

# UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY FORUM 9 MAY 2018

## Information about the event

- The University previously organised annual Neighbourhood Forums at Whiteknights Campus. This event was phased out due to declining numbers.
- In autumn 2017 the Redlands and University Safer Neighbourhood Forum (formerly the Neighbourhood Action Group) asked that this forum be reinstated, to give the opportunity for local residents to ask questions of the Vice-Chancellor and his team.
- The University welcomes the opportunity to identify ways to work more effectively with local neighbours and find solutions to common issues.
- The first event was held on 9 May 2018. The University invited community partners to be on the panel, including representatives from Reading Borough Council and the Thames Valley Police, as well as the Students' Union.
- Local residents living around the University campus and local Councillors were invited to attend.
- The University intends to hold another forum in approximately 6 months and will use feedback from local residents to influence the design the next forum.

## Notes from the meeting on 9 May 2018

### Vice-Chancellor's welcome and panel introductions

- The Vice-Chancellor, Sir David Bell, welcomed everyone to the University of Reading Community Forum at London Road and introduced the panel guests:
  - Inspector Alastair Lloyd from the Wokingham policing team (it was also noted that representatives from Reading policing team were in the audience).
  - Professor Robert Van de Noort, incoming Deputy Vice-Chancellor
  - Charlotte O'Leary, Activities Officer at the Reading University Students' Union
  - Rose Lennon, Welfare Officer at Reading University Students' Union
  - Sarah Gardner, the University's Community Relations Manager.
- The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged that whilst the vast majority of students are positive ambassadors for the University, there are some concerns about the University's impact on the local area.
- The Vice-Chancellor noted that the panel particularly wanted to listen to local residents' views about the University and its role in the community.
- Sarah Gardner, the University's Community Relations Manager, gave an update on the University's Street Support Scheme, which launched at the start of April. This is a pilot scheme, running to the end of the year, to encourage students to be respectful as they socialise in residential areas late at night. The Street Support Team patrol residential streets around the Whiteknights campus, working Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays between 10pm and 4am. The scheme has been developed based on local resident feedback and the University welcomes feedback from local residents about how they think it is working.
- Charlotte O'Leary and Rose Lennon from RUSU gave an introduction to the Students' Union and outlined roles and responsibilities.
- Inspector Al Lloyd from Wokingham Police spoke about how the Wokingham police team works closely with the University, including supporting RUSU's 3sixty nightclub to make sure students

are safe and behaviour is managed. He noted that his team works alongside the Reading police team, who cover the town.

## Question session

The audience was invited to ask questions to the panel.

The majority of questions came from local residents living around the University campus. The main topics included the increasing 'studentification' of the local area, including conversion of traditional family homes into student lets and the impact on the neighbourhood, negative student behaviour, parking and litter. A number of audience members wanted to note their thanks for the new Street Support Team which they felt was making a positive difference. There was also a few comments about the role of the Students' Union and the need for them to be more visible and active in the community.

Questions have been grouped by theme, with the answers given by members of the panel.

## Waste

- Residents cited concerns about some students not disposing of their waste correctly, with waste piling up and recycling being put into the wrong bins, which means the Council will not collect. Additionally, some students knock bins over on nights out. Is the University doing enough to educate students?

Response from Sarah Gardner, Community Relations Manager: the University provides information to help students settle into the local community, including information about waste and recycling. For example, the Safer Neighbourhood Forum and other residents help to deliver 'moving in' packs at the start of term to student houses. This information is also communicated online. If complaints are raised, the Community Relations team investigate these and support the students to dispose of waste and recycling correctly. The University is looking to work much more closely with Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council (who both have different waste guidelines) to improve the ways we communicate with students and make sure they understand the waste/recycling regulations.

- Litter on campus is increasing and gives a very poor impression. What is the University doing about this?

Response from the incoming Deputy Vice-Chancellor: the University has a team of people across campus who work hard to keep the campus open and clean. Their hard work and commitment was demonstrated by the campus being open during the heavy snow earlier in the year. However we are aware of issues with litter and we are looking at ways to address this, including installing additional bins in places of high demand and considering additional staff resource.

## Complaints and disciplinary procedures

- Can the University clarify what action they are taking to identify students who behave poorly off-campus, late at night?

Response from Sarah Gardner: the University has a complaints procedure which includes informal and formal processes to investigate reports of poor behaviour and apply appropriate sanctions. If we receive a complaint about off-campus behaviour and the students can be identified, the community team will contact them, remind them of the regulations for student conduct and give them an opportunity to respond. We will outline that if complaints continue, the matter will be passed to the disciplinary team. In the majority of cases this informal process works but if we do need to escalate it to the disciplinary team, they will arrange a compulsory meeting with the students, review the evidence and apply formal sanctions. One of the issues

we've had this year is with larger groups of students being disruptive in residential areas on their way out or on their way home. We have trouble identifying these students, which is why we introduced the Street Support Scheme. This new team is working at the time the students are socialising, so are able to identify students behaving poorly, encourage positive behaviour and report individuals to the University for further action as necessary.

Response from Charlotte O'Leary, Activities Officer at the Reading University Students' Union: if a complaint is made about a society or sports club, a meeting is held with the RUSU Activities team and the relevant committee to discuss the complaint. We then either escalate this complaint through to the full disciplinary procedure or we decide a satisfactory sanction for the student group. Consequences of the procedure can range from fines, bans from the premises/utilising our services for a specified amount of time and dis-affiliation of a club or society.

- **How effective is the disciplinary process? The consequences need to have more impact.**  
Response from Sarah Gardner: when the University is able to identify the students the system works well. Our records shows that in the majority of cases issues are dealt with via the informal process, and that when the disciplinary process is used, this resolves most remaining issues. The exception has been the poor behaviour by larger groups of students moving through residential areas this academic year where individuals could not be identified. This is why we have put the Street Support Team in place.
- **The University should be more transparent about the outcome of disciplinary investigations – in one case, no follow up was given to the local resident who complained. What is your process for updating people?**  
Response from the Vice-Chancellor: the University legally cannot give details about individuals or share any personal data. However our aim is to be as transparent as possible.

Response from Sarah Gardner: the community relations team always aims to let residents know if a disciplinary hearing has taken place and whether a penalty was applied, and we apologise for any oversight in rare cases where a local resident did not hear an outcome.

## Street Support Team

- **How many wardens are there?**  
Response from Sarah Gardner: the Street Support Team is made up of 6 paid and skilled staff and a manager, working on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays between 10pm and 4am. We are working with an events security agency who already work with the University's on-campus security team and know the campus and students well. They have worked with other universities to provide similar schemes, so we are confident they have the right skills and experience.
- **How will the team tackle students who continue to behave poorly even when asked to be more considerate?**  
Response from Sarah Gardner: the team has a lot of experience of working with students and so far they haven't needed to take any additional action – simply by being out at the same time as students, being highly visible, and by reminding students to be respectful is working. However if necessary, the Street Support Team can take student details and pass these to the community relations team or the disciplinary team. The team also wear body cameras so that every interaction with a student is recorded and can be reviewed if necessary.

## 'Studentification' and numbers of students

- Studentification is increasing in the streets around the University campus. Does the University have a target number of students it wishes to recruit and how do you plan to absorb these additional students with minimal impact on the local neighbourhood?

Response from the Vice-Chancellor: The University has to be ambitious in order to be successful in a very competitive higher education market. Since the government lifted the amount of students universities can recruit in 2012, we have increased the numbers of students we admit to the University, but we are fully aware that we need to balance our student numbers with what we can offer in terms of teaching facilities, accommodation space and the impact on the local community. We currently have around 5000 places for students to live in hall accommodation. Increasing this is a priority, as we know that both students and other residents are better served by providing university managed accommodation rather than larger numbers of students living in private accommodation. This will also relieve the impact on the local housing market.

## Parking and transport

- What is your policy on student parking and how do you enforce it?

Response from Sarah Gardner: the University does not allow students living in University hall accommodation to bring cars onto campus or park within one mile of the campus. If a local resident has reason to believe a student in halls is parking their car on or around campus, they should let us know so we can identify them, and the student will be given the opportunity to remove their car or be taken through the disciplinary process. If a student is renting private accommodation, they have the same right to park as anyone else living in the local neighbourhood and the University does not have the authority to control this. However, they must abide by the terms of any parking schemes the Council has implemented.

- Why can't you ban all students from bringing cars and/or provide more parking spaces on campus?

Response from the incoming Deputy Vice-Chancellor: we would not have an outright ban as this would penalise students who need vehicles to access learning, e.g. disabled students or students commuting from home. If we were to provide more parking spaces, this would encourage more students to drive. The University actively promotes sustainable transport options to staff and students. Our partnership with Reading Buses resulted in the introduction of an additional 21 and 21a bus stop on campus, and continual improvement to this route has led to an increase in use of this route. We offer training and support to staff and students for bicycle use, invest in car-sharing schemes, and offer free taster bus tickets, rail season ticket loans and discounted bus passes.

## Alcohol consumption

- There is a link between alcohol and poor behaviour – what is the University doing to address this and wouldn't it be more effective to close campus bars earlier?

Response from the Vice-Chancellor: closing bars is not the answer - students expect to socialise as part of their study and it is easier for the University to support students in facilities on-campus. We work with University and police colleagues to manage behaviour of students in our clubs and bars and we also have a number of ways we support and provide information to students about alcohol consumption.

## Reporting issues to the Police

- This isn't just a matter for the University – the police should take a more active role in managing poor behaviour. What is the best way to report issues to the police?

Response from Inspector Al Lloyd: local residents should report any anti-social behaviour or criminal matters to the police on 101 (or 999 if a crime is in progress) and this should be investigated. If it is not, please let him know personally so he can follow up (see: <https://www.police.uk/thames-valley/N402>).

## Dogs on campus

- **How does the University enforce a policy of dogs on leads and should it consider banning dogs from campus?**

Response from the Vice-Chancellor: the University is a fantastic parkland which many people in the community enjoy. We want it to continue to be welcoming and do not wish to put people off it with excessive regulation. We have an on-campus security team who will address safety or security issues – however we have not seen a particularly large increase in issues with safety issues regarding dogs on campus.