



Sustainable Development Panel

09:30 to 12:00

19 June 2019

Present: Councillors Stonard (chair, following appointment), Maguire (vice chair, following appointment), Carlo, Davis, Giles, Grahame, Lubbock, Maxwell and Stutely

1. Appointment of Chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Stonard as chair for the ensuing civic year.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Maguire as vice chair for the ensuing civic year.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2019.

5. Purpose-built Student Accommodation in Norwich: Evidence and Best Practice and Best Practice Advice Note: Consultation Draft

The planning policy planner presented the report.

During discussion a member praised the planning policy for compiling the consultation document and said that she understood he had received a distinction as part of his professional accreditation for this report.

The panel considered a number of amendments and made suggestions to be included in the consultation document. The planning policy planner agreed that there was an error to the figures in Table 1, Student Numbers in 2017/18, under column titled "Full-time students" and in relation to the UEA, amend the numbers of undergraduates to 12,725 and postgraduates to 3,125. A member of the panel said that the consultation document needed to be clear that the totals in Table 3 were estimated bed-spaces rather than targets for potential growth. The planning policy planner agreed that this would be clarified in the text (paragraph 4.30). The panel

noted that under paragraph 5.37, bullet point “Refuse storage and collection arrangements”, recycling was implicit but for clarification insert text to show that it includes minimisation of recycling and positive recycling protocol. Members also asked that paragraph 2.5 be amended to include “Private rental sector”. It was also proposed that the word “be” should be inserted in paragraph 5.20, paragraph (c), second paragraph after the word “should” and before “of”. A member also pointed that in order to provide accommodation for students suitable to the needs of the diverse population and in terms of accessibility and room size, it was important to provide rooms for wheelchair users but also to ensure that communal areas and doors were wheelchair accessible to enable wheelchair users to circulate freely.

During discussion, the planning policy planner, the head of planning services and the planning policy team leader, referred to the report and answered questions.

The panel considered the section on external amenity and landscape design, a member suggested that that there was an opportunity to improve open spaces and green infrastructure for students in the city centre. Members noted that there was a degree of densification in the city centre and that large developments would provide for infrastructure enhancements to improve the public realm, develop the riverside walk and provide open spaces.

Discussion ensued on the formulation of any policy on student accommodation in the context of other issues, and that it would feed into the Greater Norwich Local Plan. This included the need to relieve the pressure on the rental sector in the city centre for other people on low wages, single people and people who have just left prison, reducing their accommodation and travel costs. A member pointed out that it was important not to stigmatise students and to provide a welcome them to the city. The chair referred to the University of East Anglia’s (UEA), [Connecting People and Places, 2019](https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/3523509/0/12717_UEA_ConnectingPeople%2BPlaces_Brochure_300519_Web_LR.pdf/90855164-904c-b64d-737d-cc63175af4f4)¹ and acknowledged the benefit that higher education establishments have on the local economy.

The panel discussed the need to relieve pressure on the rental sector and the impact that purpose built student accommodation would have. Members were concerned that landlords could achieve higher rents for HMOs and therefore properties were no longer available to be let for family lets. The panel was also concerned about the intensification of student HMO’s (houses in multiple occupation) particularly in areas around the UEA and that in planning terms there was no regulation available. A member said that the report was a good piece of work but not going far enough to bring houses back into general use and said that the council had no policy in place to restrict studentification in these wards which, as evidenced by councillors’ case work, was not a perception. The chair and the head of planning services confirmed that there were other discussions on the control of HMOs, including consideration of Article 4 Directions which had not been ruled out in future. Whilst this did not form part of the guidance paper on purpose built student accommodation there was still a lot of discussion on the issues relating to HMOs, with the universities and student unions. It was important that there was a variety of accommodation for all groups of people and HMOs provided accommodation for under 35s, the low paid, single

¹ Link to document:

https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/3523509/0/12717_UEA_ConnectingPeople%2BPlaces_Brochure_300519_Web_LR.pdf/90855164-904c-b64d-737d-cc63175af4f4

people and people on benefits. The planning policy planner said that the UEA received complaints about HMOs but it often turned out that the residents were not students. The panel was also advised that shorter two year degrees and longer terms times, and more overseas students meant that exodus during vacations were not so clearly defined as in the past.

Discussion ensued on affordability and student finance and that living in an HMO was a cheaper alternative to purpose built accommodation. The panel considered that there should be cost incentives to students to choose purpose built accommodation over shared houses and that developers should provide a range of different priced accommodation. It was estimated that half of the minimum student income was spent on rent, leaving little for books, food and other expenses. The planning policy team leader said that one of the issues relating to affordability was the length of contracts and the guidance provided an opportunity to raise this with providers. The panel expressed concern about the high cost of accommodation for students on minimum student finance and that developers received a better return for the higher end accommodation, which appealed particularly to overseas students, who because of the high tuition fees were from wealthier backgrounds. The head of planning services advised members that it was not currently possible to ask developers to provide more affordable rooms and this was market driven. There were no social registered landlords providing student accommodation. Lower rents were charged for rooms with a less advantageous aspect or more basic fittings. There was clearly a market for affordable accommodation and student welfare could evidence this.

The panel considered the projected growth of student numbers in the city and the uncertainty of the national economy. The chair pointed out that concern about the impact of Brexit on student numbers should be weighed by the fact that at present only 20 per cent of international students were from EU countries. The panel was advised that if demand fell in the future purpose built student accommodation could be altered to accommodate other groups of people but that as student needs and life styles were different and were not liable for council tax, mixed accommodation would not be appropriate. It was considered that the probable outcome would be that rents for purpose built student accommodation would fall if there was an oversupply making it a more attractive option than shared accommodation in an HMO. Rents were currently more expensive as there was an undersupply of purpose built accommodation. The panel noted that it was possible that if there was an oversupply of student purpose built accommodation then student HMOs could return to general use rather than converting student purpose built accommodation.

The panel also considered room sizes and were advised that the majority of purpose built student accommodation rooms met national guidance on room sizes. One of the drivers for purpose built accommodation was to improve accommodation available to students. Many smaller HMOs were converted former council houses or terrace houses, with cramped bedrooms or had converted living rooms as bedrooms, and therefore lacked communal and amenity spaces. A member raised the question of aspect and light to rooms, stating that it was important to provide a suitable environment for students conducive to study. Members noted that communal rooms were fundamental to student accommodation. The panel noted that under permitted development rights offices could be converted into residential accommodation and that in some cases the lesser harm was to provide student accommodation than general housing. These conversions were subject to building regulations. During

discussion on access to light and providing a suitable environment for study, it was noted that some art students would prefer rooms with a northern aspect because there was no glare.

A member asked that information could be provided for comparison purposes on rents per square metre. The policy planner said that this information would be available to the panel when the outcome of the consultation was reported back to the members.

The panel discussed the proposed consultation timetable commencing on 1 July for 6 weeks and it was suggested that the consultation should be extended because it fell out of term time. The panel, however, considered that students were unlikely to respond to the consultation and that, as the universities' respective student unions would respond on behalf of the student body, there was no need to extend the consultation or change the consultation timetable.

During discussion, a member had asked for a timetable to be set to review the guidance, given the lack of robust data on the impact of Brexit and climate change. The head of planning services said that he would be reluctant to set a date for a review of the policy because projections for the growth of student numbers would be constantly monitored and if the UEA and the Norwich University of the Arts developed slower or faster than projections had indicated the guidance would be reviewed.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) endorse the consultation document for consultation "Purpose-built student accommodation in Norwich: evidence and best practice advice note" subject to the changes itemised above;
- (2) approve the consultation timetable as set out in the report;
- (3) ask the planning policy planner to provide information to the panel on rents by the square metre for comparison purposes.

CHAIR