

REF: R00118/MR

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7 March 2025

Dear Mr Young,

**EXAMINATION OF THE BRISTOL LOCAL PLAN 2022-2040  
HEARING STATEMENT: MATTER 7 [OTHER HOUSING POLICIES]  
ROK PLANNING ON BEHALF OF SMART URBAN LIVING BRISTOL [ONE]**

I write on behalf of our client, Smart Urban Living Bristol [One] (the Respondent), to submit a Hearing Statement in response to the Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQ's) raised by the Inspector concerning the Examination of the Bristol Local Plan 2022 – 2040 (draft BLP). The submission of this Statement follows representations made on behalf of the Respondent to both various stages of the draft BLP's preparation, the last being representations to the Bristol Local Plan Publication Version in January 2024.

Following on from the representations submitted on behalf of the Respondent to the draft BLP Publication Version at Regulation 19 Stage, dated 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and hereafter referred to as 'Reg. 19 reps', this Statement focuses on Matter 7 and specifically the following issue which relates to draft Policy H7: Managing the Development of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation of the draft BLP and relevant sub-issues set out subsequently:

- Issue 7.2: Whether the remaining policies relating to housing delivery positively prepared, justified and consistent with national policy and would they be effective in securing sustainable development?

Each issue is addressed in turn below.

**Issue 7.2: Whether the remaining policies relating to housing delivery positively prepared, justified and consistent with national policy and would they be effective in securing sustainable development?**

Each specific question, as raised by the Inspector, is addressed below.

**Q7.5: Is Policy H7 justified, consistent with national policy and effective? In particular:**

***a) What overall need for purpose built-student accommodation has been identified and would the policy be effective in ensuring this is met?***

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The policy will not be *effective* in so far as the proposed caps to student numbers identified in relevant growth areas seeks to 1) manage student housing need too rigidly and 2) is not sufficiently flexible to meet changing university models and societal needs.

As identified by PQ84 the projected growth in student numbers for both UWE Bristol and UoB up to 2040 have not been considered in their joint report. In their response in EXA024 that, 'any need for additional bed spaces in Bristol generated by UWE's intended growth is unlikely to be significant and can be accommodated through the current policy approach'. But this is not substantiated. The joint report represents the most up to date evidence and should be relied upon. This confirms that *expected growth* has not been suitably measured.

Added to this, and a crucial point noted in other objections from peers, is that there is already an *existing shortfall* of PBSA within the City. This is confirmed in the Bristol Housing Needs Assessment. Fundamentally, The HNA identifies that there are around 59,400 students currently studying at institutions in Bristol and that there was a total of 16,500 bedspaces provided in 2023. This equates to a figure of 3.6 students per bedspace. This is likely to The HNA then continues to identify that university growth plans will result in this number increasing to approximately 65,900 students by 2030, and that in the event that all currently planned PBSA bedspaces came forward, this would result in a 49% increase in PBSA accommodation. Whilst that may be the case, a provision of 24,650 bedspaces against a projected population of 65,900 students still only equates to a figure of 2.7 students per bedspace.

This is also covered in our Respondent's regulation 19 representations referencing 5.60 of the Bristol Local Housing Needs Assessment which states 28% of students are housed in the existing PBSA bedspaces, this rising to 37% in the event of pipeline delivery. This represents a significant undersupply noting comparisons made to other leading University cities in Oxford and Sheffield.

In the Council's response in EXA024 to the Inspector's question, PQ85 it states:

*"The council is aware that the needs of the existing student population have been met to date through a variety of existing accommodation types including university owned halls of residence and houses, PBSA and other forms of small-scale private accommodation including shared houses/flats. On this basis the policy has not considered the issue of supposed existing under-supply of PBSA given that all existing students are understood to have some form of accommodation"*.

The Council has not provided suitable evidence to substantiate where it is aware, or it understands there to be a sufficient supply of PBSA. Thus, the policy fails to properly capture expected growth and ignores existing shortfall. This is not effective.

***b) How does the provision of student accommodation contribute to the overall housing numbers and is this justified?***

This is unclear, particularly in light of recent NPPF changes and Housing Delivery test updates where the ratio applied to student accommodation, has changed from 2.5 to 2.4 (this has been calculated by dividing the total number of students living in student only households by the total number of student only households in England). This increases the contribution student housing makes to Housing supply and notably the influence student housing has in overall housing delivery. Therefore, PBSA development is something that should be positively encouraged rather than *carefully managed* which H7 seeks to do from the outset.

Indeed, Bristol confirm the positive role student housing has in the draft local plan at paragraph 6.68:

*“Changes in higher education have increasingly seen the development of purpose-built accommodation, mostly within the city centre. This type of housing helps to ease overall demand, relieves pressure on the city’s housing stock, is well managed and provides greater accommodation choice. This form of development also supports the renewal of parts of urban areas through high quality mixed-use schemes, including the re-use or replacement of redundant buildings and the upgrading or creation of new areas of public realm. Student schemes can also increase levels of activity within areas and bring additional vitality to areas in need of regeneration”.*

There is very limited evidence produced by Bristol which properly tests the release of other housing stock following the delivery of student housing and over the course of the current plan. We’d ask that this be presented at the EIP as this is important to fully understand statements made in respect of a) above.

The Bristol Five Year Housing Land Supply Assessment 2020 to 2025 identifies an annual local housing need of 2,368. The five-year need, including a 20% buffer, is 14,205. Bristol can only identify a provision of 10,579 thus demonstrating a supply of 3.7 years and therefore falling short of a 5-year housing land supply. Thus, there should be no limits placed on PBSA which contributes positively to housing need.

***c) Is the principle of the numbers and defined locations/distribution as set out in the policy (for the University of Bristol sites, Bristol city centre, Bristol Temple Quarter and St Philip’s Marsh, Broadmead, Frome Gateway and Central Bedminster) justified?***

The respondent finds that it is entirely logical to define and encourage the delivery of PBSA in an appropriate and/ or defined area. Such areas will be more accessible, located closer to essential amenities and services, and in proximity to University campuses. This in turn creates developments which are more attractive to future occupiers. The planning application process then provides a suitable means to determine the acceptability of any proposed new development, which should also consider relevant planning considerations on a site-by-site basis through the preparation of policy justification and agreed technical evidence.

Arbitrary caps placed within identified growth and regeneration areas however goes against the integral requirement of the policy to ensure growth and regeneration in these areas. Similarly, as growth is encouraged and expected in these areas, such caps will be met quickly and would not ensure effective delivery over the course of the development plan period. No proportionate evidence is provided and thus the policy is not justified.

This lacks consistency with the NPPF in two ways:

- 1) The NPPF makes no reference to maximum housing limits. The fundamental aim of the new NPPF is to deliver new housing. In Bristol, the adopted NPPF housing targets in December 2024 which is set out for Bristol as 2,986 new homes required per year. Whilst this has reduced from 3,057 homes required proposed in July 2024, an average delivery of 1,793 over the past three years is noted. This points to an overwhelming need for housing.
- 2) This is entirely inconsistent with the NPPF paragraph 124 where planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses. Paragraph 125(c) where a presumption is given to making effective use of brownfield land where there is no substantial harm and (d) which goes further to promote and support the development of under-utilised land and buildings, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained, and available sites could be used more effectively. Growth and regeneration areas will have an abundance of these sites, and the introduction of a cap means potentially some sites will not be developed to their maximum potential.

Ultimately by imposing any form of cap, this could reverse the intention of the policy and push PBSA to other locations that could be less appropriate for PBSA development. The cap and any reference to limits should be removed.

***d) Will it be clear to the decision maker how to react to proposals when assessing them against the three bullet points in the first paragraph of the policy? How does this relate to the final paragraph of the policy relating to general provisions? Are the general provisions also capable of being assessed appropriately?***

No substantive comments. The respondent considers the general provisions as set out in the policy are entirely reasonable to ensure a high standard of accommodation and recognises this is the intention of the policy.

Requirements for conventional residential accommodation should however not be applied to student housing as, in reality, the typical demand from students per annum falls significantly below even the 10% mark.

***e) Are the suggested main modifications to Policy H7 in response to PQ86 regarding the support needed of the relevant higher education provider necessary for soundness? Is this part of the policy justified and will it be effective?***

The Respondents maintains their position set out in the Regulation 19 representations. Providing a definition of larger scale development doesn't change the intention of the policy which is unjustified. Requirement of a nominations agreement could stifle development coming forward especially as these are commercial agreements corresponded outside of the planning process which take time to confirm. This should be removed from the policy. At the very least, the policy should be clarified so that the policy encourages developers to liaise with relevant Universities who *can* provide their support however this should not be a determining factor in terms of decision making. The London Plan similarly requires Nominations Agreements as part of a legal agreement and secured on occupation. It is not required on submission. This is also a model that whilst brought forward in London, would not translate to Bristol given the number of Universities and different boroughs.

***f) Are the suggested main modifications to Policy H7 in response to PQ88 regarding the support of local communities necessary for soundness? Is this part of the policy justified and will it be effective?***

No comments. This policy is generally supportive of appropriate student housing growth and if based on a suitable assessment of student need in the relevant plans identified and no caps included. Ultimately a community-based strategy wouldn't form adopted policy thus would hold no weight. This should be taken out of the policy and included in supporting text as guidance.

***g) The part of the policy referring to 'Other locations' indicates that proposals for purpose-built accommodation should form part of mixed-use locations. When considered with the other bullet points in this part of the policy, will be it be effective?***

The policy as written would not be effective and this sentence should be removed. It further contradicts with the supporting text at paragraph 6.85 of the draft Local Plan which notes:

"Development of purpose-built student accommodation outside of defined locations should where feasible form part of a mixed-use development with the mix of uses provided appropriate to the site and its context".

This suggests a wider mix of uses rather than just residential. This is as far as the policy can go as requiring mixed forms of development may not even be viable or possible for some developers, thereby stifling development. As such the policy would not be positively prepared.

***h) Paragraph 6.87 sets out the circumstances in which a local imbalance is likely to occur. To be effective, should these circumstances be set out in the policy and is the approach justified?***

The approach is unjustified and should be removed from the supporting text. There is no tangible evidence to suggest that concentrations of PBSA causes harm to the balance, function, diversity or character of an area, nor an adverse impact on residential amenity. The assumption that concentrations of university students are liable to give rise to residential amenity issues and be detrimental to the cohesiveness of communities is discriminatory and a distorted generalisation of a single category of people.

The need for student developments to be well managed is an integral feature of the success of any student accommodation. If they are not well managed and suffer from regular complaints, students will not want to stay there. This is especially the case as the enjoyment and life quality of students is well reported now at various developments and accessible to new students wanting to move to new student accommodation.

The general provisions set out in Policy H7 are thus sufficient here to ensure that the policy is effective and states:

*„ Be subject to an appropriate management regime set out in an approved management plan.*

As a pre-requisite of planning and for achieving permission this ensures that early thought is given to the management, maintenance and security of these spaces especially as adherence to these plans will/ can be conditional.

***i) The policy states that development in all locations will be expected to include an appropriate proportion of affordable student housing to meet identified need. Is this approach justified, based on viability evidence and will it be effective?***

This policy cannot be found sound for the following reasons:

- There is inconsistency with the NPPF which stipulates that PBSA should be excluded from the requirement to provide affordable housing.
- Notwithstanding justification set out in the TPC006 Managing the Development of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation topic paper (April 2024) and the Bristol City Council: Local Plan Viability Assessment (August 2023), the typologies and examples referenced are not sufficient to determine if 35% is an appropriate method. This is too small a sample size noting developments can provide a larger range of student bedspaces and a mix of units. Similarly, the nature of the market is already far different to how it was pre-August 2023 due to global economic and political

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changes. This statement is also unclear, 'A policy seeking at least 35% affordable student housing provision would be viable in most cases'. This is not substantiated and can't be substantiated until a development has undertaken a detailed cost plan and appropriately viability tested the scheme.

- In addition, the Respondent would highlight that the provision of affordable student housing will have viability impacts. Other policies within the draft Local Plan, for example those that concern the sustainability credentials of new development, come at an increased cost for developers. Similarly, affordable student housing does not benefit from CIL exemption in the same way as conventional affordable housing. This in turn will stifle development which further goes against the new presumptions set out in the NPPF, particularly on previously developed land.
- There is concern that the draft policy does not include provision for a reduction in affordable housing requirements subject to viability testing or indeed acceptance that no affordable student housing may be feasible. Every site is different and comes with its own land value complications and construction costs, particularly depending on the complexity of the scheme. The policy is not sufficiently flexible or written clearly enough to cater for this including how sites are expected to contribute on an individual basis, and also stay viable over the lifetime of the development (i.e., if mitigation is required to protect financial viability such as build costs or the costing of other rents).

In addition, the below element of the policy should be removed:

*Bed spaces provided as affordable student housing should be allocated by the relevant higher education provider to students it considers most in need of the accommodation.*

The modification proposed does not make this policy justified. The Council similarly acknowledge that higher education providers will not have control over all student accommodation developed thus this cannot be monitored or enforced.

Smart Urban Living Bristol reserve the right to further their comments via participation in the hearing sessions as part of the Examination in Public.

I trust this Statement is in order and look forward to confirmation of safe receipt. Please do not hesitate to contact myself should you have any queries.

Yours faithfully,



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