

# POLICY PROPOSAL

**TITLE: AFFORDABLE ACCOMMODATION**

**PROPOSED BY: BRAD BAINES (BTB24)**

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## INTRODUCTION

Bath has less affordable accommodation than Greater London<sup>1</sup>, with many students spending more than half of their maintenance loans on rent alone. Despite this, Bath students receive the same level of maintenance loan as students at the University of Stirling, where accommodation is half the price of Bath's as a multiple of average local income. Amongst university accommodation, only Osborne House and Eastwood provide rooms for which the total cost is lower than 50% of the maximum maintenance loan<sup>2 3</sup>. The city as a whole has seen house prices rise 20% from 2010 to 2015<sup>1</sup>, whilst the maximum maintenance grant and loan only increased by 15% over the same period. Since the current Vice Chancellor first held that office in 2001, university-owned accommodation rent has increased by 150% whilst prices more generally have only increased 50%.

At the same time, the price of private rented accommodation is high and standards are inconsistent, though consistently below the standards of university-owned accommodation.

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## REASON FOR CHANGE

1. Rents in Bath are unusually high, driven in part by student demand for housing.
2. Rent has increased in all university-owned accommodation almost every year since 2001, and whilst renovations and staff costs may increase the cost of maintaining accommodation and improve the quality of accommodation, neither of these mean that students have more money to spend on rent.
3. The University of Bath has exceeded its target operating surplus every year it has had one, since 2012, and so can afford a real-terms cut in rent in university-owned accommodation without reducing spending on accommodation services or in any other area.
4. Students in Bath face a scarcity of quality student accommodation, due to Bath's diminishing brownfield stock and the unwillingness of the council to grant planning permission on green belt land or to grant more HMO licences given the existing saturation.
5. Landlords and letting agencies in Bath have widely diverging standards in dealing with student renters, with many providing insufficient support and treating students as a resource rather than as clients, with little to no check on the standards of their behaviour.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/globalassets/documents/media/press-releases/lloyds-bank/2015/2015-affordable-cities-review-full-list-of-cities.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/undergraduate-accommodation-prices-2016-to-2017/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance/new-fulltime-students>

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## THE PROPOSAL

1. Bath SU calls for the University of Bath to implement a three-year rent freeze, maintaining or reducing 2017/2018 nominal rent levels until the academic year 2020/2021.
  2. Bath SU calls for the University of Bath to sign a compact whereby any new accommodation built or acquired by the university with a total rent burden of more than 50% of the maximum maintenance loan shall be matched room-for-room with new university-owned accommodation with a total rent burden of less than 40% of the maximum maintenance loan. Further, that any new accommodation built or acquired by the university for primary use by first-year undergraduates shall be matched room-for-room with new university-owned accommodation for exclusive use of students not in their first-year to alleviate pressure in the local private rented student accommodation market.
  3. Bath SU will collate a code of practice, along with stakeholders including students, local landlords and letting agencies in order to improve students' experience of private rental whilst keeping terms achievable and agreeable to at least a significant minority of private landlords and letting agencies. Bath SU will base this on the ACORN ethical lettings charter.
  4. Bath SU will encourage AHS to produce a system to accredit landlords and letting agencies which abide by this Code of Minimal Practice, and to encourage students to rent properties from providers on the accredited list in preference to providers who fall short of accreditation.
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