

## **HRA Comments**



### **Avenue Campus Revised Redevelopment**

The HRA Committee has considered the revised proposals for the redevelopment of the Avenue Campus.

HRA recognises that a number of changes have been made to the previous proposals. But the fundamental concerns from the earlier feedback – overdevelopment, quality of design, the impact on the local community and the impact on the surrounding area – have not been addressed. HRA remains of the view that this is an inappropriate development in an inappropriate place. HRA also notes that the proposals have occasioned considerable levels of anger and mistrust of the University on the part of local residents.

### **Overdevelopment**

The effect of the proposals is to turn the present Avenue Campus parkland into a series of four-storey blocks that are intensive and overbearing and quite different in scale, design and appearance from buildings elsewhere in the immediate area as well as from the rest of the Avenue Campus. As we said in our previous response:

*...rather than starting from an assessment of the character and constraints of the site, the proposals appear to be simply a reflection of the need to find 400-500 additional bed spaces for the University's continued expansion by inserting conventional, generic accommodation blocks that could be located anywhere – and increasingly are, across the city – rather than in this rather special place.*

This remains true of the revised proposals with extensive new buildings housing a large number (about 400) of additional students and situated far too close to residential streets and Southampton Common.

### **Quality of design**

The consultative document claims that the designers adopted, 'a *townhouse* approach that reflects the character of Highfield'. But the illustrations do not reflect the character of Highfield in any way. As a matter of fact, there are very few townhouses locally. The Avenue Campus is mostly surrounded by two-storey houses with pitched roofs. The original Taunton building nearby is attractive and much loved. The new block designs do not reflect that building in any way.

### **Impact on the local community**

In our previous comments we argued that the proposed new blocks would fundamentally change the character of the neighbourhood, and not in ways that would benefit those actually living there. HRA particularly highlighted:

- The likely additional pressures on Highfield Road and adjacent streets and walkways, including Lover's Walk. Highfield Road is already close to being unusable during study periods from the numbers of people using it. Lovers Walk is heavily used, not only by pedestrians but also by cyclists, e-scooters, etc. Both Highfield Road and Lovers Walk are at times unsafe and almost impassable for people with children and people with disabilities.
- The fact that the accommodation will not be catered for will increase the number of student journeys to fast-food and other outlets at various times of the day and night, including to and from the main University Campus. There will almost certainly be a substantial increase in the level of incoming and outgoing food delivery traffic, with bikes, electric bikes, electric scooters, cars, taxis and motorbikes all being used. These will all increase the risk of traffic and pedestrian safety issues and noise at anti-social periods of the day and night into and out of the site, as well as potential confusion on and offsite caused by 'lost' delivery drivers. This is already being experienced by residents who live close to Highfield Hall.

The new blocks will be far too close and intrusive for residents in Oakmount Avenue, Westbourne Crescent, Highfield Road (especially Nos.1-5), Khartoum Road and Heatherdene Road. All of these roads will suffer detriment and loss of amenity from being heavily overlooked, from significant noise from students day and night (however much the University will try to control this) and from the position of the new tennis courts. Houses in Khartoum Road will be subject to disturbance from almost 600 surrounding students (from Highfield Hall and from the new blocks).

The consultative document states that, 'the images...show the current views, and the outline of the proposed buildings, which in some cases are mostly concealed or not visible at all'. This is simply untrue. The diagram of the tree screening shown is impossibly dense for the space available and the current trees would only provide seasonal screening. It will simply not be possible to plant adequate screening during the lifetime of most living residents.

### **Impact on the surrounding area**

HRA drew attention to the fact that the present Avenue Campus is surrounded by the Common and two-storey dwellings with pitched roofs. Together, these give the campus a pleasant and distinctive 'green' setting. The green space acts as an appropriate (and much needed) buffer zone between the University and nearby residential roads. The development is very close to the city's largest and most valuable green space and it will seriously detract from one of the most pleasing views in the city from the Common. It is also close to the Oakmount Triangle Conservation Area, Uplands Estate, Crofton Close and Heatherdene Road residential areas.

## **Conclusion**

HRA fully appreciates the contributions to the City's development made by the two universities. In recent years the University of Southampton has made considerable, and largely successful, efforts to develop a community dimension to its role. HRA has welcomed this and the Civic Agreement that enshrines it. HRA believes that it would be consistent with the spirit of this document if the University were to have a further think about its proposals and see if there is not an option of locating the additional accommodation elsewhere on its estate which does not give rise to such a level of potential civic detriment.

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