

## University facelift to unite town and gown

*SAM HALSTEAD*

A PLAN worth tens of millions of pounds has been unveiled to upgrade Edinburgh University and its surrounds.

A ten-year blueprint drawn up by one of the architects of the new Scottish Parliament aims to create a more integrated university precinct in the Capital.

The vision includes refurbishments of the university's academic buildings, including a facelift for Appleton Tower.

Under the plan, the Potterrow Port flyover next to Bristo Square will be demolished and Lothian Street and Teviot Place will be re-aligned.

Two new pedestrian routes will be created, from Bristo Square to Nicolson Square and from Middle Meadow Walk to the medical school.

University chiefs believe the long-awaited revamp, which is expected to cost tens of millions of pounds, will breathe new life into the south side of the city.

Angus Currie, director of the university's buildings and estates, said work would progress alongside the £400 million transformation of the old Edinburgh Royal Infirmary site.

He said: "The whole idea is to try to demonstrate the university's place in various parts of the city. We want to try and improve the general environment. One of the major issues over the years has been the flyover. It has effectively isolated the Old College from the rest of the precinct."

Other features of the master-plan include:

- Transforming single-storey garages in Meadow Lane into academic accommodation, and turning tenements in Buccleuch Place into affordable flats for students or staff.
- Building a £40m hi-tech centre on the site of the Crichton Street car park for the School of Informatics, which was destroyed by the Cowgate fire in 2002.
- Improving Chambers Street, including new street furniture.

Mr Currie said Lothian Street and Teviot Place could either be re-aligned to free up space or narrowed and made more pedestrian friendly.

RMJM, joint architects of the new £431m Scottish Parliament, was commissioned by the university in 2002 to prepare a masterplan for the 85-hectare site.

Councillor Trevor Davies, the city's planning leader, today described the proposals as "excellent" and said the master-plan aimed to rejoin the university with the city.

He said: "The dual carriageway at Bristo Square divides the city from Potterrow. It is a barrier which must be overcome."

In a report to the council's planning committee, head of city development Andrew Holmes added: "Together these proposals help to link town and gown, consolidate the university and contribute to restoring the traditional urban grain."

The proposals are expected to be completed by 2015.

Southside councillor Bob Cairns welcomed the blueprint.

He said: "I welcome the general thrust of the plans, especially the re-development of the Crichton Street car park site. It was a major disaster when the flyover was constructed."

Last September, the Evening News revealed plans for a new housing and shopping quarter on the campus, bordered by the Royal Mile and Holyrood Road.

Leading city architect John Hope has drawn up a blueprint for the site, which is expected to include new academic buildings, conservatories, underground parking and gardens.

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