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20th December 2017

The Society's response to the application to close Tyndall Avenue to through traffic, widening of St Michael's Park to accommodate diverted vehicular traffic, modifications to the approaches to Royal Fort Gardens and other enhancement works - 17/06169/F

Summary

The Society supports the principles behind the scheme and agrees that there is the potential to create an interesting space that the public can share with the University. The Society welcomes the pedestrianising of Tyndall Avenue and the proposal to blur the Royal Fort Gardens boundary. This scheme together with the forthcoming changes around the Hawthorns site, will provide an identifiable centre for the university.

Although the Society supports the changes in principle it regrets that it cannot support the current scheme. The proposal is over designed, which gives the impression of a private space closed to the non-University public. The graphic paving pattern, the curved build outs and planting will create a barrier that will confuse the public and create a belief that Tyndall Avenue is private space. The University's declarations that Tyndall Avenue remains public space cannot offset the strong visual impression.

Although the University has conducted two public presentations there is no evidence that anything contributed by the public has influenced the progression of this application.

Planning issues

Will the public retain non-permissive access to Tyndall Avenue?

If the Council supports the University's application or a Stopping Up Order to end all highway rights, along Tyndall Avenue, it is critical for the public to retain a full, unimpeded right way along the road at all times and for all purposes without motor vehicles.

The University's proposal to enter a covenant with the Council to allow continued public access to Tyndall Avenue as a non-vehicular through route, on terms approved by the Council would protect the public's legal, non-permissive right of way. The Society would like to see a

draft of the proposed covenant, in a form agreed by the Council, submitted with the planning application.

The Society infers that the traffic diversions and the proposed road works in St. Michael's Park are designed to meet the known requirements of Council's Traffic Department and of First Bus.

Does the scheme maintain the appearance of Tyndall Avenue as a public space?

The critical planning issue will be the question of the maintenance of the appearance of Tyndall Avenue as public space. The Council should not support a proposal whose effect is to change an existing 'normal' public road into a 'non-road' that will cement the public impression of a private University precinct. The Society's view is that the scheme changes the public nature of Tyndall Avenue to an unacceptable degree. The overall effect of the proposed design is to create a strong visual impression of a private space, which harm a public asset, the area's permeability.

The scheme converts a road with buildings on both sides into a linear park with a series of 'event' and other spaces. The graphic pattern on Tyndall Avenue is strong. The impression on the public will be to create a series of signposts that lead to the buildings that border the street. The effect of these curving lines that lead to University's buildings will be to raise a visual barrier against the pedestrian or cyclist who intends to travel through Tyndall Avenue. The curves leading to the University's buildings conflict with the linear quality of the street.

The concave and convex build outs and the proposed planting reinforce the visual impact of the graphic pattern of the pavement graphics. Tyndall Avenue is public space, which it must remain. The public's right of way would appear subservient to the University's private purposes. Further changes to the Woodland Road/Tyndall Avenue junction could add to impression that the whole 'campus' is private space from which the public is excluded.

The Society suggests a simpler treatment. Retain the existing trees (except the cherries) and plant a new 'avenue' to create a dignified setting for the large University buildings. A paved area simply flanked by trees would retain the appearance of a road through the University. The files of trees would mask the changes of level necessary to improve access to the University building entrances. Less would be more.

Trees

The scheme would fell 15 fifteen trees in Tyndall Avenue, some in poor condition. However, the group of four trees, directly in front of the Sports Centre, are in good condition. They are important, they partly conceal the poor quality of the Sport Centre architecture. These trees would to be replaced with new specimens, planted within a metre of the felled trees. A simpler design could retain existing trees, which provide a substantial amount of canopy. It would be many years before the replacement trees provided an equivalent canopy. Similarly, two existing trees are lost in front of the Computer centre due to the adoption of the curvy geometry.

The Society regrets that in St Michaels Park, fifteen trees are inevitably lost to widen the road, with virtually no space to plant replacements. The current extensive tree cover civilises this road. The treeless appearance will be visually damaging.

Motor vehicles

It is proposed to allow access to Tyndall Avenue in early morning and early evening with movable bollards controlling access. Control of access by motor vehicles is a planning issue. The public realm will be harmed if there are always parked vehicles on Tyndall Avenue. The Society suggests a planning condition to restrain surface car parking of vehicles on Tyndall Avenue.

Four parking spaces will be lost in St. Michael's Park and twenty-seven in Tyndall Avenue. The Society suggest a further planning condition to require the University to absorb the loss of residents' and paid parking bays within the customer street parking permits that it allocates to its staff.

Public access

The Society welcomes the University's statement that it will put up a sign at the western approach welcoming public use and to show public access. Will there be a similar notice at the eastern approach?

The transfer from the public realm to Tyndall Avenue must be seamless to ensure continued permeability and for the public to feel that access is unfettered. The Society suggests that 'No entry except for cyclists' road signs could avoid the need for physical barriers, such as retractable bollards, at the Woodland Road and St. Michael's Hill entrances. There should be a planning condition to that effect. Bollards would raise a visual barrier against the pedestrian or cyclist who intends to travel through Tyndall Avenue.

The Society hopes that the University takes the opportunity to remove its banner advertising whose continuation would undermine the purpose of the landscape improvement.