
Leicester Market Redevelopment

Decision to be taken by: City Mayor

Decision to be taken on: 13 August 2026

Lead director/officer: Peter Chandler

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: Castle
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- Report version number: 1

1. Summary

This report updates on the redevelopment of the Market Place and Leicester Market.

This includes details of the archaeological finds that have been discovered in the market place and the subsequent impact on the programme and funding of the redevelopment project, and the market offer.

The scheme will create a modern, versatile, high-quality environment for traders, residents and visitors, together with a flexible event space to support specialist markets, seasonal activity, cultural events and community use, ensuring the market remains adaptable, vibrant and sustainable for years to come.

2. Recommended actions/decision

The City Mayor is recommended to:

2.1 Approve the addition of £1.9m to the market capital project, following the requirement to complete additional archaeology works, to be financed by prudential borrowing.

2.2 Note the circa 10-month impact on the project programme.

2.3 Approve the revised design of the market scheme, comprising 72 larger demountable stalls with increased trading space, delivering a modern, flexible and high-quality environment for traders, shoppers and visitors.

2.4 Approve a rent-free period for market stall holders, unit traders and Food Hall traders from the 13th July 2026 to 31st December 2026, at a cost of £150k.

3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

A public consultation inviting comments on redevelopment options closed on Monday 9th December 2024. As part of the consultation process the proposed options were discussed at EDTCE Scrutiny on 6th November 2024 and also at a special meeting on 4th December 2024. Comments raised in the consultation have been incorporated into the design of the scheme.

Questions on the market redevelopment have also been discussed at EDTCE Scrutiny on 28th August 2024 and 8th January 2025. Further updates were presented on 12th March 2025 and 27th August 2025.

4. Background and options with supporting evidence

4.1 Archaeological Context

The requirement to undertake archaeological investigation in advance of, or during, development arises through the planning system. Archaeology is treated as a material consideration in determining planning applications under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Local Planning Authorities, including Leicester City Council, are therefore required to consider the potential impact of development on known or potential archaeological remains when determining applications, often informed by the Historic Environment Record and advice from specialist archaeological officers.

Where a site is considered to have archaeological potential, particularly within historic urban centres such as Leicester city centre, and specifically with the Market Place Public Realm scheme, the Local Planning Authority can require the developer (in this case Leicester City Council) to undertake archaeological desk-based assessments, field evaluations (e.g. trial trenching and bore holes), and, where necessary, full excavation or mitigation works. These requirements may be imposed either prior to determination (to inform the planning decision) or secured through planning conditions attached to a consent. In practice, this process is coordinated through the local authority's archaeological advisors, who outline a proposed approach taking into consideration the historical context of the site and the proposed works.

The underlying policy approach is commonly referred to as “development-led archaeology”, which has been embedded in the planning system since the introduction of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16) and carried forward into subsequent policy (PPS5 and now the NPPF). A key principle established by this framework is that developers are responsible for investigating and mitigating the impact of their proposals on archaeological remains. This can include preservation in situ where feasible, or preservation by record through excavation and documentation where remains will be affected.

In terms of cost, the UK planning system operates on a “developer pays” principle. This means that the costs of any necessary archaeological work, including site assessments, field evaluations, excavation, recording, reporting and archiving are borne by the developer as part of the overall development costs. This approach reflects the principle that development creating the impact should fund the mitigation required.

In Leicester specifically, this national policy framework is applied through the Local Plan and the council's planning archaeology advisory service. Given the city's significant Roman and medieval heritage, archaeological conditions are common for city centre schemes, and early engagement with the council's archaeological advisors was undertaken to manage programme risk, scope of works, and associated costs effectively.

4.2 Archaeological Background

Building on the above context, as part of the planning process for the redevelopment project, the City Archaeologist reviewed the proposed development, drawing on both historic archaeological records from previous market redevelopment works and targeted borehole investigations undertaken across the site.

The available evidence indicated that earlier market redevelopment activity had not uncovered any significant archaeological remains. Similarly, the borehole investigations did not identify material suggesting the presence of substantial archaeological deposits within the proposed development area. On the basis of this information, the City Archaeologist concluded that significant archaeological remains were unlikely to be encountered near ground level and recommended that the works proceed under an archaeological watching brief.

This recommendation was further informed by the understanding that the proposed public realm works would not require excavation below the formation levels established during the previous market redevelopment.

Following the commencement of works, however, archaeological remains were identified at a shallow depth. Subsequent investigations have confirmed that the site is of significant archaeological interest. The nature and extent of these findings, and their implications for the project, are set out in the following section.

4.3 Archaeological Significance

Archaeological investigations undertaken as part of the Leicester Market redevelopment have uncovered nationally significant remains spanning more than 2,000 years of the city's history, including Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval features. The discoveries have provided valuable new insights into Leicester's historical development and have created a comprehensive archaeological record of one of the city's most important heritage sites.

The excavations were undertaken in accordance with heritage management best practice and national planning requirements, ensuring that significant archaeological assets were appropriately investigated, recorded and preserved. The findings are expected to contribute to future research, public engagement and interpretation of Leicester's heritage.

The programme of archaeological works extended over approximately ten months due to the complexity and significance of the remains encountered, together with the need to adapt archaeological methodologies in response to evolving site conditions and development requirements.

The excavations have generated benefits beyond the immediate redevelopment project, enhancing understanding of Leicester's historic environment and supporting the city's wider cultural, educational and tourism offer. The project builds on Leicester's established record of using archaeological discoveries to deliver long-term public value, including the interpretation of the Jewry Wall site and the international profile associated with the discovery of Richard III.

Overall, the Leicester Market redevelopment represents both an investment in the city's future and a commitment to safeguarding and understanding its heritage, demonstrating

how regeneration and heritage conservation can be successfully delivered alongside one another.

4.4 Costs associated with Archaeology

University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) Direct Costs

Archaeology fieldwork is the primary data-acquisition phase of archaeological research, involving the systematic identification, recovery, and documentation of physical remains. This represents a critical compliance, risk-management, and asset-discovery phase before or during land development. Fieldwork cost - £596k

Post-fieldwork is the analytical and laboratory phase of archaeology. This phase represents the transition from raw data collection to regulatory clearance, risk closure, and final compliance reporting. No archaeological project is legally or contractually complete when the digging stops; the data must be processed to satisfy state or environmental heritage requirements. Post Fieldwork cost - £499k

Main Contract Archaeological Costs

The associated archaeological costs to the main contract cover the operational logistics required to bridge construction and the archaeological works. The costs include stripping away modern topsoil down to historical layers, providing the mandatory health, safety, and utility-clearance infrastructure to keep workers safe in deep trenches, and supply the necessary on-site welfare facilities. There are also contractors preliminaries and prolongation costs within the overall figure. Main Contract Archaeological Costs - £805k

Options

This is an unavoidable consequence of the development and therefore there is no option to avoid this cost.

4.5 Revised market scheme

The vision for the new market is to create a vibrant and distinctive destination that celebrates Leicester's longstanding market heritage whilst embracing a contemporary future.

The discovery of extensive archaeology on the site precludes the quick delivery of a fixed structure in this location, although the need for a more permanent structure can be revisited in time if required.

The redeveloped market will now comprise 72 larger demountable stalls, designed in consultation with traders, and providing increased trading space compared to existing provision. They are designed to maximise weather protection and provide improved trading conditions, while maintaining the familiar character of a traditional market. The scheme sees an increase from the 48 stalls in earlier proposals and enables a broader range of traders to be accommodated in the new market.

The stalls will be located closest to the Food Hall to strengthen the relationship between the two offers, but with the flexibility to alter the layout, size and arrangement of the market as required.

The flexible arrangement of stalls, grouped in clusters, will also enable the creation of a multi-use events space within the wider square. This will support specialist markets, seasonal activity, cultural events and community use, ensuring the market remains adaptable, vibrant and sustainable for years to come.

The revised market scheme has been based directly on the results of the December 2024 public consultation, and feedback from EDTCE Scrutiny and market traders. Around 1700 people responded to the public consultation, and just over 60 per cent supported locating the market in front of the Food Hall/ Corn Exchange, equating to more than 1000 people.

Some consultation comments also recommended delivery of a broader trader offer and a diverse range of speciality markets, as well as enhancing views of the surrounding historic buildings. These recommendations have been incorporated into the revised market scheme with larger flexible demountable stalls. The consultation also provided input into the future use of the area, with strong public support for creating a major new flexible event space in front of the Corn Exchange.

The redevelopment will retain the character, culture and community significance that has defined the market for generations, while delivering a modern, flexible and high-quality environment for traders, residents and visitors. The market will continue to serve as a key city centre destination, with a strong focus on food, independent businesses and local produce.

Working alongside the Food Hall, the market will provide a complementary offer that encourages visitors to spend more time in the city centre, supports local enterprise and contributes to the area's economic vitality. A distinctive brand identity will be developed for both the market and Food Hall, reflecting Leicester's heritage, culture and diversity, and establishing a cohesive destination.

In recognition of the significant disruption as a result of the market redevelopment programme and other major works in the surrounding area, a rent-free period is recommended for all market and food Hall traders from 13 July 2026 to 31 December 2026, or until the market returns to its original location, whichever occurs first, at a cost of up to £150k. This is to support traders during this period and help maintain business resilience while these long-term improvements are delivered.

5. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

This report proposes the addition of £1.9m to the capital programme. Of this £1.1m relates to the direct cost of archaeology with the University of Leicester, with £0.8m associated with increased contractor costs. This will be financed from prudential borrowing over 40 years (in line with the maximum permitted for infrastructure assets within the capital strategy), at an estimated annual cost of £100k. The Director of Finance, in consultation with the City Mayor, has delegation to apply available capital receipts to finance the capital programme in place of prudential borrowing where this is considered financially advantageous, having

regard to affordability, sustainability, and the Council's Treasury Management and Capital Strategies.

Signed: Stuart McAvoy – Head of Finance

Dated: 20 July 2026

5.2 Legal implications

The cost and scope impact of the changes to the Design & Build Contract with Spellers will be managed in line with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

Signed: Kevin Carter – Head of Law – Commercial, Property & Planning

Dated: 20 July 2026

5.3 Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council must exercise its Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations across all protected characteristics.

The report provides updates on the redevelopment of the Market Place and Leicester Market.

The larger demountable stalls and revised layout are intended to improve the overall experience for market users, including those with mobility needs, and to support a wider range of traders and market uses. The scheme also reflects feedback from consultation and engagement with traders and stakeholders.

The proposed rent-free period may help to reduce the impact of disruption on traders, including small independent businesses. No adverse equalities impacts have been identified from the recommendations in this report.

The project should continue to be delivered with due regard to equalities considerations, and accessibility and inclusion should remain important factors as the scheme progresses. An equality impact has been carried out on the Market redevelopment and should be updated as the project develops.

Signed: Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

Dated: 20 July 2026

5.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications associated with this request for additional funds, and the archaeological works may have resulted in minor temporary greenhouse gas emissions associated with excavation plant, vehicle movements and site activities but which are short term and limited in scale.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246

Dated: 24 June 2026

5.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

None

6. Background information and other papers:

Not applicable

7. Summary of appendices:

Not applicable

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

9. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?

Yes – capital expenditure of more than £1m is being committed to a scheme.