**CIVIC UNIVERSITY AGREEMENT**

**ISSUE**

1 How should HRA/NSCF respond to the University of Southampton’s proposal for a Civic University Agreement?

**RECOMMENDATION**

2 That, subject to discussion with other local residents’ associations through the NSCF, the thoughts below should be the basis of an initial response to the University.

**BACKGROUND**

3 Under a national initiative, universities are being encouraged to draw up CUAs with their local communities. What follows by way of background is taken from a recent meeting with the University.

4 The underlying aim of a CUA is to celebrate, promote and improve a university’s interactions with its local community (Southampton of course has several distributed campuses and not only in the City). Current thinking envisages the University through the Agreement, supporting local educational growth, economic life, and cultural and physical wellbeing. The underpinning principles are understanding local context and need; working with, by and for local communities, groups and organisations; and local infrastructure and partnerships.

Based on consultation to date, the University has identified seven priorities:

1. Education, learning and future jobs
2. Research and Innovation, Enterprise, Business and Economic Growth
3. Staff, Students and Graduate Support and Retention
4. Health and Wellbeing
5. Improving the Quality and Cultural Life of our places
6. Environment, Sustainability, Decarbonisation and Biodiversity
7. Social Justice and Equality.

It can be assumed that these will be the main fields of action under the agreement.

The University has not yet determined a structure for the agreement. It hopes to settle one by the end of the current academic year. It is currently consulting local communities about what they see as their key priorities/needs and how best the University could work in partnership with them, hence this note.

**ARGUMENT**

The University of Southampton (and, to a much lesser extent, Solent University) plays an important part in the life of Highfield and Portswood. Through the North Southampton Community Forum (which seems well placed for this purpose, given its geographical coverage), HRA should welcome the University’s initiative and aim to play a constructive part in developing the agreement. However the agreement will only be worthwhile if it adds value to existing activities and relationships. It therefore needs to provide a framework for discussing developments at the University which could benefit both the University and the local community in the fields identified above.

In common with most other universities, Southampton has grown considerably over the past couple of decades. There can be little doubt about the benefits of this expansion. However this growth has also thrown up major problems, some of which were not fully anticipated and some of which have still to be fully resolved. It is therefore suggested that the starting point for the agreement should be an appreciation of what further changes or expansion are envisaged over the next 5 to 10 years, and how these may be expected to affect our area and community. The University’s approval of a new Strategic Plan should put it in a good position to be able to do this.

There are two further issues that it might be worth putting on the table initially.

One, which was raised at the earlier meeting, is how the success of the agreement will be assessed, and by whom. The other is whether the agreement might provide for some machinery through which issues of mutual interest can be discussed on a regular basis rather than having to be dealt with on an ad hoc basis as is sometimes the case now. It might be that a single structure could meet both sets of needs provided it had both University and community support.

RB

30 March 2022