

Invitation to open meeting for University Square residents

Dear resident

We would like to invite you to an open meeting for University Square residents to give you the chance to discuss the issues covered in this letter. The meeting will be at 6.30 pm on Tuesday 7 May in the main Lecture Theatre at The Forum Southend-on-Sea (TF.0.11).

Keeping our buildings under review

Protecting our community is our priority, and this is at the heart of our approach to maintaining and reviewing the safety arrangements at all our buildings.

As part of this work, and in the context of national discussions around building regulations for tall buildings, we proactively employed an independent fire engineering consultant to review the arrangements in place at University Square, and shared the results with Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

The consultant's report advised us that despite being certified at the time of completion as being compliant, the insulation and cladding being used on the outside of the accommodation blocks at University Square do not comply with UK building regulations, and require replacement.

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service reviewed the fire safety arrangements we have in place at University Square and our measures for mitigating any risks. They confirmed that our mitigation arrangements meet the recommendations of the National Fire Chiefs Council.

Its officers have confirmed in writing they're satisfied with the fire safety arrangements at University Square and it is safe to occupy. Notwithstanding this assurance, we want to ensure University Square complies with relevant building regulations and we're exploring how best to replace the insulation and cladding.

The written confirmation we received from Essex County Fire and Rescue Service assures us that the building is safe to occupy while steps are taken to replace the insulation and cladding to ensure it meets the latest building regulations.

We want to be as transparent as possible with our community so that is why we are sharing this information with you and organising next week's meeting.

Next steps for you

You don't have to do anything. As mentioned above, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service have confirmed University Square is safe to occupy while arrangements are made to replace the insulation and cladding.

We are arranging the open meeting to give you the chance to speak to University staff if you want to. At the meeting you'll also have the chance to speak directly to Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

We will update you as soon as we have a timetable for any work which will be required.

Next steps for us

The building was constructed and is now owned by a private company which has leased it to the University. Because of this we cannot simply do the work ourselves, so we are in discussions as to the best way to ensure that any necessary works will meet the latest building regulations and Government guidelines going forward.

Safety measures in place

The safety of our students is our priority and this is the focus of any decisions we take in relation to University Square. We have extensive safety measures in place at University Square which have been reviewed by Essex County Fire and Rescue Service. These include the highest standard of fire alarm system, fully-trained security staff on-site 24-hours a day who will respond to any alarm activation within two minutes, and procedures for full simultaneous evacuation if an alarm is activated.

We've gone beyond Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's advice and introduced additional measures to provide further reassurance to residents. This includes increasing our on-site patrol staff overnight, increased patrols throughout the day, additional checks on personal electrical equipment (PAT Testing) and an extra fire drill scheduled during the academic year.

Our next free tests of personal electrical equipment for students will take place in the Common Room in House 2 at University Square on Saturday 11 May from 10am to 5pm, Monday 13 May from 2pm to 7pm and Tuesday 14 May from 2pm to 7pm.

We are also following the latest advice from the UK Government's Building Safety Programme for managing buildings with cladding.

Responding to your questions

If you have any questions please free to email me at: directorofestates@essex.ac.uk.

Regards



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