

## **Comments on Houses in Multiple Occupation: October 2009**

### **HOUSING IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION AND POSSIBLE PLANNING RESPONSES: EVIDENCE GATHERING**

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/housesmultipleconsultation](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/housesmultipleconsultation)

#### **Response from the Canterbury Society**

##### **Consultation Questions**

###### **Q1. Do you experience problems/effects which you attribute to high concentration of HMOs?**

Yes quite acutely in some parts of Canterbury. And such problems are perceived by many local residents as some of the most serious in the city. These problems include all those listed in the introductory part of your consultation document. In Canterbury the general problem is very acute because of the large number of students (a significant proportion of whom live in HMOs) in relation to the number of other residents in a relatively small city.

Appendix 1 gives information about the age profile of the residents of the local authority area. It shows clearly the unusually high proportion of people aged 15-24. However, it should be noted that the table is concerned with the whole local authority area, which includes Whitstable and Herne Bay and the villages. The majority of students live in Canterbury, which has a population of 43,431 (2001) with three universities, at which around 25,000 students are currently studying.

###### **Q2. Do you consider the current planning framework to be a barrier to effective management of HMOs by local planning authorities?**

Yes. It provides no means by which the planning authority can prevent very high concentrations of HMOs with fewer than 6 residents in certain parts of the city.

###### **Q3. Could promotion of best practice measures as opposed to changes in the planning framework sufficiently deal with the problems associated with HMOs, in particular those problems often associated with high concentrations of HMOs with student occupants?**

No. This approach has been tried in Canterbury mainly coordinated by the local authority and with the cooperation of the Universities. While it has had some small degree of success it is not perceived locally to have done more than scratch the surface of the major causes for concern

###### **Q4. If planning legislation is seen as a barrier to the effective management of HMOs in an area how should planning legislation be amended - along the lines of option 2 (introduce a definition along the lines of the Housing Act 2004) or option 3?**

We much prefer the option 2 solution. We feel that more effective local authority supervision and control will be achieved by this than by option 3. Even under option 2 effective local authority enforcement of decisions will be vital.

**Q5. Do practitioners have a preference for one approach listed as part of option 2 over the other?**

Our preference is for the first approach which appears easier to apply. But others are probably better qualified to comment on this point than we are.

**Q6. What effect would a change of Use Class Order as described in option 2 have on those local authorities that do not encounter problems with high concentrations of HMOs?**

Probably very little. But cannot legislation allow local authorities some choice on the system they use?

**Q7. Would a change to the Use Class Order as described in Option 2 or 3 have an impact on the homeless and other vulnerable groups?**

We do not see why this should be the case.

**Q8. Would a change to the Use Class Order as described in option 2 or 3 have any unintended consequences, for example an impact on small scale care homes, which are currently classed a C£ dwelling house?**

Other are better placed to comment. But it is surely possible to draft legislation to avoid such unintended consequences.

**Q9. Would a change to the Use Classes Order as described in option 2 or 3 impact unfairly - directly or indirectly – on any equality strands?**

Again others are better placed to comment, but we see no obvious reasons why it should.

**Q10. Would a change to the Use Classes order reduce the supply of HMO accommodation in your area?**

There is no reason why it should. The main objective of any legislative change would in Canterbury be to get a better distribution and location of HMOs. At the same time we support (as do some members of our local authority) encouraging the local Universities to provide more purpose built accommodation for students.

**Q11. If amendments are made to the Use Classes Order, should a property that has planning permission for use as an HMO require planning permission for use to revert back to a C3 dwelling house?**

No. But if it does so revert, it should require further planning permission before becoming an HMO again.

**Q12. Would a change of Use Classes Order as described in option 3 place a new burden on local planning authorities?**

There would of course be some additional work, but it should not be excessive and would be well worth the cost if the ends we expect are achieved.

**We do not feel qualified to comment on questions 13, 14, 15 and 16.**

Closing date for comments; 7 August 2009.

Responses to be sent to:

Susan Turner, Planning System Improvement Division, Communities and Local Government  
Zone 1/J10, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU