

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL FORUM

29 July 2026
10.00 - 11.52 am

Present: Councillors Baigent, Clough, Fisher, Griffin, Illingworth, Porrer, Smart and Todd-Jones

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

26/1/DCF Introduction by Chair to the Forum

The Chair outlined the role and purpose of the Development Control Forum. They stated no decisions would be taken at the meeting.

26/2/DCF Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Bennett and Dryden.

26/3/DCF Declarations of Interest

Name	Agenda Item	Interest
Councillor Baigent	All	Personal: Member of Acorn. Decision Unfettered.
Councillor Baigent	All	Personal: Member of Cambridge Cycling Campaign. Decision Unfettered.
Councillor Clough	All	Was against the application at the original Planning Committee but remained open minded. Decision Unfettered.
Councillor Fisher	All	Studied at Christs College, Decision unfettered.

Councillor Griffin	All	Fellow of Kings College. Discretion unfettered.
Councillor Porrer	All	Ward Councillor, Decision unfettered.

26/4/DCF Application and Petition Details

Case by Applicant

- 1) The Applicant introduced their presentation by explaining why they were here, why they wanted to replace the library and why they did not want to dig a basement.
- 2) The application was to demolish the 1970's library and replace with a new library, social and study spaces including re-provision of bridge to the Bodley Library.
- 3) There had been a lengthy consultation period including a previous Development Control Forum held last summer with Planning Permission granted in November 2025 with written confirmation received the same month.
- 4) In December 2025, the Christs Lane Action Group (CLAG) applied for a Judicial Review (JR) for which the High Court granted permission to proceed to a full hearing, in March 2026.
- 5) The Court had identified the date of 20 October 2026 for the hearing which the college felt was too long a time. It was added that the college looked at the substance of the Judicial Review which did not touch on the merits of the project but looked at the procedures and found four shortcomings.
- 6) The College had looked at those shortcomings and thought that they could all be addressed in a second application so that should a second Planning Application be granted the Council could be confident that it met the standards of the JR.
- 7) Time was of the essence for the College as students had already been using a temporary library for one year.
- 8) In regard to the existing library, Christs College was the only college in Cambridge where all six of the central elements were around the first court which included the Porters, Chapel, Masters Lodge, hall, buttery and the library.
- 9) In the 1970's the college built the structure which was shoddily built with no thought given to the impact on the city as it faced into the

loading bay of Argos at the time and therefore not publicly facing. It was an ugly building with no public realm benefit.

- 10) Over the last fifty years the building had been gradually deteriorating which had now accelerated. The original spec gave the building a life span of 50 years which had now expired and needed to be replaced.
- 11) Alternatives had been looked at on the current college site which had been rejected for both the historic reason of keeping things together on First Court and secondly, as the library connects Bodley which was a building from the 1890's and was the old library and had not been in use since the current student library was built.
- 12) The college wanted to bring Bodley back into use and have a vital connection with the undergraduate library so that both could be used simultaneously.
- 13) The College needed to replace the library and the need had been known for some time. A new library had been proposed 15 years ago when Rick Mather designed a replacement which received planning permission. However, funding was not available at the time.
- 14) Since then, the building environment had changed with sustainability and accessibility concerns being a different place with things that people did not care about 15 years ago they do now.
- 15) The key feature of the Mather design was a basement. On reconsidering the colleges needs, it was concluded that on advice this would be the least 'Green' thing that could be done for three main reasons:
 - Firstly the amount of embedded carbon. Typically, in a modern building 40% of embedded carbon was in the basement which the college wanted to avoid. The only way to ensure a basement was watertight was to use concrete which is one of the most carbon intensive building materials.
 - Secondly the site was very close to Grade 1 listed buildings. The Bodley dated from the 19th Century, but behind the student library was the 16th Century First Court which had no foundations. If a basement was dug within inches of this you would not know what you would find and were likely to have an unpleasant surprise. Heritage Harm was at the top of the colleges mind and they did not want to disturb the environment.
 - The third reason was the extra disruption. Many of the objections on the Planning Portal were about disruption, which was inevitable with a city centre site, with digging a basement would massively increase that as all of the material would need to be removed by lorry. In order to minimise any

disruption it was decided not to include a basement which made the previous design no longer fit for purpose.

- 16) The college had organised an architectural competition with six entries. The winners Grafton Architects of Dublin, one of the world's leading architectural firms who had come up with a beautiful, sustainable accessible design.
- 17) A Student in her final year in the Architectural Department in support of the application commented that she lived in Cambridge and was also bringing up her to children in the city. She informed the meeting that:
 - Students needed different areas to work in. Some needed quiet space to concentrate, whilst others needed somewhere to discuss ideas and work in groups.
 - The current library did not accommodate those needs which was why many students ended up working elsewhere such as cafes in hotels so that they could eat and spread out their work. The college could not support this way of working.
 - As a Member of the Architectural Society at Christ's College, she was invited to attend interviews and the selection process for the new library Competition.
 - The Grafton design responded to the colleges needs to provide different kinds of study spaces including a lounge, spaces for group work, social study areas, individual workstations and places where students could spend an entire day.
 - The design should engage with its surroundings. The current design was not isolated and took inspiration from the walls, windows and chimneys of the buildings around it and also the historic courts and gardens at the college.
 - The façade at Christ's Lane responded to the architectural character of Cambridge through the chimneys and its use of brick and stone.
 - Inside, the design took you on a journey through a set of rooms, the Bath Court, green and open to the sky, the social hall which created a protected hub for students and finally the library itself.
 - As a resident she walked Christs Lane almost every week with her children. Today the college side is blank brick wall with no reason for anyone to stop. The project would put windows, people and light behind the wall for the first time. It would give views into the library, a bench and an un-arched gate by day and at night light from the library windows falling gently into the lane.

- She supported the project as it would give future generations the kind of library her generation had needed but never had. A place to study, socialise and belong.
- 18) In regard to heritage harm and the advice of Historic England, although this was a repeat of the previous application approved in November 2025. The Listed Building Consent application was approved at the same time has not been challenged and still remained valid.
 - 19) Much has been made about the implied harm to the setting of the Bodley Library. This 19th Century addition to the original library is not listed in isolation but was part of the Grade One listing covering the whole of the entrance court which dated to the 16th Century and also part of Second Court.
 - 20) The college had been very clear and consistent in its assessment of the heritage impact of the proposals, which was set out in the heritage statement and carefully considered the impact of the proposals on all parts of the listed buildings themselves, not just the Bodley, and impact on their settings and the colleges historic park and gardens and conservation area.
 - 21) The design did not just focus on one part of the building as others had done and sought to draw conclusions on a partial assessment.
 - 22) The impact on the Bodley Library, other than the replacement bridge link, there was no physical attachment or alteration. In that respect, the current scheme differed significantly from the 2011 and 2016 Mather scheme which had attached a glazed roof to glaze over Bath Court which had been forgotten by the Victorian Society.
 - 23) The focus of concern about setting appeared to be in the view on Christs Lane from where the new library would appear taller than the Bodley. Historic England setting guidance and stated that the importance of setting lied in what it contributed to the significance to the setting of the heritage asset or to the ability to appreciate that significance.
 - 24) The present library on the Christs Lane side was bland and utilitarian which was appropriate when it was built to face a private access lane but was now out of place since the lane was reopened to the public.
 - 25) The new library would be of high design quality and designed by one of Europe's leading architects. It had been endorsed by the design review panel. It would be further away from the Bodley, and views would be gained through the new gate into Bath Court allowing the lower level to be seen.
 - 26) Evening focusing solely on that view and ignoring the clear enhancement to Bath Court, and the improvement that would make to

the setting of the Bodley and other parts of the colleges grade one listing, it was argued that the replacement library would not detract from the significance of the Bodley or anyone's ability to appreciate that significance and would be beneficial.

- 27) Even if it was considered that there was some less than substantial harm caused to the heritage significance of the Bodley by replacing the library in its setting, this would still need to be weighed with the other heritage benefits and to the setting and to the significance of the other parts of listed buildings and conservation area in particular. This was why the college considered the heritage impact of the proposed library to be beneficial.
- 28) The statutory duty with regard to the listed building was within Section 661 in the Planning Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act, which required that those making decisions about planning applications to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a building or its setting or any features of special architectural historic it possesses.
- 29) This special regard had to be assessed as the college had done and given great weight when considering proposals in the planning balance. When proposals did lead to less than substantial harm this needed to be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme by virtue of paragraph 215 of the Planning Policy Framework. There was no harm to be outweighed anyway quite the opposite but there were clear benefits.
- 30) Those suggesting that there was harm to the significance of the Bodley caused by the new library and its setting needed to also consider these other heritage benefits which stood to be weighed in the balance together with the other public benefits.
- 31) Historic England had been involved in other a year of discussion and were confident when they said that the college had acknowledged the benefits of removing the basement and glazing from the court and the architectural merits of the current scheme. With this in mind, they did not wish to object to the application.
- 32) Historic England also welcomed the revisions introduced to the scheme and retained its position of no objection.
- 33) It was acknowledged that Victorian Society had found some harm as they had concentrated on the 19th Century Bodley Library rather than the wider college. It was felt that they had not considered the wider heritage benefits. Clarification had been sought on some of their comments to which they replied that their committee did not consider this to be an overly contentious design, rather that small adaptations could be implemented to mitigate any outstanding harm.

- 34) The college had been consistent in that it did not identify harm to the setting of the Bodley and indeed had recognised many other heritage and public benefits from the proposal. Historic England did not object nor did the conservation officer.
- 35) If the Council concluded that there was any residual heritage harm, then that weight stood to be weighed against the other public benefits.
- 36) It must be remembered that public benefits are those that are included in the National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 8 which was anything which delivered economic social and environmental objectives. The enhanced design and streetscape improvements would be a definite positive, so would the sustainability benefits as well as the economic benefits of delivering the scheme and the improved accessibility to the library and the existing parts of the historic building.
- 37) The objection to optimum viable use was not mentioned in the application. However, the college contended that the new library would be better than the old one as it would be accessible in a way that the old one was not. The CLAG website talked of phantom benefits. The college thought that by allowing its students with mobility issues and neurodiversity challenges to study was a plus.
- 38) A lot had been made in regard to the massing of Christs Lane which the college disputed and that having quite high buildings with a narrow lane between them was a feature of the Cambridge vernacular. The lane would be cool and would not be narrower and light from the upper stories would increase the light in Christs Lane after construction.
- 39) The building was on the north side of Christs Lane and would not affect the light.
- 40) The last contention was that the college and officers had failed to bring to the Councils attention significant other plans including the Mather design which had been dealt with significantly. The second was to create a streets schema which was a single page that showed one elevation onto Christs Lane. The only advantage of this to the colleges opponents was that it was shorter. It also had no back elevation, so that the relationship with the Grade One listed building was absent nor did it have any floorplans. Therefore, it was not at all certain that the college could achieve what it needed inside the building and was not a serious alternative. The Council were invited to look at it and reject it as a consequence.
- 41) In respect of the Massing, if the Council allowed the college to build, it would still be the case that the more massive and taller building on

Christs Lane was already there. A new building would be smaller than the building opposite and have the incidental advantage of protecting the colleges students from the direct view from the penthouse floor of Christs Lane into their rooms.

- 42) The scheme was all about the students, it was not commercial and the college would not make money out of it. It was for the colleges 700 students over generations. It was hoped that the proposed building would last over 200 years so that many thousands of students would benefit from a beautiful, varied building.

Case by Petitioners in Objection

- 43) The Petitioners introduced their presentation.
- 44) It was highly irregular for the Council to make a decision on a subject that was still current to High court proceedings. Furthermore, it would open up the Council to further challenge on the basis that a decision to grant would give the impression of the Council bending over improperly to support the interests of a private applicant that was frankly attempting to circumvent proper process.
- 45) It was presumptuous of the college to simply resubmit the same application effectively saying to the Council you must try harder.
- 46) Whilst the Court eventual position was unknown, a judge had already found evidence of the previous recommendation for approval being defective on four accounts. It was very likely that the only way forward would be found to be with a different or amended scheme.
- 47) Informed opinion against the current scheme had hardened. Historic England had reiterated its view that the development would cause harm. The Victorian Society and the Councils own conservation officer had also hardened their positions and Cambridge, Past, Present & Future had now objected in strong terms.
- 48) This all pointed to the proper course of action to defer any decision on the resubmitted application.
- 49) The petitioners did not characterise themselves as opponents and that there wanted to collectively arrive at a solution that did not harm the city but satisfied the objection and objectives of the college. At no point were they trying to thwart the objectives of the college. They supported libraries and Christ College having a library. However, the design had been found to cause heritage harm by every single independent expert, by statutory consultants, public amenity societies, and the local civic body in Cambridge.

- 50) The petitioners wanted to reconcile what would be a possible way of moving forward that satisfied the colleges objectives whilst also not causing heritage harm.
- 51) It was important to note that there was an intermediate step that kept being skipped over every time there was a discussion. A JR was brought because it was felt that Members had not been correctly informed on the heritage aspects that needed to be taken into account. The judge gave the petitioners permission and the college, and the Council signed consenting to quash the decision which has not been mentioned as all four grounds both had agreed that there were errors and that the first permission should quashed.
- 52) It was important to note that judge at the Planning Court stated that these issues had a bearing on key planning considerations which informed the grant of consent. This meant that the errors that were made informed the permission granted. When these errors are corrected there may be a different decision and outcome.
- 53) It was noting that neither the college or the Council were defending the first permission. Therefore, CLAG found it interesting that an identical application had been submitted although the first permission had been quashed.
- 54) It was anticipated that the judge at the hearing scheduled for 20 October 2026 would explain what had gone wrong and what needed to be corrected. CLAG had made the case so that the public would benefit.
- 55) The four grounds had all been conceded by the college and the Council and that the Planning Committee had been misled. These were:
- Historic England found harm: Excessive bulk, too big for its location. Members were told the opposite.
 - The report found harm, then called “neutral”. Both cannot be true. The balance never happened.
 - The library was counted as its own benefit, securing optimum viable use erroneously. A phantom benefit as it already has a library.
 - When heritage harm was found, less harmful alternatives must be considered. Members were actively dissuaded from considering alternatives on the table.
- 56) CLAG quoted all of the heritage experts that had been consulted all of which had found harm in the application. Members had been told that the heritage benefits outweighed heritage harm.

- 57) Cambridge Past, Present & Future noted the objections from residents of Christs Lane and had found harm across multiple assets and found that the public benefits did not outweigh the heritage harm.
- 58) It was stated that the college was in opposition to every single heritage body that had been appointed nationally.
- 59) It was noted that the JR was not about the building but about the scheme with heritage harm being denied outright. The college could have adjusted the scheme, taken expert advice, waited for the High Court's reasoned judgement but instead had rushed to resubmit the scheme unchanged.
- 60) It was not clear to CLAG what the rush was to approve the application even though the judge had refused the colleges request for special expedition.
- 61) The current proposed structure did have a have a half basement which would require digging and would be half a storey below ground. The building would also be larger than those surrounding it.
- 62) A previous design from 2010 had been rejected by the college as it would compromise views from First Court and dwarf Christs Lane.
- 63) As the first application was found to be of neutral harm it was felt that members had again been misled. Members should have been asked if the public benefits outweighed any harm. Planning balance would need to be weighed differently going forward.
- 64) The basement question was one of degree as it was half a basement.
- 65) A building that deferred to the Bodley was preferred by the public.
- 66) The colleges own Master Plan from 2023 had a library in the current location which was more modest but had additional locations throughout the college. This was adopted and those locations are currently being used by students. CLAG felt that this was another alternative to the proposed application and should not be disregarded.
- 67) CLAG saw this as an opportunity. However, under the current scheme the public would only get a bench, a gate but would only get a "beautiful wall". The wall would be 14 m in height on a 6m wide lane. This represented an enclosure 2.3 to 1. The comparative streets mentioned by the college (including Trinity St) were not pedestrian streets, and did not have vehicular access, nor were they key thoroughfares in the city.
- 68) The proposal would be over 40% more enclosed than the tightest of Cambridge streets and would create a Canyon Effect.
- 69) Christs Lane was a civic space and had an ecosystem sor society, economy and culture and served a broad range of people.

- 70) The Council had done an amazing job of redeveloping Bradwell's Court which opened up the street for many people to use and the Council needed to preserve this in Christs Lane.
- 71) This was an opportunity for the Council, the College and the public. The application should be deferred and use the next twelve weeks to look at a consented design, constellation and an appropriately sized scheme and also bring all parties together in an engaged, respectful, transparent and collaborative process.

Case Officer's Comment

- 72) Copies of the consultation response from all of the relevant heritage consultees had been distributed to Members.
- 73) The application at Christs College on St. Andrews Street and proposed the demolition of the existing 1970s library, its replacement, social and study spaces including the reprovision of a bridge to the Bodley Library, alterations to the kitchen, upper hall and adjacent areas including new plant, access improvements, alterations to toilets, provisions in the south east range of Second Court, landscaping, ancillary works and the installation of a temporary kitchen and dinning facility in Second Court.
- 74) The proposed development was to the southeastern corner of Christs College site.
- 75) The primary heritage points were the entirety of the entrance court surrounding First Court which was Grade One listed.
- 76) The relevant planning history was outlined.
- 77) At the time of writing the presentation the following comments had been received; there had been a total of 108 comments of which 61 were in support and 47 in objection with approximately 19 representations received from the Christ's Lane action Group.
- 78) In regard to the consultation date, the initial notification letters were sent out on 11 June to adjoining premises, additional notification letters were sent to four further addresses along St Andrew's Street and Christ's Lane, a further update letter was sent to all notified neighbours clarifying that comments would be received up to 22 July, and that the expiry date for comments on the public portal was updated to clarify the updated end date on 22 July.
- 79) Historic England were comfortable to reiterate their position of no objection. However, their comments had been appended to the previous application where it was clearly stated that they had concerns regarding the scale and bulk of the building and would

result in a certain level of harm to the significance of the Grade One listed Christ's College buildings.

- 80) In terms of the internal Conservation Officer, they had concluded that on balance the harm to the setting of the Grade One listed building was considered to be less than substantial at the lower end of the scale in requiring paragraph 215 of the MPPF to be engaged. There were other heritage benefits considered but not sufficient to outweigh the heritage harm.
- 81) The Victorian Society had stated that the proposal would result in a low to moderate level of less than substantial harm.

Case by Ward Councillors

Cambridge City Councillor Bick spoke as a ward councillor and made the following points:

- 82) If the fundamental physical proposal was the same as previously, he would choose to focus on that and wait to see what the Planning Committee made of those changes to its decision criteria.
- 83) Given the opportunity he would return to the points that he made previously with the concern primarily being the impact on Christ's Lane as public realm.
- 84) The current frontage of the college onto Christ's Lane is extremely ugly looking like the back of an industrial estate. The proposed plans could be argued to be an improvement. However, they were taller.
- 85) In respect of the height, it sounded necessary that the light and shade analysis be presented to the Planning Committee as this had been challenged.
- 86) There was a desire for a more active frontage even more than that which had been proposed as at pedestrian level it was still just a wall and enquired what options had been considered in the context of the current scheme to improve the experience of the public realm?

Members' Questions and Comments

- 87) Enquired what other options had been considered to improve the public realm.
- 88) If no decision was to be made, what was the reason for holding this meeting.
- 89) What was the harm in Planning terms and at what level.
- 90) There had been several quotes taken out of context
- 91) The public benefit needed to be refined

- 92) The DCF could flag up any issues. However, clarity was needed on the height of the chimneys and detail of the wall and the public benefit needed to be defined.
- 93) The existing library already had a partial basement.
- 94) Has the College considered public access to the library.
- 95) What was the justification for demolition and could the existing building be revamped.
- 96) Any heritage harm evidenced had to be balanced.
- 97) Would the proposals create a canyon effect.
- 98) Is the land in the proposal in the ownership of the applicant.
- 99) Would the new basement be at the same level as the existing building.
- 100) Could the college be opened up in a more equitable way.

Summing up by the Applicant

- 101) The green credentials of the proposed building were substantial which was why the design included chimneys. The height of these was to aid ventilation and to avoid further digging into the ground. The height had also been cut back as much as possible.
- 102) The library was a private space, although certain areas of the college were open to the public who could enjoy the Courts. The college would look at how it could share its facilities in the future.
- 103) The current library was out of commission and a replacement was needed as soon as possible and was having a negative impact on students.
- 104) The proposal was a beautiful building.

Summing up by the Petitioners

- 105) Alternatives needed to be considered such as the College's own Master Plan.
- 106) CLAG were not opposed to a new library.
- 107) The proposal could be lower
- 108) Students only used the library for 26 weeks of the year.
- 109) The building was already accessible.
- 110) Better alternatives were available and the proposal did not need to have such an overwhelming mass causing a canyon effect.
- 111) Heritage will be lost.
- 112) The chimneys could start at a lower level and there were better options available for ventilation which emitted less carbon.
- 113) Christ's Lane needed to remain a diverse pedestrian street.

Summing up by the Chair

114) The Chair noted the following:

- i. Notes of the Development Control Forum would be made available to relevant parties, published on the council's website and appended to the Planning Officer's report.
- ii. The Planning Case Officer should contact the Applicant/Agent after the meeting to discuss the outcome of the meeting and to follow up any further action that was necessary.
- iii. The Applicant would be encouraged to keep in direct contact with the Petitioners and to seek their views on any proposed amendments.
- iv. The Council would follow its normal neighbour notification procedures on any amendments to the application.
- v. Application to be considered at a future Joint Development Management Committee.
- vi. Along with other individuals who may have made representations on the application, the Petitioners' Representatives would be informed of the date of the meeting at which the application is to be considered by Committee and of their public speaking rights. The Committee report would be publicly available five clear days before the Committee meeting.

The meeting ended at 11.52 am

CHAIR