

**Statement to B&NES Planning, Housing and Economic Development Policy  
Development and Scrutiny Panel - 5th January 2016**

**Student Accommodation in Bath**

I am Chris Beezley, a member of FoBRA which, for over 10 years, has been pressing B&NES to adopt a Student Housing Strategy.

With the Placemaking Plan (PMP) reporting 24,000 students now, forecast to rise to 32,000 within 5 years, B&NES has acknowledged FoBRA's concerns:

- that there will be considerable and ever-increasing pressure for private sector student accommodation for the foreseeable future;
- that Bath 'over performs as a host to Higher Education' (para.252);
- that student accommodation 'is one of the most high profile issues affecting Bath'(para.221);
- that student accommodation is 'clearly a matter that requires policy direction at a strategic and site specific level.' (para.233); and
- that, as early as 2020, even with 1,000 further campus beds, there could be a shortfall of 5,000 private sector beds (para.229)

and yet it refuses to advocate a Student Housing Strategy (para.234).

The Plan proposes little scope for further accommodation blocks, and there is no indication that the universities will scale back their growth aspirations or risk building more campus bedrooms than the usual demand from new students justifies. This means that more students could find themselves homeless (a trend that has already started at the University of Bath this year) as demand for additional HMOs approaches 1,250, that is 250 per year over the next 5 years.

To put this into context, the Government's net additional housing allocation to Bath of 7,020 equates to 390 per year. FoBRA suggests that homeless students and/or a build rate of 640 new dwellings per year to achieve the target figure of 390 would be unsustainable, and is likely to render the PMP 'unsound'.

And that is only up to 2020. Within a further 8 years the PMP predicts demand for up to a further 4,000 private sector student beds.

Where in the PMP does it state how the universities intend to house their future students or what increase in HMO numbers would be sustainable? Nowhere. That is why FoBRA believes that a Student Housing Strategy is so desperately needed.

Other unanswered questions include:

- Is Article 4 Direction working and should its 25% threshold be changed?
- How many more accommodation blocks and where?
- Is it sustainable that students could soon number one-third of the population and occupy well over 4,000 HMOs exempt from Council Tax?
- How many more campus beds and for what proportion of students?
- At what rate of build?
- Within the Cotswolds AONB as suggested in the PMP?

FoBRA has little confidence that a workable solution is in sight. There needs to be urgent discussion between the Council, the universities and residents to agree the compromises that will inevitably be needed to allow all this to work.

FoBRA therefore seeks this Scrutiny Panel's assurance that the long-overdue Student Housing Strategy is now developed as a matter of urgency, is regularly reviewed, engaging openly with the universities and residents, and that the Placemaking Plan and its reviews are guided by it.

Thank you.

Chris Beezley

Federation of Bath Residents' Associations