# Southampton council to decide on contested St James Centre student flats amid affordable housing concerns



Plans to transform the St James Centre in St Mary’s into a new student housing complex have sparked a lively debate among local stakeholders as the proposal is set to go before Southampton City Council’s planning panel for approval. The applicant, Mr Bajar, has put forward a development plan for 25 studio apartments, but the initiative faces opposition from local councillors who advocate for more affordable housing options to meet the urgent needs of the city's residents.

Councillor Sarah Bogle, representing Bargate ward, has expressed her concerns, arguing that the proposed student accommodation does not align with the broader regeneration plans for the area. In her objection, she emphasised the need for developments that enhance social cohesion and serve the pressing demand for affordable housing. “I do not oppose redevelopment of the site but it needs to complement any other plans for regeneration and development in the area,” she stated. Fellow councillor John Noon echoed her sentiments, deeming the site unsuitable for a student block and suggesting it could better serve as a site for social housing.

Despite the opposition, the planning officer’s report ahead of the meeting recommended approval of the outline application. It noted the presence of evidence indicating a demand for student accommodation in the St Mary’s area. Furthermore, the report acknowledged that the development would alleviate pressure on housing in the city, particularly on houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), which have been a growing concern as the student population swells. The officers highlighted that while there is indeed an acute need for affordable housing in Southampton, they are mandated to assess the proposal on its own merits.

The site currently hosts a two-storey flat-roofed building that was previously used as an educational and training centre. The development plan suggests a more vibrant and functional use of the space, proposing a four-storey structure that integrates communal areas, including a laundry room and private gardens. This redesign aims not only to improve the aesthetic appeal of the area but also contribute to creating a mixed community by minimizing the burden on existing housing stock.

In a design and access statement, Kode Architecture, acting on behalf of Mr Bajar, described the proposal as "a vast improvement over what exists" and promised it would inject life into the locality. Notably, the development will not provide on-site parking for students, with designated spaces reserved primarily for staff and management. The plan also includes secure bicycle storage, promoting environmentally sustainable transport options.

This proposal is not an isolated case amid a backdrop of increased student accommodation developments in Southampton. Recent approvals have included a significant project on Hulse Road, transforming St Margaret's House into a five-storey complex with nearly 200 bed spaces and various amenities such as gyms and social areas, reflecting the city's commitment to addressing its student housing shortage. Another approved plan involves the conversion of the historic Dolphin Hotel into 99 student rooms, despite concerns from heritage groups about preserving the building's historic character.

As the planning panel prepares to review Mr Bajar’s application, the ongoing dialogue about the balance between student housing development and the need for affordable accommodation continues to resonate in the community. This situation showcases the complexities of urban regeneration, where development must align with social needs and local identity in a rapidly changing environment.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/25208053.southampton-student-flat-plan-set-approved/), [[2]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/25208053.southampton-student-flat-plan-set-approved/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/25208053.southampton-student-flat-plan-set-approved/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/25208053.southampton-student-flat-plan-set-approved/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/25208053.southampton-student-flat-plan-set-approved/), [[2]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/25208053.southampton-student-flat-plan-set-approved/), [[3]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/24145396.southampton-hulse-road-student-housing-plan-approved/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/25208053.southampton-student-flat-plan-set-approved/), [[4]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/24704320.southamptons-dolphin-hotel-set-become-student-bedrooms/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/24145396.southampton-hulse-road-student-housing-plan-approved/), [[4]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/24704320.southamptons-dolphin-hotel-set-become-student-bedrooms/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/25208053.southampton-student-flat-plan-set-approved/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/25208053.southampton-student-flat-plan-set-approved/> - An application by Mr Bajar to redevelop the St James Centre site in St Mary’s into 25 studio apartments is set to be considered by Southampton City Council's planning panel on June 10. Councillor Sarah Bogle has objected, advocating for affordable housing to address the city's urgent needs. She questions the demand for student housing in the area and emphasizes the importance of complementing existing regeneration plans. Councillor John Noon also opposes the proposal, suggesting the site is more suitable for social housing. A planning officer's report recommends approval, citing evidence of student demand and the development's potential to alleviate pressure on houses in multiple occupation. The proposed four-storey building would include communal spaces and private gardens but no on-site parking for students. The application seeks permission for access, appearance, layout, and scale, with landscaping to be addressed later.
3. <https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/24145396.southampton-hulse-road-student-housing-plan-approved/> - Southampton City Council has approved plans to replace the existing St Margaret's House on Hulse Road with a new five-storey student accommodation complex. The development will provide almost 200 bed spaces, doubling the current capacity. Amenities include a gym, cinema, and social spaces on each floor. The project aims to address the city's shortage of purpose-built student accommodation and reduce the number of students living in houses of multiple occupation. Despite some local objections regarding the building's height and potential impact on the area, the council has granted approval, subject to a legal agreement.
4. <https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/24704320.southamptons-dolphin-hotel-set-become-student-bedrooms/> - Plans to convert Southampton's historic Dolphin Hotel into student housing have been approved by the city council. The Grade II-listed building, associated with Jane Austen, will be transformed into 99 student bedrooms. The proposal has faced opposition from residents and heritage groups concerned about the loss of the hotel's historical significance. However, the council has granted permission, emphasizing the importance of preserving the building's character while meeting the demand for student accommodation.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cv2g6eree1mo> - Plans to convert Southampton's historic Dolphin Hotel into student accommodation have been recommended for approval. The Grade II-listed building, associated with Jane Austen, will be transformed into 99 student bedrooms. The proposal has faced opposition from residents and heritage groups concerned about the loss of the hotel's historical significance. However, the council has granted permission, emphasizing the importance of preserving the building's character while meeting the demand for student accommodation.
6. <https://www.stellingproperties.com/major-milestone-for-historic-building-in-southampton-as-modular-redevelopment-nears-completion-duplicate/> - A £12 million regeneration project by Stelling Properties is nearing completion at 31 High Street in Southampton. The development involves restoring a historic building, formerly the Bank of England, and converting it into 121 self-contained studio apartments for students. The project utilizes modular construction methods, with all apartments manufactured and fitted offsite, reducing construction time by approximately 50%. The development aims to address the city's undersupply of student accommodation while preserving the building's historical features.
7. <https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/24018956.southampton-city-centre-student-block-plans-approved/> - Southampton City Council has approved plans for a 13-storey student accommodation block at the junction of Vincents Walk and Pound Tree Road. The development will provide almost 140 new student flats, including amenities such as a gym, study area, and laundry rooms. The project aims to address the shortage of student housing in the city centre and is expected to boost the local economy by increasing footfall and spending. Despite opposition from supporters of the nearby Firehouse Pub, the council granted approval, highlighting the development's potential benefits.