



# Strategic Estate Framework Summary

A long-term vision for the  
University's operational estate.  
Reshaping spaces that better  
connect people.



# Introduction

For over 800 years, the University of Cambridge has contributed many of the ideas that shape our world.

History has been made – and written – in its buildings, halls, libraries, lecture rooms and laboratories. Our duty today is to ensure that the University can continue to maintain and develop the physical spaces that will allow it to deliver world-leading education and ground-breaking discoveries.

We need an estate that enables collaboration, connecting people across different disciplines. We need an estate that is efficient and sustainable. We need a high-quality built environment that allows smarter use of space and reduces running costs, allowing us to reinvest available resources in research and teaching.



This Strategic Estate Framework has been crafted in collaboration with the University community. It outlines some of the opportunities that will allow Cambridge to continue making ground-breaking discoveries for generations to come.

**Professor Deborah Prentice**  
Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge

# Our estate, our vision

The Strategic Estate Framework sets out a design philosophy and a series of concepts that have been developed in collaboration with the University of Cambridge community.

Throughout ongoing discussions and feedback, one resounding theme emerged: the need to create spaces that better connect people. These connections are vital to fostering a vibrant community where ideas can be shared and transformed into world-changing discoveries.

Guided by this theme, a long-term vision for the estate has been developed. It lays the foundations that will ensure the University strives to be a place of academic and interdisciplinary excellence.

**Our vision for the estate is to support the University's academic mission by developing facilities and links that better connect people (a) across our estate, (b) within our sites, (c) inside our buildings.**

By delivering higher quality and more welcoming places that encourage collaboration and that promote an inter-connected community of scholars, we will improve academic outcomes in a way that also uses our estate more intensively.

This will create vibrant spaces that will improve both the staff and student experience and their wellbeing in a way that is more enjoyable and supportive for all our people. These spaces will also be more biodiverse and sustainable, all at a lower cost, enabling reinvestment back into research and teaching.

# The challenge

The current estate is not operationally, financially or environmentally sustainable to support the academic mission.

**25%** of buildings for academic and administrative uses are in a poor or very poor condition, with **50% no longer fit-for-purpose** for a modern university

**CO<sub>2</sub>** The University emits double the amount of carbon per head than the average across the Russell Group Universities

**£140m+** spent each year to operate and maintain the estate

**23%** more space per head than any other university, with **50% more space per head** than the average Russell Group University

# Reshaping our Estate Principles

The University Council agreed a set of six estate principles in 2024 that form the foundation for this Framework and all changes to the University's operational estate. Supporting tools, such as the decision-making guidelines, ensure every project aligns with the estate's vision and responds to funding priorities.

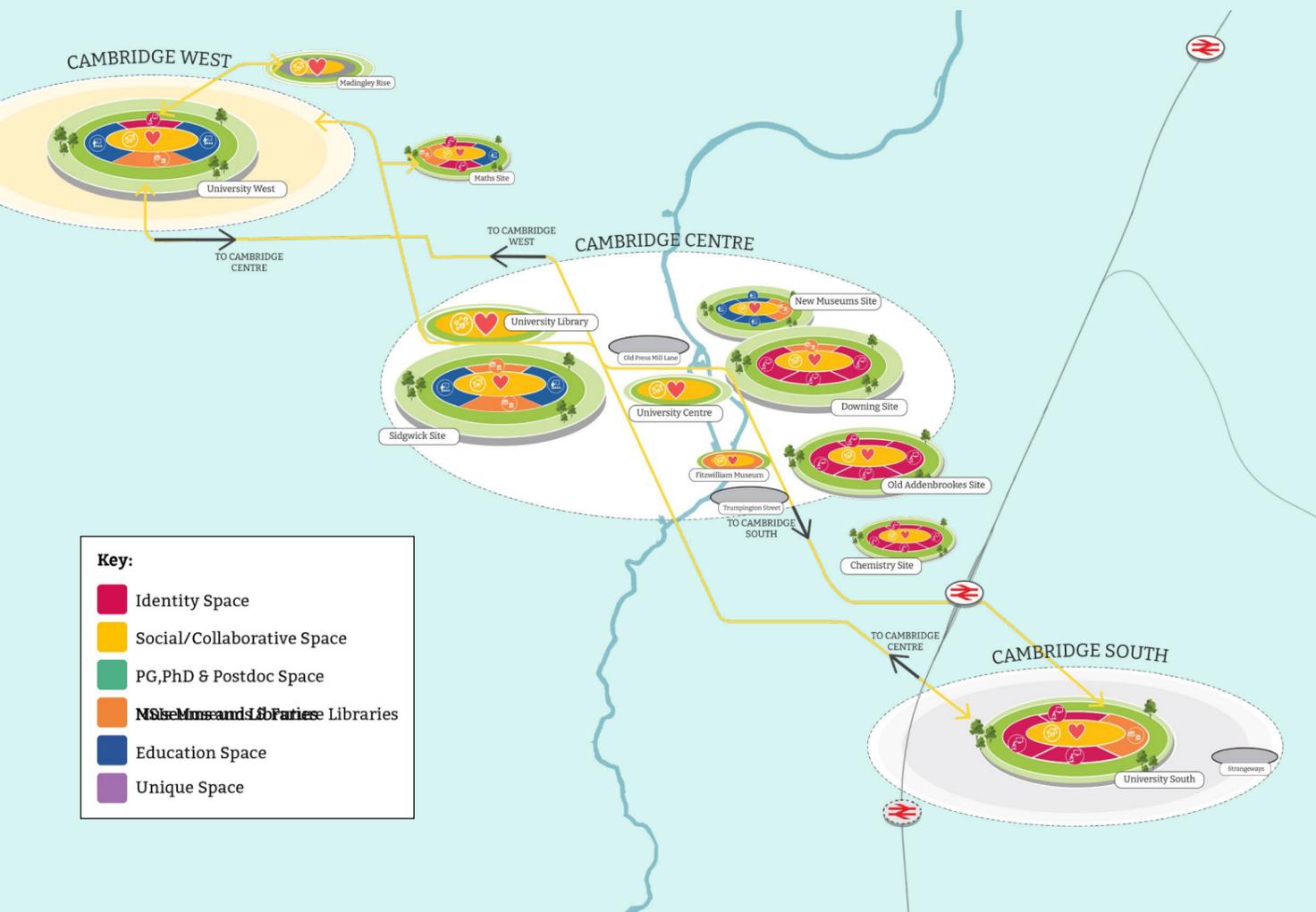
Access tools here: [www.em.admin.cam.ac.uk/Strategic-Estate-Framework](http://www.em.admin.cam.ac.uk/Strategic-Estate-Framework)

- Create **high quality spaces** that support staff and students to do their best work
- Support teams across the University to **adopt new ways of working**
- Develop a **smaller estate** with more **shared spaces**
- Develop a **financially and environmentally sustainable** estate
- Consider how to **make the most of existing spaces** before building new ones
- Protect and promote our built and **cultural heritage**

# Design Philosophy

Engagement with the University community indicated that change to the estate is essential. Many of the sites today feel disconnected, traditionally operating in silos which limits collaboration and the sense of community that underpins interdisciplinary excellence.

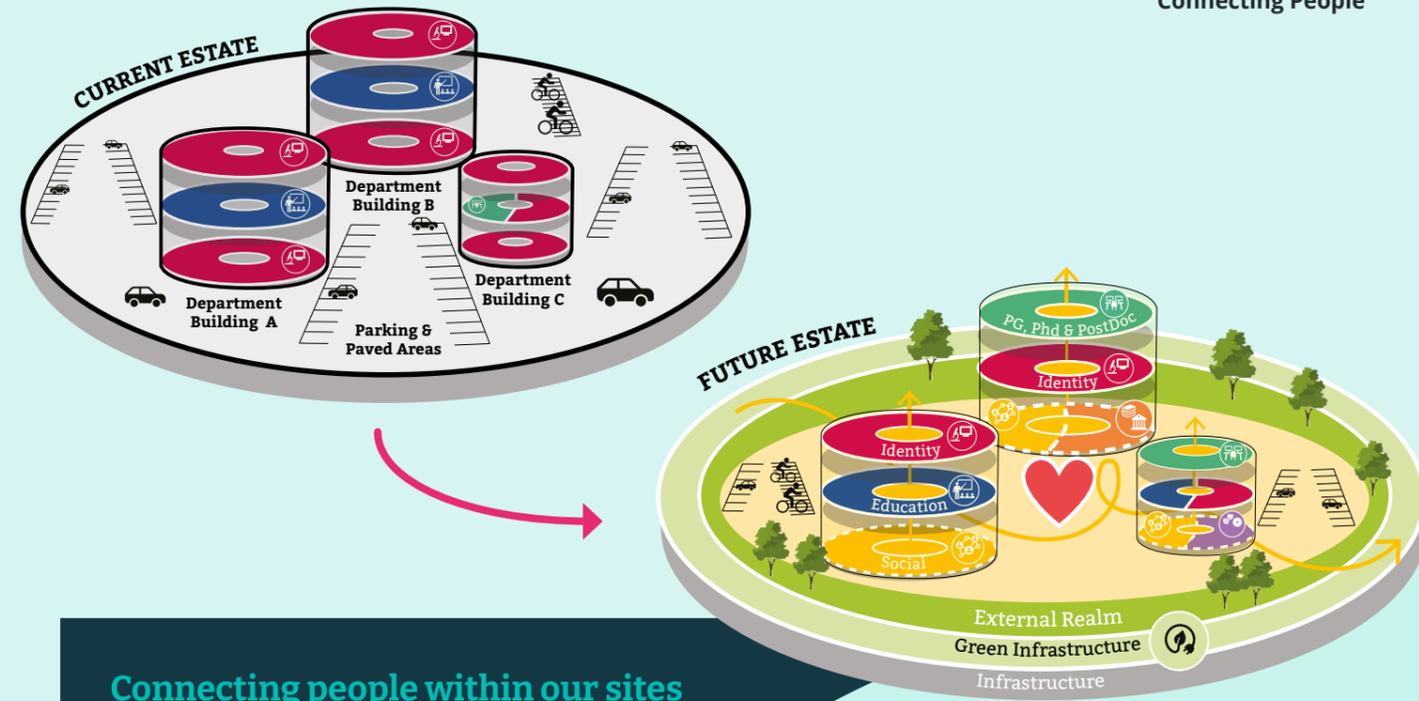
This design philosophy outlines a new approach, one that brings people together through a more connected, inclusive estate that supports world-leading education and research while strengthening connection and collaboration.



## Connecting people across our estate

The design philosophy aims to create a more connected, welcoming estate in the west, centre and south of Cambridge. In response to community feedback, the University will work with local authorities to improve transport links, signage, lighting, and access between sites.

By addressing barriers like restricted access and limited flexible space, the goal is to connect people across the estate in safe, accessible, affordable and sustainable ways that encourage users to visit different University sites and facilities, whether they are a student, staff member, or visitor.



## Connecting people within our sites

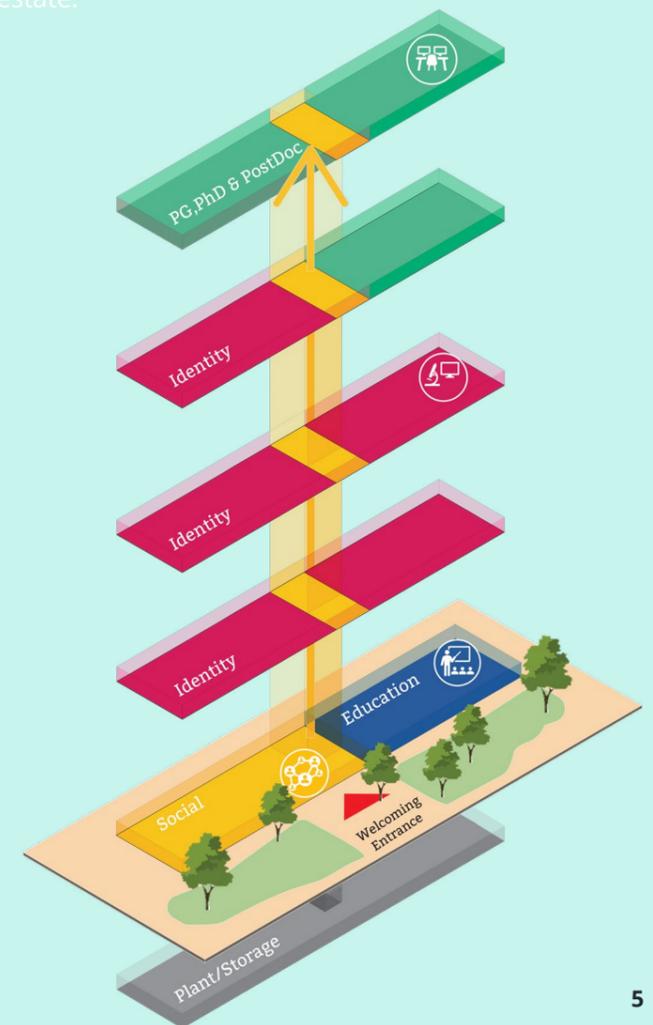
The University is reimagining its sites to reflect its global reputation and support collaboration across disciplines. Engagement feedback revealed that many sites feel uninviting, with limited facilities and poor connectivity discouraging movement across and between locations.

The design philosophy focuses on developing vibrant, inclusive, and flexible environments, both indoors and outdoors, that offer choice, comfort, and connection. By enhancing shared facilities and linking sites through biodiverse landscapes, the University will reduce underused space and deliver a more effective, efficient and sustainable estate.

## Connecting people inside our buildings

The University aims to move towards an estate where all its buildings provide facilities that enable collaboration between Departments, Faculties and across Schools. Many current facilities are duplicated, underused, and of poor quality, particularly for postgraduate students, who have expressed concerns about loneliness.

Future buildings will retain clear departmental identities while offering welcoming, high-quality shared spaces. Ground floors will be open and accessible, supporting teaching, collaboration, and social interaction, while upper floors will house flexible, specialist research areas and dedicated 'home spaces' for Departments.



# Connecting people across and beyond the estate

The design philosophy creates many opportunities, reimagining sites as vibrant academic neighbourhoods that celebrate each discipline and achieve the visions and goals of each School. Each site will be a welcoming destination, supporting wellbeing and offering reasons for people to travel between sites, to meet and share ideas.

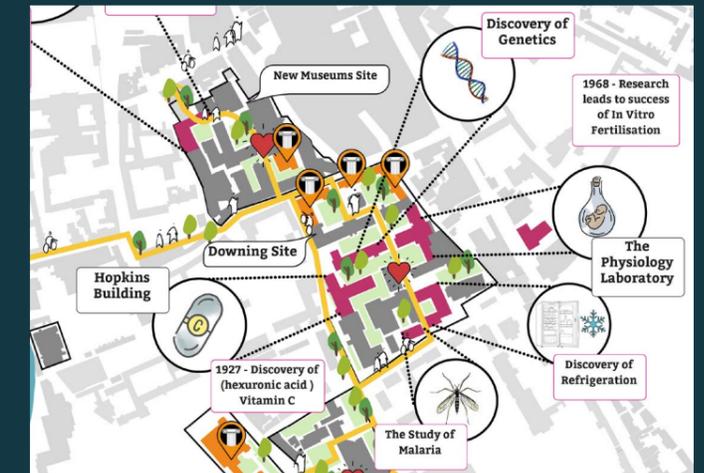
## Vibrant spaces that encourage collaboration and community



- **Themed Forum Spaces – The Campus Front Door:** Branded to the academic theme or discipline, and accessible by card entry (where needed), forum spaces form the heart of each site. These spaces offer shared specialist facilities that enable and encourage research, bringing together the best and brightest minds from across academic, professional and collegiate boundaries.
- **Hub Spaces – The University Front Door:** Welcoming, inclusive spaces open to staff, students, visitors, commercial partners, and members of the public, hub spaces across the estate encourage informal connections and support collaborations that drive world-class partnerships, spin-outs, research and teaching.



## Building connections that honour heritage and unlock opportunities



- **Creating seamless connectivity** across, and between, the three zones (Cambridge west, centre, and south) connecting to the wider city, through improved signage, pathways and sustainable transport, whilst celebrating the University's heritage and fostering a sense of belonging that inspires future discovery.
- An innovative, collaborative and more intensively used academic estate also has the potential to free up space for other commercial or residential uses to deliver strong financial returns to the University and enable academic, public sector and business partnerships.

**Key:**

- University Sites
- College Space
- Green Space
- Golden Web connecting sites
- Buildings
- Forum Spaces
- Hub Spaces

# A change in thinking

At the heart of this design philosophy are the interconnected buildings and sites - spaces that will nurture a sense of belonging and community while enabling collaboration across the University estate.



### Themed Forums

The heart of each site, welcoming and inclusive themed spaces open to all University staff and students.



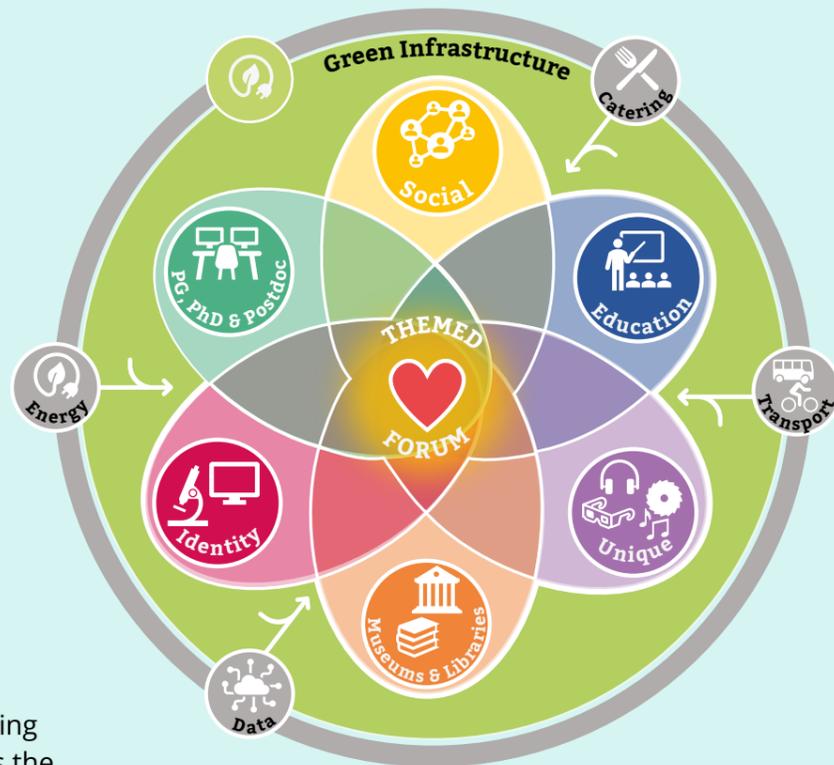
### Social and Collaborative Spaces

Places that encourage informal interactions and community-building, fostering a sense of belonging across the University and beyond.



### Education Spaces

Flexible environments designed to adapt for teaching, learning, exams and research needs.



### Unique and Specialist Spaces

Specialist spaces for multidisciplinary use showcasing their location's excellence, creating a destination within the estate.



### Museums and Libraries

Welcoming both the University community and visitors, celebrating heritage and providing working environments that support academic brilliance.



### Identity Spaces

Dedicated spaces that reinforce the identity of each Department and their disciplines with unique and specialist facilities.



### Postgraduate, PhD and Postdoc Spaces

Research neighbourhoods that support postgraduates, postdocs and PhDs, which will be themed to the identity of the relevant academic discipline.



### Green Infrastructure

Biodiverse landscaping and green spaces that seamlessly link buildings and sites, making the estate more climate resilient.



### Transport

Accessible and sustainable transport options that are reliable and affordable to connect staff, students and visitors to the estate, as well as benefiting the local community and businesses.



### Catering

A variety of food and beverages to be easily available across the sites.



### Energy & Water

Resilient infrastructure that supports Cambridge's research and teaching while minimising climate impact.



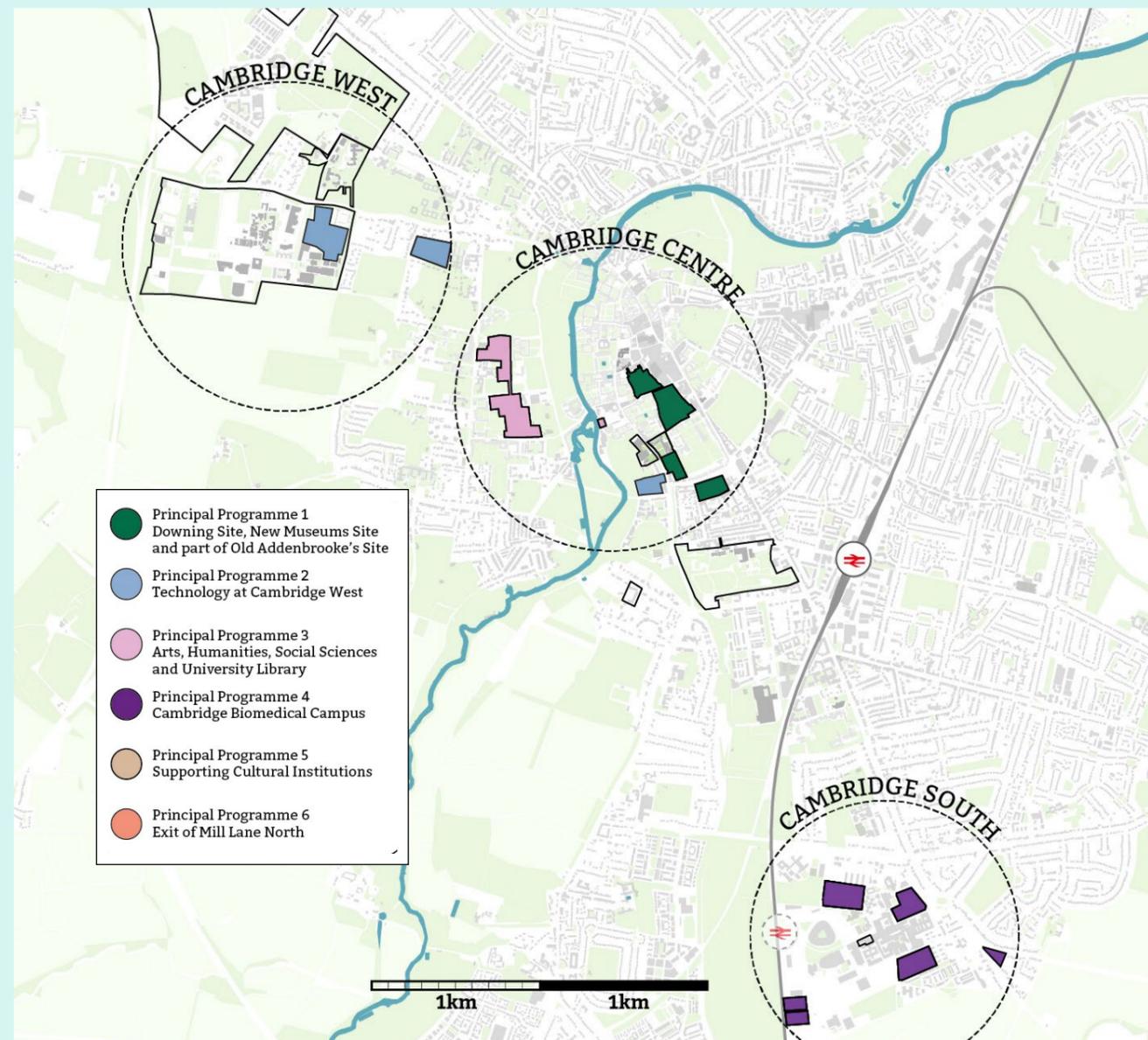
### Data

Robust digital infrastructure that facilitates knowledge exchange and cutting-edge academic activities.



# Turning vision into action – the Strategic Estate Capital Plan

The Strategic Estate Framework encapsulates a scope of opportunities across the University's operational estate, focused on developing six main areas, known as the Principal Programmes:

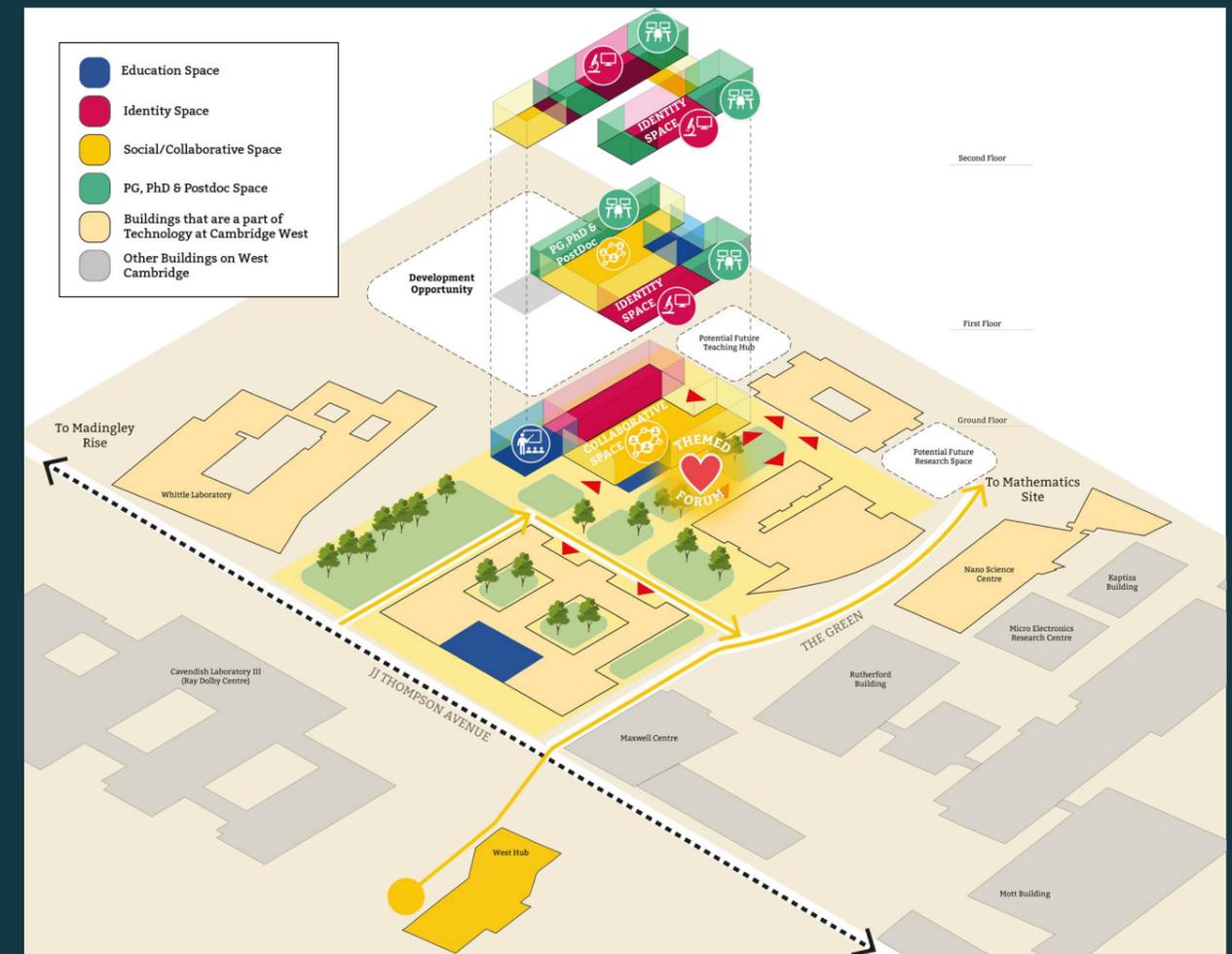


Developed in collaboration with the Schools and Non-School Institutions, these programmes are pivotal to achieving the estate's long-term vision, aligning future developments with the University's academic ambitions.

Each programme includes a series of projects specific to its site or location, supported by the Strategic Estate Capital Plan, which provides a long-term financial framework for how the University will invest in its estate to deliver the vision and academic goals of the six Principal Programmes.

# From concept to reality – an example case study

The Roger Needham Building proposal presents a concept to centralise the Department of Engineering within the Cambridge West Innovation District, demonstrating how a single project supports the wider design philosophy and academic ambitions across Principal Programme 2. It outlines creating a collaborative forum space that will strengthen interdisciplinary synergies across the School of Technology and the wider University.



At the heart of the proposal is the connectivity of people – the development of vibrant spaces that are better used and will lead to a higher quality, more effective, efficient and sustainable estate.



First Floor Atrium Collaboration and Social Space



Ground Floor Public Collaboration Spaces with views

The Strategic Estate Framework and Capital Plan were approved by the University Council in July 2025. Designed to be flexible, both strategic documents will be reviewed annually and updated to reflect new projects, shifts in priorities, changes in financial context and opportunities for external funding.



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**Contact us**

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Scan the QR code  
to access the full  
Strategic Estate  
Framework

