

Submission

No 62

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACCOMMODATION IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Bankstown City Council
Name: Mr James Carey
Position: Manager
Sustainable Development Unit
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Social Policy Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into International Student Accommodation

Bankstown City Council welcomes the inquiry into international student accommodation and we are thankful for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion.

The following comments outline our observations and concerns in relation to student accommodation and boarding houses within the context of Bankstown Local Government Area:

Demand for affordable student accommodation and extent of unauthorised student accommodation operations:

Council understands that a number of issues have arisen in other locations where in effect dwellings become illegal boarding houses, and overcrowding of individual dwellings in otherwise low density locations have created not just inadequate living conditions but impact more broadly on the provision of social and physical infrastructure.

Given the increasing number of privately run educational places in Bankstown and the University itself, there may be potential future enforcement and compliance issues if this were to occur.

Current and future standards controlling affordable student accommodation and other accommodation used by students and potential impacts:

Council supports the maintenance of existing controls in low density suburbs as opposed to a relaxation of controls or any amendments to the Affordable Housing SEPP that would enable boarding houses or walk-up apartments in low density residential areas near education establishments or transport hubs serving universities/colleges.

Enabling these types of accommodation in low density locations can significantly impact the provision of adequate social and physical

infrastructure to all local residents, including the students. Potential impacts include:

- on-street parking pressures on suburban roads due with more vehicles per dwelling outnumbering off-street parking available;
- increased number of cars on suburban roads and traffic congestion particularly during peak hours;
- surge in the use of local parks and community facilities without the corresponding increase in resources to expand or maintain the required infrastructure;
- conflict between existing residents and the students, such as noise impacts;
- increased perception of crime due to higher density and lack of public domain ownership;
- subsequent alterations to dwellings not complying with the Building Code of Australia (BCA) giving rise to numerous health and safety concerns (eg fire safety issues).

An appropriate framework for managing the provision and on-going operation of affordable student accommodation and the role of Local Government:

Council understands a public register of boarding houses and/or other affordable accommodation can help to reduce risks of students being exploited and risks to their personal safety. However, maintaining a register of these properties and enforcing certain standards applicable to this type of accommodation should not be solely or mainly a responsibility of Local Government. The system would be more efficient if managed by an agency with authority across the State as social issues related to the provision of affordable accommodation are much broader.

It is a known issue across the State that very low levels of housing are currently available to low income earners. In the present context of Bankstown Local Government area the most likely occupants of illegal boarding houses would be economically, socially and/or physically disadvantaged individuals. While Council supports stronger regulations and enforcement action regarding boarding houses, a detailed plan for alternative accommodation of people occupying illegal premises needs to be in place to prevent a surge in homelessness and other related social issues.

Additionally, international students in particular may be less aware of existing regulations and of their own rights contributing to the proliferation of providers of inadequate accommodation. If a public register of boarding houses or affordable student accommodation is to be of greater benefit to international students, universities and tertiary institutions should be able to convey all necessary information to students regarding potential issues and available resources.

Council would support the educational institutions themselves looking to provide solutions in the long term and increasing their role in the social issues of appropriate student accommodation. This is not only construction of new apartments but the leasing of properties and alike. They need to consider and have greater regard to locational issues as well as an understanding of the impacts on neighbourhoods and the potential increase in demands on social and physical services.

If you would like to discuss the information presented here further, please contact Ms Cynthia Herkrath on 9707 9806.

Yours truthfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Carey', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

James Carey

Manager

Sustainable Development Unit - CPE