



Glasgow City Council

**Economy, Housing, Transport and
Regeneration City Policy Committee**

**Report by George Gillespie, Executive Director of
Neighbourhoods, Regeneration and Sustainability**

Contact: Sarah Shaw Ext: 76066

Item 5

3rd June 2025

**City Development Plan - Development of Policy on Housing (Student
Accommodation)**

Purpose of Report:

To provide an update on Student Accommodation development in the City.

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to consider the update for information.

Ward No(s):

Citywide: ✓

Local member(s) advised: Yes ☐ No ☒ consulted: Yes ☐ No ☒

1 Background

- 1.1. Committee will be aware that on the 3 April 2025 the Council [received confirmation](#) that the Scottish Government's appointed Reporter was satisfied that the Council's [evidence report](#) contains sufficient information to enable the planning authority to prepare its local development plan.
- 1.2. This report provides a summary of student accommodation in Glasgow at January 2025 as well as highlighting the main findings of the evidence report, as it relates to student accommodation provision in Glasgow. The report also provides a brief update on the progress of the Student Accommodation Working Group and the recent scale of interest and recent progress through the planning process of purpose-built student accommodation proposals.

2 Student Accommodation in Glasgow

- 2.1. There were 87,215 students enrolled in the 5 Glasgow institutions at 2023/24 according to [data published recently by HESA](#). Their data also shows that student numbers in Glasgow peaked in 2021/22 at 92,430 but have since reduced to 90,035 in 2022/23 and further again to 87,215 in 2023/24. This is still around 10,000 more than were enrolled prior to the pandemic in 2019/20 (77,935). Figures for 2024/25 have not been published yet.
- 2.2. In January 2025 the Council published an [audit of managed Student Accommodation](#). 72 managed sites hosting a combined total of **20,218 beds in student accommodation in Glasgow** were identified. It confirmed that around half of the existing supply is located in the city centre (10,390 beds).
- 2.3. A development pipeline, of 16,280 further beds, was identified based on planning consents and pending planning applications. The audit confirmed that around 64% of proposed beds are for city centre locations.
- 2.4. The City Development Plan (2017) policy for student accommodation (Policy CDP10) supported new development where it would be clustered around an existing University campus or close to public transport nodes that had access to the campus. During the first three years of the plan (to 2021) this decision-making framework delivered 4,425 additional beds.
- 2.5. Supplementary guidance was then subsequently approved in 2021 which identified two areas (at Townhead/Cowcaddens and Yorkhill/Partick) where further purpose-built student accommodation would be resisted. The audit at January 2025 mentioned above confirmed that around half of the existing managed student accommodation capacity was located in these areas of over-concentration (9,708) while as expected almost none of the pipeline was (111 beds from 16,323 beds proposed).
- 2.6. The supplementary guidance also introduced other requirements such as integrating elements of mainstream housing into proposals in certain circumstances such as for larger sites. In the period from March 2020 to January 2025 (almost 5 years) the new policy approach covers a period

where 5,401 beds were approved and 1,256 additional student beds were delivered.

- 2.7. The evidence report notes that the [UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence September 2024](#) (CACHE) report for the Scottish Cross-Party Group on Housing calculated that, for the 2022/23 academic year, there was a shortfall of 6,093 beds to accommodate the 90,030 students at Glasgow universities.
- 2.8. The evidence report concludes that the complexity of the student accommodation market in Glasgow is not reflected in the NPF4 policies and a bespoke policy approach is likely to continue to be required for Glasgow. It indicates that as well as recognising the current shortfall identified by CACHE, the policy should also reflect on the Council's commitment to double the population of the city centre (a commitment made after the 2017 City Development Plan had been prepared) as well as supporting the Universities' aspirations for growth in student numbers.
- 2.9. The evidence report also reports that development of future policy should reflect on student concerns about affordability of student accommodation, about ensuring options for students in terms of studio and cluster flats; and it should recognise a clear student preference for on-campus accommodation. A review of the efficacy and outcomes of the areas of over-concentration policy in terms of its overall impact on deliverability of purpose-built student accommodation as well as considering how to present a Glasgow-approach to housing in multiple occupation will be required as a new development plan is prepared.
- 2.10. Additional evidence on the housing needs of students is contained in the [background report on housing](#) (pages 105 to 127) which accompanied the evidence report.
- 2.11. Engagement with students has been ongoing as part of evidence gathering and will continue as part of preparation of the Proposed Plan. The Evidence Report (see 1.1 and 2.10) included engagement with students at the University of Glasgow and University of Strathclyde, this is also noted in the [Report of Engagement](#). As such paragraph 2.9 notes the concerns of students. The Student Accommodation Working Group (noted below) also reflects the views of students, the Universities have been considering the needs of their various cohorts of students themselves and have been feeding this into the considerations of working group.

3 Student Accommodation Working Group update

- 3.1. In March 2023, a Student Accommodation steering group was established to address the recommendations of an [earlier CACHE report](#) on purpose-built student accommodation and student housing in Scotland. It established a working group in June 2023.

- 3.2. The working group constituted representatives from Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow School of Art, University of Glasgow, and University of Strathclyde, as well as Glasgow City Council representatives from the Housing and Planning Services and has included a developer and market analysis company that specialises in student accommodation.
- 3.3. The working group has met a number of times through 2023 and fed into the evidence report. More recent meetings have been held on 26 February and 14 May 2025 when data, international demand and affordability were discussed.

4 Development Management Issues

- 4.1. The Student Accommodation Supplementary Guidance approved in 2021 continues to form the basis for assessing planning applications for student accommodation (PBSA).
- 4.2. A key aim of the guidance is to prevent an overconcentration of PBSA within a local area to ensure the level does not harm the overall sustainability of the community. The general increase in applications granted, under consideration and in the pipeline makes the assessment against the locational guidance criteria important, particularly in the city centre where there continues to be a high volume of cases. Over time the assessment methodology has evolved and officers have been able to apply more nuanced population data to allow more reliable analysis of the potential for an over-concentration of PBSA population. However, it must also be emphasized that the proportion of local population is just one of the criteria to be applied in considering cases, so whilst the comparison of student beds to mainstream population in a locality provides important baseline data, it must be considered in the wider context analysis of population density, character and range of other uses and the nature of the proposal itself.
- 4.3. Along with the locational assessment, the level of need for student accommodation is significantly influenced by the volume of cases going through the planning process. The guidance expects applicants to demonstrate that there is demand for accommodation based upon a variety of evidence points, with a view to preventing an oversupply of PBSA. This is made more challenging as levels of demand are becoming difficult to predict because of the range of market, operational and geo-political factors that are influencing overall student numbers. In light of this, the Planning service is taking account of several factors in undertaking the overall Need assessment. Firstly, while a range of permissions have been granted, the number of developments being implemented is clearly lower. The slower transition to implementation of permissions illustrates a market tolerance and appetite to develop, along with the influence of funding and other factors. Experience is clear that many planning permissions granted (not just PBSA), particularly in the city centre, do not come to fruition for a range of reasons. Therefore a more balanced approach towards overall demand is being taken.

- 4.4 Consideration of applications also includes an embedded safety net whereby all applications will have demonstrated the ability to be repurposed without significant alterations to superstructure. This allows for future resilience should demand for PBSA reduce.
- 4.5 In addition to these issues around Need and concentration of PBSA some other factors have emerged including the promotion of affordable PBSA opportunities. The Planning guidance does not currently set a requirement for affordable provision, although it does state that proposals offering affordable options will be encouraged. This is something that is regularly relayed to applicants as the clear evidence over time, and as reinforced in the CPD2 Evidence Report, shows that affordability is a significant issue for future PBSA residents. In addition to affordability, weight is being given to cases where there is an opportunity to repurpose existing buildings which contribute towards a positive response on embodied carbon. Likewise, a more tolerant approach is being applied where a proposal presents an opportunity to repurpose and retain a listed building.
- 4.6 Over time the appliance of the guidance is affording sufficient flexibility to respond to these different factors as they emerge. As a result the guidance is considered to provide a robust framework for assessing proposals in a way that accommodates the range of market dynamics influencing wider trends in PBSA until it will be reviewed in the new City Development Plan.

5 Next Steps

- 5.1 As development proposals work their way through the pipeline the planning service is monitoring the level of concentration in certain areas and continues to assess the impact on the locality of PBSA. Further efforts are ongoing through the City Centre Strategy to attract local providers of services such as GP facilities, to serve the increased residential population of the City Centre (including students). Work to monitor supply and demand continues with the universities and other PBSA providers and will feed into forthcoming planning policy in the City Development Plan and other Council strategies.

6 Policy and Resource Implications

Resource Implications:

<i>Financial:</i>	There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.
<i>Legal:</i>	There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.
<i>Personnel:</i>	There are no direct personnel implications arising from the report.

Procurement:

There are no direct procurement implications arising from the report.

Council Strategic Plan:

The development of a purpose-built student accommodation policy has the potential to support the following Grand Challenges and Missions:

Grand Challenge 2, Mission 2: Support the growth of an innovative, resilient and net zero carbon economy by implementing the City Centre Recovery Plan and City Centre Strategy which...encourages positive strategic development of sites to deliver place-making, sympathetic development, and improved public realm.

Grand Challenge 3, Mission 2: Become a Net Zero Carbon City by 2030 by developing and reviewing planning policy to deal with development models such as... purpose-built student accommodation in order to address issues of affordability... with a view to ensuring standards and supporting the maintenance of balanced communities with a variety of tenures.

Grand Challenge 4, Mission 1: Create safe, clean and thriving neighbourhoods by delivering a new City Development Plan with attention to sustainability, inclusivity, accessibility, biodiversity, and climate resilience; and working across the council to address back court waste issues in tenemental properties including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

Grand Challenge 4, Mission 2: Run an open, well governed council in partnership with all our communities by recognizing the value of youth work when creating council policies and... building relationships of trust with young people over the long term...creating conditions and opportunities for young people to develop and thrive.

Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:

Does the proposal support the Council's

The report is for information only.

*Equality Outcomes
2021-25?*

What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?

Delivery of a future policy which supports affordable, well-designed student accommodation that allows equitable access for all and which tackles social isolation and loneliness has the potential to positively contribute.

Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socioeconomic disadvantage.

The report is for information only.

Climate Impacts:

Does the proposal support any Climate Plan actions? Please specify:

The report is for information only.

What are the potential climate impacts as a result of this proposal?

Delivery of a future policy which supports well-designed student accommodation in sustainable locations close to existing University campuses has the potential to positively contribute to climate action.

Will the proposal contribute to Glasgow's net zero carbon target?

The report is for information only.

Privacy and Data Protection Impacts:

No privacy or data protection impact identified.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 The Committee is asked to consider the update for information.