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The Society's response to Bristol University's Tyndalls Avenue Public Realm Project.

February 2017

Principle

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. However, the Society points out that University have expressly stated that the space “will remain in the public realm, for all Bristolians to enjoy” (Patrick Finch) and as such University has some responsibilities to ensure they are not the only beneficiaries of the proposals. University proposes that the space will be perceived by students as part of the University, and students will outnumber members of the public. Specific consideration must be given to how this ‘joint space’ will serve students (as part of their ‘student experience’) and the public equally.

Issues

Traffic – The Society assumes that the Council have told the University its requirements and the University is confident that its data will satisfy the Council's demands.

- i. Whilst understanding that St Michaels Park (SMP) will be widened to accommodate 2-way bus travel in addition to relocated parking bays, neither St Michaels Hill at one end and Woodlands Road at the other are as wide as the ends of Tyndalls Avenue; traffic measures will be problematic.
 - ii. Residents should be told the advantages and disadvantages of a pedestrian priority ‘dual use’ design for Tyndalls Avenue (as per Exhibition Road, London) which may (?) be possible. Tyndalls Avenue is not a particularly heavily used public traffic route at present.
 - iii. Has the University considered including a cycle lane with the SMP works – is there enough room? ‘University’ cyclists will use the Cycle Hub but there will also be non-University cycling ‘commuters’ navigating a place designed for pedestrian use.
1. **Access** - The choice between shared space/cycle access/no cycle access. The Society supports pedestrianisation, with cycle access. The Society assumes that the University has consulted the Bristol Disability Equalities Forum about the opportunity to re-shape the various changes in level, and the new parking arrangements maintain the number of disabled parking bays.

1. **Parking** – The University does not command the confidence of its local residents. There is bad feeling caused by commuting University staff occupying and blocking residents' parking spaces throughout the day. 4 parking spaces would be lost in St. Michael's Park and 27 in Tyndall Avenue. The University could overcome the parking issue and generate goodwill if it absorbs the loss of residents' and paid parking bays within the customer parking permits that it allocates to its staff.
2. **'The campus exclusion zone'** – This lively issue is difficult to resolve because the public and University are at cross purposes. The University welcomes the public into the public realm around its buildings. The public meeting illustrated that many residents feel excluded from areas surrounded by University buildings where students dominate the 'public' space. The rather assertive signage of University buildings contributes to this reticence. Tyndall Avenue is quiet in the evenings and outside term-time, making some people wary of walking through the space. The presence of motor traffic cannot add to perceived personal safety at night because there is little through traffic. The Society suggests that the University accepts that there is a perception problem; these ideas could help overcome it.
 - i. If the University satisfies the Council's highway and planning requirements and obtains a planning permission, the Council will probably transfer the road to the University. The former road will then be the University's private space. It will generate opposition if the community loses a public road in exchange for permissive pedestrian access. The land transfer should include an express dedication of Tyndall Park as a public right of way in perpetuity by foot and bicycle.
 - ii. The proposed improvement to Tyndall Avenue could increase the public perception of exclusion. There is more than one way of addressing this problem – signage must reflect both public and University members – perhaps differing signs for each Council signs showing 'through pedestrian traffic/cycle routes', University signs showing local University buildings.
 - iii. -It is important that the public feel welcome to use the area. Any seating areas, cafes, stalls etc should be as attractive to the public as they are to students etc. Whilst recognising that the area will be predominated by University staff and students it should be an area where the whole wider community feels at home.
 - iv. University security staff 'patrolling' the area can intimidate the public and defy the logic of 'public realm'
 - v. -It was mentioned at the public forum that whilst University would seek to install a high quality of materials and finishes (as per Royal Fort Gardens) any areas that the Council retain in the public sector – ie the widened St Michaels Park – should be only to a basic standard of detailing as ongoing maintenance needs to be cost effective. It is suggested that University build to the highest standards possible and make such arrangements as necessary with BCC to ensure that all the areas affected by these proposals are of a high standard of finish and materials

- vi. -University must be made aware that the intended movement towards a 24/7 'student experience' (!) in the area will have an impact upon the local amenities in due course though supply and demand' It was stated at the meeting that the area has been subject to both 'campusification' and 'studentification' and local shops, cafes and bars etc are geared primarily towards students – the local mini-supermarket now specialises in cheap alcohol and pre-packaged 'ready meals' and the inevitable pizzas. This situation should not be made worse by the proposals.

1. Design

The Society would welcome and appreciate the opportunity of commenting on the design at the earliest stage when there is an opportunity to influence the outcome. Public consultation has little meaning when a developer discusses the options internally and presents the public with its preferred option. Design issues which the Society would like to discuss:

- i. The Society supports the proposal to blur the boundary with Royal Fort Gardens and asks whether more could be done to 'green' the east end.
- ii. The proposals to unify the south frontage of St. Michael's Park.
- iii. A lesson from the recent public realm improvement in Royal Fort is that the design should avoid creating a public space and then filling it with too many features.
- iv. The Society is anxious that although the design is at an early stage it shows a preferred approach. The design should be kept simple, clear and almost formal. This is a wide space flanked on both sides with large institutional buildings and free of traffic. A bold and simple layout using trees would create a classy new public space, very flexible in use and economical to construct. The 'indicative' design for Tyndall Avenue does not suggest this sort of clarity but an attempt to create a quirky, curvy, broken up space. Incorporating 'event space', itself an obstruction.
- v. Activation details of the features that would advertise to the public that Tyndall Avenue is public space such as markets, café and any public events space.
- vi. Should there be a simple, straight 3m. wide signed pedestrian priority path for pedestrians walking between St Michaels Hill and Woodland Road, which would never be closed by University?
- vii. The maintenance programme for Tyndall Avenue.