



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 2 – The Move of the University of Northampton

**Response from Debi Waite, Private Sector Housing Manager,
Northampton Borough Council**

The Scrutiny Panel is currently undertaking a review: The Move of the University of Northampton

The purpose of the Review is to review the impact on the town and local areas; including student accommodation

CORE QUESTIONS:

A series of key questions have been put together to inform the evidence base of the Scrutiny Panel:

- 1. Please provide information of the work being undertaken by the University of Northampton, Northampton Borough Council (NBC), and other partners to support the relocation of the University (specific organisation to be put to the specific expert advisor e.g NBC to the Cabinet Member)**

I have had no direct involvement in the relocation of the University.

- 2. Please provide your opinion on the social, cultural, physical, economic and environmental effects of the move of the University. *Please can you aim to keep your response to this question to a maximum of 250 words***

From a housing perspective, we have observed a number of changes in the local housing market that are linked to the University's move:

- Since the University's announcement that it will be moving to Waterside, homes in the areas closest to the new Campus (including Far Cotton) have been actively marketed as investment and business opportunities. At first, house prices were relatively low but, as the opening date of the new Campus has approached, prices have risen to the point that many first-time buyers and young families are now no longer able to afford to buy homes in the area.

- Since issuing its Article 4 Direction for Far Cotton and Delapre, the Council has received a significant number of planning applications to convert residential properties into houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) in those areas close to the new Campus.
- Demand for student accommodation in the areas closest to the original University Campus (including Kingsthorpe) has reduced significantly during the past year, and many landlords are now saying that they are struggling to attract enough students to fill their HMOs.
- The student housing market is also being distorted by the significant amount of new student accommodation that is being built and the fact that the University has not enrolled as many students as it intended.

Economic impacts

The high demand for student housing in particular parts of the borough can inflate property prices to the point that they are no longer affordable to first-time buyers. This can lead to a reduction in the owner-occupied stock and the dominance of student accommodation / HMOs in the area.

Accommodating the demands of a student housing market can lead to the traditional retailing functions of some local neighbourhoods being replaced by a concentration of take-aways and discount food retailers. Conversely, this increase in demand may also result in an increase in the range of goods, services and social / leisure facilities available in the area.

There are, of course, significant positive economic impacts associated with the presence of the University and a large student population.

The University is a major employer and has a major impact on the local economy by creating employment opportunities, generating significant economic output, injecting spending power into the local and regional economy and providing a graduate and skilled workforce.

A student population constitutes a flexible part-time labour force to undertake seasonally based employment, and the goods and service purchased by students make a significant contribution to the local economy. There are also social and cultural benefits to be gained from a large student population, including accessibility to lifelong learning opportunities and sporting and cultural facilities. Students may also contribute to their local communities through volunteering work.

There are positive impacts to be had from a high demand for private rented accommodation. As well as increasing property prices, demand for private rented properties – especially larger properties – can provide an incentive to improve the existing stock and bring empty properties back into use. This can have significant regeneration impacts in neighbourhoods by improving the local environment and introducing a new population and life back into the area.

Environmental and physical impacts

Compared to other tenures, private rented accommodation is generally of a poorer quality. Therefore, concentrations of such stock – especially in student areas – can lead to a poor quality local environment.

This is manifested in unkempt property frontages and litter strewn over streets. Increased population densities associated with HMOs and shared housing – and the lifestyles that can accompany such occupants – can place a strain on existing services such as refuse disposal and street cleansing, as well as car parking provision.

Anti-social behaviour and the extra pressure placed on existing services may contribute to a resentment between students and other residents that may lead to some long-term residents moving out of the neighbourhood.

3. Please provide your views on the positive impact and challenges, across the various areas of the town, in respect of the move of the University. (NB the various areas such as town centre, Bedford Road, Far Cotton, Beckett's Park, Avenue Campus, Park Campus, Kingsthorpe village will be included in this core question to the relevant expert advisor)

As explained in my response to Question 2, a concentration of student housing (especially HMOs) can have a big impact on neighbourhoods and a positive and negative effect on local housing markets.

HMOs play a vital role in helping to meet the housing needs of specific groups and the high demand for low cost, affordable housing. However, not all HMOs are properly managed or maintained and, where there is a high concentration of HMOs and/or students, this can result in unintended consequences that create tensions in the local community.

Residents and Councillors complain that high concentrations of student housing and HMOs contribute to the following problems:

- Anti-social behaviour, noise and nuisance
- Negative impacts on the physical environment and streetscape
- Pressure on local community facilities and services
- Pressures on parking provision
- Increased crime
- Imbalanced and unsustainable communities

At this stage, it is too early to accurately forecast the long-term impact that the University's move to Waterside will have on the housing stock in the Far Cotton and Delapre area or, indeed, the Kingsthorpe area.

We do not know, for example, whether the current over-supply of student housing will continue and, if it does, whether or not housing providers will choose to let their accommodation to non-students and/or convert their HMOs back into family homes.

Anecdotally, we know that some landlords are choosing to undertake high quality refurbishment of their HMOs in order to appeal to professionals who are willing to pay a higher rent for better quality accommodation.

The HMOs that are most difficult to let are also not necessarily of the poorest quality. Some tenants will forego quality in favour of a lower rent.

4. Do you have any other information, concerns or suggestions you wish to raise in relation to the move of the University of Northampton?

The Council is committed to improving and enforcing housing standards in Northampton's private rented sector and ensuring that all HMOs are safe, well managed and, where appropriate, licensed.

Its robust intelligence-led, targeted approach to tackling criminal, rogue and irresponsible landlords is applauded by the MHCLG and the Home Office which are keen for local authorities to use the powers that the Government has given them under the Housing and Planning Act 2016

Although the housing legislation does not empower local authorities to directly control the scale and distribution of student accommodation and/or shared housing, the Housing Act 2004 does provide them with the opportunity to intervene to secure improvements in the way in which such properties are managed and maintained.

The HMO Management Regulations 2006 impose certain duties on managers and occupiers of all HMOs, irrespective of whether or not the HMO is licensable:

- For managers of HMOs, the duties relate to basic management practices (such as providing contact details, supplying annual gas safety certificates and providing suitable rubbish disposal facilities) and property maintenance issues (such as fire safety, providing adequate drainage and maintaining the property in a good condition)
- For occupiers of HMOs, the requirements relate to not hindering the manager's duties, not damaging the property or its contents, disposing of rubbish adequately and complying with fire safety instructions

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 has provided local authorities with the power to impose civil penalties of up to £30,000 per offence for a wide range of housing offences, and to use the income generated by civil penalties and rent repayment orders to fund housing enforcement, landlord accreditation and other private sector housing activity.

In January 2018, the Cabinet approved the expansion of the Council's Housing Enforcement Team and this has significantly increased the capacity and effectiveness of the Team in dealing with the enforcement of standards in the private rented sector, especially in relation to substandard, badly managed and unlicensed HMOs.

Where an HMO requires a licence, the Housing Enforcement Team will establish its suitability in terms of the following:

- The number of occupiers
- The facilities (toilets, bathrooms and cooking facilities, etc)
- Whether the landlord / managing agent is a 'fit and proper person'
- The arrangements for the management of the HMO

Conditions can be attached to the HMO licence and, where a landlord or managing agent is in breach of their HMO licence, the Council has the option of revoking the licence.

The Private Sector Housing Team works very effectively with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to encourage good practice and mitigate any negative effects of any concentrations of student housing.

It hosts a well-attended Landlord Forum three times a year, and has established a Student Housing Group with the University of Northampton, the Students' Union, the Northampton Student Landlord Network and DASH (Decent and Safe Housing) to share information, develop and promote good practice, and raise awareness amongst students of their responsibilities as tenants and good neighbours.

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