

Have the flats been granted planning permission?

Yes. Outline planning permission was granted for the development of the whole site for student housing in 2000 (97/00342/NOY). Reserved matters planning permission was obtained for the detailed design, siting, external appearance and landscaping in July 2002 (02/00989/RES). The first phase of the development was completed for occupation in 2004.

The City Council adopted the core strategy of their Local Development Framework in 2011 following a period of public consultation. Policy CS25 imposed a limit of no more than 3,000 students living in private accommodation in the city. The University's Council reviewed revised proposals for more units on the undeveloped area of the site in July 2011. This was Phase 2 of the development. Plans were drawn up for 312 units and submitted to the City Council in November 2011 following pre-application consultation with the City Council.

The Council resolved to grant planning permission in February 2012. Full planning permission was granted in August 2012 (11/02881/FUL) following completion of a planning agreement. During the process for seeking discharge of conditions on the planning permission relating to external materials, City Council officers requested changes to the cladding and roofing materials proposed by the University. The requested changes have been implemented by the University.

What was the consultation process?

The planning consultant appointed by the University wrote to a number of organisations and affected individuals and arranged a public exhibition in October 2011 prior to the planning application being submitted. The City Council carried out a consultation of statutory bodies, erected site notices and placed adverts in the local press once the application had been submitted.

What did the independent planning review (the Goodstadt report) say about the process?

Vincent Goodstadt, former President of the Royal Town Planning Institute was commissioned to conduct a review of the planning process, following a petition submitted to the City Council in December 2012. The review concluded that the City Council had fulfilled its statutory and legal requirements in all areas covered by the review, but that the planning process could have been improved by using the more extensive consultation processes found in best practice elsewhere. The University has revised its processes in light of this guidance.

Why was the Environmental Impact Assessment carried out after construction had started?

The University asked the Council to issue a formal 'screening' opinion as to whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was required for the development. City Council planning officers confirmed that an EIA was not necessary. However, the University volunteered to commission a retrospective EIA and appointed independent consultants Nicholas Pearson Associates to prepare an EIA to be submitted to the City Council for its assessment.

What did the EIA say?

The findings of the EIA are set out in the Environmental Statement. The Statement states that the visual impact of the flats on the local landscape and on 'heritage assets' is 'substantial adverse'. In mitigation of this, the Statement suggests three indicative options:

- 1: Building façade treatments and landscaping of the buildings (estimated cost £6 million)
- 2: Option 1, plus modification of the roof line (estimated cost £13.5 million)
- 3: Option 1, plus removal of the top floor from six buildings (removal of 33 units) and replacement of all roofs with low-level roofs (estimated cost £30 million)

The Statement notes that both options 2 and 3 would require the closure of all 312 units for at least one full academic year, resulting in the students having to find alternative accommodation during the period of the building works, and option 3 would also involve the permanent loss of 33 units. For these reasons, the Statement concludes that on balance both Option 2 and Option 3 would have adverse social and economic impacts.

The Statement says: "*with the improvement proposed in the Design Mitigation Strategy (Option 1), the advantages of the development would outweigh any residual harm*" and that "*... for economic and social reasons anything more than the minimum required to achieve a measure of environmental improvements would have a disproportionate effect and should not be pursued on these grounds.*"

How is the £30 million calculated?

The £30 million is a figure provided by experts advising on the costs of implementing the Design Mitigation Strategy of the Environmental Statement. It takes into account the loss of rental income (a publicly available figure) and the cost of constructing a replacement building for students. It does not allow for inflation in rent or construction costs nor the cost of further land acquisition. Nor does it allow for the disruption to families who would have to move from the site. Ultimately it is an estimate; so the real figure could be more or it could be less. Either way it is clear the impact and disruption will be substantial.