

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **PLANS FOR REDEVELOPMENT OF HISTORIC CAMBRIDGE GUILDHALL ISLAND SITE UNVEILED**

Award-winning Freeland Rees Roberts Architects have announced that their plans to redevelop part of the historic Guildhall 'Island' site in Cambridge City centre have now secured planning consent. The plans include the relocation of the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) and the Cambridge City Council Box Office. Redevelopment of the former Age Concern Day Centre in Parsons Court opposite is also proposed, to provide offices for the Council's Arts & Entertainment's team.

As part of the project, the Council has agreed outline terms to let the space now occupied by the Visitor Information Office and Box Office to 'Jamie's Italian' - a new Italian-themed restaurant chain being created by Jamie Oliver. The celebrity chef has a local connection - his parents running The Cricketers at Clavering - and he is keen for Cambridge to be one of the first cities to enjoy one of the new restaurants, designed to serve authentic and affordable Italian food.

The Guildhall occupies a prominent site in the centre of Cambridge and has had continuous municipal use for nearly 800 years. A comprehensive plan for the redevelopment of the whole site by Charles Cowles-Voysey resulted in the Guildhall being largely rebuilt in 1939, although on the south side the 1862 'Large Hall' with Reference Library on the ground floor and the 1884 Rotunda with Lending Library were retained. Also retained was the 1916 two-storey block on the south west corner which formerly housed the library offices. The library moved to a new facility in Lion Yard in the mid 1970s and the vacated space converted to a Tourist Information Office. All the buildings on the Guildhall site are listed grade II.

A suite of court rooms was included as part of the 1939 Guildhall building and until 2004 housed the Cambridge Crown Court. Accessed from Peas Hill, the rooms consisted of a Police Court, a Sessions Court, a Jury room and Robing Rooms and, in the basement beneath, a number of cells for holding and interviewing prisoners.

Since the Crown Court vacated their premises, the City Council has considered how best to use the space and that of the splendid 1880s Rotunda. They asked Freeland Rees Roberts Architects to produce a feasibility study to develop the idea of relocating the VIC functions to the old Crown Court area and create a more visible presence nearer the Market Square, leaving space for a Restaurant in the Rotunda and pavement café opposite the Arts Theatre. English Heritage required The Old Sessions Court, with all its original fittings, to be retained and this is currently occupied by competitive sight-seeing company 'Live the City', who have made good use of the space.

As part of the plans, the VIC will be relocated to the former Police Court and the small interview rooms built in the 1970s will be removed to create a single, open space as originally designed. Other alterations to the interior will be made sensitively so as to preserve the original character, with the large skylight restored to create a bright and welcoming space for visitors.

The VIC shop will be relocated to the former court offices on the Peas Hill frontage and the former 'Robing Room' will become a new VIC meeting space, with a new viewing window to provide a visual connection with the entrance lobby. The design of these features will be carefully detailed to tie in with the existing oak panelling, minimising the need for significant alteration to the original building fabric.

The Box Office is to be relocated out of The Guildhall into No. 3 Wheeler Street with a new shop front, counter and queuing system added, which will include automatic sliding entrance doors for ease of access. Many of the tickets sold in the Box Office relate to the Corn Exchange and its new position, on the same side of the street, will enable it to join the existing Arts & Entertainment Offices which occupy the rooms above.

Jeremy Lander, Director of Freeland Rees Roberts Architects, commented: "As all the buildings involved are grade II listed, any alterations have to be handled in a sensitive manner to protect the original features they contain whilst enhancing the space to support the modern day operations of the Council. We had already prepared a Conservation Plan for the Guildhall and this helped considerably. We are looking forward to working with the new Restaurant tenants to help them make the most of the fabulous Rotunda and corner site."

Rod Cantrill, Executive Councillor of Cambridge City Council, commented: “The Guildhall is in far too valuable a location to be simply taken up with bureaucracy. This announcement is part of our plans to make a much better use of this area for residents and Council tax payers and also demonstrates the City Council’s commitment to ensure the on-going vitality and economic prosperity of Cambridge’s city centre. It is great news, given Jamie Oliver’s local connection, that he has chosen Cambridge as a venue for his new concept. I believe that the new restaurant will add to the diverse range of food offerings already present in the city centre.”

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**Notes to the editor:**

1. For images of schemes designed by Freeland Rees Roberts Architects, an interview or photo/film opportunity, please contact Carri Crook, Carisma Communications. Email: [carri@carismacommunications.co.uk](mailto:carri@carismacommunications.co.uk), telephone: 01842 811313 or mobile: 07704 920 350. We regret that no images are available relating to the Guildhall Island Site redevelopment.
2. Freeland Rees Roberts Architects’ key areas of expertise include: Schools, Colleges & Universities; Local Authority; Sport & Leisure; Private Houses; Residential Schemes; Churches & Cathedrals; Commercial & Workplace; Healthcare; Historic Buildings & Conservation and Libraries.
3. Other historic building projects Freeland Rees Roberts Architects have been involved with include Kings College Chapel, Cambridge; the relocation and conservation of Temple Bar to Paternoster Square, City of London (which has been awarded seven architectural awards in the past two years); the redecoration of period buildings in Magdalene Street, Cambridge; the refurbishment of the Cambridge University’s Department of Architecture; the conversion of a former derelict gallery into new library facilities at Peterhouse, Cambridge, (which was awarded a national RIBA Conservation Commendation in 2006) and numerous conservation and repair projects at Ickworth house, Suffolk.