

The Canterbury Society

COMMENTS ON THE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

BALANCED HOUSING PROVISION: HOUSING IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION

General comments

In general we welcome this document and would like to commend the City Council for preparing the draft and inviting comments on it.

Many of our members are very concerned about the issue of student accommodation in our city. Though they are aware of the positive benefits which students bring, they are much more likely to mention the challenges.

In particular, our members are concerned about the way in which some streets and neighbourhoods have been 'taken over' by students living in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). This can leave local residents to cope with anti-social behaviour, pressure on parking, disturbed nights and a run-down environment. Adults can find themselves advising on recycling and policing night-time noise, rather than finding friends for themselves and their children among their neighbours.

Proportion of HMOs in any area

It is proposed that the proportion of HMOs should not exceed 20 per cent of the total number of dwellings within a 100m radius of any property. This means that the Council will not permit changes of use to an HMO or extensions to existing HMOs, if it means that that proportion would be exceeded.

We would suggest that this target is too high. It is notable that the National HMO Lobby suggests limiting HMOs to 10 per cent in any area. We would prefer a target of 15 per cent of the total dwellings in an area. Given that the change is not retrospective, this still leaves large areas of the city in which HMOs very much exceed 20 per cent of all dwellings.

Policy for HMO saturation

The report to the Council's Executive, dated 12 August 2010, set out the context for the debate on the draft report on *Balanced Housing Provision: Housing in Multiple Occupation*. It suggested that 'in areas where there is an exceptionally high proportion of HMOs in any particular block of properties, consideration will be given to permitting further conversions'.

We would oppose this suggestion, which could leave a very small number of local people marooned in a sea of student HMOs. In addition, we would like consideration to be given to a policy of severe limitation on new HMOs within the city walls.

Immediate situation

We are particularly concerned about the immediate situation. Changes to the legislation enacted by the Coalition Government mean that there will be a loophole in the law relating to change of use to an HMO over the next few months. We would urge the Council to take action to control the situation.

Conclusion

In general, we welcome this document and will be happy to continue the discussion through our membership of the Student Community Group.

Members have asked us to use this opportunity to express their concern more generally about the 'studentification' of the shopping and leisure facilities of the city. The High Street used to be characterised by its variety of locally-owned shops and businesses. More and more these are being replaced by snack bars, cafes and cheap clothes shops which cater for the student population.

We would urge the Council to continue to put pressure on the universities to provide student accommodation, retail outlets and leisure facilities on site, so that the city centre can cater to local residents once more.

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