



NATIONAL ORGANISATION OF RESIDENTS ASSOCIATIONS

Please reply to:

42 Abbot's Ride,
Farnham GU9 8HZ.

Tel: 01252 711876

Email: norachairman@gmail.com

14th February 2020

The Rt. Hon. Christopher Pincher MP,
Minister for Housing,
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government,
2 Marsham Street,
Westminster,
London SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister,

Regulation of Short Term Letting

I am writing to you as Chairman of the National Organisation of Residents Associations (NORA) and on behalf of our members. As individual groups, it is usual that they contact their own Member of Parliament.

However, as a national group, to support our membership, I am contacting you directly.

For some years now N.O.R.A. has raised many matters with your Department at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government regarding Housing and the impact on Localism.

Following a recent meeting with Officers at the M.H.C.L.G. matter of Short-Term Lettings was raised together with our members' concerns regarding the future and the implications of the Short-Term Lettings Market in the United Kingdom.

Short-Term Letting (or the 'Airbnb Phenomenon') has straddled the world, resulting in greatly increased availability of visitor accommodation, especially in attractive towns and cities, but also consequential damage to long-term residential housing stock, and to the Bed and Breakfast and small Hotel trade.

This started in the U.S.A. as a way for householders to earn a little extra money by letting a spare room. Much of it has now become a global business, with whole blocks of flats being turned over to Short-Term Letting (STL), but without the regulation that accompanies a business, such as fire inspection, taxation and planning approval (thereby allowing the local planning authority to consider whether conversion is in accordance with the Local Plan; and neighbours to comment if they choose to), none of which currently happens in England and Wales.

We contend that this is not, therefore, a 'level playing field' and it needs to be; but there is more, for example, including potentially dangerous visitor accommodation; avoidance of taxation; great damage to the regulated accommodation sector; creation of a serious shortage of rented dwellings for 'real people' to live in long term; and deep disturbance and nuisance to neighbours.

A particularly worrying sub-set of STL is the emergence of the 'Party House' (in places such as Bath, York, Brighton, etc), which needs even more regulation. In most countries of the civilised world, this trade has been regulated, starting with compulsory registration, including in Ireland. Scotland has recently proposed legislation to do so; but not England and Wales. Why not? Moreover, in the last six months there has been a deluge of comment in the press about these problems and yet no response from the Government. It would be tiresome to cite all of this, but a particularly good article by Libby Purves on 2nd September 2019 in The Times should serve to illustrate the problem. I append the article below.

May I therefore urge you, Minister, to give serious consideration of this problem and to initiate a much needed and appropriate action which everywhere else is seen as normal and necessary?

It would be most appreciated by our members if you would be able to meet with myself and another at a date, time and place convenient to you, so that we may be better able to present our case for regulation and present further evidence of the detrimental impact upon our local communities.

I await the favour of your reply and remain

Yours faithfully,

For and on behalf of the National Organisation of Residents Associations,

Signed on behalf of **Zofia Lovell, Chairman.**

TIMES: 2.9.19

Airbnb is a monster that must be tamed

The offer of an airbed and breakfast has grown into a \$31bn beast that threatens to damage local communities

Libby Purves



@LIB_THINKS

It was born 11 years ago in a San Francisco loft and grew to be worth \$31 billion. Its soft tentacles cover the world, invigorating or choking. It isn't the showiest of digital revolutions but a stealthily significant one, challenging the most intimate domestic sphere. Now, from Edinburgh to Oahu and Boston to Bath, communities are waking up and wondering how to control it. It is Airbnb.

An old idea was turbocharged by the IT age, when in 2007 young Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia needed help with their rent, put an airbed in the living room and offered bed and breakfast. We've all done it, usually without charging. But another friend, Nathan Blecharczyk, was a tech wizard. Fancying "a few bucks" extra, they set up a website linking spare-room owners with business or holiday travellers who couldn't find a hotel or needed something cheaper. They branded

and professionalised the idea of being a stranger's guest: the sharing economy was born.

Fed by bright venture capitalists Airbnb went global. Within three years more than a million nights were booked, rocketing to ten million a year later. Now it has offices in 11 world cities and plans more.

Airbnb is basically a harmless, friendly, sensible and economical idea, and savvy business because when it comes to sleeping, people are wary of relating to total strangers — foreign ones at that — but comfortable dealing with a company and a safe payment system. The website still sells itself on basic internationalist matesness: Francois

Neighbours can find themselves living next to a noisy 'party house'

of Paris who met a Finnish interior decorator, Silvia and Mateo of London who enjoy guests who "often bring gifts from their country... sometimes they invite us to their home town". It is fashionably "woke" about nondiscrimination and a person's gender being whatever they identify as. But when a sweet little idea collides with a capitalist economy things tend to harden.

Despite the company's considerable commission, hosting is a good earner. The second "b" for breakfast soon eroded as people realised they didn't have to be there or feed anyone, but could use lets to pay for their holiday, with the first £1,000 a year tax free because UK law rightly encourages lodgers. Now a vast number of Airbnb properties are "entire house/cottage/apartment" rather than a room with a family. It becomes a self-catering let without paying a hotel's business rate (unless you exceed 140 nights a year and get found out). Crucially it is free from the stringent fire, electrical and safety regulations laid on real hotels and B&Bs.

Next, entrepreneurs realised that it needn't be your home at all, just a buy-to-let without the hassle of tenancy agreements. Some "hosts" are actually companies listing multiple properties, raising concern about the hollowing-out of desirable neighbourhoods. From Barcelona to Bath, concern rises about profit-seekers distorting the local housing market, dumping long-term tenants and disrupting the lives of those who stay. In Bath last week councillors complained of their powerlessness against it. From across the world, alongside friendly, happy tales you hear neighbours appalled at suddenly living next to a "party house" where instead of the tolerable racket of

occasional festivities perpetrated by familiar neighbours whose names they know, there are months of nonstop loud music, screaming rows, double parking, drug and barbecue smoke. Often small apartments are let to large groups, though Airbnb officially bans it. Some examples are preposterous and rare: one US let advertised as "The Love Shack" seemed to be housing porn shoots.

We unhealthily accept that transients are of more value than locals

Others are just intensely annoying. One long-term bedsit tenant found that his absentee landlord had cavalierly put the rest of the house on Airbnb, listing personal property like the tenant's washer-dryer and fridge as "amenities". He was unwillingly sharing facilities with a series of messy strangers who let his cat escape and used his towels.

A parliamentary committee discussed Airbnb last year, the formal hospitality industry obviously hates it, since in London, Brighton and Bristol it has already swallowed over a quarter of the market in rooms. But there are wider reasons. Gordon Marsden, the chairman, observed: "There is an image that

this is a lot of happy, jolly people with a spare room trying to make some pin money... That's true, but it's also true that there seem to be systematic attempts to do block booking on blocks of flats." Some are tall blocks. The risks are obvious.

Slowly authorities wake up and try to tame the beast. The mayor of Honolulu signed a bill to limit even rentals where the owner lives on site. From San Francisco to Edinburgh research shows that a local increase in Airbnb raises the neighbourhood's rents and house prices. New York has put limits on it, while Japan, Singapore and parts of Spain restrict or ban it. In Greater London you may only do 90 nights without planning permission. Even 90 nights can wreck a neighbour's peace.

As the committee said, the UK government is slow to take it seriously. Politicians love to boast about Britain's vibrant attractions, but maybe also it reflects the sentimental unease of an owner-occupier nation, reluctant to tell an Englishman what he can do with his castle. Apart from price inflation and nuisance there is something unhealthy in the idea that, just because a pleasant little scheme grew monstrously profitable, we accept that transients are more valuable than rooted residents. It's not how to build communities.