

CAMBRIDGE – Democracy died a little in the Guildhall this week. [Christ's College has been given the green light](#) to bulldoze its way through Cambridge's historic heart — after a chaotic, packed-out planning meeting that residents are calling “*a stitch-up from start to finish*.” The controversial library plan was approved **4–3** (Listed Building Consent – LBC) and **4–2** (Full Planning Permission - FUL) in two votes — but the scenes inside the chamber shocked even seasoned observers. So many members of the public turned up for **CLAG** that the meeting had to be [paused and adjourned](#). Fire exits were blocked, people were standing in aisles, and the council had to scramble for extra seats. “*It was democracy in overflow*,” said one resident. “*But they'd already made up their minds*.”

‘Accessibility for the few’

Cambridge's disability champion, Cllr **Naomi Bennett** ([Abbey Ward](#)), gave an impassioned plea to protect the city's safe walking routes. “*Christ's Lane is our safe off-road route into the city centre*,” she told the chamber. “*You can't build an ‘accessible’ library by making the rest of the city inaccessible*.” The response? The case officer admitted he hadn't even attended the accessibility meeting — and mumbled that the College had “*taken points on board*.” Residents called it “*tokenism at its worst*.”

Insulting ‘public benefits’

Cllr **Matthew Howard** ([Abbey Ward](#)) blasted the so-called “public benefit” of the plan — which amounted to just one bench outside the new building. “*A single bench in a £100 million project*,” he said. “*An insult to residents and civic pride alike*.”

Heritage harm, ignored

Historic England and the **Victorian Society** had both warned the scheme would cause heritage harm to the [Grade I-listed](#) Bodley Library. Yet the case officer unilaterally declared that harm “*offset*,” claiming a “*neutral impact*” — a manoeuvre directly [contrary to case law](#). “*On one side sat a multi-million-pound concrete monolith*,” said one observer. “*On the other, a token bench. That's Cambridge's planning balance*.”

Not So Neutral: Chair in the Hot Seat



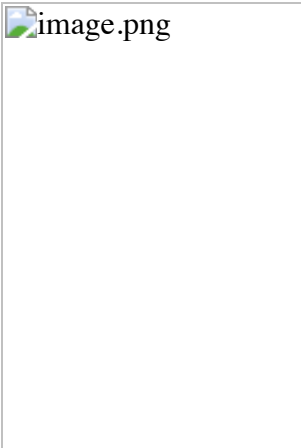
Cllr **Robert Dryden** challenging the impartiality of the Chair

The meeting reached boiling point when Cllr **Robert Dryden** ([Cherry Hinton Ward](#)) — a former Mayor and veteran planning committee chair — launched a direct forceful challenge at the chair, Cllr **Martin**

Smart (King's Hedges) (captured in the [video clip](#) attached). “*You’re not consistent in your views,*” he said. “*And it looks like you’re leading us on.*” Applause broke out before the chair hastily silenced the room. “*For once, someone told the truth,*” said a young high-schooler in attendance afterwards.

‘A rigged vote’

Cllr **Ingrid Flaubert** (Petersfield Ward), who voted against the [LBC](#) scheme, suffered a nosebleed and briefly left the room for the [FUL](#) vote. When she returned, her seat had been moved and her vote disqualified. “*She was literally removed from the picture,*” said one witness. The vote was passed — and College representatives high-fived members of the committee. “*Transparency, Cambridge-style,*” said one campaigner.



College celebrates with Planning Committee Member

‘We’re not done yet’

The Christ’s Lane Action Group (CLAG) says this is far from over. “*This isn’t the end — it’s the beginning of a civic movement,*” said a spokesperson. “*Cambridge deserves better. We’re preparing a full procedural challenge. The planning process may be broken, but our resolve is not.*” Christ’s had barely finished celebrating. But for the second vote, a Cambridge Don — an acclaimed Professor of Physics — stepped up on behalf of CLAG in an [impromptu intervention](#), and shattered the calm. What followed wasn’t a speech, it was a dismantling — a searing, methodical exposure of how the process had been twisted from the inside out.

Step by step, clause by clause, she tore through the paperwork and laid bare the rot beneath it. It was surgical, merciless, and utterly damning. By the time she finished, the room wasn’t breathing. For a long moment, the chamber just held — the silence heavier than any applause. Then shuffling, a cough, the chair reaching for his papers. The authority in the room had shifted, and everyone knew it.

What’s next for Cambridge

Outside the chamber, the mood had hardened into purpose. CLAG is joining forces with more residents, academics, councillors, and local groups to fight back against what they call “**developer capture**” in the city. A public meeting will be announced soon. One local resident summed it up best: “*They built walls, not bridges. But we’re still here — and we’re not going anywhere.*”

Onward and Stronger,

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

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