# Howells’ Blackfriars plans mark fresh push to pair student flats with social homes at transport hubs



Howells’ submission for Blackfriars sits within a broader arc of high-density transit-adjacent housing currently moving through Southwark’s planning pipeline. The Architects' Journal reports that Howells, an AJ100 practice, working with landscape architect Planit, has lodged proposals with Southwark Council on behalf of iQ Student Accommodation for a two-block scheme on the former Blackfriars Crown Court site. The plan would replace the existing modernist building with two linked blocks rising six and eight storeys. To the west, the student accommodation block would be organised around four cores, with floors largely comprising eight cluster units of five- and seven-person flats, complemented by self-contained studios and wheelchair-accessible rooms. Ground-floor spaces totaling 486 square metres would accommodate a public café, flexible commercial rooms, a gym and shared amenities, with a roof terrace providing additional outdoor space. The social rent block would lie to the east and be 100 per cent dual-aspect, with documents describing the homes as carefully designed to promote wellbeing, community and long-term flexibility. Howells emphasises that the form establishes two distinct buildings sharing a familiar scale and grain, including terrace-like massing along Sawyer Street and a taller, contemporary student element around Pocock and Loman Streets. Planning status remains undecided, and no precise completion timetable has been published. The scheme sits beside a site rich in heritage and ambitious redevelopment ideas, including early discussions about an urban forest concept for the same precinct. According to the announcement, the project is part of a wider strategy to bring together student housing with affordable accommodation in a single, legible urban form.

A broader picture emerges when the borough’s agenda for PBSA and over-station developments is considered. BBC News reports that Southwark Council approved plans to build two high‑rise blocks above Southwark Tube station, comprising a nine‑storey council housing block and a 15‑storey student accommodation block. The student element would provide 429 studio apartments, while the social rent homes would include a mix of 15 one-bedroom, 13 two-bedroom, 15 three-bedroom and one four-bedroom units. The scheme also features on-site amenities such as a ground-floor retail/café, a community garden and a roof garden for residents, with local debate focusing on infrastructure provision and daylighting in the surrounding streets and public realm. The project is a joint venture between Places for London (TfL) and Helical, illustrating the borough’s continued pivot to high-density, publicly accessible developments anchored to major transit nodes. Within this context, the council’s approval of these above‑station ambitions underscores Southwark’s appetite for blending student housing with affordable homes in close proximity to rail infrastructure.

Looking further afield in the same corridor, progress on the Southwark Over Station Development has been reported by AHMM, which notes that Southwark Council granted planning permission for a scheme delivering 429 PBSA bedrooms above Southwark Tube station and a separate 44-unit affordable housing building on the opposite side of Joan Street. The design integrates the station entrance within the base of the new block and enhances the public realm with new retail space and landscaping. The two buildings are described as having contrasting horizontal and vertical lines, with rounded corners intended to acknowledge the site’s heritage while delivering a contemporary landmark for residents. This plan aligns with the broader trend of combining student accommodation with affordable housing at strategic transport hubs, and it complements earlier discussions around urban-regeneration concepts for the area. Meanwhile, the Blackfriars site has its own near-miss history with the Roots in the Sky proposal—Studio RHE’s bid for London’s first urban forest rooftop above the former court site. The six‑storey upper mass would have supported a vast rooftop landscape featuring more than 100 trees and thousands of plants across roughly 1.4 acres, with public access, community spaces and an on‑site café/retail presence. Although the concept did not proceed to delivery, it helped shape the conversation around biodiversity, wellbeing and placemaking in the area, a thread picked up by subsequent developments and industry coverage. The idea of integrating greenery at such scale continues to inform designers and policymakers as they weigh density, amenity and ecological targets in a dense urban setting.

Taken together, the Blackfriars and Southwark Tube proposals illustrate a shared aim: to couple large‑scale student housing with affordable options and enhanced public realm near major transit nodes, while navigating heritage constraints, daylight considerations and the realities of delivery timelines. The lead project embodies a current model of accommodation-led regeneration in the heart of central London, framed by a sequence of related plans and approvals that speak to the borough’s evolving housing strategy and the role of over-station housing in the city’s future.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/howells-submits-plans-for-600-bed-student-flats-led-scheme-in-blackfriars), [[4]](https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/news.nsf/articles/Places%2Bfor%2BLondon%2Band%2BHelical%2Bsecure%2Bplanning%2Bapproval%2Bfor%2Bdevelopment%2Babove%2BSouthwark%2BTube%2Bstation%2B07032025092000)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/howells-submits-plans-for-600-bed-student-flats-led-scheme-in-blackfriars), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4g0zpj82zxo), [[5]](https://www.southwark.gov.uk/news/2025/green-light-44-new-council-homes-next-to-southwark-tube-station)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ahmm.co.uk/news/2025/southwark-osd-receives-planning-permission/), [[6]](https://www.studiorhe.com/project/roots-in-the-sky/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/howells-submits-plans-for-600-bed-student-flats-led-scheme-in-blackfriars> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4g0zpj82zxo> - BBC News reports that Southwark Council approved plans to build two high‑rise blocks above Southwark Tube station, comprising a nine‑storey council housing block and a 15‑storey student accommodation block. The student element is planned to provide 429 studio apartments for university students, with the council homes including 15 one-bedroom, 13 two-bedroom, 15 three-bedroom and one four-bedroom social rent homes. The scheme, a joint venture between Places for London (TfL) and Helical, also features on-site amenities such as a ground-floor retail/café, a community garden and a roof garden for residents. Local debate focused on infrastructure and daylight concerns. Nearby public realm.
3. <https://www.ahmm.co.uk/news/2025/southwark-osd-receives-planning-permission/> - AHMM reports that Southwark Council granted planning permission for the Southwark Over Station Development at the Blackfriars/The Cut junction. The scheme, prepared for Helical and Places for London, comprises 429 PBSA bedrooms above Southwark Tube station and a separate 44-unit affordable housing building on the opposite side of Joan Street. The proposal integrates the station entrance within the base of the new block and enhances the public realm with new retail space and landscaping. The two buildings are designed with contrasting horizontal and vertical lines and rounded corners to acknowledge the site's heritage while delivering a contemporary landmark for residents.
4. <https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/news.nsf/articles/Places%2Bfor%2BLondon%2Band%2BHelical%2Bsecure%2Bplanning%2Bapproval%2Bfor%2Bdevelopment%2Babove%2BSouthwark%2BTube%2Bstation%2B07032025092000> - TfL's Places for London and Helical secured planning approval for the Southwark Over Station Development above Southwark Tube station. The scheme comprises a 15-storey PBSA block containing 429 studio apartments and an adjacent nine-storey building with 44 affordable homes, positioned above the Jubilee line. AHMM is the architect; the development includes a Bauhaus-inspired PBSA block, ground-floor retail, and improved public realm with greenery. The project aims to balance student housing with affordable homes while providing community facilities and retail space, and is part of TfL's portfolio of over-station developments across London. It aligns with policy goals and local housing targets.
5. <https://www.southwark.gov.uk/news/2025/green-light-44-new-council-homes-next-to-southwark-tube-station> - Southwark Council confirms planning approval for Styles House Over-Station Development, delivering 44 social rent homes on Styles House Estate alongside 429 PBSA rooms above Southwark Tube Station. The project, led by Places for London in partnership with Helical, includes additional public realm enhancements, new play spaces, and retail frontage to support the local community. Approval followed months of consultation and signals the council's commitment to affordable housing as part of major regeneration near Blackfriars/Cut junction. Construction is expected to begin in 2026 and complete in 2028. The project will integrate new public spaces, improved access, and essential community facilities locally.
6. <https://www.studiorhe.com/project/roots-in-the-sky/> - Roots in the Sky has been designed by Studio RHE to be a unique combination of creative power house and an oasis in the city with London's first urban forest rooftop. Believing that ‘the greenest building is the one that exists’ is what set our creative bid apart from the competition. The project reimagines the former Blackfriars Crown Court site as a two‑volume development with a six-storey upper mass supporting a vast rooftop landscape. The forest comprises over 100 trees and thousands of plants across roughly 1.4 acres, with public access, community spaces, and an on-site café/retail presence, emphasising biodiversity, sustainability and wellbeing.
7. <https://www.mixinteriors.com/project/londons-first-office-building-with-urban-forest-granted-planning/> - MIX Interiors reports on London’s first office building with an urban forest rooftop, Roots in the Sky, conceived by Fabrix London and Studio RHE, planned for the former Blackfriars Crown Court site. The design places a six-storey upper volume atop the existing lower structure, supporting a rooftop forest of more than 100 trees and around 10,000 plants across 1.4 acres. The scheme includes public access to the rooftop garden, community spaces, an on-site café and restaurant, and aims to deliver significant biodiversity and sustainability targets, with a focus on placemaking and wellbeing. It symbolises an ambitious approach to urban regeneration.