

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE
11 FEBRUARY 2008**

**ADOPTION OF SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE STUDENT
ACCOMMODATION DEVELOPMENTS IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider representations received in relation to the draft Supplementary Planning Guidance on Student Accommodation Developments in Residential Areas and agree proposed guidance for adoption.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In July 2007 the Executive agreed draft Supplementary Planning Guidance on Student Accommodation Developments in Residential Areas for public consultation.
- 2.2 The guidance relates to the interpretation of Local Plan Policy H5 in regard to the potential over concentration of student accommodation in certain parts of Exeter.
- 2.3 Copies of the SPG were made available at the Civic Centre and on the Council Website. Copies of the SPG were also sent to academic institutions, providers of purpose built accommodation, residents' associations, agents, councillors, Devon County Council and Exeter Civic Society. A press release was issued and posters were displayed in shops within the areas referred to in the guidance.
- 2.4 Fourteen written comments have been received. These are available for inspection in planning Services.

3. CONSULTATION RESPONSES

- 3.1 A schedule of the comments received and the proposed responses is included at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 Of the fourteen representations received, twelve were in general support of the guidance although specific reservations were expressed, and two were opposed in principle to the guidance.
- 3.3 Those in general support of the guidance were pleased that the Council were attempting to control student accommodation in particular areas of the City. Issues of noise, disturbance and parking were often cited in these responses. However, concern was expressed as to the effectiveness of the guidance and

some confusion was apparent in regard to the actual impact of the guidance. In particular there was uncertainty as to whether the guidance would affect the need for planning permission, when and how strictly it would be applied, and whether appeal inspectors would give it weight.

- 3.4 Whilst the University of Exeter indicates that they fully appreciate that pressures of student housing demand on areas within the City are generating concerns from residents, they state that, by adding additional constraints, the guidance runs the risk of being ‘part of the problem’ rather than a positive planning measure. The University regard the focus on achieving a ‘mixed community throughout the year’ as a questionable planning objective that does not relate obviously to Policy H5 or national policy guidance. They believe the area boundaries are not robust, do not support the community based approach and will require constant review. The University questions the view that 25% or greater student occupation produces an over concentration and considers that these are areas close to the campus that have considerable merits for student living. They believe that the guidance is unlikely to have a significant real impact on the conversion of terraced dwellings, but could preclude some potentially helpful development such as new purpose-built accommodation. Furthermore, by increasing ‘protection’ for particular areas, the policy could transfer pressures from one community within Exeter to another in an unplanned and unsustainable way. Accordingly the University suggests that the draft SPG is not adopted and that the Council works with the University to address the housing needs of the City’s students through the provision of managed accommodation around the university and in other suitable locations within the City. The University have also made a number of more detailed comments; a proposed response is in Appendix 1.

4. COMMENTS

- 4.1 It must be recognised that this guidance will not change the requirement for planning permission. It will still be the case that in many circumstances planning permission will not be needed for students to live as a single household.
- 4.2 Furthermore it needs to be clear that this guidance does not introduce a new policy. Policy H5 already exists and is used to assess any relevant planning application that is submitted. This SPG provides guidance on interpreting Policy H5 within particular areas, so that student developments do not adversely affect the character of the neighbourhood or create an imbalance in the local community.
- 4.3 The objections raised have been carefully considered. The importance of striking the right balance between planning controls and positive planning measures is recognised. The Council will continue to work closely with the University in order to promote positive measures to reduce the conflict between students and other Exeter residents. The Council also recognises that the University’s aim to provide housing for all full-time students who want it will ease pressure on existing family housing.

- 4.4 Minor amendments to the nature of the guidance would not address the University's concerns. The only option to meet the University's concerns would be to abandon the SPG and accept that some areas will become increasingly dominated by student accommodation.
- 4.5 Four correspondents have also suggested amendments to the boundaries of the areas covered by the SPG. However, the level of homes exempt from Council Tax due to student occupation does not exceed 25% within these new areas and therefore amendment does not appear justified.
- 4.6 The focus of this guidance is on achieving a mix of uses throughout the year in areas that already have a high concentration of student accommodation. Whilst it is recognised that there are limitations on the ability of the planning system to control the occupancy of properties by students, it is considered that this guidance will make a worthwhile contribution to protecting the character of those neighbourhoods identified.
- 4.7 The effectiveness of the SPG will be reviewed with a view to introducing any appropriate policies in the Generic Development Control Policies Development Plan Document that is due to be prepared from late 2008.
- 4.8 It is recommended that the proposed SPG be adopted with only consequential amendments to reflect its change in status from a draft to adopted advice. A copy of the proposed amended SPG is at Appendix 2.
- 4.9 Planning Member Working Group considered the results of the consultation on 2 January 2008. Members recognised the limited ability of the planning system to control some forms of occupation of property. Officers clarified that the advice did also apply to new purpose built student accommodation, however there were unlikely to be significant proposals in the defined areas.

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 That Executive adopts the proposed SPG at Appendix 2.

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Local government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:
None