

Plans for demolition of Southside 'mistakes' to get green light

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A VISION for the shake-up of Edinburgh's Southside, which could include the demolition of the 1960s Potterrow flyover and the creation of new public spaces linking the university with nearby developments, is set for approval tomorrow.

The multi-million-pound plan, formed between the University of Edinburgh and the city council, has been hailed a "huge step forward" for the capital and could transform the fortunes of the area.

A heritage group has welcomed the proposals, which undo some of the "mistakes of the 1960s" that saw part of the Georgian George Square replaced by concrete sprawl, including the landmark high-rise Appleton Tower.

The blueprint, expected to be given the green light by councillors, is part of a shake-up of Edinburgh University sites. That shake-up includes plans for a £40 million technology centre on Crichton Street that could create hundreds of jobs over 15 years. The new facility, which would replace a car park considered by many to be an "eyesore", would house the School of Informatics, whose old building was destroyed in the Cowgate fire in December 2002.

Edinburgh University wants to return Buccleuch Place, currently used as academic offices and tutorial rooms, to residential use - linking the eastern Southside with the major new Quartermile housing development on the former Royal Infirmary site, further west.

Trevor Davies, convenor of Edinburgh's planning committee, said: "This is immensely important for the city. It will make the area more accessible for everyone.

"Research work at Edinburgh University is among the most advanced in the world. To have that work carried out right in the heart of the city, with all the benefits to our economy, is strategically very important."

Councillor Davies added: "Education and research is a major component of Edinburgh's wealth. Integrating university sites and activities with the rest of the city is a very good idea."

The plans include the demolition of the Potterrow elevated section, with its concrete underpass.

The move is part of a wider strategy to revitalise the Southside, which has already included the relocation of the popular jazz venue the Spiegel tent to George Square during August.

Angus Currie, director of estates and buildings at the University of Edinburgh, said even the controversial Student Centre and Management School building on Bristo Square could be demolished if necessary.

He said: "This is a long-term strategic development framework for the university to make better use of its important city-centre location.

He added: "So far we have received a lot of positive support.

"The Spiegel tent was very successful during last year's Fringe and brought lots of festival-goers to an area that would otherwise have been forgotten."

David McDonald, director of the Cockburn Association heritage group, said: "If some of the mistakes of the 1960s can be undone and improved on, we would welcome such proposals with open arms. The urban fabric around the university, especially on Potterrow, is in need of a facelift.

"Fortunately some of the worst 1960s proposals never went ahead, thanks to organisations such as ours.

"Now is the time to amend the mistakes that were made."

Edinburgh University hopes to have all its plans, including improvements to George Square Lane, Buccleuch Street and the area around Middle Meadow Walk, in place by 2015.

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