

Leith Central Community Council

Purpose-Built Student Accommodation

Developments in Leith

Date: 13 March 2025 (v.1.1, ae, ce)

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.

Executive Summary

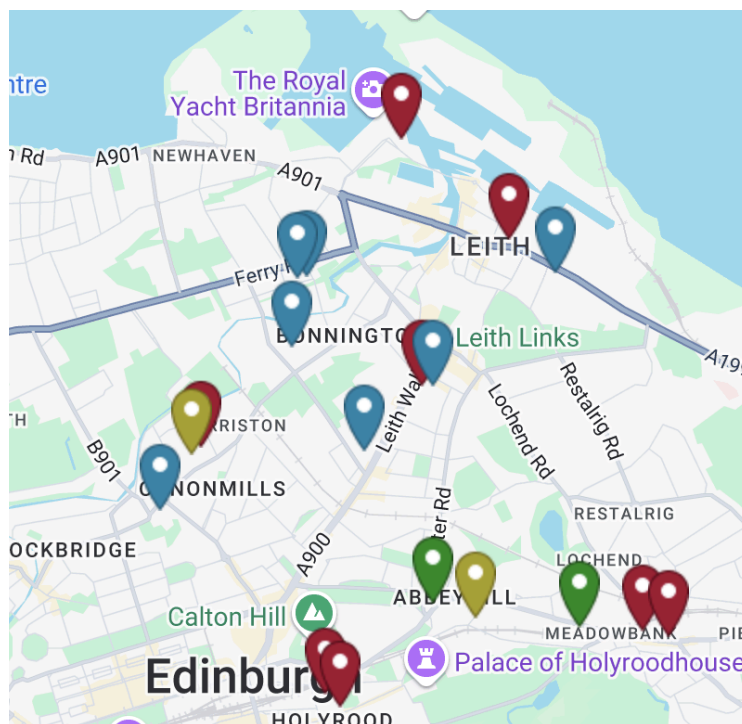
Leith Central Community Council (LCCC) has been concerned for some time that PBSA expansion strains local resources, while universities promoting these projects may be neglecting their wider responsibilities. Despite Leith not being a university area, PBSA developments have proliferated, reducing opportunities for resident-focused housing and conflicting with Edinburgh's broader housing objectives.

The numbers paint a stark picture: approximately two thirds of PBSA beds are in Leith (6332) out of a total of 9873 in Edinburgh (March 2025). There are also 31 PBSA's buildings in Leith out of a total of 46 PBSAs across Edinburgh. This equates to 67% of all PBSA buildings.

To address the issue, LCCC proposes collaboration with other community councils, housing providers, and advocacy groups to create a coordinated response and to prioritise developments that meet local housing needs, focusing on affordable, family-oriented, and mixed-use housing that supports long-term residents.

LCCC is calling for a moratorium on further PBSA developments in Leith and intends to engage with Edinburgh Council's forthcoming consultations on Local Housing Strategy and Student Accommodation Non-Statutory Planning Guidance to reinforce this stance.

In the meantime, LCCC has developed a policy approach (see Appendix B) to oppose the continued expansion of Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) developments in our area, based on our concerns about their impact on local housing, infrastructure, and community balance.



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.

3. Recommendations

1. Develop a Position Statement for LCCC

- o **Action:** Draft a clear position statement opposing further PBSA development in Leith.
- o **Objective:** Establish a formal LCCC stance to guide advocacy, community engagement, and negotiations regarding future development proposals.

2. Organise a Coordinated Stakeholder Meeting

- o **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.
- o **Objective:** Develop a coordinated strategy to communicate opposition to further PBSA projects and prioritize the community's need for resident-serving housing.

3. Engage with City Council and Housing Authorities

- o **Action:** Investigate PBSA developments' alignment with city-wide housing policies to strengthen the argument for opposing PBSA expansion.
- o **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.

4. Consider OSCR Complaint Regarding Charitable Responsibilities

- o **Action:** Explore the feasibility of filing a formal complaint to OSCR concerning the universities' use of charitable resources for PBSA projects in Leith.
- o **Objective:** Advocate for scrutiny of universities' responsibilities to ensure they are not placing undue burdens on Leith, a non-university area, through these developments.

Appendix A: Actions – November 2024-March 2025

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

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.

A draft position statement has been developed, which LCCC hopes to present to other affected Leith organisations for agreement in early 2025.

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.

Appendix B: Proposed LCCC 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.

Appendix C: Research and sources

	PBSA's in Leith March 2025		On site/in Operation	Approved	In Planing/ Proposed	Refused	TOTAL
1	Abbey Lane (Burnet Point)	EH8 8HL	298				
2	Arthur Street	EH6 5DA		112			
3	Ashley Place	EH6 5PX			229		
4	Baltic Street (Shore Station)	EH6 7BR		604			
5	Bangor Road	EH6 5RT			166		
6	Beaverbank Place	EH7 4FB	300				
7	Brae House, 31 Abbeyhill	EH8 8EH	422				
8	Brewer's Court, 59-61 McDonald Road	EH7 4NA	87				
9	Canongate 179a	EH8 8BN		76			
10	CRM Students, 38 Haddington Place, Leith Walk	EH7 4AG	240				
11	Destiny Holyrood Road, Edinburgh	EH8 8EH	411				
12	Eyre Place	EH3 5EL				142	
13	Huxley Studios Stanley Place	EH7 57B	104				
14	Jock's Lodge	EH8 7AA		191			
15	Firehouse Trust , Leith Walk (139)	EH6 8NP	230				
16	London road (65)	EH7 6AA	76				
17	Manderson Street	EH6 8LY			201		
18	Murano: Amphion Lane, Edinburgh	EH7 5FL	258				
19	New Waverley North	EH8 8BH		267			
20	Northfield Drive	EH8 7RW			13		
21	Norton's Student Living, Montrose Terrace	EH7 5DJ	141				
22	Ocean Point 2, Ocean Drive	EH6 6JJ		404			
23	Pitt Street (117-129)	EH6 4DE				80	
24	Pitt Street (137-145)	EH6 4DE				140	
25	Salamander Street (52-66)	EH6 7LA			279		
26	Shrubhill House, 8 Middlefield, off Leith Walk	EH7 4QW	260				
27	St Margaret's House (151)	EH7 6AE		361			
28	Student Roost, 99 McDonald Road	EH7 4GT	104				
29	The Pepper Mill, Dunedin Street (22.24.26.31)	EH7 4JG	155				
30	Vita Student, Iona Street	EH6 8FN	205				
31	Willowbrae Road (229)	EH8 7ND		138			
	Total PBSA's beds in Leith		3291	2153	888	362	6694
				Totals	6332		
	Total Actual PBSA beds in Edinburgh						
	Total Actual PBSA beds in Leith		6332				
	as @ March 2025	Approx 64% (just under 2/3 of beds are in Leith)					

- <https://www.scarlettdev.co.uk/pbsa/?status=&map=true>
- <https://www.edinburghlive.co.uk/news/edinburgh-news/edinburgh-locals-warn-our-family-30553748>
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- <https://destiny-student-holyrood.edinburgh-hotel.org/en/#main>
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- <https://pbsanews.co.uk/2022/01/10/mixed-use-edinburgh-scheme-forward-funded-with-vita-group/>