

JOINING UP POLICY ON STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

An A-Z Guide

The heart of
student living

UNITE

A

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

UNITE believes that we have a role to play in improving the supply of affordable housing. Through the provision of targeted and designated student housing we can free up space in the private rented sector. For example a typical UNITE development will free up approximately the equivalent of 40 terraced houses. This housing stock will not be taken up by students, hence demand will fall, which will have an effect on price and this stock can then be rented by young families or other people who are not yet in the position to buy.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING QUOTAS

As providers of student housing there is currently no clear regulation on whether or not we should include affordable housing in our developments. However, in all cases we apply to develop without the inclusion of affordable housing as student housing is targeted at a specific group who themselves require affordable housing. There are a number of reasons for this, the main one being that we are developing purpose built accommodation for students which are suitable only for students. Another reason is that by developing purpose built accommodation for students we are actually freeing up other private rented accommodation that would have previously been occupied by students.

B

BROWNFIELD DEVELOPMENT

At UNITE we focus on developing brown field inner city sites. Not only are these ideal locations for students, but it is also important for someone to take on the challenge of reviving these forgotten land pockets. For example we have renovated many disused inner city office buildings and brought them back into use as vibrant elements of inner city communities

C

COMPETITION

UNITE pioneered the provision of professionally rented student accommodation, since we entered the market in 1991 the sector has seen enormous growth. We of course welcome this competition and the choice that it presents to our customers, however, we are mindful that students are under a lot of pressure and they need to feel safe and secure in their accommodation as well as having peace of mind about their finances. We are founding members of the ANUK Code of Standards for Larger Private Landlords and are in favour of the wider private rented sector being more closely monitored to ensure consistency of service across the industry. We would not however like to see professional landlords being placed at a disadvantage against smaller 'independent landlords'.

COMMUNITIES

UNITE is dedicated to becoming a part of the communities in which we operate, unlike other developers we don't just develop and move on – we retain our properties and manage them. Ensuring that we build long lasting ties with the communities in which we operate is very important us. We also believe that communities are key to ensuring that our residents have an enjoyable experience whilst at university and we encourage them to become involved in the local community. Our developments can have a significant impact on local communities - on average a 600 bed UNITE development will generate over £4 million of income for the local economy.

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Caring ✓

Working together ✓

Taking the lead ✓



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

D

DEVELOPMENT

We have a substantial development pipeline and this is based on the continuing demand for purpose built student accommodation. As the government continues to work towards its goal of 50% of school leavers attending university and the quality of British universities continue to attract international students in large numbers, so the demand for student housing continues to rise. Without developments specifically tailored to students like our own, the demands on the private rented sector would continue to grow. Therefore we are committed to continuing to develop purpose built student accommodation, and we will endeavour to do this in a way which is respectful to the needs of our local communities and is in tune with the demands of universities.

E

ENVIRONMENT

UNITE is committed to improving and preserving the environment, we strive to ensure that our construction techniques are as environmentally friendly as possible, this includes the use of prefabricated units developed off-site at our own factory, which significantly reduces waste, disruption in the community and construction time. We also aim to ensure that our developments have recycling facilities and that energy saving features are installed wherever possible.

F

FORWARD PLANNING

Every year more and more students are going to university; this along with the ever-growing contingent of international students means that everyone involved in higher education must plan carefully for the future. For UNITE this means continuing to work very closely with university accommodation and estates teams so that together we are ensuring that there will be enough accommodation available. We feel strongly that the government and local authorities also need to be planning ahead to prepare for increased student numbers.

G

GOVERNMENT POLICY

It is our view that the government does need to pay more attention to the professional rented sector and the role it can play in helping to solve the current housing challenges. The government has made an admirable commitment to ensure that more school leavers go to university; this of course creates challenges for universities and for the infrastructure in key university towns. UNITE wants to play a role in providing appropriate and targeted housing and we feel that the government should recognise the important role that we have to play in this area.

H

HIGHER EDUCATION

UNITE totally support the government's aim of getting at least 50% of school leavers to attend university. We do however feel that there has not been due consideration given to the effect that this will have on housing in popular university areas. This is particularly the case in London where private rented accommodation is already at a premium. We are currently engaged in a campaign to raise the profile of this important issue and set out the arguments in support of the development of more student accommodation.

I

INNOVATION

From day one UNITE has been an innovator, of the professional sector for students, of the use of modular construction, of the student hospitality experience to name a few. We work hard every day to ensure we continue to lead thinking in our sector. The student experience is important to us and we aim to ensure that our developments enhance the students' experience and the local area. We survey all of our residents regularly during the course of their stay at UNITE to find out what worked well and areas where we can do more.

INTEGRATION

Not everyone wants students living next door to them – we know this and this is why it so important for us to integrate out properties within communities. We continue to manage all of our properties and have dedicated teams to support our customers and to help provide the local community with a visible point of contact. We also want to commit to the local areas in which we operate, forming a lasting relationship and our on-site hospitality teams, staffed by local people, are responsible for this.

INTERMEDIATE

The concept and provision of intermediate housing is often over looked by policy makers. Indeed it is the case that there is not even a clear meaning of what exactly intermediate housing means, the government's definition for example differs from the GLA definition. To us intermediate housing describes somewhere people live when they are in between a permanent home, this obviously has lots of applications, but one place where it certainly applies is student housing.

J

JOB

Our student properties have dedicated on-site hospitality teams, creating jobs in the local community. Our accommodation provides an urban home for thousands of flexible of students who increasingly need to work to support themselves through university and enhance their cvs.

K

KNOWLEDGE

UNITE has operated in the professionally rented student accommodation sector since 1991, we were one of the founders of the concept and the early pioneers of a model which is now being replicated by many others. Every year we talk to thousands of our customers and learn about what is important to them; we also do lots of research into the market drivers for our sector. It is because of this and our experience, success and knowledge that we consider ourselves to be student housing experts.

L

LONDON

London is home to more than 376,000 students and these numbers are rapidly increasing, during the last five years there has been a 19% increase in full time students in London and a 47% increase in international students. London's universities have a shortage of accommodation and rising rents in the private rented sector are pricing students out of the markets. London is a key market for us, yet it is also the area where we encounter the most problems with our developments. We are working hard to educate planning officials and local councils of the facts about student housing.

M

MANAGEMENT

We manage all of our properties through our own on-site hospitality teams, this is our long term commitment to the local areas, we do not just develop sites and then leave the buildings for someone else to manage. Management includes, maintenance of the property, security, waste disposal and many other services designed especially for students. It's important for us that we have staff on-site to look after our customers but also to act as a link between UNITE and the local communities in which we operate.

N

NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

We recognise the important and influential role of student representative bodies such as the National Union of Students and local Student Unions. We communicate regularly with these stakeholders through conversations, newsletters and face to face meetings. Of course, we don't agree on everything all of the time, but we endeavour to have an open and honest relationship about our business and strategy. If we are alerted to any potential issues or concerns from the NUS we try to be as proactive as possible and provide them with the information they need. We support local student unions through sponsorship and advertising, this monetary support is injected back into the NUS providing core student services for their members, such as welfare advice and clubs and societies.

O

OPPORTUNITY

The current government has consistently pledged to provide more and more young people in the UK with access to higher education and the opportunity that it provides. This is a laudable aim and one which we wholeheartedly support, but it is vital that the increased pressure it places on housing is considered by all tiers of government.

P

PLANNING GAIN SUPPLEMENT

We are pleased that the proposed planning gain supplement has been scrapped, we do however, recognise that there is a need for more money to be invested in local infrastructure and of course developers have a role to play in this. We are committed to working with government, British Property Federation, British Urban Regeneration Association and others to ensure that whichever solution is put forward in the place of PGS it is appropriate for all parties.

PLANNING

We continually face challenges when trying to obtain planning permission for our sites, and there are a number of reasons for this. Perhaps the most frequently heard is the fear of students, generated through a generation's worth of stereotypes. Of course students will be students but in actual fact they contribute massively to the communities in which they live, for example students living in a typical UNITE development will contribute about £4 million to the local economy each year. We aim to highlight these benefits and work with planning officials to inform of the benefits of and the need for purpose developed and managed student accommodation.

PROFESSIONAL RENTED SECTOR

This is the umbrella term for members of the residential property sector who are large-scale specialist landlords, committed to high quality and professional standards and codes of practice for rented accommodation.

R

REGENERATION

Our business model has always been focussed toward regeneration and urban renewal; we focus on developing dilapidated inner city office space or other centrally located brownfield sites. This is of huge benefit to the local area - as well as rejuvenating the buildings we also bring a new vibrancy to the area through our residents.

RECYCLING

The environment and limiting the impact that our business has upon it is of great importance to us, and as such wherever possible we include recycling facilities on site.

S

SPATIAL STRATEGIES

It is of course very important to plan for the future and we believe spatial strategies play a key role in this. However, we would like to see more emphasis placed on the development of intermediate housing in spatial strategies. Currently there is little or no recognition in spatial strategies for the growing student population, and importantly where these students will find accommodation.

SUSTAINABILITY

Making sure our developments stand the test of time is very important to us and this is why we are at the forefront of sustainable development, such as using modular construction techniques. We operate to a sustainable business model.

U

UNIVERSITIES

Universities play a crucial role in preparing people for the world of work and ensuring that Britain has a steady stream of able and well equipped graduates ready to fit into the work force. Their accommodation offices are a key destination for students looking for appropriate accommodation, we maintain an open dialogue with universities and always consult directly with them over any development plans which we have

V

VISION

Our vision is concerned with creating space for people, providing students with access to quality accommodation with high standards customer service. By doing this, we aim to encourage students to take pride in their home and the surrounding community. As pioneers of professionally rented accommodation for students, we believe we offer an unrivalled understanding of how student housing provision fits into the wider UK housing challenge.