

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO PLANNING  
COMMITTEE**

**15 OCTOBER 2008**

**CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF  
DEVELOPMENT AND  
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

**LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: PROPOSED POLICY ON STUDENT  
ACCOMMODATION**

**SUMMARY**

1. This report informs Members on the report on student accommodation in the Borough which has been produced with a view to including policies on this issue in the Core Strategy and Regeneration Development Plan Documents.

**RECOMMENDATION**

2. Members are recommended to: -
  - i) note the content of the report
  - ii) advise of any amendments prior to submission to Cabinet

**BACKGROUND**

3. At present Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council does not have any planning policies to guide officers when dealing with planning applications for student accommodation. The Local Plan contains no specific targets or precise allocations for this particular use and previous applications for student accommodation indicate that there is no clear consensus about the amount and type of accommodation that it required. It is uncertain what impact student accommodation is having on existing residential areas around the Borough.
4. National Government policy on housing does not offer any particular guidance on student accommodation. The adopted RSS emphasises the importance of the region's further and higher education establishments to the economy but offers no direct guidance on the provision of student accommodation.
5. Therefore, the purpose of this report is to gather evidence on student accommodation and to set out an action plan for guiding planning officers on how to deal with applications for student accommodation and give clear guidance for prospective developers through statutory planning policy in the future.

**EVIDENCE**

6. The report attached as Appendix A sets out the full evidence base which has been used to inform the policy.
7. Queen's Campus which is part of Durham University is considered to be the main generator of need for student housing in the Borough. However, other educational establishments such as Stockton Riverside College, University of Teesside and The Open University may also generate a need for student accommodation, although the amount required is difficult to quantify.

8. Development Services are currently considering four applications for purpose built student accommodation. There are also two applications which were refused by the Council which are now being appealed by the developers. This means there are currently potentially 1007 bed spaces in the pipeline subject to approval by the Council and PINS.
9. The new Rialto Court purpose built development on Bridge Road was approved in Development Services in 2006 and is now open for the 08/ 09 academic year and has 382 bed spaces. Private sector letting agents in the area have noticed a drop in the take up of properties for this academic year as a result of this new development. The University accommodation office also has a higher vacancy rate than it has done in previous years. The Rialto Court development is around 80% let, of which 50 bed spaces are being let to first year students at Queen's Campus.
10. Durham University has in place a strategy designed to meet its own needs and the North Shore Outline approval contains provision for student accommodation for the University. The University would like to continue the collegiate system in this location. However, it must be noted that the University does not have a statutory requirement to provide accommodation for its own students and ministerial guidance advises that it is not the role of the planning system to restrict competition between different types and/ or providers of accommodation.
11. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Community Safety Manager and Environmental Health sections were contacted to ascertain the impacts of student housing on existing residential areas. There is no evidence to suggest that students are causing many lifestyle issues with existing residential populations. The final draft September 2008 Tees Valley Strategic Housing Market Assessments highlights the concerns of local landlords about the movement of students into purpose built accommodation.
12. The impacts of students moving into new build developments on current areas of private rental in Stockton are difficult to quantify. In the opinion of the Council's Head of Housing while smaller properties could be converted into accommodation for non students other larger properties are more difficult to let.
13. Purpose built student housing is often in the form of individual units of accommodation consisting of a relatively small bedroom and en-suite bathroom, with several units sharing a kitchen and sometimes a living room. Such buildings are generally not easily converted into other uses such as mainstream housing. Furthermore, as parking requirements are lower for student housing, then problems could arise if they were to be converted to accommodation for non- students. Although developers would have to re- apply for planning permission should they decide to adapt the buildings, and these factors would be considerations for case officers.
14. Other Local Planning Authorities have approached this issue in different ways. Some such as Salford, Scarborough and Preston have developed policies based around need for purpose built accommodation. Whereas others like Newcastle, Nottingham and Charnworth have much greater student populations and different issues, leading them to propose area restraint policies to rebalance communities. In the case of Newcastle purpose built accommodation in appropriate sites has been promoted to reduce the pressure on existing residential areas.
15. From the Planning Inspectorate appeal decisions it was clear there would have to be comprehensive evidence to refuse applications on the grounds of over- concentration of students. Anecdotal accounts of the negative impacts students were having on areas would not suffice. However, they are limited in what they can indicate about refusal on the grounds of need.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

16. Based on these conclusions the following policy is recommended for inclusion in the Core Strategy Development Plan Document in Core Strategy Policy 8 Housing Mix and Affordable Housing Provision:

“Major planning applications for student accommodation will have to demonstrate how they will meet a proven need for the development; are compatible with wider regeneration objectives; and are conveniently located for access to the University and local facilities.”

The reasoned justification for this will be:

“Queen’s Campus which is part of Durham University is located on Teesdale south of the river Tees from Stockton Town Centre. There are around 2,000 students currently based here. The University is of key strategic importance to the Borough, and it is important that the need for student accommodation is satisfied, but only in appropriate locations, which have good access both to the educational establishments they serve and to local facilities such as shops to be in accordance with the wider sustainability objectives of the LDF. Furthermore, it must be ensured that these developments are compatible with the character of the area and do not impact negatively on the amenity of neighbouring developments. The overall number of applications for student accommodation has increased recently and the Council wishes to avoid an oversupply of provision.”

17. This policy is considered to be flexible enough to respond to increasing student numbers, as the University is expected to grow over the longer term, and this will impact on both the type and quantity of student accommodation required over this longer time frame. The policy addresses sustainability issues, by including the requirement that major applications are conveniently located for access to the University and local facilities, and are compatible with wider regeneration objectives.
18. The timescale for this document is it anticipated it will go out for first publication at the end of October which will involve a consultation period of eight weeks. Submission of the Core Strategy and supporting documents to the Secretary of State is anticipated to take place in February 2009. The Independent examination will take place 14 weeks after submission. The receipt of the Inspector’s report will be 29 weeks after submission. The amendments of the Core Strategy in line with the Inspector’s requirements and adoption is expected to be in Autumn 2009.
19. The North Shore development is considered to be the preferred location for further purpose built accommodation for students as it will be well integrated with the future development of the campus and also with the existing site via a foot bridge. It is a mixed use site which is of strategic importance to the Borough. This site is recommended to be identified for student accommodation in the Regeneration Development Plan document as it already has planning permission.
20. Additional to the identification of North Shore, the number of applications for student accommodation will be monitored closely and if there is still considered to be an issue then a more detailed criteria based policy may be included in the Regeneration Development Plan Document.

## **THE NEXT STEPS**

22. Following consideration by Planning Committee it is anticipated that the final report will be referred to Cabinet on 6 November 2008 for Members to endorse the policy recommendations.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

23. Members are recommended to: -

- i) note the content of the report
- ii) advise of any amendments prior to submission to Cabinet

### **Corporate Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services**

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**Background Papers** - None

**Financial Implications** - None

**Environmental Implications** – None.

**Community Safety Implications** – None

**Human rights Implications** – The provision of the European Convention of Human Rights 1950 has been taken into account in the preparation of this report.

**Ward and Ward Councillors** – N/A.