

From The Chairman:

16th July 2018

Dear Chronicle,

Short Term Lettings

FoBRA applauds the full Council's decision to seek law changes to regulate short-term lettings in B&NES.

We have long been concerned about the spread of short-term lettings, which reduces the supply of housing for long-term rental; this at a time when the Core Strategy requires an increase in residential housing in Bath. Large 'party houses' are a related but particular problem because of the nuisance they cause. We risk 'hollowing out' central Bath, as long-term residents flee the noise and disturbance.

We support controls such as licensing or imposing a 90-day limit in a calendar year. We welcome the Council leader's call on Government to create a new use class for short-term rentals, and encourage him to pursue his quest with resolve.

However we think the Council could and should be brave and do more within the existing legal framework. For example, any property available to rent for more than 140 days a year is liable to business rates, so the Council should refer all such properties to the Value Office Agency (VOA).

Secondly, while the creation of a new use class would clarify matters, Government advice is that the use of large properties as party houses is not consistent with residential (C3) use. There is case law for this, so the Council could require them to apply for 'sui generis' change of use. Action on party houses should not be limited to 'nuisance'.

Moreover, such properties must be subject to the same fire and safety rules as hotels, B&Bs and HMOs. To date, the Fire Service has been slow to act.

All this would help level the playing field with conventional suppliers of accommodation.

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