

Christ's College has launched a proposal that risks erasing decades of careful planning safeguards in the heart of our city. The College is attempting to push through a scheme that says plainly: their private interests matter more than the public good. Christ's Lane - a beloved, open and accessible public artery in the heart of Cambridge's conservation area - is now the target of a mega-development that breaks rules, erodes heritage, and sidelines the very people who keep this city alive. This is not just construction. This is the rewriting of the rules of who the city is for — the public, or private institutions.

What's At Stake

The College's proposal, if approved, would let loose a wave of harm on Cambridge's streetscape and public life:

- **Breaking the Height Rules** : The proposed building would dwarf surrounding heritage assets and overwhelm the public realm, rising to nearly twice the height and bulk of the neighbouring Bodley Library — a highly significant heritage asset. Planning height limits are being openly flouted, imposing a canyon-like oppressive effect on a narrow public passage — the very outcome planners have warned against for decades.
- **A Dead Wall on Christ's Lane** : Instead of shops, windows, and activity enlivening the street, the public is confronted with a blank, lifeless façade — a sheer monolith of brick that casts shadows, kills natural light, and shrinks the lane into a hostile corridor.
- **No Greening, No Softening** : The development contributes nothing to the public realm — no greening, no landscaping, no ecological design. The promised green façade and connection to Christ's Pieces have been dropped, leaving only a barren surface with nothing for the public — no planting, no ecology, no design for human beings.
- **Shrinking the Public Highway** : Christ's Lane was guaranteed as a 6m-wide pedestrian only public-highway by the Secretary of State. The College has already covertly claimed two metres for itself as 'private', leaving a miserly 4m squeeze for the public.
- **No Plan for Pedestrian Safety** : The proposal would bring huge construction disruption to a vital artery used by 10,000 people every day — yet not a single pedestrian safety plan exists, for construction or for afterwards. That is negligence, and worse, contempt.
- **Faux "Public Benefits"**: A solitary bench and diffuse lighting are presented as “public benefits.” Replacing blocked daylight with artificial light is not a benefit, it is an insult.

A Tale of Two Developments

It wasn't always like this. When Bradwell's Court was approved in 2004, on the other side of Christ's Lane, strict obligations were mandated by the Planners:

- A maximum height capped at 11.4m.
- Active frontages to keep the street lively and human in scale.
- Landscape continuity with Christ's Pieces.
- Guaranteed pedestrian right of way at a width of at least 6m.

The lesson was clear: development is allowed, but the public realm comes first. These rules were not optional — they were protections Christ's itself once demanded. Now, the same College wants to erase them. Why? So they can squeeze in bulk, profit, and control where once there was shared space.

Who's Fighting Back

Christ's Lane Action Group (CLAG) — a coalition of locals, academics, carers, traders, students, retirees — is leading the charge for fairness and accountability. We've:

- Submitted detailed objections and evidence to the Council.
- Raised awareness with posters, petitions, and press briefings.
- Forced the application into full view at a Development Control Forum (DCF). This is no trivial step — most applications never get that far. We tripled the number of signatures required to trigger the meeting.

And now, on 11 September 2025, at 11am, in the Guildhall, Christ's College will be forced to answer the public, in the chamber of accountability.

Even National Institutions have weighed in, Historic England has issued strong warnings about the "*excessive bulk of the new building*" and "*harm to the setting of a listed building, as well as to the character and appearance of the Central Conservation Area*" posed by the scheme.

The College's Dirty Tricks

In the final days before the Development Control Forum, Christ's College played its hand: **a sudden dump of thirteen new documents, nine of them revised architectural drawings.**

This was not an honest attempt to address public concerns. It was a distraction. The changes are cosmetic — tweaks to chimney heights to improve their own internal views — while every major objection stands untouched.

Here's what their eleventh-hour upload **DID NOT** include:

- **No response to public or expert objections** or consultee comments.
- **No updated assessment of visual impact harms**
- **No revised daylight, sunlight, and shading impacts**
- **No pedestrian safety plan.**
- **No analysis of the harm caused by the excess bulk and massing** to heritage assets and the public realm.

The heart of the problem is unchanged: an overbearing building that overshadows and oppresses Christ's Lane, harms significant heritage fabric, erodes pedestrian safety, and gives back nothing of value to the public realm.

Yet the Council has, thus far, turned a blind eye to the College's antics, refusing to postpone the Development Control Forum despite the rushed timetable and lack of proper scrutiny. If this stands, the public will be forced to fight blind against a moving target, while the College spins unexamined documents designed to exhaust, not inform.

Real Voices. Real Cambridge.

This is not a clash between “outsiders” and the University. It is Cambridge itself speaking:

- A Danish grandmother, a design veteran, whose grandson calls the scheme “ *something out of Mordor* .”
- A local housekeeper worried for her safety: “ *If a tall wall goes up and darkens the lane, I will feel unsafe. Do they ever think about how we feel walking here?* ”
- A retail business owner whose livelihood depends on footfall: “ *The planned construction threatens to severely disrupt day to day operations* ”
- A disabled resident from the Kite community fearing construction will cut off access altogether.
- A Cambridge alumna: “*I’m fiercely loyal to the university — which is why I oppose this plan. Why can’t we build something inspiring, like the Jerwood Building?* ”
- A historian reminds us: “*Christ’s College is part sanctuary, part garden — not a site for monolithic developments.*”

What You Can Do — Right Now

Here's how we fight back:

1. **Show Up in Person** : The DCF on Thursday 11 September 2025, Guildhall at 11am is our chance. Presence matters. Let’s fill the chamber, every seat, every row — they must see the city watching.
2. **Object, Object, Object** : Submit via the Council's portal (Ref. 25/02161/FUL) [[Link](#)]. Numbers matter — whether it’s a long critique or one line, every objection forces recognition.
3. **Sign and Share the Petition** : Add your name and encourage others [[Link](#)]. The list is already over a hundred strong.
4. **Spread the Word** : Share this newsletter, talk to neighbours, put it in your community WhatsApp groups. Tell your local press. This story must be too loud to bury.
5. **Get the Full Dossier**: Email us at CLAG to receive our full dossier of annotated visuals, policy analysis, and talking points you can use to sharpen your objection. Knowledge is power.

Why This Fight Matters

This is not about resisting all development. It is about defending balanced, human-scale planning that prioritises Cambridge's public life and heritage. Christ's College is betting on public fatigue, hidden processes, and rushed deadlines to bulldoze through a development that serves itself, not the city. We say otherwise.

Cambridge belongs to everyone — students, residents, visitors, workers, families. If Christ's College can override rules in the heart of a Conservation Area, where do we draw the line?

Cambridge deserves better than to be darkened, stripped of its functional public spaces, and diminished in its historical richness. It deserves a public realm worthy of its history and future.

This is our chance

Let history show that when the College tried to claim a beloved public space for itself, the people of Cambridge stood up, spoke out, and defended the soul of their city.

— Christ's Lane Action Group (C.L.A.G)

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