



OLD ABERDEEN HERITAGE SOCIETY



May 2019

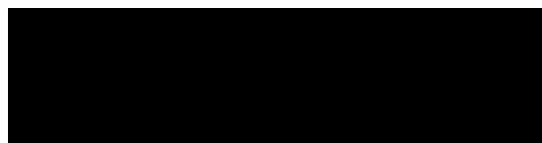
Andrew Brownrigg
Team Leader
Local Development Plan Team,
Planning Dept
Aberdeen City Council

Dear Mr Brownrigg,

Main Issues Report

I enclose the Society's response to the Consultation on the City Council's Main Issue Report.

Yours Sincerely,



Ronald Leith

Chairman



Aberdeen Local Development Plan Review

Main Issues Report Response Form 2019

Aberdeen City Council has published a Main Issues Report (MIR) which is part of the process of preparing a new Local Development Plan. It is designed to gather views on specific proposals and sets out options for dealing with the key planning matters facing Aberdeen over the next 20 years such as the location of new housing and employment development, the future of retailing and the City Centre, housing needs and tackling climate change. It also includes a number of potential new policies which would be used in the determination of planning applications.

The MIR has been published alongside a Monitoring Statement and Environmental Report. Copies are available to view at Marischal College, Broad Street, Aberdeen. These, and other supporting documents, are available at: - www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/aldp2022

Everyone now has the chance to comment on the report and associated documents. All comments received will be considered and used to inform the preparation of the Proposed Aberdeen City Local Development Plan. There will be a further opportunity to comment on the Proposed Plan when it is published in early 2020.

The consultation runs from 4 March 2019 to 13 May 2019.

Responses to the published documents can be:

- made online at:- <http://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/planning/mir2019>;
- emailed to:- ldp@aberdeencity.gov.uk; or
- by post to:- Local Development Plan Team, Strategic Place Planning, Aberdeen City Council, Business Hub 4, Ground Floor North, Marischal College, Broad Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1AB.

Completed response forms should be with us no later than 13 May 2019.



YOUR DETAILS

Name	RONALD LEITH
Organisation (if relevant)	OLD ABERDEEN HERITAGE SOCIETY
On behalf of (if relevant)	
Address	
Postcode	
Telephone	
E-mail	

Thank you for taking the time to complete this response form. If you wish to be added to the LDP e-mailing list to be kept informed of our progress in producing the next Local Development Plan, please tick here



If yes, please provide an e-mail address

PRIVACY STATEMENT

As part of the review of the Local Development Plan, Aberdeen City Council (ACC) will offer you several opportunities to submit your views and comments. These opportunities will range from the current consultation stage, the Main Issues Report, where we will ask you to comment on specific proposals and alternatives to the Proposed Plan stage where the set view of ACC has been established.

ACC are legally required to consult at this stage and at Proposed Plan stage. This is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) and supporting regulations. The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 also requires us to consult on a Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report.

By submitting a response to the consultation, you understand that ACC can use the information provided in this form, including personal data, as part of the review of the Aberdeen City Local Development Plan. ACC will not share or disclose any personal data about you to any organization or person unless it is authorized or required to do so by law.

The data controller for this information is ACC. We understand our legal basis for processing this information as Article 6(1)(c) of the General Data Protection Regulation as this is an activity we are legally required to carry out under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) and supporting regulations and The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. The data on the form will be used to inform the preparation of the Proposed Aberdeen City Local Development Plan 2022. At the end of the consultation, where contact details have been provided, the Local Development Plan team will provide you with a respondent number. You may also be contacted about the comments you have made and, as obliged by the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) and supporting regulations, the Local Development Plan team will contact you to inform you of the publication of the proposed Aberdeen Local Development Plan in early 2020. If you chose not to provide your contact details, your comments will still be valid but we will not be able to contact you in the future.

Responses will be collated, redacted, summarised and stored electronically or in locked cabinets in Marischal College. All redacted responses will be published, alongside the respondents name (if provided), on the Aberdeen City Local Development Plan website. Contact details will not be made public, but your name and respondent number will be published.

Aberdeen City Council will only keep your personal data for as long as is needed. Data will be kept until the emerging Local Development Plan is itself replaced – this is likely to be around 5 years following its adoption in 2022 – so 2027. Following this, data will be disposed of in a secure manner.

YOUR DATA, YOUR RIGHTS

You've got legal rights about the way ACC handles and uses your data, which include the right to ask for a copy of it, and to ask us to stop doing something with your data. Please contact the Council's Data Protection Officer by e-mailing DataProtectionOfficer@aberdeencity.gov.uk or writing to Data Protection Officer, Aberdeen City Council, Governance, Level 1 South, Marischal College, Broad Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1AB. More information is available at: - <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/your-data>

YOUR COMMENTS

Which document(s) are you commenting on?

- Main Issues Report
- Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report
- Monitoring Statement

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Please indicate the document and the specific Issue, Question, Site, Policy, Map or Table you are commenting on. Please provide your comments below and explain your reason for supporting, opposing or commenting on this specific part of the document.

SEE ATTACHED SHEETS

COMMENTS ON MAIN ISSUES REPORT

MAIN ISSUE 1 - Question 6 – City Centre Masterplan Intervention Areas

We have serious concerns about the proposed intervention Area at “Queen's Square”:-

1) The proposed demolition of the Town House Annex seems extremely unwise and short-sighted. This building was purpose-built and designed for the smooth functioning of Council business, with a debating chamber of correct proportions and facilities, with public and press galleries, and adjacent offices for support services and Committee meetings, incorporating necessary restaurant and other facilities for those working through the day at meetings, and members of the public attending meetings. These are Council Chambers built both for convenience and efficiency, and their demolition would be a shameful waste.

The alternative sites proposed in a Council report for these functions are King's College Conference Centre and the Mitchell Hall and Picture Gallery at Marischal College. King's College is completely inappropriate, being a long way from the City Centre, and, therefore, not only far removed from many necessary support services at Marischal College, but also making it a long and complicated journey for members of the public attending Full Council meetings. Further, there is no space available at King's for the provision of offices for the many support staff (Committee Services, Members Support, Legal Officers etc), and no adequate refreshment facilities. The University are already desperately short of space at King's.

Marischal College (Mitchell Hall/Picture Gallery) is also completely inappropriate. The Hall is entirely of the wrong proportions and dimensions for a debating chamber, meaning that members of the public could often be far removed from the debate, and the balconies are not adaptable to what is required for Public Galleries. The splendid Hall is also Category “A” listed, which means that the major alterations necessary for turning it into a Council Debating Chamber would not be permitted. Add to this the difficulties of access to these upper floors, the lack of parking, and it is clear that this not an attractive option for a Debating Chamber. Most of all, however, it would be a shameful waste of an extremely fine historic concert hall, complete with a superb and unique organ, which could be restored to its former glory as such, and restored to its intended use. The Council should be supporting the University to this end. Support is also needed for the renovation of the magnificent Anthropological Museum at Marischal, formerly and potentially a huge attraction for citizens and tourists.

There is no need, in fact, for the demolition of the purpose-built Council Debating Chamber, Committee Rooms and offices in the existing Town House extension. The concept of a “mixed use urban quarter”, as the Queen's Square proposal is described, can quite happily include the existing Council Chambers.

MAIN ISSUE 2 - "A 24 hour City"

We would urge the Council to make it crystal clear in any reports, policies, or promotional material, that the "24 hour City" description applies only to the City Centre. There is potential, otherwise, for this to be misinterpreted, and even used in support for applications for 24 hour development outside the city centre, to the detriment of residents in these areas.

It is simply inappropriate and unfair to introduce 24 hour uses outside the City Centre.

"Quality Places"

4.1 – There should be emphasis here (and at every stage in the consideration of the amenity provided by any proposed development), on the impact on the existing amenity of neighbouring and nearby properties, and the existing amenity of the area in general.

There should also always be serious emphasis on the potential loss of amenity of nearby properties.

4.3 - "External Space Standards"

MAIN ISSUE 4: QUESTION 16

We do indeed need to strive for a better quality and quantity of private/semi-private residential amenity space, and should indeed refuse permission for proposals which do not meet these higher standards.

Every home (apart, perhaps for the City Centre, where it is impractical) should have access to a pleasant sitting-out area, and drying green for washing, a space to grow some kind of flower garden or vegetables, and a shed for garden tools. Not only is this important for quality of life, but it is good for the environment. It would reduce the use of high energy consuming tumble-driers, would provide a safe place for children to play, the chance for families to connect with nature through gardening, and would promote biodiversity with the increased greening of residential areas within the city. There should be absolutely minimal hard ground surfaces, and native trees and shrubs of suitable size, planted whenever possible, to help counteract pollution in the atmosphere and increase biodiversity.

5 – TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE – We have three comments on this section:-

1) The issue "of access to amenities and services faced by those who do not own a car", is one that has been consistently neglected by the Council. In particular, there is a serious problem for those without a car in accessing recycling facilities of certain kinds, or of disposal of large items. It presents a major challenge for those without a car to take items to the Altens recycling centre, for instance (for redundant tins of paint, household chemicals, etc) or to take an old and unusable piece of furniture or mattress to one of the tips on the outskirts of the Aberdeen. The Council will collect the latter from Council tenants, we understand, but seems to provide no help to other residents. If the Council is serious about encouraging responsible disposal of non-household waste, positive action must be taken to address this issue.

2) The use of pavements for cycling must stop. It is both inconsiderate and dangerous for pedestrians. The Council should also take firm action to stop the increasingly prevalent practice of bicycles being chained to lamp-posts, drainpipes, etc thereby blocking the footway for pedestrians. This is a particular problem in historic areas of the City with narrow pavements, such as Old Aberdeen, where it can force pedestrians, particularly those with prams or push-chairs, on to the streets, and is therefore an issue of road safety.

3) The Council should take every possible step to improve the local bus service in the City, perhaps

taking it into Council control if at all possible. At present, the very high cost and inadequate provision of services is a major factor in the continuing use of cars to travel around the City, with the resulting congestion and pollution.

MAIN ISSUE 12 - HMOs

There is widespread agreement that the most clearly effective way to control the density of HMOs in particular areas is for the Council to establish an Overprovision Policy under the Housing Act. This would therefore be a Housing Policy, rather than a Planning Policy. This is what cities across Scotland have been enacting, with the goal of achieving a fair spread of HMOs across the City, so that no one area has its sustainability severely impacted by high densities.

The Housing Act enables the Council to exercise some control, because the calculations of density involved include all HMOs (3 bedrooms and over).

A Planning Policy, however, at present only considers those HMOs with 6 occupants or over, and therefore at present captures very few for assessment. One way or another, however, it could be more effective, and at any rate will be of some help.

As stated in the MIR Consultation document, the Council could reduce the threshold for the number of occupants in a flat or house to 3 or more, to include all HMOs. Along with a Planning Policy by way of an HMO Overprovision Policy (such as many Scottish cities have had in place for some years), each HMO application could be assessed to see if there was capacity in that area, or if it was overprovided.

An Overprovision Policy with a 10% threshold for each Small Data Zone would then really begin to address the serious problems that have arisen in certain parts of the City (mostly Garthdee and Old Aberdeen, but especially serious in the Old Aberdeen and surrounding area).

This could be achieved within the LDP. Other cities across Scotland have had an Overprovision Planning Policy for some years, and some have gone on to establish efficient, easy-to-use HMO Overprovision Policies under the Housing Act, with solid legal grounding, which has given welcome certainty to both residents and landlords alike.

The current situation in Aberdeen is, of course, that an Overprovision Policy under the Housing Act was unanimously agreed upon by the Council, but cancelled for no clear reason a few months later.

Until such time as a Housing Policy is considered once again, it is imperative that some Planning Policy is enacted to begin to address the serious loss of community sustainability within various areas of Aberdeen.

In January last year, Aberdeen City Council, having considered the serious consequences of HMO Overprovision in particular areas of the City where community sustainability was under threat, instructed Planning officials to include as a Main Issue in the Main Issues Report of the LDP, the issue of HMO Overprovision in the context of "Mixed Sustainable Communities". Investigation of this issue would, it was hoped, presumably, lead to the formation of a new Planning Policy which would bring about a fairer distribution of HMOs across the City.

None of the proposals put forward in the Main Issues Report would bring about the result which Council members sought.

It is of the most serious concern that the section of the MIR dealing with HMOs seems to be hampered by a basic misunderstanding of the issues involved.

The Main Issue is “Mixed Sustainable Communities”

Sustainability of communities is at the heart of Aberdeen City Council's vision for Aberdeen, as well as being the foundation of the Scottish Government's policy for Scotland as a whole.

The “Preferred Option”, Option 2, simply does not address the issue of sustainability at all. It simply discusses the issues of incidental adverse impacts of individual HMOs on neighbours, which is not the same thing. The proposed Policy H10 takes very much the same line, and is in fact no more than a word-for-word repetition of what is already contained in the Council's existing Supplementary Guidance.

Paragraph 3 of Policy H10 at first glance, looks as if it could, perhaps, be of some use in the control of HMO densities, but experience with past planning applications has shown it to be usually ineffective.

One slight alteration to that paragraph, however, to provide clarification, could improve the Policy considerably, if Councillors wish to address the issue through this proposed Policy.

We would propose that the words “*of any size, from 3 occupants upwards*” be inserted after the words “*An excessive concentration of HMOs in a given locality*”, under paragraph 3 of Policy H10.

The insertion of this phrase would mean that any planning application for an HMO would then be assessed in the context of the concentration of all HMOs in the locality, and there would be no grounds for suggesting that only HMOs of 6 or more occupants should be included in the assessment.

This would be the only fair way to ensure that the Council could assess the full picture relating to material change in the character of the area, as the smaller HMOs cumulatively impact just as much, and very often far more, on the character of an area.

It is our view, then, that the proposed Policy H10 would be of virtually no use in beginning to tackle the issues identified by Councillors unless the additional wording is inserted.

The fact remains, however, that as the Council's Planning Policy stands at present, only those HMO applications for 6 or more occupants will ever be considered under such a policy, because the City Council has chosen to define an HMO in planning terms as a house or flat with 6 or more occupants (as opposed to the Council's definition, and the legal definition – of an HMO for licensing purposes as a house or flat with 3 or more occupants). Only a small fraction of HMO applications, therefore, currently require planning permission, and therefore very little control can be had over HMO concentrations in general. The only improvement which could be made would be to add the wording we proposed earlier, which would help slightly in the case where an HMO of 6 or more occupants is proposed, but as such instances are very much in the minority, it will have little effect in protecting community sustainability.

The Society does not believe that the proposed Policy H10 as it stands, will do anything to deliver sustainable communities, and so can not support it as it stands. With the additional wording, it could be slightly improved, but only in the sense that this option would be better than nothing (ie the current situation).

A much greater, and generally effective improvement to the proposed Policy H10 would be if the

Council decides to choose (as it is free to do) to reduce the threshold for when planning permission is required from the current level of 6 occupants or over, to the match the legally defined level for all HMOs – viz 3 occupants or over.

Such a move would mean that all HMO applications would be assessed by the Planning Dept, and that those proposals judged to be located in an area already suffering from an excessive concentration of HMOs could be refused, on the grounds of protecting the sustainability of the community.

With the two adaptations suggested above, the proposed Policy H10 could make a real difference, but it would require a bold decision on behalf of both Council Officers and Elected Members.

Needless to say, it would work best with a clear definition of what constitutes overprovision in an area, although in many cases it is often obvious where there are already excessive concentrations of HMOs.

This brings us to the proposal to have a HMO Overprovision Policy to accompany Policy H10, which we believe is now necessary, until such time as the Council decides to institute a Policy under the Housing Act, as other cities have done.

We wish to make it clear from the outset that “Option 3” on page 58, presented as a sort of Overprovision Policy is completely unacceptable, and we do not support this in any way. It is manifestly unfair to restrict HMOs to specific areas. This is tantamount to complete disregard for the sustainability of the community in those areas, and the Council should not countenance such a proposal.

For an Overprovision Policy to accompany Policy H10 (revised as suggested above) we propose the following:-

- 1) A percentage limit of HMOs in each area to be 10%
- 2) A geographic boundary to define areas to be “Small Data Zones”.
- 3) A threshold for when an HMO requires planning permission to be 3 or more occupants (ie in all HMO applications).

NB In response to the MIR “preferred option” of Ward Boundaries to define areas for percentage limits, it has to be said that this, along with the “Intermediate Data Zones” would be completely counter-productive. Far from helping to ensure an even distribution of HMOs across an area, they would in fact lead to situations where large numbers of HMOs were concentrated in a very small corner of that larger area – even into just a few residential streets nearest to the University in question.

Those options, and particularly the “Ward Boundary” option would do no good whatsoever; in fact it is obvious even at first glance that it would be manifestly inequable. It is astounding, and indeed most regrettable, that these options were introduced, but particularly unjustifiable that Ward Boundaries should have been presented as the “Preferred Option”.

To re-cap, we propose a percentage limit of 10% of HMOs in any area; a geographic boundary of “Small Data Zones”; and an occupancy threshold for requiring planning permission of 3 or more occupants.

The above would provide an Overprovision Policy in conjunction with Policy H10, which would be perfectly workable (with the co-operation of the HMO Licensing Dept, as advised by Scottish Government guidelines) and would have solid legal grounding, being included in the LDP. Critically, it would deliver the result which Elected Members have long requested, to facilitate the delivery of sustainable communities – and there would be no reduction in the total number of HMOs available to rent; they would merely be spread more evenly throughout the city.

Lastly, but most importantly, we wish to present the Main Issue which has been largely neglected in the Main Issue Report's consideration of the question of Houses in Multiple Occupation:-

That issue is, quite simply, the issue of Community Sustainability itself – what this actually means; how important it is; and how it can be achieved. This clearly has to be looked at properly if the Council is to achieve its stated aim of “Mixed Sustainable Communities”.

First, it is necessary to state that although the incidental impact of some HMOs on the immediate environment (potential noise disturbance, neglect of property by landlords, pressure on parking etc), is certainly a matter of importance, it is only a small part of the story. These factors can indeed impact on the sustainability of parts of communities in the sense that they cannot flourish as they should, and these can present particular obstacles to a settled environment, but it is something else entirely which has the most harmful effect on the sustainability of communities.

That 'something' is the direct result of the proliferation of HMOs in particular areas. In these areas, homes for long-term residents have been displaced by lets to short-term residents; family homes have been replaced by student flats and student houses; and the residential balance of the community has been lost.

A community cannot be said to be sustainable if half or more of the properties in many of its streets are occupied by transient residents on short-term leases. Given that the great majority of HMOs are let to students who are typically only present for 7 months of each year, that means that a great many properties in areas such as Old Aberdeen will be standing empty for 5 months of the year, and some streets can seem deserted during that period. This is simply not good for social cohesion, which is an important requirement for a settled community. The fact that large areas (including short-term lets of smaller size) are left empty for so much of the year is also not good from a point of view of public safety.

If there were only a small number of short-term lets in each street or cul-de-sac, there would still be enough homes occupied by permanent residents to ensure a better sense of security and a genuine sense of community; where neighbours get to know each other over the years; where children grow up together and who are there long enough to put down roots and work towards goals for the long-term good of the community, its schools and similar community organisations. A community which is largely made up of long-term residents is also one which helps to support local businesses, which otherwise would struggle.

All these are aspects of a sustainable community – one which can be sustained as a community.

Once the residential balance of a community is tipped too far in favour of short-term lets and transient residents, however, the characteristics of a truly sustainable community begin to be lost.

First to go is social cohesion, because instead of a balanced mix of families with children, working age singles or couples, and the retired and elderly, one finds that whole streets become largely dominated by short-term lets to temporary residents. Neighbours, generally, then, no longer get to know each other, or form part of a community because so many of them are just passing through.

This is in no way a criticism of lifestyle; just the way things turn out. Most students are necessarily too busy with their studies or own group of friends to put down roots when they are likely to move on a short time hence.

Another aspect of areas where HMOs and other short-term lets predominate, is that for a significant part of the year, certain streets have a deserted quality, and it can be an unsettling prospect to walk there alone at night because of the number of empty homes.

It is also true that such areas are bound to be more vulnerable to crime, such as burglary, because of a much diminished residential presence for so much of the year.

Of particular seriousness is the effect that a preponderance of HMOs and short-term lets can have on the viability of local businesses, particularly shops. When a community becomes largely dominated by properties occupied for only 7 months of the year, this change in residential balance can be seriously damaging to local businesses. As fewer local residents are present throughout the year, so fewer local shops are able to stay open every day, or even for the whole day when they are open, in the months outside term time. In certain areas, local shops and businesses have been much affected by this in terms of viability. Shops which are normally open all day, now close just after lunchtime in University vacations, as there are not enough year-round residents to cover the costs of staying open longer.

Similarly, shops that used to open all day Saturday are now closing early or not opening at all due to the significant decrease in the settled population of the area.

These trends have appeared since the major expansion of the University, and the lack of control over the accompanying 'take-over' of so many family homes by Buy-to-let landlords with a view to substantial financial profit. It is a very lucrative business whereby HMO landlords can charge significant monthly rentals for each bedroom in each property they own.

It is therefore little wonder that some landlords have bought up multiple flats or houses to convert them to HMOs. By way of example, in one Old Aberdeen courtyard development of houses built as family homes in the 1990s, 25% of these are now owned by the same Buy-to-let landlord, having been steadily acquired as the opportunity arose.

The problem here, and in other areas too, is that landlords have been out-competing families and young people, including University staff who want to make their permanent home in the area. Landlords can simply afford to pay more for such houses than a private buyer can.

For the sake of the viability of local businesses, then, the proliferation of HMOs in such areas must be halted. This will then give a better chance for those who very much want to make places like Old Aberdeen their settled home, and so contribute year-round to the local economy. Local businesses are a vital part of a sustainable community, and need to be supported. The Council can do this by a policy decision to halt, and indeed gradually reverse, the decline in year-round residential occupancy in the areas affected. An effective HMO Overprovision Policy can achieve this.

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Finally, it is obvious that a community can not be said to be “mixed” and “sustainable” where a balanced demographic is steadily being lost – where in some areas an increasing majority are in the 18-25 age bracket, and largely absent for almost half of each year. Families and other long-term residents are being squeezed out, largely as a result of the lack of regulation of HMO densities, whereby a fairer, more even distribution across the city could be achieved.

As noted earlier, Buy-to-let landlords have long been able to outbid local families who want to settle in Old Aberdeen. The results of this can be seen in a quiet cul-de-sac of traditional family homes and a 1990s courtyard development of houses built for families, where 50% of these have become HMOs – in the latter case many more are short-term lets also, but do not count as HMOs, as they only have two bedrooms.

In other streets, it is common for between 25% and 33% of family homes to have been converted to HMOs. These figures, too, do not convey the true scale of the loss of permanent homes, for in some of these streets, the number of homes for rent which appear to be for short-term let to students can be as many as 75% of the total number. It is understood that these extra rental properties, being under the 3-bedroom limit, cannot be controlled by an HMO limit, but the fact is that regulation of the use of the many family-sized homes of 3-bedrooms or more, would make a huge difference to the sustainability of the area.

There is absolutely no need for such a high concentration of HMOs in any area. The same total number of HMOs could be provided with a fair HMO Overprovision Policy in place, but distributed more evenly across Aberdeen.

There is, by contrast, quite clearly a need for availability of affordable housing, particularly for University staff and their families in Old Aberdeen. It should be noted at this point that the legislation rules that the need for HMO provision should be considered in the context of the need for other forms of housing, and most certainly not in isolation.

As long as HMO landlords can continue unchecked to buy up houses for conversion to HMOs, the shortage of reasonably priced family homes in Old Aberdeen will continue to impact significantly on the residential mix and balance, and so on the sustainability of the community.

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As shown earlier, high concentrations of HMOs in particular areas have a negative impact on a community's sustainability in terms of:-

- a) Loss of social cohesion
- b) Reduced security
- c) Loss of year-round support for local businesses
- d) Residential mix and balance
- e) Loss of family homes, and
- f) Obstacles to young families wishing to settle in the area, being unable to outbid HMO landlords

It is of critical importance to note that none of the Options put forward in the Main Issues Report on the subject of HMOs would even begin to address these issues, where a community is clearly heading towards being unsustainable.

For some years, Councillors have expressed concern about the situation with HMOs in Old Aberdeen, and have recognised the importance of its historically distinctive “village community” character. That character is being steadily eroded, and its sustainability increasingly damaged by the lack of a Council Policy to address the whole issue.

In January last year, at Full Council, Elected Members decided that the question of HMO Overprovision in the context of “Mixed Sustainability Communities” be thoroughly investigated in the Main Issues Report.

Councillors have asked for proposals to enable these Mixed Sustainable Communities.

The preparation of Policies for a New Local Development Plan is the ideal opportunity to make real headway on this issue. The Main Issues Report has had no success in addressing this, and we therefore ask that the proposals we have put forward be seriously considered as an alternative way forward.

Such a solution would, we believe, utilise new policies (one an adaption of the proposed Policy H10, and one entirely new and equitable Overprovision Policy) to bring about a fair outcome for all communities affected.

We urge the Council to adopt this approach.

FURTHER POLICIES:-

On two further issues, we believe that new Council Policy is necessary.

The issues are:-

1) The inappropriate zoning of the whole of the historic core of Old Aberdeen as "CFI" or "Community Facilities"

We would refer you to our comments on this which were submitted to the Pre-Main Issues Consultation which explain exactly why it is completely inappropriate to include in this designation considerable areas of housing of all kinds, none of which qualify for the description of "Community Facilities" (institutions).

We asked then, as we do now, that the CFI zoning be restricted to the University's major institutional buildings, and that the remainder of Old Aberdeen be zoned as residential.

2) We also asked for a new particular Policy to protect the residential character of the High Street and College Bounds.

Details of that proposal can also be found in the comments we submitted to the Pre-Main Issues Consultation.

In essence, we highlighted the pressure on the High Street in particular, where the University has, over the years, converted family homes into other uses, and in several instances into offices, despite having ample accommodation in their many modern buildings around Old Aberdeen.

In October last year, the Scottish Government Reporter dealing with the Planning Appeal against the Council's refusal of permission for a pub at 15 High Street gave some clear rulings. He agreed with our Society that *"Old Aberdeen is a settled community of residents with a 'village community' character which has endured despite the growth of the University around it"*

He also considers that *"the residential element is important to the character and community identity of the area"*.

He repeats this judgement at para 16, where he finds that 15 High Street *"is located within a predominantly residential enclave"*

In his summary, he states that ***“the residential use of the appeal property makes a positive contribution to the character and community identity of the area”***

and that ***“the loss of the dwelling house..... would erode that character and identity”***

In the light of the Government Reporter's findings and rulings about the character of Old Aberdeen and the High Street in particular, we would ask that -

1) This area be recognised officially as residential, by zoning it as H1, along with the rest of the Old Aberdeen Community.

2) A new Policy be prepared to protect the priceless residential nature of this historic street from encroachment by any other use ie. that no house should be allowed to be converted for use as office or University facilities, social space or other facilities, as it is now absolutely clear that this unique residential enclave is valued highly not only by the City Council here, but also from a national perspective.

It is vital that we do not lose even one more family home in the heart of this distinctive “village community”.