

Academic Forum

Meeting 27 September 2013: notes

Attendees – Angela Steward (LB Lewisham), Jonathan Seager (London First), Colin Plank (UCL Estates), Chris Cobb (University of London), Andrew Bull (LB Westminster), Kevin McCarthy (London and Partners), Peter Shadbolt (City of London), Jagdeep Bhogal (UNITE), Warren Forsyth (Middlesex University), Paul Watson (Liberty Living for students), Dick Johns (Planning consultant/Ealing), Paresh Shah (London Higher), Simone Williams (LB Tower Hamlets), Jo Goodman (NUS), Sophie Donaldson (LB Newham), Samuel Cuthbert (LB Ealing), Kingsley Izundu (LB Hackney), Sakiba Gurda (LB Islington), Allan Hilton (Cass and Claredale), John Lett (GLA), Zhuoya Ling (GLA), Jennifer Peters (GLA).

The final forum meeting summarised the issues discussed in the previous sessions, which will form the recommendations the academic forum will put to the Mayor. The GLA prepared a draft final report 'Mayor's Academic Forum – Strategic planning issues for student housing in London' and circulated it to the group before the meeting. The group discussion was based on topics covered in this draft report, including future student numbers, requirements for purposed built accommodation, meeting strategic as well as local need, affordability of student housing, quality of provision, and partnership working arrangement.

1. Comments on the last meeting notes (31 July 2013)

1.1 It was raised that the ANUK code (for non- educational providers) and UK Code of Practice (for educational providers) are a set of management standards for student accommodation, specifying appropriate controls to ensure that the particular needs of students are delivered effectively. They are not suitable for use as 'design standards' to manage the design of the student development.

1.2 Some members were uncertain about the application of housing standards on student developments. The chair clarified that student housing was exempt from the Mayor's Housing Standards set out in the Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance (GLA, November 2012). The SPG does not cover requirements for student housing. It was suggested by a borough representative that the Mayor's Housing Standard was not helpful in terms of exemption and acceptability. Student development should be compliant with the housing standards.

2. Academic Forum recommendations to the Mayor

2.1 A draft report 'Mayor's Academic Forum – Strategic planning issues for student housing in London' was circulated prior to the meeting. This report seeks to summarise the conclusions of the Forum, distinguishing points over which there was a consensus and those where there were differences of opinion. It will form the Forum's recommendations to the Mayor, contributing to refinement of London Plan policy through the forth coming Further Alterations (FALP). It was agreed that the notes of the Forum meetings should be appended to the report to the Mayor as part of the wider evidence base.

- **Future student numbers**

While there was concern among central boroughs that the figures were high, the projected student numbers were agreed by the group. It was suggested by the London Higher representative that clarifications should be given to 'HSEA' and 'Non-HESA' students. Definition of HESA-registered students refer to those students who feature in the HESA data,

while non-HESA students include those at London campus branches, alternative providers and international exchange students from Study Abroad and Erasmus.

- **Requirements for purposed built accommodation**

The group discussed how to measure student housing demand in London, a global city with rising tensions among various land uses. It was suggested by the London Higher representative that the wording of 'the projected demand' (Annex 3, table 4) should be rephrased. As currently drafted the report states: 'The projected demand for student accommodation is based on the consensus obtained at the academic forum that 21% of total students would have a propensity to live in purpose built accommodation in the future'. However, the 21% referred to is derived on the basis of current housing preferences and application of this proportion in the conversion of student numbers to requirements of purposed built student accommodation cannot sufficiently meet the need of students. The 21% is considered by the majority of the group to be too low and does not reflect the historic shortages in purpose built student housing. Conversely, a borough representative considered the 21% (the trend of historic provision) was appropriate in terms of a balancing need for conventional housing and student housing. However, there was a concern that shortage of student housing would potentially tend to increase rents.

As an alternative 26% was suggested as this the level of purpose built accommodation in Manchester (the second largest student population in the UK). However, some of the group felt it would be difficult for London to meet the same level of student housing needs as Manchester which doesn't have such high pressure on conventional housing. It was argued by the charitable representative that if students who are currently living in HMOs move to clusters of purpose built flats, this would free up residential spaces and relieve pressures on conventional housing. It was noted that the projected demand was a factor issue that should be separated from considerations of its potential impacts on conventional housing.

Taking account of the NPPF's requirement to assess 'needs' objectively, the group agreed that provision of a range of proportions in the calculation of requirements for purposed built accommodation (Table 4b, Annex 3) would be helpful. The range of proportions of total student numbers who would have a propensity to live in purpose built accommodation in the future should be around 26% (the current proportion of provision in Manchester) to 40% (the market saturation level from an investment perspective). The NUS representative welcomed the 'range' proposal as it would give flexibility to boroughs when determining planning application which should be made on case by case basis. The Chair said the Mayor would have to take a view on which approach to choose – the 'range' or the single figure.

- **Affordability of student housing**

The chair asked whether the language used in the affordable student housing section (paragraph 4.4 and 4.5) was strong enough to resolve the tensions among universities, commercial and charitable student accommodation providers.

It was suggested by university representatives that 'paragraph 4.4' regarding nomination agreements should be included in Recommendation 3, making it an option for the Mayor to consider. Policy implications in paragraph 4.5 should be made more explicitly.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a planning charge under which development may be liable for a charge. Most universities are registered charities, so, in principle, the student housing they develop can benefit from the CIL exemption for charities (see regulation 43 of the

Community Infrastructure Level Regulations 2010). The CIL relief status is through individual based application and will not happen automatically even if it meets all the criteria. Development of CIL charging schedule is dependent on economic viability, taking account of other priorities such as social infrastructure.

Private providers considered that inclusion of 'CIL exemption' in the policy would create an unlevelled playing field between the charitable providers and the private developers, making it more difficult for developers going forward in terms of 'charitable' status.

Representatives felt recommendation 3 should provide a clarification around what constitutes 'affordable housing' in this situation, as they feel it is not logical to provide affordable conventional housing (C3 use) but there should be a scope for affordable student housing. It is more appropriate to keep the existing policy wording with a replacement of S106 requirement from affordable conventional housing to affordable student housing. That means student housing is to be built either with a link to university on a nomination agreement or sign up to Section 106 that requires making a contribution towards provision of 'affordable student housing'.

Some boroughs were concerned that there might be some policy 'loopholes' if the development was not associated with universities. Developers could get planning permission for student development and later justify it as no longer economically viable and change it to other high value uses (e.g. conventional housing), as a result of that cheap and low quality housing would be built without being compliant with housing standards.

Some suggested that new policy wording should ensure a proportion of affordable student housing was provided in all types of new student developments, and define the eligibility for the affordable rent. Definition of affordability could be benchmarks against university rents of similar type. Private sector representative argued that pricing was not comparable between universities and the private providers. University's price is often based on a 38 – 40 weeks contract while the length of private sector accommodation is around 42 – 44 weeks. In addition, some universities rent out student rooms during the summer holidays. It was suggested to develop 'affordable' principles on per annum basis as opposed to per week rent. The affordability issues will be discussed at the forthcoming 'small working group'.

- **Meeting strategic as well as local need**

There was a strong feeling from some borough representatives that the report should make it clear that a dispersal approach should include university facilities as well as accommodation. It was agreed that the SPG should make clear that 'strategic' means that student housing should meet needs over and above those generated by academic institutions beyond the boundaries of the borough in which the housing is proposed.

- **Quality of provision**

It was noted that while the universities and providers felt that the quality of student provision was adequate, boroughs have had concern over the design of some development and the way they relate to local character. It was again confirmed that currently the Housing SPG standards do not apply to bona fide student housing – some boroughs felt that it should be, or that bespoke guidance should be developed. It was recognised that while car parking should be provided for disabled students, it was difficult to assess the effective demand for it.

- **Partnership working arrangement**

The forum has solved majority of issues identified in the 'Proposal for a London Academic Forum'. For those outstanding issues such as design (quality of student housing) and affordable student housing, the group considered these would be better dealt with at the small working group and stimulate wider discussion through circulation of meeting notes.

The chair asked volunteers from forum to join the 'small working group'. Some boroughs would like to engage in this working group, but clarifying that the group has no power to influence them to comply with the London Plan in terms of 'strategic' and 'local' needs.

A list of volunteers signed up for the 'small working group' includes:

Name	Position	Organisation
Jagdeep Bhogal	Design and Planning Director	Unite-group
Paul Watson	Operational Policy Manager	Liberty Living plc
Richard Johns	Planning Policy Consultant	LB Ealing
Paresh Shah	Research Manager	London Higher
Roland Shanks	Information and Project Manager	London Higher
Allan Hilton	Chief Executive	Cass and Claredale Halls of Residence Association Limited
Joanna Goodman	Research and Policy Officer (Welfare)	NUS
Borough representatives (e.g. Islington)		

- **Further alterations to the London Plan Timescale**

It was noted that while a formal decision had yet to be made, officers' working assumptions was that Further Alterations to the London Plan would:

- be subject to consultation January – March 2014
- EIP would be held in Sept/October
- be published early in 2015