



The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

Pre-application ref: PPA/24/0034 & 24/50331/PREPPA

Christ's College Library

Thursday 13 February 2025, In-person meeting

Confidential

The [Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth](#) sets out the core principles for the level of quality to be expected in new development across Cambridgeshire. The [Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel](#) provides independent, expert advice to developers and local planning authorities against the four core principles of the Charter: connectivity, character, climate, and community.

Attendees

Panel Members:

Simon Carne (Chair) Architect and Urban Designer, Director at Simon Carne Architect

Vanessa Ross, Landscape, Director at arc Landscape Design and Planning Ltd.

Shikha Bhardwaj, Climate, Sustainability Associate, Hawkins \ Brown

Hero Bennett, Climate, Partner at Max Fordham

Jasmine O'Garro, Access, Senior Consultant, Arcadis Consulting (UK) Ltd

Graham Whitehouse, Character, Director at GWP Architects Ltd

Anne Cooper, Heritage, Director at AC Architects

Applicant & Design Team:

Dr Jon Burgess, Director, Planning and Heritage, Turley

Shelley McNamara - Founding Director, Grafton Architects

Ger Carty – Director, Grafton Architects

Simona Castelli - Director of Practice, Grafton Architects

Keir Dixon, Partner-Project Management from Ridge & Partners LLP

David Hawkins, Director, Skelly & Couch

LPA Officers:

Brooke Moore – DRP/Business Support Officer

Tom Davies – DRP Manager

Jane Green – Built Natural Environment Manager – observing online

Katie Christodoulides – Case Officer

Emily Jacob – Senior Landscape Officer

Paul Robertshaw – Principal Conservation Officer

Henri Comrie – Principal Urban Designer

Tracy Martin - Senior Sustainability Office

Observer(s):

Esther Kurland - Head, UDL

Robin Nicholson – Fellow, Cullinan Studio

Rosa Teira Paz - Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas, Historic England

Declarations of Interest

The DRP manager asked if there were any Declarations of Interest for DRP members. There were none.

Previous Panel Reviews

None

Scheme description

Demolition of existing library and replacement with new library and social facilities including enhancements to Upper Hall and kitchens.

Site context

Christ's College is Grade I listed building located in the historic core of Cambridge City Centre. It stands immediately east of St. Andrew's Street/Hobson Street, and is bordered by King Street to the north, Christ's Pieces to the east, and the Bradwell's Court redevelopment to the south.

The application site is the existing Christ's College library, which includes the existing 1970's library (designed by Christopher Grillet), the Bodley Library (C19) and West Range, South Range (early C16) and Bath Court. The Bodley Library punctuates the corner of Christ's Lane where it meets St Andrews Street. The 1970's library abuts Christ's Lane, turning inwards and meets the lane in the form of a brick wall.

Christ's College has been placed by Historic England on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England at Grade II.

The site falls within the Central Conservation Area and within the controlled parking zone. There are tree preservation orders within the Christ's College grounds. Many

surrounding buildings, including buildings within and outside the College grounds are listed.

Planning history

16/0406/LBC -New library (1539 sq m), the enclosure of Library Court (201 sq m) and the provision of bridge access between the first floor of the new library and the South Range and Bodley Library. Internal and external alterations to Bodley Library and South Range (Staircase G and Guest Suite) and the South Elevation of South Range between First Court and Library Court. Involves the demolition of the existing library (809 sq m) -Approved.

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11/0516/LBC –Internal and external alterations to Bodley Library and South Range (Staircase G and Guest Suite) and the South Elevation of South Range between First Court and Library Court. The demolition of the existing Grillet library (809 sq m) to grade I listed building-Approved.

11/0495/FUL -New library (1539 sq m), the enclosure of Library Court (201 sq m) and the provision of bridge access between the first floor of the new library and the South Range and Bodley Library. Demolition of the existing library (809 sq m)- Approved.

Background

The Panel were briefed by a detailed notes from the design team including an earlier proposal with planning permission, an emerging masterplan for the college as a whole, the competition entry and design in progress for a new library, dining and staff accommodation on the site of existing facilities. The college Bursar also took the panel on a tour of the existing facilities and external spaces affected by the proposals which was invaluable for such a complex and challenging design project.

The redevelopment of the library is a key part of the long term future of Christ's College (Grade 1, parts of which date back to the 15th century). The brief highlights better accessibility, addressing long term sustainability and spatial flexibility to accommodate needs of the modern student. The project faces challenges of scale, massing, identity and public space provision in a tight and significant site on the edge of the college estate. All buildings are part of the Grade 1 listing but of varying age and significance. All sit within the conservation area but there are no fundamental issues over their future. The character of the public realm around the college has changed significantly with the previously private gated pedestrian Christ's Lane now open as public highway.

Grafton Architects conceive the project as a 'library in a walled garden'. The review and this report does not go into detail of the design processes that produced this. The concept, sketches and depth of analysis based on a very thorough and detailed brief has been beautifully expressed, guiding the scheme as it has developed.

The Big Picture: Bulk, scale, massing and spatial concept.

The existing library sits on the corner of what was until recently the back yard to Christ's College. Retail development opposite opened Christ's Lane into a key pedestrian thoroughfare. The redevelopment of the 1974 library and ancillary buildings, characterised by complex internal and external circulation, inaccessible parts and time expired servicing offers an opportunity to make a significant contribution to both the public realm and the life of the college.

A new library had planning permission but has not been delivered, allowing time to rethink some of the fundamental principles of the earlier scheme. The benefits are plain when the two schemes are considered alongside each other.

The Panel endorse the concept and strategy of the proposal. There is a pleasant interaction with the public realm, specifically Christ's Lane and views from St Andrew's Street. It is comfortable with the scale and massing. When viewed from this junction, it has significance and a character of its own.

The dominant chimneys, performing an essential ventilation function are welcome. Some members of the panel expressed the view that they could be taller. That popping up above the ridge line when viewed from First Court within the college would not be a problem. Trying to keep them out of sight was inconsistent with historic precedent.

There are differing views on the impact of the design on Bath Court. It is a tight space and the internal cross section dimensions to accommodate a functioning library have largely determined the form. Bath Court is not a pleasant space at the moment. It is hemmed in by the vertical façade of the existing library with no shelter. The move to open up the ground level space with greater width and a degree of shelter with a cantilever overhang are positive moves that will enhance the space. The dimension between the projecting upper level of the library and the roof opposite will be in the order of 4 metres. This is a concern to some panel members. There is a tricky balancing act between the needs of the library and the occupiers of the rooms opposite, although the rooms are dual aspect and so daylight is not a problem. However the façade of the upper levels of the library will be very much in the face of occupiers of the roof top rooms. Material selection and detail are important considerations as the design team acknowledge.

From the macro to the micro.

In considering the more detailed aspects of the emerging plans, the Panel focussed on aspects that fall within the four C's. This is a useful way of focussing on design whilst acknowledging many cross currents between each.

Character

Built character

The panel are happy with the design principles of the elevation facing Christ's Lane. A solid and void façade in brick is an appropriate response. This cannot be an active frontage with spill outs but more could be made of visual connections into the body of the library for example views up to the dramatic ceiling and on to artwork or detail to internal walls. The short length of wall and emergency escape door at the west end of the façade as well as the detail design of the bridge link require further consideration to further benefit the public realm along Christ's Lane.

External public seating is always welcome. A continuous bench, effectively a plinth to the new wall will demand careful design and detailing along with ongoing maintenance. The attempt to retain the existing brickwork was worthy but the implications would be unnecessary complications. The elevational treatment of the Bath Court facade of the library and in particular the upper storeys is a work in progress. There was no support from the Panel for the earlier heavier stone clad detail. More work is in hand, including how the elevation will be viewed obliquely. The elevation will be barely visible apart from dormer windows opposite. Opportunities to incorporate lighting and colour could be pursued.

Landscape character

Within Bath Court, there were different views of the importance of retaining the palm tree both as a practical proposition and future maintenance obligation, however it was recognised that as an existing feature, the palm tree does provide some benefit. Planting Bath Court with shade tolerant planting, ferns or similar, is welcomed though will need careful maintenance to ensure its success. Careful selection of paving, internal floor finishes and rainwater channel details were highlighted as important issues. The flow of space from inside to outside is welcome and to make this work well material selection and details will be critical. Sunpath diagrams into Bath Court are needed. There should be some sunlight penetration at the height of summer though that would tend to be outside term time. The design team acknowledge that this an issue to be addressed in more detail. Outdoor seating needs to be carefully considered as part of the design ethos to allow the quality proposed for the internal spaces to be replicated in the external spaces.

The existing drainage channel should be maintained within the scheme proposals and opportunities should be considered for the integration of the use of rainwater from the new buildings within the design of the courtyard as part of the proposed rainwater harvesting.

Climate

The Panel welcome the thorough, wide ranging and long term interrogation of future energy requirements. The proposal's flexibility to switch from air source heat pumps to other sources including ground source heat pumps and the heat network is most welcome. The college has an ongoing project of enhancing the performance of the existing fabric. Monitoring performance and communicating to staff and students is an important part of the climate agenda informed by post occupancy reporting. Services have been thoroughly assessed and incorporated within the structural proposals. For example PV panels have been integrated elegantly into the main timber roof structure with north lights over the library.

Climate implications and detail is work in progress. It could take up a large proportion of a longer design review. There is always a balance between time and the amount of information presented. In this instance the pre-review briefing comments were relatively short and lacking detail. More focus on how they will be achieved would be appreciated although the time available to discuss them is also limited. The Panel were pleased to hear that a pre-demolition materials audit was proposed. A few next steps were suggested to ensure that Net Zero goals are clearly demonstrated and achieved:

- **Material Use & Waste Reduction:** The proposed material language/ renders suggest reuse of the existing materials, which is welcome, supporting circular economy thinking. A pre-demolition audit has been proposed to assess this. The Panel advised that materials should be reused on-site first. If not feasible, they should be repurposed elsewhere and find a new home to prevent waste.
- **Net Zero Embodied Carbon:** The team would benefit from comparing different brick façade types/ build-ups and construction methods to understand their impact on embodied carbon and help achieve the upfront target. The attention should also be paid to Whole Life Carbon impact.
- **Balancing Operational & Embodied Carbon:** The use of passive design strategies to reduce energy demand is greatly appreciated. It was suggested to review the operational benefits of chimneys versus their embodied carbon impact for a more balanced approach.
- **Celebrating Sustainability:** The design has strong environmental principles. There is an opportunity to use it as a tool for sustainability awareness among staff and students. This could include sharing performance data, encouraging behavioural change, and celebrating its impact.

Connectivity

In this instance connectivity focused on movement into and around the development. Accessibility for all being a particular design aim challenged by the complexity of different levels within different parts of the college. This challenge is fully appreciated and lift access to all levels has been considered. Small changes in level and direction of travel will be particular challenges and should not be forgotten as the design develops. Refuge spaces have been considered and should be identified to explain the design intentions. Additional thought should be given to evacuation strategy with the proposed design focusing on 'egress for all' as a principle to allow people to self-evacuate where possible for example the use of evacuation capable lifts. This is also echoed when considering the wellbeing benefits that can come from design that enables community benefits.

Community

The college is a series of semi-private spaces restricted largely to members of the college. Within the college there are spaces for the different members of the community to come together. This was a key component of the brief. It was suggested that the need for informal spaces for quiet work and meetings could be described more fully on the plans in the same way that circulation routes have been added. The public face of the library and how it relates to the public realm will be an important element in the life of the City. How this can be enhanced, giving something back to the City is an opportunity not to be missed.

The detailed sectional model presented provided valuable background to assess the development. It deals with a very specific situation internally and externally and at a sensible scale. The Panel noted that some of the more complicated interactions between existing and proposed built form could be modelled to inform the scheme's development. More ambitiously it should be possible to view the proposals and any other future developments in the context of the overall college using 3D printing or similar modelling techniques.

The scheme will no doubt be subject to many detailed planning conditions. Full size mock-ups of materials and detail relationships will play an important part in getting the right solutions.

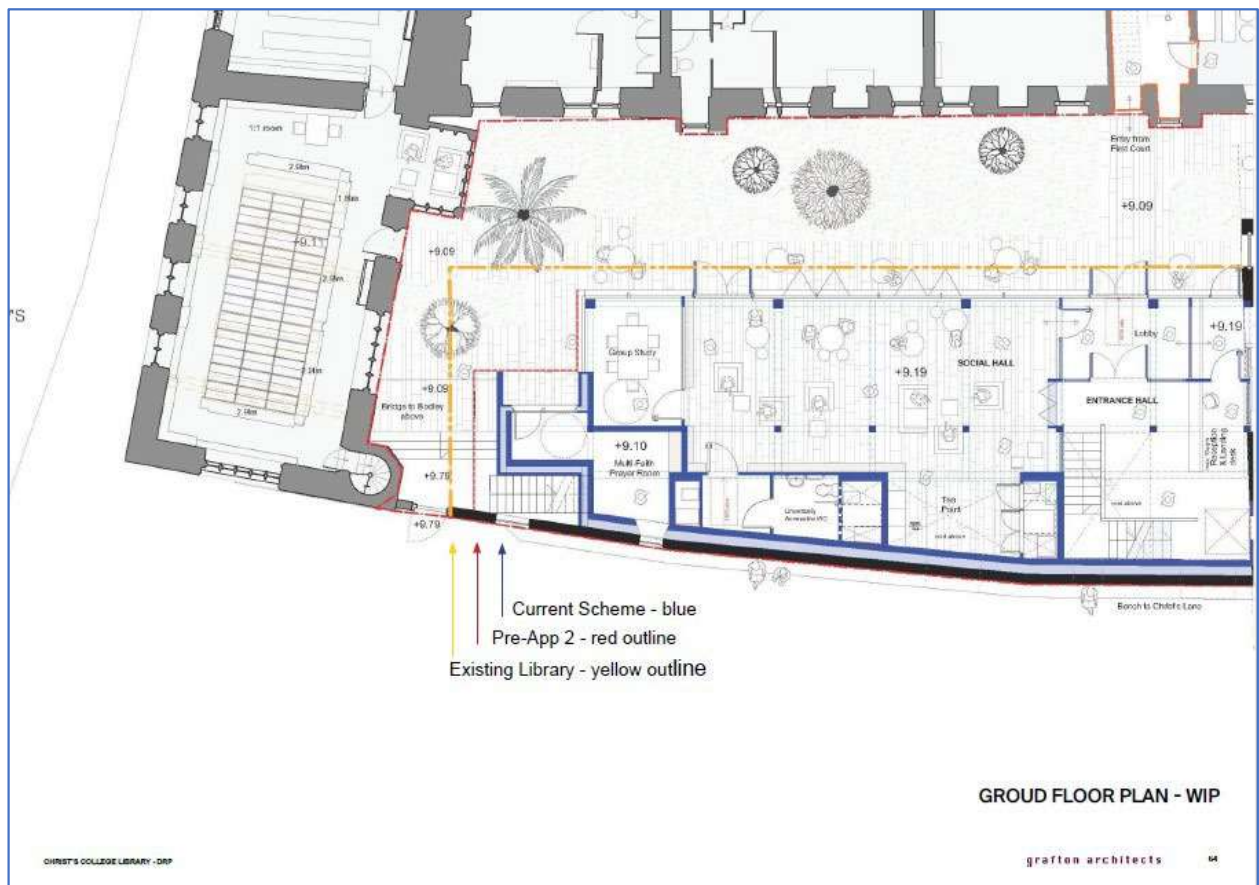
In conclusion the panel applaud the scheme as an exemplary proposal. As the details develop, the Panel believe the richness will be enhanced.



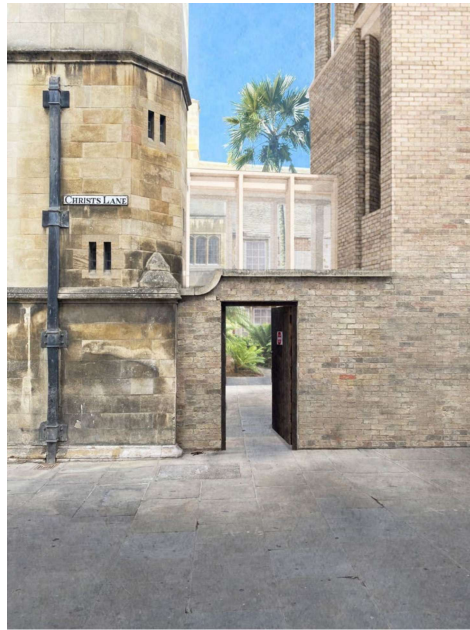
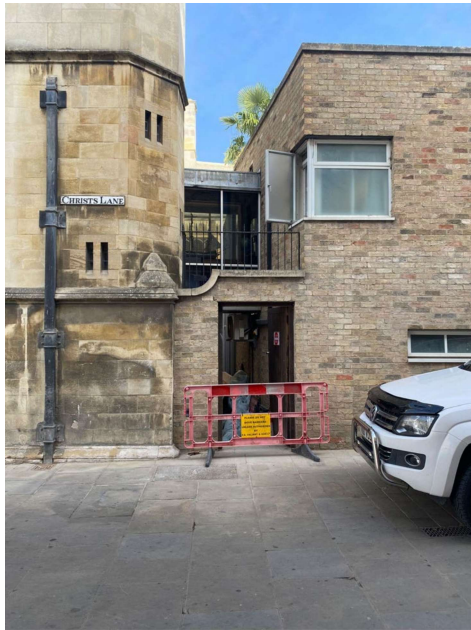
Site location plan – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (13 February 2025)



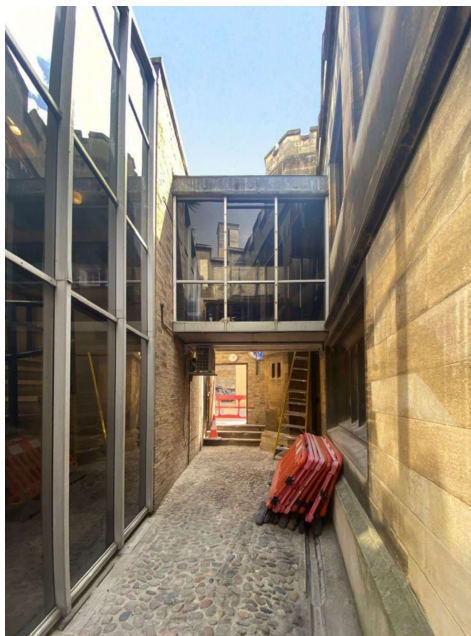
*EXISTING VIEW FROM ST ANDREWS STREET (A) - extracted from the applicant's
DRP presentation document (13 February 2025)*



GROUD FLOOR PLAN – WIP – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (13 February 2025)



*EXISTING AND PROPOSED VIEW FROM CHRIST'S LANE ENTRANCE –
extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (13 February 2025)*



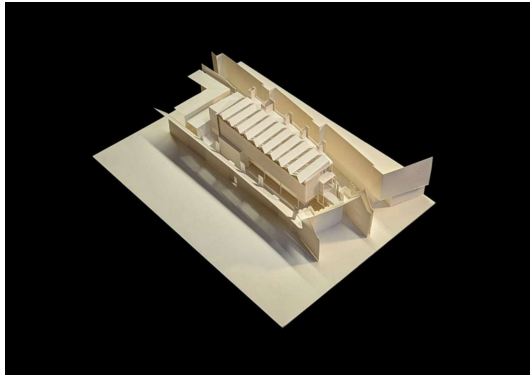
EXISTING AND PROPOSED VIEW FROM BATH COURT EXIT extracted from the
applicant's DRP presentation document (13 February 2025)



EXISTING AND PROPOSED VIEW FROM BATH COURT- extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (13 February 2025)



BATH COURT ELEVATION- extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (13 February 2025)



SECTIONAL MODEL - extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document
(13 February 2025)



Landscape - extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (13 February 2025)

Disclaimer

The above comments represent the views of the Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel and are made without prejudice to the determination of any planning application should one be submitted. Furthermore, the views expressed will not bind the decision of Elected Members, should a planning application be submitted, nor prejudice the formal decision-making process of the council.