

# **National HMO Lobby**

## **Balanced Communities & STUDENTIFICATION *Problems and Solutions***



**2008**

## Contents

Foreword	3
1 Introduction	4
2 Balanced Communities	5
3 Studentification	8
4 Problems	10
5 Solutions	11
6 Conclusion	13
References	15

**Note** HMOs are defined as in housing legislation throughout the UK (see the National HMO Lobby's Briefing Bulletin [What is a HMO?](#))

## Foreword

THE NATIONAL HMO LOBBY is a network of local community associations trying to redress the impact on their communities of concentrations of shared houses or houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). Begun in 2000, the Lobby now comprises some fifty groups in over thirty towns, in all the countries and regions of the UK. Information on the Lobby and its lobbying is available on the website at [www.hmolobby.org.uk](http://www.hmolobby.org.uk).

Over the years, the Lobby has provided support for its members. It has circulated information on HMOs in Briefing Bulletins, and it has enabled debate through its Discussion Documents. And the Lobby of course has lobbied - for recognition of the problem of HMOs, and for national legislation to tackle this, especially in housing and planning - specifically for licensing of HMOs and for planning controls in the UK's Use Classes Orders. In this, we are supported by our elected representatives.

Nationally, last year, many of our MPs joined forces to set up the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Balanced & Sustainable Communities, and in Parliament, members of this Group have raised the issue of HMOs.

Locally, also last year, many of our local councillors joined forces to set up the Councillors Campaign for Balanced Communities. Meanwhile, councils have sent delegations to Westminster, and have adopted motions calling for national action on the issue of HMOs.

In fact, national government has acknowledged that concentrations of HMOs cause problems for communities. Three recent reports have identified different aspects of these problems - CLG Housing Research Summary 228 [Dealing with 'Problem' Private Rented Housing](#) (2006), House of Commons, CLG Committee [Coastal Towns](#) (2007) and CLG, [Evaluating the impact of HMO and Selective Licensing: the baseline before licensing in April 2006](#). (2007).

Local government has recognised the problems caused by concentrations of HMOs in very practical ways. In their planning policies, some have sought to resist concentrations (like Leeds), or have proposed thresholds (like Loughborough) or again have promoted purpose-built developments as an alternative to student HMOs (like Newcastle).

There is after all no question that the major market for HMOs is student demand, or studentification - hence the emphasis of *Balanced Communities & Studentification*

Universities have admitted that there is an issue. In 2006, Universities UK published *Studentification: a guide to opportunities, challenges and practice*. Unfortunately, this guide fudged the real issue, and offered answers only to the superficial effects of studentification.

In 2007, the National Union of Students published *Students in the Community: Working together to achieve harmony*. Unfortunately, this denied the existence of the problem altogether.

*Balanced Communities & Studentification* for the first time publishes the perspective of those at the sharp end, the community. But that is not the only way it is innovative. For the first time, it suggests a workable idea of 'balanced community'. For the first time, it provides a systematic analysis of 'studentification'. And for the first time, it proposes a programme of action which tackles the root cause of the problem (rather than tinkering with its effects). In a gesture of collegiality, *Balanced Communities & Studentification* is launched at the Conference of the Councillors Campaign for Balanced Communities in Nottingham on 13 March 2008.

Dr Richard Tyler, Co-ordinator, National HMO Lobby

## 1 Introduction

**01 Community** *BALANCED COMMUNITIES & STUDENTIFICATION* is essentially about community, its loss and restoration, what it should be, why it goes wrong, how it can be put right. But what is a community, what is meant by the word? A quick search of a language corpus shows that the term ‘community’ is used in numerous contexts, and in many ways. And the reason for this is that it has a long history of positive ‘warmly persuasive’ associations. Consequently, the term is frequently appropriated for polemical purposes, to give a positive gloss to a measure which has nothing to do with community in any meaningful sense. A prime example was the infamous Community Charge - immediately recognised for what it was, and re-christened the Poll Tax. In cases like this, ‘community’ is used simply as a synonym for ‘people’, implying that a random group of people has something in common, when in fact it does not. This is the *meaningless* sense of ‘community’.

**02 Spirit** Any *meaningful* use of the term ‘community’ must go beyond the sense simply of ‘population’. The origin of the word indicates what this is - it derives from the term ‘common’. A *community* then is in fact a group of people with *something in common*. The word implies *many* acting ‘as one’. This commonality is sustained by what social scientists call social capital - which includes things like social networks (simple contacts between people, companionship) and social norms (ways of behaving - like neighbours looking after each others’ children, pets, gardens, taking in parcels, holding keys, keeping the neighbourhood clean and quiet and safe) and social sanctions (penalties for mis-behaviour) - otherwise known as *community spirit*.

**03 Categories** Of course, there are many kinds of communities. And most people belong to several at once. But they tend to fall into three main groups.

There are *original communities*, and what they have in common (looking back) is their origins. The main examples are ethnic communities.

There are those which look around, *local communities* - what they have in common is a concern for the neighbourhood in which they find themselves.

Looking forward, there are *vocational communities*, groups of people with common goals - such as a religious vocation or an occupational vocation (like being a student).

**04 Policy** With the new millennium, the idea of ‘community’ figured large in government policy. A key principle in the Housing Green Paper *Quality & Choice* (DETR, 2000) was ‘Promoting sustainable development that supports thriving, balanced communities.’ When the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister succeeded the DETR in 2002, it adopted the motto *Creating Sustainable Communities*, and in 2006, it was succeeded in turn by the Department for Communities & Local Government. Local authority plans frequently refer to ‘balanced communities’. The idea of the ‘balanced community’ therefore is prominent in national and local policy, frequently combined with ‘sustainable community’. But has government given adequate consideration to the concept of community?

See for instance, Belfast: *Issues Paper on HMOs: ‘3 Balanced Communities’*; Coleraine: *Balanced Communities Review Group*; Durham: *Planning for Housing: ‘8 Provision of Balanced Communities’*; Loughborough: *Student Housing Provision: ‘In search of a balanced community’*; Nottingham: *Building Balanced Communities*.

## ② **Balanced Communities**

**05 Sustainability** ALL LOCAL COMMUNITIES, as communities, want to be sustainable. The Department for Communities & Local Government explains [‘sustainable communities’](#) as ‘places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.’ CLG identifies eight components – sustainable communities are active, inclusive & safe, well run, environmentally sensitive, well designed & built, well connected, thriving, well served, and fair for everyone. But this definition entirely overlooks the obvious fact that what’s necessary for a sustainable community is a resident population willing and able to sustain that community.

**06 Polarisation** Local populations can be disabled in a number of ways, all of which are types of polarisation. Polarisation can mean *opposition* – where the neighbourhood becomes a place of contest between competing factions. Or polarisation can mean *one-sidedness*. Again, this can take a variety of forms – exclusive communities (dominated by gated enclaves of the privileged) or excluded communities (dominated by ghettos of the deprived). Another is domination by *transience*. A transient population lacks the *ability* to be sustainable (community campaigns often take years of concerted action). It also lacks the *will* (clearly, members of the population are only briefly committed to the neighbourhood). Of course, one type of polarisation can easily slide into the other.

**07 Balance** Localities certainly need balanced communities. There is no possibility of a sustainable community without an appropriate balance between settled residents and a transient population. But balance is also needed for social justice. All forms of polarisation are based on exclusion - the voluntary segregation of an exclusive group, or the disadvantaged, excluded involuntarily. And balance is also needed for the common welfare. Every social grouping has its strengths and weaknesses, whether this arises from age or gender or culture. A balance between diverse groups maximises the potential social capital of any local community. But government makes no attempt to define what is meant by ‘a balanced community’. It is nowhere defined in national policies, and rarely in local policies.

The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan *Issues Paper on HMOs* (2005) defined a balanced community as ‘one that is not dominated by one particular household type, size or tenure.’ This would imply a community made up, for instance, of equal shares of the three main housing tenures - owner-occupation, social renting and private renting. But this would be a very odd community, quite at odds with normal experience, where owner-occupation dominates.

**08 Definition** The key problem identified by the members of the Lobby is *demographic imbalance* in their neighbourhoods, which leads to rising problems and declining community, in short, to unsustainability. The imbalance arises from concentrations of HMOs, whose distinctive demographic (typically, young, high-density, transient, and unstructured) destabilises the local community. The members of the Lobby seek to restore *balance* to their communities, in order to restore their *sustainability*. Belfast’s effort shows that *equal* proportions in the mix are not the answer. As an alternative, the Lobby proposes reference to *normal* proportions, that is, the mix or balance which is experienced by most people.

A balanced community is a community which approximates national demographic norms. A number of points must be made.

- First of all, this definition is not *prescriptive*: it is not intended to specify that all communities should match these norms (rather, it provides guidance to those communities who feel that they have become imbalanced).
- Secondly, it is *descriptive*: that is, it is based on the norms as they are, here and now (they were different in the past and will change in the future, they are different in other countries) – the point being that they reflect contemporary experience.
- Thirdly, the reference is to *approximations*, not tight criteria.
- Finally, the definition is *variable* – different norms will be relevant in different circumstances.

**09 Norm** A whole range of norms might be invoked in different situations. The latest [Census](#) provides a variety of statistics, such as the five main age bands of the population – children (up to 15 years) comprise 20%, ‘young adults’ (16-29) comprise 17.5%, adults (30-44 and 45-59) comprise 41.5% together, and older people (60 plus) comprise 21%. The current [Survey of English Housing](#) provides the proportions of different forms of housing, such as – *Housing Tenure*: 70% are owner-occupied, 18% social rented, and 12% private rented (Table 1); *Household Type*: 64% are families, 29% one-person, and 7% HMO (Table 5) [previous year, *Accommodation Type*: 82% are houses, and 17% flats (1% other)]. The Lobby’s concern is with the sustainability of communities – the most relevant *balance* therefore is between household types (since families in general have a stronger commitment to permanence than single people or multiple households [indeed, private rented housing which includes HMOs has an average tenancy of only eighteen months]). Allowing for a degree of deviation from the norm [see para 10 below] the Lobby’s particular criteria for a *balanced community* are (a) *not less than 60% families*, (b) *not more than 33% one-person households*, and (c) *not more than 10% HMOs*. (It is important to note that household proportions and population proportions are not the same, as households vary in size. One-person households are single of course, while the average family household comprises about two-and-a-half persons, and the average HMO at least five persons. On this basis, the normal population balance is 72% in families, 12% single people and 15% in HMOs.)

**10 Approximation** What degree of deviation from the norm remains acceptable? A standard deviation could be adopted (10%, 20%, 25%, 33%, 50%). But a low figure is clearly inappropriate if the norm is low (for instance, a 10% deviation from a 7% norm allows for a range of 6-8% only) – while a high figure is equally inappropriate for a high norm (a 50% deviation from 66% allows for a range from 33-99%!). The answer evidently is a variable deviation – that is, a deviation which varies from low for a high norm, rising to a high deviation for a low norm. (Thus, the Lobby’s criteria in para 09 above are based on a 10% deviation for family households [norm 66%], a 20% deviation for single persons [norm 28%] and a 50% deviation for HMOs [norm 7%]. As a rule of thumb, the deviation [Y] from a norm [X] can be calculated as  $Y = (100 - X) \div 2$ .)

**11 Application** How large should the area covered be? There is a range of possibilities. (a) *Street* or block (which is the basis for [Glasgow](#)’s policy on HMOs – not more than 5% per street generally, or 10% in certain areas). (b) *Neighbourhood*, comprising several streets (the basis for [Loughborough](#)’s ‘Threshold Approach’ to student housing – using Small Output Areas from the Census, a neighbourhood is understood as the Home Output Area plus all other Small Output Areas sharing a boundary with that area). (c) *Community*, comprising several neighbourhoods (Leeds City Council defines Community Areas for the purpose of allocating Section 106 funds – they correspond to areas recognised as communities by local residents [for a variation, based on Output Areas, see R Unsworth & J Stillwell, *Twenty-First Century Leeds*, University of Leeds, 2004, pp18-20]).

**12 Tipping Point** The tipping-point is the threshold at which a deviation departs so far from the norm that a community tips from balance to un-balance. With regard to HMOs, the tipping-point can be expressed in terms both of population (20%) and of properties (10%).

(1) The HMO tipping-point occurs *when HMO occupants exceed 20% of the population*. Normally, HMO occupants account for about 15% of the population – the tipping-point represents a 33% deviation. It also significantly exceeds the whole of the ‘young adult’ band of the population (16-29 year-olds are 17.5%). (Any community begins to seem unbalanced when any of the five main age-bands exceeds one-in-five of the population.)

(2) The HMO tipping-point also occurs *when HMOs exceed 10% of the properties*. Normally, HMOs account for 7% of households – the tipping-point represents a 50% deviation. At the same time, given the comparatively large numbers in HMO households, if HMOs are 10% of households, then their occupants account for about 20% of the whole population (depending on the local balance of families and one-person households).

The most common cause of a tipping-point for HMOs is demand by students for shared houses - or studentification.

### ③ Studentification

**13 Concept** STUDENTIFICATION is a term coined (by Darren Smith in 2002) to identify the process and the product of concentrated student settlement in university towns in the UK. It may be defined as **the substitution of a local community by a student community**. Here, ♦ ‘substitute’ means displacement of one community, and replacement by another, ♦ ‘community’ means a group of people with a common ground and continuity through time (para 02), ♦ ‘local community’ means one whose ground is their locality, and ♦ ‘student community’ means one with a vocational ground (para 03).

**14 Structural problems** Studentification comprises different sorts of problem. The principal, *structural problem* is demographic: studentification entails demographic imbalance. Until the last decade, high concentrations of students were unusual. But now, in the new millennium, it is common in university towns for a core of several (or many) streets to be dominated by a student population, with three particular characteristics – this population is transient (moving annually, leaving after three years), it is seasonal (resident for two-thirds of the year) and it is young (late teens, early twenties). The demographic pattern varies: Leeds, for instance, is a large city, with a large student population concentrated in a very compact area (though proportionately small in the city as a whole) [the redbrick model]; Loughborough by contrast is a small town with a proportionately very high student population [the smalltown model].

**15 Functional problems** The secondary, *functional problems* (effects) arise directly and indirectly from the primary problem, the cause. At least fifteen ‘symptoms of studentification’ may be identified (para 20). On the one hand, these include a *rise* in a range of problems, social, environmental, economic (especially crime, squalor and a resort economy). On the other hand, secondary problems consist of *decline* of local social capital (or community spirit).

**16 Experiential problems** Studentification is also an *experience*, which produces a sense of alienation among residents. This feeling arises from a number of factors. The structural problems (the demographic imbalance) lead to a sense of oppression in public places (the crowding), and by contrast a sense of isolation at home (the loss of networks). The functional problems lead to fear of crime, to a revulsion from the squalor of the environment, and a sense of rejection by the resort economy. Underlying these, residents feel anger at the self-interest of universities & landlords, and despair at their neglect by government.

**17 Cause** Many parties bear responsibility for the development of studentification.

- *National government* has expanded HE, but has failed to provide the resources and powers necessary to manage the accommodation implications.
- *Universities* have left the accommodation of their students to an unregulated market.
- *Students* have usually congregated in what are perceived to be ‘student areas’.
- *Landlords* and their agents have exploited the demand for student housing.
- *Local government* has neglected the management of local housing developments.
- *Communities* have sometimes panicked and fled areas perceived as being invaded.

**18 Course** Typical stages may be identified in the process of studentification.

(1) The *Ivory Tower* stage: the university establishes a campus to accommodate its core business (classrooms, libs, labs, offices, etc)

(2) The *Cloister* stage: the university provides purpose-built accommodation for non-local students, usually close to the Ivory Tower, and cloistered from the host community.

(3) The *Settlement* stage: student overspill from the Cloister settles in private accommodation in the neighbouring host community.

(4) The *Studentification* stage: expansion of student numbers leads to further pressure from, and domination by, students of the areas already settled around the Cloisters: this is the moment of *studentification*. If the proportion remains at (or below) one in five, it is readily accommodated (and indeed has been for many years in many university towns). But one-in-five is the ‘tipping-point’ (para 12). When it exceeds this proportion, stresses appear. When students number *one in four*, this impacts on the character of the area, and challenges social cohesion. If students number *one in three*, the disproportion is marked, the student community achieves autonomy and becomes the dominant social group (being larger than any other segment), and cohesion is lost. In some cases, imbalance may increase, and students equal (or even outnumber) the rest of the population combined.

(5) The *Destudentification* stage: in the aftermath of *studentification* (already experienced by some communities), evacuation of the neighbourhood (to new ‘Cloisters’ or purpose-built housing) leads to loss of demand, and collapse of the local housing market.

**19 Consequence** Studentification includes a number of *effects* of demographic imbalance (para 20). In particular, it also generates difficult relationships between the two communities at the sharp end – local residents and students themselves. And different perspectives on those relationships have developed.

Residents adopt a range of stances.

- *Militants*: some residents (especially local youth) develop strong antipathy to students.
- *Passivists*: the majority of residents maintain a low profile, and respond to circumstances; eventually, pushed by declining amenity, and pulled by rising property prices, many emigrate.
- *Idealists*: some residents empathise with, support and defend students.
- *Realists*: some resident activists attempt to analyse *studentification* as a problem, and to address its causes.

Students also manifest a range of stances (in parallel with residents).

- *Colonists*: some students assert territorial claims to ‘student areas’.
- *Camp-followers*: the majority of students follow their predecessors into ‘student areas’, and pursue their own interests, oblivious of their circumstances.
- *Idealists*: some students identify with the local community, and try ‘to put something back’.
- *Realists*: some students recognise *studentification* as a problem.

The Groundhog Effect: relations between residents and students are complicated by the range of different reactions (and their inter-relations). But on-going dialogue is made almost impossible by the ‘groundhog effect’ of *studentification*. ● As temporary residents, students are unaware of the *past* of an area, and have no knowledge that it was ever otherwise. ● Similarly, as temporary residents without a *future* in the area, many students are unable to engage in long-term strategies. ● Relations between residents and students therefore remain in an eternal *present*, and have to be renewed every year, with each new cohort of students.

Despite the aspirations of the Idealists on both sides, residents and students remain distinct communities. The only possible relation between Colonists and Militants is confrontation (like the Belfast Incident of 23 Nov 2004). Camp-followers and Passivists remain largely oblivious of each other. But even Idealists follow parallel paths: in Leeds 6, for instance, there are many local community associations addressing neighbourhood issues (Headingley Network, Far Headingley Village Society, South Headingley Community Association, etc, etc); but nevertheless, students (in good faith) have independently established the ‘LS6 Project’ to do exactly the same. A Realist approach is the only viable option.

## 4 Problems

**20 Symptoms of Studentification** FIFTEEN SYMPTOMS may be identified. They arise directly and indirectly from the primary problem of demographic imbalance. On the one hand, they include a *rise* in a range of problems (especially crime, squalor and a resort economy): some problems are social, some problems are environmental, and some are economic; affecting all these are traffic problems, and overwhelming pressure on public services. On the other hand, secondary problems include *decline* of local social capital (or community spirit), and loss of services.

### INCREASE OF PROBLEMS

#### *Social Problems*

**(1) Anti-Social Behaviour:** endemic low-level ASB, including noise nuisance, minor vandalism, public drunkenness, evacuation.

**(2) Crime:** high rates, especially burglary.

**(3) Insurance:** owners pay top premiums for house, contents, vehicle insurance.

#### *Environmental Problems*

**(4) Squalor:** surrounded by litter, rubbish, flytipping.

**(5) Dereliction:** neglect of houses and gardens, over-development of houses and gardens.

**(6) Street Blight:** letting boards, flyposting, security grilles.

#### *Economic Problems*

**(7) Distorted Retail:** orientation towards a very specific market, manifest in the particular range of lines in shops, and the range of retail outlets (especially increased numbers of pubs, take-aways and letting agencies).

**(8) Fluctuating Market:** from high demand (term-time) to low demand (in vacations).

**(9) Casualised Employment:** local employment becomes increasingly seasonal (term) and part-time (evening).

#### *Generic Problems*

**(10) Carparking:** obstructs pavements for pedestrians, and access by emergency vehicles, cleansing, buses, and residents.

**(11) Services Overwhelmed:** not only disproportionate demands on public services like cleansing and policing, housing and planning, but also indirectly the drain of resources away from provision in other areas [and neither students nor landlords pay Council Tax or Business Tax].

### DECLINE OF COMMUNITY

**(12) Decimation:** student demand gives rise to high property prices and low amenity, encouraging emigration and making immigration almost impossible, with the result that there are fewer elders (retaining past memories), fewer adults (present activists) and fewer children (the community's future).

**(13) Disruption:** most owners and occupiers are absentees (hence disengaged), the young and the old especially are isolated (losing their peers), and the neighbourhood loses its social capital or 'community spirit' (its social networks, social norms and social sanctions).

**(14) Distress:** deep and rapid changes are felt acutely: the population imbalance itself is stressful (public oppression, private isolation), the declining amenity is alienating (fear of crime, revulsion from squalor, exclusion from the economy), and residents feel anger and despair at their disempowerment.

**(15) Services Underwhelmed:** school closures as families depart (ironically, reducing education).

## 5 Solution

**21 Ten Point Plan** IS THERE A SOLUTION? In many communities, the damage has been done, and there will be no return to the previous balance. Also, there is no single solution - numerous measures are necessary. Dealing with the problems of polarisation, and restoring sustainability, requires concerted action. No one policy will resolve polarisation, nor will one party. All concerned must act together, council and community, universities and students, and landlords. Since polarisation in general, and **studentification** especially, involve a particular pattern of land-use, *planning* measures are crucial. At the same time, the actual land use is residential, so *housing* measures have a vital bearing. Finally, if cumulative action is necessary, it needs to be co-ordinated – so *management* measures are needed. In all, ten key actions need to be taken. (NB the measures considered here could be applied to any form of polarisation caused by high turnover.)

**22 First, Accommodation Audit** The first requirement is to establish the breadth and depth of the problem – where is the transient population located, and to what degree of penetration? How does it change, year by year? The local university is the key actor here, as it knows where its students live (of course, collective not individual data on distribution is what is needed). Students of course provide their university with this information. If necessary, the council and the community may need to lobby the university to provide it.

The University of Leeds provides annual data on the distribution throughout the city of its students.

Leeds and Nottingham have established a Shared Housing Group and a Student Strategy Leadership Group respectively, comprising representatives of all local stakeholders.

**23 Second, Co-ordination** In order to work together, stakeholders need some form of forum. All are responsible for actively engaging, but it is up to the local authority to set up such a forum.

**24 Third, Action Plan** Each stakeholder will need its own strategy (see Section 6). But these will be ineffective without coordination. Again, the local authority needs to take the initiative, but other stakeholders must support the council.

Leeds and Nottingham have both adopted Student Housing Action Plans.

The National HMO Lobby has produced a *Notification Form* for licensable HMOs. See also [‘What is a HMO?’](#)

**25 Fourth, Mandatory HMO Licensing** Through the Housing Act 2004, the government has introduced licensing of HMOs in England & Wales. With regard to polarisation, licensing’s most useful role is in identifying the location of HMOs, hence where the transient population is located. By law, local authorities now have to issue licences, and the landlords have to apply for them. (HEIs are also required to adopt codes of practice for their properties.) Communities and students have a shared interest in supporting licensing – for instance, by reporting licensable HMOs to the council. (In Scotland, all HMOs are already subject to licensing. In Northern Ireland, all are in selected areas, and very large HMOs elsewhere.)

**26 Fifth, Additional HMO Licensing** Mandatory licensing applies only to larger HMOs. But the Housing Act provides also for the licensing of all additional HMOs in designated areas, in England & Wales. Additional HMO licensing is essential, to take full advantage of licensing (and to remove an escape route for any landlords trying to avoid mandatory licensing). The local authority has to apply to government to introduce additional licensing. Responsible members of the private rented sector (PRS) can support the council. The community, students and universities have a shared interest in lobbying the authority to take action. And the government should support the authority’s application.

Southampton is committed to applying for additional HMO licensing throughout the city.

[Headingley Development Trust](#) in Leeds is reviving local amenity, and planning a Community Land Trust to intervene in the local housing market.

**27 Sixth, Restoration of Balance** A destabilised neighbourhood will not easily re-balance itself. **Studentification** makes this very difficult. In due course, ‘de-studentification’ may provide opportunities. Only the resident population itself can restore sustainability to a community. Above all, it needs commitment, in order to do so. But all stakeholders can lobby for, and provide support to, the re-introduction of long-term residents, especially families (whether partners only, or partners with dependants, or single people with dependants), especially within policy frameworks set by local and national government.

**28 Seventh, Areas of Restraint** Local planning authorities around the country are adopting a range of [local HMO plans](#) to deal with the problems of concentrations of HMOs or student accommodation (the new planning regime of [Local Development Frameworks](#) gives opportunities to do this). One of these plans is the idea of an ‘Area of Restraint’, in order to resist further development where there are already high concentrations. The council is of course the lead actor here. Community associations can lobby for some form of restraint, while universities, students and the PRS can offer their support. National government too, through the Planning Inspectorate, can support such policy initiatives.

The best-known such policy is Leeds [ASHORE](#) (Area of Student Housing Restraint), which has been supported by Planning Inspectors, though redesignated an ‘Area of Housing Mix’.

[Glasgow](#) has set ceilings for the proportion of HMOs in a neighbourhood. [Loughborough](#) is adopting a series of thresholds which will govern planning permission.

**29 Eighth, Threshold Policy** Another measure that has been proposed by local councils is the idea of some sort of threshold, beyond which further development of HMOs or student accommodation will be resisted. This is meant to prevent concentrations developing in the first place. Again, the council takes the lead. Universities, students and the PRS can support the council by encouraging the dispersal of student accommodation. The community can lobby for both. And the Planning Inspectorate can support such a policy initiative.

**30 Ninth, Purpose Built Development** Some councils also support the development of purpose-built housing for students. Such housing takes the pressure off conversion of family homes into HMOs (and in a time of housing shortage, this is far better than the conversion of family homes into seasonally-occupied second homes). At the same time, the siting of purpose-built development has to be carefully handled, so that it does not in fact increase polarisation. Universities, student unions and developers can take initiatives, independently or together. The council can suggest locations, and communities can lobby for this sort of development. The Planning Inspectorate can be supportive of developments endorsed locally.

There are many joint HEI/PRS ventures of this sort. Of particular interest was NUS’s plan for purpose-built co-operative student housing. [Newcastle](#) has published guidance on purpose-built sites.

The National HMO Lobby has been [lobbying](#) for years. In Northern Ireland, the Dept of the Environment has in fact changed its own Use Classes Order. On 15 January, Planning Minister Iain Wright reported to Parliament that the Use Classes Order in England & Wales in relation to HMOs was to be subject to consultation.

**31 Tenth, Use Classes Order** Many council ideas are hamstrung by national planning legislation. They can control only developments which need planning permission. Restraint and threshold policies in particular are undermined by the limitations of the current Use Classes Order – which allows family homes to be converted to HMOs without planning permission. A change of the Use Classes Order (redefining HMOs, and subjecting them to planning permission) would make an enormous difference to the power of local councils. Here, it is up to government to take action – and all local stakeholders should lobby the government on this issue.

## 6 Conclusion

**32 Stakeholders** WHAT THEN CAN WE DO? Five local stakeholders are involved in studentification, and one national. The local stakeholders include both sides of Higher Education, the universities and their students, they include both local councils and the communities they represent, and they include the private rented sector (PRS), which dominates studentified housing. The national stakeholder is of course the government. All stakeholders supporting the Ten Point Plan need to adopt a strategy towards the polarisation which arises from concentrations of student housing.

**33 Community Associations (CAs)** The local community has the strongest motive to adopt a strategy, as its very survival depends on resisting polarisation – yet at the same time, it is the weakest of the stakeholders. The community's first job therefore is to build its capacity – organisation is essential (and in a large town, where more than one community association may be involved, co-ordinated action is invaluable - Leeds HMO Lobby and the Nottingham Action Group are examples of umbrella community organisations.). The community may look for outside help – it may even consider setting up a local Development Trust. Otherwise, the local community depends on lobbying – for local housing and planning policies especially – and community associations can support their council's initiatives (especially the introduction of a local Student Housing Strategy). It is important therefore to adopt a clear guiding strategy.

**35 Student Unions (SUs)** Regrettably, NUS remains in denial over the issue of studentification, though it is students who are at its sharp end (see NUS, *Students in the Community: Working together to achieve harmony*; unfortunately, despite its subtitle, this libels the Lobby). This is not always the case however with local student unions (and not at all with many individual students). Student unions can support housing and planning initiatives by their local councils, and there are some issues where they share an interest with the local community (like additional HMO licensing). Certainly, they too have an interest and an obligation in preparing a strategy for the accommodation of their members.

**34 Local Authorities (LAs)** The council is the local ringmaster. It has a responsibility to its communities (not to mention a self-interest) to maintain their sustainability. It also has many powers and resources (though not as many as it needs). So, the local council has to take the initiative – in setting up a management structure, in licensing HMOs, and in introducing planning policies. It can support initiatives by other local stakeholders, and it can lobby local universities and national government for supportive action. All councils have a housing strategy – this should include a specific *Student Housing Strategy*, so that developments take place to benefit both students and communities.

**36 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)** For too long, universities kept aloof from their effect on their host communities (and their government department, the DIUS, still does). But their organisation, Universities UK, has now acknowledged the problems, in their report *Studentification: a guide to opportunities, challenges and practices* (2006): “it is incontrovertible that the negative effects of studentification are evident in several towns and cities across the UK” (para 3.12). Universities can of course provide accommodation for their students, and indeed most do – though rarely for more than a minority. So universities should also support initiatives taken by their local councils to deal with the problems raised by their students living in the private rented sector – ‘in the community’. Indeed, since it is universities which recruit students, they have an obligation to develop a strategy for housing them (see for instance, Leeds University's [Housing Strategy](#)).

**37 Private Rented Sector (PRS)** It is both practically and logically difficult for the PRS to develop a strategy. Logically, the PRS is the main agent in developing **studentification**, and it has the least interest in doing anything about it (in fact, many landlords vigorously oppose local housing and planning strategies). At the same time, practically, the PRS is the least co-ordinated stakeholder – it is made up not only of landlords in competition with each other, but also increasingly with the developers of large-scale purpose-built housing (it also includes letting and managing agents). Nevertheless, responsible landlords and developers can act on and support local council strategies, such as local accreditation and licensing schemes. (A unique organisation grounded in the PRS is [Unipol](#), the student housing charity based in Leeds, which has now organised several national conferences on the issue of studentification.)

**38 Her Majesty's Government (HMG)** The ultimate responsibility for the mess of **studentification** however lies with the government, and its incoherent policy development. On the one hand, the government has (laudably) promoted access to higher education – but without a moment's thought to its housing implications, still less to the local effects these will have. On the other hand, national government has steadfastly resisted giving local government the powers it needs to pick up the pieces. Government has turned a deaf ear to lobbying over **studentification**, and a blind eye to its consequences. (Indeed, ODPM commissioned Universities UK's *Studentification* Guide – but specifically excluded any attention to changes in legislation from its terms of reference.) Stakeholders around the country badly need a coherent strategy for student accommodation from the government.

**39 Restoration** Since its inception, the National HMO Lobby has lobbied for legislation, both housing and planning, to enable regulation of HMOs. All parts of the UK now have some form of licensing. Northern Ireland has shown the way with planning legislation. The Lobby trusts that the other national authorities will follow suit. With adequate powers, local authorities throughout the UK will be able to address the problem of concentrations of HMOs - whether student HMOs in university towns, or claimant HMOs in seaside towns, or migrant worker HMOs in market towns. Not only may local communities be saved from further erosion - but maybe also, they can begin to see a restoration of their balance and cohesion, and hence their sustainability.

## **References**

Richard **Tyler**, 'Comprehending Community' (pp21-28), in S Herbrechter & M Higgins, eds, *Returning (to) Communities: Theory, Culture and Political Practice of the Communal*, Rodopi, Amsterdam & New York, 2006

Darren **Smith**, 'Patterns and processes of studentification in Leeds', *Regional Review* 12:1 (2002) pp14-16.  
**Universities UK**, [Studentification: a guide to opportunities, challenges and practice](#) UUK, London, January 2006  
**National Union of Students**, [Students in the Community: Working together to achieve harmony](#), NUS, London, 11 June 2007

National HMO Lobby, [What is a HMO?](#)

National HMO Lobby, [Local HMO Plans](#)

### **WEBSITES**

**Local** Some members of the National HMO Lobby:

[Broomhill Action & Neighbourhood Group](#) Sheffield

[De Havilland Resident's Association](#) Hatfield

[Egham Residents Association](#) Surrey

[Highfield Residents Association](#) Southampton

[Hillhead Community Council](#) Glasgow

[Jesmond Residents Association](#) Newcastle-upon-Tyne

[Leeds HMO Lobby](#) Leeds

[Nottingham Action Group](#) Nottingham

[Redland & Cotham Amenities Society](#) Bristol

[Spon End & Chapelfields Community Forum](#) Coventry

[Talbot Village Residents Association](#) Poole

[Winton Community Forum](#) Bournemouth

### **National**

[National HMO Lobby](#) an association of community groups concerned to ameliorate the impact of concentrations of HMOs on their communities

[National HMO Network](#) aims to promote a wider understanding of all aspects of HMOs

### **International**

[Town Gown World](#) on town and gown planning from around the world

### **Other Organisations**

[Department for Communities & Local Government](#) responsible for housing and planning in England & Wales

[The Scottish Government](#) responsible for housing & planning in Scotland

[Northern Ireland Executive](#) responsible for housing & planning in Northern Ireland

[Local Government Association](#) representing local authorities

[Universities UK](#) representing Higher Education Institutions

[National Union of Students](#) representing students

[Landlords UK](#) providing links to landlord associations

**Balanced Communities and Studentification**



**National HMO Lobby**  
Cardigan Centre, 145-147 Cardigan Road, Leeds LS6 1LJ  
**2008**