4.1 Approach to Brief

Initial brief and aims for the Corn Exchange

- Improve the acoustics of the Hall.
- Improve the spend per head by offering a more attractive destination and generating more income for the council.
- Reduce annual operational costs and improving energy efficiencies
- Create synergies with an improved Market Square and Guildhall as part of a Civic Quarter destination and contribute to the outdoor events programme in the overall area as part of the overall Civic Quarter development and design proposals.

Additional briefing information from the Council.

Further briefing was provided by the Council in May and included the following points related to the Corn Exchange;

- 3 Parsons Court is added to the scope and the council would like to explore opportunities for a food and beverage or commercial lease in any of the space of the enhanced Corn Exchange area.
- This will provide opportunities to increase capacity, using all available space including use of rooftop area to enhance the venue offering including food and beverage, enhanced acoustics and performance space.
- The target of net zero carbon and water neutrality must not reduce capacity. This will help the council meet its net zero carbon by 2030 target.



4.2 Cambridge Cultural Offer

Prior to embarking on the proposals for the Corn Exchange we've undertaken a review of the cultural offer in Cambridge, the local area and wider region.

Prominent Landmarks in Cambridge.

- Parker's Piece
  Description: A large, flat green common in the centre of Cambridge.
  Highlights: Historically significant as the site of the first game of association football (soccer) played by the modern rules in 1848.
- Jesus Green and Midsummer Common
  Description: Two large green spaces along the River Cam.
  Highlights: Popular for outdoor activities, picnics, and the annual Midsummer Fair, one of the oldest fairs in England.
- Cambridge Station
  Description: The main railway station in Cambridge, a key hub for both local and long-distance travel.
  Location: Located south of the city centre, on Station Road.
- Cambridge North Station
  Description: Opened in 2017 to better serve the growing population and business area in the northern part of Cambridge.
  Location: Situated in the northern part of the city near the Cambridge Science Park.
- Addenbrooke's Hospital
  Description: Part of the Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Addenbrooke's is a leading teaching hospital affiliated with the University of Cambridge.
- Royal Papworth and The Rosie Hospital
  Description: A specialist heart/lung hospital, it is renowned for its expertise in cardiograph surgery and respiratory medicine. & A dedicated maternity hospital.
- ADC Theatre
  Capacity Seated: +- 228
- The Robinson Theatre
  Capacity Seated: +-142



Satellite view of Cambridge

- Cambridge Corn Exchange
- Performance Arts
- Concert Halls
- Event Spaces
- T Parks & Public Spaces (5k-30k people)
- R Railway
- H Hospital
- E Education & Research (500-5k people)
- C Church (300-2K people)
- S Sports (4k-8k people)
- +- 800 People
- +- 500 People
- +- 200 People
- "town" = Non-Academic
- "gown" = Academic

4.2 Cambridge Cultural Offer

Cambridge Folk Festival

Visitors: Approximately 10,000 people per day, totaling around 30,000 over the full three-day duration.

Cambridge Science Festival

Visitors: Around 3,000-5,000 people per day, totaling over 40,000 across the two-week festival.

Cambridge Beer Festival

Visitors: Approximately 6,000 people per day, totaling around 36,000 over the six-day event.

Cambridge Literary Festival

Visitors: Around 1,500-2,000 people per day, totaling over 15,000 across the ten-day festival (both editions combined).

Cambridge Film Festival

Visitors: Approximately 1,000-1,500 people per day, totaling around 10,000 over the ten-day festival.

Strawberry Fair

Visitors: Approximately 40,000 people attend on the single day of the event.

The Big Weekend

Visitors: Around 10,000 people per day, totaling about 30,000 over the three-day event.

Midsummer Fair

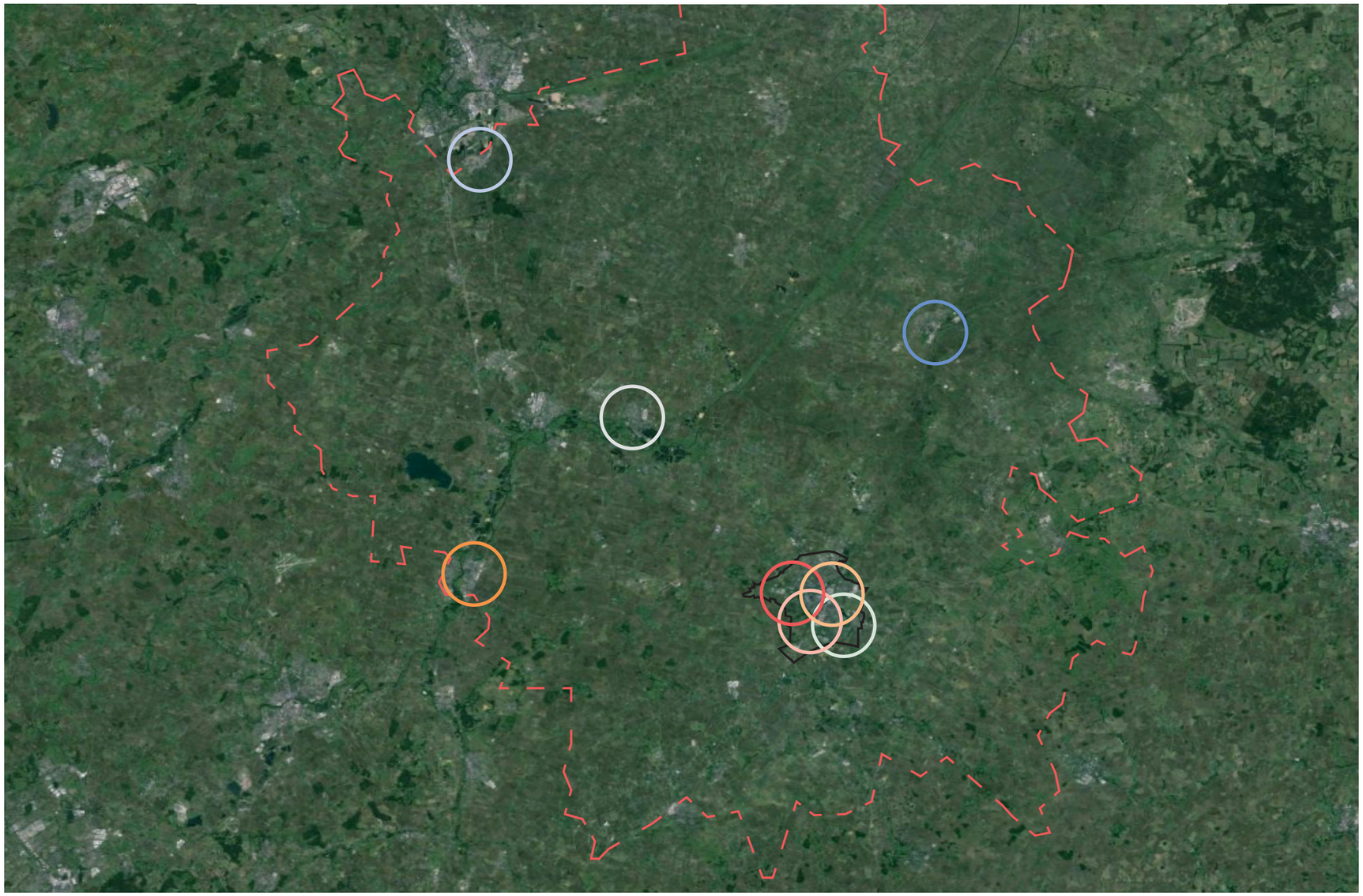
Visitors: Approximately 5,000-7,000 people per day, totaling around 20,000 over the four-day fair.

Ely Cathedral Christmas Gift & Food Fair

Visitors: Around 3,000 people per day, totaling around 12,000 over the four-day fair.

Cambridge Open Studios

Visitors: Around 1,000 people per weekend, totaling approximately 4,000 over the event's duration.



Satellite view of Cambridgeshire

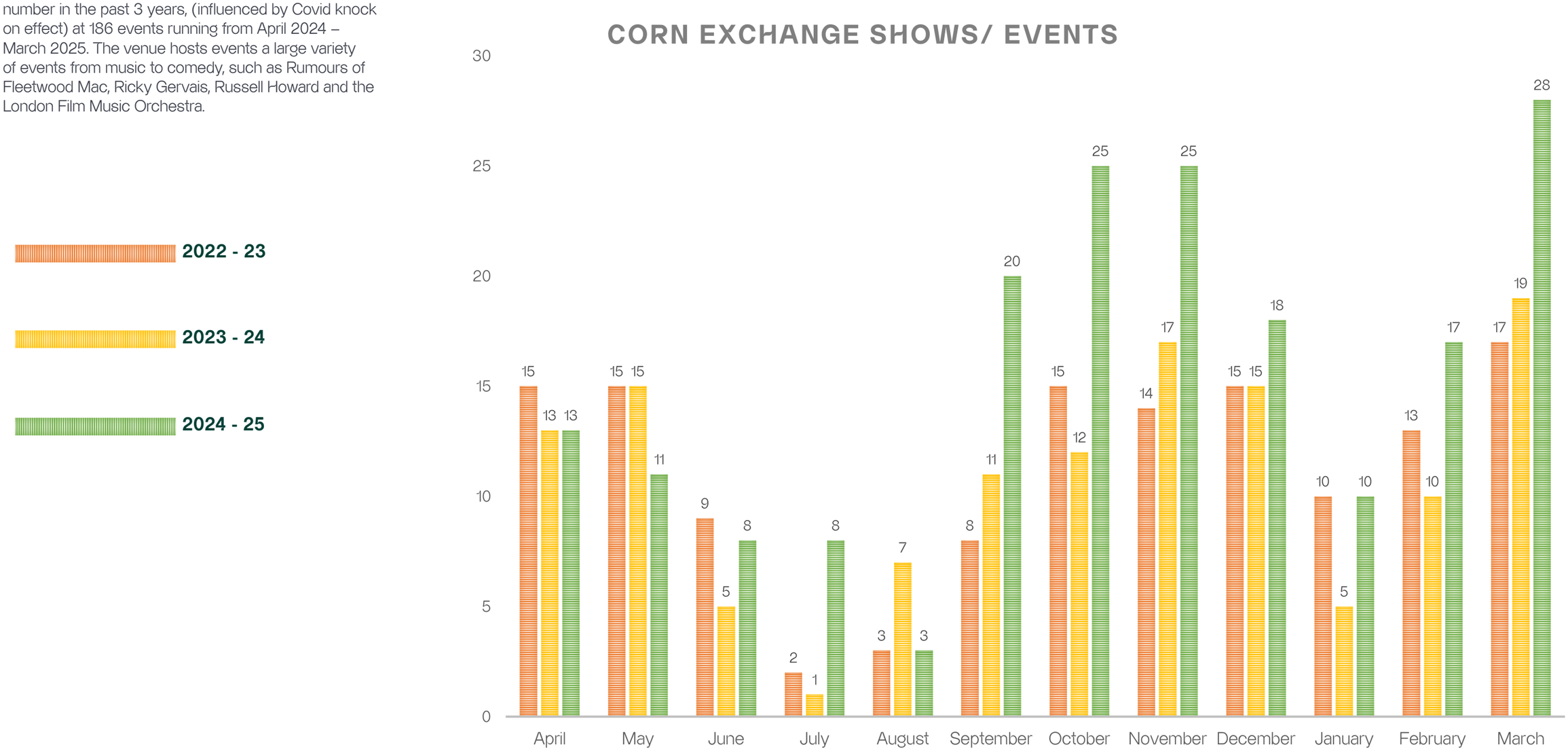
- Cambridge Folk Festival
- Cambridge Science Festival
- Cambridge Beer Festival
- Cambridge Literary Festival
- Cambridge Film Festival
- Strawberry Fair
- The Big Weekend
- Midsummer Fair
- Ely Cathedral Christmas Gift & Food Fair
- Cambridge Open Studios
- +- 800 People
- +- 500 People
- +- 200 People

4.2 Cambridge Cultural Offer

Corn Exchange Shows/ Events

Venue Booking Trends

The Corn Exchange hosts a wide array of events. With the current calendar year forecasting the largest number in the past 3 years, (influenced by Covid knock on effect) at 186 events running from April 2024 – March 2025. The venue hosts events a large variety of events from music to comedy, such as Rumours of Fleetwood Mac, Ricky Gervais, Russell Howard and the London Film Music Orchestra.



4.2 Cambridge Cultural Offer

Commercial & Private Hires

Venue Booking Trends

The Corn Exchange hosts a large variety of events in the space. The most popular commercial and private hire event seems to have been conferences, which aligns with what discussions with what Corn Exchange staff have told us. They also outlined that this is where they see the trend in venue bookings heading in future years. From May – August are the busiest years in the calendar for event hire.

Corn Exchange	2022-23												
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	**Totals**
TRIPOS		1	5										**6**
Graduation	1		1	6				2					**10**
Conference				13	4								**17**
Other			4			2	3		1	3	1		**14**
													47

Corn Exchange	2023-24												
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	**Totals**
TRIPOS		3	10										**13**
Graduation	1		1	3				2					**6**
Conference				13	3	6							**22**
Other		1		1	4	1	1		1	1	1		**11**
													52

Corn Exchange	2024-25												
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	**Totals**
TRIPOS		12											**12**
Graduation	1			3									**3**
Conference				6	8	5							**19**
Other			1	1		2		1	3				**8**
													42

Corn Exchange number of commercial & private hires

4.3 Building History

Venue History

The Corn Exchange has a rich history and has served many functions since the grand opening on 6 November 1875. A selection of key moments in the Corn Exchanges history are below;

1868 It is decided to build a new Corn Exchange building in its modern day location, at the time the site of the Black Bear Inn

1869 A design competition is launched, and won by local architect Richard Reynolds Rowe.

1874 The foundation is formally laid by Mayor John Death, constructed from Cornish granite from the Cheese Wring quarry. A statue of Jonas Webb is erected.

1875 Quarter of a million local bricks – red, yellow and dark blue – are selected to use for the construction. The decorative patterns made can still be seen on the building to this day.

Grand Opening - 1875 The Corn Exchange formally opens on 6 November. The occasion is marked with a civic procession from the Guildhall, followed by a dinner for local dignitaries.

The Early Twentieth Century: The Corn Exchange becomes part of Cambridge life

1917 Grocers move into the Corn Exchange, from the overcrowded streets of Petty Curry, causing queues and blockages in the building.

1940s During World War 2, the venue is used as a base for local women to “do their bit” by cleaning and repairing rifles.

1950s The Corn Exchange begins to be put to an increasingly wide range of uses, including roller skating, wrestling and boxing bouts, and county badminton matches.

The Post-War Years: The Corn Exchange loses its way

1965 The trading of corn at the venue ceases as a new “corn exchange” is built at the cattle market site. The venue is hired out as a warehouse

1970s The building is used for a mixture of purposes: one day sales, pop concerts and exhibitions.

1971 The decision is made that the Corn Exchange building will be converted into a proper concert hall, rather than incorporating a brand new concert hall into the Lion Yard development project.

1973 The Council’s search to find funding for the planned Corn Exchange conversion founders.

1981 A combination of the unsafe roof and noise objections from local residents lead to the closure of the Corn Exchange. 600 people march under the banner “Keep Cambridge Life” in protest.

The Late Twentieth Century to Today: The revival of the Corn Exchange

1982 The conversion of the building into a proper concert hall begins

1987 The official opening takes place on 4 February.

2006 The venue gets an overhaul, with internal redecoration and other improvements made.

2011 The Corn Exchange celebrates its 25th anniversary since its reopening in 1986 with a Royal Philharmonic Orchestra gala performance.

The 21st century saw appearances from old musical legends like Van Morrison, Chuck Berry and John Martyn, as well as young upstarts like Arctic Monkeys, Lily Allen and Amy Winehouse.

* Venue History taken from Cambridge Live (https://www.cambridgelive.org.uk/cornex/venue-info/venue-history-0)



View along Wheeler Street - Capturing Cambridge



No.1 Parsons Court - Capturing Cambridge



Corn Exchange intertor - Capturing Cambridge

4.4 Existing Building Assessment

Main Auditorium Space

Impressive timber roof structure reinforced with steel cross bracing. Currently not functioning properly, with leaks in the roof. Roofing material and build up will need to be replaced as part of upgrades, with standing seam roof and rockwool insulation. Existing decorative timbers and steel framing to be retained. Box position closest to the stage provides compromised view. Openings could be widened to allow for additional wheelchair seating capacity.



Front of stage view



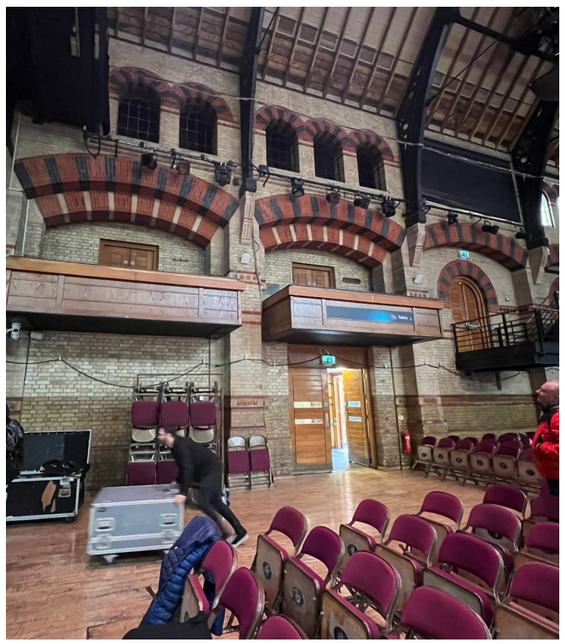
Decorative roofing panels



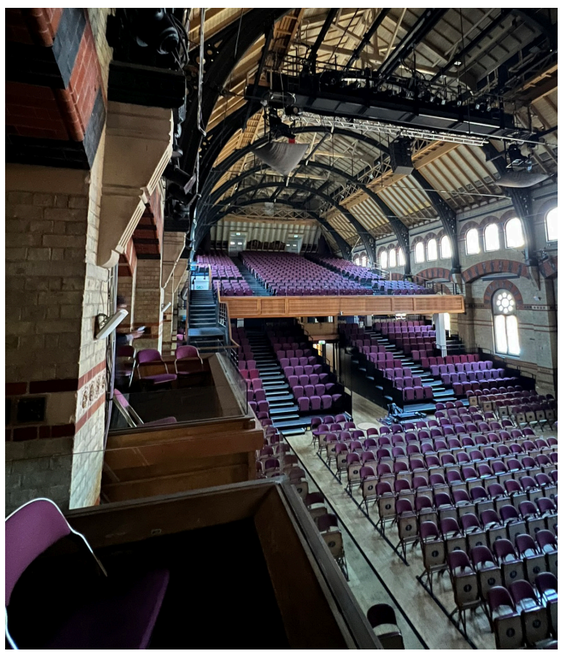
Corn Exchange rafters



Top of racked seating view



View to box seats



View from Box seat positions

4.4 Existing Building Assessment

Original Decorative Features

Several decorative features from the current building are important historic features worth noting. Sculptured stone work above entrances are of key importance, along with tiling, as shown in the pictures below. The decorative roof panelling in the rafters of the structure, should be restored and reinstated in the new Corn Exchange proposal.

Modern Decorative Additions

Within the back of house staircase there are a series of murals showing performers/ performances at the Guildhall.







Intricate brick tiling outside Box Office



Decorative Paneling



Decorative Paneling



Decorative Detailing



Decorative external tiling



Decorate stonework

4.4 Existing Building Assessment

Existing Openings

A number of alterations to the interiors of the Corn Exchange should be made to enhance the space.

Original façade detailing hidden behind blockwork wall at Mezzanine level, to be removed as part of new mezzanine bar option. Original brickwork infilled, could be knocked through and restored to express original structure as part of proposal. Decorative detailing visible for users when moving up to Mezzanine Level. St. Johns bar brickwork and window opening with views visible into Parsons Court. In the main Auditorium space a number of listed opening framing entrance and exit points, along with box seating next to main stage.



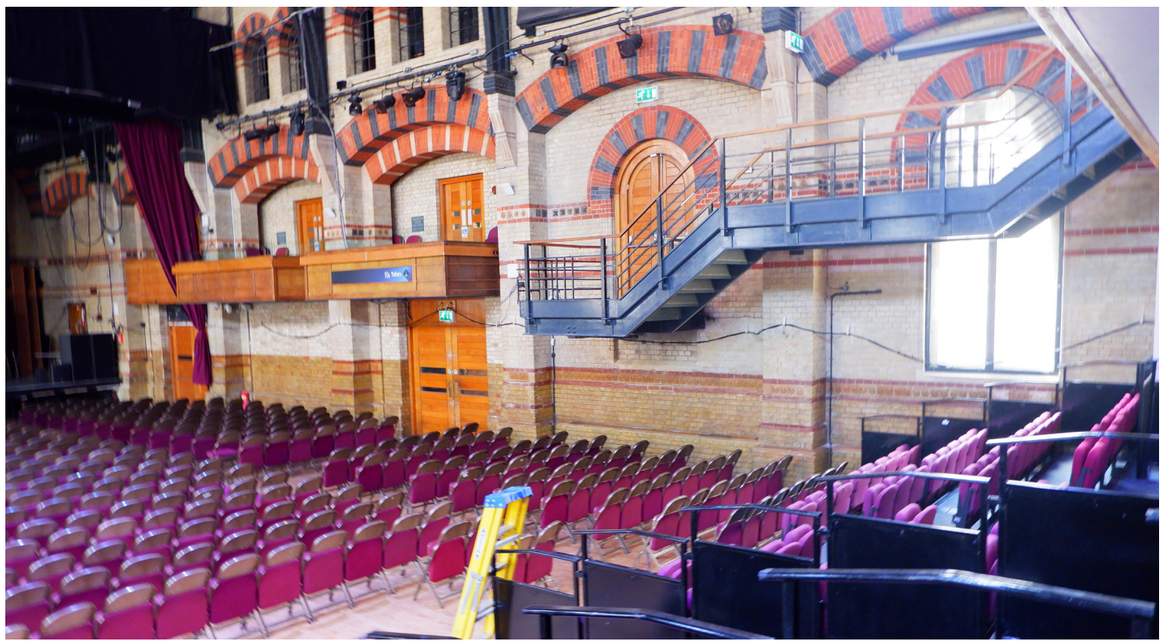
Front entrance double doors



Mezzanine side entrance



Blocked up arched brickwork



Fire escape stair from Auditorium



Mezzanine Level Stair



St. Johns Bar arched brickwork

4.5 Building Constraints and Opportunities

Outline of Building Opportunities

Improved arrival experience through reorganisation of foyer space with improved bar arrangement and introduction of new mezzanine level bar to create a 'wow' factor.

Creation of new entrance and outdoor break out space utilising Parson Court, improving access to the venue and reducing congestion through a single entry point

Opportunity for on site energy generation. Potential area for PV's on roof structure. East to West sloped roof provides optimum conditions for harnessing the sun's power.

New insulated roof to improve thermal performance, occupant comfort and reduce running costs

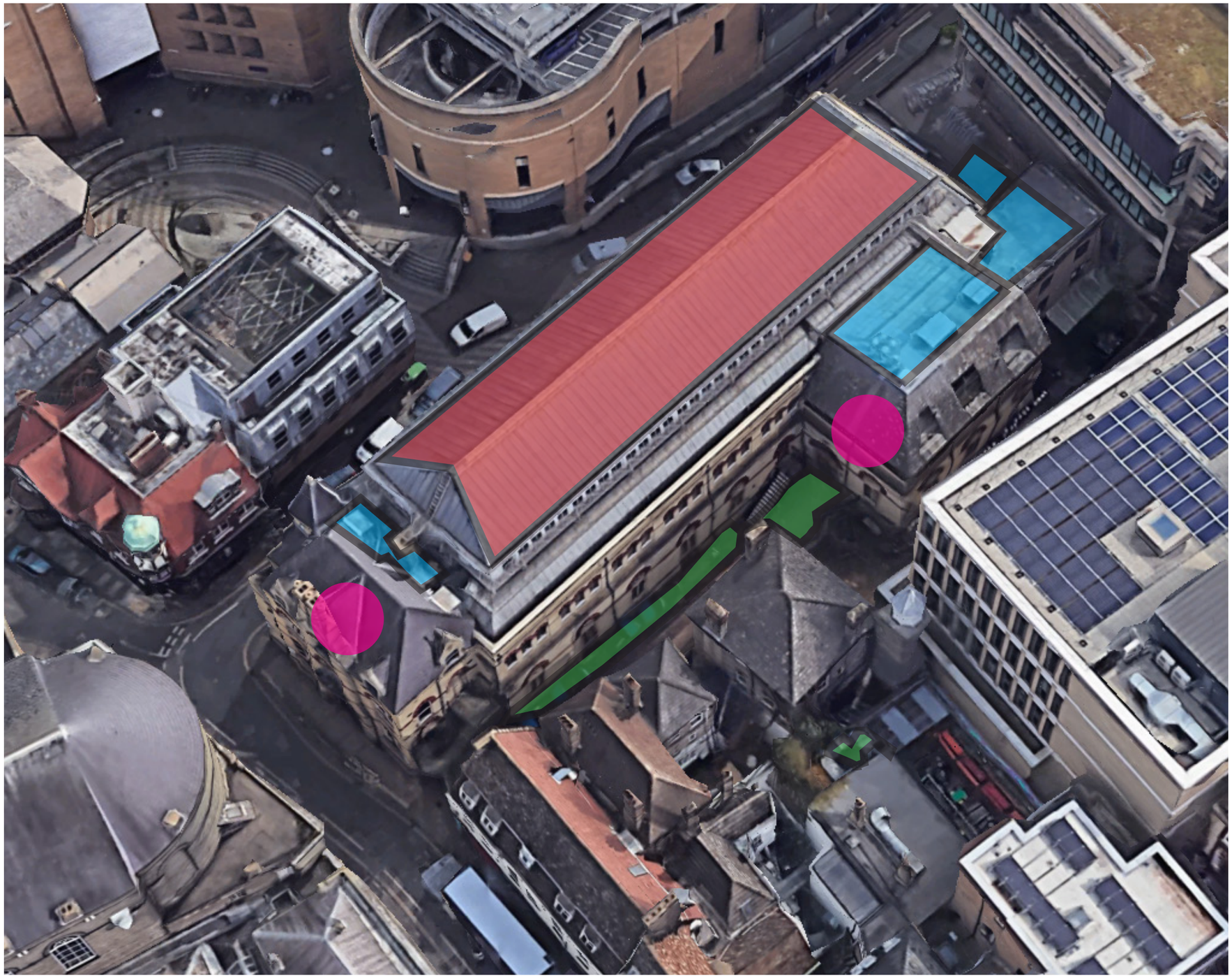
New plant and ventilation equipment to reduce running costs.

Locations for plant kit on top of roof structure, along with new infill location. Will have to be stepped back to not obstruct views from neighbouring buildings.

Improved access to existing first floor bar with upgraded bar experience.

Opportunity to improve accessibility for both performers and customers with new level access to the stage and new lift provision.

Improved WC provisions throughout.



4.5 Building Constraints and Opportunities



Parsons Court Fire Issue

Pinch point created from the exit of Parsons Court of less than 3m. Parsons Court could be used as 'holding capacity' for 250 people but would likely require fire protection to the windows on this façade.



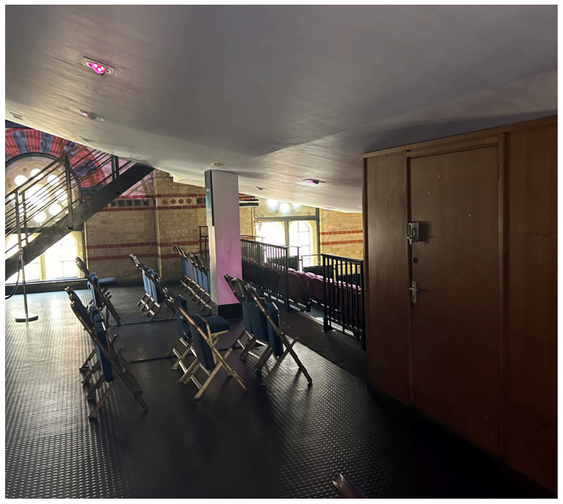
Parsons Court Bins

Currently large amount of bins stored in Parsons Court alleyway. Relocation of these needs to be resolved, could use Guildhall space if sufficient.



Corn Exchange Fire Escapes

The exits to the Corn Exchange St are stepped down to street level which decreases their capacity by approx. 25% Would likely require fire protection to the windows on this façade.



Compromised Seating

Low ceiling height at mezzanine level means seating capacity and view are compromised for most users on this level.



Lack of Storage Provision

There is a lack of drinks storage, potentially blocking fire exit routes. Proposals for the Corn Exchange need to account for increased bar storage and back bar areas need adequate space.



Limited Access to Plant Space

Plant areas above level 3, in the roof space has very limited access. The roof will need to be taken out in order for new plant to be installed. There is a need for upgrades to the current plant to meet Net Zero targets.



Limited Access to Substation

Limited access to substation. Will need to check with UKPN regarding access for substation upgrades.



Vehicle/kit congestion

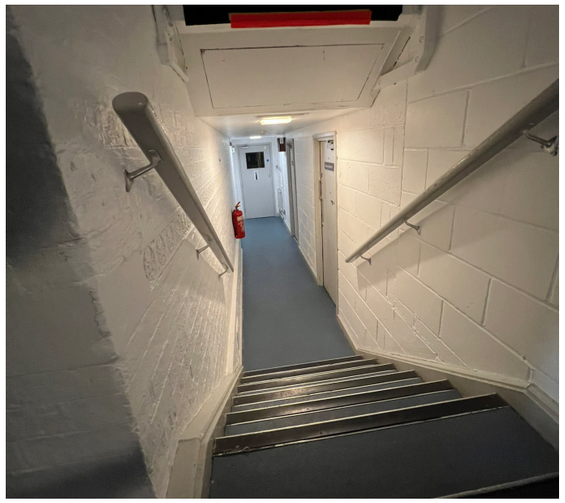
Vehicles parked in Parsons Court, along with equipment used in performances creates congested area and potential fire risk in the event of an evacuation.

4.5 Building Constraints and Opportunities



Thermal Envelope Issues

The main Corn Exchange roof needs replacing and bringing up to current standards to improve the thermal envelope. This brings an array of heating and cooling issues, which are apparent from visitors of the venue, complaining about the heat experienced in the top sections of the raked seating, along with people sitting in the flat section complaining about the cold. Secondary glazing to be replaced.



Level Access Issues

Existing Corn Exchange presents a number of challenges, including non-level access, meaning that wheelchair accessibility into staff changing areas challenging. Currently there is no access route for wheelchair users to get to the stage directly.



Bar Inefficiency

The current layout for bar provision is inefficient, with visitors queuing into each other, only allowing for around 4-5 people deep. This leads to a reduced number of sales made at the bar. Additionally, the only entrance and exit point to the main auditorium and ground level is through the central point, impacted by the bar queues results in large amounts of congestion and stagnation.



Inadequate Workstations

Existing office spaces are dark, unappealing places to work. Corn Exchange staff have complained about the current working conditions. Dimly lit, tight and in some cases no natural daylight in the current building will need to be addressed.

4.6 Key Interventions

Improvements Headline Figures

Fire Capacity Increase

Current Fire Capacity: 1550*

*limited by Fire Brigade

Max. Fire Capacity: 2090*

*Fire exit capacity can accommodate this number of occupants.

For further information regarding fire exit capacity please see Appendix 11. For further information about the auditorium design capacity refer to Appendix 12.

Improved Food & Beverage Offer

2 Current

Bar snacks available, St. John's bar currently under utilised

4 Proposed

Improved food and drink offer proposed

Improved Sustainability

Gas fired inefficient heating system

Limited Insulation

All electric ASHP heating system

Highly insulated roof

PV panels generating electricity

Potential 65% reduction in energy use

4.7 Initial Sketch Proposals

Initial Ideas

Our initial ideas for the Corn Exchange included;

- Increasing capacity, specifically standing capacity
- Offering more choice of food and drink
- Enabling a wider range of activities within the Corn Exchange
- Improving the acoustics and AV systems
- Improving Accessibility

These initial ideas were presented on the Engagement Boards, which can be seen opposite.

A visit to Brighton Corn Exchange was also undertaken to learn what was done to the transform a similar listed space. Here we understood challenges they faced on the building, discussing seating configurations and procurement approaches specifically relating to retractable seating in the Corn Exchange.

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

Cambridge Civic Quarter

Corn Exchange

Celebrating 150 years of the Corn Exchange

The Corn Exchange is the largest performance venue in the East of England, vital to Cambridge's cultural life. The proposed enhancements will ensure it continues to thrive. By upgrading the Corn Exchange, we aim to attract more high-profile events and performances, boosting Cambridge's reputation as a cultural hub. We want to make the venue more inclusive and enjoyable for all visitors.

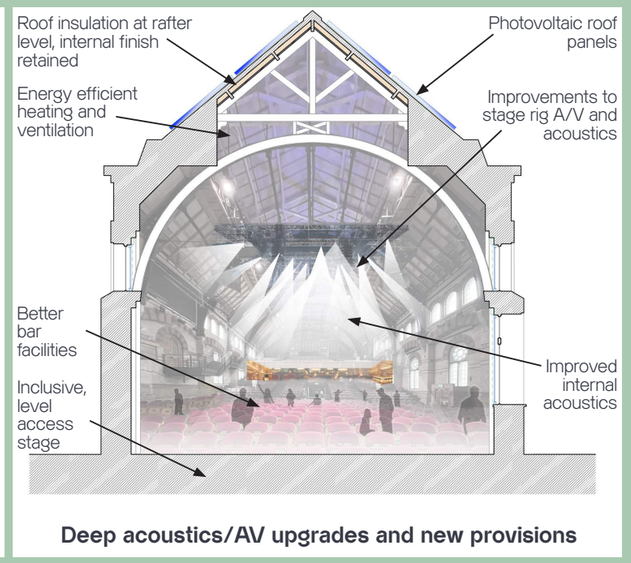


Cambridge Corn Exchange now



Examples of a refurbished Corn Exchange





Deep acoustics/AV upgrades and new provisions

Energy efficiency: Roof insulation, photovoltaic panels, and reduced energy consumption. These upgrades will lower operational costs and minimise the environmental footprint.

Acoustics and AV: Improving sound quality and new AV systems for diverse events, ensuring that performances and events meet the highest standards for audiences and performers alike.

Accessibility: Making all areas, including the small bar, accessible and more welcoming. Enhanced seating arrangements and facilities will ensure everyone can enjoy the venue.

Increased capacity: Expanding seating and standing areas to accommodate more attendees, allowing for larger events and wider variety.

More food and drink offerings: Introducing new concessions and bar areas to provide a wider variety of food and drink options, enhancing the overall visitor experience.

More variety: Enabling a wider range of daytime activities, including educational programmes for schools and community events, making the venue a dynamic hub for more groups throughout the day.

Tell us how we can make these spaces better for everyone

4.8 Design Development
Team Workshops

Workshops with Corn Exchange Staff

- Waste Management – Following a session with the Cambridge City Council Waste Team, it was discussed that there should be a change in the way customers are served in Corn Exchange bars. Currently the venue mainly serves bottles, instead of draft pints. The waste team suggested a change in licensing agreement with Greene King (alcohol provider) to serve draft beers to reduce waste/ carbon footprint.
- Foyer size – Discussions with Corn Exchange team regarding Foyer size. It was identified that they require a large footprint here for ticketing upon arrival of visitors of the venue. The suggestion of an additional entrance B, in Parsons Court to reduce congestion in this zone of the building. Staff also identified that a cloak room was required for people's possessions during shows. It was also noted that the area near the front entrance to the mezzanine stairs on both sides are used for temporary pop ups/ advertising stands during shows. These zones would need to remain clear in proposals for the space.
- Parsons Court &Neighbouring Building – Staff acknowledged Parsons Court could be reused as an outdoor entertainment destination for people to enjoy drinks outside, during or after shows. This would generate further revenue and alleviate congestions inside the Corn Exchange, resulting in further people being able to purchase drinks/ snacks at inside bars. Discussions began regarding No.3 Parsons Court, identified as a potential further expansion area for Corn Exchange, utilizing the space as an additional bar and outdoor drinking destination in the Courtyard space.
- Dressing Provisions – an additional session with staff discussing the current issues with dressing provisions in the building. Their main concern is the poor conditions of the current change areas, which need upgrading. They also identified that the laundry rooms at the rear second floor of the Corn Exchange is an incredibly important space for the building to operate efficiently. During the ballet performances, the touring companies will be washing costumes as this is the only location for them to be able to do this.
- Bar Provisions – it was explained in a session with staff the issues with current bar layouts in the building. The ground floor bar area is particularly congested, with visitors blocking the thoroughfare to enter the auditorium. It was also identified that the stairway at the rear to enter the first-floor bar (St. John's Bar) becomes incredibly congested during shows. A strategy to alleviate pressure from this bar would be developed with staff in the architectural proposals presented.

Key Points Identified

Waste Management

Foyer Size

Parsons Court & Neighbouring Building

Dressing Provisions

Bar Provisions





Team Workshop Sessions

4.8 Design Development

Project Study - Brighton Corn Exchange

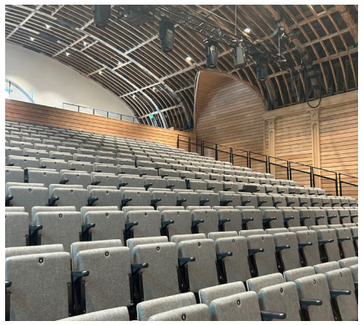
Development Overview

Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios has refurbished Brighton's Grade I-listed Corn Exchange and Grade II-listed Studio Theatre, located near the Royal Pavilion. The project updates these historic venues for modern audiences by adding new public foyers, improving operational spaces, and enhancing accessibility. Alongside these upgrades, essential conservation work was done to preserve and celebrate the buildings' heritage, ensuring they can host a wider range of events as part of Brighton Dome, a leading arts charity on the South Coast.

Source: https://www.e-architect.com/england/brighton-dome-corn-exchange-and-studio-theatre

Lessons Learnt

- Specifically for the retractable seating element the procurement method meant the finished quality was not as good as they would have hoped for. Specifying different teams for joinery, metal work and finishes complicated the process.
- The project was delivered during covid which lengthened the programme bringing it massively overbudget.
- Extremely high budget compared to Cambridge Corn Exchange, no expense spared in this scheme.











Venue Layout



Interior restoration image