Evening News

Wed 1 Sep 2004

University's £40m IT school unveiled

FIONA MACGREGOR EDUCATION REPORTER

UNIVERSITY chiefs have unveiled the first images of their plan to transform a city car park into a £40 million hi-tech centre of information technology.

Architects for Edinburgh University have revealed their designs for the new School of Informatics building, to be sited on the current Crichton Street car park beside Potterrow.

The development, planned for completion in 2007, will provide a new Informatics Forum for the School of Informatics, which had its South Bridge premises destroyed by the Old Town fire in December 2002.

Designers say the new building will be one of which "the university and the city can be proud" and it will provide a new focus for the institute's presence in the Southside community. It has been designed by Bennetts Associates, with Reiach and Hall.

The six-storey centre will include a hub for students with a cafe and other facilities.

The university describes the School of Informatics as one of the "jewels in its crown".

The only five star A-rated school of computing in the UK, it is regarded as one of the top four in the world and makes a significant economic contribution to both the university and the city.

Professor Michael Fourman, head of the School of Informatics, said: "This development will secure Edinburgh's position as a leading centre for the new enlightenment, in which information and communication technologies underpin a revolution in society - changing the ways we work and play, changing the ways we teach and learn, changing the way we think.

"It will also enable researchers to interact with others, both within and outwith the university, and to build the multidisciplinary teams needed for new applications in areas ranging from neuroscience and bioinformatics to speech technology, robotics, and core technologies for ubiquitous computing."

As well as the School of Informatics, the university also plans further developments around the Potterrow area, including accommodation for a range of student support services, and for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The university's ten to15-year masterplan for the George Square/Bristo Square area, which included the School of Informatics building, was endorsed by council planners in June this year.

Angus Currie, director of Estates and Buildings at the university, said: "We are working with the local authority, residents and conservation groups to ensure that we achieve the best possible accommodation to meet the needs of our staff and students and over time to enhance the south side of the central area of our city.

"This extensive programme of building and renovation will take between ten and 15 years, and will benefit both the university and the surrounding area.

"The Potterrow development will be a significant step towards creating a more coherent precinct for the university, whilst retaining and enhancing connections with the city and meeting our masterplan framework objectives."

John Miller of Bennetts Associates said the Potterrow building looked more complex than it actually was.

"The university requires simple flexible space to accommodate constantly changing academic requirements.

"We have therefore varied the scale, introduced pedestrian routes to a courtyard and changed materials to balance functionality against the desire to contribute positively to a diverse context.

"The university is also committed to a broad view of sustainability and therefore the design approach has been informed by social and economic as well as environmental objectives."

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