

Item 6: Cambridge Market Square Project

Introduction

Cambridge and the surrounding Greater Cambridge catchment area is experiencing significant population and economic growth, with plans to deliver a further 14,000 additional homes in the city, and 19,500 in South Cambridge, by 2031.

Cambridge is also a nationally and internationally important visitor destination, with annual visitor numbers increasing from 5M to 8M in the past 3 years.

The market square is one of Cambridge's most important outdoor public realm assets, given its central, strategic location within the historic core and associated civic functions.

The central 'cobbled' area of the market square is owned by the City Council and used to accommodate a successful 7 day a week day-time general market, in accordance with the Charter Market Regulations, and returns a net income of c£300K per annum. The surrounding tarmac 'road' which wraps around the City owned 'cobbled area' is managed by the County Council as a public highway and used for vehicular access (predominantly for business deliveries; street cleansing operations and market set up/ take down) and by pedestrians and cyclists.

Project outline

We have embarked on a multi-stage project to explore how the design, appearance and daytime, evening and night-time use of the market square can be enhanced, while being sensitive to the site's obvious heritage value and retaining its market function. The agreed objectives of the project are as follows:

- a) To develop a strategic vision for the market square in terms of its future use and appearance, covering both day and night-time periods
- b) To maximise availability and flexibility of outdoor public realm space to accommodate both commercial and community use
- c) To incorporate a continued daytime 7 day per week general market but with an improved design/ layout which enhances both the market offer and overall visitor experience of the space
- d) To maximise the ability to use the market square space for other activities at times when not being used for the day-time market function
- e) To maintain and, where feasible, enhance the net commercial return from the market square public asset
- f) To enhance the quality of the public realm offer and associated furniture provision, including waste management and seating

- g) To ensure the underground structures associated with the square, including drainage pipes/ culverts, are physically sound and able to function effectively
- h) To conserve and enhance the heritage value of the space
- i) To determine a future access plan for all modes/users of the space
- j) To create an inclusive design that meets the needs of all user
- k) To review future toilet provision requirements (public and, as existing, market trader) within market square
- l) To address commercial and public waste management issues, including waste storage and collection issues
- m) To assess feasibility of restoring the Listed historic fountain structure
- n) To enhance quality and design of outdoor public realm, ensuring it is consistent with that of wider historic core

Through these objectives, the project aims to identify and assess the issues and opportunities offered by this key strategic city centre open space asset; and to use the findings to identify a feasible and financially viable concept design and associated set of proposals, which can be successfully progressed to implementation.

The project is being undertaken in accordance with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Plan of Work: <https://architectureforlondon.com/news/the-riba-plan-of-work/>; and is being managed by a project steering group led by the City Council, with support from Cambridgeshire County Council and Greater Cambridge Partnership.

Stage 1: Feasibility assessment

In July, 2019, we completed the first stage of the project, which involved an assessment of the current form and function of the market square, and the associated issues, constraints and opportunities. A copy of the resulting feasibility assessment report can be viewed at: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/market-square-redevelopment>

The feasibility assessment shows that the square suffers from a range of design and operational management issues, which prevent it from achieving its full potential as the city's main city centre public space, including:

- a) Fixed market stall infrastructure prevent the space from being able to fulfil other uses when the market is not in operation
- b) Fixed market stall infrastructure attracts anti-social behaviour associated with the night-time economy and is not an inviting space to visit at night
- c) Fixed market stall infrastructure makes it difficult to wash the space down and keep clean as functional daily market space

- d) Significant lack of public seating in the square
Uneven and varied surfacing materials, including granite setts; and raised kerbs, which makes the space difficult for people to access easily, especially disabled
- e) Central area of granite sets are uneven with exposed joints making it difficult to keep clean.
Design quality of the space is poor, with unsightly and abundant street clutter an over-wide, confusing road system and surfacing which is difficult to clean and maintain.
With the exception of the trial of the night time markets, there is currently no night-time commercial or community benefit return from asset to the Council
- f) Limited available space/ opportunities for residents and visitors to meet and relax within the square

Stage 2: Concept design

We are now seeking to use the first stage work to inform the development of a proposed concept design for the market square, which is financially viable and addresses the project objectives and management issues identified above.

In summary, we are committed to retaining the existing 7 day per week day-time market function in the square, but would like to investigate alternative market stall design, layout and management options that maximise the availability and flexibility of the market square project area space and accommodate a range of uses and activities (both commercial and non-commercial/ community) outside of the market function operating times. Current and previous use of the space has included: 'trial' night markets, outdoor films with associated temporary outdoor seating (on pavement and road area outside Guildhall), commercial events (e.g. Christmas lights 'switch on') street performers and for public gatherings/ protests/ civic events.

To support the proposed concept design, we will also be developing an accompanying investment plan, which will review and identify how the design's indicative capital and revenue costs are proposed to be met.

We are currently embarking on a programme of stakeholder engagement to inform the proposed concept design. We aim to present the proposed concept design and investment plan to committee, autumn 2020, for formal public consultation, ahead of final committee adoption, spring 2021.

Equalities Panel discussion

As part of our Stage 2 stakeholder engagement programme, we welcome the opportunity of discussing the project with the Panel and obtaining members' views on how the existing form, function and management of the market square space could be improved. The results of the Panel discussion, along with our other stakeholder engagement work, will be used to inform the development of the proposed concept design and investment plan. Listed below are some specific prompts for Panel members to consider, ahead of the 21st January meeting discussion item:

- a) What benefits does the existing use/ management of the market square space provide different equality groups or people with protected characteristics?
- b) What changes to the daytime use/ management of the space would benefit different equality groups or people with protected characteristics?
- c) What changes to the night-time use/ management of the space would benefit different equality groups or people with protected characteristics?
- d) What more should the project be doing to support the council's Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)?