

## DEPUTATION 4 – LEEDS STUDENT UNIONS

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council meeting. Please now make your speech to Council which should not be longer than five minutes, and could you start by introducing the people in your deputation, please.

MR P GOLD: Lord Mayor and fellow Councillors, my name is Paul Gold and I am a representative of Leeds University Union. This is Jack Shielt also from Leeds University Union, Jo Johnson and Ian Challenger from Leeds Metropolitan University Union.

Lord Mayor and fellow Councillors, we come here today as representatives of the students of the University of Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan University. Combined, we represent over 60,000 students in Leeds, but more than that we feel we speak on behalf of young adults throughout this city and their future within it, which we believe the Article 4 Direction threatens implicitly.

Earlier this year I attended a discussion held by the Leeds Initiative based on the 'What if Leeds' consultation. The wellbeing of our young people was a paramount concern. At the discussion, Tom Riordan asked a question: 'How do we make young people feel valued in Leeds?'

This Article 4 Direction is not the answer. This Direction aims to limit the number of Houses of Multiple Occupation across the city, housing that is essential for young people considering the high cost of owner-occupation and growing need for flexible housing among the young. The question does not appear to be whether we feel valued but whether we feel welcome.

We are not here to engage in a narrow defence of the student area, an issue on which many of you will be familiar. Instead, we are here to urge the Council not to embark on a scheme that, far from having the desired result, will only create fresh problems for Leeds. Article 4 will have no effect on existing HMO numbers in the areas targeted by the Direction. It will not help to reverse high concentrations of HMOs.

We urge the Council to reconsider creating such a large area for the Direction, one that will limit social mobility and exacerbate the perceived problems facing areas of high HMO concentration. It has been chosen to manage areas, in the words of the proposal itself, 'likely to suffer from a displacement of HMO demand from the areas currently experiencing significant problems'.

I hope that the social mobility of our youth is not something that this Council views as a burden that Leeds must suffer. With the average age of a first time buyer in Leeds currently at 37, this Direction can only be detrimental to anyone under this age who wishes to move out of areas of high HMO concentration. By limiting the areas where new affordable shared housing can be found, Article 4 will only enforce the status quo.

It is not only students who will suffer but those who least can afford it: recent graduates, individuals on a low income or benefits, immigrants to this city. The consequences: students and graduates will be forced to stay in the Area of Housing Mix where affordable housing is abundant; young people in general will be forced into these areas or away from the City entirely so that commuting becomes the only option; migrants will have no choice about where they live at all. The city will stagnate.

Moreover, with almost 5000 free bed spaces in the Area of Housing Mix, how can the Council justify the Direction as a necessary tool to restrict further growth of HMOs, at a time when Universities, faced with an uncertain future, predict reduced numbers in the years to come?

Leeds cannot afford to let problems facing a small area of the city dictate policy across its entirety. Leeds deserves better than a one size fits all approach to housing that does nothing to tackle

the real social problems facing its residents. Implied is the suggestion that there is something intrinsically wrong with living in HMOS, when in the fact the Council should be looking at where it is failing the occupiers themselves.

In short, the Council are proposing a sledgehammer to crack a nut, a blanket restriction on HMOs, when what is needed is greater management of the existing stock which points to a policy meant to appease a small but vocal minority, while the interests of the majority are ignored.

Given the lack of clarity around the assessment of planning applications, we fear the Direction will be used as a control tool to limit the number of HMOs in a given area and, therefore, to restrict the ability of certain groups of people to live where they choose. This is discrimination via the backdoor, based on socio-economic factors that will disproportionately affect the young.

Students bring many benefits to this city. For those that choose to study here, as well as those who choose to settle here post-graduation, this is a thinly veiled attack on their presence.

We ask the Council to answer the following questions: who benefits from the Direction? Who benefits from depriving people of affordable housing at a time when they most need it? Who benefits from the demonisation of HMO occupiers? Who benefits from the Council enforcing a narrow-minded view of what constitutes a balanced community drawn along age and socio-economic lines?

We ask the Council to consider the impact of the Direction and its geographical scope on Leeds's Housing policy. We urge Council and the Executive Board to reject this proposal and the misconceived area it covers. Thank you. *(Applause)*

THE LORD MAYOR: Thank you. Can I call on Councillor Gruen, please?

COUNCILLOR GRUEN: Lord Mayor, thank you. Can I move that the matter under debate be referred to the Executive Board.

COUNCILLOR LOBLEY: Can I second, my Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: Can I call for the vote on that, please. *(A vote was taken)*  
That is clearly CARRIED.

Can I thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which your comments will receive. Good afternoon.