

Record of the Christ's College Public Consultation Meeting

**Application 26/02109/FUL: Second Application for Christ's College Library+ Scheme
Held at Christ's College, Cambridge, Monday 6 July 2026, 6:00 pm**

Meeting concluded shortly after 7:00 pm

Chaired by the Master of Christ's College

The College's initial presentation is not reproduced here; this record focuses on the public question-and-answer session and the College's responses.

The College representatives included the Master, the College's planning consultant Turley, and the Bursar

Method and redaction

This record has been prepared from the complete audio transcript. It is not a verbatim transcript, but a faithful minute of the exchanges, retaining direct quotation where the precise wording is material.

Private attendees are identified by role or capacity only; named individuals are named only where they spoke in an official or applicant-team capacity.

1. Capacity and the Abandoned Mather Scheme

A long-standing member of the collegiate community said she was "*bewildered*" that, having finally secured the funding, the governing body did not proceed with the Rick Mather design approved in both 2011 and 2016. She described the present scheme as "*an unnecessary overdevelopment of the historic Bath Court.*" She presented a capacity analysis: approximately 900 potential users (undergraduates, postgraduates, fellows and staff); comparable colleges' libraries cater for approximately 100 users; outside the 24 teaching weeks the active user ratio falls further. She noted the Trinity model of distributed library provision as an alternative.

The Master responded that the governing body had considered the matter "*multiple times over several years*" with one dissenter. The "*major consideration*" in rejecting the Mather scheme was its basement, which is "*absolutely out of current architectural sustainability thinking.*" On whether the basement was the only reason, he added that "*issues of materiality... were also part of the consideration.*" Asked whether minutes of the governing body's decision were kept: "*The college keeps its own records.*" He noted that until his own tenure as Master, "*there was no money available*" to build the Mather scheme.

2. The College and the City

A senior fellow of another college spoke to the broader relationship between the College and Cambridge. She suggested that study needs did not require concentration of capacity in a single building, and that the meeting — and the planning controversy of the previous autumn — had highlighted that "*the college was not thinking sufficiently about its relationship with the other inhabitants of the city.*" She told the Master that his presentation "*just reinforces that. Any college would be able to make the case that you've just made for building absolutely anything anywhere as long as they had got the finances.*" She asked to hear "*a genuine concern and interest in what locals feel.*"

A further questioner asked whether the basement was the sole reason for abandoning the Mather design. The Master confirmed it was *"the major consideration"* alongside materiality, and did not dispute that the governing body's internal records exist.

The Master responded to the civic-relationship question by listing the College's contributions: it is open every day apart from examinations and Christmas; it is providing the commissioned gate artwork; it will install a public bench (*"something borrowed from Italian architecture... a Milanese bank"*); it is taking no land from the lane; and the ground-level design *"will spill light into"* the lane after dark. He closed: *"In the end, I am here as a trustee of Christ College trying to do the best for the community of Christ College."*

3. Paragraph 3.16 and the Heritage Balance

A senior academic asked about the change in the heritage case between the first and second applications. The covering statement for the second application (paragraph 3.16) now asserts that no public benefit need be demonstrated because, in the College's view, the building itself causes no net heritage harm. She asked the Master to explain this position.

The Master initially replied: *"The heritage case hasn't changed."* The College's planning consultant from Turley clarified: *"where you have no overall heritage harm, then that doesn't need to be balanced against any public benefits. We are providing public benefits anyway."* After repeated requests for a direct answer on whether paragraph 3.16 states that public benefit need not be provided, the Master confirmed: *"The answer is it is not necessary, but it is being provided,"* and repeated: *"Although it does not need to be provided, we are providing public benefits."*

The questioner pointed out that this contradicts the findings of Historic England and the Victorian Society, both of which have identified heritage harm requiring balance. The Master replied: *"We do not believe there is net heritage harm."* On the Victorian Society specifically: they are *"one of the 22"* consultees, and not *"custodians of a building from the Tudor era."* He added: *"The bottom line for every single consultee was no objection,"* invited the room to compare before-and-after images, described the existing building as *"an excrescence,"* and noted *"a wonderful article in the Observer yesterday."*

The questioner replied: *"Aesthetics are not the same as heritage. And I'm sure we all know that."*

4. Alternatives and the Height Overlay

The long-standing member of the collegiate community asked whether the College had visuals of the Create Streets counter-proposal. The Master replied that the Grafton scheme had reached RIBA Stage 4 with full floor plans and elevations, while *"the Create Streets design is one sheet of paper... There's no floor plan. There's no rear elevation... It is not a serious proposal... it should not be considered."*

On a height overlay of the Mather scheme against the Grafton scheme, the Master asserted that the Mather design *"is higher even [than] the apex of the Bod[le]y library."* When the member questioned this, recalling the Mather scheme as no higher than the Bodley, the Master replied: *"I think you are revealing your partiality here."*

On sustainability: the Grafton scheme uses solar panels and an air source heat pump and *"will consume way less energy than we do even right now."*

5. The Judicial Review

An attendee asked the Master to explain the judicial review. The Master summarised the four grounds: (1) presentation of Historic England's advice to committee — *"the bottom line was no objection, but there was detail and how that was presented"*; (2) heritage; (3) optimal viable use — described as *"a marginal point"*; (4) failure to take account of material alternatives.

A questioner observed that Historic England's letter contains eight serious concerns before reaching its *"we do not wish to object"* conclusion, and that committee members would have had no means of knowing the substance of Historic England's advice from a summary of *"no objection."* He noted that objectors are allocated three minutes before committee. The Master replied: *"That is the system that we have and the bottom line from Historic England was that they did not object... We got English scholars in here. I think that is clear."*

6. Bradwell Court and the College's Own Objection

A supporter of the scheme asked what specific harm the objectors identified. A questioner answered: the Cambridge City conservation area, and the impact on Christ's Lane from height and massing. The Master showed a view from a student's bedroom overlooked by Bradwell Court: *"If you're worried about height, the bigger building already exists. Our building will be shorter."*

He was asked: *"Did the college object to the redevelopment [of Bradwell Court] when it was proposed?"* The Master: *"It did. It did."*

7. The Consent Order Placed on the Record

A resident stated that in written correspondence the College's lawyer had claimed the judge who granted permission to proceed on all four grounds was biased against Christ's College. He offered to share that correspondence with anyone who wished to see it: *"Light is the best disinfectant."* The Master asked for it to be sent to him.

The resident asked why the College had not awaited the 20 October judgment, given the signed draft consent order conceding on all four grounds: *"We lost on committee and we won in court. Nobody ever wins on a judicial review. You guys conceded."* As the exchange continued, the Master stated: *"I am now going to talk over you deliberately."*

The Master then said: *"The judicial review is not against Christ's College. The judicial review is against the city of Cambridge."* From the floor: *"If it's not against you, why did you sign it? We have your signature."* The Master moved the meeting on, explaining that the College wished to *"crack on"* rather than wait for October, and that the second application was designed to address all four grounds.

The senior academic then made a final statement: that between the grant of permission and the substantive hearing of 20 October, the College and the Council had signed a draft consent order agreeing that the first permission should be quashed on all four grounds — *"and this has not been communicated to the public."* She noted that the second application repeats errors conceded in the first: optimal viable use is again argued as a public benefit, and the College continues to dispute heritage harm that Historic England and the Victorian Society have identified. She concluded: *"When the court says that all [four grounds] are strongly arguable and the college concedes that [optimal viable use] was erroneously applied... and then comes back and argues for [it], or when a heritage body says there's harm and then the college comes back and says, 'We know better than the court, we know better than the heritage body,' I think it says something."*

The Master closed: *"I disagree with both points just made... If this can all go wrong again, absolutely can all go wrong again, but I ask you, look at the building that will be preserved as a consequence of us losing a second time. We believe that we are creating something beautiful... Thank you very much for coming."*

The meeting closed shortly after 7:00 pm.

Requests for Corrections

Any request for correction should identify the relevant passage.

The full transcript is available on request, subject to appropriate redaction.