

# 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](mailto:equalities@cambridge.gov.uk) or phone 01223 457046.

Once you have drafted the EqIA please send this to [equalities@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto: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 – 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024](#)

[Committee report – 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024](#)

## 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 3 (detailed designs) and updated business case, business plans and preparation for the submission of a planning application in autumn 2025.

*The 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. We are currently at Stage 3 – Design refinement prior to a planning application.*

## **Corn Exchange**

The project provides 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. A reimagined open space area within Parsons Court, providing an external space linked to the Corn Exchange and 3 Parsons Court.

## **Key features of the Corn Exchange Design (at end of RIBA Stage 3)**

- **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 WCs on multiple floors and better layout to reduce queuing and congestion
- **Inclusive seating** provides 1% of auditorium capacity for wheelchair users, with improved sightlines and comfort.
- **Sensory-friendly features** like clear signage and lighting support 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**

The project outputs for RIBA stage 3 are listed below, together with indicative dates for future project milestones.

January 2025 - Detailed stage 3 design work commences

May 2025 – Community Engagement

Autumn 2025 – End of Stage 3 report to Cabinet

Autumn 2025 - Submission of a planning application (subject to Cabinet decision)

Winter 2026 – Approval to enter a works contract

TBC – First handover of completed 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

The design work for this phase (up to RIBA Stage 3) included community engagement and stakeholder workshops and consultation on the detailed designs for the 3 assets. This was delivered between 12 May – 22 June 2025.

#### 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 Property, Procurement, Policy, HR, Customer Services, Cultural 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, including Cartwright Pickard Architects, responsible for the overall architectural design, heritage-sensitive interventions, accessibility improvements, and coordination of the design evolution, and Blue Horizon Ventures – Theatre consultants advising on commercial resilience and front-of-house design.

**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 – 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024](#)  
Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee - [Committee report – 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024](#)

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 report to Cabinet will be in September 2025, which will set out the outcomes of the RIBA stage 3 detailed design work and recommendations setting out the next phase of the project and the submission of a planning application.

**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.

A comprehensive engagement programme was delivered by ECF (the comms lead in the Design Team Consortia) for the Civic Quarter project in May 2024 and they reached out to several community and accessibility groups as part of the developing of concept designs as part of the RIBA Stage 2 work. The [engagement outcomes report](#) was published on the Council's website and informed the developing design.

A further round of Community Engagement took place in May 2025, as the part of the shaping the detailed design work. A multi-layered approach to reach different audiences was deployed including

- Workshops and drop-ins were hosted at the Guildhall and local community halls.
- Targeted engagement sessions with Students, and with Council Access Officer and Camsight.
- Digital engagement included over 5,675 unique visits to the consultation site, social media campaigns, and local media coverage.

A full report will be published later in September 2025 but the headlines have been [published](#).

**Key feedback from the 2025 Engagement Programme**

- **Strong public support** for the proposed upgrades, with **54% stating** they would be more likely to visit after improvements.
- Key suggestions included:

- Improved signage
- Accessible toilets
- More inclusive seating
- Raised viewing platforms for wheelchair users
- Sensory-friendly lighting
- Comfort and accessibility remain major concerns, especially for disabled and older visitors.
- Local businesses expressed worries about event-related disruption and requested clarity on how nearby spaces (like Parsons Court) would be improved.
- Some participants felt event programming and performers were more important than venue upgrades. The Cultural Strategy sets out the council's approach to supporting cultural activity in the city.
- Ticket prices were flagged as a barrier to access, with fears that improvements could lead to higher costs.

## 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 be subject to more detailed testing at RIBA Stage 4 technical design during early 2026, again these will have a positive impact for all patrons. The inclusion of an outdoor event space in Parsons Court, improved food and 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.

### **Visitor**

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 improve access to all levels for people with mobility impairments.

The number and location wheelchair accessible seats will be expanded and improved (1% of the occupancy will be provided as wheelchair accessible locations), and the new locations on the parterre will provide positions with a direct view of the stage.

An increase of an additional accessible toilet (radar key controlled) in the Corn Exchange will have a positive impact, with facilities on the ground and first floor (accessed via a lift). This will benefit people with hidden and visible disabilities but may be at a disadvantage if people who are transgender or non-binary have to use the accessible toilet if they don't have a disability.

Within 3 Parsons Court there is a further accessible toilet (radar key controlled) on the ground floor.

There will be positive impacts for people with visual and hearing impairments with a refresh of signage and of updating audio equipment Further work to be done during the technical design work in early 2026, to consider what type of signage e.g. braille and the details around updated audio e.g. hearing loops. The lighting will improve experience for people with visual impairments and support needs of neurodiverse individuals,

There will a disadvantage for those with mobility issues not able to use the planned VIP area in 3 Parsons Court, as the first floor will only be accessible by stairs. As part of the detailed design work, we reviewed the ability to install a lift to these spaces, but the constraints of the existing Listed building made it an impractical task.

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, gender neutral dressing rooms and adjacent shower and toilet facilities on ground floor and gender-neutral toilet on the first floor will be provided.

#### **Visitor**

The improvements to the toilet provision will have some positive impact for gender reassignment and non-binary and gender fluid people.

Gender neutral toilets in the new bar areas in 3 Parsons Court are being provided.

Within the toilet facilities supporting the main auditorium, the toilet designs may still reflect binary gender norms as only male/female toilets are being provided, this could exclude or discomfort non-binary or gender-diverse individuals, whose only alternative could be to use the accessible toilets. We will review the design through the technical design stage in 2026, in light of the recent Supreme Court judgement. Whilst there is improved accessible toilet provision for people with disabilities, people who are transgender or non-binary who don't have a disability may feel uncomfortable using an accessible toilet potentially delaying someone who has a disability (hidden or visible) accessing the facilities they need.

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 proposed 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 no specific spaces allocated for prams/buggies or the provision of baby changing facility for parents to use. These can be looked at in more detail as part of the technical design work in 2026.

**(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.

We need to consider signage too for people for whom English is their second language and signage with pictorial representation as part of the technical design work in 2026.

**(g) Religion or belief**

There may be some negative impacts from the inclusion of the additional bars and VIP lounges 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**

The expanded number of female WCs (on the ground floor) will help address historic under-provision for women in the venue which has caused queueing during show intervals.

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**

**Workforce and Artists**

Backstage provision of gender-neutral facilities will benefit workforce and artists who are Transgender or Non-Binary.

**Visitor**

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.

The toilet provision in the main auditorium (male/female) may not meet the needs of non-binary or gender non-conforming individuals, which can disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ people.

(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\\_159kt25q](https://media.ed.ac.uk/media/1_159kt25q)).

- **Low-income individuals and families** may be excluded if ticket prices rise post-renovation, especially for premium events or VIP areas.
- **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 EqlA accordingly.)**

Update EqlA at the following project milestones

During 2026, as part of the development of the technical design and post planning application decision.

**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

Date of EqlA sign off: 27 August 2025

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 EqlAs need to be sent to [equalities@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cambridge.gov.uk)**