

Re Consultation Draft Durham City Neighbourhood Plan

St Nicholas Community Forum is the residents' group for the centre of Durham City, encompassing The Peninsula, The Sands, and Claypath/Lower Gilesgate. This area has a great deal of student housing both HMO and PBSA.

We welcome much of what is in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan, for example the protection of heritage and green spaces and promotion of sustainable travel.

We do however have major concerns regarding the scale and pace of growth of Durham University because of the impact it brings, already out of balance with this small town. To date we have 17,000 students and only 7,000 residents.

Every potential site for building family homes has been taken up with huge Purpose Built Student Accommodation buildings, and the resident population is being driven out by the loss of family homes to Houses in Multiple Occupation. Two bedroom flats in the area are heavily occupied by students. There is the particular concern about the clash in lifestyles between students and families notably the nightly noise disturbance until early morning preventing families from normal sleep and the knock on effect of constant tiredness on work, school and family life. Policies D2 and D3 are therefore of great importance to SNCF.

With regard to Policy D2, we are very glad to see the University is proposing six PBSAs within its own estate. This is the way to accommodate growth. But they will not be sufficient to accommodate all the planned increase in student numbers.

We welcome that Neighbourhood Plan Draft Policy D2 on additional PBSAs which includes the 10% limit i.e. saying that no more will be allowed if HMOs and PBSAs already there within the 100 metre radius are more than 10% of the total number of dwelling units.

Similarly, HMO Draft Policy D3 counts other HMOs in the 100 metre radius and counts the hundreds of students in a PBSA. Their loud comings and goings in the early hours are equally disruptive and damaging to balanced and sustainable communities. This Policy is fully endorsed by SNCF.

We support the part of Policy D3 covering proposed extensions to existing HMOs. Extensions add students. The County Council's Interim Policy stops extensions as well as new HMOs beyond the 10% threshold, and this is rightly retained in Draft Policy D3.

We have a significant amendment to propose for Policies D2 and D3. As currently drafted, the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan policies on HMOs and PBSAs defines them in terms of student exemptions from Council Tax. This is because the County Council does so. But it has become obvious that a lot of HMOs go 'under the radar' by some means or another (landlords choosing to pay Council Tax, for example) and these are not counted in total numbers.

It now seems wrong to lock into the policies any reference to whether or not the properties are Council Tax Class N Student Exempt. The reference should simply be to HMOs. This model is already in use in equivalent policies for another University city Oxford.

Accordingly, the PBSA Policy D2 and the HMO Policy D3 and should simply refer to HMOs and PBSAs and should delete from the Policies and from the associated texts the definition of 'being exempt from council tax charges'.

We would like future consideration given to the many student occupied premises of two bedrooms and how the Council propose to gain accurate figures of real student density in Durham City, important if following the model of percentage occupancy within a certain radius.

Janet George
Hon Sec, St Nicholas Community Forum
12 Mayorswell Close
Durham City DH1 1JU