



Draft Technical Advice Note

Student Accommodation

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1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Technical Advice Note (TAN) provides advice on new purpose built student accommodation and change of use to student accommodation. It has been prepared by Aberdeen City Council and outlines issues that need to be considered in the decision making process when it comes to student accommodation. This TAN also provides clarity to developers, agents, universities and other stakeholders on how Aberdeen City Council will manage the development of student accommodation.

1.2 The Council aims to take a positive and proactive approach to new student accommodation to ensure that they are in the most suitable location in terms of accessibility and amenity impacts on the surrounding area; that they are well managed and are appropriate in size and scale; meet the needs of the universities; and that they offer appropriate accommodation.

Non-Planning Issues

1.3 There are a number of other issues concerning the impact of student housing (both shared housing and purpose built accommodation) which cannot be directly addressed by planning policy or guidance e.g. policing matters and environmental nuisance. The City Council will continue to work with the three further education institutions, purpose built student accommodation providers, shared housing landlords, local residents, the Police and others to manage potential conflicts between students and other sectors of the community. For non-planning enquiries please contact Aberdeen City Council's Environmental Health team on 01224 523737.

Background

1.4 According to the Aberdeen City and Shire Housing Need and Demand Assessment (2011), Aberdeen has a high proportion of 16-24 year olds. Students are a vital component of the City and account for approximately 13.5% of its population (Housing Need and Demand Assessment). Aberdeen is home to two major universities: the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University (RGU), as well as the North East Scotland College. The continued success of these higher education institutions are a key driver of Aberdeen's economy.

- 1.5 Over the past 10 years, the number of students in further and higher education has been steadily increasing. Latest figures from Aberdeen City Council's Behind the Granite (2015) highlights that in 2013/2014, the University of Aberdeen had 15,267 students (12,022 full time), RGU 17,276 (10,428 full time) and North East Scotland College 28,654 students (7,056 full time). The number of students attending the three further education institutions has seen an increase of 30% in the last ten years (Housing Need and Demand Assessment). The increase in student numbers however, has not just occurred among 16-24 year olds; this is due to the fact that there has also been a growing number of mature students attending university and college in recent years.
- 1.6 Most students in the city either live in purpose built student accommodation, shared housing or in their parental home. For the University of Aberdeen, student accommodation is generally located in or around the Old Aberdeen Campus, Hillhead Student Village and within the city centre. RGU accommodation is generally focused in and around its Garthdee Campus. North East Scotland College does not have its own accommodation for students. Instead, it expects students to find their own accommodation either from student accommodation providers or from the private rented market.
- 1.7 Traditionally, university accommodation is guaranteed only to first year students. Thereafter, students are required to look for accommodation elsewhere. Most students rent from private landlords, others rent from social landlords and others live in properties purchased by their (or friends) parents. However, lack of lettings at the lower end of the private rental market in Aberdeen presents a major problem for students as most of them are unable to afford the high rents. Evidence from the Citylets Rental Report (2015) indicates rents in and around Aberdeen remain higher than elsewhere in Scotland, including Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- 1.8 In the past few years there has been an increase in the number of planning applications for purpose built student accommodation that have both been received and approved by the City Council. These schemes range in size from less than 10 bedspaces to over 350 bedspaces.

2: POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Student accommodation is essential in contributing to the creation of sustainable communities in Aberdeen as they offer choice to students in the City. They help to relieve pressure on the local housing stock and pressures on Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), which account for a significant proportion of the available rental accommodation in the City and support the student population.

2.2 Scottish Planning Policy encourages sustainable economic growth and the reuse and redevelopment of brownfield land before any development takes place on greenfield sites. It promotes development that is designed to a high quality, emphasising six qualities of a successful place: distinctive; safe and pleasant; welcoming; adaptable; resource efficient; and easy to move around and beyond.

2.3 The Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan (2014, para 3.50) also emphasises its commitment to the development of brownfield land and high quality design. The Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2012) has no specific policy regarding the provision of purpose built student accommodation. There are however other policies within the Aberdeen Local Development Plan that are relevant to consider in preparing and determining applications for student accommodation. These include, but are not limited to:

- Policy D1 – Architecture and Placemaking;
- Policy D2 – Design and Amenity;
- Policy D3 – Sustainable and Active Travel;
- Policy H1 – Residential Areas;
- Policy H2 – Mixed Use Areas;
- Policy H3 – Density;
- Policy NE6 – Flooding and Drainage and;
- Policy R7 – Low and Zero Carbon Buildings.

2.4 It is essential that all planning applications for student accommodation give due consideration to all relevant policies contained within the adopted Local Development Plan. The following Supplementary Guidance documents must also be duly considered:

- Supplementary Guidance: Transport and Accessibility;

- Supplementary Guidance: Open Space;
- Supplementary Guidance: Low and Zero Carbon Buildings and;
- Supplementary Guidance: Harmony of Uses.

3: CRITERIA FOR PURPOSE BUILT STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

3.1 The following will be considered when assessing applications for purpose built student accommodation (new and change of use):

A: The development meets an identified need for the type of accommodation proposed

3.2 All proposals for purpose built student accommodation should give adequate consideration to addressing an identified need for the type of development proposed. Developers should consider:

- What specific need the proposal is aimed at and why this need is currently unmet;
- If the proposal is to meet a recorded increase in student numbers.

B: The development should be in a location that is easily accessible to the higher education campuses by sustainable transport modes

3.3 This allows relative ease of access to campus for students and will promote sustainable means of travel, thus minimising car use. We would encourage new student accommodation to have direct, attractive, safe and secure pedestrian links to higher education campuses. They should be ideally located next to high frequency public transport routes (10/15 minutes peak/off-peak) and cycle routes.

C: The development should be designed in a way that does not conflict with adjacent properties or the general amenity of the surrounding area

3.4 Successful built developments must also be in locations which will be attractive to students. They must be located and designed to minimise adverse impacts on their surroundings. Such impacts include overlooking, overshadowing or overdomination of buildings.

3.5 The Council's principal policies on designing high quality places include Policy D1 – Architecture and Placemaking, and Policy D2 – Design and Amenity. All proposals for new student accommodation will be required to comply with these Policies.

3.6 Taller, higher density student accommodation should be sited in locations where this is compatible with the existing built area. The most suitable location for such developments is in the city centre and the immediate surrounding area. They must be situated in close proximity to good public transport links to allow for access and an increase in pedestrian movement. Pedestrian permeability in large, high density developments is essential to their integration with surrounding areas.

3.7 Where new developments are proposed in residential areas outwith the city centre, these must have regard to the local residential environment by respecting the existing character, massing and height of the area. These developments must also respect and consider form, landscape and topography, existing street pattern and permeability, noise, scale, materials, connectivity and urban grain.

D: The layout, standards and facilities provided within the development are of high standards

Open Space Provision

3.8 Access to good, quality open spaces is important for both students and other members of the local community. Proposals for new student accommodation should make provision for high quality and accessible open spaces. This could include natural green spaces and green corridors, allotments or outdoor sports areas. Open space should always be provided on-site unless there is a strong justification otherwise, in which case an off-site contribution will be sought.

Inclusive Design and Accessibility

3.9 New student accommodation should incorporate high quality design that is inclusive and accessible. This includes within the accommodation and the external areas, along key access routes to and from the site (in line with Policy D3). For further information on inclusive design and accessibility please refer to the [Aberdeen Transport and Accessibility SG](#), and [PAN 78: Inclusive Design](#). Minimum requirements for student accommodation (new and change of use) that allow for flexibility into a dwelling in the future can be found in the Building Standards Regulations: [Technical Handbook - Domestic](#).

Parking

3.10 Existing maximum car parking standards for new student accommodation must be considered as part of the development. That is; 1 parking space per resident staff member plus 1 per 10 students in the city centre, the inner city and the outer city areas (see Aberdeen Transport and Accessibility SG). Disabled parking and enhanced cycle parking facilities should also be provided as set out in the SG.

Travel Plans and Car Clubs

3.11 Developments are encouraged to prepare Travel Plans in support of their applications. However for developments which exceed the thresholds mentioned in the Aberdeen Transport and Accessibility SG, Travel Plans are mandatory. Travel Plans aid in promoting more sustainable travel choices for students, while decreasing reliance on the private car.

3.12 Proposals which enter into agreement with Car Clubs will be encouraged as a means to help to eliminate the need for onsite parking and minimise overall traffic.

Waste Disposal Facilities

3.13 Consideration should be given at an early stage in the design process to the provision and management of waste disposal facilities such as residual waste bins, organic waste bins and mixed dry recycling bins. This provision needs to be convenient and accessible both for students and for waste collection staff, ideally at ground level. Waste storage areas must be within 10 metres of an access point for collection vehicles. Vehicular access in terms of vehicle weight, width etc. need to be taken into account in the design process. Proposals must ensure that waste is disposed of in accordance with the waste hierarchy set out in Policy R6 – Waste Management Requirements for New Development.

Energy Efficiency

3.14 Purpose built student accommodation (new and change of use) should be designed to meet Building Regulations energy requirements. They must install low and zero-carbon generating technology to reduce predicted carbon dioxide emissions as set out in Policy R7 – Low and Zero Carbon Buildings.

Complementary Uses in Student Accommodation Schemes

3.15 Where other uses are proposed as part of a purpose built accommodation scheme, for example gyms, cafés or restaurants, these will be encouraged so long as they are proportionate to the scale of development proposed. Proposals for such uses will be considered against all other relevant national and local planning policies and guidance. For further information on mixed-use matters please refer to the [Aberdeen Harmony of Uses SG](#).

Flexibility

3.16 Purpose built student accommodation is not required to contribute to affordable housing, and it is for these reasons that all applications for student accommodation will be conditioned to limit occupancy to students. Approval to remove this condition at a later date will need to be demonstrated at that time that all of the policy requirements for general needs housing, including amenity standards and education provision, can be met.

3.17 Developers should aim to ensure the design of new accommodation is as flexible as possible, for example by considering how the proposals could be reconfigured to meet general housing needs in the future.

E: The development scheme has appropriate management in place, to minimise potential negative impacts from occupants and to create a positive and safe living environment for students.

Management Plan

3.18 Well managed student schemes can significantly minimise negative impacts on surrounding areas. The Council will expect all student accommodation schemes to have a Management Plan to ensure a satisfactory residential environment for existing residential neighbourhoods. Applicants are encouraged to prepare a Management Plan that addresses general management operations, site and landscape maintenance and servicing.

5: FURTHER INFORMATION

1. [Aberdeen Local Development Plan, 2012](#)
2. [Supplementary Guidance](#)
3. [PAN 78: Inclusive Design](#)
4. [BREEAM Communities: Technical Manual](#)
5. [Technical Handbook - Domestic](#)
6. [Behind the Granite, 2015](#)

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