



## The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

Pre-application ref: PPA/25/0005

Cambridge Civic Quarter

Thursday 26 June 2025, In-person meeting

**Confidential**

The [Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth](#) sets out the core principles for the level of quality to be expected in new development across Cambridgeshire. The [Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel](#) provides independent, expert advice to developers and local planning authorities against the four core principles of the Charter: connectivity, character, climate, and community.

## **Attendees**

### **Panel Members:**

Russell Brown (Chair) – Architect and Founding Partner at Hawkins Brown Architects - Character

Fiona Heron – Founder at Fiona Heron Limited - Character – Landscape

Helen Goodwin - Head of Programmes at Design Southeast – Community

Joel Gustafsson - Director at JG Consulting – Climate

Anne Cooper - Director at AC Architects – Character Conservation

Teri Okoro – Director and chartered architect – Inclusive Design

### **Applicant and Design Team**

In-Person Attendance:

David Roberts, Director Cartwright Pickard Architects

Richard Griffiths, Associate, Cartwright Pickard Architects

James Pickard, Director, Cartwright Pickard Architects

John Mason, Associate, Carter Jonas

Paul Belton, Head of Planning and Development East – Carter Jonas

Jon Burgess, Director, Planning and Heritage, Turley

Sarah Potter, Associate LDA

Kirsty McMullen, Director, KMC

Nadya Lokhmotova, Senior Passivhaus Consultant, Max Fordham

Benedict Binns, Assistant Director | Housing & Regeneration Leader, Cambridge City Council

Online attendance:

Tom Conlon, Client – Cambridge City Council

Louise Bradley – Practice Director – ECF

### **LPA Officers:**

Tom Davies – Senior Urban Designer and DRP Manager

Bana Elzein – Principal Landscape Architect - online

Maxine Ross – DRP/Business Support Officer

Egle Packauskaite – Urban Designer

Mary Collins - Senior Planner

Mark Taylor – Access Officer - online

Christian Brady - Historic Environment Team Leader - online

Rosa Teira Paz - Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas, Historic England

### **Declarations of Interest**

The DRP manager asked if there were any Declarations of Interest for DRP members. Russell Brown informed members that Hawkins Brown had bid for the feasibility study, and then the further design work for the Civic Quarter. Joel Gustafsson informed members that he had worked for Max Fordham for several years. The panel agreed that these declarations by the panel members were not conflicts of interest.

### **Inclusive Design / Accessibility**

The panel member specialist agreed that the inclusive vision is welcomed; access should be a holistic aim, for everybody, not only disabled people. Everyone should be able to access the toilets at the Guildhall, this needs to be carefully thought through. Decluttering the circulation routes by introducing shared surfaces is supported. The treatment of the ground plain is important for people with visual impairments; colour contrasts can help the identification of different areas of use. It is important to design seats for people of all abilities, preferably including seats with backs and arm rests.

Clear, predictable, legible layouts are important for neurodivergent users. The designers need to be to consider overstimulation, in what will be a busy market area, and to provide options for quiet & calm zones.

Training and education are needed to improve cyclist behaviour, which will take time to be implemented. Sound and noise are important considerations around the design of large-scale public spaces. Wayfinding will be critical, to help everyone to use and move around the transformed, civic buildings. Colour could be used to support this.

## Sustainability

The panel member specialist was pleased for the proposals for the Guildhall. In the short time allocated he could only raise some technical issues, such as the use of vapour closed walls for preventing moisture damage in buildings.

For the Guildhall roof, he raised queries about visual and noise impact from enclosed ASHPs. He has previously raised concerns about the availability of free air around enclosed equipment. Could some of the equipment be moved to the basements to reduce impact on the skyline?

He is concerned about underfloor cooling for the Corn Exchange spaces. The hot air in crowded spaces, coming against cold surfaces, could cause moisture and safety issues.

Customisation of the permanent / temporary market stalls is important. At Camden market, for instance, the stalls are too uniform.

The growing popularity of E-scooters creates street clutter and are a nuisance; they are as important to consider as cyclists. Operators will find ways of introducing these around the market square and so they need to be designed into the plans.

Energy considerations for the market operations. This is an opportunity to remove the trader's need for the use of propane gas. Provide traders could be with power and there is the opportunity for installing a microgrid. This is a cost-effective solution for the Council.

The fountain could be celebrated as a congregation meeting point. It is currently sad looking. Running water is needed for this to make it truly operational again. This is an issue given the water scarcity in Cambridge. Could potable mains water from a starting point at the fountain to provide drinking water and be recycled as greywater?

Nadya Lokhmotova explained that the Guildhall has been thermally modelled and that there are areas where the cavity is bridged so that a consistent wall build up is not possible.

## **Character**

The panel member specialist was concerned about the proposal for permanent structures on public open space, and in terms of the market proximity to prime retail estate in the City Centre. What is the view of shop owners and landlords around the changes to the market? Would people going to the Market Square be using the toilets in the shops? Given the increased number of food stalls in the market, will the Guildhall have enough WCs provision? She had concerns about the balance of the number of hot food stalls in comparison to more traditional traders.

The applicant team explained that the current proposals retain the current balance of traders, so that no more hot food stalls are planned. The Council has been talking extensively to the major landowner around the square and the proposals are welcomed and not seen as reducing rental values.

The panel member specialist felt the proposal for updated ground surfaces is very positive. She agrees that there is a lot of clutter (cycle racks) and street furniture and kerbs on Peas Hill and around the Guildhall, which is off putting. The sequence of spaces created on Peas Hill is still unclear. Could the Guildhall entrance and existing café (located on Peas Hill) be opened up more to the public realm at Peas Hill? At the moment, these spaces feel closed off. Could this entrance area relate more to the built context of Peas Hill? There needs to be a better connection through from the Market Square to the Corn Exchange.

Conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists are of concern, as cyclists follow desire lines and use short cuts to go from Trinity Street/Kings Parade to Peas Hill. Intercepting these cycle routes is sensible. Currently, there is a problem of lack of enforcement for poor cycling behaviour. The provision of cycle parking (short/long stay) needs to be integrated across Cambridge.

The proposals for the Guildhall are supported. The panel understands that the building needs to be revitalised to come back into viable use, both as office space for the council, and to become a fully functioning community space. The roof extension on the 4th floor is in a logical location and is an appropriate design. There are still concerns about the design and extent of the plant screening. Its impact needs to be modelled and reviewed, in the long views across the Square, and the screening reduced in height and extent. and pushed back from the main façade as far as possible.

The panel member specialist agrees that being radical in the transformation of the Guildhall will be critical to its future success. She understands the need to re-invigorate the spaces and for the whole building to work together. The addition of PV panels is supported, and the panel understands the need for mechanical ventilation and cooling in a changing climate.

The proposals for the Corn Exchange are welcomed. The proposals to remove the refuse store and introduce a new bar in Parsons Court are strongly supported. Could some of the courtyard be covered with a canopy to extend its use in winter?

The proposals are seen as broadly sympathetic. It is important to provide accessibility in as much of the venue as possible. There remains a concern that exiting out (at the end of an event) on to the narrow pavement of Corn Exchange Street can be dangerous, without the proposed traffic calming in this street.

James Pickard responded that there had been extensive discussions about both buildings with Historic England. Adapting the furniture in the main council chamber was difficult, in order to achieve full accessibility. The key views from the Market Square were being modelled. The building will need to have cooling, and this requires extensive mechanical ventilation at roof level. This is also required to deliver the net zero targets in operation. There are also lift overruns for the new lifts to be considered on the roofline.

He further explained that lightwells/atria can be really beautiful additions to a building, helping a building to become welcoming and friendly, replacing corridors, and aiding wayfinding. A good example is Lambeth City Offices.

## Landscape character

The panel member specialist commented that the relationship between inside and outside will be key – e.g. between the Guildhall café and the public realm. It could be interesting to look at the fountain as a meeting point; it is important to give places a function.

Consolidating and removing the clutter is strongly supported; a lot of the cycle racks are not being used or are broken; stripping away disused material internally and externally would be a major benefit.

How do the outdoor stalls and the spaces around the Square relate to the existing context of the neighbouring buildings? The Market Square's character does not come across yet. It should be an exemplar public open space; providing a strong vision for what this will feel like is key. What is the character of the market stalls; are they all different, are they customisable? Do they possess a unity yet individuality eg; like the beach huts at Brighton? At the moment, the designs look heavy and permanent. Holding onto the spirit of what exists currently could help!

There is an inherent conflict between the Square's history as the civic centre of Cambridge, and its use as a market. Bringing out the market character is crucial; a lightness of touch is key. The stalls should not compete with the surrounding buildings. It is important for the stalls to celebrate the context and not create something new and ubiquitous, that dominates the market square rather than being sympathetic to the buildings.

What is the tree strategy? The planting should respond to orientation, location, purpose, proximity to the church and building entrances? Why are trees where they are? The current location of trees does not echo the forms of the spaces or establish a clear character for the new spaces. The bike stands need to be designed as an element of the landscape, not as an obstacle.

The panel member specialist raised the issue with the setts. Is there a strategy as to how they go back? Should they reinforce the axis or reflect a pattern? Could they be

used to create new routes and support wayfinding and did they need to echo a certain drainage pattern?

A cycling strategy is important, perhaps a linear approach is best to have one simple cycle route.

At the moment, the fountain is innocuous/almost hidden. Perhaps the covered seating could embrace the fountain. Should the covered dining area relate to the fountain? Why is the dining area where it is? Should it be the focal point?

The orientation of the stalls does not appear to be resolved. How do they link with the other spaces? There needs to be an exploration of the context, and where shapes/forms of spaces come from. Why are things where they are? Could there be any reference to historical precedents? The market stalls need to be lightweight and relate to the routes.

The design of the lighting will be important, both for the market and the surrounding buildings. Currently the proposals are somewhat generic and potentially feel like 'anywhere'; there needs to be more of a focus on the characterisation of the new spaces and place making and how they relate uniquely to this important and individual and unique Cambridge open space.

## **Community**

The panel member specialist spoke about what will be the 'life of the place'. The design needs to consider what a market is as a place of gathering historically? The design team should do a drawing of the market square as a node in the city centre with a focus on people's movements and activities. Who is coming here and how do you draw tourists here from King's Parade to the Market Square? A market is historically a place of exchange. This is an important project for the whole of the city centre. How can you make the market and the two cultural venues a 'honey pot', and a catalyst for activity at the heart of the city?

There is a great opportunity to give the Guildhall a renewed presence, be a gem and become, like London's Festival Hall, Cambridge's 'living room' that is not part of the University ownership. It would be great if the Cambridge Museum moved here to provide an added attraction, so that visitors could see the bigger picture of Cambridge's development.

The messy, convivial nature of a market is a key quality. It is the one place in Cambridge that does not need curating, it should have a temporary feel. It will be a challenge to incorporate permanent stalls while holding onto the everydayness and provisional feel of a market. St Albans Town Hall which has a museum, gallery and café is a useful precedent for the transformation of the Guildhall.

James Pickard agreed that the market needed to become the "honeypot" in the City Centre. The project was looking to halt the spiral of decline, sorting out the bike parks, the bins, the illegal parking and the uneven surfaces. The aim is to make the market much more accessible, to give it back to the locals, encourage families to visit with new events and to extend the timetable and uses of a new public realm.

The panel member specialist added that she understands that the Council wants to "clean up" the market but its messiness and conviviality can be an asset, and it must not get too sterile. It needs to maintain its distinct nature; it should be the one place in Cambridge that does not need curating. It needs to feel like a market and hold on to its sense of impermanence. The panel member specialist made an additional suggestion that Barking Town Square incorporates an arboretum, with 40 native trees, and that this helps define a separate character from the open marketplace.

### **Chair's Summary**

Where the proposals reduce the impact of the traffic, cyclists, and the (illegal) parking around the Corn Exchange they are to be welcomed. The proposals to dramatically improve circulation in the foyers and access to the bars, will really transform the visitor experience. The proposals to clear the refuse storage out of

Parsons Court and introduce a new bar, and better access, will be a really positive improvement.

The proposal to extend the Guildhall at 4th floor are logical and a positive step. The panel is still concerned about the loss of the Council Chamber use (and furniture). This would seem to lose some of the building's civic value and its meaning as a focus of democracy. The applicant is urged to look at this again and to perhaps find clearer, more focused uses that support the business plan for each of the large spaces in the Guildhall.

There is an inherent conflict between the nature of a civic space as rational, permanent, open and the attractive impermanence, unpredictability that characterises a marketplace. This conflict is crystalised around the retention and re-use of the fountain. Although it has historic value, the applicant could look to relocate the fountain outside of the market, where it could become a happier focus of a calmer, greener public space. The drawings showing the empty space around the fountain, and the placing of the covered dining area away from the fountain are evidence of this mismatch.

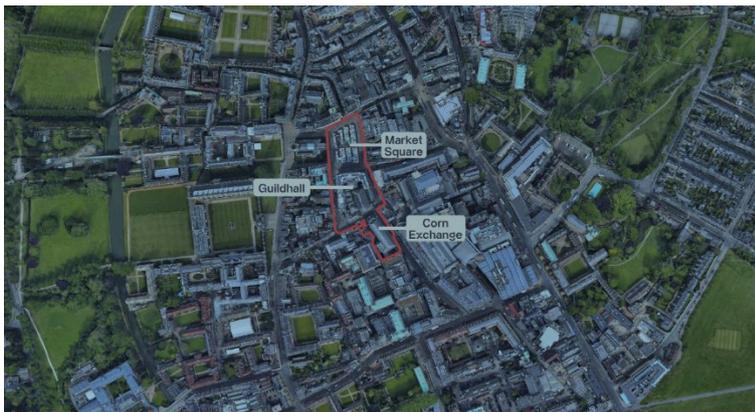
The design of the permanent (and impermanent) market stalls is crucial, they need to touch the ground 'lightly' and retain the feel of impermanence, adaption, variety that are the nature of markets.

The cycling routes, cycle parking, vehicle access and parking all need careful and visible management in the future. This will require proper funding and political support for the day-to-day management of these spaces,

The panel feel the public realm around the Guildhall could be bolder in design and characterisation. The clutter needs to be removed to create clearer spaces, the parking needs to be included and managed but the design is not 'exemplar' yet. The spaces could be better defined by more planting (including more trees) and landscaping could be used to 'intercept' the speeding cyclists. Responding to the surrounding buildings could help this process.



*Existing birds eye view of the Cambridge Civic Quarter – extracted from Cambridge Civic Quarter DRP presentation (June 2025)*



*Location Plan – extracted from Cambridge Civic Quarter DRP presentation (June 2025)*





*The Guild Hall, Market Place and the Corn Exchange – extracted from Cambridge Civic Quarter DRP presentation (June 2025)*

### 3.8 4th Floor Extension and Roof Plant Screen

**4th Floor Extension**

- The proposed fourth floor extension will extend the office provision from the existing stair core on Peas Hill and connect to a second core (south Peas Hill) by extending the stair from third floor.
- In reference to the existing fourth floor, the proposed massing will be recessed behind the existing parapet across each elevation, turning at the south corner as it does on the lower levels

Peas Hill Elevation

4th Floor Bay Study

**Roof Plant Screen**

- Panels are a repeated modular design using bronze effect metal finish to match the existing metalwork.
- Articulation in the panels are created from framing around an inset panel, in the same metal finish.

3D view - Roof plant screen and 4th floor extension

*The Guild Hall proposals – extracted from Cambridge Civic Quarter DRP presentation (June 2025)*

#### 4.7 Climate - 3rd Floor Extension



*The Corn Exchange proposals – extracted from Cambridge Civic Quarter DRP presentation (June 2025)*

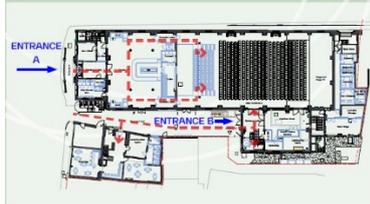
#### 4.8 Community - Creating a destination

##### Parson's Court

Utilising the Parson's Court as an alternative 'Entrance B' for ticket holders to alleviate the pressure from the main 'Entrance A'.

We're creating an outdoor social space by relocating the current refuse bins and upgrading the ground surface. Evacuation modelling shows the space can also accommodate a food truck to supplement the F&B offer.

Users of the Corn Exchange will be able to use this space before, during and after shows.



Ground floor plan circulation



Parsons Court

*The Corn Exchange proposals – Parson's Court - extracted from Cambridge Civic Quarter DRP presentation (June 2025)*

### 5.3 Existing Public Realm



*The Market Square – existing public realm - extracted from Cambridge Civic Quarter  
DRP presentation (June 2025)*

### 5.7 Market Square Layout

#### Market Stalls (x44)

- Lockable stalls with integrated canopy and signage

#### Demountable stalls (x50)

- 3x3m stalls to be fixed to sockets embedded into the setts
- 2x2m stalls located within the highway for additional capacity on the busiest days

#### Canopy

- Lightweight structure with seating and secure gate to be closed at night

#### Fountain

- To be restored and brought back into use, subject to survey

#### Storage

- Integrated storage units for demountable stalls located between Market Stalls

#### Welfare facilities

- Accessible WC and storage on the ground floor for traders.
- Basement storage, WC's and tea point for traders



*The Market Square layout proposals – layout - extracted from Cambridge Civic  
Quarter DRP presentation (June 2025)*



*The Market Square layout proposals – CGI - extracted from Cambridge Civic Quarter  
DRP presentation (June 2025)*

**1.2 Cambridge Civic Quarter Vision**

**Create a civic heart**

- An inclusive space for everyone
- Reinforces a civic heart of Cambridge
- Links the Market Square, Guildhall and The Corn Exchange
- Broadens the use and appeal of the civic quarter
- Embrace & enhance the historic setting

**Adding value**

- Rejuvenate the Guildhall embedding CCC, Civic & democratic functions
- Revitalise and support a thriving Market
- Widen use & appeal of Market Square
- Expand Corn Exchange use
- Commercially viable
- Reduce operational costs

**Net Zero Carbon**

- Sustainable and Net Zero in operation

 An aerial architectural rendering of the Cambridge Civic Quarter vision. It shows a mix of buildings, green spaces, and a central square. The rendering is more detailed than the previous one, showing more of the surrounding urban context.

*The Cambridge Civic Quarter Vision - extracted from Cambridge Civic Quarter  
DRP presentation (June 2025)*

**Disclaimer**

*The above comments represent the views of the Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel and are made without prejudice to the determination of any planning application should one be submitted. Furthermore, the views expressed will not bind the decision of Elected Members, should a planning application be submitted, nor prejudice the formal decision-making process of the council.*