

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE**

**3 JULY 2007**

**DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE  
STUDENT ACCOMMODATION DEVELOPMENTS IN RESIDENTIAL  
AREAS**

**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval of draft supplementary planning guidance for the purpose of public consultation. The draft guidance is on issues relating to the interpretation of local plan policies regarding over concentration of student accommodation in certain parts of the Exeter.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Members will recall that a report to Planning Committee in December 2006 identified that the University of Exeter has proposals to expand from about 11,000 to about 15,000 students (Full Time Equivalents) by 2016. The University envisages that about 700 additional students would live at home, about 900 in the private rented sector and about 2,600 in purpose built student accommodation of the University or private sector providers, of which about half is likely to be on sites that can already be identified. The Committee report also included a list of streets in Exeter with the highest concentrations of students based upon University and Council tax records.
- 2.2 The Council subsequently consulted upon and adopted supplementary planning guidance relating to proposed University related developments. The guidance listed nine principles including student numbers only increasing proportionate to additional purpose built student accommodation, provision of as much purpose built accommodation as possible to reduce pressures on the private housing market and the identification of the City Centre, St David's Station/ Cowley Bridge Road areas and Duryard campus as favoured general locations.
- 2.3 The Planning Committee has also noted that it is intended to separately bring forward supplementary planning guidance to seek to control further concentrations of students in areas where they would give rise to unacceptable impacts. This guidance may later be reviewed and form statutory planning policies in the 'Generic Development Control Policies development plan document of the Local Development Framework that is due to be subject to Issues and Options stage consultation in Autumn 2008.
- 2.4 A petition with about 150 signatures was presented to Council on 17 April and reported to Planning Committee on 21 May 2007 calling on the City

Council to restrict further multi-occupancy accommodation within various streets in St James ward.

### **3 LIMITATIONS OF PLANNING CONTROLS**

- 3.1 There are limitations to the ability of the planning system to control the occupancy of properties by students. Up to six people can live in a house as a single household without the need for planning permission. The Council cannot control the acquisition of homes and their use as such student accommodation.
- 3.2 The Council does have planning control over material changes of use of homes to other forms of accommodation such as houses in multi occupation (HMOs). These may be occupied by students or other low income or transient people. Only a small proportion of HMOs that are three or more storeys high, have five or more people in one household and share amenities such as bathrooms, toilets and cooking facilities are required by law to be licensed by the Head of Environmental Health Services. Licences are granted on the basis of standards relating to issues such as safety and cannot be refused on grounds of the concentration in an area.
- 3.3 New purpose built student accommodation is normally in the form of cluster flats that share communal kitchen/lounge facilities or studios. These are usually limited to occupation by students only and may have lower standards of residential amenity than properties designed for longer term occupation.
- 3.4 The development, conversion or extension of ordinary dwellings may be in a form that is clearly intended for student use, such as extensions to provide a large number of bedrooms, with or without en suite facilities and proposals for very large rooms that are capable of future subdivision.

### **4 JUSTIFICATION FOR PLANNING CONTROLS**

- 4.1 Local residents frequently express concerns about late night noise and disturbance and car parking associated with students, such problems are however not unique to this sector of the population. The presence of a proportion of students can contribute to the diversity of local communities, however, there may be occasions where there are concentrations in such numbers that may have adverse effects on the mix and balance of a community. For example, large numbers of properties may be vacant outside of term times.
- 4.2 It is proposed that any policy be justified on grounds of maintaining a mixed community throughout the year rather than problems such noise, rubbish and car parking that are not unique to students.
- 4.3 Any proposed restriction needs to link to policies in the Exeter Local Plan First Review and be subject to public consultation if it is to carry weight as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Policy H5 of the Local Plan states:

**H5: THE CONVERSION OF DWELLINGS TO FLATS, SELF-CONTAINED BEDSITTERS OR HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS OR STUDENT HOUSING WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THAT:**

(a) THE SCALE AND INTENSITY OF USE WILL NOT HARM THE CHARACTER OF THE BUILDING AND LOCALITY AND WILL NOT CAUSE AN UNACCEPTABLE REDUCTION IN THE AMENITY OF NEIGHBOURING OCCUPIERS OR RESULT IN ON-STREET PARKING PROBLEMS;

(b) THE PROPOSAL WILL NOT CREATE AN OVER CONCENTRATION OF THE USE IN ANY ONE AREA OF THE CITY WHICH WOULD CHANGE THE CHARACTER OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OR CREATE AN IMBALANCE IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY;

(c) SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING IS LOCATED CLOSE TO LOCAL SHOPS AND SERVICES, COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND BUS ROUTES;

(d) STUDENT ACCOMMODATION IS LOCATED SO AS TO LIMIT THE NEED TO TRAVEL TO THE CAMPUS BY CAR.

4.4 The proposed guidance will amplify the interpretation of criterion (b) of the policy as to which areas are considered to experience an over concentration of students. In formulating proposals it is also important to have regard to criterion (d) regarding proximity to campuses and accessibility to bus routes.

4.5 The proposed policy clarification only relates to the issue of students, it does not deal with flats and HMOs in non-student occupation that have different distributions around the City. For example, licensed HMOs are concentrated in streets of larger properties such as Mount Pleasant Road, Old Tiverton Road and Portland Street, albeit about 70% of licensed HMOs are entirely occupied by students.

## **5 POLICY ISSUES**

5.1 There are three main dimensions to the interpretation of policy H5(b):

- What categories of accommodation should be restricted
- Character and imbalance, and the threshold at which the restriction

will apply

- The area for calculation such as whether it should be broad brush such as wards or at a more localised level of individual streets

## 5.2 Categories of accommodation

Proposals that require planning permission may take the following forms:

- New developments, extensions or conversions into student hall accommodation
- Construction, extension or changes of use to HMO accommodation.
- New dwellings, conversions or changes of use to dwellings that have an internal design that may be intended for student occupation.
- Extensions of existing dwellings where there is evidence of occupation by students.

5.3 Changes of use from family dwellings to student occupation is likely to have most impact upon the character and balance of a community because of the loss of other age groups as well as the introduction of more students. It is proposed to restrict further student accommodation in all these forms in the areas set out below.

## 5.4 Character and imbalance, threshold for imposition of control

There are, or will be, large numbers of students in some areas due to the presence of off-campus purpose built halls such as James Owen Court (c 250 students). These have relatively less impact upon a community than similar numbers of students living in ordinary private housing. There are seven streets in Exeter where the number of properties exempt from Council Tax exceeded 50% at April 2007: five of these are in the area between Old Tiverton Road, Pennsylvania Road, Union Road and the railway line. The area where proportions of properties exceed 25% extends more widely from Monks Road in the east to Danes Road in the west through the older suburbs to the north of the City Centre.

5.5 The policy test in H5(B) is that proposals would change the character of an area or create an imbalance. Existing concentrations of students will already have changed the character and balance in some areas, however, it is important that the situation is not exacerbated. Survey work in Loughborough indicated that 68% of respondents considered that the balance of a community was adversely affected by student numbers above 20% and about half above 10%. Nottingham City Council is understood to impose restrictions above 25% based upon the level experienced in areas where student numbers are perceived as an issue. It is proposed to apply a restriction in three areas where the proportion of properties presently exempt from Council Tax exceeds 25% calculated on that area as a whole.

## 5.6 Area for analysis

The distribution of students in private housing is influenced both by proximity to the University and characteristics of the housing stock. For example, Victoria Street, a terrace of small Victorian homes has over 65% of properties exempt from Council tax due to full student occupation. In the adjoining Devonshire Place, which is primarily more substantial Victorian

semi detached housing, the proportion of student properties appears to be negligible. Similarly, Danes Road has over 60 % of properties exempt from Council tax but the proportion in the adjoining Hoopern Street is much less at a little over 20%. Communities also operate at various levels from individual streets up to larger neighbourhoods. A more localised analysis by street will provide a finer grained analysis of impact upon localised communities than a more broad brush approach based upon large areas. The area to be subject to proposed restriction therefore excludes streets such as Devonshire Place where there is no localised problem.

- 5.7 The number of students in areas is not expected to change significantly from year to year. The appropriateness of controls will be reviewed if there are any radical changes in student numbers.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 A plan is attached showing three areas where the proportion of students is already significant and where it is considered that further student developments should be restricted. A draft SPG will be prepared indicating that in these areas all forms of new student accommodation will be considered contrary to policy H5 (b).
- 6.2 The effectiveness of the approach will be monitored to inform decisions on policies for eventual inclusion in Local Development Framework development plan documents. The approach of restricting additional student accommodation in parts of the City does need to be balanced by a positive approach in the areas already identified as potentially suitable, the City Centre and St David's Station / Cowley Bridge Road. This is reflected in the nine principles on university related development that were adopted by Executive at the last meeting.
- 6.3 The draft SPG will be subject to public consultation in a form to be agreed by the Portfolio Holder Sustainable Development and Transport. The results of the consultation will be reported back to Planning Member Working Group and Executive with a view to adoption of the guidance. It will then form a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

## 7 PLANNING MEMBER WORKING GROUP

- 7.1 Planning Member Working Group on 12 June supported the proposed approach noting that it was important for the University to provide high quality accommodation for students at low cost otherwise there would be adverse effects on rental levels in the private sector.

## 8 RECOMMENDATION

- 81 Executive is recommended to agree the preparation of supplementary planning guidance as a basis for public consultation that amplifies the interpretation of Local Plan policy H5 (b) seeking to limit all further forms

of additional student related accommodation in the areas shown on the attached plan.

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**ECONOMY & DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE**

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended):**

Background Papers used in compiling this report:

None