CHRIST'S COLLEGE LIBRARY · OCTOBER 2026

Watch this space

Dear friend,

"Controversial."

The word everyone is using to describe the latest episode in the ongoing planning dispute. Even the Cambridge Independent, in Eoin McCaul's report, headlined Wednesday's decision: **"Controversial Christ's College library plan approved by Cambridge City Council ahead of High Court hearing."**

On Wednesday the Council approved the identical Christ's College library scheme. In just thirteen days, the High Court hears our challenge to the first permission for the same scheme. Councillors pleaded they did not have time to acquaint themselves with complete facts in such a complex case. They expressed alarm that our emails to them had been blocked. They worried about the case on the exact same scheme to be heard in Court on 20 October. Yet the Council juggernaut rolled on, regardless, it seemed, of their repeated expressions of disquiet.

> *Even the Master of Christ's tempered his 'relief' over the outcome with a warning: CLAG, he said, **"still have legal options"**. **"Watch this space."***

On that, at least, we agree.

A STRONG CONTINGENT

The library item did not come up until after lunch. Through the day, more and more residents came into the Council Chamber. By the time the vote was taken, most of the public seats were filled by people who had come for Christ's Lane.

Many more of you wrote to the Committee, and many watched online. More than 150 letters and documents from us and our supporters are on the Council's register for this application. This is not a handful of people. It is a neighbourhood. As the ward councillor, Hugh Clough, told the Committee, the errors in the first decision **"only came to light through the determination and persistence of local residents"**.

INSIDE THE CHAMBER

> *Roger Hepher, a former head of planning at Savills, had warned the Committee in writing that approving the identical building now would be **"walking inevitably into another"** legal challenge, one that was **"entirely foreseeable and avoidable"**.*

The meeting showed why. Councillor after councillor said they had not been able to read everything. Some papers had arrived that morning. One asked for **"some sort of assurance that I have now received everything I needed to see"**. Another asked for time **"to do some more homework"**. The Chair paused the live stream and gave members ten minutes to read a case that has been before the High Court for most of a year.

Several members wanted to wait for the Court. The planning officer explained that after 16 October the College could appeal if no decision had been made. The Chair turned that into something else: if members waited, the Council would **"lose the right to determine"** the application. She said it three times, and told members **"I give significant weight to this."**

That is not what the law says. Members were not told that the deadline could be extended by agreement, as it already had been. They were not told that an appeal is the College's choice, not something that happens automatically, or that the Council keeps the power to decide unless and until an appeal is actually made. Members were left with a misleading picture, and the facts that would have corrected it were not put in front of them.

One councillor gave the risk of an appeal as his reason to go ahead. The talk of waiting ended there, and the building was approved.

OUR EMAILS

The first question at the meeting came from a councillor: emails to members had been captured and forwarded on. **"Were those emails read?"** No one answered.

On the morning of the meeting, Gemma Gardner of the Cambridge Independent reported our concern that our emails were being blocked and the dates on our evidence altered.

Councillor Clough found out for himself. Our letter to the Committee **"did not reach my inbox"**, he said. **"Nobody had told me."** Then, to his colleagues: **"It is inexcusable that members' emails should be interfered with."** And: **"A planning process that is not transparent and democratic cannot lead to a fair decision."**

WHAT WE SAID

> *Our speaker had three minutes.* ***"You have been told we're putting a gun to your head. I think it's the other way around. You are being rushed into a decision which is legally incorrect."***
>
> *On the report's claim that last year's errors had been put right:* ***"They have not been corrected. They have recurred."***

20 OCTOBER

The High Court hears our case on the first approval on 20 October. We will write again before then.

Thank you to everyone who wrote, came to the Guildhall or watched online. We are only gathering our breath for the interesting road ahead.

As the Master says: watch this space.

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