Cambridge Civic Quarter
Design and Access Statement
Corn Exchange

October 2025

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CAMBRIDGE
CITY COUNCIL

CARTWRIGHT
PICKARD

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1.0

Introduction and Context

1.1 Executive Summary

Preserving and modernising historic sites

Modernising the sites will help reduce the council's running costs, and providing space for commercial occupiers would increase the council's income to support frontline council services.

A green, sustainable place

We will target net zero operational carbon in the Guildhall and significant reductions in the Corn Exchange, water neutrality, and a net gain of 20% biodiversity, including trees to provide shade.

A place that works for Cambridge

Improving the experience of residents and visitors will make it easier for people to spend more time in the Corn Exchange, Market Square, and city centre shops, restaurants and bars.

Accessible and Inclusive

High quality public spaces with access for all, through high quality surfaces, the re-use of historic setts, public art and integrated discrete children's play.

Improved visitor experience

Reduce the space for vehicles, whilst maintaining access for servicing, to create attractive and inclusive public spaces.

Biodiversity and ecology

Provide green infrastructure to support biodiversity, increase resilience to climate change and improve people's experience.

150 Council Staff working in the Guildhall

Bringing the Council offices back to the Guildhall will consolidate operations, improving staff productivity and wellbeing

Commercial office space

The proposed works will protect a valuable and much loved Listed heritage asset. The upgraded Guildhall will contribute greater revenue, through the letting of commercial office space, and therefore help protect the Council budgets and front-line services.

Thriving 7 day Market

Creating a bustling seven-day market which is an accessible, attractive, welcoming, exciting and safe place to visit, shop and gather during the day and into the evening.

Flexible spaces

Provide flexible public spaces to support various types of events and uses.

Corn Exchange Increased standing capacity

Improving the experience of visitors to the Corn Exchange by sympathetically modernising the venue and increasing capacity for standing events.

Corn Exchange Acoustics and AV

Improving sound quality and new AV systems for events in the Corn Exchange, ensuring that performances and events meet higher standards for audiences and performers alike.

1.2 What is the Civic Quarter?

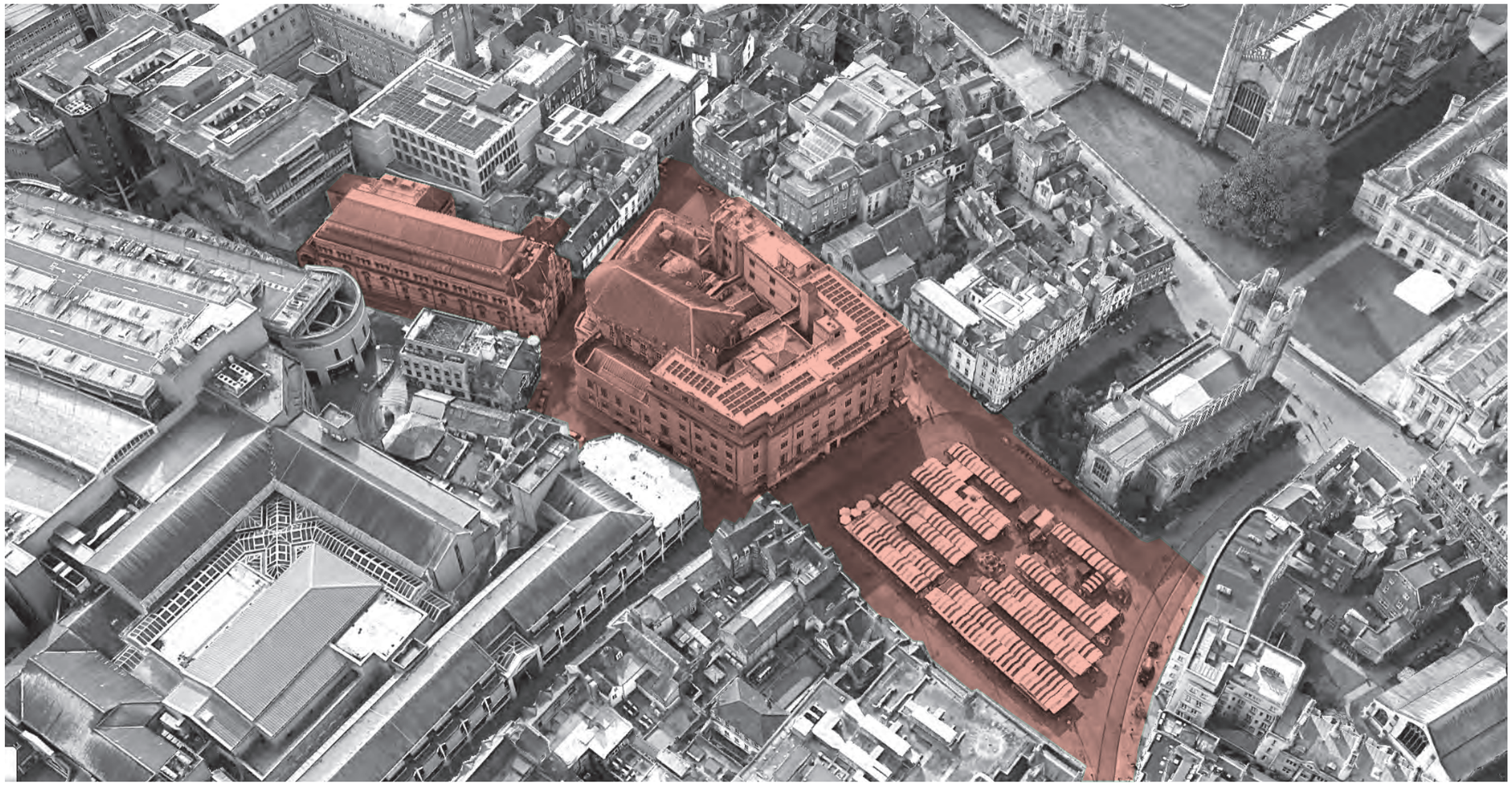
The Civic Quarter is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reconnect the Guildhall, Market Square, Corn Exchange, and surrounding public realm. The project will create an inclusive, attractive destination that enhances the civic heart of Cambridge, increasing visitor numbers and establishing a more vibrant, people-focused city centre.

The ambition is to improve the experience of residents and visitors through more accessible and inclusive buildings, alongside high-quality public spaces for meeting, trading and cultural events. At the same time, the project will conserve heritage assets, achieve water neutrality, reduce carbon emissions and running costs, and generate income to support frontline council services.

The scheme unites three listed assets—the Guildhall, Corn Exchange, and Market Square—linked by enhanced public realm. A coordinated approach to traffic, servicing and movement will strengthen connections between the assets and create a cohesive identity.

As custodians of these heritage buildings and spaces, Cambridge City Council is committed to refurbishing, revitalising, and renewing them for the 21st century. The Guildhall will be retrofitted to EnerPHit standards, enabling Net Zero Carbon operation in line with the UK Net Zero Carbon Building Standard and the Council's 2030 climate target. Energy use at the Corn Exchange will be significantly reduced, while public realm improvements will encourage active travel and prioritise walking and wheeling.

The Market Square will be transformed into a more accessible, welcoming and flexible civic space, with upgraded stalls, improved services for traders, and a better experience for customers. Designed for flexibility, it will host both daily markets and cultural events, strengthening its role as a key focal point of city life.



Aerial view of the Civic Quarter

The Civic Quarter is about more than buildings and spaces – it's about people. It will breathe new life into the very heart of Cambridge, creating a place where everyone can feel welcome, proud, and inspired. By bringing heritage and modern sustainability together, it will be a destination to enjoy every day and a stage for the city's biggest moments. This is our chance to create a civic heart worthy of Cambridge's past, present and future – and to leave a lasting legacy for generations to come.

1.3 The Brief

The Civic Quarter

The primary objectives of the Civic Quarter project were agreed at the January 2024 Strategy and Resources Committee as;

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. Making essential, long-term savings and enhancing revenue 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.

The Guildhall, Corn Exchange, Market Square and Public Realm all play key roles in achieving these aims. Collectively they will target Operational Net Zero, water neutrality and Net Gain in Biodiversity of 20%.

The Guildhall

A key goal of the Civic Quarter project is to reinstate the Guildhall as the main civic and office space for Cambridge City Council whilst future proofing it for years to come. This is key in light of Local Government Reform and proposed Unitary Authorities.

The proposals need to address the following four areas:

- Sustainability – the Council will require the Guildhall to be an exemplar project with a Net Zero Carbon aspiration.
- Office – the proposals should demonstrate that the Guildhall is capable of providing sufficient modern office desk space to accommodate current and future needs of the Council.
- Civic function – the proposals should demonstrate how the core civic functions will continue to be met. In addition, the building should accommodate a Customer Service function for the public.
- Commercial use – the Guildhall currently provides a range of commercial income generating uses. Opportunity should be taken to maximise commercial use including office, conferencing and civic functions.

Whilst delivering the above, the Guildhall proposals must consider the Grade II Listed status and the key requirement to make the Guildhall an accessible, inclusive and welcoming Civic space.

Corn Exchange

The Corn Exchange is one of East Anglia's largest and most significant concert venues, welcoming around 133,000 visitors annually and generating over £2 million in turnover. Its activity complements a wider network of local businesses, including the Arts Theatre, hospitality, and traders, with economic benefits extending beyond the venue itself.

The Civic Quarter proposals should focus on strengthening the Corn Exchange's competitiveness, accessibility, and sustainability. The brief sets out specific goals, including upgraded acoustics, modernised MEP and thermal systems, and enhanced food and beverage facilities within Parson's Court. These improvements must balance current event capacity with an improved comfort and customer experience, while aligning with the Council's net zero and water neutrality ambitions.

The Corn Exchange should also be designed to operate as a central component of the wider Civic Quarter. Its cultural offer should actively support events and activities which animate the Market Square and Guildhall, drawing visitors into the heart of the Quarter and sustaining local traders, hospitality venues, and the broader city economy. The brief ensures the venue functions as a connected, cohesive element within the Civic Quarter's cultural ecosystem, rather than as an isolated destination.

Market Square & Public Realm

The Public Realm will knit the Civic Quarter together and should set a new standard of quality in Cambridge. There are opportunities to add areas of planting and trees to improve biodiversity, whilst also providing shade.

The proposals should continue to consider the placemaking of the Civic Quarter to ensure that quality of design brings more people to the market by improving the Market Square and reinstating the historic importance of the Guildhall in the public life of the city.

Stakeholder engagement has identified key areas for improvement and the proposals should address the following key points;

- Improved seating and spaces to eat outside.
- A fully accessible market square and public realm with spaces for people to interact at the heart of the city.
- Match the area of existing market stalls whilst improving trader facilities.
- Provide a combination of fixed and demountable stalls.
- Improving opportunities for evening activities.
- Bring water back to the fountain.

The vision for the Market Square remains;

"An inspiring, strategic public realm heart to the city centre, the market square will be welcoming to all to work, visit and spend time here. A 21st century international and local multi-generational and multi-cultural space, celebrating Cambridge's history and heritage, it integrates a thriving, sustainable, accessible, safe and open environment, connecting the surrounding streets with spaces to shop, wander, stop and socialise. A bustling 7-day market, space for seating and eating, additional business and social opportunities and engaging and inclusive cultural events will add to the richness of the area, making this an active day and evening hub in the city centre for local businesses, residents, and the wider community."

1.4 The Applications
Linking the Civic Quarter

Bringing the Market Square, Corn Exchange, and Guildhall forward as one coordinated project creates a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the heart of Cambridge. Individually these are important places, but together they can form a dynamic Civic Quarter that celebrates heritage while delivering a bold, unified vision for the future.

By combining their development, the city can achieve far more than the sum of its parts: a seamless public realm, stronger connections between key cultural venues, and a distinctive identity that will attract visitors, support businesses, and enrich community life.

A single strategy also allows for coordinated access and servicing, and an outdoor events programme that brings new energy to the city centre — with the Market Square as the natural stage for civic life, cultural celebration, and daily activity.

The plans for the Civic Quarter have been designed holistically, following a very comprehensive pre-application process with detailed engagement provided by many different stakeholders. This holistic design approach has ensured that all aspects of the proposals work in harmony so that the social, economic and environmental opportunities and benefits of this project can be maximised.

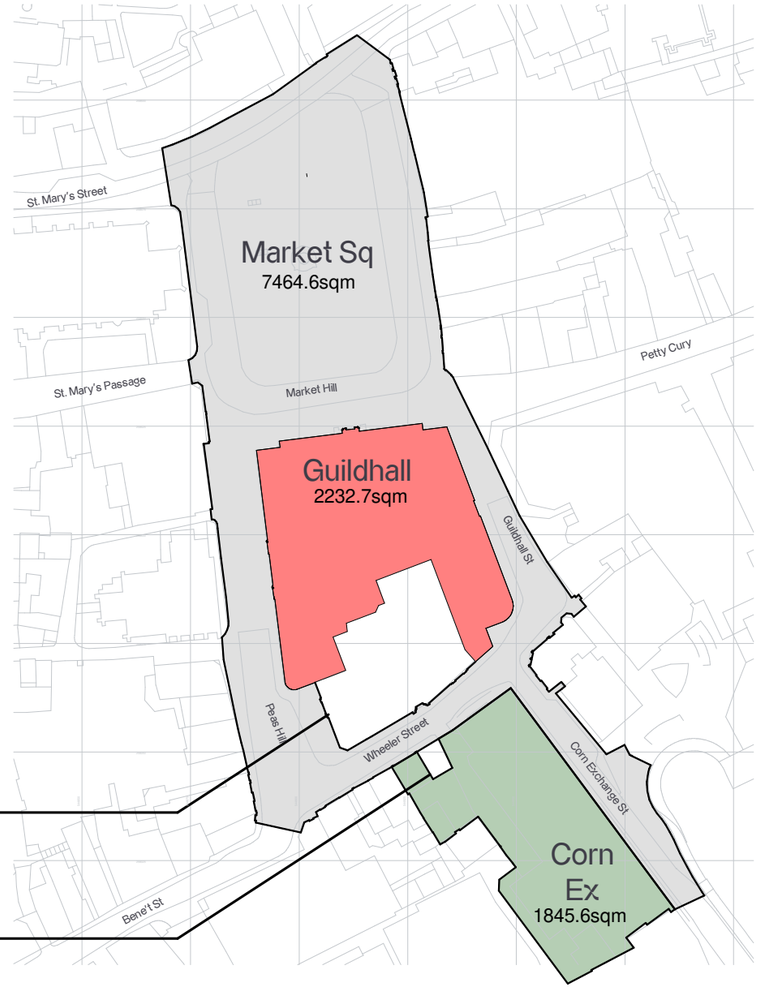
The applications have been designed so that each project (Guildhall, Corn Exchange and/or Market Square) can be implemented either collectively or in isolation. This ensures that the Civic Quarter project is adaptable and deliverable.

While the detailed phasing and delivery programme will be determined in due course, each of the projects have been designed so if needed, they can come forward in isolation as part of an initial phase of the wider Civic Quarter development. Each individual application will not prejudice the delivery of any other planned improvements across the Civic Quarter.

Guildhall: Planning and listed building consent is being sought for the refurbishment and extension of the Guildhall, installation of roof plant and screen, and landscaping of Peas Hill and Guildhall Street.

Corn Exchange: Planning and listed building consent applications are being lodged for refurbishment and extension of the Corn Exchange; changes to public realm; and alterations to 3 Parsons Court/2 Wheeler St and change of use to drinking establishment

Market Square: Planning and listed building consent is being applied for seeking approval for the refurbishment of Market Square, Peas Hill and Guildhall Street, including: provision of cycle parking; erection of replacement market stalls and covered seating area; refurbishment of Grade II listed setts; works to listed fountain and railings; and additional landscaping and street furniture.



2.0

The Corn Exchange

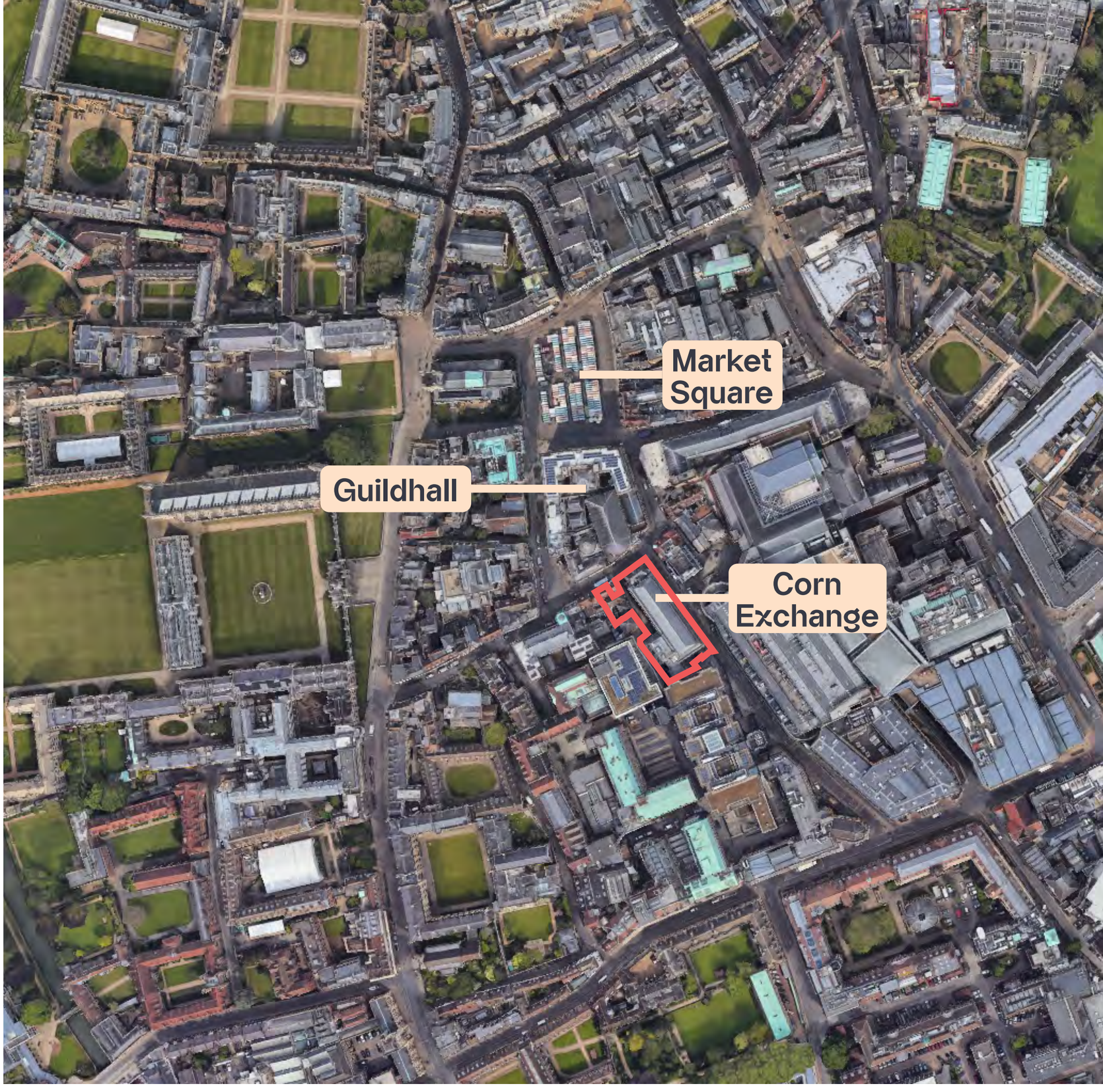
Context

2.1 Location

Cambridge Civic Quarter sits in the heart of the historic city centre.

The Corn Exchange is located in the heart of the city centre, just south of Market Square, on Wheeler Street. It is a prominent cultural venue housed in a Grade II listed Victorian building that originally functioned as a trading hall for grain merchants. The Corn Exchange sits within a vibrant cultural quarter, adjacent to the Cambridge Arts Theatre, Guildhall and the Grand Arcade shopping centre.

Together, the Corn Exchange and Arts Theatre form a cluster of performing arts venues, hosting a wide range of music, theatre, and public events throughout the year. The area is also framed by several University of Cambridge colleges, including King's and Corpus Christi, reinforcing the historic and academic character of the setting.



Aerial view of the site and surrounding context

2.2 Existing Use
Key Cultural Asset

Introduction

The Corn Exchange is one of the largest venues for concerts in East Anglia. It is a much loved arts, entertainment and conference venue with around 133,000 visitors per annum.

The Corn Exchange hosts a wide array of events and the 2024 calendar year forecast the largest number in the past 3 years, (influenced by Covid knock on effect) at 186 events running from April 2024 – March 2025.

The venue hosts a large variety of events from music to comedy, such as Rumours of Fleetwood Mac, Ricky Gervais, Russell Howard and the London Film Music Orchestra.

In 2025 the Corn Exchange has celebrated its 150th year and had a series of special events including a community open day.

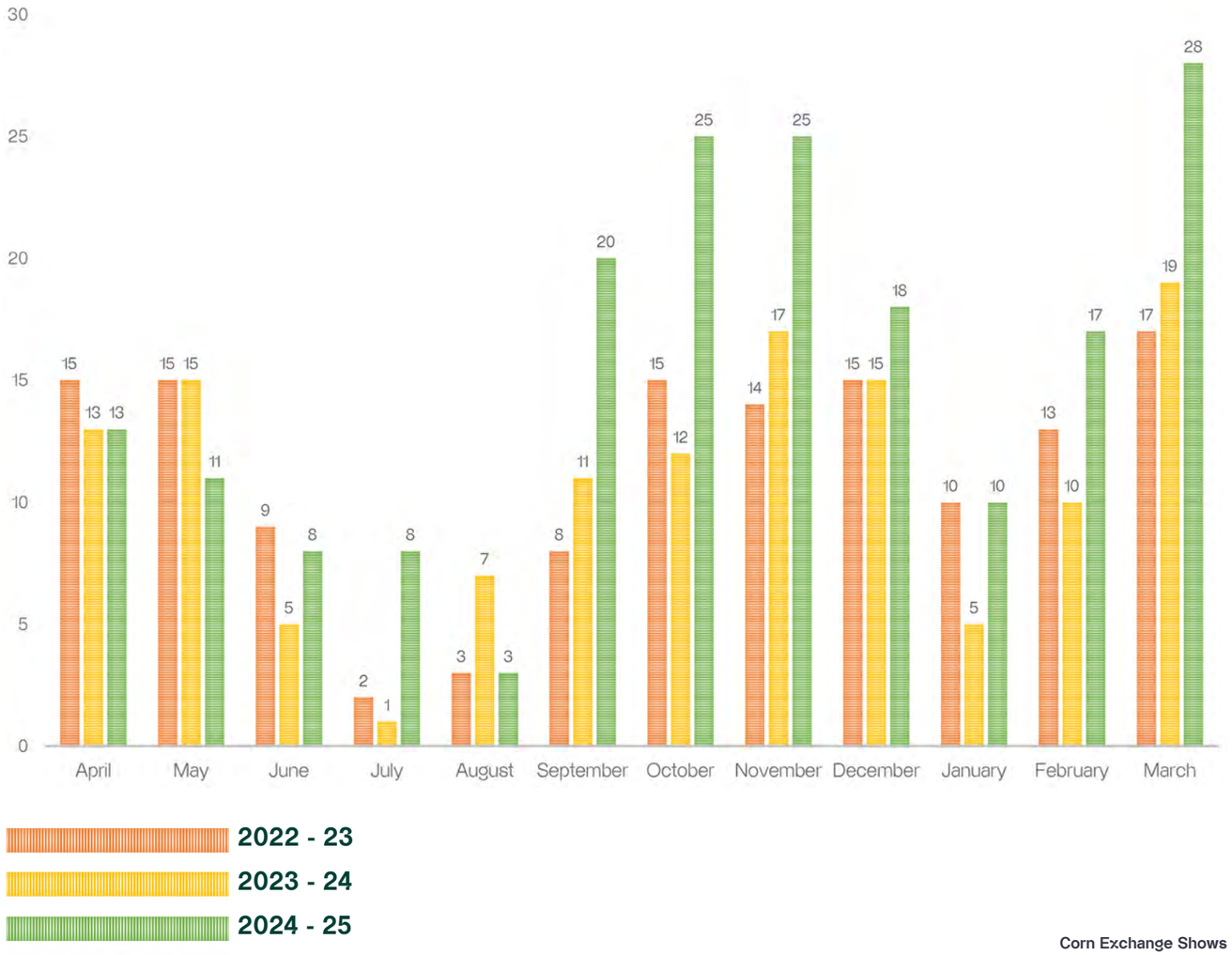
The Corn Exchange is managed in house by the Cultural Services team. With a current seated capacity of 1365 and a standing capacity of 1586, the venue boasts the capability to house a large number of visitors.

Venue Booking Trends

The Corn Exchange hosts a large variety of non-performance events in the space. The most popular commercial and private hire events in 2024 were conferences.

The Corn Exchange have advised that Autumn is the busiest period in the calendar for event hire.

The Corn Exchange often works in tandem with the events spaces in the Guildhall, typically the Small and Large Halls but sometimes other smaller breakout spaces.



Corn Exchange Shows













Example Corn Exchange Shows

2.3 Heritage
Building

Official Listing Entry

WHEELER STREET 1. 942 (South Side) ---------- Corn Exchange TL 4458 SE 6/712 18.5.67. II 2. 1875-6. By Richard Reynolds Roew. Successful design in the competition of 1869 assessed by A Waterhouse, Grey gault brick with red and blue brick dressings and tiled bands. 3 bay entrance front onto wheeler Street with the arched entrance set slightly forward. Gothic detailing, 10 bay frontage on Corn Exchange Street. Each bay contains a pointed arch recess with a 2 light window and rose window above, above this 3 pointed arch windows. Roof of glass and cast-iron. The interior makes considerable decorative use of both local and industrial materials, coloured bricks. Cast-iron, terracotta, encaustic tiles and faience.

Listing NGR: TL4495558342

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1126025

Date first listed: 18-May-1967

List Entry Name: CORN EXCHANGE

Statutory Address 1: CORN EXCHANGE, WHEELER STREET



Corn Exchange intertor - Capturing Cambridge

Description

The Corn Exchange is a Grade II Listed Building designed by Richard Reynolds Rowe in 1875. Rowe had beaten a local architect, John Edlin, in an architectural competition judged by Alfred Waterhouse, though some, including Waterhouse himself, penned some concern at the decision!

The original use of the building, the association with Reynolds Rowe who was the Ely Diocesan architect and the records of the original architectural competition all add to the building's historic significance though that is unaffected by the proposed works.

The building was converted to a public hall in the early 1980s and has undergone several relatively minor alterations since.

Its architectural interest derives from its attractive Venetian Gothic design with good use of polychromatic brickwork to add character. The 3-bay façade to Wheeler Street is particularly attractive with a fine gabled centrepiece which gives a dignified entrance to the building. The side bays incorporate stone panels carved with agricultural scenes.

The main door and first floor windows are all within Venetian arched heads of red and blue brick. The first floor windows are plate glass sashes with carved spandrel panels.

At roof level are gablets, the west dormer now with louvres replacing the sash windows.

The side elevations which run the length of the hall are more repetitive but nicely handled with large arched windows with plate tracery set below an upper arcade with smaller windows arranged in groups of three. The Corn Exchange elevation has a large single storey porch in similar design at its south end and the granite foundation stone at the north end.

The upper part of the main hall has a recessed attic storey and then a zinc clad roof (presumably replacing slates in the 1980s works). The safety gantries are modern.

The Parson's Court elevation is similar, though some emergency / loading doors have been inserted below the sills. A half level external fire escape has been added and the south end window replaced by a modern timber door. At the south end is a return single storey range, of similar materials and features and again used for loading. This has a modern door. There is a first floor extension added at the end of the C20.

The interior of the Corn Exchange has been significantly altered in its conversion to a concert hall. As a result, many of the fittings are from the 1980s. The main aspects contributing to the architectural significance are the impression of the original space and the exposed ironwork work and glass roof and the fair-faced polychromatic brickwork of the walls.

The original elements of the building are considered to be of high architectural significance. The 1980s and later additions are of low / no significance.

Opposite, on the west side of Parson's Court, No.3 has been included as part of the Corn Exchange proposals. This Grade II listed building, built in the late Georgian period was originally a house. It is plain but attractive, two bays wide and three storeys high.

Other than because of its age, there is no known historic interest. Its architectural interest stems mostly from its simple, balanced proportions and sash windows, which reduce in height at second floor level. The most notable feature is the attractive Tuscan doorcase and panelled door which occupies the right-hand ground floor bay.

Internally, the building has been repurposed as office accommodation and few features of any architectural interest remain. Consequently whist the exterior is considered to be of high heritage significance, the interior is low, though opening up works could reveal more interesting features hidden behind later fittings.

Wheeler Street

Wheeler Street, once "Short Butcher Row" in Cambridge's medieval meat market, was renamed for 19th-century basket-maker Richard Wheeler. Two adjoining 18th-century Grade II listed brick buildings once housed L.S. Dodd (cabinet maker) and Charles Makings & Sons (saddlers).



No.1 Parson's Court - Capturing Cambridge



View along Wheeler Street - Capturing Cambridge

2.3 Heritage
Venue History

The Corn Exchange has a rich history and has served many functions since the grand opening on 6 November 1875. A selection of key moments in the Corn Exchanges history are below;

1868 It is decided to build a new Corn Exchange building in its modern day location, at the time the site of the Black Bear Inn

1869 A design competition is launched, and won by local architect Richard Reynolds Rowe.

1874 The foundation is formally laid by Mayor John Death, constructed from Cornish granite from the Cheese Wring quarry. A statue of Jonas Webb is erected.

1875 Quarter of a million local bricks – red, yellow and dark blue – are selected to use for the construction. The decorative patterns made can still be seen on the building to this day.

Grand Opening - 1875 The Corn Exchange formally opens on 6 November. The occasion is marked with a civic procession from the Guildhall, followed by a dinner for local dignitaries.

The Early Twentieth Century: The Corn Exchange becomes part of Cambridge life

1917 Grocers move into the Corn Exchange, from the overcrowded streets of Petty Curry, causing queues and blockages in the building.

1940s During World War 2, the venue is used as a base for local women to "do their bit" by cleaning and repairing rifles.

1950s The Corn Exchange begins to be put to an increasingly wide range of uses, including roller skating, wrestling and boxing bouts, and county badminton matches.

The Post-War Years: The Corn Exchange loses its way

1965 The trading of corn at the venue ceases as a new "corn exchange" is built at the cattle market site. The venue is hired out as a warehouse

1970s The building is used for a mixture of purposes: one day sales, pop concerts and exhibitions.

1971 The decision is made that the Corn Exchange building will be converted into a proper concert hall, rather than incorporating a brand new concert hall into the Lion Yard development project.

1973 The Council's search to find funding for the planned Corn Exchange conversion founders.

1981 A combination of the unsafe roof and noise objections from local residents lead to the closure of the Corn Exchange. 600 people march under the banner "Keep Cambridge Life" in protest.

The Late Twentieth Century to Today: The revival of the Corn Exchange

1982 The conversion of the building into a proper concert hall begins

1987 The official opening takes place on 4 February.

2006 The venue gets an overhaul, with internal redecoration and other improvements made.

2011 The Corn Exchange celebrates its 25th anniversary since its reopening in 1986 with a Royal Philharmonic Orchestra gala performance.

The 21st century saw appearances from old musical legends like Van Morrison, Chuck Berry and John Martyn, as well as young upstarts like Arctic Monkeys, Lily Allen and Amy Winehouse.

* Venue History taken from Cambridge Live (https://www.cambridgelive.org.uk/cornex/venue-info/venue-history-0)

Original Decorative Features

Several decorative features from the current building are important historic features worth noting. Sculptured stone work above entrances are of key importance, along with tiling, as shown in the pictures below. The decorative roof panelling in the rafters of the structure, should be restored and reinstated in the new Corn Exchange proposal.

Modern Decorative Additions

Within the back of house staircase there are a series of murals showing past performers/ performances at the Corn Exchange.











2.4 Existing Constraints - Corn Exchange

External Constraints



Parson's Court Access

A pinch point exists at the exit of Parson's Court onto Wheeler Street, of less than 3m.



Parson's Court Bins

Currently a large number of bins stored in Parson's Court alleyway. Relocation of these needs to be resolved.



Equipment & Vehicle Congestion

Vehicles parked in Parson's Court, along with equipment used in performances creates a congested area



Corn Exchange Fire Escapes

The exits to the Corn Exchange St are stepped down to street level. In fire escape calculations/modelling this decreases their operational capacity by 25%.



Thermal Envelope Issues

The main Corn Exchange roof needs replacing and bringing up to current standards to improve the thermal envelope. The Corn Exchange suffers from being too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. These



issues are apparent from visitors reviews of the venue, complaining about the heat experienced in the top sections of the raked seating, along with people sitting in the flat section complaining about the cold. Secondary glazing to be replaced.



Limited Access to Substation

Limited access to substation, access for UKPN to be maintained.

2.4 Existing Constraints - Corn Exchange

Internal Constraints



Bar Inefficiency

The current bar layout is inefficient, with visitors queuing into each other, only allowing for around 4-5 people deep. This leads to a reduced number of sales made at the bar.



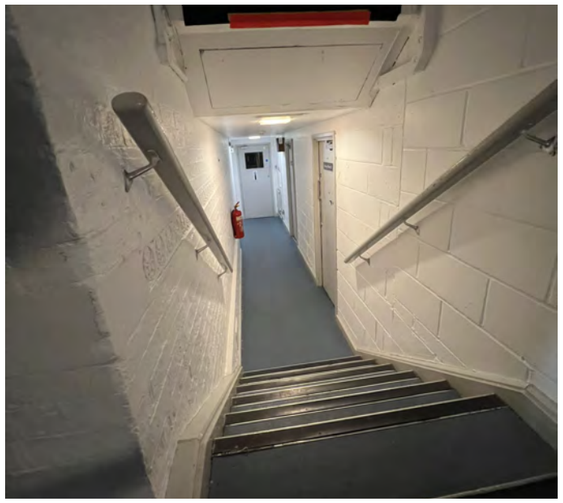
Auditorium Access

The only entrance and exit point to the main auditorium and ground level is through the central point, impacted by the bar queues results in large amounts of congestion and stagnation.



Lack of Storage

There is a lack of drinks storage, potentially blocking fire exit routes. Proposals for the Corn Exchange need to account for increased bar storage and back bar areas need adequate space.



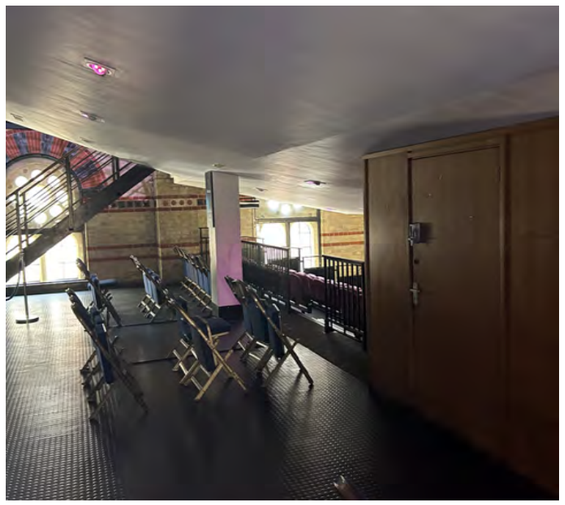
Level Access Issues

The Corn Exchange presents several accessibility issued. Wheelchair access to back stage is currently not provided and is no access route for wheelchair users to get onto the stage.



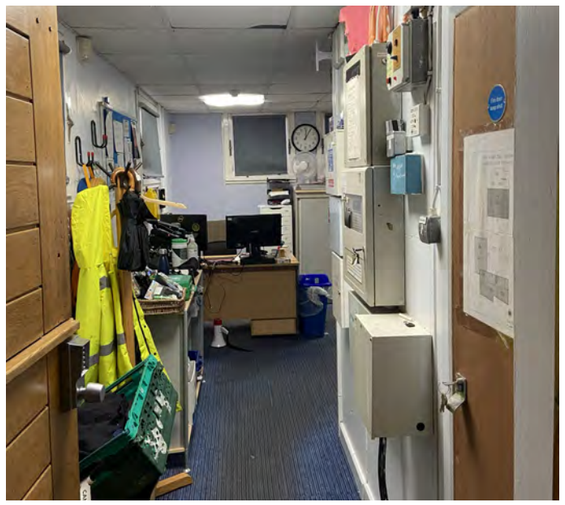
Limited Access to Plant Space

The plant areas above level 3, in the roof space has very limited access. There is a need for upgrades to the current plant to meet project aspirations.



Compromised Seating

Low ceiling height at mezzanine level means seating capacity and view are compromised for most users on this level.



Inadequate Workstations

Existing office spaces are dark, unappealing places to work. Corn Exchange staff have complained about the current working conditions. Dimly lit, tight and in some cases no natural daylight.

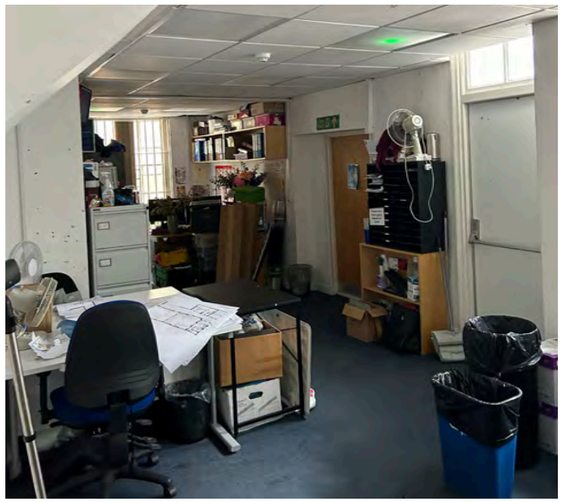


Underutilised Spaces

St.Johns bar with its limited access receives a low amount of footfall. Currently only used for corporate events/ occasions it gets limited use.

2.4 Existing Constraints - Parson's Court & Wheeler Street

Building Constraints



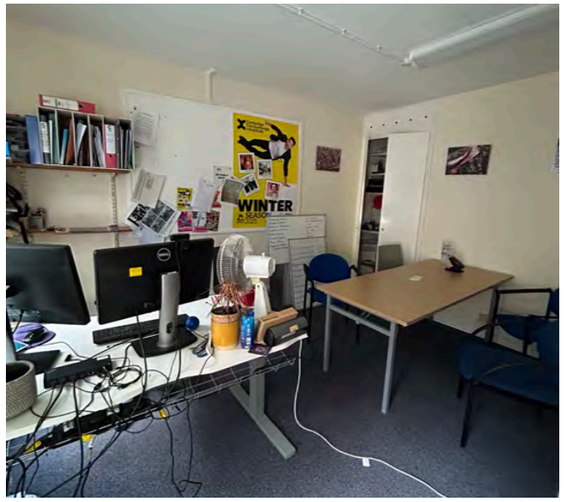
Restricted Floorplan

Poorly lit spaces with limited floor to floor heights, provide sub optimal working conditions.



Tight WC Configuration

Current toilets are in poor condition, need replacing and reconfiguring. Very tight configuration of extremely low quality.



Dark Office Spaces

Poor quality office spaces, floor finish needs replacing, dark space. Desk configuration not optimal or efficient.



Close proximity to Neighbouring Building

Existing neighbouring building in very close proximity, reducing scope to extend out or over Parson's Court existing building



Low basement ceiling height

Low ceiling height, no existing window openings, limits use of Parson's Court basement.



Non-level access

Change in levels, limit accessible users into Levels 1 and 2. Step into current office and WC space, with single stair access.



Untidy Courtyard

Tired and disregarded Courtyard, with building material blighting the area. Cabling and pipes littering the listed façade, with flaking paintwork in need of a refurbishment.



Restricted building configuration

Change in levels and double door opening, with columns impacting configuration of No.2 Wheeler Street Scheme must be sympathetic of current building restraints.

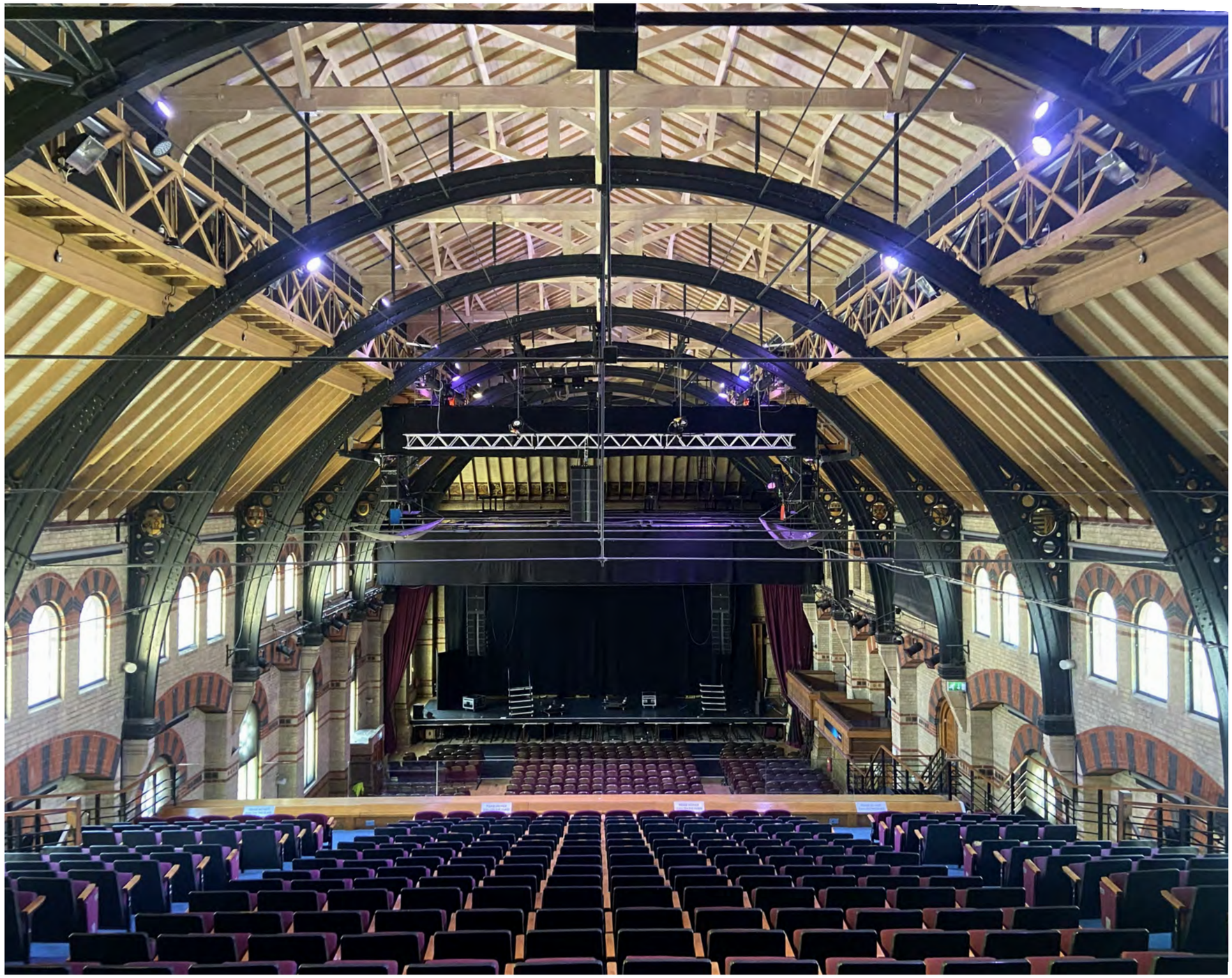
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Design Evolution

3.1 Corn Exchange Brief
Summary

Project brief and aims for the Corn Exchange

- Improve the acoustics of the Hall
- Improve the spend per head by offering a more attractive destination and generating more income for the council.
- Reduce annual operational costs and improving energy efficiencies
- Create synergies with an improved Market Square and Guildhall as part of a Civic Quarter destination and contribute to the outdoor events programme in the area as part of the overall Civic Quarter development and design proposals.
- Explore opportunities for a food and beverage or commercial lease in any of the space of the enhanced Corn Exchange area, including 3 Parson's Court
- Explore opportunities to increase capacity, using all available space including use of rooftop area to enhance the venue offering including food and beverage, enhanced acoustics and performance space.
- The target of net zero carbon must not reduce capacity. This will help the council meet its net zero carbon by 2030 target. In addition, Cambridge City Council are aiming to meet water neutrality targets.



3.2 Key Interventions

Improvements Headline Figures

Improved Visitor Experience

Significant opportunity to improve visitor experience

From arrival through to show, refreshments and access to WC's

Improved Visitor Experience

By making significant updates to the entrance experience through reconfiguring the foyer and providing a new entrance B.

Upgraded seating improving physical comfort

Improved Acoustics

New heating and cooling systems improve visitor comfort

Reduced number of restricted view seats

Improved Accessibility

Many areas inaccessible to non-able bodied persons

Limited viewing positions for wheelchair users and no wheelchair access to back stage

Accessibility significantly improved

3 no. Lifts making all areas of the Corn Exchange accessible

Wheelchair positions improved

13% increase in accessible WC provision

Levelled raised floors provide 'Back of House' wheelchair access, including accessible shower and WC dressing provisions

Improved Food & Beverage Offer

2 Current Bars

Bar snacks available, St. John's bar currently under utilised

4 Proposed Bars

Significantly improved food and drink offer proposed.

Foyer bar reconfigured

New Mezzanine bar and kiosk

St. John's bar reconfigured

New bar and VIP spaces in 3 Parson's Court

Improved Sustainability

Gas fired inefficient heating system

Limited Insulation

Potential 61-79% reduction in energy use

All electric ASHP heating system

Insulation added to roof, auditorium floor and back of house spaces

PV panels generating electricity

New sanitaryware reducing water usage on site

Seated Event Capacity

Existing

1365

Proposed

1332

A slight reduction but this results in an improved visitor experience

Standing Event Capacity

Existing

1586

Stage +2 (fully extended)

Proposed

Stage +2 (fully extended)

1628 (+42)

Stage +1

1780 (+194)

3.3 Public Engagement
Summary

Why is engagement so key?

We believe every person in the local community, no matter their background, should have the ability and the right to create positive change and influence the decisions that impact their lives. That means engaging beyond the usual suspects and providing the opportunity for harder to reach groups to get involved and shape the future of their Civic Quarter.

Cambridge has a unique and complex stakeholder environment. High profile individuals, and organisations, take a keen interest in the development of the built environment.

The design team have been tasked with producing a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process and putting this into action, working closely with the Council's communications team.

ECF are fulfilling the communications consultant role, bringing strong institutional knowledge of the Cambridge stakeholder environment to the project. Our approach has been based on the following:

- Strong collaboration with key internal stakeholders within Cambridge City Council, and particularly the council's communications team, to deliver a best practice, engagement plan.
- Front loading engagement in the process to ensure the feedback is properly used by the project team to shape the proposal, and communicating changes back to those who participate.
- A focus on ensuring harder to reach groups, including young people, and those with disabilities, are heard throughout the engagement process.
- A commitment to open, transparent, and regular communication to help close the feedback loop.
- A robust, hybrid approach through website updates, social media campaigns, mailshots and webinars.
- The use of a mixture of tools including 1-2-1 meetings, workshops and GoVocal consultation survey platform to derive feedback from as wide a range of people as possible

Engaging the City: Local Voices Shaping the Future of Cambridge Civic Quarter

Between 12 May and 22 June 2025, the City Council and project team carried out the second phase of public engagement for the Cambridge Civic Quarter (CCQ) project. This phase built upon the engagement undertaken in 2024, presenting updated design proposals for the Guildhall, Corn Exchange, Market Square, and surrounding public spaces.

Who Took Part?

- 543 survey responses were received via GoVocal—506 from individuals and 16 from organisations (21 did not want to provide an answer).
- 70+ interactions were recorded with market traders, including 7 meetings, 4 pop-ups, and 3 surveys.
- 111 children aged 9 to 16 participated in youth workshops at 3 local schools.
- Over 100 people engaged via pop-ups across Cambridge.
- 4 written submissions received from stakeholder organisations.
- 3 themed 1-2-1 stakeholder meetings were held, in addition to informal discussions with residents, traders, and staff.

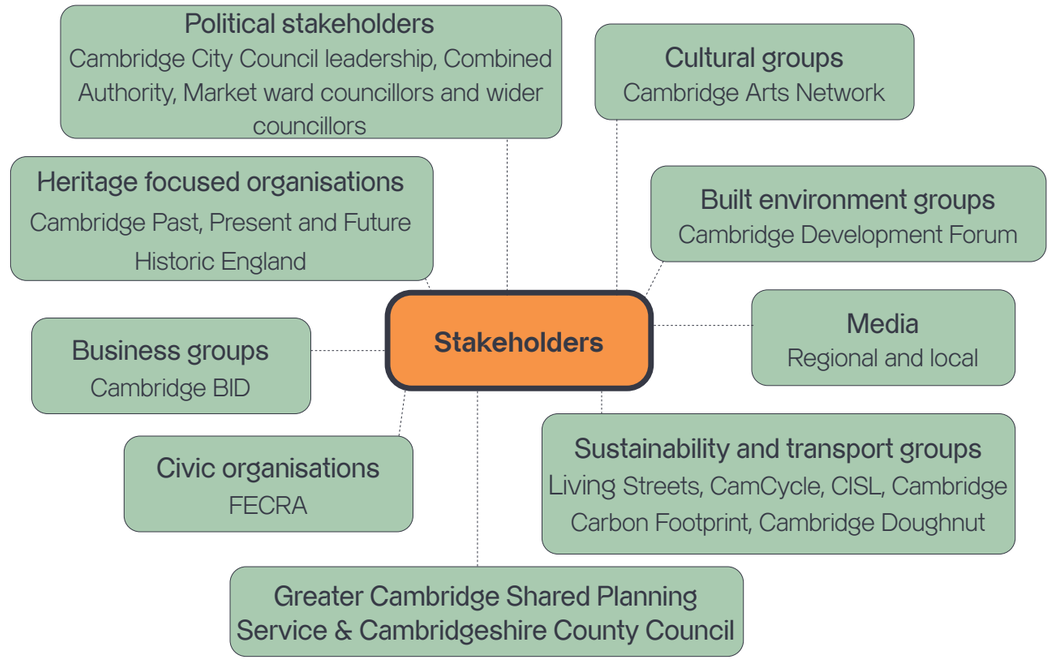
Diverse Methods of Engagement

This phase employed a multi-layered approach to reach different audiences:

- Workshops and drop-ins were hosted at the Guildhall and local community halls.
- Targeted sessions engaged council staff, youth groups, market traders, and accessibility stakeholders.
- Digital engagement included over 5,675 unique visits to the consultation site, social media campaigns, and local media coverage.

Key Messages from the Community

- A strong appetite exists for a more accessible, inclusive and vibrant civic space.
- There is enthusiasm for civic reuse of the Guildhall—including co-working, events, and exhibitions.
- Market traders and residents expressed a desire for proposals to maintain the market's traditional role while enabling improvements.
- Accessibility, heritage, affordability, and safety were recurring themes across all locations.



3.3 Public Engagement
Headline Responses

A Cultural Landmark for All: Prioritising Comfort, Accessibility and Affordability

Corn Exchange Findings

The Corn Exchange was widely recognised as one of Cambridge's central cultural venues, but feedback shows that its success depends on improving **comfort, access, and affordability**—not just cosmetic upgrades.

Likelihood of Increased Visits

56.4% of respondents said proposed improvements would make them more likely to visit the Corn Exchange.

Key motivators include:

- More comfortable seating.
- Easier access for disabled and older visitors.
- A better overall experience for both residents and tourists.

Comfort and Accessibility Challenges

Respondents described current issues with:

- Cramped seating and poor acoustics.
- Limited or difficult emergency evacuation routes.
- Poor signage and inadequate toilets.

Key Suggestions for Accessibility

Inclusive design is a top priority:

- Accessible toilets and wider, more comfortable seating.
- Raised viewing platforms for standing events.
- Box seating reconfiguration to support inclusivity.
- Sensory-friendly lighting and clear signage.

Affordability and Community Access

Ticket prices were a major barrier for many, with some fearing improvements could increase costs.

Respondents want reassurance that:

- Renovations will not reduce community access.
- Efforts will be made to keep ticket prices affordable.

Venue Identity and Role

While many support modernisation, some urged the venue to retain its character and not attempt to compete with newer or larger cultural spaces.

Others asked whether the focus should remain on local community use rather than a commercial model.

Practical Concerns

Local businesses expressed concern about event-related disruption, especially vehicle movements during set-up and take-down.

There were requests for greater clarity on how nearby improvements (e.g. to Parson's Court) will support or hinder event access.

Key Headlines

Proposed improvements to comfort, accessibility, and visitor experience at the Corn Exchange are widely welcomed.

Some suggestions include improved signage, accessible toilets, more inclusive seating, raised viewing platforms for wheelchair users, and sensory-friendly lighting.







3.4 Council Engagement
Summary

Pre-application Process

Early engagement with the Planning Authority and Historic England has led to Planning Performance Agreements being put in place during both RIBA Stages 2 and 3.

Given the scale of the Civic Quarter project significant engagement has been undertaken, please see programme opposite.

Stage 2	
Meeting	**Date**
Project introduction	08.05.24
Site walkaround	15.05.24
Sustainability discussion	21.05.24
1st Pre-application meeting	28.05.24
Breakout 1: Guildhall	02.07.24
Breakout 2: Movement	02.07.24
Breakout 3: Corn Exchange	18.07.24
Breakout 4: Market Square	18.07.24
2nd Pre-application meeting	12.09.24
Pre-app 'Mop Up'	26.09.24

Stage 3	
Meeting	**Date**
Market Square Pre-Application 1	06.03.25
Market Square Pre-App Historic England	06.03.25
Guildhall/ Corn Exchange Pre-App 1	12.03.25
Market Square Pre-App 2	07.05.25
Guildhall/ Corn Exchange Pre-App 2	14.05.28
Sustainability Workshop	22.05.28
Highways Workshop	12.06.25
Civic Quarter Workshop	18.06.25
Design Review Panel	26.06.25
Civic Quarter Pre-App 3	06.08.25

Key Corn Exchange Discussions

Main foyer alterations

A key aim of the Civic Quarter project is to improve the visitor experience provided by the Corn Exchange whilst increasing spend per head by visitors. To achieve this we are proposing to alter the current foyer design, moving latter additions away from original Corn Exchange facade.

This principle will be applied in other areas too, exposing heritage features where practicable.

Main auditorium ventilation

To improve the customer experience, reduce energy use and carbon emissions new ventilation systems are proposed at the Corn Exchange. A key part of this is the introduction of increased levels of ventilation in the main auditorium.

To facilitate this the proposals include new ventilation ductwork and the sympathetic enlargement of existing ventilation plenums.

The impact of these proposals on the interior and exterior of the Corn Exchange have been reviewed in detail.

Rear extension and plant enclosure

To replace the current plant equipment and replace with modern energy efficient equipment requires a larger plant enclosure.

An extension to the south of the Corn Exchange is therefore proposed. The form, composition and detail of this has been reviewed with officers.

Link to St John's Bar

To improve access to St. John's Bar on the first floor a link from the main auditorium was proposed. Following discussions with officers and Historic England it was decided to not progress this option.

Extent of demolition

The proposed demolitions have been discussed with officers and focus has been given to only demolish later additions, which often obscure earlier heritage features.

Photovoltaics and roof alterations

Photovoltaic panels will be integrated within the standing seam roof finish, designed to appear seamless and uniform across the surface, ensuring no visual interruption to the overall roof aesthetic

3 Parson's Court & No.2 Wheeler Street

No. 3 Parson's Court and the front no.2 Wheeler Street is proposed as a ground-floor bar that can operate independently of the Corn Exchange.

The upper levels will accommodate members' lounges, enhancing the experience for customers attending shows and offering premium spaces for socialising before and after performances.

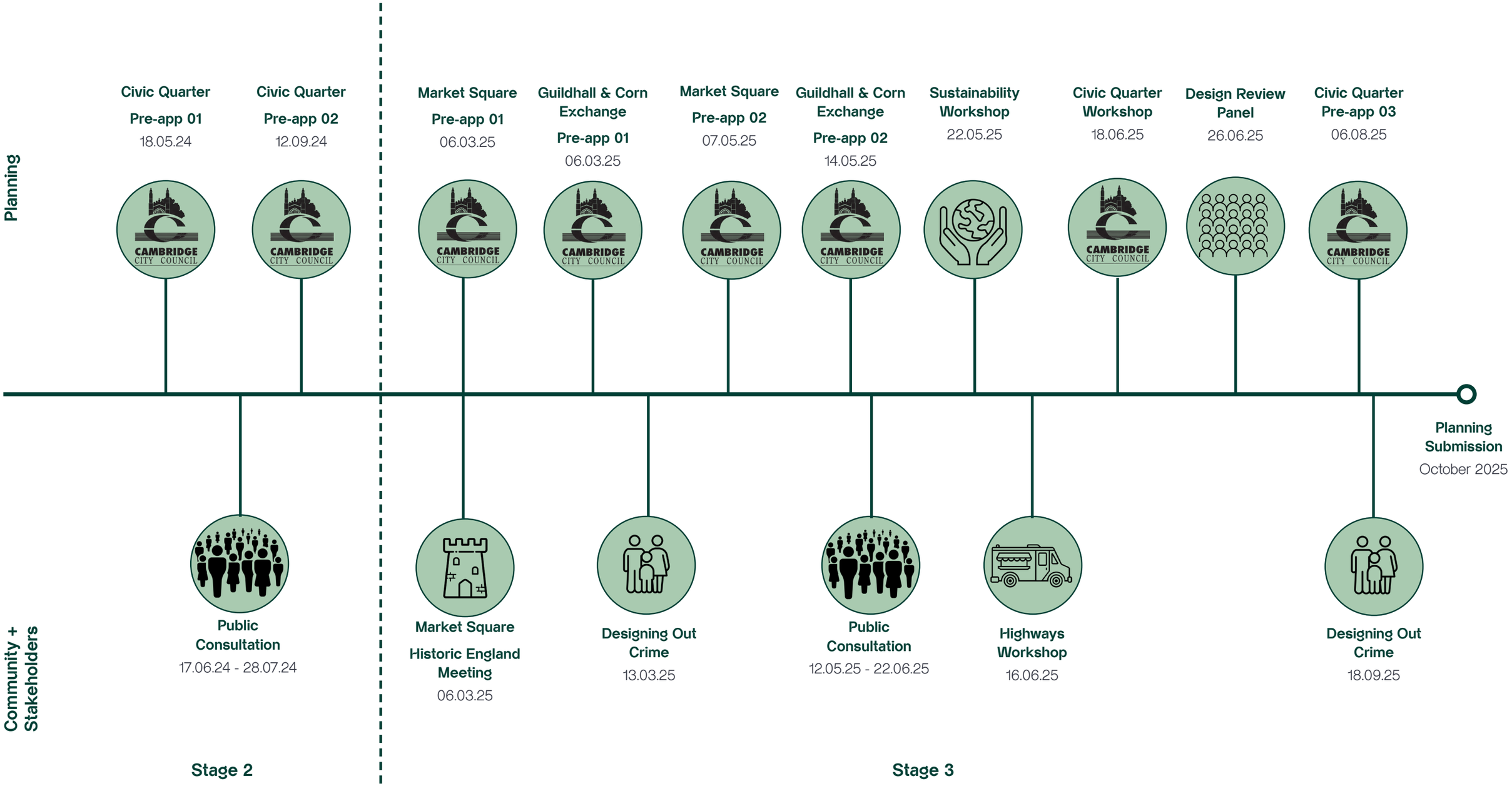
Parson's Court

Parson's Court is currently occupied by waste containers serving several businesses.

Activating new links from No.3 Parson's Court to the main foyer and Auditorium, through reconfiguration of current layouts, entrance and exits.

3.5 Pre-application and Consultation Timeline

Summary



3.6 Design Evolution
Summary

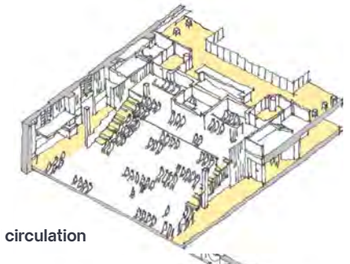
The design has evolved in collaboration with the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning team and Historic England, input from Cultural Services and feedback from the Design Review Panel. Below is a time-line of key meetings and summary of input which has informed the design evolution. Further key design details are summarised later in this chapter.

Pre-App 1
12.03.25

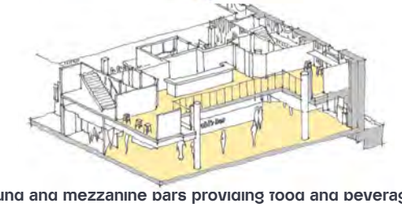
Pre-Application 1 Summary

As part of the planning process, the design team presented the Stage 2 principles and emerging Stage 3 proposals during the first pre-application meeting. The proposals aim to enhance the building's function, accessibility, and heritage value.

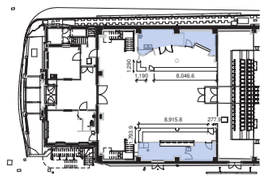
- Transformation of the ground and mezzanine foyer bar areas to improve flow, visibility, and customer experience.
- Introduction of a secondary entrance and improved internal circulation routes.
- Optimised bar and cellar storage, allowing more space for visitors and exposing sections of the listed perimeter walls.
- New lift installations to improve accessibility, including a lift from the main lobby to the mezzanine level, supporting access to new bar areas and additional wheelchair seating.
- Back-of-house upgrades, including a rear infill providing improved green room and office space.

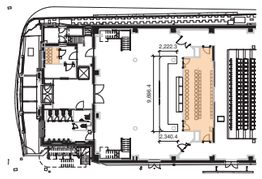


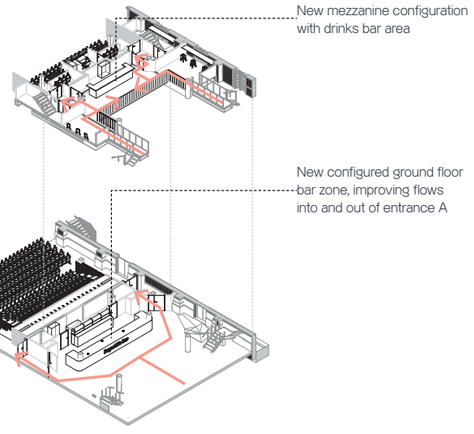
Improved internal circulation



Proposed ground and mezzanine bars providing food and beverages







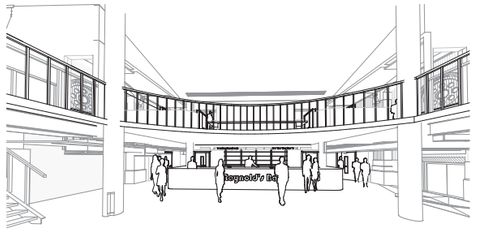


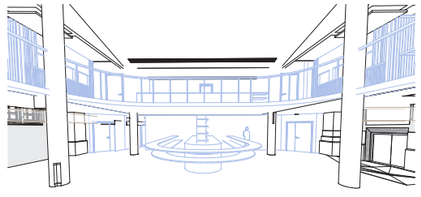
Pre-App 2
14.05.25

Pre-Application 2 and Historic England Summary

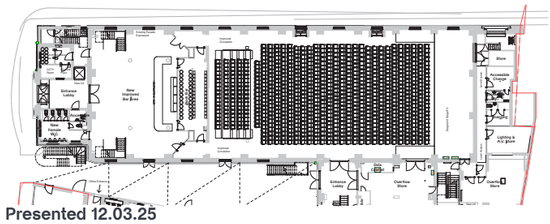
As part of the planning process, updated proposals were presented focusing on improved functionality, accessibility, and visitor experience, while continuing to respect the building's historic character.

- The accessible lift has been relocated and stair layouts reconfigured to improve flow to the mezzanine and open up foyer space for uses such as merchandise stands. A new horseshoe bar layout enhances service and dwell time, supported by more efficient cellar storage.
- Back-of-house areas have been rationalised, retaining dressing room provision, including one fully accessible unit, and establishing a clearer route via the side alley.
- A new bar and active frontage are introduced to Parson's Court and Wheeler Street, with upper floors proposed as members' lounges. St John's Bar follows similar principles, with a decluttered layout, exposed brickwork, and improved circulation.

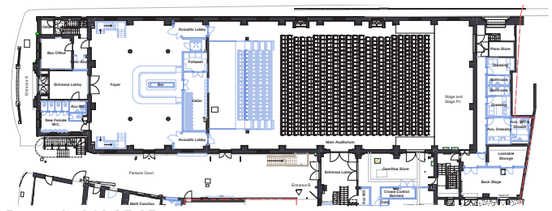




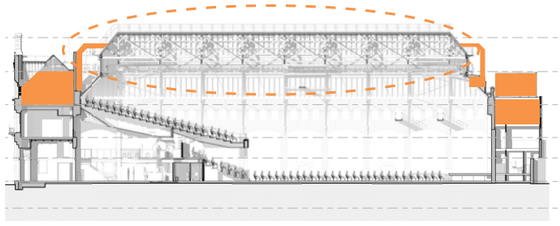
Workshop
22.05.25



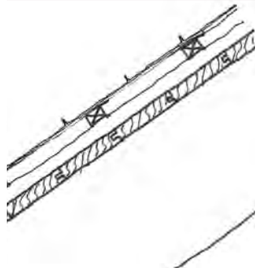
Presented 12.03.25



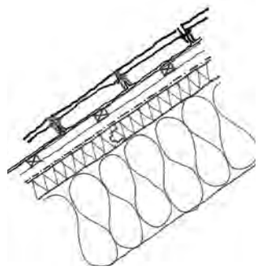
Presented 14.05.25



Pitched roofs - Slate



Pitched roofs - Zinc



3.6 Design Evolution
Summary

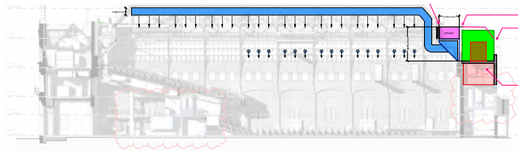
The design has evolved in collaboration with the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning team and Historic England, input from Cultural Services and feedback from the Design Review Panel. Below is a time-line of key meetings and summary of input which has informed the design evolution. Further key design details are summarised later in this chapter.

Pre-App 3 18.06.25 — Design Review Panel 26.06.25 — Pre-App 4 06.08.25

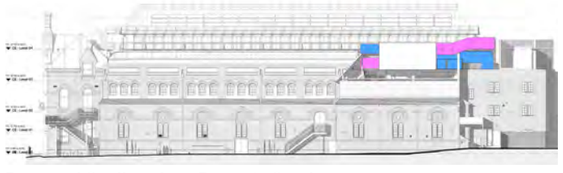
Pre-Application 3 and Historic England Summary

- Given limited space, careful coordination with heritage elements is key.
- Initial ideas for thermal upgrades include roof upgrades through insulating and replacement for finishes, preserving internal timber boards. The main roof will integrate photovoltaic panels within upstand seams.
- Additional non-heritage existing wall thermal upgrades also presented as being explored.
- The emerging MEP strategy includes the removal of the roof over the Parson's Court extension to create an open-air plant space. This can accommodate stacked air handling units and making use of existing plenum, ducts, and roof openings.

Feedback from Historic England was constructive, supporting the direction of travel and encouraging continued refinement to ensure the extension remains



Proposed Section through Auditorium



Proposed Section along Parson's Court

Existing | Proposed



View of the Auditorium



View down Parson's Court



View along Corn Exchange Street

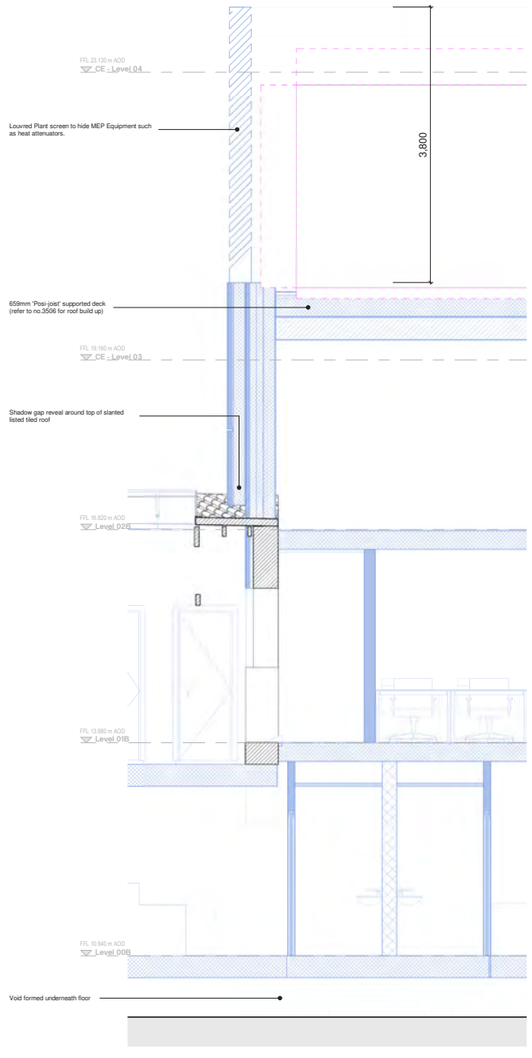
Pre-Application 4 Summary

The design team presented updates focused on the roof plant strategy and the architectural expression of the infill extension and Parson Court elevation

- Key topics included the treatment of the pitched roof elevation, where adjustments respond to servicing needs while maintaining a form sympathetic to the existing building.
- Discussions also covered the materiality, pattern, and texture of the infill extension, with proposals developed to complement the surrounding heritage context.



Bay Studies



4.0

The Proposals

4.1 The Proposals
A key cultural asset

The Corn Exchange is one of the largest venues for concerts within East Anglia. It is a much loved arts, entertainment and conference venue. The proposals contained within this document have been developed to build on the success of the Corn Exchange and give one of Cambridge's key cultural assets a much needed refurbishment and renovation.

The investment and development work at the Corn Exchange will unlock a revitalised content and operational strategy that positions the venue as a vibrant, commercially resilient, and socially valuable cultural hub at the heart of Cambridge.

The refreshed approach will deliver:

A broader, more dynamic programme, building upon the current programme to further expand into family entertainment, spoken word, contemporary events, community programming, enhanced classical and orchestral offers and alternative social uses such as e-sports, attracting wider and more diverse audiences.

An improved customer experience, supported by reconfigured front-of-house areas, more intuitive circulation, upgraded facilities, and a more welcoming environment throughout.

New hospitality experiences, including flexible bar and café offers, premium packages, and event-led food and drink propositions – generating greater dwell time, increased secondary spend, and enhanced audience satisfaction.

Creating a new outdoor social space in Parson's Court.

Improved access and inclusivity, with step-free access throughout, upgraded accessible toilets, inclusive signage and navigation, and new backstage provision to support artists and staff with access needs – significantly increasing the venue's inclusivity credentials.

Enhanced community and educational use, supported by a more welcoming and inclusive venue environment, creating new opportunities for learning, outreach and audience engagement in partnership with local groups and institutions.

Significant economic and social impact, through increased footfall, extended opening hours, new employment and volunteering opportunities, and greater engagement with under represented groups – reinforcing the Corn Exchange's role as a major contributor to the local cultural economy.

Together, these improvements will future-proof the Corn Exchange, enabling it to thrive as a distinctive, inclusive, and financially sustainable venue serving the people of Cambridge and beyond.



A re-imagined Parson's Court creating a vibrant place for Corn Exchange visitors to use

4.1 The Proposals

Summary of proposed works

The proposals for the Corn Exchange form part of the broader Cambridge Civic Quarter regeneration and aim to improve the building's performance, accessibility, and visitor experience while respecting its heritage value.

1. Entrance Foyers and Ground Floor Enhancements

- Additional Lift Provision: An accessible lift has been positioned in the bar foyer to improve spatial clarity and flow.
- Lobby reconfiguration: Space has been released for Front of House (FoH) and office functions,
- Improved circulation: Existing stairs are reconfigured to guide movement toward the bar and mezzanine, freeing space for uses like merchandise stands.
- Horseshoe bar layout: A redesigned bar increases frontage, improves service efficiency, and optimises dwell time, with cellar storage is reconfigured for better access.

2. St John's Bar and Mezzanine

- Design principles extended: Decluttered to expose original brickwork, the bar is recessed to increase public space and improve atmosphere.
- Enhanced accessibility: New layout allows access to lift for mezzanine evacuation with generous parterre seating.

3. Parson's Court Infill and Member Facilities

- Active frontage: The new bar enhances street-level vibrancy along Parson's Court and Wheeler Street.
- New bar zones: Allows for increased bar revenue generated both during and after shows in the venue.
- Members' lounges: First and second floors are proposed to be converted into premium lounge spaces, offering a VIP experience for events at the Corn Exchange

4. Back of House & Dressing Rooms

- Reconfigured dressing rooms: Maintain existing capacity while adding an accessible unit with WC and shower.
- Green room expansion: Better accommodation for performers.
- Efficient service flow: Clear equipment delivery via the alley improves logistics and backstage organisation.

5. MEP Upgrades & Sustainability

- New rooftop plant space: Roof slab over the modern extension is removed to create open-air plant space for stacked AHUs and ASHPs. Equipment integration considers views and heritage.
- Energy strategy: Replaces gas heating with an all-electric ASHP system, improving air quality, temperature control, and future-proofing for daytime use.
- Improved ductwork: Routed through thermal plenums and truss gaps to preserve symmetry and avoid ceiling intrusions.
- Targeting is predicted to bring about a carbon saving of 61-79% over the current annual carbon emissions of the building.*

* *This variance in potential savings is due to sourcing the baseline annual energy use figures for gas and electricity from the published DEC while further analysis is carried out on the current operational energy consumption data, part of which is still being collected. Furthermore, there are still many aspects of the design and operation that are unknown at this stage which will affect the performance of the building in-use and thus the variance in predicted energy use. As we receive actual in-use energy data and the design of the building is further refined, this variance and uncertainty will reduce.*

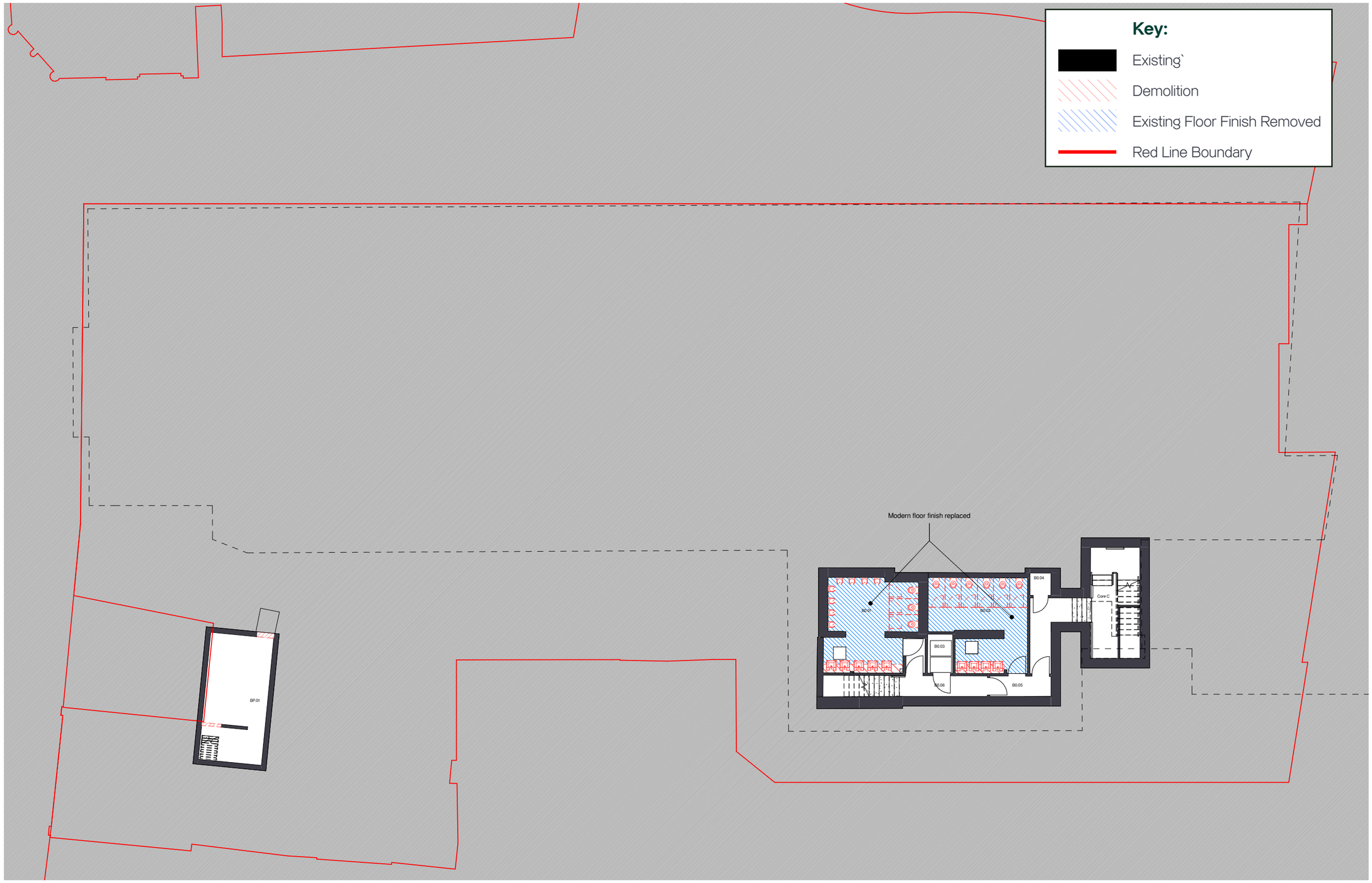
* *Baseline TM54 assessments, looking at low, medium and high use periods have been carried out which have produced a variety of results.*

6. Roof & Fabric Interventions

- Roof renewal: Selective replacement and insulation of existing tiles and zinc roofing. Heritage timber boards preserved.
- Gable-end extension: Roof pitch on Parson's Court raised and extended to screen rooftop plant and reduce visual impact.
- Attenuated plant screen: Located beside the Museum of Zoology, carefully positioned to manage noise and views.

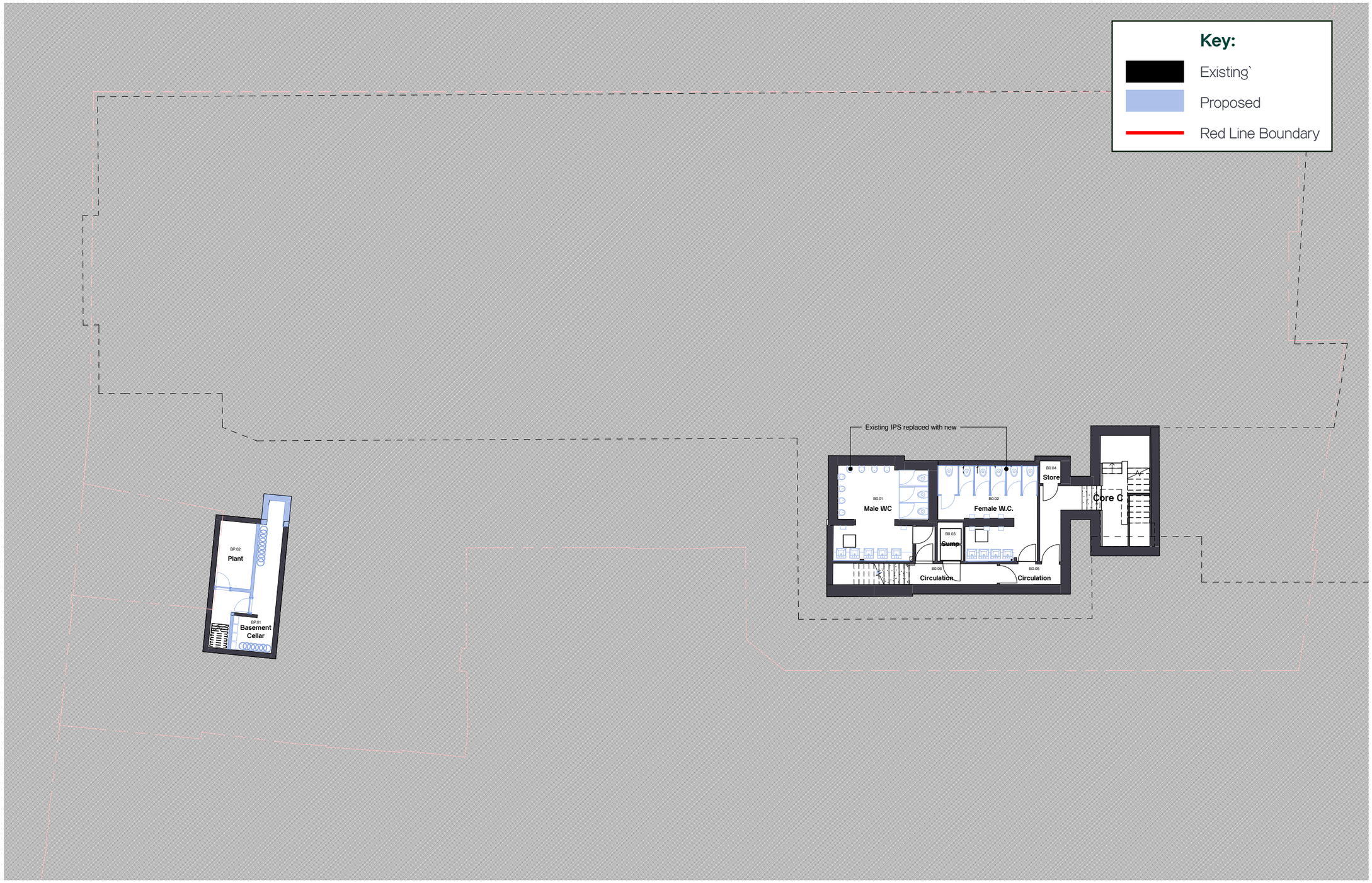
4.2 Demolition Plans

Basement Floor



4.2 Plans

Basement Floor



4.2 Demolition Plans

Ground Floor

