

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER MASTERPLAN PUBLIC MEETING

24 February 2009

Introduction

The meeting was held at the Stripe Theatre, University of Winchester and attended by approximately 70 members of public, Councillors and local representatives.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr Tommy Geddes (Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Winchester), and Mr Steve Tilbury (Corporate Director, Operations, Winchester City Council).

The University's Masterplan

Mr Geddes outlined the University's Estates Masterplan, and his presentation is available electronically [here](#).

In addition to the points raised in the above presentation, Mr Geddes highlighted the following issues:

- That the Masterplan was the University's document, detailing its plan for its own estate. Whilst it was not the planning authority's document, it would provide a context for future planning applications. Following the comments made at this meeting of the Forum, the City Council's Cabinet would consider the Masterplan at its meeting on 18 March 2009.
- That the University anticipated no significant growth in full-time student numbers during the period of the plan, 2007-17. This reflected both a change in government policy (which had halted funding for additional student places) and a change in the country's demographics, as there was a predicted 17% downturn in the number of 18 year olds in the UK. Therefore, the only scope available for the University to expand was from attracting more, self financing, non EU students and more part-time EU students.
- In speaking about the context of the University and its neighbours, Mr Geddes explained that much of that part of Winchester was a commercial business service area. He explained that it was an accident of history that a residential area had grown up immediately adjacent to the commercial area.
- That the University plan to open a coffee bar in the town centre had fallen through.

- That the Masterplan took into account the main pedestrian walking routes of students from both the main campus and the town centre.
- That the University had demonstrated, through its management of the West Downs Student Village, that it was possible to accommodate a large number of students with minimal disruption to immediate neighbours.
- That, since the term of the Estate Strategy which the Masterplan represents began in 2007, some of the main building projects had already been completed, such as the University Centre and the relocation of the Arts Faculty to the St Edburga building.

The other main projects outlined in the Masterplan were:

- That Performing Arts provision would, in effect, swap locations with the Business provision with the latter going to West Downs.
- That the 400-bed student residences near Milnthorpe Lane would enable the University to convert some of the existing outdated student residences to offices if that became necessary.
- A £14m teaching and learning block in Burma Road was to be built on the footprint of the existing Cottage, St Swithun's and Herbert Jarman Extension Building.
- A performing arts building to be built on the "old tennis courts" and screened from Milnthorpe Lane residents by a "living wall".
- Beyond 2022, the University had identified three possible sites for development (the south east corner of West Downs Campus, the St Edburga/Arts Centre Buildings, and Medecroft; illustrated as the yellow areas on Slide 21 of the presentation).

In discussing Student Housing, Mr Geddes explained that:

- The University had 3,800 full-time students, of which 950 lived in University residences (excluding University Managed Housing), 1,350 lived at home and 1,500 lived in the private rented sector (250 of whom were in University Managed Housing).
- Approximately 750 of those students that lived in the private rented sector (therefore, 50% of the total in this type of housing) lived in the 130 student shared houses in Stanmore. However, only 10 of these houses were managed by the University. The "studentification" of Stanmore had increased dramatically over the previous five years and Mr Geddes explained that this had had a negative effect on the available local housing stock, noise, parking and rubbish.

- However, he explained that it was in the University's interests to mitigate the downside of students living in the community. The University therefore sought to increase the number of university managed properties in the town. This may not mean that the University owned the accommodation let to students, but Mr Geddes explained that it did mean that students were likely to be better behaved in this type of accommodation; that it drove up accommodation standards and provided neighbours with an easy point of contact in the event of any problem.
- In addition to this, the completion of the Domain student accommodation block near Milnthorpe Lane would lead to 400 fewer students living in the wider community. It was the University's expectation that the extra capacity which would be available upon the completion of this block would enable the University to offer all of its first-year students accommodation on campus as well as some second and third years. It was the University's experience that it was the first-year students who were most likely to cause disruption to neighbours in the community. There were currently 127 first-year students living in the community, which was likely to rise to 150 next year. Mr Geddes explained that accommodating these students on campus would benefit the majority of Winchester's residents because, as the site was largely self contained, there would be less noise from students walking through residential areas at night. Furthermore, the University was better able to manage these blocks through residential wardens.
- He explained that the University was unable to itself finance the development of any further accommodation blocks, as a result of the significant debt it carried from the development of the West Downs Student Village. Therefore, any new development had to be in partnership with a private developer. Hence, the University had entered into a long-term lease with Domain for the yet to be constructed 400 bed accommodation near Milnthorpe Lane.
- An additional constraint on the University's development of student accommodation was its landlocked location. It was the University's view that it should retain any spare pockets of land it had for the future, potential development of teaching and learning buildings.
- With regard to parking, he explained that students who lived within five miles were not able to park on the campus. The opening of the new Park and Ride site would reduce parking on-site further, so long as it was accompanied by a bus route along Romsey Road and residents' only parking restrictions in areas near to the University.

Public Questions

During questions, the following issues were raised:

- An objection to Mr Geddes' view that residents that lived near the University lived in a "commercial area."
- There was a concern regarding the narrow footpath at Sparkford Road. Following discussion, Mr Tilbury agreed to investigate the possibility of widening this path.
- The traffic impact related to the growth of the University.
- That the development of more on or near-campus student accommodation would not necessarily equate to a like-for-like reduction in student numbers in Stanmore alone.
- That the University's green travel plan would require updating in the light of the Masterplan, and Mr Geddes agreed to consult with County Councillor Dickens (who was present at the meeting) on this issue.

In response to questions, Mr Geddes confirmed that:

- The new Performing Arts Centre would sometimes be used for band rehearsals and the building would be designed to leak only 35 decibels at its border with Milnthorpe Lane. He assured the Forum that the Centre's hours of operation would not go on beyond 9pm, but if this did unduly disturb residents it would cease to operate in the evenings. Mr John Hearn (one of the City Council's Development Control Managers) added that an application for the Performing Arts Centre had been received by the Local Planning Authority, but had not yet been considered. However, he explained that noise from the building would be carefully assessed by Environmental Health officers and their recommendations would be a material consideration in the determination of the application.
- Hampshire County Council had recently contacted the University regarding the upgrade of the footpath beside the railway track and had suggested that the University fund part of the cost of the project.
- The beige area of land on Slide 20, currently in the ownership of the hospital, could provide for significant future development, however the University would not be seeking to buy it. But Mr Geddes explained that, if a developer bought it, the University would be interested in taking on an additional 200-400 beds. As the size of this land was capable of sustaining a development of 900 beds, any future development of the site linked to the University was only likely to be possible if it involved mixed use.

- That the Police Headquarters Site was too large for the University's needs and therefore the University had no interest in its redevelopment.
- That the University was one of the smallest in the country and was approximately the size of a single faculty of a large university. It was not possible therefore for the University to grow significantly outside of its Winchester campus; as developing a number of satellites around the county would lead to a duplication of services and facilities.
- That the increase in student managed accommodation would be attractive to students because its own accommodation was inclusive of bills and included on-site maintenance, laundry, free internet access and mediation services. Mr Geddes added that when the University had been able to offer its own accommodation to second and third year students, the demand had been 30 times greater than the available supply.
- The Forum discussed the effect noisy students, returning home late at night, had on local residents. The President of the Students Union explained that freshers were told that, whilst they were at Winchester, they should consider themselves to be part of the Winchester community and act accordingly. The University also ran a number of campaigns to improve behaviour (such as "Silent Students, Happy Homes" and providing a late night minibus service), operated its own stewards and was an active member of the Pubwatch Scheme. Furthermore, the University had recently produced a leaflet entitled "Good Neighbours Guide" and were open to suggestions as to how this could be improved in future editions.
- In response to concerns regarding student parking, Mr Geddes explained that the University's legal advice had been that it was not possible to ban students from driving their cars within a certain radius of the campus. Oxford and Cambridge Universities had been able to enforce such rules through a historic bye-law which was not applicable to Winchester.
- That developers were likely to create new student housing, not on the projected growth of the University, but in the belief that their accommodation would be more attractive than existing private let housing.
- That the University was committed to consulting at the earliest possible opportunity with those affected by its own planning applications.
- That there was likely to be an increase in the car journeys to the campus if there was an increase in the number of part-time courses taken up at the University. Mr Geddes explained that a large percentage of these courses were currently taken up by teachers, many of whom had little opportunity to use public transport to get to the

University after their working day had finished. However, there was some potential to reduce this effect through the new Park and Ride site.

- The University and the City Council had regular dialogue with all the major education providers in the town.
- Mr Hearn explained that there was no distinction in planning law between the occupancy of a dwelling by a family and the occupancy of a dwelling by a number of students sharing its common facilities, provided the number of students did not exceed six.

A number of concerns were raised regarding the recent proposed redevelopment of residential properties in Sparkford Road by Abbotswood Properties. In response to these, Mr Geddes explained that a revised Masterplan had been submitted to Winchester City Council following the University being approached by Abbotswood Properties to re-develop three houses at Sparkford Road. He explained that although the site was not part of the University's estate, the area had been highlighted in the revised Masterplan, so as to be open and clear to local residents. The University had not entered into a long-term lease agreement with Abbotswood for the site, nor had Abbotswood requested such a lease.

Abbotswood's original proposal was for a 107 bed building on the site. The University had subsequently made a triangle of land available to Abbotswood to help square off the plot. Following public consultation (which had been encouraged by the University) and pre-application negotiations with the City Council's planning officers, the original proposals had been significantly altered with the removal of the upper floor and a smaller footprint which did not involve any University land. Subsequent to this, Abbotswood had acquired a property adjacent to the site and had yet to announce how this would affect their plans.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman thanked Mr Geddes for his presentation and the public for their contribution to the debate.

The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and concluded at 9.10pm.

Chairman