**Appeal date is set**

**Uni’s student flats plan scrutinised**

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THE appeal date has been set for the launch of an inquiry into the rejection of a university’s application for 836 new student flats.

The University of Reading is appealing Reading Borough Council’s (RBC) decision to reject its application to extend and upgrade student development at St Patrick’s Hall.

The planning appeal will be heard on March 19 at the Town Hall, with the Northcourt Avenue Residents Association (NARA) and the council speaking in defence of the original decision.

Simone Illger, chair of NARA, said: “We are sticking to the reasons that RBC gave in its decision.

“They have wasted four years and a lot of money on this scheme which has seen very little change from its inception.

“We have never said we do not want development on the site. We accept that some buildings have probably come to the end of their life.

“They could have kept the building to just four storeys and found something more appropriate and in-keeping with the area. I would like to think that we have prepared well but we cannot afford to pay for expensive legal experts. I am hoping that the inspector will hear our voice and understand our arguments.

“If we had been engaged in meaningful consultation from the start this lengthy appeals process would not have been necessary.”

Planning permission was refused by the council in February 2018, with the Planning Applications committee deciding the development would harm the surrounding Northcourt Avenue area and impact on parking.

The issue over parking has now been resolved, according to Ms Illger. She said NARA and the council both agreed that new time limit restrictions on parking in the area meant it was no longer an issue.

Members of the council’s planning committee decided the buildings were out of keeping with the area, issues over parking and the high number of rooms proposed.

The university appealed to the government’s Planning Inspectorate after the decision, stressing the urgent need for accommodation, with some students having to start their first year in hotels.

The appeal will be heard in the Waterhouse Chamber in Reading Town Hall on Tuesday, March 19 at 10am.