

Leith Central Community Council (LCCC) Discussion Paper on Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) Developments in Leith

Date: November 2024

Purpose of the Paper: This document outlines concerns about the impact of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) developments in Leith, focusing on how these projects threaten local housing availability, disregard community needs, and conflict with local development goals. The aim is to foster a united stance against further PBSA expansion in Leith, particularly given that Leith is not a university area and lacks direct benefits from these developments.

1. Background

The past few years have seen a surge in PBSA developments across Leith, sparking concerns about reduced opportunities for local housing and strained community resources. While some organisations, like Living Rent, are addressing individual sites, and each community council is tackling specific PBSA planning proposals, a coordinated approach is still lacking, that would also include local housing providers for example.

The consensus among residents and local groups is that PBSA projects, benefiting universities and private developers, are being imposed on a community without a nearby university presence, exacerbating housing pressures and affecting community cohesion.

2. Key Concerns

2.1 Impact on Local Housing Availability

- **Issue:** PBSA expansion limits land available for housing developments that cater to Leith residents. Local housing providers face increased difficulty in meeting the needs of the community.
- **Consideration:** Engaging with local housing providers will highlight the adverse impact PBSA developments are having on the availability of resident-focused housing options in Leith.

2.2 Conflict with Local and City-Wide Housing Strategies

- **Issue:** PBSA growth in Leith appears to contradict Edinburgh's broader housing objectives, particularly concerning affordable housing and sustainable community development.
- **Consideration:** A review of the city's housing strategy could clarify any conflicts between PBSA expansion and the council's intended housing policies, reinforcing the argument against further PBSA projects in Leith.
- There may be an opportunity to comment on a draft of Edinburgh Councils Local Housing Strategy will be published at the end of 2024 for consultation and feedback over December 2024 to February 2025.

2.3 Charitable Responsibilities of Universities

- **Issue:** As charitable entities, universities have a duty not to harm the communities they impact. By promoting PBSA in an area distant from any university, they may be misusing resources and disregarding their responsibilities toward community well-being.
 - **Consideration:** Examining the role of OSCR (the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator) could provide grounds to challenge whether university-driven PBSA developments are consistent with universities' charitable obligations to support—not harm—local communities.
-

3. Recommendations

1. **Organise a Coordinated Stakeholder Meeting**
 - o **Action:** Arrange a meeting involving LCCC, other local community councils, housing providers, and advocacy groups like Living Rent to create a unified stance against PBSA developments in Leith.
 - o **Objective:** Develop a coordinated strategy to communicate opposition to further PBSA projects and prioritize the community's need for resident-serving housing.
 2. **Engage with City Council and Housing Authorities**
 - o **Action:** Investigate PBSA developments' alignment with city-wide housing policies to strengthen the argument for opposing PBSA expansion.
 - o **Objective:** Demonstrate that further PBSA developments in Leith not only conflict with local needs but may also undermine the council's broader housing strategy.
 3. **Consider OSCR Complaint Regarding Charitable Responsibilities**
 - o **Action:** Explore the feasibility of filing a formal complaint to OSCR concerning the universities' use of charitable resources for PBSA projects in Leith.
 - o **Objective:** Advocate for scrutiny of universities' responsibilities to ensure they are not placing undue burdens on Leith, a non-university area, through these developments.
 4. **Develop a Position Statement for LCCC**
 - o **Action:** Draft a clear position statement opposing further PBSA development in Leith.
 - o **Objective:** Establish a formal LCCC stance to guide advocacy, community engagement, and negotiations regarding future development proposals.
-