

BALANCED COMMUNITIES: HMOs & STUDENT HOUSING

VISIT TO NOTTINGHAM

BY

Iain Wright MP

Under-Secretary of State

Department for Communities & Local Government



In an open letter featured in this magazine three years ago, Cllr. Dave Trimble pleaded with Government for *'the tools to do the job'*.

Two years ago, at the Westminster launch of the Universities UK report on studentification and its impact on host communities, Baroness Andrews promised to come to Nottingham, meet us and visit our neighbourhoods. The City Council and the NAG wanted her to see for herself why we (National HMO Lobby members and our local authorities) need Government to enact changes in legislation (principally planning legislation) which will enable local authorities like ours to control the concentration and spread of HMOs – the Councillor's *'tools for the job'*.

On Tuesday, 13 May, 2008 Iain Wright fulfilled the promise made to Cllr. Trimble and the NAG by his predecessor. So, finally we were able to say ...

MINISTER – WELCOME TO OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS!

WEDNESDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 2008

7.00 pm. – 9.00 pm

at the

Hillside Club

Derby Road, Lenton

THE NOTTINGHAM ACTION GROUP ON HMOs

is hosting an open meeting

'HMO LICENSING & THE WORK OF NOTTINGHAM'S HMO LICENSING TEAMS'

City Council Officers will

- ❖ **talk about HMO licensing & the Housing Act 2004,**
 - ❖ **enforcement of HMO Licensing in the City,**
 - ❖ **the HMO Action Zones,**
 - ❖ **future actions,**
- ❖ **& answer your questions & get your feedback**

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NOTTINGHAM ACTION GROUP ON HMOs

FOREWORD

In response to a journalist who asked what is most likely to blow governments off course, Harold Macmillan is said to have replied: *'Events dear boy, events'*.

I'm not a politician and I can't begin to understand much about how governments work. But, it's been an eventful time and I do begin to identify with something of what Macmillan meant. Events have a way of gaining a momentum of their own.

So, my apologies that it's been a while since the last magazine appeared. There are those, including myself, who had begun to wonder if there was going to be another issue.

However, here it is.

The format isn't quite the same as usual. There are two supplements. *'Balanced Communities: HMOs & Student Housing'* started out as something to give to Iain Wright at the beginning of his visit here in May. *'Around the National HMO Lobby: Postcards from ...'* comes from our website and is made up of contributions from other National HMO Lobby members.

At this point, it's probably only fair to mention that they sent pictures to illustrate the adverse effects of HMOs on their neighbourhoods, not to show us the good things which, as with our neighbourhoods, are what make them places where they want to continue to live. They're as proud of their neighbourhoods as we are of ours.

Together with the supplements, the magazine amounts to 64 pages in all. I hope you find it useful, perhaps even interesting.

Editor, September, 2008

APOLOGIES to Leonie Stewart for mis-spelling her name on P.32 of the guide prepared for Iain Wright's visit. Also, the End Note on P.11 of *'Postcards from ...'* should read *'These 'grot' photos from around the National HMO Lobby clearly show that the problems that HMOs create for us and our neighbours are **not** unique to Nottingham.'*

THE MINISTER'S VISIT

THE CAMPAIGN FOR 'THE TOOLS TO DO THE JOB'

— AND WHY THEY ARE NEEDED —

'NOTTINGHAM MUST ADDRESS ITS STUDENT HOUSING'

Houses in multiple occupation (HMO) are becoming increasingly frequent in some parts of Nottingham. Lenton resident Maya Fletcher says the rise in student accommodation should be a concern for everyone.

HMO is the name given to what is more commonly known as a "shared house". It is difficult to know how many HMOs there are in Nottingham, though it is believed the proportion is over three times the national average.

With two popular universities and a population of over 40,000 students needing accommodation in the private rented sector, it is hardly surprising there has been a significant amount of buy-to-let activity aimed at the student HMO market.

Given the location of the two universities, it is also not surprising that the majority of these HMOs are to be found in areas such as the Arboretum, Dunkirk, parts of Wollaton Park and, of course, the archetypal student village, Lenton.

It is in fact the clumping together of HMOs in particular neighbourhoods that exacerbates the social and environmental problems which in Nottingham and other cities with large student populations has been dubbed "studentification".

However, people who immediately assume that anyone who talks about studentification is also anti-student need to understand that the problems associated with student HMOs – noise, litter, inadequate management of waste, lack of proper maintenance and so on – in essence are no different from those caused by HMOs occupied by benefits recipients or migrant workers.

All tend to be young and highly transient. In the case of student tenants, it is not unusual for an established resident to have a new set of neighbours every nine months.

It is all of these factors brought together that have such a devastating impact on what politicians and social scientists call 'community sustainability and cohesion'.

Given the emphasis put on communities by successive governments, it is somewhat ironic that it is only now that politicians are finally realising that 'something has to be done' to ameliorate the problems caused by HMOs.

We can but hope that the recently announced government review of HMOs will result in at least a change in legislation so that conversion from family home to HMO will need planning permission.

It is also a hopeful sign that Iain Wright MP, Under-Secretary of State in the Department for Communities and Local Government is to visit some of Nottingham's studentified neighbourhoods next week.

He will meet residents and hear first hand about how HMOs are affecting their lives and what they believe

needs to be done in order for their neighbourhoods to be places where they want to keep on living, and where future families will want to settle.

To achieve this aim – to have neighbourhoods where families want to live, not leave – is not just important to those neighbourhoods with high numbers of HMOs, it is important for the future of Nottingham itself.

The city not only needs to retain its families. It also needs to attract new families into the city. To do this it needs good-quality, good-sized family housing. Paradoxically, it is just that sort of family housing that has either already been converted into HMOs or is still a target for buy-to-let investors and parents of students.

So taken to the extreme, graduates of Nottingham's two universities who wish to remain here, put down roots and bring up families are probably going to have to go outside the city to find the sort of houses they want.

Not exactly what is wanted – the city puts resources into managing the problems caused by HMOs, but it is other local authorities which reap the rewards in terms of a qualified and affluent population.

[Article by a Guest Columnist, *Nottingham Evening Post* website, Saturday, 10 May, 2008]

THE VISIT THAT NEARLY WASN'T

Nottingham does not always seem to be on the Westminster map when it comes to HMOs and visits from Ministers. Baroness Andrews had urgent Parliamentary business to keep her away, postponing her visit twice before being reshuffled into a new post with new responsibilities. However, this February, Iain Wright, her most recent successor, said he wanted to visit Nottingham and Loughborough in late spring. When no dates for the visit were forthcoming, it did seem as if history was going to repeat itself.

It is fortunate that we and our National HMO Lobby colleagues in Loughborough keep in touch with each other. It was from them that we learned that Iain Wright was scheduled to visit Loughborough on the 13 May. Eventually, after much behind the scenes effort by many different parties, the visit to Loughborough was extended to Nottingham.

The two hours available for the Minister's visit to Nottingham made it important that the programme

- ① allowed sufficient time for him to visit a representative sample of the neighbourhoods where HMOs cause problems, and see some of those problems for himself;
- ② created opportunities for discussion with him about what Government needs to do to help solve the problems;
- ③ provided enough time for an informal meeting with local residents, as well as refreshments.

Because time was so limited, the City Council and the NAG put together a pack for the Minister. This included a guide to the neighbourhoods he was going to visit, along with local estate agent leaflets illustrating the focus on the buy-to-let market, data on future purpose build and future student numbers, as well as copies of the BBC *Inside Out* and *Groundswell* programmes.

What we wanted was to give the Minister something to look at on the day, but also to take back to

Westminster as information for his advisers and his department's Civil Servants.

The Guide's contents, with some additions and omissions, make up the '*Balanced Communities: HMOs & Student Housing*' supplement to this magazine.

PROGRAMME FOR MINISTER'S VISIT

10.20: Leave Loughborough to travel to Nottingham

11.00: Arrive at St. Mary's Church, Wollaton Hall Drive.

11.05: Minibus tour of parts of Lenton, Dunkirk, Wollaton Park highlighting key issues around student, HMO, private sector rented housing. One or two very brief stops.

Minibus party to include:

Cllr. Dave Trimble, Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure & Communities and Ward Councillor for Lenton & Dunkirk
Maya Fletcher, Co-ordinator Nottingham Action Group on HMOs

Derek Martin, Director of Regeneration, Planning & Transport, Nottingham City Council

Shane Neville, Head of Planning Services, Nottingham City Council

Mike Cole, Student Strategy Manager, Nottingham City Council

Kerry Ferguson, Executive Support Assistant, Nottingham City Council

11.45: Arrive back at St Mary's Church

11.45 -12.35: Light lunch and discussion with residents in Church Hall

12.35: Minibus to take Minister to railway station driving past new purpose-built student housing on Faraday Road & the 'Lenton Village' residential development.

Around thirty local residents from the neighbourhoods visited during the tour came to a meeting and buffet lunch at St. Mary's Church Hall, along with Council officers and the Beat Manager for the Hillside Local Area. Representatives from Nottingham's universities and from their associated students unions had also been asked to join the meeting.

It was a 'lively' session with some frank exchanges of opinions and ideas. The topics covered ranged from the contributions the Nottingham University makes to the community, through to a change to the Use Classes Order (UCO) and Additional Licensing, and finished with Council Tax exemption and Business Rates for HMO owners.

A number of people made very articulate and impassioned statements about the effects of studentification on them and their neighbourhoods. Put together, they covered just about every aspect of the problem – transient tenants, noise, anti-social behaviour, absentee landlords, no social investment by landlords and tenants, and above all the loss of community.

Michael Lees from Nottingham Trent University rounded things off by saying he and his university have seen that the Council has done, and continues to try and do, the best it can, but that it has gone as far as it now can without further help from Government. He added that he understood residents' concerns, problems and difficulties, and supported them in the campaign to

restore balance and sustainability to their neighbourhoods. A very welcome message and a good note on which to end a difficult meeting.

So where does this leave us. In no small part as a result of efforts made by our Loughborough neighbours and other HMO Lobby Group members across the country, it appears that finally Government may be listening to our concerns.

It also seems possible (not probable) that planning legislation will be altered so that conversion of a family home into an HMO will require planning permission – not the magic potion to solve all the problems, but at least a beginning to the process of restoring to viability those of our neighbourhoods with too many HMOs, whilst at the same time safeguarding other neighbourhoods where HMOs can threaten balance and sustainability.

Certainly, the 'mood music' at the meeting the Nottingham delegation had with Iain Wright in February, and then at a seminar on HMOs at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in April was much more positive than any heard before.

During his visit, Iain Wright showed that he appreciates what some of the problems are: noise, anti-social behaviour, litter, rubbish. It is to be hoped that he returned to Westminster understanding that to

concentrate solely on these is an over-simplification of the situation and of what needs to be done. In principle at least, noise, anti-social behaviour, litter, rubbish, mis-management, etc. can be controlled, provided that resources like manpower and money and willingness to get something done are made available.

However, as was made clear to the Minister, here and in Loughborough, controlling them will not go to the heart of the real problem: the loss of community cohesion and social capital as manifested by local schools that are closing down, overwhelming numbers of take-aways and letting agents in local shopping areas – not to forget the pub that closes in June and does not re-open until September.

During his visit, the Minister plainly stated that he did not want to rush into new legislation to avoid any unintended consequences. However, as was pointed out to the Minister, we are living with the unintended consequences of the policies of successive governments and, while we wait and Ministers and Civil Servants deliberate, our neighbourhoods are running out of time.

We can only hope that the need for Government to act and do so quickly is the message the Minister took back to Westminster.

A CHANGE IN USE CLASSES ORDER IS ESSENTIAL TO: ① prevent neighbourhoods with concentrations of HMOs from further conversions of homes into HMOs; ② prevent neighbourhoods where concentrations of HMOs are beginning to build up from over-concentration; ③ protect neighbourhoods which are clearly target areas for future conversion of homes into HMOs

THE HOUSING ACT 2004

THE HOUSING TOOLKIT IN ACTION

The first lobbying activity representatives of the Nottingham Action Group became involved in was a meeting at Westminster with the then-Minister, Keith Hill, to lobby him about, amongst other things, the provisions of the Housing Bill. Later that year the Bill was given Royal Assent and became the Housing Act 2004.

The Act closed the 'shared house' loophole. Now, the majority of so-called 'shared houses' are HMOs (houses in multiple occupancy). It also introduced mandatory licensing for all HMOs with three or more storeys (including loft and cellar conversions) and with five or more occupants.

Sadly, it has been estimated that almost half of Nottingham's HMOs fall outside this category. However, there are provisions within the Act for local authorities to apply for permission to extend licensing to other categories of HMO. The City Council is preparing the ground work to an application to the Secretary of State for those powers

In the meantime, the Council does now has the powers and the legal obligation to act on those properties which do fall within the mandatory licensing regime.

Since last spring there has been a good deal of activity in the City relating to HMOs. Articles from last year's *Evening Post* highlight some of what was in the pipeline

Now, a year on, the activity continues with the first reports in the *Evening Post* of successful actions taken by

the Council on landlords who have failed to take heed of the Act.

In this section on the Housing Act and what has stemmed from it, we also have a report from one of the Council officers who is spearheading the work of the HMO Action Zone teams.

The New Lenton 'Drives' HMO Action Zone was shown to Iain Wright MP when he visited Nottingham in May as an example of how legislative tools can lead to 'best practice'. We hope the comparison with the lack of appropriate planning tools did not go un-noticed. You can read a full report on the Drives Action Zone in our Supplement: *'Balanced Communities: HMOs & Student Housing'*, pp 12-15.

'CITY CRACKDOWN ON UNLICENSED LANDLORDS'

The city council plans to crack down on landlords who have failed to obtain a licence for their properties. Less than one in ten have applied for a licence so far.

Rotting rubbish piled outside homes, collapsed ceilings, death trap electrics and gas-leaking boilers.

These are just a few of the problems connected with rented housing which have been regularly clocked by officers of Nottingham City Council.

Often they are student houses, but they may also be occupied by economic migrants or multiple occupants of any kind, seeking the cheapest lodgings they can find.

These health and safety issues, coupled, in student areas, with noise and parking problems, are why the Government passed a law last year to force landlords to obtain a licence for homes let to "multiple occupants".

The £375 licences, granted by local authorities, last for five years and require landlords to meet basic minimum standards such as ensuring properties are safe, gardens and yards are clean and tidy, rubbish is collected and anti-social behaviour prevented.

The rules came into force in April 2006, but only nine per cent of city properties covered by the legislation have actually been licensed.

And it is not as though landlords have not been informed about their new responsibilities. There has been a national advertising, and the council has written to all the landlords it has record of, highlighted the issue at a local landlord's conference and raised it in newsletters.

Barry Horne, head of city development at the council, said: 'We have done everything possible but there are landlords out there acting illegally. Now we want to go further.'

Later this year he will seek approval from the council's executive board later to employ up to 20 more people to work on landlord licensing.

The estimated cost of the scheme over five years is up to £3m.

The council will initially target three areas – Derby Road, Cromwell Street off Canning Circus, and Sneinton.

The law only requires rented houses of three storeys or more and with five or more occupants to be licensed.

There are estimated to be 3,700 in the city

Meanwhile, the problem of unlicensed landlords remains all too apparent in the city.

Maya Fletcher, of the Nottingham Action Group on Houses in Multiple Occupation, highlights rubbish in gardens, noise, and parking problems, as a few of the issues faced by residents where she lives in Lenton.

While she supports licensing, she is concerned the system may simply lead to landlords selling their three-storey homes in favour of two-storey properties to avoid the licence requirement.

She said: 'I am in favour of the council catching up with landlords. We need that to drive up standards. But we have always known that one of the knock-on effects is some landlords will move somewhere else.'

Landlords have complained the rules are unfair since they apply only to the private rental market. They say the rules are more "red tape" that is stifling their businesses. And some landlords have side-stepped the law by reducing the number of occupants in their houses to fewer than five.

Frank Hardy, chairman of the East Midlands Property Owners Ltd, which has about 450 members, said: 'The council has not had a successful launch but unless landlords put their heads above the parapet there will be £20,000 fines hitting doormats. We have no option but to comply with the law. We accept there are a lot of bad landlords out there and the sooner we get rid of them the better.'

[Charles Walker, Nottingham Evening Post, 8 March, 2007

'CITY LANDLORDS FACE LICENCE CHECKS'

In March 2007 the *Evening Post* reported that the City Council's Executive Board was about to increase the price of an HMO licence from £340 to around £600 for each property along with additional charges for incomplete applications and inspections. The story was picked up again in August, 2007 with this article.

A crackdown on rogue landlords begins this week. Nottingham City Council has recruited 14 officers to check up on people offering homes for rent without a legally-required licence.

They will also be talking to those who do have licences, to make sure their management of homes meets proper standards.

Derek Martin, the council's director for physical regeneration in neighbourhoods, said: "The officers have joined us in the last few weeks. They are getting to know the neighbourhoods and communities where they will be working."

It marks a step-up in efforts to make landlords obtain licences. All those who rent out properties with three or more floors, or with five or more residents, have been required by law to get the document since last April.

But in the first 12 months only 600 applications were received – far fewer than expected. The city council has responded by increasing the licence fee from £340 to £600, and using the extra income to fund the expanded team.

Mr Martin said: "We know there has been a very poor response from landlords and will be reminding them of their responsibilities." He said persistent offenders without the proper paperwork could face a fine of £20,000.

"These people are breaking the law", he added. "It is the law to have a licence and we have had a poor response."

The officers will be focused in three areas around Sneinton Hermitage, Lenton and Burns Street, in Arboretum.

They aim to achieve 100% compliance with the law in these neighbourhoods, which should mean an additional 600 properties licensed.

A fourth team will focus on the rest of the city.

A licence compels a landlord to meet certain standards.

He or she is required to tackle tenants over antisocial behaviour and ensure bins are emptied, and not overflowing outside properties.

Other rubbish, such as mattresses and sofas, cannot be left around the properties.

Buildings must be properly maintained inside and out.

Mr Martin said: "If we have got a bad landlord we will be able to take action."

The initiative is seen by the city council as part of its agenda to "transform neighbourhoods".

Keith Rose is a team leader in the new set-up, and said he was confident he and his colleagues could make an impact.

He said: "It is a fundamental change, with a group of officers picking particular areas of the city and looking to

turn things around. In two years we hope to have made a fundamental difference in those areas."

The officers are already knocking on doors to identify properties requiring licences. They will also draw up a detailed picture of building conditions.

So far, about 50 homes have been visited. Each one is given an environmental health assessment.

Mr Rose said: "The officers are invited in. The vast majority of people are very happy to talk to you."

[Charles Walker, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 3 August, 2007]

LANDLORD FINED FOR LENTON STUDENT HOUSE DISREPAIR

The provisions of the Housing Act 2004 came into force in April 2006, giving landlords and their agents plenty of time to do the job, or at least you would have thought so.

However, this July the *Evening Post* had an article about Mr. Michael Singh's Magistrates' Court appearance.

A landlord has been fined £8,000 for letting a student house fall into disrepair.

The ceiling of the house in Lenton Boulevard, Lenton, was on the verge of collapse after Michael Singh did not get it repaired.

Nottingham magistrates heard he told students a large bow in the ceiling was nothing to worry about.

But, after they complained to the city council, inspectors visited in November and found it was in urgent need of repair and was leaking water.

They also found Singh did not hold a licence to allow multiple tenants there.

Naomi Matthews, prosecuting for the city council, said the ceiling was in one of the bedrooms on the third floor and above a stairwell.

A repair had been done a few years before Singh took ownership but it had been a "cheap fix", said Mrs Matthews.

"The rafters had become overloaded," she added.

The court heard the five students in the house had tried to contact Singh.

At first they could not get hold of him but, when they did, he told them everything was fine.

One student had looked at the house the summer before the council's visit.

Mrs Matthews said the student noted the carpets and walls were dirty, electrical wires were exposed and that the ceiling was sagging and had mould on it.

The student was asked to sign a form to say the house was safe but refused.

In mitigation, Alan Millband said Singh was "not a rogue landlord".

He added: "He genuinely believed the sagging was because of the age of the property."

He said the poor repair work had been done before he bought the house around seven years ago. He added that while Singh has owned the house he has had it "spruced up" at the end of each term.

The court heard Singh, in conjunction with his brother, rented out 30 homes in Nottingham, some to students and others to families. "He wishes to provide more than satisfactory accommodation," added Mr Millband.

Singh pleaded guilty to failing to licence the property and failing to repair the house.

Magistrates fined him £5,000 for the licence offence, £3,000 for the lack of repairs. and ordered him to pay £1,967 costs.

Coun Alan Clark, the city council's portfolio holder for Neighbourhood Transformation, said: "The safety of residents is paramount and the council is determined that private landlords comply with laws to ensure tenants' safety."

[Marcus Boocock, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 25 July, 2008]



Lenton Boulevard

NOTES ON ADDITIONAL LICENSING

Mr. Singh is not the first landlord to have been prosecuted by the City Council and, if the track record is anything to go by, he will not be the last landlord to find himself (or herself) in the Magistrates' Court.

There are a few things in this tale to take note of.

The first is that the maximum fine for not complying with the licensing provisions of the Housing Act 2004 is £20,000.

The second is that it is the occupants of the property who are in the best position to draw attention to any shortcomings in it, or in the way in which it is managed.

With a bit of luck, the example set by this group of student tenants will be followed by others.

Also, with UNIPOL now established in Nottingham, we can hope that, over time, students will turn to landlords who are accredited by UNIPOL, and give a wide berth to those who are not.

That, combined with the City Council's determination to enforce the provisions of the Housing Act 2004, should begin to drive up the physical and management standards of all our HMOs, not just those occupied by students, and put out of business those landlords who should not be in the business.

In itself that will not rebalance communities, or make them more viable than they are now, but it may just help to slow down, if not stop, further erosion.

The third is that if Mr. Singh's HMO had only had four tenants, mandatory licensing under the Housing Act 2004 would not have applied.

This loophole is already being exploited. Recent anecdotal evidence has indicated that some landlords are reducing the number of tenants in three-storey properties in order to avoid licensing.

The potential result of this is that:

- ① the Council may not be getting the revenue needed to continue with the HMO Action Zone work;
- ② the 'left over' tenants, who need somewhere to live, are potentially fuelling the demand for more HMOs;
- ③ and there is a likelihood that landlords/investors will focus on buying two-storey houses in future.

In addition, the majority of HMOs in Nottingham are two-storey and therefore not subject to mandatory licensing.

Not infrequently, this creates the anomalous situation where an HMO has three storeys and five tenants (and therefore requires a licence), whilst the next property, though still an HMO, is two storey, has eight tenants, but its owner does not need to licence it.

Quite a sizeable loophole!

These facts together highlight the need for Additional Licensing powers for the Council, powers that will enable it to require licensing of all HMOs regardless of their size or occupancy.

In England, in order to apply for Additional Licensing powers, a local authority is required to gather evidence to prove to the relevant Secretary of State that exceptional circumstances exist that necessitate the extension of HMO licensing. Also, there has to be a consultation process during which objections can be made. The process is cumbersome, slow, and ill-fitted to deal effectively with an HMO market that can, and does, change rapidly in response to changing circumstances as well as changing client demands.

All these points were made to the Minister during his visit to Nottingham in May.



**HMO: Derby Road,
7 tenants, licence needed**



**HMO: Derby Road. 8 tenants
no licence needed**

Since the Minister's visit, we have learned from our colleagues in Swansea that an Additional Licensing scheme has been approved for specific neighbourhoods with large concentrations of HMOs. That is really good news.

However, we have also learned from them that in Wales an application to the Welsh Assembly for approval to implement an Additional Licensing Scheme merely requires the local authority to say (not prove) that it has a need. This is a significantly lower hurdle than the one English local authorities are required to jump, and leads to yet another question that Government needs to answer:

WHY THE DIFFERENCE?

AN INTRODUCTION TO HMO ACTION ZONES

Last August's *Evening Post* article mentioned that the City Council had recruited extra officers who would be working in three pilot HMO Action Zones located in Sneinton Hermitage, in the Arboretum, and in Lenton.

Leonie Stewart has written this article for us about the work of the HMO Action Zone teams. She is a member of the Lenton 'Drives' team, and contributed to the report on the 'Drives' HMO Action Zone in the supplement to this issue of the magazine. She also came to the May meeting with Iain Wright MP.

If you have issues you want to discuss, or complaints you want to bring to the attention of the Action Zone teams, please contact them on Nottingham 915-6798, or e-mail them at: public.health@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

The Housing Act 2004 changed the definition of what constitutes an HMO, and as a result the number of HMOs in the City has increased substantially. The City Council is committed to transforming its neighbourhoods. It has responded by setting up HMO Action Zones in three areas of the City where there are significant concentrations of HMOs, namely: the Drives area of Lenton, Sneinton Hermitage, and the Burns Street part of the Arboretum. It is hoped that this will help achieve the fundamental changes that are needed to aid the transformation.

Three new City Council teams have been formed specifically to concentrate their efforts in the HMO Action Zones. Each of the teams is made up of two Environmental Health officers, two Enforcement officers and one Licensing Support Officer. They are located in offices near to their respective zones so that they can be more pro-active in dealing with problems and able to respond more quickly to requests for Council services. The city-wide scheme, based at Lawrence House, continues to cover the rest of the City.

As part of their contribution to the overall Nottingham picture, Action Zone officers are working with a range of partners including landlords, managing gents, police, fire and rescue service, residents, community groups, and other council departments.

The HMO Action Zone teams aim to raise the profile of the HMO licensing regime brought about by the Housing Act 2004, and to ensure that all licensable HMOs are indeed licensed. The teams are also concentrating their efforts on pro-actively working in the zones to tackle poor housing standards and environmental issues.

In spite of the fact that Nottingham City Council has been very actively working with landlords and agents to prepare them for the introduction of licensing, the response from landlords and agents has been disappointing. However, team members have been walking the streets in the Action Zones and have identified a large number of properties which have not applied for a licence. The majority of these have now had licence applications submitted for them.

Nevertheless, where landlords fail to work with the Council's teams and do not licence their HMOs prosecutions will be sought. In this way the Council can ensure that bad landlords are not given an unfair

advantage over good landlords who comply with the relevant legislation. The aim is to work with and engage with landlords to improve housing conditions.

Mandatory licensing of HMOs only applies to properties of three storeys or more having five or more occupants. It is anticipated that some owners may well reduce the number of occupants to avoid having to license their properties. It is proposed therefore that once the Council is able to show that it is making considerable progress with mandatory licensing, an application will be made to the Secretary of State for 'additional licensing'. If approved this will enable the Council to require all other HMOs, irrespective of size or number of occupants, to be licensed.

In addition to ensuring that landlords and agents comply with mandatory licensing requirements, the action zone teams are dealing with a range of environmental issues such as refuse accumulations and land or property that is detrimental to the area. They have also identified other areas of concern to the people who live in the action zone neighbourhoods. These issues include the displaying of To Let boards and bins being left out on the streets.

The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 lay out certain conditions in relation to 'for sale' and 'to let' boards which include:

- not more than one advertisement permitted;
- no advertisement to be more than 0.5 m²;
- no advertisement to extend more than 1 m;
- the board must be removed no later than 14 days after the granting of tenancy.

Where the conditions are not complied with, action can be taken in the form of prosecution with a fine of up to £2,500.

Team members are also taking formal action against the occupiers of properties where wheelie bins are left out on the street eight hours after the collection day. Failure to comply with this requirement will result in statutory notification being issued to each person living in the property and if the notice is not complied with it will result in a Fixed Penalty Notice of £100 being issued to each individual in the house. Several students in the Lenton Drives area are amongst those who have been issued with fines, and Nottingham City has also had its first successful prosecution for non-compliance.

Action Zone team members want to make a noticeable impact on the visual appearance of their areas and to significantly improve housing standards. By improving the visual appearance of the area the teams hope to create a safer neighbourhood. By improving housing standards they want to give confidence to tenants that the house they are living in is of a good standard and is well managed.

Leonie's article was written in late 2007. Since then, the Drives HMO Action Zone team has extended its activities further down Derby Road to the streets leading on to Lenton Boulevard. This summer, a new officer has been appointed and the work of the Action Zone teams is to be further extended to the 'Lenton Triangle'. In fact, the new team member and other Council officers have been walking around the 'Triangle' and have already met with some of our members who have homes there.

This should be a piece of good news for them since it could mean the start of long-term improvements for everyone who lives there and cares about that neighbourhood.

TOWN & GOWN IN THE SHADOW OF A-SPIRE

NOTTINGHAM UNIVERSITY'S VICE-CHANCELLOR RETIRES

Professor Sir Colin Campbell, whose retirement as Vice-Chancellor of Nottingham University was announced earlier this year, was appointed to the post in 1988. He was knighted in 1994.

Woven into the tapestry of his achievements are the links that have been forged with China, particularly the foundation of the University's campus at Ningbo, opened in 2005. Its counterpart in Malaysia was opened near Kuala Lumpur, also in 2005.

In Nottingham, he has been the driving force behind the University's expansion to the former Raleigh site at Triumph Road (the Jubilee Campus) as well as the acquisition of the former headquarters of Central TV, now



the King's Meadow Campus. Also under his leadership, the University is co-sponsoring the Nottingham University Samworth Academy due to open in Bilborough next year.

In addition he has been an important figure in the development of regeneration projects such as the re-development of the City's Lace Market area, and the Britain in Bloom initiative.

He has also supported the development of the City's tram system, and of Nottingham Science City.

On the 26 September, Sir Colin will be made an Honorary Freeman of the City.

'... As well as establishing the University of Nottingham as one of the leading institutions in the country, he has also played a key role in developing Nottingham as a cosmopolitan and tolerant city. ... I'm really looking forward to proposing Sir Colin at the special ceremony in September when, as a City, we'll be able to pay tribute to him and his contribution to Nottingham.'

[City Council Leader, Jon Collins]

Perhaps another accolade – Sir Colin's elevation to the House of Lords – will not be too long in coming!

CITY GROUND SUPPORTER

Sir Colin will be a hard act to follow. However, his successor has already been appointed. He is Professor David Greenaway, a Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University who was Acting Vice-Chancellor for a period in 2006-2007 when Sir Colin was ill. Professor Greenaway was educated at Henry Mellish School in Bulwell.

Members of the NAG who are regular attendees at the City Ground should keep an eye out for him since he, too, is a regular.

'ASPIRE'

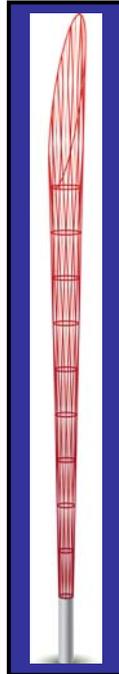
'*Towering Ambition*' was the headline used in the *Nottingham Evening Post* earlier this year to announce the unveiling by Nottingham University of plans for a 60 m high sculpture to be erected on the Jubilee Campus.

It was commissioned and funded by an anonymous benefactor and cost £800,000. The sculpture, designed by Ken Shuttleworth (the creator of London's 'Gherkin') was installed at a ceremony in June.

It is Britain's tallest free-standing sculpture and commemorates the granting to the University of its Royal Charter 60 years ago. It has been named 'Aspire'.

'Aspire symbolizes a vital aspect of the university. It sends a message to everyone that no matter where they come from, they can achieve great things. It celebrates our efforts to make the world a better place.'

**[Sir Colin Campbell,
Vice-Chancellor, Nottingham University]**



£200 MILLION JUBILEE CAMPUS EXPANSION

Nottingham University's expansion of the Jubilee Campus is reaching its next phase. It was reported in the *Nottingham Evening Post* on the 24 July that the University wants to buy 50 acres of land to create its Innovation Park. The land in question includes the gasometers on Ilkeston Road and part of the former Raleigh site alongside Triumph Road.

It is believed the University will be paying National Grid more than £5 million for the gasometer site alone. If negotiations with National Grid and other landowners on Triumph Road are successful, this will create the City's largest science park. As it is, this signals that the University intends to go ahead with a £200 million expansion of the Jubilee Campus.

Work on a 10 acre plot is already under way on land to the west of Triumph Road. However, it may prove difficult for the University to achieve its goals. In the *Evening Post* article, a spokesman for Imperial Tobacco was reported to have said: '*All of our warehouses are in use and we need them all.*'

In December 2004 the City Council produced a Jubilee Campus Development Brief to ensure that the development of the site was carried out in a co-ordinated manner that maximized its potential whilst minimizing any adverse impacts. The Brief included allocation of land for student accommodation in what it called a 'Student Residential Zone' at the northern end of Triumph Road, and includes the gasometer site.

Does this mean the University is going to build student housing there, or has the Brief changed?

DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

On the 14 July – appropriately Bastille Day – the University marked the 60th anniversary of the granting of its Royal Charter with a firework display at the Aspire.

It was certainly spectacular and, judging from our postbag, its effects were heard and felt across a wide area including the Park, the City Centre. So it is not surprising that complaints were made to the University and to the City Council's Noise and Pollution Control Team. Professor Chris Rudd, Pro Vice-Chancellor for External Relations has sent this letter to residents who contacted the University directly:

'... I was sorry to learn that the recent fireworks display held at our Jubilee Campus – as part of celebrations to mark the 60th Anniversary of the award of the Royal Charter to The University of Nottingham in 1948 – caused distress and disruption to our neighbours. The fireworks were spectacular but they were also very loud (and 30 minutes later than we had scheduled). I attended the event myself and therefore appreciate that the noise, especially when coming unexpectedly, would have been unwelcome, particularly for older residents, for families with young children, and for any pets in homes and gardens nearby. We have passed on similar views to the firework company but I accept that the ultimate responsibility lies with us.

We apologise sincerely for this upset. We intended to inform our neighbours of the schedule of events – unfortunately this was not carried out. This was an oversight and my colleagues have been made fully aware that this must always precede any unusual noise or special activity within our estate.

We consider it to be a privilege to have been invited to assist the City in regenerating the former industrial area around Triumph Road. The celebrations on Monday evening marked one further stage in that process, along with our own Diamond Anniversary. We believe that bringing internationally significant architecture into the City boundaries is something that we can all share. I appreciate though that your homes, and those of your neighbours, were on that map first. You deserve to be treated with consideration, and we will strive to do that to a much higher degree in future.

I would like to assure you that our commitment to the well-being and vibrancy of this community continues. Our programme at Lakeside, our staff and student volunteer programmes and the ongoing work with William Sharp School to launch Nottingham University Samworth Academy

are all major commitments in which we invest very substantially.

We take seriously our accountability to our neighbours. If you have any further concerns please contact Melanie Futer on 0115 9514649.

I hope that this apology and explanation is helpful and that we can enjoy cordial relations long into the future. ...'

We thank Professor Rudd for his comments. We now know the Council has an agreement with the University that firework displays will finish by 10.00 p.m to prevent noise nuisance. The celebrations certainly did over-run and the firework display took place well after the 10 p.m. watershed. However, late as it was, the excessive loudness of the fireworks caused the most unhappiness.

TOP TIPS ON LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

Melanie Futer, Manager Off Campus Student Affairs at Nottingham University recently sent a letter to the NAG. In it she said that : 'The University of Nottingham takes its responsibility of being a good neighbour seriously and expects its students to do likewise. As part of the social responsibility education for our students, I am enclosing the letter jointly written and resourced by the University of Nottingham and Nottingham City Council. The letter which welcomes the students to Nottingham and contains tips on living within the community has been posted to all returning students at their home address.' The letter is signed by Professor Karen Cox, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Community Relations and starts: 'Welcome back to Nottingham. ...

This is going to be your home for a significant part of the year. Have a great time, studying and enjoying life in Nottingham, but please make sure your neighbours appreciate your company. You are going to stay within a residential area sharing the streets and facilities with people who live there all year round, and who will continue to be here after many of you have graduated and moved away.

Students can have a significant impact on the communities in which they live. As a student you will have the opportunity to make a real and positive contribution to the areas well being. But to ensure that the whole community lives in harmony you need to show consideration for people whose lives are likely to be different from yours, young families, older residents, and people working at all times during the day and night.

Please remember every student who registers with the University of Nottingham signs up to the following statement.

'I also acknowledge that I have responsibilities to the communities of Nottingham in which I am temporarily resident and undertake to act with consideration and respect for the welfare and interests of members of the wider community and my fellow students.

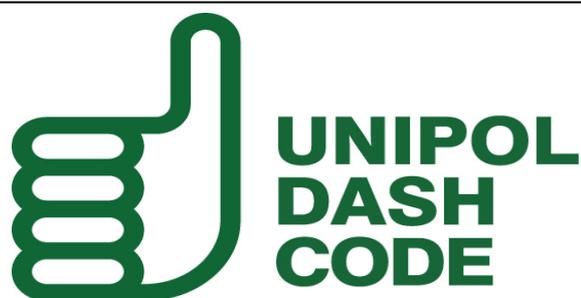
Students are, and can continue to be, the best possible ambassadors for the University simply by being good and considerate neighbours.

TOP TIPS ON LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

- **Introduce yourself to your neighbours.**
- **Take an interest and pride in where you live – it is your home and neighbourhood too.**
- **Let your neighbours know if you are planning a party – try and agree a mutually acceptable time for it to end.**
- **Shut and lock your doors and windows when you are out of your room, smart water your property.**
- **When calling a taxi, ask the driver not to sound their horn when arriving at your house.**
- **Get to know when your bin needs to go out and put it away – you could be fined £100 for leaving it on the street.**
- **Don't leave rubbish in the garden or outside your property. It is easy to clear it up or arrange for it to be taken away.**
- **Cyclists should stick to the roads or, better still, to the designated cycle lanes.**
- **If you are coming home late at night please keep your noise to a minimum.**

We wish you every success for the forthcoming year and hope you enjoy all that the University and the City has to offer.

NOTTINGHAM ACTION GROUP ON HMOs NEIGHBOURHOOD PERSPECTIVES



Last year we quoted an example of one parent's experience of student HMOs. [See the Nottingham Action Group Magazine, Winter 2006-Spring 2007, p.14].

In November 2007, Canon Bob Baker wrote to the *Evening Post* about the fact that, several months after leaving student accommodation, his daughter was still

waiting for her deposit to be returned by 'the unscrupulous company through whom she rented her temporary home.'

More recently, the NAG was contacted by a parent who, having seen our website, wanted advice and help because he found himself in a similar situation to that of Canon Baker and his daughter. We put him in touch with the City's Public Health team, Nottingham Trent University and Nottingham Trent's Students Union. We also suggested he take legal action against the agent.

Not too long ago, he 'phoned to say he had won a County Court judgement against the agent. Moreover, he wanted to let us know that the 'action' in our title was well deserved and thanked us for our help.

Very much later than we had hoped, and only after pressure from the Council (which has provided the major part of the funding of the project), the two Student Unions and the NAG, UNIPOL finally opened offices in Nottingham almost a year ago.

The first steps towards making experiences like that of Canon Baker's daughter a thing of the past have been taken, good for the students, but also with potential benefits for established residents.

The new Unipol-DASH Code for landlords and tenants has been published and copies of the full Code will be available soon. Meantime, here is the section of the Code most relevant to us, that dealing with 'Community Relations'.

Owners will ensure that:

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

6.00 In the event of any anti social behaviour (defined as "behaviour likely to cause alarm, harassment, inconvenience or distress to members of the public not of the same household as the perpetrator") by tenants, landlords will use reasonable endeavours to intervene with a view to ending that behaviour and ensure that the occupants are treating the property and its environs in a tenant-like manner. It is accepted that not all intervention will be successful and, in this case assistance will be requested from a number of statutory and non statutory agencies who may be able to intervene. Landlords will receive from Unipol a manual detailing the services and agencies available to them, including help from the educational establishments and Unipol in dealing with problem tenants. For more information, visit www.homeoffice.gov.uk/antisocialbehaviour

6.01 In respect of matters that can be regarded as anti-social behaviour neighbouring residents and representative organisations shall have access to and be eligible to use the complaints procedure. A neighbour shall be defined as a resident living within 400 metres of the property.

GARDENS AND YARDS

6.02 All boundary walls and fences will be maintained stable and in good repair;

6.03 Where a garden exists, the path to and from the external door(s) to the house will be kept in good repair and free from obstruction;

6.04 Where a garden or paved area exists this shall be kept in good order and free of waste and litter, so far as is reasonably practicable;

6.05 Where a front garden already exists, it is not converted, in accordance with Local Authority recommendations and planning policies, into a hard standing area and, where possible where a garden already exists this shall be retained as a soft planted area (this includes low maintenance gravelling with planting);

6.06 Where possible, wheelie bins should be located at the rear of the property and tenants should be informed of the need to return them to that location as soon as possible after they have been emptied. The guideline currently set out by Nottingham City Council for this is that the bins should be put out and returned 8 hours either side of the collection, Rushcliffe and Broxtowe Councils currently ask that the bins are put out by 7.00am and returned as soon as possible. For more information, see www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk, www.broxtowe.gov.uk and www.rushcliffe.gov.uk;

6.07 The landlord, so far as is reasonably practicable, shall have responsibility to enforce a requirement that their tenants keep the garden free of litter and the

garden area should not be used to store old or unwanted furniture or fittings more than 10 working days prior to its removal;

6.08 The landlord will co-operate fully with an annual garden check to be undertaken by Unipol and/or its agents as part of their obligations under this Code to ensure compliance with matters relating to the external environment of the property, its care, tidiness and adherence to security requirements. Landlords will receive at least two week's notification of when the survey is to be conducted and will rectify any aspects of non-compliance that is identified to them within 10 working days of such notification;

6.09 In respect of environmental matters neighbouring residents and representative organisations shall have access to and be eligible to use the complaints procedure. A neighbour shall be defined as a resident living within 400 metres of the property.

Unipol Student Homes has an office in The Old Engineering Building, Cut-Through Lane, University Park, University of Nottingham, Nottingham NG7 2RD, and its 'phone number is: Nottingham 846-8599

Well, UNIPOL is here. Potential problems with specific landlords, agents and HMOs and whether they should be part of the revamped Accreditation Scheme surfaced at the consultation meeting the NAG hosted with Martin Blakey (Chief Executive of Unipol) and Jamie Woolley (Manager of Unipol in Nottingham) in June. It would be wrong to ignore them. However, it is still early days and there is time for difficulties to be sorted out. The next house hunting season has yet to start. Now is the time to give UNIPOL space to work, and to wait and see what comes about.

NAG representation on the Board of UNIPOL Nottingham has been blocked, and is not likely to happen. However, the Group has had a good working relationship with UNIPOL. It has been useful and can continue to be so if both parties want it to be.

So, keep an eye out for the UNIPOL-DASH Code logo. If there's one on an HMO near you any problems, concerns, worries about that HMO, its landlord, agent, or tenants can be passed on to UNIPOL as well as the City Council and the relevant university.

OH, AND DON'T FORGET TO LET THE NAG KNOW AS WELL.

THE LETTING BOARD JUNGLE

As the number of HMOs has increased, so has the number of letting boards. Coupled with the seemingly ever earlier onset of the 'letting season', this last academic session the result has been a seemingly permanent jungle of letting boards especially in Lenton and Dunkirk. In some of the blighted neighbourhoods, you could have been forgiven for thinking that some-one had stretched a banner (colour dependent on which agent or landlord) from one end of the street to the other.

The effect of this concentration of letting boards is to further degrade the appearance of the area, signal the presence of HMOs and a transient population, and act as a beacon for those criminals who prey upon students and established residents and their property.

Moreover, because they emphasize the 'ghetto nature of the areas and deter families from either renting or

buying homes in them, they do nothing to help restore balanced and sustainability to these neighbourhoods

'Doing something about letting boards' is a topic that has come up time and again at NAG meetings and at the plethora of other occasions where HMOs and studentification are discussed. It is one of the topics on which the NAG and Nottingham's Students Unions have agreed to work together.

As with so many other things to do with our neighbourhoods, there is no one, simple way forward.

The Council's powers of enforcement are limited. Landlords and agents are 'deemed' to have consent to put up letting boards on any property that is vacant or is going to come up for rent. Indeed, a landlord or agent is entitled to advertise as long as just one room in the property is to let.

Therefore, the Council has to prove that a property has been fully let before it can even begin to contemplate taking action. There is also the simple fact that to take action on the scale we are talking about has serious implications in terms of manpower and other resources.

This is not say that the Council is not trying to tackle the problem. In her article, Leonie Stewart touched on the relevant planning legislation, and in fact the Drives HMO Action Zone team has been doing work in this area.

During their walkabouts, team members have noted the numbers and frequencies of letting boards put up by individual agents and they have been made aware of advertising regulations and enforcement action, as indeed have landlords.

'Let By' boards – particularly favoured by one of our local agents – are potentially easier to control. They identify that a property is no longer on the market and, our understanding is that they contravene regulations if they remain up for more than 14 days after the tenancy has been agreed.

We also understand that when these contraventions have been flagged up with the City's Planning Enforcement officers, they have written to the offending agent(s) and the boards have come down. But, again, that's not an efficient and particularly effective way of dealing with the problem.

So what is? Not surprisingly, there do not appear to be any magic solutions.

In Leeds a voluntary scheme has been tried. In Nottingham, the City Council (in conjunction with UNIPOL) is also exploring the possibility of introducing a voluntary code of practice for landlords.

If this fails, an application to Government for permission to remove 'deemed' consent is a possibility. However, the experience in Leeds and Loughborough where voluntary codes failed and the local authorities applied for permission to remove 'deemed' consent, is that it is a lengthy procedure which does not always succeed the first time round, if at all.

In any case, a precursor to any such application requires the sort of evidential backing that monitoring of a voluntary scheme would produce in the first instance.

Interestingly, it appears that students are increasingly using the internet as their main source of information about available accommodation. This in itself, may lead to a reduction in letting boards, though it has to be said that it is largely agents who use letting boards, and they use them not so much to advertise to potential tenants, as

to show to their landlord clients that they are earning their commissions.



THE 364-DAY LETTING BOARD

There has been a To Let board outside one of my local HMOs since around the end of last October or the beginning of November. A colleague pointed out that by looking at agent and landlord websites, he'd found that for a substantial number of properties, although they were no longer available to rent, letting boards had not been taken down. Prompted by this observation, I had a look at the website of the agent dealing with my local HMO.

There it was, let for the 2009-2008 session, but already being advertised to let for the 2009-2010 session. I am told there is nothing in Planning Regulations to prevent this abuse. So, we now have the 364-day (365 if it's a Leap Year) letting board.

Editor, September 2008



Midland Avenue, Lenton, May, 2008

'GET OUT OF CAR PLEA TO STUDENTS'

One in five university students in the East Midlands use a car, according to a survey.

Coach operator National Express estimates that this could mean an extra 500,000 cars on the roads at holiday times such as Christmas.

Following the survey of 1000 people, the company is launching a campaign to get the students out of their cars and back onto public transport.

The National Express "keep cars off campus" campaign started in October with the launch of Campus Hoppa – a new coach service travelling between Nottingham, Birmingham, Leicester and Loughborough universities.

This encourages students to use the coach rather than the car. National Express is also offering cheap fares for students at Christmas.

[*Nottingham Evening Post*, 14 December, 2007]

CONVERSATION ...

... with two female students about to get into their very nice Mini parked over the road. This is after I've just taken a hike down the street to move my own car nearer to my house:

Resident: "Excuse me, why are you parked there? Do you live on this street?"

Student: "Don't worry, we're just going out."

Resident: "But where do you actually live?"

Student: "Oh, on the campus"

Resident: "Why don't you park on the campus, then?"

Student: "Because we're not allowed to park there"

Aside from Resident: I've had enough of this – I must have been driving around my street for ten minutes tonight, looking for somewhere to park

[As recounted in an e-mail to the Editor]

IS THERE A SPACE ON YOUR DRIVEWAY?

Last September one of our members, who is a close neighbour of Nottingham University, told a story about a parent who had knocked on their door one evening looking for a driveway to rent on behalf of their child.

The student, who lives in Mapperley Park, was about to start at the University and had discovered they would not be able to bring a car on to the University's campus.

To get to the University from Mapperley Park by public transport involves two buses and a change in the city centre. Neither the student nor the parents were prepared to accept this. Rather, they were looking for some-one close to the University who would rent out driveway space.

It's nearly the beginning of the next university year now, so if you live in close proximity to Nottingham University, you never know. One evening soon

ENTERPRISE THWARTED?

STUDENT PARKING

SECURE
(OFF STREET)

LIMITED SPACES

Tel: 0XXXX XXXXXX

However, a note of caution. This may not be the best way of coping with rising Council Tax bills.

This notice (but with a real mobile 'phone number) was nailed to the wall outside a house on Derby Road near the QMC (as well being pinned to a notice board inside the Students Union at the University) by the absentee owner/developer of a property with enough frontage to take around 8 or 9 cars. The Council's Planning section were alerted to this. They contacted the owner and pointed out that the development might need planning permission. The notice has not re-appeared.

That notice may have disappeared, but not so the problem.



Derby Road, Lenton, March, 2008

COMING TO AN HMO NEAR YOU? THE TALE OF A 'CANNABIS FARM'



Bedrooms: 7 — Rent: £70 pppw — Deposit: £250

AVAILABLE NOW

This property has plenty of parking in a desired location.

- Detached •Furnished •Some double beds •Separate living room •Garden •Parking •Full double glazing
- Gas central heating •water gas heated •Baths and showers •2 bath/shower facilities •Washing m/c point
- Fridge/freezer • Tel points •Single tel. line •1-2 miles from City Centre •less than 1 mile from Notts University
- Burglar alarm

[As advertised on agent's website,
12 September, 2008]

The buy-to-let market has taken off in the last ten years. It is estimated that 25% of buy-to-let mortgages are for properties let out as HMOs. This HMO is one of them.

Hardly a day goes by without a report in the press of the discovery of yet another so-called 'cannabis farm'. They are clearly a growth industry. And one of them could be coming to an HMO near you – soon.

At the end of August, a cannabis farm was discovered at this HMO on Derby Road, Lenton.

A large number of plants were removed, but not before a crop had been harvested. It is very probable that the 'farmers' moved in during the second half of June after the student tenants had vacated the property.

By their very nature, HMOs are an ideal location for cannabis farms. They are vacant for substantial periods of time. Their tenants and their visitors come and go, as do their cars. In many neighbourhoods there are very few, if any, established residents around, and they find it difficult to know who has and who has not got a good reason to be there. Neither are they likely to notice anything 'odd' happening, or in fact think of what they do see as anything other than what is usual with HMOs.

How is anyone to know that the sudden flurry of activity isn't anything more than the landlord or his contractors clearing out the usual accumulation of debris or perhaps having a half-hearted attempt at maintenance? As for anything else, well, neighbours of HMOs get used to bizarre behaviour.

This is what loss of Social Capital is all about in practice.

Here are a few pointers my local Beat Manager put together for me regarding 'cannabis farms' in residential areas and what to look out for:

- Most are found in rented houses, often four-bedroom and larger.
- Most have been discovered in traditional 'student', or other areas where there is a large amount of rented accommodation.
- Most have been set up and run by Vietnamese or other Far-Eastern nationals.
- Quite often only one person will live at the address and will be employed as a 'gardener', simply to water, feed and generally cultivate the plants.
- There will be very little activity seen – few people visiting the property.
- Curtains will often be closed or the windows totally blocked out.
- Although extractor fans are used to try and get rid of the smell of cannabis, it can often still be smelt in and around the premises.

If residents have any concerns about a property, they are advised to contact the Police direct or, if they prefer, they can report their concerns anonymously via Crimestoppers on **0800-555-111**.

**RESIDENTS ARE STRONGLY ADVISED NOT TO VISIT
THE PROPERTY THEMSELVES.**

EDITOR'S NOTE

cannabis: Hemp plant of genus Cannabis; preparation of parts of it used as intoxicant or hallucinogen ..

Concise Oxford Dictionary

To the list of things to look out for I'll add an observation made by a Councillor and Council officer from the Leeds Headingley area when they visited Nottingham last year:

- heavy condensation on the window glass and piping unexpectedly running from inside a room to the outside, both possibly indicative of a room at high temperature and with high humidity

... I am told, ideal cannabis growing conditions.

I make no apology for writing about my neighbour, the cannabis farm, or for printing a picture of it, or for ranting about it.

Government has encouraged the conversion of homes like this into HMOs. Universities have condoned it. Parents and students have ignored its effects on the people who live around it.

For me this HMO is an example of one of those 'unintended consequences' I, not Ministers and their Civil Servants in Westminster, now live with.

The wholesale conversion of so many decent family homes into HMOs by people who have no concern for what they do to the neighbourhoods they operate in – just so long as they get an 'adequate' return on their investments and aren't required to do very much to earn it – is one very good reason why I support the NAG.

And will continue to do so.

'ICONIC' BUILDING PROPOSED FOR DUNKIRK

Developers seem to have identified provision of purpose-built student housing as a growth area. The latest to do so is Gladman Developments Ltd., whose first excursion into this area is under construction in Sheffield.

Dunkirk Fire Station is moving to a new building in Beeston. Gladman has agreed to purchase the Dunkirk site, along with adjacent land, 'Dunkirk Place', owned by the City Council. Its intention is to build housing for some 550 students there. Gladman organized a drop in event at the Dunkirk and Old Lenton Community Centre on the 28 May this year. In early June residents had another opportunity to see what Gladman have in mind when the NAG hosted an evening meeting at the Hillside Club, attended by representatives from Gladman's development consultants.

Providing students with alternative accommodation is fundamental to the Council's strategy to deal with the problems of imbalance in neighbourhoods with high numbers of student-occupied HMOs.

Crucial to the success of this strategy is that: ① The alternative accommodation is attractive to students and also is somewhere they can afford to live; ② It must be sensitively located and properly managed so that it does not have a detrimental impact on the lives of people living near-by, and does not aggravate the imbalance inherent in neighbourhoods where students are already dominant.

If the former is to be fulfilled, it seems sensible for developers to engage in meaningful dialogue with students, in this case Nottingham University's Students Union. This had not happened before the Hillside Club meeting, but since then contact with the Students Union has been made. It was certainly one of the actions Gladman's representatives were strongly urged to take at the meeting. Whether this means designs that are attractive to students as well as the developer remains to be seen.

The problems experienced by residents neighbouring the Beeston Broadgate Park 'student village' (Nottingham Action Group magazine, Winter 2006-Spring 2007) which led to BBC Radio Nottingham's *Groundswell* programme revisiting the issue of studentification in February 2007, provide ample evidence that it is not easy to square this particular circle when it comes to nearby residential areas.

The Fire Station is a difficult site to regenerate. Student accommodation is certainly one way of doing so. However, the same can be claimed for key worker housing. It is also needed. It would not increase further the concentration of students in Dunkirk and the surround neighbourhoods (already amongst the highest in the City), and therefore would not add to the problems of an unbalanced community struggling to retain its viability.

The sheer scale and size of the proposed development is also a factor. Gladman's consultants showed plans for what they called an 'iconic' building between five and 15 storeys high. Neither is it at all clear that the proposed management of the site would be sufficient to prevent disturbance to the family homes nearby.

Parking is also an issue. At the consultation meetings, Gladman said that only disabled parking would be

provided. The Broadgate Park experience alone makes it difficult to image that none of the other students will bring cars to Nottingham.

Yet another factor is the Dunkirk Primary School Playing Field which, if the development goes ahead, will be isolated from the rest of Dunkirk, except for a narrow strip of land. And, of course, with its close proximity to the student accommodation, it is more than likely that the students will consider the playing fields to be their recreational facility. Also, it tends to mean that Gladman will be the major player in any possible future development of the playing field, say for housing.

The site was advertised as an opportunity to develop student and key worker accommodation. At the Hillside Club meeting, Gladman's representatives were clear that they do not intend to provide key worker housing.

Having paid a reputed £4 million or so for the whole site, it is hardly likely that Gladman will not push ahead with a planning application to build student accommodation. (In fact their agents have already approached the Council about the need to provide an Environmental Impact Assessment.)

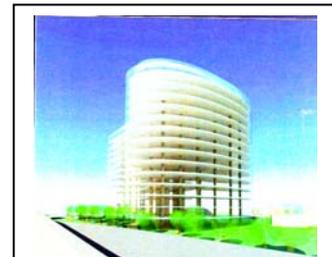
What happens when the full application is submitted will be of more than a passing interest to all of us.

REPRESENTATIONS OF OPTION 1: PROPOSED RE-DEVELOPMENT OF DUNKIRK FIRE STATION

[Scanned from Consultation Brochure]



View from Dunkirk Roundabout



View from Ring Road

SAINSBURY'S: LENTON BOULEVARD

As reported in February's *News Desk*, the Council see controlling the hours take-aways are open as an important way of protecting local amenities, creating a family-friendly atmosphere, and achieving the long-term objective of restoring balanced and sustainability to our neighbourhoods in Lenton and Radford.

But, takeaways are not the only businesses wishing to cash in on studentification. Sainsbury's has applied to the City Council for permission to extend to 24 hours the time it can sell alcohol, and it wants to provide late-night refreshments from 11.00 p.m. to 5.00 a.m. at its store on Lenton Boulevard. In its application, Sainsbury's says that it 'may elect not to open the store between these hours but wishes to have the flexibility to provide late night refreshment should the store be open. The provision will take place inside the premises but customers may leave the premises with items purchased.'

If you want to know more about what can be done to object to this development and you live in Lenton, please call us on 07762-525-625. The closing date for objections is the 4 October.

WHILE SHOPPING FOR LEMON DRIZZLE

As I shop for the lemon drizzle, it might be useful for me to remind myself why I support the NAG.

I needed to move shortly before my retirement: family left home, house too big. I wanted to be in town for the urban convenience, but I also wanted an outside space.

I found a development which had been built as a partnership between a developer and the City Council 20 years previously, specifically for families, to draw residential development back into the city centre.

It ticked all the boxes as far as I was concerned. However three to four years ago, the expansion of Trent University put pressure on accommodation. All of a sudden the four student houses out of 85, increased to 11.

With more student houses came an increase in the sharp discrepancy in lifestyle – Noise, mess left by bins, cars everywhere and parking problems, minor crime (burglary and personal attacks), and a general degradation of the environment.

I have been a university student and strongly believe in opportunities for higher education for those who genuinely want to pursue it. It must aid a society to replenish and develop its social, practical and intellectual resources. Increased opportunity is an excellent way for our society to develop.

However, and a big 'however', many of the young people are opting for higher education as a way of moving from protected childhood to adulthood. They know little of the practical issues of living away from home, and are unappreciative of the fact that with rights come responsibilities.

An example in my own area is a few weeks ago, when a group of students coming home in the early hours were making a heck of a noise. A neighbour went outside to ask them to tone it down as his very young children were asleep. Immediately they stopped quarrelling amongst themselves and attacked him. He is a judo expert so fortunately was able to defend himself. Several neighbours were disturbed by the noise and called the police. Later a number of students were taken in to cool their heels for 24 hours.

This was an incident which affected a dozen or so houses, and was completely avoidable. The noise disturbed people who had to go to work a few hours later.

There are lots of occasions where the two societies do live in close proximity without incident, but alas there are more where a local community is damaged by having to deal with irresponsible and juvenile 'adults'.

Unfortunately, those who can sell up and move to a quieter area, more students move in and the area spirals down as the community falls apart and is abandoned during vacations.

It really is high time that the universities recognised that the increasing numbers that they take on do have an impact on the areas where the students are housed. A minority of students do put something back into their temporary living areas, but the vast majority do not. So we residents not only fund the university expansion through our taxes, but suffer a serious disbenefit in terms of degradation of our home and social environment, a double whammy.

Plus we have to live with all the disbenefits of having a highly mobile, and frequently completely irresponsible population, laying the area waste and then moving on when they find it no longer tolerable

[Thoughts of a city centre resident, first printed in the Guide produced for the visit by Iain Wright, 10 May, 2008]

A MORNING IN THE GARDEN

one resident's observations
– from a somewhat interesting
perspective –
of events last autumn when recycling
came to parts of Lenton

There are shiny brown things in the garden
That look just the same as the green:
Except, as they've just been delivered
They look almost impossibly clean.

There are words written on them that tell you
Exactly what each one is for,
But there's one that I can't quite decide on,
So I'll just ask the woman next door.

"It's for waste that you get when you garden",
Which has left me as wise as before.
I suppose I can figure it out for myself
Or what is my high IQ for?

Well, now that I stand in the garden
I think I can see what she means,
For there, shining out from the rockery
Is a tin that contained sardines.

And further along, by the rose bush
Some half-empty bottles I find.
We had some mates in for drinks last month,
And they must have left these behind.

The grass is so deep round my ankles
That it needs concentration to see
The crisp bags, kebab sticks and wrappers
Left there by the previous three.

High up in the branches above me
Hang remains of some scarlet balloons;
They must have been left from some party
The previous lot had in June.

I see there're some empty juice cartons
Someone else has thrown over our wall;
It must have been the kids in the long hols;
For there's also a slimy football.

By the back door there still are some boxes
All wet, beginning to smell.
We couldn't find room when we moved in
So I think that I'll dump them as well.

It's quite hard to get the bin lid closed,
But I'm sure that nobody will mind.
For it's all 'garden waste' as requested;
No more waste in our garden they'll find!

It's been very hard work this morning,
But really, for all that it's worth
I've rather enjoyed the time that I've spent
Doing my bit to save the Earth.

[Thank you to the 'Pam Ayres' of Lenton]

BBC TV INSIDE OUT PROGRAMME ON STUDENTIFICATION

The BBC TV *Inside Out* feature on studentification in Loughborough and Nottingham is a programme that might not have been broadcast

In 2004 BBC TV's *Inside Out* first investigated the impact of studentification on the neighbourhoods around two universities in the East Midlands: Loughborough and Lincoln. At the time the programme's team was told that much was being done to tackle the disquiet felt by established residents living in those neighbourhoods.

As we reported in March's copy of *News Desk*, the increasingly high profile of the subject (in no small part due to the efforts of the NAG and our colleagues in the National HMO Lobby) led the programme's producers to take another look at (as the BBC said on its *Inside Out* web page) '... what has been done and to talk to both sides of the debate about how town and gown can live as one community.'

This time, however, in addition to revisiting Loughborough, the programme team also came to Nottingham in Autumn 2007, filming in and around neighbourhoods in Lenton and talking to residents at a NAG meeting where they were also joined by members of S.A.R.G. (the Loughborough HMO Lobby group). The team returned in 2008 to film a clean up day in Dunkirk organized by the City Council, Nottingham University and its Students Union.

The final programme went out on Friday, 28 March. But it might so easily not have.

Strong objections to the Nottingham Action Group's involvement in it had been made beforehand, and, earlier that week, in events somewhat reminiscent of the lead up to last year's BBC Radio Nottingham *Groundswell* debate, a BBC Radio Nottingham feature, due to be broadcast to trail the *Inside Out* programme, was dropped.

Not everyone in the NAG was able to see the programme. However, we have been given a copy of it, and we should be able to show it at one of our Group meetings before too long

NATIONAL HMO LOBBY STUDENTIFICATION: THE TEN KEY ACTIONS

'... there is no single solution- numerous measures are necessary. Dealing with the problems of polarisation, and restoring sustainability, requires concerted action. No one policy will resolve polarisation, nor will one party. All concerned must act together, council and community, universities and students, and landlords. Since polarisation in general, and studentification especially, involve a particular pattern of land-use, **planning** measures are crucial. At the same time, the actual land use is residential, so **housing** measures have a vital bearing. Finally, if cumulative action is necessary, it needs to be co-ordinated - so **management** measures are needed. In all, ten key actions need to be taken. ...'

[Extract from the Foreword to the National HMO Lobby publication:
Balanced Communities & Studentification – Problems & Solutions]

POINT 1: ACCOMMODATION AUDIT. The first requirement is to establish the breadth and depth of the problem - where is the transient population located, and to what degree of penetration? How does it change, year by year? The local university is the key actor here, as it knows where its students live (of course, collective and not individual data on distribution is what is needed). Students of course provide their university with this information. If necessary, the Council and the community may need to lobby the University to provide it.

POINT 2: CO-ORDINATION. In order to work together, stakeholders and need some form of forum. All are responsible for actively engaging, but it is up to the local authority to set up such a forum.

POINT 3: ACTION PLAN. Each stakeholder will need its own strategy. ... But these will be ineffective without co-ordination. Again, the local authority needs to take the initiative, but other stakeholders must support the council.

POINT 4: MANDATORY HMO LICENSING. Through the Housing Act 2004, the government has introduced the licensing of HMOs in England and Wales. With regard to polarisation, licensing's most useful role is in identifying the location of HMOs, hence where the transient population is located. By law, local authorities now have to issue licences and the landlords have to apply for them. (HEIs – higher education institutions - are also required to adopt codes of practice for their properties. Communities and students have a shared interest in supporting licensing - for instance, by reporting licensable HMOs to the council. (In Scotland, all

HMOs are already subject to licensing. In Northern Ireland, all in selected areas, and very large HMOs elsewhere.)

POINT 5: ADDITIONAL HMO LICENSING. Mandatory licensing applies only to larger HMOs. But the Housing Act provides also for the licensing of all additional HMOs in designated areas, in England and Wales. Additional HMO licensing is essential, to take full advantage of licensing (and to remove an escape route for any landlords trying to avoid mandatory licensing). The local authority has to apply to government to introduce additional licensing. Responsible members of the private rented sector (PRS) can support the council. The community, students and universities have a shared interest in lobbying the authority to take action. And the government should support the authority's application.

POINT 6: RESTORATION OF BALANCE. A destabilised neighbourhood will not easily re-balance itself. Studentification makes this very difficult. In due course 'de studentification' may provide opportunities. Only the resident population itself can restore sustainability to a community. Above all, it needs commitment in order to do so. But all stakeholders can lobby for, and provide support to, the re-introduction of long-term residence, especially families (whether partners only, or partners with dependents, or single people with dependents), especially within policy frameworks set by local and national government.

POINT 7: AREAS OF RESTRAINT. Local planning authorities around the country are adopting a range of local HMO plans to deal with the problems of

concentrations of HMOs or student accommodation (the new planning regime of Local Development Frameworks gives opportunities to do this). One of these plans is the idea of an 'Area of Restraint', in order to resist further development where there are already high concentrations. The council is of course the lead actor here. Community associations can lobby for some form of restraint, while the universities, students and the PRS can offer their support. National government too, through the Planning Inspectorate, can support such policy initiatives.

POINT 8: THRESHOLD POLICY. Another measure that has been proposed by local councils is the idea of some sort of threshold, beyond which further development of HMOs or student accommodation will be resisted. This is meant to prevent concentrations developing in the first place. Again, the council takes the lead. Universities, students and the PRS can support the council by encouraging the dispersal of student accommodation. The community can lobby for both. And the Planning Inspectorate can support such a policy initiative.

POINT 9: PURPOSE BUILT DEVELOPMENT. Some councils also support the development of purpose-built housing for students. Such housing takes the pressure off conversion of family homes into HMOs (and in a time of

housing shortage, this is far better than the conversion of family homes into seasonally-occupied second homes). At the same time, the siting of purpose-built development has to be carefully handled, so that it does not in fact increase polarisation. Universities, student unions and the developers can take initiatives, independently or together. The council can suggest locations, and communities can lobby for this sort of development. The Planning Inspectorate can be supportive of developments endorsed locally.

POINT 10: USE CLASSES ORDER. Many council ideas are hamstrung by national planning legislation. They can control only developments which need planning permission. Restraint and threshold policies in particular are undermined by the limitations of the current Use Classes Order - which allows family homes to be converted to HMOs without planning permission. A change of the Use Classes Order (redefining HMOs, and subjecting them to planning permission) would make an enormous difference to the power of local councils. Here, it is up to government to take action - and all local stakeholders should lobby the government on this issue.

[From the National HMO Lobby Publication:
Balanced Communities and Studentification: Problems and Solutions p.11-12, March 2008]

NATIONAL HMO LOBBY DAVID & GOLIATH

On average, editing this magazine, especially with summer almost gone, isn't a job for a SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) person like me. Finding something that produces a warm glow isn't always easy, and more often than not 'high' is something to associate with blood pressure, frustration and brick walls.

So, many thanks to the Broomhill Neighbourhood Group for showing that a latter-day David can still get one over on Goliath. and Mark Pickering for letting us know about it.

SHEFFIELD PLEDGES TO SAVE NATION'S GARDENS 18 JULY, 2007

The University of Sheffield and some of the UK's leading wildlife and horticultural organisations are today joining Natural England in signing a wildlife gardening manifesto to save the nation's gardens, particularly those in towns and cities.

Dr. Ken Thompson, honorary senior lecturer in the Department of Animal and Plant Sciences at the University, will sign the manifesto on behalf of the University at an event in London today (Wednesday 18 July 2007). Sheffield has been at the forefront of research that has demonstrated the value of gardens for wildlife, and is the only University in the UK to make the pledge. It marks a commitment by the University to take action in supporting the role gardens play in providing habitats for wildlife and providing easy access to nature.

This action follows a recent ICM Poll, commissioned by Natural England. The Poll found that 45% of 18-34 year olds do not feel they are well informed about wildlife gardening and 37% of 18-24 year olds said they would like to do more but don't know how.

Dr. Ken Thompson said: 'Gardens act as a food supermarket for many visiting and breeding animals. They are rich in biodiversity, help balance the water table and allow children and adults to encounter wildlife. The University wants to make this pledge because cutting edge environmental research is at the top of our agenda and we recognise the importance of gardens in both aiding our research and as valuable resource for learning and enjoyment.'

Sir Martin Doughty, Chair of Natural England, said: 'The gardens of England are under threat. In London, front gardens with an area 22 times the size of Hyde Park are now paved over and lost, reducing havens for wildlife, increasing the impact of flash flooding and contributing to climate change.'

'Through this manifesto, Natural England is calling to action businesses, the public sector and the public to play their part and give gardens a future – for the benefit of our own health and the survival of declining species, such as hedgehogs, frogs and bumblebees, that live on our doorsteps.'

Joan Ruddock, Minister for Biodiversity, said: 'This manifesto will help improve gardening advice to encourage people to manage gardens in a way that benefits wildlife. This is essential because as our climate changes, the network of gardens could help wildlife to adapt and migrate throughout the country.'

DAVID DEFEATS GOLIATH'S PLAN TO DESTROY SHEFFIELD HERITAGE GARDEN

30 OCTOBER, 2007

A proposal by the University of Sheffield and Miller Homes, which have a combined annual turnover approaching £900 million, to build houses on a site in the Broomhill Conservation Area in Sheffield was rejected yesterday by a City Council Planning Board following a six month campaign by the local community association.

The 500 members of the Broomhill Neighbourhood Group (BANG) pay £2 a year.

The scheme drawn up jointly by the University and the developer proposed building 69 apartments and 48 houses on the site of a student hall of residence and an area used by the Department of Animal and Plant Science. The plan required the demolition of a walled garden dating back to 1853 and the felling of a prominent line of trees shown on a map dated 1895. The Planning Board identified these two factors when rejecting the application and also stated that the proposed scheme constituted over-development of the three-hectare (7.5 acre) site. In addition, it was not satisfied with proposals for the provision of affordable housing.

Welcoming the Planning Board decision, the chairman of BANG, Professor Hamish Ritchie, said: 'While we have welcomed the plan to replace the Tipton Hall of Residence itself, the proposal to destroy the walled garden and the 100-year-old trees next to it was completely unacceptable. It is very gratifying that the Planning Board agreed with us.

'It is now possible for a piece of Sheffield's Victorian heritage to be saved and opened to the public. We hope the University will be willing to co-operate with us to this end. We are confident that funds would be available to bring this about, and we have demonstrated that the community has the necessary commitment'.

Over the last six months the Broomhill Neighbourhood Group has campaigned to save the half-acre walled garden so that it could be restored and, together with the land around it, opened as a public park. This part of the proposed housing estate was originally the garden of Tipton Elms, built in 1853 by John Hobson, a successful scissor manufacturer, and his wife, Thyrsa. It was subsequently the home of their second son, Albert, who was Lord Mayor of the city in 1911 and was also awarded a knighthood. The house and land were acquired by the University in 1921.

The housing development affecting the garden was opposed by the Sheffield Conservation Advisory Group, the Urban Design Panel, the Hallamshire Historic Buildings Society and more than 1600 individuals.

CCBC & APPG BALANCED & SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

THE COUNCILLORS' CAMPAIGN FOR BALANCED COMMUNITIES AND THE ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FOR BALANCED & SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Last year we reported on the inaugural meeting in Nottingham of what has become the 'Councillors' Campaign for Balanced Communities' or CCBC.

A year on, 23 Local Authorities have representatives involved in the CCB and membership is still growing.

Individual members and their councils have been actively working to raise Central Government's awareness of HMO issues and the need for changes to legislation.

Bath, Bristol, Canterbury, Leeds, Newcastle, Nottingham, Sheffield, Southampton and Swansea have all adopted Motions calling for Central Government to follow the Northern Ireland lead and amend the Use Classes Order so that an owner aiming to convert a family home into an HMO will need to apply for planning permission to do so.

Members of the NAG spent an interesting afternoon listening in to the debate on Nottingham City Council's Motion, which was passed unanimously.

The All Party Parliamentary Balanced and Sustainable Communities Group (APPG) has been in place since March, 2007. With the Councillors Campaign on Balanced Communities (CCBC) and the National HMO Lobby, it means that there are now three national organizations sharing concerns about the effects of HMOs on our neighbourhoods.

As with the CCBC, it's early days yet, but, in May and June 2007 APPG members initiated a campaign in Westminster with an Early Day Motion, a Ten-Minute Rule Bill and two Adjournment Debates.

Strange as they may seem, these formal procedures, whilst not in themselves achieving any short-term goals, are important because they have begun to draw Parliament's attention to the issues we have been campaigning on for so long.

Attention translates itself into pressure on Government. One reason why Iain Wright came to Nottingham and Loughborough. One reason for this year's Government activity on HMOs.

'If the greater majority of the population changes from one year to the next, the number of settled, long-term residents is too few to sustain, try as people will, the community organizations and sense of neighbourhood – the social capital, as it is called in the academic jargon – that makes our communities work.'

John Denham, MP, House of Commons, 5 June, 2007

NOTTINGHAM ACTION GROUP ON HMOs POSTSCRIPT

AND FINALLY ...

I'd like to finish by flagging up some reasons for gentle optimism.

The first is the work of the Council's HMO teams. I've lost count of the number of properties I know they've visited and the number of Notices they've served on landlords and agents, either as a result of their observations, or acting on information from residents. I don't want to contemplate what my own neighbourhood might have looked like by now if it hadn't been for their work.

The second is the National HMO Lobby. Apart from anything else, the support members give one another makes it that bit harder for anyone to dismiss what the NAG does and why it does it.

Oddly enough, Iain Wright's visit here in May is also one of my reasons. I don't think it's as easy to ignore what you see and hear first hand. Also, that we finally got 'The Minister' (never mind which one) to Nottingham shows that perseverance and nagging can work.

And finally, there's you – the members of the Nottingham Action Group.

I hope you have found something positive in the magazine to take you into the Autumn. I also hope you have found something to have a quiet smile about.

The poem 'A Morning in the Garden' has made more than one of my colleagues chuckle, and 'The Riddle of the Alarmed Wheelie Bin' brought some light into a dull and wet afternoon recently when I was despairing of getting this magazine off to the printers. So I am going to end with it.

My thanks to Silex of Lenton for it, and to the unnamed Council officer who got wet but, in a feat worthy of Raymond Chandler, solved the riddle.

THE RIDDLE OF THE ALARMED WHEELIE BIN

You know the background. Somewhere in the neighbourhood an alarm has been wheezing away for days. It seems like weeks.

It's not next door, but it's loud enough and persistent enough to be more than a little irritating. A bit like a niggling tooth ache, it's always there, and it's worse in the depths of the night.

In the end, you've had enough and set out to find the source of the nuisance. Your search leads you to a house which your ears tell you is the right place. But you can't see an alarm. The place looks empty.

The only thing you can do is go home. Perhaps it'll stop, or you'll just learn to live with it.

Or, you might just decide to call the Council.

By the time the Council officer you spoke to has reached the house in question it's raining the proverbial cats and dogs.

He has more experience than you, and so it is that he finally locates the source of the noise.

It's a wheelie bin at the side of the property. But what's the cause?

He has to empty everything out of it until, at the bottom, he finds it.

Some-one has thrown out an internal alarm (smoke detector, carbon monoxide detector – that sort of thing), but hasn't bothered to take out the batteries and disarm it. Which is what the officer now does.

So, if you find yourself in a similar situation, desperately seeking an elusive alarm, just make sure you check that wheelie bin. It could save you a sleepless night

Editor, 15 September, 2008

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The views and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Committee of the Nottingham Action Group on HMOs

We endeavour to ensure that our reports are accurate, but from time to time mistakes may occur. If you feel we have made such an error, please write to us at the following address.

NOTTINGHAM ACTION GROUP ON HMOs

c/o THE HILLSIDE CLUB

357A DERBY ROAD

LENTON

NOTTINGHAM NG7 2DZ

TELEPHONE: 07762-525-625

E-MAIL: contact@nottinghamaction.org.uk

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Tel: 0115 941 8123

