

Two years have gone by since the Castle Mill development of graduate flats took shape by the railway station and began dominating southward views of Port Meadow. During that time, the University as a whole has not been given the chance to comment on the development that has become a major *cause célèbre* arousing criticism far beyond the city and University of Oxford. The appropriateness of the site for development has never been an issue: it is the nature of the development which has been in question.

Now, the Environmental Impact Assessment (hereinafter EIA), undertaken retrospectively to remedy the lack of full scrutiny during planning and building, has provided welcome confirmation of what had long been obvious to very many observers, that the flats have done serious environmental damage. The Environmental Statement contained therein says that the Castle Mill Phase 2 development has 24 "substantial adverse" landscape and visual effects and a "high adverse impact" on the setting of four heritage assets of national significance: St. Barnabas Church (a Grade I listed building), Port Meadow (a scheduled monument and registered common), the River Thames and towpath, and the Oxford skyline. It is particularly ironic that the latter skyline features prominently in the artwork of many official University publications.

It is especially welcome that the EIA is so specific as to the ways of remedying the damage, providing three options:

- Option 1: Building façade treatment (referred to in the Assessment as design mitigation measure 1) and tree planting (measure 2) along western boundary of the site in the Badger run;
- Option 2: Building façade treatment (design mitigation measure 1), tree planting (measure 2) and modification of roof forms to hip and low level roofs (measure 5);
- Option 3: Building façade treatment (design mitigation measure 1), tree planting (measure 2), removal of a floor from six buildings and replacement of all roofs with low level roofs (measure 6). A total of 33 student residence units (38 bedrooms) would be removed.

All of these will be costly. It is possible to argue about the costs listed, but what is clear is that neither Options 1 or 2 will really do much to undo the harm caused by the development. Only Option 3 will go some way to achieving the desired result. It is the minimum possible response which the University can decently make.

When considering Option 3, Congregation should consider what intangible but vital assets have been damaged by this development. Most obvious is one aspect of natural beauty in an exceptionally beautiful city. Part of the University's world-wide appeal is precisely that beauty; it is why many students and academics come to work here, in preference to other world-class institutions which might offer them greater financial reward. Even more precious assets to be purchased by expenditure on Option 3 will be good name, good will and good reputation for the University in the City of Oxford and beyond. All three of these have been lost at a stroke by the building of the Castle Mill development, and it will take drastic action to recover them.

The value of a good name 'is far above rubies or pearls'. If the University is going to continue to attract generous donors and admiring benefactors, then the price of implementing Option 3 is a small capital sum to pay to put an end to this deeply unhappy episode in our communal life.

Signatories to the flysheet:

W.J. Blair, Queen's
W.R.C. Briant, St Cross
Christopher Brown, Worcester
Averil Cameron, Keble
Jane Caplan, St Antony's
E. Carmichael, St John's
Rory Collins, St Cross
P.L. Davies, Jesus
Jan-Georg Deutsch, St Cross
Robert Evans, Oriel
Keith N. Frayn, Green Templeton
Diarmaid MacCulloch, St Cross
Jane Roberts, Nuffield
Robin Ward, St Stephen's House
R.W. Zetter, Green Templeton