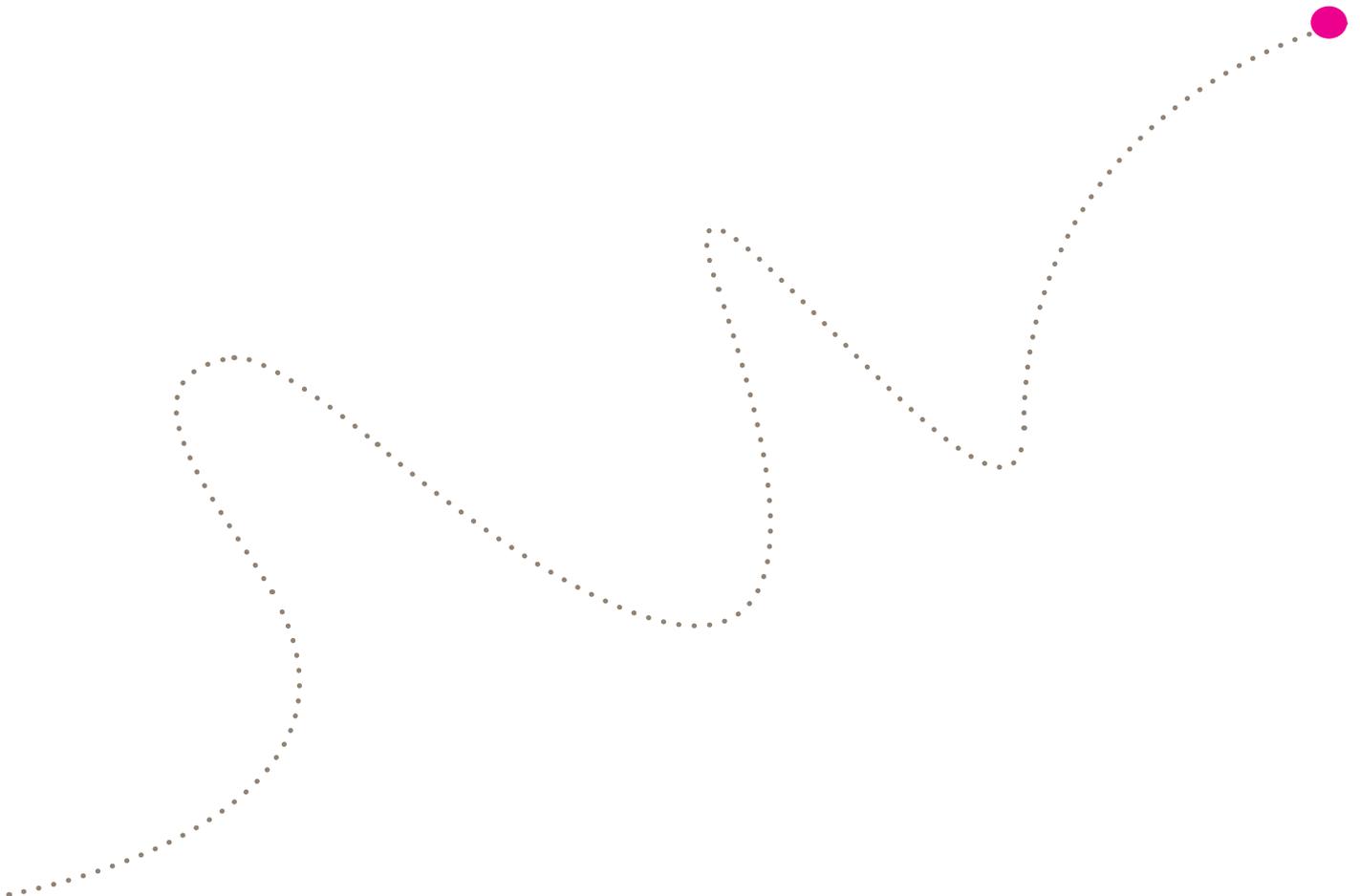
Image courtesy of National Trust Images / James Deane

Team work

Rather than doing something completely new or completely different, we've focused on improving on what we had already and we had the teams in place to do the work. We've enabled all the different teams at Mottisfont by giving them the right training and settings to do their work well and as a result visitor numbers have increased and secondary spend and income has increased.

Special events

There are lots of income-generating ideas that seem attractive, such as special events — but these often only reach out to a relatively small number of people, and can take up a lot of staff time. By the time you cost in your time the return on investment (ROI) on even the biggest events may not be worth it. Events can be a big distraction away from your core business.



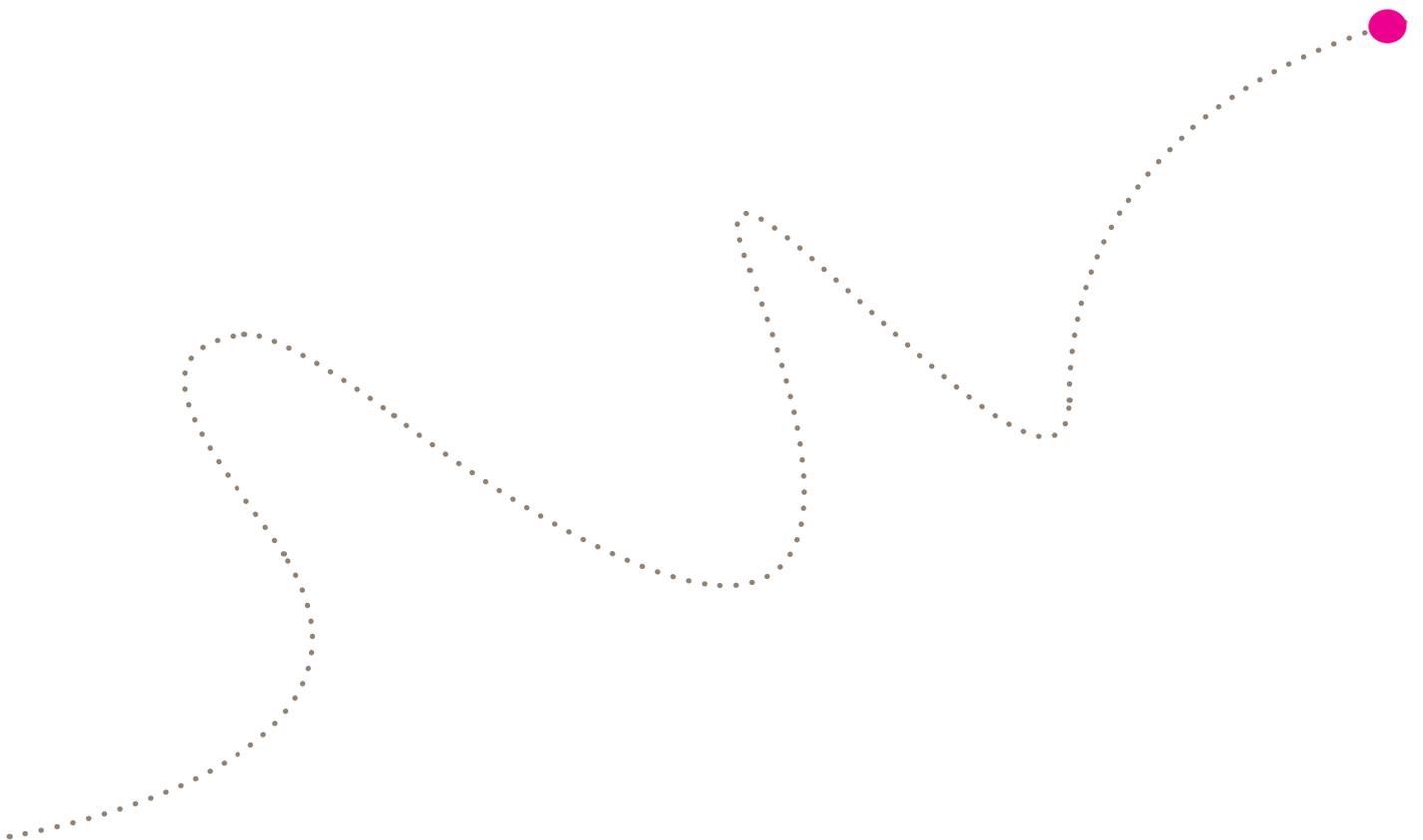
Think about...

What is your core business? And how can you do that better?

What are the main ways of getting income?

What are you set up to do as a business?

What do you have to sell or offer that people want or need?



Impact

— benefits of increasing capacity

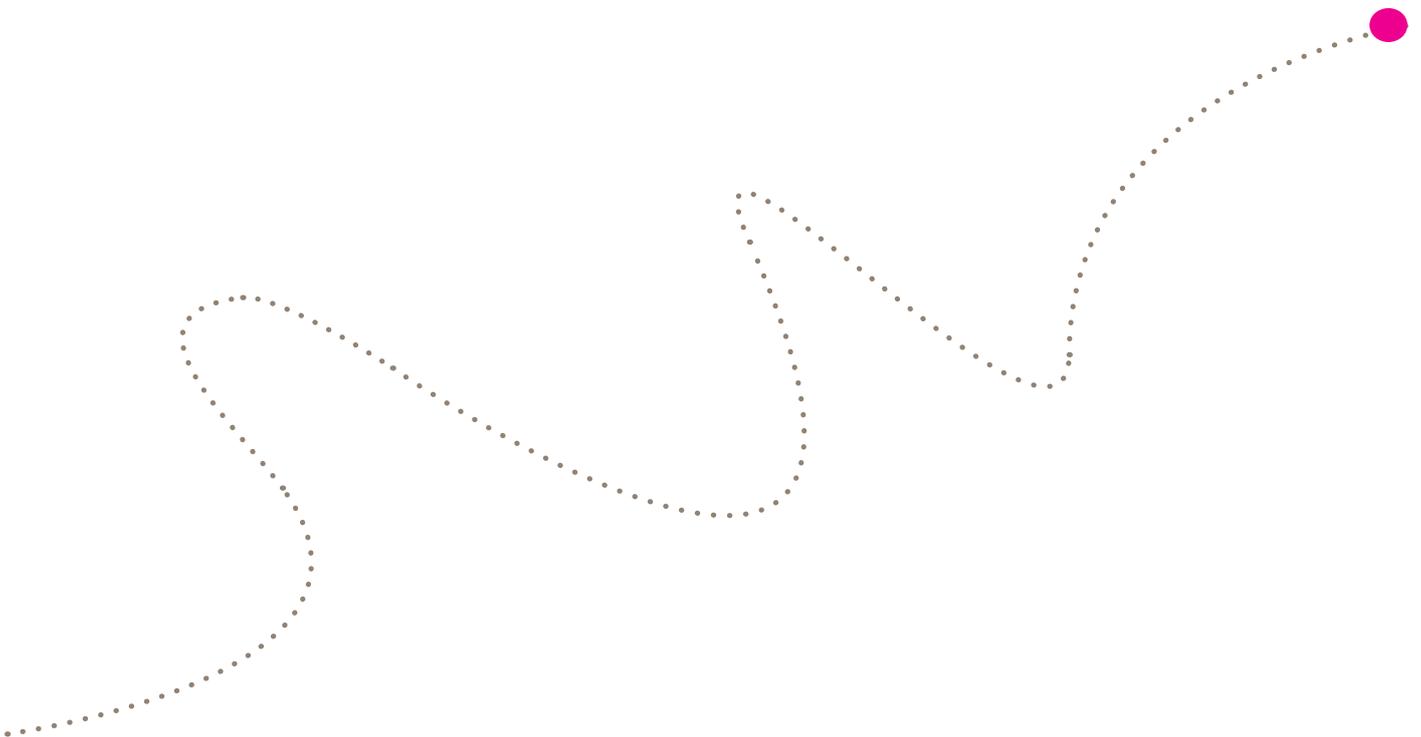
There's a connection between the income generated and the work that we do — if visitors are enjoying themselves then they're willing to spend more.

Increasing capacity on what we already do at Mottisfont has had a significant impact. The following figures show the percentage increase in visitor numbers, catering and retail, and membership recruitment from 2013-14 until 2017-18:

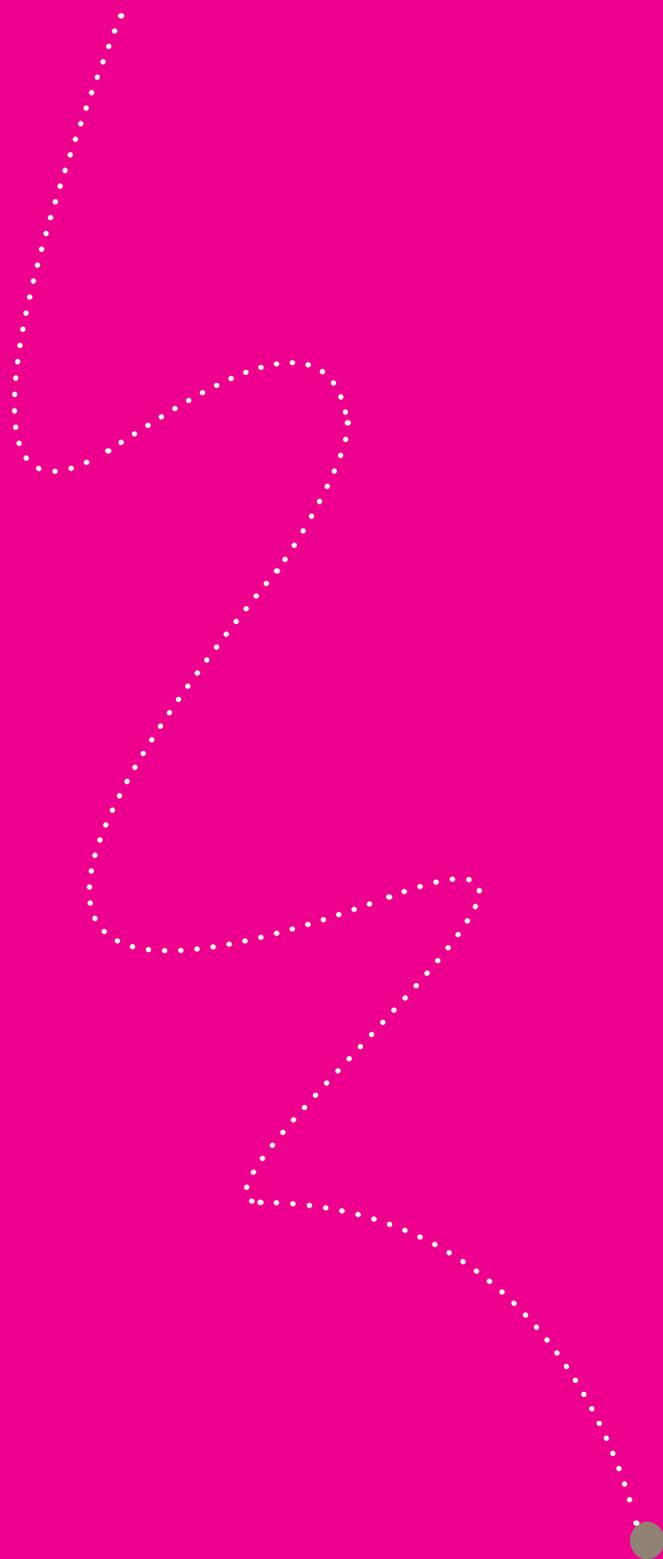
- **Visitor numbers up by 43%**
- **Catering & retail income up by 62%**
- **Membership sales up by 125%**

The increase in secondary spend is higher than the increase in visitor numbers — this is partly because we've invested in the infrastructure to give us better facilities, but it's also due to the hard work and focus of the Mottisfont team.

With shared understanding across the organisation income generation is not a dirty word. More income means that we can do a piece of conservation or engagement work that would not otherwise take place.



Recommendations



Secondary spend

— key recommendations

– **What do you have?**

What do you do that people want or need, and that they are prepared to spend money on?

– **Don't be frightened of making money**

There are some things that you have or can offer that some people will have the money to spend on — and there's nothing wrong with that.

Remember:

This income will enable you to do activities that perhaps don't make money or to do things with people who can't afford it — secondary spend can enable you to do the creative work that you want to do with everyone.

– **Special events and new activities**

Don't get distracted by time-hungry, exciting new activities or special events — always ask the question: "what's the return on investment (ROI) on this activity?" After you've costed in everything, including staff time, is it going to make a surplus? You can spend a lot of time and energy organising a special event or new activity with not much financial return.

Remember:

You could tweak something that you're already doing — doing it well may give you a better return.

– **Building capacity**

Look for where there's potential growth in capacity — more visitors, more spend, more dwell time. Think about what the barriers are for building capacity. For example, needing more indoor seating.

– **Creative thinking**

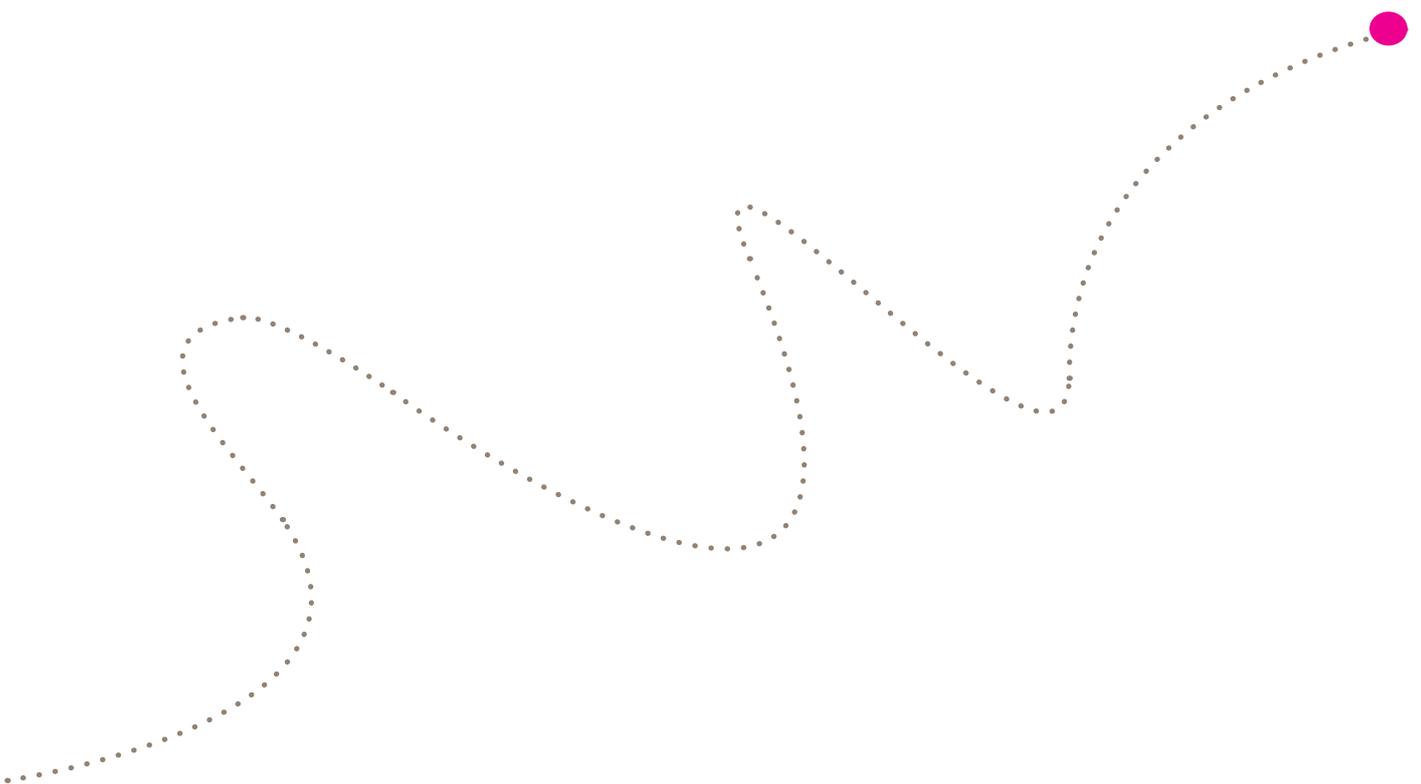
Get everyone's input and ideas, with the proviso that you'll always have to consider the resources you have (including time), and that not every idea can be taken forward.

– **Keep an eye on the costs**

There's no point increasing income if your expenditure goes up at the same rate. Try to keep making the gap between income and expenditure bigger all the time, so that you're not increasing your costs at the same rate as you're increasing your income.

Remember:

You need to gain surplus on your income so that you can reinvest that in the core purpose of your organisation.





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