

Studentification: *the impact on residents of an English city*

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Abstract

This research aims to explore how ‘studentification’ has impacted on the lives of local residents in the West End area of Lincoln, England. Semi-structured interviews, based on a convenience sample, included key informants linked to the West End, alongside focus groups with students living in the West End. The data was analysed through a content analysis, picking up key themes and issues which were then discussed in relation to the research literature. Results show a mix of opinions and experiences regarding studentification in the West End, both from the students and interviews with the other participants. Many of the issues relating to studentification in the West End are similar to those experienced in other areas of the country, such as a reduction in street parking, excessive noise and rubbish being left around the properties; however, some to a more or lesser extent. Results also highlight that the West End community is becoming clearly divided into two groups, residents and students, as a result of studentification. This may lead to further more complex issues.

Keywords: Studentification, Lincoln, Housing, Higher Education.

Author Profile

Matt Mosey has recently graduated with a first-class honors degree from The University of Lincoln. He conducted this research during his second and final years, funded as part of a University Scheme to support undergraduate research. The research followed on from a previous piece of research which investigated the issues that students face when living in privately rented student accommodation. Matt was supervised by Prof. Mike Neary at The

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Introduction

The term studentification was coined and defined by Darren Smith as ‘contradictory social, cultural, economic and physical changes resulting from an influx of students within privately-rented accommodation in particular neighbourhoods’ (Smith, 2002, 6). Since then, it has been used in both the media and academic papers across the UK (Hubbard, 2008; Munroe et al., 2009; Rugg et al., 2002; Sage, 2011; Smith, 2005), and even the world - Slovakia (Sekelsky, 2014), Spain (Garmendia et al, 2012) and China (He and Lin, 2015). The term has become more popular as university enrolment figures have increased. In the UK, as a result of New Labour’s equal opportunities policies to provide access to higher education to more people, especially those in disadvantaged families, student numbers rose from 1,600,000 in 1995 to 2,470,000 in 2004 (Hubbard, 2008, 325). This massive increase was not met with purpose built student accommodation. This led to huge numbers of students turning to the private rental sector for accommodation (Rugg et al., 2002, 289-291). This need for accommodation was satisfied by ‘studentifiers’ (landlords) who are often ‘small-scale property owners and investors, primarily in locations within proximity to university campuses (Smith, 2005, 79).

The concept of studentification relies on an increase in ‘Houses of Multiple Occupation’ (HMO). An HMO which is defined by the government as ‘a property rented out by at least three people who are not from one ‘household’ (e.g., a family) but share facilities like the bathroom and kitchen’ (gov.uk, 2016). For landlords to be able to let out an HMO they must acquire a license which is renewed every five years and abide by various terms such as making sure the house is considered ‘fit’ to live in, ‘send the council a gas safety certificate,

install and maintain smoke alarms and ensure the manager of the house is considered 'fit' - with no criminal record (gov.uk, 2016).

The vast increase of HMOs in specific areas of university cities has led to a change in geographical patterns as these locations were to become 'student areas' where rows upon rows of terrace houses accommodate students for the nearby universities (Munroe et al., 2009). These student areas have been labelled as 'student ghettos' by the media (BBC, 2008; The Guardian, 2009). This often means that studentification is assumed to be a simple concept, this, however, is not the case. Studentification has multiple and differing effects on communities around the UK. The severity of effects can be based on numerous variables such as the percentage of students to the local residents, the age of the university and the history of the area, all of which vary around the country.

While some studies do address the positive aspects of studentification, such as the economic effects students have on the towns and cities they inhabit (Sage et al, 2012, 1072), many focus on the key negative effects of studentification. Issues include the degeneration of the exterior of houses as a result of students or their landlords not maintaining them (Sage et al, 2012, 1067), the displacement of local services for families (Sage et al, 2012, 1068), the reduction in community events, and a fragmentation of community cohesion (Sage et al, 2012, 1069). Other issues include a reduction in parking, littering on the streets and an excessive amount of 'to let' signs in student areas. The most reported negative effect of studentification is 'noise nuisance'. This has been shown in multiple studies which often identify students making noise, primarily at night, as allegedly the most detrimental effect to local residents' lives (Hubbard, 2012, 2633-2634; Sage et al, 2012, 1067).

The West End, Lincoln and The University of Lincoln

The West End of Lincoln is located to the west of the city (Figure 1). There is evidence that the area has been inhabited since the 10/11th century. The West End is parallel to the Fossdyke Canal which runs off the Brayford Pool. Carholme Road, Newland Street, West Parade and Yarbrough Road are known to be the primary roads in the area, with smaller avenues and streets darting off them into neat cul-de-sacs or through-ways holding more housing, history and beauty (Walker, 2008). The area is mainly terrace houses. On the edge of the West End lies grassland which was previously a racecourse, with the remains of a spectator stand which is used by the community for a variety of purposes, including a temporary mosque (Walker, 2008).

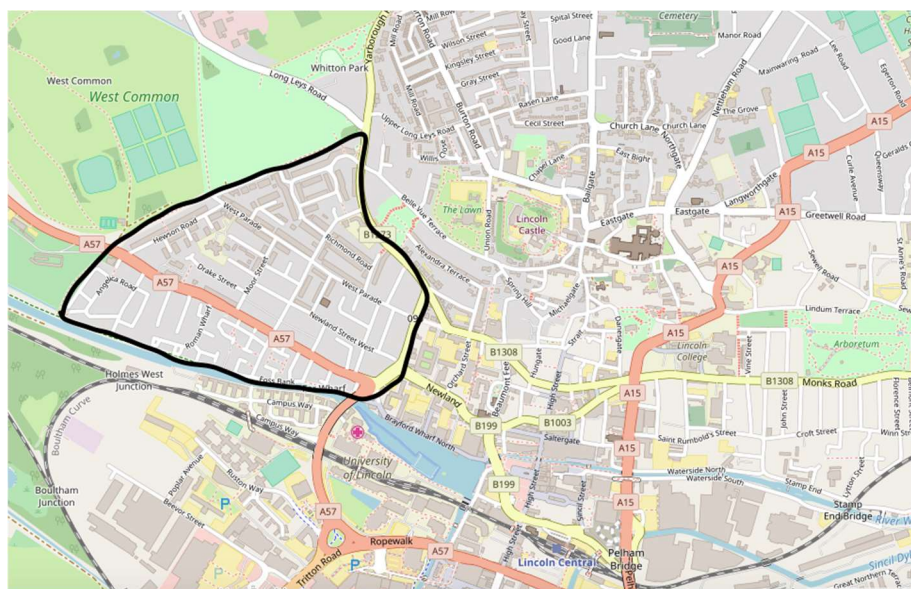


Figure 1 – Map of Lincoln with the West End highlighted (© OpenStreetMap contributors)

Lincoln, with a population of 97,065 (NOMIS, 2017), is an interesting city when assessing the impact of studentification. While the University of Lincoln has been in Lincoln for only 20 years, and with Bishop Grosseteste University gaining degree awarding powers in 2012, both institutions have grown at an impressive rate; with the University of Lincoln enrolment figures climbing from its first 500 students in 1996 (University of Lincoln and Humberside, 1997) to 15,045 in the academic year 2015/2016 (FOI, 2017). A similar trend can also be

seen with Bishop Grosseteste University enrollment figures steadily increasing from 1915 in 2010 to 2235 in 2015/16 (HESA, 2017) . Additionally, the recent growth has been exponential regarding jobs at The University of Lincoln. In the period from 2007-2016, staff numbers climbed from 1750 to 2300 (FOI, 2017). These figures show that the main university is expanding and growing by the year. This has had an effect on the economics of the city as more jobs and students means more money is being spent within the city.

With food and beverage businesses booming from the influx of students and the tourism trade expanding, Lincoln has been and still is experiencing a growth (Lincolnshire Research Observatory, 2011). Furthermore, new constructions for businesses, accommodation and various other modes of urban planning is a cause and a consequence of the population of the city continuously rising (NOMIS, 2015).

The combined number of students at the two city based universities, the University of Lincoln and Bishop Grosseteste University is over 17,000. Therefore, the population of Lincoln is made up of over 16% of students, which, in comparison to other university cities, is relatively high. Lincoln has three main locations which are populated by university students. These are the West End, The High Street and Monks Road (Figure 1). In particular, in the West End in 2011 over a third of the houses were occupied by full-time students aged 16-74. This is almost 3,000 students living in one area of the city. If these students were all living in houses of five there would be over 600 student houses in the West End. It is, therefore, possible to understand the magnitude of the density of student population in this relatively small area of the city of Lincoln. It was for this reason that the West End region was chosen for this research.

Research Methods

In order to carry out this research, data was gathered through seven semi-structured interviews and five focus groups. The data gathered from the interviews included experiences and opinions of studentification from a range of participants who all had a different role within the West End community. These individuals often represented groups of people within the community or had direct contact with the residents of the West End. The inclusion of the student perspective on this issue as part of focus groups is significant, as the student voice is not usually presented in the studentification research literature.

A total of seven interviews were carried out. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and involved asking a total of eight questions (Appendix B). If the participant said something of particular interest, a follow-up question would be asked by the researcher to hopefully get the participant to expand on their point. Interviews were conducted from August 2016 to December 2016 and were held in numerous locations. The interview location was based on participant convenience and choice – this meant the venues ranged from a university room, cafes, to the participant's place of work and their home. The sample was gathered through a convenience sample. Key people to interview were identified from these interviews, creating a snowball effect, and from newsletters distributed in the West End which often gave the contact details of those who were of particular interest.

Semi-Structured interviews were used for a number of reasons. While there were nine questions that the interviewee received, they were able to talk freely about something related to the question in a great amount of detail and depth. This increased validity and meant that the participant may provide a new angle to an issue highlighted in previous interviews. Furthermore, by it being a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has the option to ask the

participant to expand on a point, so that matters of interest can be discussed further and points clarified.

Focus groups lasted around 30 minutes each. Each focus group was asked six questions (Appendix A), and like the interviews, if something of interest was mentioned, a follow-up question would be asked to get the participant to expand on their point. Focus groups were conducted in October 2016 comprising of between three and six students, all of whom belonged to the same house. Participants were selected by how long they had lived in the area and where in the area they lived. This enabled the focus groups to be gathered from a range of locations in the West End. It also meant that the data was collected from students who had both lived in the area one year and less than one year.

By using focus groups within houses, it was possible to gather data which expressed a group feeling on the issues aised in response to the questions that were asked. It also meant that a broad range of information could be gathered, for example if the different students had different experiences within the same house, or if they all had similar experiences within that area.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, content analysis (Bryman, 2016) was used to examine the responses. Key themes were identified and quotes which accurately presented a recurring opinion were used within the paper, with the permission of participants.

Findings - Interview Analysis

The Impact of Students

Economic growth was typically noted as a positive impact which the students have had on the city of Lincoln and indeed on the West End. Job opportunities, business expansion and general growth of the city were a handful of factors which participants expressed to be positive as a result of the university presence. This was also an important contributing factor to why some participants thought the city has changed significantly in the last 20 years.

“I moved to Lincoln many years ago and I can see a lot of changes. Lincoln is getting bigger, there’s more opportunities, more jobs, the population is younger and more investment is going into the city” - City of Lincoln Council Staff

“From what I can gather the revenue that the students bring into the shops in the city, is good, a lot of business wouldn’t have survived without the students” - Police Staff

“It has put the city more on the map... a lot of businesses have developed because of the university...including the university being a big employer” - University of Lincoln Member of Staff

Although some participants saw this as positive, some saw it as a burden as this led to problems for the community. Issues raised included: not enough homes for young families, having a large number of houses remaining empty for half the year and the residents constantly having new neighbours moving in. All of these factors had an effect on the community to the point where people have left the area.

“The number of HMOs, within the West End, which isn’t just student accommodation...it’s the number of HMOs which has had an effect on the community of the West End...it’s always been a very tight knit community...and I think that has been affected by the university and by students moving in...I think at certain points since 1999 there have been periods where people have decided to move out” - West End Residents Association

The lack of space for car parking was persistently raised as an issue, being a result of the influx of students into the area. While there is a parking permit scheme in place, some houses apply for multiple parking permits which leads to car overcrowding on the roads. This causes residents to become frustrated when parking becomes problematic.

“There’s not enough parking spaces, it does put residents on edge” - Police Staff

“If there could be a way of providing a place for students’ cars to go in the week, to try and ease the pressure on residents, ...you can’t just create space in the middle of a community” - Vicar of St. Faiths Church[Charles Street, West End of Lincoln]

Rubbish being left out and a lack of exterior house upkeep was seen as another issue. The worst of this seemed to be at particular points of the year, most notably at the end of the academic year when the students move out and leave their bins outside to be collected; however, once they have been collected, the students are not there to bring the bins back in.

“Some of the properties are not kept in a fantastic state” - West End Residents Association Spokesman

The most common issue that participants would talk about was the increase of the level of noise in the West End. While there was continuity in the fact that noise was an issue commonly expressed by some residents and discussed in the various community meetings, there was a mix of opinion over: how bad the issue is, how common the issue is and who makes the noise. Some participants found that there was either not an issue with noise in the West End or that it was rarely something they were aware of.

“I spoke to my daughter, I said do you hear the students...she said I never hear them mum....She sleeps in the front” – Resident

On multiple occasions it was apparent that the noise is not made exclusively by students.

Some participants raised concerns that non-student residents also often make noise and that there needs to be less stereotyping and stigma towards the idea that all the noise is made by students.

“The worst thing is that the noise issues are being related to students only and I think the message needs to be that there is a noise problem all over the city and not just in Lincoln...It’s not just students, you can be young professionals and cause problems, but if you are young in the West End you will still be classed as a student” - City of Lincoln Council Staff

“There is noise in transit, but it’s not always students, and I think it’s important to distil that noise from student noise to non-student noise”- Vicar of St Faiths Church, [Charles Street, West End of Lincoln]

“It’s not always students that create noise, it can be a group living together, but also we get complaints from students about other residents and other students” - University of Lincoln Staff

Relationships Between Students and Residents

There were a diverse range of experiences, opinions and thoughts with regard to the relationship between students and non-student residents. Generally, the story was positive. Residents had reported that they had a positive relationship with their student neighbours; however, stories, experiences and opinions varied.

“The community is split somewhere in the middle. When you talk to residents, some will say they don’t mind students and those are happy that the students are there; you have younger people there and it puts money into the local economy. Those residents like to have someone younger living next to them. You also get residents who unfortunately have had bad experiences with students or with a student house where there was a noise issue” - City of Lincoln Council Staff

Relationships between students and residents tended to be better if the non- student residents or the students introduced themselves at the beginning of the year, this usually led to there being less hostility and other negative issues.

“We’ve said to people living near us, you know, if you need any help..., if you want your bin putting out give us a knock and we’ll help you”- West End Residents Association Spokesperson

“I was speaking to a lady this morning... She couldn’t fault the fact that she has always lived next to students, and she never had a problem with them. I asked the question, did you introduce yourself when they moved in, and she said, yes... that’s why she didn’t have any issues...” - Police Staff

It was sometimes the case, however, that some residents would have multiple issues with students in the area. It was reported that some residents had left the area as a result of student activities.

“I do have friends that have moved out of the area” - West End Residents Association Spokesperson

“Some residents have had very difficult problems with students” – Local Counsellor

With regard to negative relationships, participants would often explain that the reason why relationships may be stretched is due to students only living in the area for a short amount of time before they move on.

Findings - Focus Group Analysis

Relationship: Student and Non-Student Residents

The majority of students had positive or very little experience with the non-student West End residents. Some students had formed a positive respectful relationship with their neighbours. In nearly all the focus groups students expressed that they would be more courteous towards their fellow residents if an initial relationship was developed.

Student B - “Next door neighbours, the old people, they’re really nice, they just ask us to be respectful, like if we’re going to go on a night out they just say ‘will you let us know’, so we don’t keep them up all night”

Student C - “And they take our bins out which is really cute...and give Christmas cards...and wine ...And we always tell them when we are going out”

Student B - “And they always lend us stuff for the back garden”

Student House on West Parade 1

While some houses had this face-to-face contact with their neighbours others had contact with their neighbours in different ways, for example sometimes communicating with notes or letters through their doors. While other students did not have as much of a formal relationship with their neighbours; either due to not feeling a need to or not having any non-student resident neighbours in the vicinity. All focus groups stated that they have pleasant feelings towards their neighbours.

Student H - “Next door, she put a letter through the door in the first couple of days we moved in, it welcomed us to the area, but she was making us aware that she has a family so partying isn’t accepted past a certain time, just be respectful really”

Student House on Richmond Road

Student M - “You just say hello to the occasional person you pass, don’t ya”

Student House on Whitehall Terrace

Student J - “Only passing conversations with the neighbours”

Student House on Harvey Street

Participants in the focus groups acknowledged that there was occasionally noise in the area, mostly in the evenings when groups of people are ‘going out’ into the city. While no participants thought the noise was a good thing, there was a mix of opinions on: the scale of the noise, whether it is something to complain about and whether it is just student noise.

Some of the houses that thought there was nothing to complain about were in areas of the West End that are apparently known to get the worst of the noise.

Student E - "The noise really irritates me, they came back at 4 and kept me up at 5"

Student D- "If I was living next door, I'd hate living next to students."

Student House on West Parade 1

Student M – "It's not a problem; like twice this year I've heard someone scream and that's about it."

Student O - "And it happens for about 5 minutes when they pass your house."

Student P- "Nothing to get your pants in a twist about."

*Student House on Whitehall
Terrace*

Student J - "I was woken up by, I think like three doors down they were having a fight a couple of weeks ago, like screaming at each other, in the garden, at like 2 o'clock in the morning. I thought it was quite funny, but if I had kids or I had to get up early in the morning for work, then obviously that's an issue."

Student House on Harvey Street

Most houses brought up alcohol as a factor as to why students are particularly noisy at night. Mentioned more than once was the fact that when students are intoxicated they do not realise how loud they are being. It was also stated that while the noise can be loud, it is not aggressive.

Student A - "A lot of the time when you're drinking you don't realise how loud you are."

Student B - "You get pissed, you get a bit louder."

Student House on West Parade 1

Student F - "It's never aggressive noise, it's just people having a laugh."

Student House on West Parade 2

Some participants were more defensive about noise, saying there is no issue or blaming it on alcohol. However, when it came to the other issues, students generally expressed more negative attitudes towards these issues than they did towards the noise problem. An example of this was vomit and empty bottles scattered on the streets the following morning of a popular night out.

Student J - "You do walk over bits of sick sometimes and there are bottles everywhere."

Student House on Harvey Street

A Community in Conflict

Participants were asked what they thought of residents complaining about student noise and other anti-social behaviours. Replies varied from the participants stating that they understand why they complain and that they are also not happy about the noise and other anti-social behaviours that occur. Other participants expressed strongly that they do not believe there is a problem and that non-student residents can be unreasonable. Multiple participants stated that they felt it is only a few individuals who complain about the noise and have 'got into the habit' of doing so. Participants' experiences varied from having residents being reasonable and polite when complaining about noise to residents having more of an adversarial approach.

Student B - "I know that next door have had noise complaints from [residents] - but they don't go in guns blazing, they are always pretty polite about it"

Student A - "And that's the only reasons why when we come back from a night out we keep the music down, like we've got neighbours man"

Student House on West Parade 1

Student I - "Some of them have got into the habit of moaning for no reason, but some things aren't on."

Student House on Richmond Road

Student F - "She came to the door at 7 pm? and told us to keep it down. We thought that was quite unreasonable. Turns out she then reported us and that led to an informal visit from a PCSO"

Student G - "The women has resorted to putting signs up, I thought it was illegal to do that"

Student F - "We feel paranoid to make any sort of noise... What they are doing to us, we lose respect for them"

Student G - "I think they exercise the right that they are older and perhaps consider themselves more mature. They think they're better than us and can tell us what to do."

Student House on West Parade 2

Something which was highlighted in the interviews and in the focus groups was that students are more considerate generally, in regards to excessive noise, if they were on personal terms with their neighbours i.e. if the students and neighbours were introduced at the start of the tenancy.

Student B - "Next door neighbours, the old people, they're really nice, they just ask us to be respectful, like if we're going to go on a night out they just say 'will you let us know', so we don't keep them up all night"

Student House on West Parade 1

Discussion

While results did vary regarding opinions and experiences of studentification in the West End, some common themes were identified throughout both the interviews and the focus groups.

Economic Growth

Economic growth based on the presence of the University of Lincoln and Bishop Grosseteste University and their students was seen to be a positive consequence, as found within other literature which examines the effects of studentification within an area (Hubbard, 2008; Sage, 2012). Sage et al. (2012), found that residents were pleased with the new local services that had been created to cater for the students, specifically in the area that they lived in. This paper found that although studentification had certainly been a key factor in Lincoln becoming more economically prosperous, it had not the same effect on the West End. This is likely because of the few shops and services in the West End. Therefore, although studentification has affected Lincoln economically, it has had little or no effect on the economics of the West End. The only economic effect was the rise in house prices as a result of property developers seeking family homes to convert into HMOs to then rent out. This, however, as later explained, is not necessarily a positive economic contribution to the area as the influx in HMOs has caused various issues for the residents of the West End.

Parking, Rubbish and Noise

Four of the major issues for long term residents in the West End, as a result of studentification, are the lack of parking, rubbish being left out in the street, the exteriors of houses not being maintained and excessive noise, primarily at night.

Parking was not mentioned as an issue by any of the participants within the focus groups, however, it was within the interviews. Participants would comment that residents would become on edge in regards to finding a parking space. One participant explained that if a student house has four cars, and ten houses on a street all have four cars, this causes difficulties for other residents in the evenings returning from work, attempting to find a place to park. In an area such as the West End, where many of the roads are narrow and one way, parking can be an issue. Although the issue of parking is not often mentioned specifically within studentification literature, the lack of local amenities is (Smith, 2005). As students come into an area, some local services become stretched while others become empty, such as schools. It seems then that depending on the area, different consequences of studentification can be more prevalent than others.

Rubbish, in general, was seen to be a bigger problem for both the interview participants and the focus groups participants. The theme of rubbish includes: wheelie bins being left outside, bin bags being left on the street, front lawns becoming dumping grounds and litter on the streets, often after popular nights out. This was not only a point of concern for the interview participants who expressed that this made the area look less attractive than before the students arrived. Although some participants did acknowledge that this responsibility can sometimes be the landlords and not the students, it is still a result of studentification.

Noise was by far the most prevalent issue throughout both the interviews and the focus groups. There was a wide range of opinions, experiences and concerns about the noise within the area. While some participants claimed that there is very little noise, others did see it more of an issue. What was also brought to attention was that some participants within the interviews did note that the noise was not always students. Despite this, the noise is the area

is often assumed to be students. This can be damaging for the image of students as they can be seen to be a scapegoat for many of the issues within the area.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to identify how ‘studentification’ has impacted on the lives of residents in the West End area of Lincoln. It appears that while there are numerous issues that are a result of studentification – lack of parking, waste left outside houses, poor upkeep of housing and less of a ‘community’ feel – the primary problem, which was consistently brought up, is excessive noise.

Another key finding is that studentification seems to have impacted on the lives of the local residents in different capacities. While some residents saw the various issues as a major inconvenience on their daily lives, others seemed to remember the positives that the students and the universities bring to Lincoln, and therefore are not as concerned about the noise. Furthermore, different participants focused on different issues depending on how it affected them individually. While some saw parking as the biggest inconvenience, others viewed night time noise as the biggest issue that studentification caused.

While the impact of studentification on the West End seemed to be mainly negative, the impact of studentification in Lincoln as a whole appeared to be more positive. Concerning economic growth and job prosperity, the university have brought Lincoln into the twenty-first century. However, it appears that while studentification has been positive in Lincoln as a whole (economically), it has affected the housing areas around the city negatively.

It seems that the issues caused by studentification are blamed on the students themselves. This can divide the community as the 'students' and 'residents' become two separate entities which can lead to conflict. While recent policy developments, such as the introduction of Article 4 (a policy which restricts the amount of family homes (C3) that can be licensed as HMOs (C4) in a given area) in Lincoln, have attempted to stop the issue by getting worse, other solutions which attempt to rectify some of the consequences of studentification are often short lived or ineffective.

In other university cities with the similar issues arising from studentification, they have similarly struggled to find solutions to these issues. Additionally, It cannot be assumed that policies or strategies that were successful in one university city would be effective in Lincoln; since percentage of students within the population, density of the city and university growth rates can all lead to the problem being more or less severe.

It appears that the results of studentification within the West End is assumed to be exclusively negative for the local residents only. This paper has shown that students are also suffering the consequences of studentification such as excessive noise. This needs to be taken into account before a generalisation is made that all students are involved in the day to day negative aspects of studentification such as making excessive noise at night.

Future Prediction

During writing this paper two new on-campus accommodation blocks have been built in line with the continuing growth strategy of the university. While these are adequate to cater for first year students, when students move they may struggle to find a HMO to live in if Article 4 restricts the number of HMOs in Lincoln. It could therefore be predicted that eventually

students will be living in outside areas of central Lincoln, such as North Hykeham, and commuting into Lincoln, as Lincoln reaches its HMO limit. However, it is therefore possible that the effects of studentification may spread further out of the city.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

1. Why did you choose to live in the West End?
2. What is it like to live in the West End?
3. Some residents of the West End complain about the behaviours of some students, particularly around the issue of noise at night and other anti-social behaviours. What do you think about this?
4. Do you know about the universities policy on dealing with complaints made about students making too much noise at night and other anti-social behaviours?
5. Do you know about any campaigns that have attempted to strengthen the relationship between students and residence or tackle other issues? Do you think these have worked?
6. What do you think could be done to strengthen relationships between students and other residents of the West End?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. What is your relationship the West End of Lincoln?
2. Do you have a formal relationship with the University of Lincoln?
3. What do you think is the impact of students in the city of Lincoln?
4. What do you think is the impact of students in the west end of Lincoln?
5. Do you have any examples of positive or negative events involving students in the West End?
6. How do you think the relationship could be improved further?
7. Have you ever been involved in any events including students and residence? Has it been successful? How do you know?
8. How do you see the future for the West End and its relationship with the university?