

Newnham College proposed new building

The project brief

The College strives to provide a supportive, elegant and inspiring environment to all who learn and teach at Newnham. In 2014, the College carried out a strategic review of its accommodation needs which identified that to support the University-led move for a gradual increase in graduate student numbers, Newnham would require an additional 60 student bedrooms by 2023.

The strategic review also concluded that the existing Strachey building, which was considered to be state-of-the-art student accommodation when it was completed in 1968, is coming to the end of its useful life and is in need of replacement.

In November 2014, Walters and Cohen architects were appointed to explore potential design solutions to meet these two strategic objectives with high quality, flexible and energy efficient accommodation.

Both the College and architects are committed to ensuring that any new building not only meets the practical needs of the College, but also makes a positive contribution to the College and surrounding area.

Newnham College today



Champneys' buildings create a clearly defined edge and enjoy a strong relationship with the gardens. The south elevation of Elizabeth Scott's Fawcett building also makes a positive contribution.



The later Strachey building, Porters' Lodge and north elevation of the Fawcett building, with its bar (previously the plant room) and tower additions, as well as their car park setting, create the feeling of arriving at the back door of the College. This is despite forming the primary College frontage along Sidgwick Avenue. By contrast, the south side of Fawcett is of better quality and enjoys a positive connection to the listed Sidgwick building.

The Strachey building

This building was designed by the local architects, Lyster and Grillet, and built from 1966-8. The Strachey building is not listed, nor is it a Building of Local Interest identified by the City Council, or even identified as being 'positive' in the conservation area appraisal. In planning terms, the building is not a 'heritage asset'.

The building is coming to the end of its useful life. Refurbishment was estimated at £15m in 2008 and further problems have emerged since:

- The rusting reinforcement within the concrete structure is causing cracking and has led to applied tiles dropping off.
- The flat roofs are leaking badly.
- The rooms are small and some are awkward shapes. It would be impossible to provide en suites; while not an essential pre-requisite of the College, clearly a very costly upgrade would be needed to bring this building up to the best modern standards.
- The pipework is set within the concrete structure, is leaking, and therefore almost impossible to mend.
- The electrical system is beyond its useful life. The fire alarm needs to be replaced.
- Kitchens and bathrooms are too small, squalid, and fittings need replacing.
- The windows leak and are failing, doors are deformed. The environmental performance of the building is poor.
- The lift is beyond its useful life.



Unfriendly ground floor treatment of Strachey building



Lawn between RFB and Strachey is underused, RFB feels excluded from main space