

STUDENT HOUSES AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

WORKING TOGETHER FOR IMPROVED RELATIONS

An open letter to landlords from Redland & Cotham Amenities Society and Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society.

Over the past 18 months the universities in Bristol, student representatives, the City Council and local residents have held regular meetings to find out how we can work together to make areas where there is a large number of shared rented properties pleasant places for everyone to live together.

We are writing as local residents to you as landlords (or managers) to invite you to join this initiative. The benefits for landlords of working together with the local community include early notification of repair or other issues and a watchful eye kept on empty properties during the vacations. We both own property in the area and it is not in our interest to let it devalue. The following are some points which we think are especially important:

- **The appearance of streets** is very relevant to house prices. The un-loved look of many student houses damages public amenity, does not encourage care by tenants and lowers house values. Typically frontages are cluttered and lack any screening or planting. Bin spaces are ill-defined and often difficult to use. Rear gardens, overlooked by many neighbours are neglected. Hedges grow over and obstruct pavements and are a danger for pedestrians. The proliferation of agent's boards is unsightly and indicates lack of stability. Although these are not exclusively student house problems they are prevalent in student housing areas and give landlords a bad name.
- **The life styles of students and the local population** are different and inevitably some tensions arise. These were identified and addressed at the meetings. Some positive and practical measures have been taken. There is more that we all can do. The Bristol universities now ensure that students are fully informed about their responsibilities while living in the community. They give information about local services such as recycling and waste.
- **Contact information for neighbours.** This information is not solely to facilitate complaints! Permanent residents can help landlords by reporting property damage and security issues, particularly when student houses are empty. Providing neighbouring properties, including those opposite and to the rear, with your contact phone number, mobile number, address and email is a benefit to both parties.

We feel strongly that we should all work together to make it as easy as possible for tenants and long-term residents to live as 'good neighbours'. There will always be some annoyances for both sides. Some students will still be noisy and un-cooperative, some residents over-critical and some landlords and managers will be less responsible than others, but good procedures can help.

The table overleaf sets out suggestions for all parties. It is based on the experience of Redland & Cotham Amenities Society and Clifton & Hotwells Improvement Society and discussions with other parties. We would welcome your comments and other suggestions.



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SUGGESTED PRACTICAL ACTIONS TO HELP RESOLVE SOME OF THE CURRENT PROBLEMS

Problem	Action by universities	Actions by residents	Actions by landlords
<p>Lack of information</p> <p>- for new tenants</p> <p>-for nearby residents</p>	<p>All students are now given full information about their responsibilities while living in the community. The Council Waste Service provides extensive information for display in the houses.</p> <p>UoB students are emailed with recycling information each October which is available at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/accommodation/prs/community/refuse.html</p>	<p>Make personal contact with those who live nearby and make them feel part of the community.</p> <p>Invite students to provide mobile phone no or email contact.</p> <p>Ask them to inform neighbours when they plan a party and agree with them a reasonable time for it to end.</p>	<p>Ensure that information provided by the Council and Universities is displayed to incoming tenants. Put up laminated notices giving full information about bin collection making it clear that it is the tenant's responsibility to put out and take in the rubbish bins and recycling containers. Tell them that plastic is not yet collected for recycling</p> <p>Arrange for regular external inspections, and always during the first week of university vacations, and deal with any problems identified. Remind tenants of responsibilities.</p> <p>Provide adjoining and nearby residents with contact details of landlord or manager.</p>
<p>Rubbish bin storage</p>	<p>Remind students not to leave bins etc on the pavements</p>	<p>Call on, phone or drop a note to ask politely that bins are not left on the pavement.</p> <p>Try this before complaining to Council and landlord.</p>	<p>Provide adequately sized and accessible storage space for all recycling/waste containers.</p> <p>Ensure that tenants know that black bags can only be used and collected with Council permission, which has to be obtained by the owner of the property.</p>
<p>End of tenancy/end of year move out. Dumping of debris and waste outside</p>	<p>For 4 weeks from late June the University of Bristol pay the council to provide special bin collections when notified of addresses concerned</p>	<p>Notify the council of any rubbish left outside student housing including full and empty bins on pavement.</p>	<p>Visit and clear away student rubbish in first week of new annual tenancy.</p> <p>Organise building, repair and re-furnishing so that streets are not blocked by skips for long periods.</p>
<p>Noise</p>	<p>The booklet 'Moving On – A Guide to Community Living' is distributed to all UoB students and gives detailed advice on noise and other issues. It is available at http://www.bristol.ac.uk/accommodation/prs/</p>	<p>Encourage communication. Tell student neighbours of parties being held, just as they should tell their neighbours. Try not to hold outside events during and just before exam time.</p>	<p>Practical measures such as ensuring that the doorbell works so people do not have to shout. Use bells where names can be shown against the bell pushes.</p> <p>Ask new tenants to respect other people in the near vicinity by keeping music etc at a moderate to low level. Point out sensitive locations, eg back gardens and nearby bedroom windows.</p> <p>Include in their tenancy contracts a suitable provision against noise nuisance or anti social behaviour. The Office of Fair Trading have said that in order to be fair the clause should be "narrowed to preclude excessive noise that may cause a disturbance"</p>