

Inspector's follow up questions – October 2018

Q4. Student Accommodation

Planning Practice Guidance in relation to Housing Needs and Economic Needs Assessment (2015) para 2a-021-20160401 advises that local planning authorities should plan for sufficient student accommodation whether it consists of communal halls of residence or self-contained dwellings, and whether or not it is on campus. The Wycombe District Council Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2013) Report of Findings (HM4) indicates the presence of the Buckinghamshire New University is a potential driver for change in the High Wycombe housing market area. Given this, could the Council explain: what the existing and future student population in the District will be over the plan period; the impact this population will have on the housing market of High Wycombe; and how any change will be met?

Student Accommodation

Summary

- 1.1 Student numbers at Bucks New University in High Wycombe have fallen by nearly 7% between 2005/6 and 2015/2016. Recent trends in student numbers are factored into the demographic projections in the HEDNA and hence are factored into the assessment of the OAN. We do not see that demand for student housing is putting any additional pressure onto the local housing market.
- 1.2 The University currently has permission for 258 rooms in Halls of Residence that are not being taken up. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that student demand is currently being met, and that there is a reasonable prospect of future demand being met. Should this change there is flexibility within the Plan policy to deal with this.

Needs Assessment

- 1.3 PPG was updated in March 2015 to include specific reference to identifying the needs of students:

Local planning authorities should plan for sufficient student accommodation whether it consists of communal halls of residence or self-contained dwellings, and whether or not it is on campus. Student housing provided by private landlords is often a lower-cost form of housing. Encouraging more dedicated student accommodation may provide low cost housing that takes pressure off the private rented sector and increases the overall housing stock. Plan makers are encouraged to consider options which would support both the needs of the student population as well as local residents before imposing caps or restrictions on students living outside of university-provided accommodation. Plan makers should engage with universities and other higher educational establishments to better understand their student accommodation requirements.

Planning Practice Guidance March 2015 Update, paragraph 21

- 1.4 Wycombe District contains the majority of students who attend Bucks New University. Whilst the anticipated change in student numbers is not specifically addressed in the HEDNA, in establishing the OAN for Wycombe, students were included in the trend-based analysis; therefore, the needs of student households are counted as part of the overall OAN.

- 1.5 The Council contacted Bucks New University to ascertain the change in student numbers within the District for a period of time consistent with the baseline demographic work in the HEDNA. In 2005/06 there were 8,665 students from Bucks New University who studied in Wycombe District. By 2015/16 this number had fallen to 8,067. The University have not supplied any forecasts of student numbers for the plan period but trend analysis concludes a small drop in student numbers each year in Wycombe District of around 60 per annum. However, some students attending Bucks New University will be from families resident in Wycombe District, so the impact of the drop in student numbers on the migration statistics for Wycombe District is minimal.
- 1.6 Since the trend analysis incorporates the change in student numbers, this change is therefore factored into the OAN. As a result the OAN provides an up to date view of the housing market. The reality is that reducing student numbers means that this element of need is not putting additional pressure on the housing market and indeed may free up a small element of accommodation to meet other elements of need – accommodation that will already been factored into the HEDNA OAN.

Supply

- 1.7 Student rooms delivered in the period 2013 – 2018 through changes of use or extensions totalled 110. In 2007 the University was granted permission for a total of 672 rooms in three blocks in a central location in High Wycombe. Two of these blocks have been completed and are in use; the third is still not started and, if constructed, would provide a further 258 rooms. The University have not promoted or sought new sites to be made available for student accommodation through this Local Plan process and the fact that over a third of the current permission has not been taken up is potentially a reflection of the reducing demand for student places.
- 1.8 Should the situation in relation to demand change, Policy DM23 of the Plan provides flexibility for other forms of residential development to be provided on allocated housing sites and on windfall sites.
- 1.9 The fact that there has been some provision of new student accommodation over the last 10 years or so is not as a result of there being more students - they have not been constructed to meet an unmet need for extra housing that is not being met elsewhere. Rather, more students are being progressively accommodated in more student specific housing, thus freeing up their previous residences for other occupation, and reducing the need for these types of residences in the OAN. This effectively represents a change in residential mix, not the overall scale of housing need.

Conclusion

- 1.10 The student population studying in the District is falling and this is factored into the OAN assessment. Taking account of this, the availability of a significant proportion of an extant permission for a halls of residents, and the policy flexibility provided by the Plan, the Council believes that the needs of the student population and changes to it can be met.