Cambridge City Council Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

This tool helps the Council ensure that we fulfil legal obligations of the Public Sector Equality Duty to have due regard to the need to –

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Guidance on how to complete this tool can be found on the Cambridge City Council intranet. For specific questions on the tool email Helen Crowther, Equity and Community Power Manager at equalities@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223 457046.

Once you have drafted the EqIA please send this to equalities@cambridge.gov.uk for checking

1. Title of strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service
Civic Quarter Project – Corn Exchange

2. Webpage link to full details of the strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service (if available)
https://cambridgecivicquarter.co.uk/ Committee report – 29th January 2024 Committee report – 21st November 2024 Cabinet Report - 25th September 2025

3. What is the objective or purpose of your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?
The Civic Quarter project considers the future of three key Council assets: The Guildhall, the Market Square and the Corn Exchange. There are three primary objectives for the project. 1. Creating a more attractive central Cambridge destination for residents that would increase visitor numbers for the market, the Corn Exchange, and businesses in the area 2. Enhancing revenue streams across these three sites and reducing operational costs to ensure we can preserve services that our residents need and value most 3. Helping the council to meet its net zero carbon by 2030 target. This EqIA focuses on the Corn Exchange element of the wider project.

The project will be delivered in phases with the Council having the opportunity to review outputs at key gateways before commitment to subsequent phases. The current phase relates to the completion of RIBA Stage 4 (technical designs) and updated business case and business plans. We are seeking approval from Cabinet and Full Council to proceed to the construction phase (RIBA Stage 5) from January 2027.

The scheme received planning permission and listed building consent in March 2026.

RIBA is a widely recognised framework established by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) for Construction work. They organise the process of managing and designing construction projects into eight easy-to- understand stages.

Corn Exchange

The cabinet report in September 2025 highlights the potential to make the Corn Exchange a more modern and appealing venue with improvements to the facilities, exploring new commercial opportunities and reducing operational costs.

The detailed design work has focussed on improved accessibility with the provision of new lifts. Increased access to bars, with a new mezzanine bar overlooking the current foyer space. Improved provision of toilets to reduce interval queuing times.

Key features of the Corn Exchange Design (at end of RIBA Stage 4)

- **Step-free access** throughout the venue, including backstage and stage areas, ensures performers and visitors with mobility needs can fully participate.
- **Three new lifts** improve access to all levels, including the mezzanine bar and wheelchair viewing platforms. The lifts can be used for evacuation purposes.
- **Toilet provision** is expanded and improved, with accessible toilets on multiple floors and better layout to reduce queuing and congestion. This includes the provision of Gender-Neutral toilets on the ground floors, accepting the space constraints of a listed building particularly on the basement and first floor.
- **Inclusive seating** provides an increase to 15 positions for wheelchair users, with improved sightlines and comfort.
- **Sensory-friendly features** like clear signage and lighting support for neurodiverse visitors.
- **Backstage upgrades** include accessible dressing rooms and showers, promoting equal opportunities for performers and staff.
- **Parsons Court** will be transformed into an accessible outdoor social space, improving arrival experience and reducing antisocial behaviour.

Project Timetable

March 2026 – Planning and Listed Building consent approvals

October 2026 - Report to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet seeking approval to proceed to construction phase.

November 2026 – Full Council approval to release project funding and enter into works contract

November 2026 – January 2027 – Completion of the decant of 3 Parsons Court and Corn Exchange

January 2027 – Start on site.

Summer 2028 – Completion of works

4. **Responsible team**
Development Team, Economy & Place Group

5. **Who will be affected by this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?** **(Please tick all that apply)**	☒ Residents ☒ Visitors ☒ Staff

There are a wide range of stakeholders that will be affected

- Council staff working in the Corn Exchange and Events
- Customers of Corn Exchange
- Event promoters, performers and suppliers
- Surrounding businesses, including Arts Theatre, pubs & restaurants and shops
- General public, visitors and residents
- Cambridge University as they own many buildings close by
- Visitors to the City centre

There has been ongoing direct engagement activity across a range of internal and external stakeholders and updates via the Civic Quarter Liaison Group.

6. **What type of strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service is this?**	☒ New ☐ Major change ☐ Minor change

7. **Are other departments or partners involved in delivering this strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service? (Please tick)**	☒ Yes ☐ No

The project will be managed by the Development Team; Place & Economy Group and the Assistant Director (Development) is the Sponsor.

There are several subject matter experts from across the Council that will feed into the project, particularly from Cultural Services, Property, Procurement, Policy, HR, Customer Services, Transformation, Greater Cambridge Planning Service, Democratic Services, Economic Development, City Services and Communications

The Council will work with the Design Team/Consortia as a key partner throughout the project. Cartwright Pickard was reappointed as design consortia lead in January 2025 for RIBA stages 3 and 4 of the project.

Sir Robert McAlpine have been appointed as the main contractor.

8. Has the report on your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service gone to Committee? If so, which one?

Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee - Committee report – 29th January 2024
Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee - Committee report – 21st November 2024
Cabinet - Cabinet Report - 25th September 2025

There was an overarching report that went to Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in October 2022 on the Council's Future Office Accommodation Strategy.

The next reports to Cabinet will be in November 2026 and Full Council in November 2026 seeking approval to proceed to the construction phase (RIBA Stage 5) from January 2027.

9. What research methods/ evidence have you used in order to identify equality impacts of your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service?

Corn Exchange

- Information on age of the audiences as people are required to add in details of their age when booking
- Cultural Strategy – committee report and strategy document
- Number requesting disabled seating as audience members – from the booking system
- Information on staff members' protected characteristics from the Equality in Employment report
- Internal staff workshops on initial design requirements – April 2024 (also attended by Access Officer and Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer) and follow up detailed design workshops – March and April 2025.
- Community Engagement took place in May 2025 and outcomes report published in August 2025

10. Potential impacts

For each category below, please explain if the strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service could have a positive/ negative impact or no impact. Where an impact has been identified, please explain what it is. Consider impacts on service users, visitors and staff members separately.

(a) Age - Please also consider any safeguarding issues for children and adults at risk

The average age of patrons is quite high (46), and the civic quarter work will enhance our ambition in our Cultural Strategy to attract younger audiences – especially aged between 18 to 35.

The proposed improvements to access, seating and additional toilets will provide a positive impact for all ages. The acoustic improvements will have a positive impact for all patrons. The inclusion of an outdoor event space in Parsons Court, improved beverage options will have a positive impact on all patrons and could lead to increasing the attractiveness to the venue for younger audiences.

(b) Disability

Workforce and Artists

The additional facilities providing level access rear of house, with a new accessible dressing room with accessible toilet and shower on ground floor and an accessible toilet on the first floor, will provide a positive impact for performers and could extend the offering of shows and performers.

Patrons

The proposals have a number of positive impacts.

The proposal includes step free access which will benefit people who have mobility disabilities.

An increase from 1 to 3 lifts (2 front of house and 1 back of house) will improve significantly the access to all levels for people with mobility impairments.

The number and location wheelchair accessible seats will be expanded and improved to 15 and the new locations on the parterre will provide positions with a direct view of the stage.

An increase in the provision of accessible toilets by 1 will have a positive impact, the venue will now provide 1 on the ground floor and 2 on the first floor.

There will be positive impacts for people with visual and hearing impairments with a refresh of signage and of updating audio equipment.

A wayfinding approach is being developed that ensures signage confirms to the relevant British Standards and is clear, with Easy Read (words and pictures for people who have Learning Disabilities, English as second language, low literacy). Signage at lower level and in the lifts will include braille and the lifts will include informative announcements.

The lighting will improve experience for people with visual impairments and support needs of neurodiverse individuals,

The improvements within Parsons Court can help create safer, more welcoming spaces for disabled individuals, who may be more vulnerable to harassment in public areas and hate crime.

(c) Gender reassignment

Workforce and Artists

Back of house, universal dressing rooms and adjacent shower and toilet facilities on ground floor and universal toilet on the first floor will be provided.

Patrons

There are universal toilet facilities in the foyer area which is accessible from the main auditorium. On the first and second floor there is a single universal toilet, the areas that they are away from crowded areas and may, therefore, need additional surveillance either by CCTV or stewarding to ensure that those use the facilities feel safe.

The overall increase of toilet provision will have some positive impact for gender reassignment and non-binary and gender fluid people.

The outside space by Parsons Court will be well lit, free of clutter and covered by CCTV, so should support transgender people enjoy this area who may experience anti-social behaviour or hate incidents.

(d) Marriage and civil partnership

No impact has currently been identified for this protected characteristic group.

(e) Pregnancy and maternity

The designs provide a range of seating options in the bar areas, and the main auditorium is well served with lifts.

There could be some negative impact with limited designated cloakroom or storage space for prams and buggies, however, depending on the type of event or use of the venue, operational arrangements may overcome this with the use of closed off spaces for certain events e.g. St Johns Bar.

In the case of baby changing facility for parents to use, we plan to include this provision within the accessible toilets on the ground floor and first floors, as we are constrained by space, however, we are aware that will potentially delay someone who has a disability (hidden or visible) accessing the facilities they need.

(f) Race – Note that the protected characteristic 'race' refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.

There could be positive impacts from the improvements work, alongside the implementation of the Cultural Strategy, which will help with attracting a diverse programme of events.

A wayfinding approach is being developed that ensures signage confirms to the relevant British Standards and is clear, with Easy Read (words and pictures) for whom English is their second language.

(g) Religion or belief

There may be some negative impacts from the inclusion of the additional bars which may not fully consider the needs of non-drinking communities or religious groups. However, event programmers have the option to close the bar or only make non-alcoholic drinks available for specific events.

(h) Sex

Within male and female toilet facilities at basement level will be refurbished are being retained, these support the main auditorium and the high demand around start and end times of performance and intervals.

There 3 new universal toilet facilities in the ground foyer area which is accessible from the main auditorium, and this will help with capacity at intervals.

On the first-floor male/female toilets are being retained and refurbished.

The increase in the number of toilets, whilst recognising the constraints of a listed building, will have a positive impact.

We will keep under review the final determination of how the toilets will be gendered once the Council's approach to the EHRC code of practice is set in November 2026.

Parsons Court may particularly benefit women and girls, who are statistically more affected by antisocial behaviour and safety concerns in public spaces. outdoor areas like Parsons Court must be carefully designed to ensure women feel safe, especially at night. This supports the city's Purple Flag status by improving safety related to the nighttime economy.

(i) Sexual orientation

Patrons

The improvements within Parsons Court can help create safer, more welcoming spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals, who may be more vulnerable to harassment in public areas.

(j) Other factors that may lead to inequality – in particular, please consider the impact of any changes on:

- **Low-income groups or those experiencing the impacts of poverty.**
- **People of any age with care experience – this refers to individuals who spent part of their childhood in the care system due to situations beyond their control, primarily arising from abuse and neglect within their families. The term "Care experience" is a description of a definition in law, it includes anyone that had the state as its corporate parent by virtue of a care order in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and amendments.**
- **Groups who have more than one protected characteristic that taken together create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. (Here you are being asked to consider intersectionality, and for more information see: https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1_l59kt25q).**

- **Low-income individuals and families** may be excluded if ticket prices rise post-renovation especially for premium events
- **Young people**, **older adults**, and **disabled individuals**—who may be on fixed or lower incomes—could face barriers to participation.
- **LGBTQ+ people**, **ethnic minorities**, and **single-parent households** are statistically more likely to experience economic disadvantage, making affordability a key inclusion issue.UK Poverty 2025: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK | Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Pakistani and Bangladeshi households are 3 times more likely to be in poverty. If pricing structures favour commercial or high-end programming, it may reduce access to community-led or culturally diverse events.

11. Action plan – New equality impacts will be identified in different stages throughout the planning and implementation stages of changes to your strategy, policy, plan, project, contract or major change to your service. How will you monitor these going forward? Also, how will you ensure that any potential negative impacts of the changes will be mitigated? (Please include dates where possible for when you will update this EqIA accordingly.)

Update EqIA at the following project milestones

Review at 6 monthly stages whilst progressing through the construction phase and particularly at the fitting out stage and the commissioning/handover of the building back to the Council.

12. Do you have any additional comments?

No

13. Sign off
Name and job title of lead officer for this equality impact assessment: Paul Boucher (Capital Project Manager), Civic Quarter Project Names and job titles of other assessment team members and people consulted: Helen Crowther, Equity and Community Power Manager Graham Lewis, Community Equity Officer Thomas Thurbon, Venues General Manager, Corn Exchange Date of EqIA sign off: 1 October 2026 Date of next review of the equalities impact assessment: **May 2026** Date to be published on Cambridge City Council website: Click here to enter text.

All EqIAs need to be sent to equalities@cambridge.gov.uk