

22 August 2025

Cambridge District Council
Via Email

Dominic.Bush@greatercambridgeplanning.org

Dear Mr Bush,

**RE: 207237, 25/02162/LBC 'Christ's College, St Andrews Street, Cambridge, CB2 3BU'
(Grade I)**

We appreciate your patience in awaiting our response and the College's efforts to accommodate a site visit. Our Southern Buildings Committee met and reviewed the application; the comments below reflect their feedback on the scheme.

We do not consider that the proposed internal alterations require any detailed comment from us. The work to make the upper hall accessible and bring back the Bodley Library into use will positively contribute to the College's C21 legacy, and making good historic (non-C19) openings and decluttering the modern kitchen plant apparatus will improve the setting of, and ability to appreciate, the Bodley Library.

In terms of the proposed library, whilst the building was commended for its quality of design, two cautions were raised, and advice forthcoming that is offered in the hope that the quality of the final design of the new building can be elevated and the scheme rendered genuinely admirable and successful:

- The Dominant Scale in Comparison to the Bodley Library

The prevailing point of contention was the greater scale of the proposed library in comparison to the Grade-I Listed heritage asset. Ultimately, whilst the proposed steps back the new library by approximately 1m from the existing library, it would nonetheless be a whole storey higher. Owing to the tight constraints of the available floor plan, the increased height of the proposed addition has the greater potential to be harmful to the setting of the Bodley Library than the proximity of the floor plan.

Historically, to counteract this concern, the College was granted permission in 2016 to tunnel down to accommodate the extra capacity required. The Society appreciates the concerns raised by the College regarding the departure from this plan. Although the 2016 scheme would not be overtly harmful to the Grade-I Listed Heritage Asset, as the

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newly proposed scheme has the potential to be, we acknowledge that a structure emphasising light and breathability is preferable to a concrete basement.

However, to improve the overall scale of the current proposals, the submission could benefit from being more responsive to the neighbouring Bodley Library. For example, it would not be unreasonable for the scale of the proposed to take its lead from the floor heights of the Bodley, opting to align the floors with the oriel window of the Bodley structure; thus, reducing the height by approximately half at each floor. As a result, this would ensure that the existing clear views of the Bodley gable and its turret staircase, currently seen against a clear sky, would not be overwhelmed by the proposed building.

- The Detailing of the Massing.

Whilst the verticality and the modelling of the proposed were appreciated, concerns were raised about the sheer mass of the proposed in the Sqm available for the library. At present, the proposed appears to lack the “human scale” evocative both in the Bodley Library and the C15 first court. To achieve a similar outcome, the Committee recommended that the present design depart from an overtly brutalist style, incorporating details such as a head-height string course as a means to refine the design in a way that is sympathetic to the heritage asset. Although a subtle addition, the inclusion of a string course would emulate the matching elevation of the Bodley Library. Including this in the proposed library would not only continue the work of the chimneys in creating cohesion between the new and old but would also make the new library a structure that communicates with the foot passengers of a now very popular thoroughfare.

In addition to the possibility of introducing a stringcourse, we recommend that a variety of means of adding greater relief, articulation and refinement to the front elevation of the building are explored, by means of detailing or even some form of material variation. As presented the proposed elevations appear starkly unrelieved – an effect that compounds the sense of a lack of human scale.

One other means of achieving of this would be to further recess the upper storeys, which as currently propose overly impose themselves on the front elevation, undermining the very purpose of setting them back and increasing the sense of excessive scale, and also eroding the otherwise admirable and interesting architectural effect created by the ‘chimneys’.

Despite Council feedback, the Committee was also of the opinion that the original proposed heights of the chimneys were preferable. As the existing height of the chimney helps to break up the bulk of the form, and by reducing their height, the elegance of this passive ventilation strategy is negatively impacted, especially when the chimneys are barely visible from the first court (the concern raised by the council).

Overall, we welcome the principle of the new library, and the associated conservation and thermo-efficiency works that comprise the Library + project. The proposed looks to be an exciting contribution to Cambridge's visually interesting cityscape and, with the right amendments, the Society is confident that this has the potential to be a very good scheme. With this in mind, we would be happy to continue a dialogue with the College and Council to assist in the refinement of the proposed. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any further questions.

National Planning Policy Framework:

131. The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

Yours sincerely

Morgan Ellis Leah

Southern Conservation Adviser