This week Christ's College refused to attend the public hearing residents are legally entitled to, and the Council cancelled it, only for the Council's own Senior Planning Lawyer to reinstate it a day later. It is the latest turn in a longer story: on 28 April the College and the Council signed a consent order conceding a residents' judicial review on all four grounds, and on 11 June the College's Bursar wrote to every Cambridge councillor describing it as a "pending challenge." The full paper trail (court orders, letters, minutes) is below and attached.

CHRIST'S LANE ACTION GROUP
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A Very Cambridge Affair: Christ's College v the Court, the Experts and the City

They conceded in court, then came back with the same errors. The heritage experts found harm; they overruled them. The city asked for a hearing; they tried to cancel it. The College, it seems, knows better than everyone.

This one has everything: an attempt to cancel a public forum, a secret surrender, a copy-paste application, and a Master talking over the city's own residents.

THE STORY IN 30 SECONDS

- **9 March:** Mr Justice Kimblin grants CLAG permission for judicial review on all four grounds, calling them "strongly arguable" and refuses the College's plea to expedite: "The College has been educating students since 1505."
- **28 April:** Christ's College and Cambridge City Council sign a consent order conceding the residents' judicial review on all four grounds: permission to be quashed, the residents' costs paid.
- **10 June:** the College files a second, near-identical application (26/02109/FUL). Its own covering statement: "the material submitted is almost entirely the same."
- **11 June:** the Bursar emails every city councillor about a "pending challenge" without mentioning the surrender signed weeks earlier.
- **Heritage verdicts:** Historic England finds "harm… primarily as a result of the excessive bulk"; after the College's modifications, "the overall massing of the building remains unchanged."
- **8 and 9 July:** the College refuses to attend the residents' Development Control Forum and the Council cancels it. A day later the Council's Senior Planning Lawyer reinstates it, citing residents' "strict compliance with the requirements."
- **9 July:** Cambridge Past, Present & Future, the city's largest civic society, formally objects: "multi-layered harm to highly sensitive designated heritage assets."

- **Next:** objections to 26/02109/FUL close 22 July. The DCF is going ahead. The High Court rules on 20 October.

They killed the public forum. It was back within a day.

Here's the fresh one. We lawfully requested a Development Control Forum, the formal public hearing residents are entitled to. The College's response? Simply refuse to turn up. The Bursar assured everyone the scheme was "unchanged" and a meeting "will not generate any new information". A bold verdict on a meeting you refuse to attend. On that basis, the Council obligingly called the whole thing off.

It didn't stay dead long. On 9 July, the Council's own Senior Planning Lawyer stepped in, noted our "strict compliance with the requirements," and confirmed the DCF will be held after all. It turns out you cannot un-invite the public from public scrutiny by declining the invitation yourself.

And that's just the latest in a saga of dirty tricks. Take it from the top.

Residents didn't just win "the first round." There will be no second: the College threw in the towel.

You may have read that residents merely "won the first round": a judge allowing a judicial review, with the real fight still to come. That is the spin. Here is the record: having taken on their own neighbours in court, Christ's College and the Council folded. On **28 April 2026** they signed a consent order agreeing the planning permission should be quashed and CLAG's costs paid, conceding the claim on all four grounds. The only reason there is still a **20 October hearing** is that CLAG refused to let them do it quietly: we insisted on a reasoned judgment, so the errors are ruled on in open court rather than buried in a settlement.

At the College's own open meeting on 6 July, one resident reminded the Master to his face: "We won in court… You guys conceded." His reply, for the history books: **"I am now going to talk over you deliberately."**

A very selective account.

On 11 June, the Bursar emailed every city councillor, including the members who will vote on this scheme, to explain the "unusual step" of a second application, all about sparing students a "year's delay" waiting for the 20 October hearing. One thing he forgot to mention: weeks earlier, the College had signed a consent order conceding the permission should be quashed on all four grounds. The people who decide were told there was a "pending challenge." They were not told the College had already surrendered.

The same day, a "Dear Neighbour" letter from the Bursar went through the doors of Christ's Lane, telling residents only that the High Court was "not due to hear that Judicial Review until October 2026." Same story, same omission.

And the "year's delay" argument? The High Court has already heard it, and rejected it. Refusing the College's request for an expedited hearing back in March, Mr Justice Kimblin noted the College "chose to enter

contracts before the permission was legally secure. That was a risk which it chose to take." Then the line for the ages: "The College has been educating students since 1505. If it takes some additional time to review the legality of the consent, that is something which the College will manage."

Then they tried to outrun the court, and said the quiet part out loud.

Rather than wait for October, the College filed a second application on 10 June to get the scheme back before committee "more quickly." Its own covering statement cheerfully admits "the material submitted is almost entirely the same" and "no changes have been made to the detail of the drawings." Same building, same harm, fresh cover sheet. The Victorian Society was less charmed: "the same submitted scheme cannot improve its level of harm."

The Master's own letter of support, filed on the planning portal on 8 July, waves the case away as "all four procedural points mentioned in the JR." Those "procedural points" are the grounds a High Court judge called "strongly arguable", and which his College went on to concede in full.

What every heritage body calls harm, the College calls a benefit.

This is the masterstroke. In its covering statement the College argues that no public benefit even needs weighing because, in its own considered view, the scheme does no net harm at all. Indeed, it delivers a "minor beneficial impact" to the listed buildings. Marking its own homework, and awarding itself a gold star.

The heritage bodies didn't get the memo. **Historic England** found "harm… primarily as a result of the excessive bulk": the building simply "too big for its location." And after those much-trumpeted "modifications"? "The overall massing of the building remains unchanged." The great concession: 90cm off the vents and a moved wash-up pod. The harm they identified is exactly where they left it.

The Victorian Society says the new library, rising "a whole storey higher" than the Grade I-listed Bodley Library, towers over its neighbour rather than answering to it, and dismisses the College's no-benefit argument as flatly "incorrect." The Master's rebuttal, live on 6 July: "We do not believe there is net heritage harm." He waved the Society away as "one of the 22" consultees, "not custodians of a building from the Tudor era." Except they are defending the Grade I-listed Bodley from harm, which is precisely their job. When the Society put its concerns in writing, the College fired back twice in a single afternoon, conceding only that "others may draw different conclusions… However, that does not alter our assessment." Everyone who disagrees, it seems, has simply misread the building.

An independent appraisal by conservation expert Alec Forshaw, submitted with CLAG's objection, reaches the same verdict and confirms the obvious: "The scheme has not been altered physically in any way; the proposals are identical." As the Victorian Society put it, reviewing its own mitigation recommendations from last summer: "Advice ignored."

And now Cambridge's own guardians have spoken.

Here's the moment that should worry the College most. **Cambridge Past, Present & Future**, the city's largest civic society and the charity that exists to look after Cambridge's heritage, lodged a formal objection on 9 July. The body that speaks for the fabric of the city has looked at Christ's "beautiful" library and said: no.

It doesn't mince words: the bulk causes "multi-layered harm to highly sensitive designated heritage assets." It says out loud the thing the Master keeps trying to talk over: that it "cannot ignore the deep local opposition from residents, and everyday users of Christ's Lane." And it tells the Council what to do about it: "negotiate a lower and less bulky design."

Read that last line again. The Master can boycott a forum, talk over a meeting, and mark his own homework. But he cannot make the neighbours, the experts and the city's own heritage guardians all fall silent at once. They haven't. They're getting louder.

The bottom line

The College concede defeat, then came back with the errors uncorrected. Every expert heritage body finds harm; the College calls it a benefit. Told at the open meeting that it was claiming to know better than the court and the experts, the Master said only "I disagree." He can disagree. He does not decide. The court will. The committee will. Cambridge will.

Read the primary documents at christslaneactiongroup.org. The court bundle (the order granting permission on all four grounds, CLAG's full grounds of challenge, the 28 April consent order and the 20 October listing) and the minutes of the 6 July meeting are attached to this email. **Object to [26/02109/FUL] before 22 July. The DCF is going ahead. The High Court rules on 20 October.**

KEY DATES

- **22 July:** deadline for public objections to application 26/02109/FUL
- **Date to be set:** Development Control Forum, reinstated by the Council's Senior Planning Lawyer on 9 July
- **20 October:** the High Court hands down a reasoned judgment on the conceded judicial review

NOTABLE QUOTES

"We won in court. Nobody ever wins on a judicial review. You guys conceded."
Resident to the Master of Christ's, open meeting, 6 July 2026

"I am now going to talk over you deliberately."
The Master's reply, same meeting

"If it's not against you, why did you sign it? We have your signature."
From the floor, after the Master said the judicial review "is not against Christ's College", same meeting

"Harm... primarily as a result of the excessive bulk... The overall massing of the building remains unchanged."
Historic England, consultation responses

“The same submitted scheme cannot improve its level of harm… Advice ignored.”
The Victorian Society, objection to 26/02109/FUL, 10 July 2026

“Multi-layered harm to highly sensitive designated heritage assets… [We] cannot ignore the deep local opposition from residents, and everyday users of Christ’s Lane.”
Cambridge Past, Present & Future, formal objection

“The material submitted is almost entirely the same… no changes have been made to the detail of the drawings.”
Christ’s College’s own covering statement

“The College has been educating students since 1505. If it takes some additional time to review the legality of the consent, that is something which the College will manage.”
Mr Justice Kimblin, refusing the College’s request for an expedited hearing, March 2026

“I consider that they are strongly arguable and merit consideration at a full hearing.”
Mr Justice Kimblin, granting permission on all four grounds

FOR JOURNALISTS

Attached to this email: the court bundle (Mr Justice Kimblin’s order granting permission on all four grounds, CLAG’s full grounds of challenge, the 28 April consent order, and the Administrative Court listing for 20 October) and the full minutes of the 6 July open meeting. The wider evidence pack (the Council’s correspondence declining and then reinstating the DCF, the Bursar’s 11 June letters, the College’s covering statement, and every statutory consultee response) is available on request; key documents are also published at **christslaneactiongroup.org**. **Press contact: residents@christs-lane.com**