

“Saint Pancras was a fourteen-year-old Christian boy who was martyred in Rome in AD 304 by the Emperor Diocletian. In England he is better known as a railway station.”

— **Sir John Betjeman, Poet Laureate and defender of St Pancras**

Dear friends, neighbours, and fellow Cantabrigians,

On 11 September, Cambridge stirred with disbelief. Christ’s College finally faced public scrutiny at the Development Control Forum (DCF) over its plans for an oversized, fortress-like building on narrow Christ’s Lane. What emerged was deeply troubling: a proposal that would turn Cambridge’s busiest pedestrian street into an oppressive canyon, plunging it into gloom and causing severe harm to our most sensitive heritage assets — including Grade I listed buildings. Petitioning on behalf of the public, Christ’s Lane Action Group (CLAG) called it “*fundamentally misguided — too tall, too massive, too defensive.*”

Councillors highlighted tough, clear requirements:

- ◆ Christ's Lane is a vital artery for the city centre
- ◆ Reinstate the basement - no Christ’s Lane canyon.
- ◆ Lower height, reduce mass. Heed heritage warning of every National Heritage Body.
- ◆ Deliver genuine public benefit: more than just a bench.
- ◆ Full daylight/sunlight studies – compliant and complete.
- ◆ Submit complete construction plan upfront: protect pedestrians and traders.
- ◆ Engage openly with the public. No closed doors.
- ◆ Reflect community feedback and return with meaningful change.

Then came silence.

Weeks later, a response appeared on the planning portal — curt, dismissive, and drenched in entitlement. The College refused every request. No amendments. No dialogue. No recognition of Christ’s Lane as a vital public artery. Every objection, they claimed, was “overstated” or “not material.” The scheme stands untouched: no height reduction, no reinstated basement, no construction plan. The public spoke — and the College turned its back, a clear display of its contempt for civic process.

A Wall for the Few, Shadows for the Many

At the DCF, the College clung to its "beautiful" brick façade and a bench, "which is not nothing." This is their "gift" to a street used by 10,000 people daily: a high, defensive wall promising to turn a vibrant lane into an oppressive, shadowed canyon. The ward councillor stated it plainly: “It’s impossible not to conclude this will feel canyon-like.”

Christ’s College has paid no heed—not to the public, not to their councillor. The College now sets itself above the city: above the public, elected officials, and national heritage bodies. The Master disputed any suggestion of heritage harm, despite Historic England’s warning that the building’s excessive bulk would damage the protected Bodley and other Grade I listed buildings. The Victorian Society went further, suggesting halving each floor height to reduce heritage harm. CLAG offered pragmatic alternatives, notably reinstating the basement from the College’s own 2016 proposal.

All were dismissed without hesitation.

The Smokescreen of “Sustainability”

The College now hides behind the rhetoric of “sustainability.” But as CLAG’s planning consultant made clear at the Forum: *“Sustainability isn’t just carbon; it stands on three pillars — economic, social, and environmental. It means supporting thriving communities with accessibility and open space, and protecting our built and historic environment.”*

By focusing solely on a narrow aspect of the environmental pillar, and ignoring the economic and social dimensions entirely, the College has reduced “sustainability” to a hollow slogan — a convenient label to cloak a deeply harmful and exclusionary scheme.

Christ’s Lane Is Not The College’s Back Alley

Poet Laureate John Betjeman and preservationist Jane Fawcett helped save St Pancras Station from the wrecking ball. Just ten days before demolition was set to begin, it was granted Grade I listed status — and today, it stands as one of Britain’s most admired public buildings. Their story is a reminder:

A city’s character survives only when its citizens refuse to be walled off from it. Cambridge deserves better than a brick curtain dropped between Town and Gown. As in the case of St Pancras, this is not a battle against progress — it is a stand for Cambridge’s public spaces, their stewardship must reflect the needs of the entire community, rather than being shaped exclusively by private interests.

The Planning Failures They Hid

Behind the wall lies a process riddled with error, omission, and quiet evasion.

-  Falsely claiming Christ’s Lane is not in conservation documents.
-  Ignoring Local Plan Policy 10, which prioritises Christ’s Lane.
-  Skipping Cambridge’s Tall Buildings Policy.
-  Withholding Daylight & Sunlight studies until public pressure forced them — and even then, incomplete.
-  Disregarding the Council’s own Statement of Community Involvement.
-  Claiming “accessibility” applies only within College walls — not in the public realm.

These are not oversights. They are deliberate choices — a pattern of selective blindness designed to sidestep accountability and railroad a project through.

As the Market Ward councillor said: *“This isn’t just a domestic concern... it is of wider interest to the city.”*

Stay Engaged — The Decision Is Close

The Committee vote is imminent. CLAG will continue to monitor the process and share updates.

What you can do now:

- ✓ Submit an updated objection (or new one) via the Planning Portal (App. Ref. [25/02161/FUL](#)) — make clear that this scheme fails on public benefit and process.
- ✓ Share this with colleagues, neighbours, alumni, residents — anyone who walks Christ's Lane.
- ✓ Stay tuned: CLAG will track last-minute submissions and push for a public process worthy of our city.

CLAG stands at the city's front line — where the University meets the public realm — defending Cambridge's heritage, its open spaces, and its dignity against the creeping shadows of private interest.

With resolve,

Christ's Lane Action Group ([CLAG](#))

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