



26/01978/FUL – Parkers Piece Parkside, Cambridge

Application details

Report to: Planning Committee

Lead Officer: Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development

Ward/parish: Market

Proposal: Installation of ground-mounted electrical cabinets within Parkers Piece to support site infrastructure to include minor excavation, installation of the cabinets, and connection to existing services, with surrounding surfaces reinstated on completion.

Applicant: Mr Ashley Read / Cambridge City Council

Presenting officer: Madalina-Mihaela Ghita

Reason presented to committee: Regulation 3 application, a planning application submitted by a local authority for development on land it owns or controls.

Member site visit date: N/A

Key issues: 1. Heritage impacts

2. Tree impacts

Recommendation: Approve subject to conditions

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1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The application seeks permission for the installation of two ground mounted electrical cabinets within Parkers Piece to support future events within the site.
- 1.2 The proposal is considered to result in a level of heritage harm to both the Historic Core Conservation Area and the setting of nearby Grade II listed buildings. This harm is however considered to be outweighed by the public benefits arising from the scheme, with significant weight given to the environmental benefits of providing a more renewable source of energy for events within the Public Open Space.
- 1.3 Whilst in close proximity to a number of high value trees that line the edges of Parkers Piece, the proposal is considered to include adequate protection of these trees given the nature of the proposed works.

- 1.4 Officers recommend that the Planning Committee **Approve the application subject to conditions.**

Table 2 Consultee summary

Consultee	Object / No objection / No comment	Paragraph Reference
Conservation Officer	No Objection (harm identified)	6.1
County Highways Development Management	No Objection	6.3
Definitive Mapping Officer	No Objection	6.4
Drainage Officer	No Objection	6.5
Ecology Officer	No Objection	6.6
Environmental Health	No Objection	6.7
Historic England	No comment	6.8
Tree Officer	No Objection	6.9
Third Party Representations (1)	1 comment received in support	7.1
Member Representations (0)		8.1
Local Interest Groups and Organisations / Petition (0)		9.1

2. Site description and context

- 2.1 The application site comprises the entirety of Parkers Piece, located within the City boundary of Cambridge. The site is located within the Historic Core Conservation Area, the defined City Centre and Parkers Piece itself is designated as Protected Open Space. The Piece is dissected into quarters by two intersecting Public Rights of Way that cross the site. There is also a further PRoW that connects Regent Street to Park Terrace to the western side of the site. Parkers Piece is entirely within Flood Zone 1 with small areas at low-medium risk of surface water flooding.
- 2.2 Reality Checkpoint is a Grade II listed Lamp Standard within the centre of Parkers Piece. There are a number of Grade II listed buildings along the northern, northwestern and southwestern sides of the open space. In addition, there are two Buildings of Local Interest adjacent to the Piece, one to the southwestern edge and the other to the north.
- 2.3 Parkers Piece itself is a large area of open space within the Historic Core of the City and is frequently in use for a variety of events including a cricket pitch and a Christmas market during the winter months. The Piece is surrounded on all sides by highways, namely Park Terrace to the northwest, Parkside to the north, Gonville Place to the east and Regent Terrace to the southwest.

3. The proposal

- 3.1 This application seeks permission for the installation of ground-mounted electrical cabinets within Parkers Piece to support site infrastructure to include minor excavation, installation of the cabinets, and connection to existing services, with surrounding surfaces reinstated on completion.
- 3.2 The application has been amended to address representations and further consultations have been carried out as appropriate. Following initial Tree Officer comments, tree information was provided with updated Tree Officer comments provided reflecting this.

4. Relevant site history

Reference	Description	Outcome
25/03284/FUL	Use of land at Parkers Piece for the holding of temporary Christmas event, including the annual installation of ice rink, food, drink and market stalls (including lodge bar and skate bar), Ferris wheel, carousel, dodgems, attractions, seating areas and associated fencing, works and structures for the period 20th October to 14 January the following year, each year for a maximum temporary period of 4 years.	Permitted
23/03297/FUL	Use of land at Parkers Piece for the holding of temporary Christmas event, including the annual installation of ice rink, food, drink and market stalls (including lodge bar), Ferris wheel, carousel, attractions, seating areas and associated fencing, works and structures for the period 1st November to 14 January the following year each year for a maximum temporary period of 4 years	Permitted
20/03552/FUL	To renew the installation of a temporary real-ice ice rink with viewing platform and back-of-house/plant area; a family entertainment area with children's rides, food concessions and other associated entertainment (including the Big Wheel), to one quadrangle of Parkers Piece. Event to run from 1st November 2021 to 31st January 2025	Permitted

Table 2 Relevant site history

- 4.1 There have been multiple permissions granted within the eastern quadrant of the Piece for Christmas Markets during October, November, December and January. The most recent of these permissions was granted in 2025 for a four year rolling permission meaning that the market can be provided during 2026, 2027 and 2028 under this permission.

5. Policy

5.1 National policy

National Planning Policy Framework 2026

National Design Guide 2021

Circular 11/95 (Conditions, Annex A)

Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

Environment Act 2021

ODPM Circular 06/2005 – Protected Species

Equalities Act 2010

5.2 Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan 2024-2045 (Regulation 19 Proposed Submission)

- 5.2.1 The Proposed Submission Greater Cambridge Local Plan represents the latest stage of preparing a new joint Local Plan for Greater Cambridge. Once it is adopted, it will become the statutory development plan for the Greater Cambridge area, replacing the current (adopted) Local Plans for Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District.
- 5.2.2 The Proposed Submission Local Plan was published for public consultation (under Regulation 19 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012) between 3 August and 25 September 2026.
- 5.2.3 In line with Policy DM4 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), local planning authorities may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to several factors. The Proposed Submission Local Plan is consistent with policies in the National Planning Policy Framework 2026. Whilst the joint Local Plan is at an advanced stage in the plan making process, the Regulation 19 consultation is yet to be completed.
- 5.2.4 Therefore, at this stage, the Proposed Submission Local Plan and its policies can only be afforded limited weight as a material consideration in decision making.
- 5.2.5 Submission of the Local Plan to the Secretary of State is anticipated by the end of December 2026.

5.3 Cambridge Local Plan (2018)

Policy 1: The presumption in favour of sustainable development

Policy 10: The City Centre

Policy 27: Site specific development opportunities

Policy 28: Carbon reduction, community energy networks, sustainable design and construction, and water use

Policy 29: Renewable and low carbon energy generation

Policy 32: Flood risk

Policy 35: Protection of human health from noise and vibration

Policy 36: Air quality, odour and dust

Policy 55: Responding to context

Policy 56: Creating successful places

Policy 59: Designing landscape and the public realm

Policy 61: Conservation and enhancement of Cambridge's historic environment
Policy 62: Local heritage assets
Policy 63: Works to a heritage asset to address climate change
Policy 67: Protection of open space
Policy 70: Protection of priority species and habitats
Policy 71: Trees

5.4 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)

Biodiversity SPD – Adopted February 2022

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD – Adopted January 2020

Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD – Adopted November 2016

Development affecting Conservation Areas SPD – Adopted 2009

5.5 Other guidance

Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal

Biodiversity Checklist for Land Use Planners in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (2001).

Buildings of Local Interest (2005)

Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2010)

Cambridgeshire Design Guide For Streets and Public Realm (2007)

5.6 Area Guidelines

Cambridge Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal (2015)

6. Consultations

Publicity

Neighbour letters – Y

Site Notice – Y

Conservation Officer- No Objection

- 6.1 The proposed development would result in harm to the character of the conservation area and setting of listed buildings at the lower end of the scale.
- 6.2 The public and heritage benefits of supporting the ongoing public events on the site is considered sufficient to outweigh the harm.

County Highways Development Management - No Objection

- 6.3 No significant adverse effect upon the Public Highway should result from this proposal.

Definitive Maps Officer- No Objection

- 6.4 No objection to the proposal, the footpath must remain open and unobstructed at all times.

Drainage Officer- No Objection

- 6.5 No objection to the proposed development.

Ecology Officer- No Objection

- 6.6 It is not anticipated that the proposal would have significant impact on protected species.

Environmental Health- No Objection

- 6.7 No objection to the proposed development.

Historic England- No comment

- 6.8 In this case we are not offering advice, we suggest that you seek the views of your specialist conservation and archaeological advisers.

Tree Officer- No Objection

- 6.9 Following the provision of an Arboricultural Method Statement, there is no objection to the proposed development provided the recommendations are implemented and followed throughout the development process.

7. Third party representations

7.1 1 representation has been received.

7.2 Comments in support of the application raise the following points:

- Provision of electrical connection would drastically reduce the reliance on diesel generators and fuel usage to provide events such as the Christmas market.
- The permanent electrical solution would improve the long-term viability of providing the christmas market on Parkers Piece

8. Member Representations

8.1 No Cllr representations have been received.

9. Local Groups / Petition

9.1 No representations or petitions have been received from Local Groups.

10. Assessment

10.1 From the consultation responses and representations received and from an inspection of the site and the surroundings, the key issues are:

- Principle of development
- Design, layout, scale and landscaping
- Trees
- Heritage assets
- Carbon reduction and sustainable design

11. Principle of Development

11.1 The application site comprises the entirety of the Parkers Piece Protected Open Space, identified as a Park and Garden protection. The application site also falls within the Cambridge City Centre.

11.2 Policy 10 of the Local Plan sets out a number of criteria that any new development or redevelopment, within the defined City Centre should provide.

11.3 The nature and scale of the proposed development is such that officers do not consider it would have any notable impact on the wider City Center

area. It would, however, assist in providing a range of facilities within one of the Cities most prominent open spaces. As such, the proposal is considered to comply with the purposes of Policy 10 of the Local Plan.

- 11.4 Policy 67 of the Local Plan states that proposals that would harm the character of, or lead to the loss of open space would not be permitted unless it can be satisfactorily replaced within a short distance of the application site.
- 11.5 The scale of the proposed development in this instance, in addition to the location of the proposed cabinets, is such that the works are not considered to result in any material loss of open space within Parkers Piece. The siting to the cabinets to the extremities of the Piece is such that they would appear next to the existing benches and bins that are in similar locations. Whilst as set out in the heritage section of this report, the proposal would result in a level of harm to the character of the wider conservation area, it is not considered that the proposal would conflict with Policy 67 of the Local Plan.
- 11.6 The principle of the development is therefore acceptable and in accordance with policies 10 and 67 of the Cambridge Local Plan as well as the relevant Policies within the NPPF.

12. Design, layout, scale and landscaping

- 12.1 The application site comprises the entirety of Parkers Piece, although the development itself is restricted to two small areas of the Piece itself. Parkers Piece is one of the most prominent areas of open space within the site, dissected by two, intersecting public footpaths meeting in the center of the Piece which is marked by the Grade II listed Reality Checkpoint.
- 12.2 The Piece itself is a large area of undeveloped open space, however throughout the year it is frequently used to hold a variety of events which often include the provision of temporary structures. These events tend to be restricted to the eastern half of the piece.
- 12.3 There are a number of highly significant trees surrounding Parkers Piece, perhaps most importantly along the southern and northern boundaries, although there are trees to all four sides. There are also a number of buildings of varying heritage significance surrounding the site, especially to the western and northern sides.

- 12.4 This application seeks the erection of two, ground mounted electrical cabinets within Parkers Piece, one to the southwestern boundary along Parkers Terrace, and the other to the southeastern boundary along Gonville Place.
- 12.5 This siting is considered to be in two of the least sensitive areas of the Piece, being away from the majority of the surrounding heritage assets, whilst also being grouped with existing benches and bins.
- 12.6 The cabinets themselves are approximately two metres in height, two metres in width and half a metre in depth. Both would however require minor excavation to facilitate baseplates that would measure approximately 2.3 metres in width and 0.8 metres in depth.
- 12.7 It is therefore acknowledged that the cabinets would be the largest of the structures surrounding Parkers Piece, significantly larger than the benches and bins that are currently in place. Notwithstanding the heritage impacts of the proposed development that will follow in later sections of this report, the scale of the units has been justified as the minimum required to accommodate the power output necessary for their function.
- 12.8 The cabinets are to be constructed using standard materials with an indication within the Design and Access Statement that they shall be painted dark green. Given the importance of their appearance, it is considered necessary to condition the colour of which the cabinets would be painted to ensure that they are green, minimising their visual impact.
- 12.9 Overall, the proposed development is a high-quality design that would contribute positively to its surroundings and be appropriately landscaped. The proposal is compliant with policies 55, 56 and 59 of the Local Plan and the NPPF

13. Trees

- 13.1 The siting of the proposed cabinets is such that they are both within close proximity to existing trees that are of significant amenity value and protected by virtue of being within the Historic Core Conservation Area.
- 13.2 Initial comments received from the council's Tree Officer raised an objection due to a lack of information provided to demonstrate the impact of the proposal on these surrounding trees.
- 13.3 An Arboricultural Method Statement and respective Tree Protection Plans have been provided since the initial Tree Officer comments.

- 13.4 The proposed development would not itself require any tree works or removal. However, the required cabling for both cabinets is within, or in close proximity to root protection areas (RPA) of the surrounding trees. In addition, the cabinet itself and concrete baseplate along Regent Terrace is within the RPA of T034 which is identified as a Category A tree.
- 13.5 The Council's Tree Officer, following this additional information has advised that there is no objection to the proposed development subject to the implementation of recommendations set out in the provided Arboricultural Method Statement. A condition is recommended to this effect.
- 13.6 Subject to conditions as appropriate, the proposal would accord with policies 59 and 71 of the Local Plan and the NPPF.

14. Heritage assets

- 14.1 The application falls within the Historic Core Conservation Area. The application is within the setting of the Grade II listed Reality Checkpoint and multiple Grade II listed buildings along Regent Terrace, Park Terrace and Parkside.
- 14.2 Parkers Piece is an important green, open space within the Historic Core Conservation Area providing recreational facilities within the centre of the city. The edge of the Piece is marked by mature regularly spaced trees with views between these trees into the open space. Parkers Piece therefore makes a strong contribution to the character and appearance of the Historic Core Conservation Area.
- 14.3 There are a number of Grade II listed buildings to the perimeter streets in addition to the Grade II listed Reality Checkpoint lamp being located in the centre of the open space.
- 14.4 Policy HE6 of the 2026 NPPF states that substantial weight should be given to the conservation of heritage assets, and where a proposal would harm the significance of a designated heritage asset, the effect on the asset and its significance should be weighed against any public benefits resulting from the proposal.
- 14.5 The proposed development would undoubtedly be visible, within Parkers Piece and therefore also within the setting of the nearby listed buildings and Reality Checkpoint.

- 14.6 The siting of the proposed cabinets to the perimeter of the open space helps to mitigate their visual impact on the openness of the site. However their scale would be larger than that of the existing features and street furniture found within the vicinity.
- 14.7 Whilst the siting and colour of the proposed cabinets helps to mitigate their visual impact, the proposal is considered to result in a level of harm to both the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting of the nearby listed buildings as well as Reality Checkpoint.
- 14.8 The council's Conservation Officer, within their comments concludes that this harm would be *less than substantial at the lower end of the scale*. However, since these comments were received, the updated NPPF has removed reference to "less than substantial harm". Harm to heritage assets is now either "harm" or "substantial harm" with the ability to further clarify the level of harm within these broad designations.
- 14.9 Officers agree with the view of the Conservation Officer that the proposal would result in a level of harm to both the Conservation Area and setting of Listed Buildings. However, this is considered to be "harm" at the lower end of the scale.
- 14.10 Whilst Parkers Piece has, for a number of years been used for hosting public events. The Historic significance of the space is primarily as an open area, supporting recreational use and sporting events. It is not therefore considered that there are any tangible heritage benefits arising from the proposed development.
- 14.11 Given that a level of heritage harm is identified, the application would be in conflict with Policy 61 of the Local Plan, there is, therefore a requirement, under Policy HE6(4) of the NPPF to weigh this harm against the public benefits of the proposal, in accordance with Sections 66 and 72 of the LBCA 1990
- 14.12 The detailed assessment of public benefits and the balance required under Policy HE6(4) of the NPPF is reserved for the planning balance at the end of this report. In conclusion however, officers consider that taken together the economic, social and environmental benefits of the scheme are substantial. In accordance with Policy HE6(4) of the NPPF 2026, these benefits provide clear and convincing justification that outweighs the harm to the setting of designated heritage assets.

15. Carbon reduction and sustainable design

- 15.1 Given the nature of the proposed development, there is no requirement for a sustainability statement of consultation with the council's sustainability officer.
- 15.2 There are however inherent sustainability benefits arising from the proposed development. Primarily this benefit is through providing a more sustainable form of power to future events within Parkers Piece, especially when considered against the historic use of diesel generators.
- 15.3 The applicants have suitably addressed the issue of sustainability and renewable energy and subject to conditions the proposal is compliant with policy 29 of the Local Plan, NPPF (2026) Policies CC2, CC3 and DP3 and the Greater Cambridge Sustainable Design and Construction SPD 2020.

16. Biodiversity

- 16.1 The application has been subject to formal consultation with the Council's Ecology Officer, who raises no objection to the proposal. Given the nature of the application site, being a high used public open space, the scale of the proposed development is not considered likely to result in any notable impact upon protected or priority species.
- 16.2 To clarify, whilst updated Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regulations came into effect on the 6th August 2026, transitional arrangements set out that applications submitted before this date (including this application) will continue to be assessed against the regulations prior to the 6th August.
- 16.3 The footprint of the concrete bases for both cabinets would fall well below the 25m² habitat threshold for BNG requirement under the previous regulations. Whilst the laying of cable may exceed the threshold, this can be undertaken with land restored to its original condition, thereby not resulting in any material "impact" to the habitat. Overall, the proposal therefore falls below the threshold for BNG requirement in this case.
- 16.4 In consultation with the Council's Ecology Officer, subject to an appropriate condition, officers are satisfied that the proposed development complies with policy 70 of the Local Plan, the Biodiversity SPD 2022, the requirements of the Environment Act 2021 and 06/2005 Circular advice.

17. Water management and flood risk

- 17.1 The site is in Flood Zone 1 and is therefore considered at low risk of flooding. Whilst there are areas at low to medium risk of surface water flooding, the locations of both proposed cabinets sit outside of these areas and are therefore also at low risk of surface water flooding.
- 17.2 The Council's Sustainable Drainage Engineer has advised that there is no objection to the proposed development. Officers agree that, given the scale of the proposed development and the low flood risk of the site, there is no significant risk of harm through flood risk within the site.
- 17.3 The applicants have suitably addressed the issues of water management and flood risk, and subject to conditions the proposal is in accordance with policies 31 and 32 of the Local Plan and NPPF advice.

18. Highway safety and transport impacts

- 18.1 The proposed development seeks no alterations to the existing site access arrangements, nor is it considered that the scale of the development would result in a significant intensification of such use.
- 18.2 The application has been subject to formal consultation with Cambridgeshire County Council's Local Highways Authority, who raise no objection to the proposal.
- 18.3 The proposal therefore accords with the objectives of Policies 80 and 81 of the Local Plan and is compliant with NPPF advice.

19. Car and cycle provision

- 19.1 The nature of the proposed development is such that there would be no increase in demand for car or cycle parking within the application site. Whilst there may be an indirect link through events within Parkers Piece, it would not be reasonable to require additional car parking through this application.
- 19.2 The proposed parking arrangement is compliant with Policy 81 of the Local Plan.

20. Amenity

Neighbouring properties

- 20.1 No objections have been received from neighbouring occupiers. A site visit has been undertaken. Given the adjacent context, location, size, and design of the proposal it is unlikely to give rise to any significant amenity impacts in terms of overlooking, loss of daylight, enclosure or other environmental impacts. The proposal is compliant with policy 35 of the Local Plan.

Construction and environmental health impacts

- 20.2 The construction likely required for the proposed development is not considered to be significant and would not, therefore, result in any significant harm through noise and disturbance to neighbouring residential properties.
- 20.3 The location of the proposed cabinets is such that there is a high level of background noise. Therefore any noise generated through the use of the cabinets is not, in line with the comments of the Environmental Health Officer, likely to be significant. In any instance, the noise generated by such equipment would be significantly lower than the alternative use of diesel generators.

Summary

- 20.4 The proposal adequately respects the amenity of its neighbours and of future occupants. Subject to conditions, the proposal is compliant with policies 55, 56 and 59 of the Local Plan. The associated construction and environmental impacts would be acceptable in accordance with policies 35 and 36 of the Local Plan.

21. Planning balance

- 21.1 Planning decisions must be taken in accordance with the development plan unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise (section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38[6] of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
- 21.2 Summary of harm
- 21.3 Harm (at the lower end of the scale) is identified to the Character and Appearance of the Historic Core Conservation Area as well as the setting

of multiple Grade II listed buildings and the Grade II listed Reality Checkpoint. In line with the updated NPPF, this is given substantial weight.

21.4 Summary of benefits

21.5 The proposed development would help to facilitate the continued use of Parkers Piece for public events providing a social benefit. This is afforded moderate weight.

21.6 The proposal would provide connectivity to future events, including the Christmas market that has a further 3-year permission granted. This connectivity provides a significantly more sustainable, efficient form of energy for these events as set out in NPPF Policy HE6(4). This is afforded significant weight.

21.7 Having taken into account the provisions of the development plan, NPPF and NPPG guidance, the statutory requirements of section 66(1) and section 72(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the views of statutory consultees and wider stakeholders, as well as all other material planning considerations, the proposed development is recommended for approval subject to conditions.

22. Recommendation

22.1 **Approve** subject to:
-The planning conditions as set out below with minor amendments to the conditions as drafted delegated to officers.

23. Planning conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: In accordance with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans as listed on this decision notice.
 - Location Plan (001)
 - ELECTRICAL CABINET REGENT TERRACE (002)

- ELECTRICAL CABINET GONVILLE PLACE (003)
- ACE-SA-010 400-600A CUT-OUT ACE13

Reason: In the interests of good planning, for the avoidance of doubt and to facilitate any future application to the Local Planning Authority under Section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

- 3) The approved tree protection methodology (Thrive Tree Consultancy, June 2026) shall be implemented throughout the development and the agreed means of protection shall be retained on site until all equipment and surplus materials have been removed from the site. Nothing shall be stored or placed in any area protected in accordance with approved tree protection plans, and the ground levels within those areas shall not be altered nor shall any excavation be made without the prior written approval of the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure that trees to be retained will be protected from damage during any construction activity, including demolition (Cambridge Local Plan 2018 Policy 71 and Section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990).

- 4) The cabinets hereby permitted shall be painted green to ensure that their appearance is in keeping with the surrounding context.

Reason: To ensure that the impact of the appearance of the proposed development is minimised, in accordance with Policies 55, 56 and 61 of the Cambridge Local Plan 2018 and the NPPF 2026).