

Leith Central Community Council (LCCC) Discussion Paper on Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) Developments in Leith

Date: January 2025

Purpose of the Paper: This document outlines concerns about the impact of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) developments in Leith, focusing on how these projects threaten local housing availability, disregard community needs, and conflict with local development goals. The aim is to foster a united stance against further PBSA expansion in Leith, particularly given that Leith is not a university area and lacks direct benefits from these developments.

1. Background

The past few years have seen a surge in PBSA developments across Leith, sparking concerns about reduced opportunities for local housing and strained community resources. While some organisations, like Living Rent, are addressing individual sites, and each community council is tackling specific PBSA planning proposals, a coordinated approach is still lacking, that would also include local housing providers for example.

The consensus among residents and local groups is that PBSA projects, benefiting universities and private developers, are being imposed on a community without a nearby university presence, exacerbating housing pressures and affecting community cohesion.

2. Key Concerns

2.1 Impact on Local Housing Availability

- **Issue:** PBSA expansion limits land available for housing developments that cater to Leith residents. Local housing providers face increased difficulty in meeting the needs of the community.
- **Consideration:** Engaging with local housing providers will highlight the adverse impact PBSA developments are having on the availability of resident-focused housing options in Leith.

2.2 Conflict with Local and City-Wide Housing Strategies

- **Issue:** PBSA growth in Leith appears to contradict Edinburgh's broader housing objectives, particularly concerning affordable housing and sustainable community development.
- **Consideration:** A review of the city's housing strategy could clarify any conflicts between PBSA expansion and the council's intended housing policies, reinforcing the argument against further PBSA projects in Leith.
- There may be an opportunity to comment on a draft of Edinburgh Councils Local Housing Strategy will be published at the end of 2024 for consultation and feedback over December 2024 to February 2025.

2.3 Charitable Responsibilities of Universities

- **Issue:** As charitable entities, universities have a duty not to harm the communities they impact. By promoting PBSA in an area distant from any university, they may be misusing resources and disregarding their responsibilities toward community well-being.
 - **Consideration:** Examining the role of OSCR (the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator) could provide grounds to challenge whether university-driven PBSA developments are consistent with universities' charitable obligations to support—not harm—local communities.
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3. Recommendations

1. **Organise a Coordinated Stakeholder Meeting**
 - **Action:** Arrange a meeting involving LCCC, other local community councils, housing providers, and advocacy groups like Living Rent to create a unified stance against PBSA developments in Leith.
 - **Objective:** Develop a coordinated strategy to communicate opposition to further PBSA projects and prioritize the community's need for resident-serving housing.
 2. **Engage with City Council and Housing Authorities**
 - **Action:** Investigate PBSA developments' alignment with city-wide housing policies to strengthen the argument for opposing PBSA expansion.
 - **Objective:** Demonstrate that further PBSA developments in Leith not only conflict with local needs but may also undermine the council's broader housing strategy, as well as reduce income from Council Tax.
 3. **Consider OSCR Complaint Regarding Charitable Responsibilities**
 - **Action:** Explore the feasibility of filing a formal complaint to OSCR concerning the universities' use of charitable resources for PBSA projects in Leith.
 - **Objective:** Advocate for scrutiny of universities' responsibilities to ensure they are not placing undue burdens on Leith, a non-university area, through these developments.
 4. **Develop a Position Statement for LCCC**
 - **Action:** Draft a clear position statement opposing further PBSA development in Leith.
 - **Objective:** Establish a formal LCCC stance to guide advocacy, community engagement, and negotiations regarding future development proposals.
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Actions – November 2024-January 2025

4. A draft position statement is attached, which LCCC would hope to present to other affected Leith organisations for agreement in early 2025 (Feb-Mar).

Following the original paper of November 2024, Leith Central Community Council (LCCC) has considered the following key points.

Firstly, Leith has always been a welcoming community, embracing students as part of the diverse fabric of the area. However, it is essential to distinguish between the community's support for students and its opposition to Purpose-Built Student Accommodations (PBSAs). Leith is an inclusive neighbourhood where all residents, including students, should be able to enjoy a vibrant and balanced quality of life.

PBSA developments are highly profitable for developers and universities alike. These developments create predictable rental income through premium rents, often including high-end amenities such as gyms. In areas like Leith, where rising property values and high occupancy rates are common, developers and investors see significant returns. However, the financial dynamics can be complex. While privately-owned PBSAs typically contribute **business rates**, university-owned PBSAs—operated as charitable organisations—may qualify for rate exemptions, thereby reducing contributions to local council revenues.

In terms of local taxation, students in Scotland are currently exempt from paying **Council Tax**, a policy designed to ease the financial burden on those in full-time education, which shifts a heavier tax burden onto non-student residents. In areas like Leith, where the concentration of students is high, this can reduce the overall Council Tax base. A more balanced approach could involve partial contributions from PBSA operators in privately owned student accommodation, as they benefit from the infrastructure and services provided by the local community.

The question of whether students should receive **free transport**, or other options, brings mixed considerations. While student travel enables students to contribute more effectively to Edinburgh's economy and engage fully with the city—areas like Leith face additional challenges during peak times. The high volume of students using buses and trams strains local transport systems. Locating PBSAs closer to universities could help mitigate this issue by reducing students' reliance on public transport, which would, in turn, lessen the environmental impact and ease congestion on local infrastructure.

The **Edinburgh Local Development Plan 2030** highlights the city's commitment to creating sustainable communities, but it also recognises the challenge of balancing student housing with broader housing needs. In Leith, the plan includes provisions for mixed-use developments and affordable housing quotas. However, the proliferation of PBSAs risks exacerbating the over-concentration of student populations, further diminishing housing availability for families and key workers in the area.

Edinburgh City Council is preparing to release a draft of its **Local Housing Strategy (LHS)** for public consultation at the end of February 2025. This strategy will outline the city's housing vision for the next five years, focusing on affordability, sustainability, and community needs. The consultation period, running from February to April 2025, offers LCCC and the Leith community an opportunity to provide feedback and help shape the final strategy, which is expected to be finalised by May 2025. This consultation represents a crucial chance to ensure that Leith's housing needs are addressed in a way that benefits all residents, including students, families, and key workers.

Next Steps – To continue with item 1, 2 and 4 of the November paper with the following proposal as the basis of discussion. To respond to the draft Local Housing Strategy.

Draft Proposed Policy: No Further PBSA Developments in Leith

Policy Statement:

Leith Central Community Council (LCCC) opposes any new Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) developments in the Leith area, citing the absence of a local university, the oversaturation of current PBSA's in Leith, and the pressing need for housing that serves long-term residents and diverse community needs.

Key Rationale:

No Local University Presence: Leith does not host any universities, making the development of PBSAs in the area unnecessary and misaligned with local housing priorities. Students are better served by accommodation closer to their campuses, reducing their commuting burden and environmental impact.

Preserving Community Balance: Leith is a vibrant, mixed community, and further PBSA developments risk upsetting this balance by increasing transient populations and reducing the availability of housing for families, key workers, and long-term residents.

Addressing Housing Needs: The focus in Leith should be on delivering affordable, family-oriented, and mixed-use housing to address the city's housing crisis and support the area's existing population.

Infrastructure Strain: Existing infrastructure, including public transport, healthcare, and local amenities, is already under pressure. Additional PBSA developments would exacerbate these challenges without providing equivalent benefits to the wider community.

Community Vision: Leith's development should prioritise projects that align with the community's vision for sustainable growth, heritage preservation, and social inclusivity. PBSAs do not meet these objectives.

Policy Goals:

Advocate for Edinburgh Council to exclude Leith from PBSA zoning in future iterations of the Local Development Plan.

Prioritise developments that address community needs, such as affordable housing, green spaces, and local businesses.

Strengthen community consultation and input into planning processes to ensure future developments align with the long-term interests of Leith residents.

Next Steps:

Formal Moratorium Request: Request that Edinburgh Council enforces a moratorium on PBSA applications in Leith until housing policies are revised.

Engage Stakeholders: Collaborate with residents, housing experts, and urban planners to create a community-led housing strategy.

Monitor and Advocate: Track PBSA applications and work with other Leith organisations to mobilise community opposition when necessary, ensuring local voices are heard during planning reviews.

	PBSA's in the Leith Area	On site/In Operation	Approved	Proposed	
1	Abbey Lane (Burnet Point)	298			
2	Anderson Place		400		
3	Arthur Street			112	
4	Ashley Place			229	
5	Baltic Street (Shore Station)		632		
6	Bangor Road			166	
7	Beaverbank Place	300			
8	Brewer's Court, 59-61 McDonald Road	87			
9	CRM Students, 38 Haddington Place, Leith Walk	240			
10	Destiny Holyrood Road, Edinburgh	1200			
11	Dunedin Street (26)		62		
12	Eyre Place				
13	Firehorn Trust 2026/27, Leith Walk			230	
14	Huxley Studios Stanley Place	102			
15	Manderston Street			201	
16	Murano: Amphion Lane, Edinburgh	258			
17	Ocean Point 2, Ocean Drive		404		
18	Pitt Street 137 – 145				
19	Pitt Street 117-129 no 1				
20	Salmander Street 52-66 (Daltons)			279	
21	Shrubhill House, 8 Middlefield, off Leith Walk	260			
22	Student Roost, 99 McDonald Road	104			
23	The Pepper Mill, Dunedin Street	150			
24	Vita Student, Iona Street	300			
25	Willowbrae Road		138		
26	Yugo Brae House, 31 Abbeyhill	399			
	Totals	3698	1636	1217	

Grand Total	6551
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	GP Practices in the Leith area				
			Taking on New Patients?		
1	Leith Surgery	2 Duke Street	EH6 8HQ	Yes	
2	Victoria Practice	2nd Floor 12 Junction	EH6 5JA	Yes	
3	Mill Lane Surgery	4 Mill Ln	EH6 6TL	Yes	
4	Leith Mount Surgery	2 Lindsay Street	EH6 4EG	Yes	
5	Summerside Medical Centre	29B Summerside	EH6 4NY	Yes	
6	The Hopetoun Practice (Bellevue Medical Centre)	26 Huntingdon Pl	EH7 4AT	Yes	
7	Annandale Practice (Bellevue Medical Centre)	26 Huntingdon Pl	EH7 4AT	Yes	
8	Brunton Place Surgery	9 Brunton Place	EH7 5EG	Yes	
9	Links Medical Centre	4 Hermitge Pl	EH6 8BW	Yes	

	Total Students in Edinburgh				
	Edinburgh Napier University	15,700			
	Heriot-Watt University	20,994			
	Queen Margaret University	11,500			
	University of Edinburgh	49,500			
	Totals	97,694			