

Market Square Feasibility Assessment – Executive summary Conclusions and Recommendations



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Executive summary

Conclusions and Recommendations

This Feasibility Assessment summarises how Market Square is used today. Subsequent stages of the design process need to use the findings within this study to help define the brief and vision for RIBA Stage 02.

Change for the city's historic core and Market Square is forthcoming; the 2018 Local Plan promotes sustainable, positive change as part of the vision for the City of Cambridge. This change is, in part, as a consequence of Cambridge's success as a world-leading city, with a growth in resident and visitor numbers being recorded year-on-year. As such the Local Plan and current planning policy seek to protect the city's rich heritage from this pressure, safeguarding its rich heritage and its highly cherished public open spaces. Market Square is a key part of this public open space network and the setting of the vision for the city centre.

As a space Market Square holds its own challenges. It accommodates a busy and successful market, resident and student accommodation and high levels of tourism. Accommodating these uses in the square's current configuration results in conflict between users, with vehicle operations dictating the quality and usability of the public space available. As such the square, whilst being civic in nature, does not fulfil this civic role the city aspires it to undertake.

Regardless of the challenges there are clear opportunities for improvement. By re-evaluating the movement and place functions of the space, the square can be re-imagined, as long as there is the ambition to do so. Redefining the public highway, enhancing the design of the market and improving services and facilities within the space are just some of the changes that will improve the square. These changes would allow the opportunity for new spaces to be created which would give further opportunity for landscape features such as furniture, trees and lighting.

Feasibility Study Key Findings;

- The Market Square and associated market is historically important to Cambridge being inherently linked to the character of the city centre
- The square is rich in architectural character, the listed buildings of Great St. Marys, the Guildhall, and the Grade II listed central fountain are key assets which should be protected
- The central market provides animation to the space and its informal character positively contributes to the city centre
- Previous proposals for the Market Square have faced opposition/ objection(s) from key stakeholders. These objections have been enough to undermine the respective schemes
- Current licencing of traders is indefinite, the City Council is therefore unable to cancel existing agreements
- Listed buildings and features are not celebrated and the Grade II listed fountain is concealed by the configuration of the market. Historic England will require early engagement if the Grade II listed fountain is to be relocated. Relocation of the fountain would likely receive stakeholder objection
- Carriageway of Market Hill is disproportionately wide when compared to the adjoining pavements. As a prohibited street for trading, Market Hill requires legal agreement for any potential change in its use. Despite this, Market Hill is a key opportunity space for the square
- Management of parking, loading and taxis compete for space with pedestrian and cycle uses. Conflict and congestion is caused by unscheduled ad-hoc vehicular activities
- Pedestrian permeability is difficult and non-intuitive. No accessible route exists within the market and the current road profile incorporates raised kerbs which obstruct wheelchairs. The central market space is congested and restrictive for all but those able-bodied. The quality of the pavement surface is mixed; the area of natural stone setts, located within the centre of the square, is currently being considered for listed status protection. This surface is in need of being re-paved due to evidence of subsidence
- The current surface drainage system is inadequate being prone to flooding, current surface drainage system requires improvement
- Significant excavation within the square will hold a high level of risk due to known constraints and archaeological interest, consider mitigating where possible to avoid existing utilities and known basement structures. Archaeological analysis is likely to be required at 1500mm – 3000mm deep
- It is likely that a large canopy above the market area would be unachievable. This would encounter significant stakeholder objection
- Below ground refuse containment is an achievable objective for the scheme, it should encounter little resistance from stakeholders as there is an effective precedent of its application within Cambridge

- Below ground cycle storage will likely incur significant construction and maintenance costs which would likely outweigh the schemes benefits
- Market stalls are fixed, resulting in little opportunity for the diversification uses beyond that of the market
- The Market Square is perceived as a 'no go area' after dark, where anti-social behaviour is an issue

Interpreting the Design Matrix – Sections 6 & 7 Levels of Intervention

The levels of intervention represented within the final stages of the study should not be seen as designs themselves, but instead viewed as degrees of change that the Market Square could develop towards. These interventions are a means to provide background for the future setting of the vision for the space.

1. Repave, Relay and Declutter – The space retains its current layout (low to medium cost / lower risk / short to medium term intervention)

Subtle change to the character of the space could be delivered in the short-term at lower cost and risk, to help deliver 'quick win' changes to address existing, pressing issues whilst more substantial funding is being sort for more complicated, time consuming and costly measures. This helps show the local community that there is intent to address their issues and concerns in considered manner. However, repaving/relaying and repairs to existing pavement surfaces would still incur a substantial construction cost and the public perception may question its worth if an appropriate level of change cannot be seen. Public support for the scheme would likely be a mixed if disruption is prolonged and results are only seen as temporary.

2. Repave, Relay, Declutter, Relocate and Merge Functions – The space retains its current layout (low to medium cost / lower risk / short to medium term intervention)

Reconsideration of existing traffic and parking management will help to unlock much needed space and address more substantial existing market and local business issues, safety and other constraints. This approach could be delivered in the short to medium term and include temporary trials to test the potential changes, impacts and obtain local buy-in and wider on-going support if appropriately programmed and managed. These works could commence ahead, and independently, of any costly re-paving / construction works, potentially acting as an initial marker for more

substantial change. In addition this could help build awareness and support for longer-term more visionary changes.

3. Reorganise the Square – The space adopts a new layout (medium cost / medium risk / medium-term intervention)

This approach focuses on a more longer-term rebalancing of movement and place-making functions. In this approach, the space will be reorganised to help support existing as well consider future needs and aspirations of the market, businesses and the wider community. This approach represents a medium cost and risk option that would require comprehensive engagement and consultation to help ensure greater success. As such the approach would require a comprehensive engagement programme, on-going buy-in and sign-off from a number of key stakeholders and the local community. To reduce risks, temporary trials and community-led schemes could be undertaken prior to undertaking more significant / permanent changes but will require careful planning, management and monitoring.

4. Recreate the Square – The space adopts a new layout (higher cost / higher risk / longer-term intervention)

This scheme has the ability to deliver a high-quality public space that fully addresses the existing as well as future needs and aspirations of the market, local businesses and wider community. Whilst, this approach will require substantial funding, associated planning and a comprehensive engagement strategy, it has much greater potential for safeguarding this important asset in the longer term and ensuring future generations can continue to enjoy this invaluable space.

Levels of Intervention Recommendation – A collaborative and phased approach

It is recommended that prior to commencing further design work, stakeholder and community visioning exercises coupled with a robust process of bespoke engagement should be set in motion in order to define the aspiration for the square and therefore the level of change proposed. In addition, it is recommended that a funding strategy and associated programme is identified, with the aim of continuing to deliver 'quick-win' improvements, test and trial options on-street and help address existing, pressing issues and complaints. In doing so, this approach also helps to obtain and, importantly, maintain local support, whilst funding is sought for longer term, complex and costly interventions.

It is recognised that much needed drainage and pavement works are required as soon as possible to improve existing market conditions and address existing safety concerns. However, how these works are perceived by the public will be determined by both the final outcome, and the process undertaken to achieve it; resurfacing the square to its current layout would still hold significant construction costs whilst not addressing some of the current issues regarding space and place-making or known future aspirations expressed by key stakeholders and the local community. Combining the works required within a bolder vision for the space is a clear opportunity, particularly if the final outcome is to align with local policy and the emerging SPD. On this basis the 'level of intervention' the City Council and its partners should be striving towards one that fully rejuvenates this invaluable public space (levels 'reorganise/recreate').

This more visionary approach needs to take account of its extraordinary historical assets and heritage but also, importantly, look to the future, embracing change (as it has in the past) to ensure this remarkable space continues to adapt and evolve sustainably, whilst continuing to support today's market, businesses and local community. This approach would require a greater level of project management, design complexity, incur more substantial costs and hold a more challenging route in terms of agreements. However, as identified in this study, through a well-considered, managed, fully collaborative and phased approach, the longer term viability and sustainability of Market Square, as well surrounding streets and spaces, and Cambridge as a whole will be much more pronounced and long-standing.

Setting a Vision

There is a need to establish an agreed, clear vision and objectives for the scheme, which respond to the complex and competing requirements in this mixed-use environment. The aim to successfully balance the movement and place functions by prioritising pedestrian and cyclist movement while making it easier for businesses and the market to operate effectively. It is recommended that visioning workshops with technical stakeholders and the community are arranged prior to design progression to develop and agree a vision and objectives for the scheme.

Tailored Engagement

A robust engagement strategy is planned for the scheme, however it is recommended that this engagement strategy should become tailored against the agreed vision for the space once established. Elements such as introducing a canopy, or moving the listed fountain will require detailed engagement with English Heritage and other key stakeholders, proposals for below ground cycle parking or refuse containment will require engagement with city operators and local businesses.

As examples, these bold design moves will be, in part, defined the vision for the space and its resulting objectives.

Failure to engage on project specifics, such as these bolder elements, would derail or at worst terminate project progression. It is therefore crucial that a detailed engagement and consultation strategy is identified at the earliest stage and prior to further design development. This approach will ensure that an open, honest and two-way dialogue with stakeholders and the project team can be maintained throughout the project lifecycle. The engagement strategy should include the following key items and undertakings:

- Preparation of a 'live' detailed and bespoke engagement and consultation strategy and ongoing programme
- Maintenance of a 'live' list of important community stakeholders that require engagement and consultation
- Engage with the community Market Square project steering group to work with the project team throughout the project lifecycle. This group should include representatives from the business and market community, residents, disability groups, cycling representatives, students/young people and councillors. This group should aim to meet regularly to maintain communication, discuss issues and input into the design process
- Identify, procure and manage engagement and consultation activities and events, report and engage with the client and project design team
- Vision setting and early engagement with English Heritage and Colleges to assess the viability for larger infrastructure elements – cycle storage/canopy/moving the listed fountain

The Market and Business Community

It is recommended that a Market and Retail specialist is identified to work with the project team, the project community engagement specialist, the market manager, market traders and local businesses to undertake the following crucial activities:

- One-to-one interviews and/or surveys and workshops with individual market traders and local businesses to identify existing arrangements, issues, concerns and potential opportunities for change
- A market and local business assessment including economic performance, an operational review, consumer research and benchmarking against other cities to identify issues, opportunities and recommendations for improvements
- Working with market traders, the identification of a market relocation strategy for during construction, a market layout strategy and an ongoing licensing and management strategy

Scheme Trials and DIY Streets

It is recommended that, where reasonably feasible, trials and/or community 'DIY' street design events are undertaken to enable local people to test possible solutions and be actively involved in the design process. This may include:

- Temporary changes to the market stall location and layouts
- Temporary road closures to host pop-up events
- Areas of carriageway turned into temporary 'park-lets' to provide additional seating space near market stalls/local businesses. This would highlight/advertise the potential for reclaiming usable public space for pedestrians

Surveys recommended - Stage 02

- Undertake a condition survey of the drains and cobbles/setts
- Undertake a condition survey of the structural integrity of known under-sailing basements
- High mast Camera Surveys to monitor current vehicular use and behaviour
- Ground Penetration Radar (GPR) Surveys