

Turn that down! Neighbours revolt over party houses

A surge in one-off weekend rentals sparks demand for reform

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Everyone loves a good party, apart from the neighbours. The rise of dedicated party houses, from Edinburgh to Sandbanks, is being met with a growing backlash and now MPs and influential residents' groups are calling for ministers to step in.

A large and apparently growing number of ordinary residential houses are being let out for one-off events – often stag or hen parties, or big birthday celebrations – using platforms such as Airbnb and HomeAway.

MPs in popular tourist towns are fielding more and more angry complaints from residents in otherwise quiet neighbourhoods who report

loud music and raucous behaviour every weekend. Now Caroline Lucas, the Brighton Pavilion MP, and Wera Hobhouse, who represents Bath, are calling for a registration scheme where owners must log their property so that local authorities can ensure they meet safety standards or be shut down for flagrant breaches.

“People who live in crowded towns and cities have to tolerate the occasional noisy party at a neighbouring house. But it's completely unreasonable to expect people to put up with this every weekend,” Lucas said. “We need better regulation, including requiring planning consent for anyone changing property use from a home to a short-term let.”

Hobhouse said currently local authorities have far too limited powers to deal with any noise and disturbance issues that neighbours have who live next to a party house.

Airbnb has transformed the DIY holiday market, with an estimated



Hen antics in Brighton, left.
Below, litter outside a flat rented for one night in Bath.

80,000 short-term lets in London alone. But the growth in unregulated holiday lets has brought with it challenges. A survey of popular hen and stag destinations by the *Observer* indicates there are hundreds of potential party houses available through Airbnb and HomeAway. A total of 160 properties are advertised in Brighton as being suitable for 12 or more people, with 122 in Liverpool, 120 in Manchester and 76 in Edinburgh.

While these properties may also be used by quieter groups, such as families or for corporate training, some owners, or hosts as Airbnb terms them, are explicit about the party

options. The “Princes Street Party Palace” in Edinburgh advertises beds for 22 people, as does the “Hen Party Palace Group Townhouse”, where one guest mentioned that a problem with the heating was resolved with “large amounts of alcohol as an apology”.

Others are more circumspect. David Morley has put up with a party house in Sandbanks, Poole, since June, but its listing suggests no loud music after 10pm. He says the parties go on much later, and claims the owner and Airbnb have

not taken notice of complaints.

“It's basically turned what is an ordinary residential house into a commercial party house,” said Morley, who runs the 500-strong Sandbanks community group.

In Bath the problem is even more acute, according to Robin Kerr, the chairman of the Federation of Bath Residents' Associations, who says the number of party houses has risen to 70 from 54 two years ago. “It is a widespread problem, across attractive towns and cities in Britain. They [parties] take place only at the weekends and make [the owners] fabulous amounts of money.”

He is calling for compulsory registration, a new planning-use category, and a maximum density for short-term lets, similar to the powers that allow councils to limit the number of house in multiple occupation (HMO) properties.

Airbnb commented: “Inappropriate, illegal or disruptive behaviour has no place on our platform.”

