

Graduate Housing Review

In general, the MCR appreciates that we are lucky to have such a large amount of housing for graduates so close to college. A lot of the graduate housing (Richmond Road, Franks) is of a very good standard and the rent considered to be good value for money. However some of the housing, namely the Mitchell building which houses many graduate students each year, is of much poorer quality. In addition, some of the Worcester place houses are in need of updating and maintenance.

As the MCR we are particularly concerned about this because for many graduates (particularly international students) these rooms are their home for an entire year. Poor housing does a lot to taint people's experiences of Oxford and Worcester, and is known to have a large impact on the welfare of students. There are also security issues with some of the accommodation which should be a concern both for the MCR and College. In addition, we are worried that there is a disparity developing between the graduate accommodation and the majority of the undergraduate accommodation (particularly as more emphasis is placed on providing accommodation for conferences), and we are keen to prevent this from happening.

Rent re-banding

The committee have considered the possibility of re-banding the rent costs, but feel that this would not be ideal because:

- i) It is felt that most graduates (many of whom are funded) would prefer to have a decent room and pay slightly more, than have their rent reduced but still be in a poor quality room.
- ii) The decrease in rent would need to be accompanied by an increase in rent in the better accommodation, which would not prove popular with those living in better housing.
- iii) Any change in the difference in rent would still be unlikely to be indicative of the real difference in standards between accommodation.

We therefore wish to propose a review of the graduate housing in Worcester. We have listed what we believe to be the main problems with the poorer quality accommodation, and suggestions for (relatively small) changes that could be made to greatly improve standards.

Mitchell building

Lots of graduate students have complained to the committee about the standard of housing in Mitchell building. For the majority, the lower rent does not compensate for the poor quality of the accommodation. We understand that there has been discussion of getting rid of the Mitchell Building for many years, but are concerned that this is now used as a reason not to update it to a suitable standard. We understand the College's reluctance to spend money on a building whose future is uncertain. However, as it is looking increasingly unlikely that replacement of Mitchell will occur any time soon, we feel that a commitment to Mitchell building needs to be made to bring it up to the appropriate standard. We appreciate that the cost of renovating Mitchell building would be too large to allow a proper refurbishment, but there are a number of basic things that can be addressed and altered at very little cost, which we list below. We would strongly encourage college make these basic changes to the Mitchell building a priority in their accommodation planning.

Issues include:

A thorough cleaning of all rooms needs to be carried out.

Bathrooms – cleaning, painting, new shower heads/tiling

Kitchen (downstairs) – cleaning thoroughly, repainting and tiling, new cupboards and cooker.

Wardrobe doors (currently curtains rather than doors) – replace with new material, or clean properly.

Ensure the security lights outside work properly, put an extra light on the side of the building.

Ensure all the windows can close properly (currently the mechanism means they can be easily opened from the outside).

Heating – look into sorting out the underfloor heating so the heat is evenly distributed throughout the building. Encourage people to use storage heaters (although these are very old and would need to be checked to ensure they are safe).

Look into clearing some of the shrubbery/trees around Mitchell to allow light into the building, or improving lighting inside.

Think about what could be done to prevent a recurrence of last year's rat infestation

Worcester Place

The Worcester place housing is of a much better standard than Mitchell, and the standard of these houses has increased substantially over the past year with the repainting of the showers and toilets. However there are also a number of changes which could be made to improve the quality of this housing (see below). The main problem with the accommodation in Worcester place is that the difference in rent between Richmond Road and some of these houses is not felt to be indicative of the real difference in standards between the two.

Issues include:

Bathrooms – clean properly, repaint and tile (if not already been done – most now have)

Kitchens – clean thoroughly. Repaint if necessary (although many have been improved).

Clear shrubbery around the windows to allow light in!

Ensure all windows can be closed securely and cannot be opened from the outside.

Improve tiling/steps around the front of the houses to improve safety and aesthetics

Improve/install outside lights in some houses (near side entrances – some are very dark)

Proposals:

- i. Act on the above suggestions for improvements to Mitchell and Worcester Place houses.
- ii. Ensure that a review/inspection of graduate accommodation is carried out by college (possibly but not necessarily in conjunction with the MCR committee). This is in addition to the one carried out by the housekeeping staff at the end of tenancy, and should focus on maintenance, security and longer term problems as opposed to normal wear and tear. Particular attention should be paid to houses in the lower rent bracket and any problems acted on as soon as possible. Tenants to be advised of the outcome of the review, and kept updated as to improvements or problems.
- iii. Ensure that a thorough cleaning of accommodation is carried out. Checks to be made by college to ensure that this has been carried out to the appropriate standard. Provide cleaning equipment for students so they can clean their own accommodation during the year if necessary.
- iv. The MCR to encourage students to report problems with accommodation to maintenance as soon as they occur, and to report larger concerns to the committee/college.
- v. Encourage better communication between maintenance staff and students, so that if problems cannot be resolved immediately, tenants are kept up to date with when they are likely to be fixed.
- vi. If it appears that Mitchell building will continue to be used as student housing for the foreseeable future (e.g. the next 3+ years), to draw up a plan for improving the accommodation so that it meets acceptable standards. This could be done in conjunction with students, and should be made a priority over other renovations to housing.

Overall we have tried to come up with solutions that we hope will be effective but can be carried out at a minimal cost to College. We hope the committee will consider these suggestions and act on them accordingly, and we are grateful for any input and comments.

Examples:

Toilet, 20 Worcester Place



Downstairs kitchen, Mitchell building

