

## The Highland Licensing Committee

Meeting – 9 August 2016

Agenda Item	<b>6.1</b>
Report No	<b>HLC/061/16</b>

### Application for the grant of a licence for a house in multiple occupation – 23a High Street, Inverness (Ward 15 – Inverness Central)

#### Report by the Principal Solicitor

#### Summary

This Report relates to an application for a licence for a house in multiple occupation.

This application is subject to a formal hearing procedure.

#### 1.0 Background

1.1 The licensing of houses in multiple occupation is an activity covered under Part 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006. The licensing of this activity became mandatory on 1 October 2000 and from this date all houses in multiple occupation which had six or more persons residing at the premises required to be licensed. This limit or threshold has been reduced and now applies to properties with three or more unrelated persons.

1.2 An HMO is defined as living accommodation in which 3 or more unrelated adults live and share one or more of the basic amenities which are a toilet, personal washing facilities and facilities for the preparation or provision of cooked food. It must be their only or main residence.

#### 2.0 Application

2.1 On 24 May 2016 an application for the grant of a licence in respect of a house in multiple occupation was received from Mr Ali Mohamed. The application must be determined by 23 May 2017, failing which the Council will be treated as having decided to grant the HMO licence unconditionally.

2.2 The property to which the application relates is 23a High Street, Inverness. The maximum number of persons applied for to reside at the property was 31. On 15 June 2016 a letter was received from the applicant advising that they wished to reduce this maximum number to 20.

2.3 A location plan is appended for Members information (Appendix 1).

### **3.0 Process**

**3.1** Following receipt of this application a copy of the same was circulated to the following agencies/services for consultation:

- Police Scotland
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
- Highland Council Environmental Health Service
- Highland Council Building Standards Service
- Highland Council Planning Service
- Highland Council Housing Service

**3.2** At the time of writing confirmation has been received from Police Scotland, the Fire Service and the Council's Environmental Health, Planning Service and Housing Service they have no objections to the application.

**3.3** The Building Standards Service have advised that the access to the attic rooms require be adequately blocked up and they would not consent to the granting of the HMO licence until this has been undertaken.

**3.4** Up to date copies of the electrical and portable appliance test certification have been received and are satisfactory. Copies of the current gas and public liability insurance certificates still require to be submitted by the applicant.

### **4.0 Objection**

**4.1** A letter of objection has been received in relation to the application from MacLeod & MacCallum Solicitors on behalf of Inverness BID Ltd. A copy of the letter is contained in Appendix 2.

**4.2** This letter of objection refers to a planning appeal decision (PPA-270-2148) issued on 23 May 2016 by a Reporter appointed by the Scottish Ministers. This decision granted planning permission for a change of use at this premises to a house in multiple occupation with ancillary use as a hostel. This decision notice is attached in Appendix 3.

**4.3** The decision notice contains up-to-date information on the internal alterations and improvements to the premises currently being undertaken and the new facilities (including a new bin store) to be provided. As this up-to-date information is relevant also to the question of suitability of the accommodation for occupation as an HMO from a licensing perspective, the Committee is advised to take it into account in considering the grounds of objection raised on behalf of BID Ltd. Members should also note the six conditions to which the planning permission is subject, most of which are designed to regulate waste management at the HMO, a matter raised in the BID objection.

### **5.0 Hearing**

**5.1** In accordance with the Act both the applicant and persons submitting the objections have been invited to attend the meeting and will be provided with an opportunity to address the Committee through the hearing procedure.

## **6.0 Determining issues**

**6.1** Section 130 of Part 5 of Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 states that a Licensing Authority may refuse to grant a licence where the applicant or anyone else detailed on the application is not a fit and proper person to be authorised to permit persons to occupy any living accommodation as an HMO.

**6.2** Section 131 of the same Act also states that a Licensing Authority may grant a licence only if it considers that the living accommodation concerned:

- (a) is suitable for occupation as an HMO, or
- (b) can be made so suitable by including conditions in the HMO licence,

and in determining whether any living accommodation is, or can be made to be, suitable for occupation as an HMO the local authority must consider—

- (a) its location,
- (b) its condition,
- (c) any amenities it contains,
- (d) the type and number of persons likely to occupy it,
- (da) whether any rooms within it have been subdivided,
- (db) whether any rooms within it have been adapted and that has resulted in an alteration to the situation of the water and drainage pipes within it,
- (e) the safety and security of persons likely to occupy it, and
- (f) the possibility of undue public nuisance.

**6.3** If required the Principal Solicitor will offer particular advice on the criteria relating to this particular application.

## **7.0 Policies**

**7.1** The following policies are relevant to this application:

Highland Council HMO conditions and standards. A copy of these can accessed at:

[http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/1125/licences\\_permits\\_and\\_permissions/303/miscellaneous\\_licences/2](http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/1125/licences_permits_and_permissions/303/miscellaneous_licences/2)

or a hard copy can be supplied where requested.

## **8.0 Other requirements**

**8.1** If members are minded to grant the application delegated powers should be given to the Principal Solicitor to issue the licence once any requirements required by the services details in Paragraph 3.1 of the report have been completed and any relevant documents and certification submitted.

## **9.0 Recommendation**

Members are invited to determine the above application.

If Members are minded to grant the licence, agreement should be given that the licence be issued by the Principal Solicitor using delegated powers once any required documents and certification, and confirmation of satisfactory completion of required works, have been received. Agreement should also be given that, in the event that these are not received by 23 May 2017, the application be refused under delegated powers.

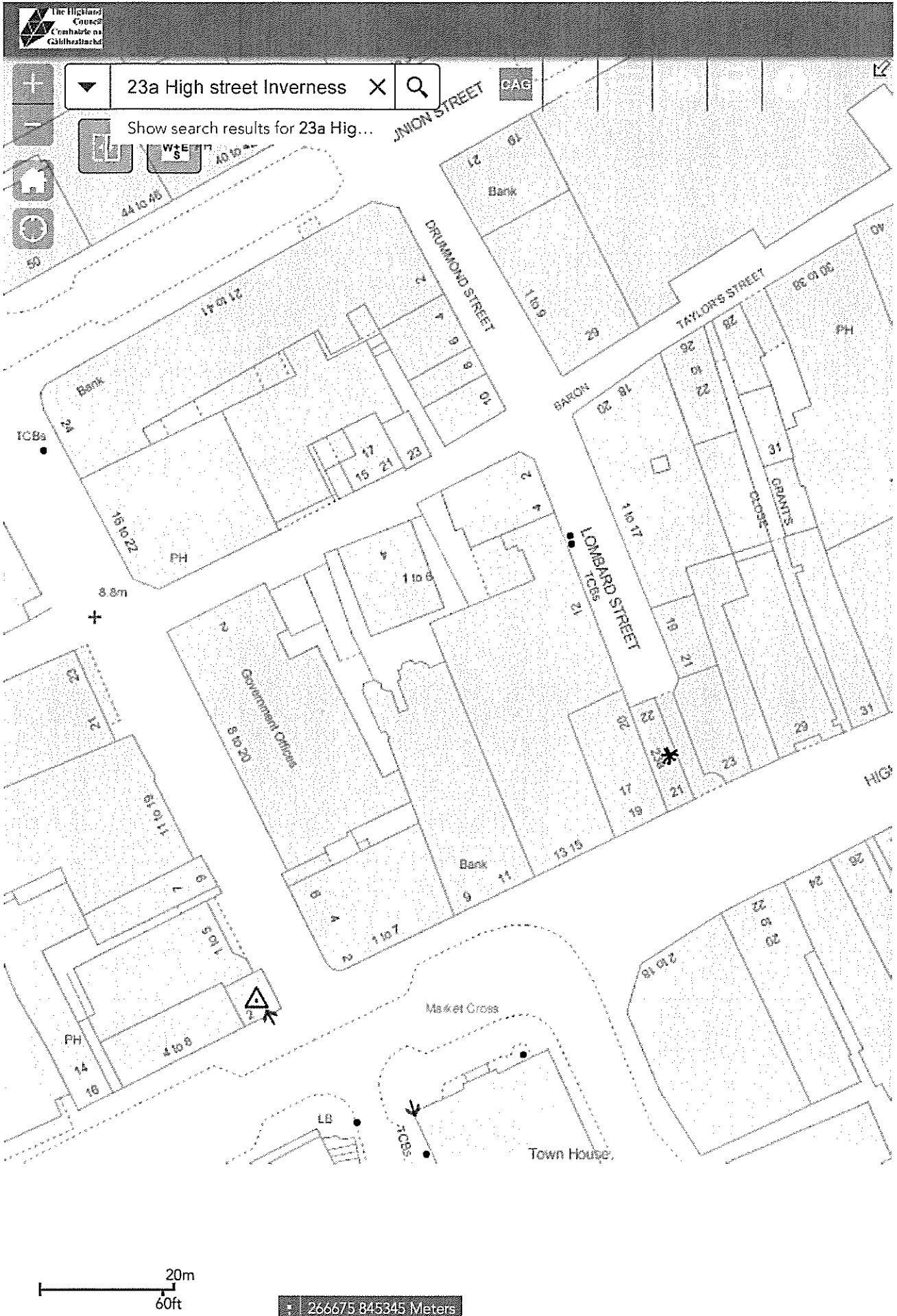
Whether Members are minded to grant the licence or to refuse the application on one of the grounds detailed in paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2 of the report, reasons for their decision must be given.

Designation: Principal Solicitor

Officer Reference: Michael Elsey

Date: 18 July 2016

Attachments: Appendix 1 – Location plan of premises  
Appendix 2 – Letter of objection  
Appendix 3 – Planning Appeal Decision Notice PPA-270-2148







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INVERNESS  
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**Our Ref** KLA/ZI/I.0649.0001

**Your Ref**

13 June 2016

Dear Sir

RECEIVED

15 JUN 2016

### Objection to HMO Licence application

**Ho Ho Hostel/Highlander Hostel, 23A High Street, Inverness**

We are instructed by Inverness BID Limited, who are a statutory body representing over 850 businesses in Inverness city Centre. They wish to raise an objection in connection with the HMO application submitted in respect of the premises known as Ho Ho Hostel, 23A High Street, Inverness which were referred to in a recent planning application as Highlander Hostel, 23 High Street, Inverness. Our client is treating these addresses as interchangeable and referring to the same property, namely the premises from which the Highlander Hostel was previously operated by the Applicant.

Our client's objections in respect of the proposed HMO application are as follows:

#### 1. Suitability of Applicant

In terms of Section 130 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 (hereinafter referred to as "the Act"), our client does not believe that the Applicant can be considered a suitable or fit and proper person to be authorised to permit persons to occupy any living accommodation as an HMO.

Our client has provided us with evidence confirming that the premises were not maintained to standards expected of an HMO property. To support our client's assertion, we enclose evidence of TripAdvisor reviews dating back a number of years to confirm the poor condition of the property over a sustained period of time and the poor attitude of staff in the premises. All of which went unchecked by Mr Mohammed.

There were also previous issues in connection with the operation of the premises. There were issues in connection with noise and disturbance, including inadequate refuse storage, that were not adequately addressed by the Applicant in the past. There are therefore concerns that, given that standards are already poor at the premises, as identified below, if concerns are raised, the Applicant is not of a suitable standing to address or rectify difficulties.

Whilst our client appreciates that Mr Mohammed was ill for a short period of time, the TripAdvisor reviews clearly show that the standards at the property have not been maintained for a number of years. Furthermore, the TripAdvisor reviews cover a period prior to Mr Mohammed's illness. Therefore there were long and continued periods whereby the standards at the property were not maintained prior to any illness. Therefore our client would stipulate that Mr Mohammed is not a fit and proper person to be authorised to have HMO accommodation.

The Law Awards of Scotland - Family Law Firm of the Year 2015

Law Society of Scotland Accreditations:

Morag S. MacIntosh - Specialist in Family Law

Graham R. Laughton - Specialist in Personal Injury Law

Fiona J. Campbell - Specialist in Family Law and a Family Law Mediator

Fiona J. Campbell and Morag S. MacIntosh are Collaborative Family Lawyers & Fiona J. Campbell is a Family Law Arbitrator

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Furthermore, our client has provided evidence that the person who operated as Manager, Sinclair Ross, who appeared to be the primary point of contact for hostel residents, has been convicted of carrying out a string of assaults on various girlfriends between 1999 and 2013. Some of these assaults took place whilst Mr Ross and his girlfriend were living at the hostel at the end of 2013. This highlights that Mr Mohammed was not monitoring staff performance to ensure that HMO occupiers are kept safe.

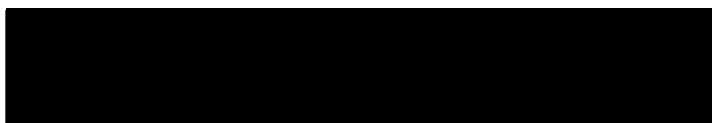
## 2. Suitability of living accommodation

Under Section 131 of the Act, we would propose that the premises are not suitable for occupation as an HMO on the following grounds:

- (a) From review of the TripAdvisor reviews, it is apparent that there are issues in respect of safe access, both to the premises and also to the individual rooms within the premises.
- (b) Condition of the accommodation - Again from the TripAdvisor reviews, it is clear that there are issues with damp, lack of heating, condition of the kitchen, mould in the bathrooms, windows not closing to name a few.
- (c) Amenities the accommodation contains - There are inadequate cooking and sanitary facilities available for the potential occupation of the premises. The TripAdvisor reviews clearly point to an unhygienic kitchen which people feel they cannot use (thus resulting in a shortage of cooking facilities) and a shortage of sanitary facilities.
- (d) The type and number of persons likely to occupy the premises - Recent press reports by Mr Mohammed have indicated that Mr Mohammed is looking to have some occupiers on a long-term basis. Our client does not believe that the accommodation is therefore appropriate to meet the proposed occupiers' needs. See our comments above with regard to kitchen and sanitary facilities.
- (e) Security is also an issue in terms of anyone being able to gain access to the premises. Furthermore, there are concerns that people with specific mental health requirements would potentially be in occupation of the premises without any specific support.
- (f) Inadequate refuse storage and noise disturbance - There were issues previously in connection with noise and disturbance at the premises and inadequate refuse storage. Whilst the Scottish Government Reporter, in granting planning permission in respect of the premises has indicated that these matters will be under the control of fewer residents in the new layout, the application submitted in respect of the proposed HMO licence is actually for one additional bed than previously held. Therefore, there are concerns that the standards of hygiene, including refuse storage, and issues in respect of noise disturbance are likely to be exacerbated rather than controlled or dealt with.

In the circumstances, our client considers that the Council is entitled to, and should, refuse the proposed HMO application.

Yours faithfully



Macleod & MacCallum Limited  
Agents for Inverness BID Limited

Encs



# Highlander Hostel

99 Reviews

#28 of 28 Specialty Lodging in Inverness

23A High Street, Inverness IV1 1HY, Scotland

## Traveller rating

Excellent		3
Very good		4
Average		4
Poor		7
Terrible		81

## See reviews for

	Families	6
	Couples	12
	Solo	21
	Business	4

## Rating summary

Location	
Sleep Quality	
Rooms	
Service	
Value	
Cleanliness	

## “Horrible”

Reviewed 3 weeks ago via mobile

Where to start ? Absolutely everything was horrible. Sheets were not clean, people at the reception not nice, bathrooms were so dirty we couldn't even think to have a shower there. Price was definitely too expensive and the place is really noisy. After dinner we come back and we found many policemen (about three) in each floor. Not really reassuring

Was this review helpful?

0/0

## “GIRLS, DO NOT GO HERE!!”

Reviewed 4 weeks ago

After reading the reviews on this place, my best friend and I were a bit skeptical to stay here (only read reviews on cleanliness and poor hygiene). Upon check in we were surprised at how clean this place was compared to what we had read.

Firstly, we were put in a tiny room of 6 beds, and being the only two females in the room we asked if we could move to a private room as we didn't feel comfortable.

That was all fine until one of us went to reception to use the wifi (we couldn't connect in our room), and the man at reception 'Vigil' struck up a conversation with a very inappropriate topic (sexual). We won't go into detail, but this set off pretty big alarm bells to us. Whilst in the common room we over heard a man ask why he was paying a different rate to another person in his room for the same



amount of nights, to which vigil got VERY defensive and wouldn't give any answers, always saying 'I don't know' until the man gave up and walked away. We also noticed that the folder just sitting on the reception desk had all of the codes to every room for everyone out to see. After building a barricade with our beds against the door (I know it sounds over the top, but this is how uncomfortable we felt) we tried to get some rest so we could wake up early and find somewhere else to move. When we went to reception to see about a refund, no one was there - so we just left after seeing a sign saying 'strictly no refunds!' After moving to a different hotel, vigil saw us on the street, approached us and asked where our suitcases were because he had gone into our room to "fix it up". Since when do hostels do daily cleans???? WE WOULD NOT RECCOMEND ANYONE TO STAY HERE - DON'T BE FOOLED BY THE BUDGET PRICE!

*“Booked for two nights, checked out after 7 hours!”*

Reviewed 1 September 2015

Dirty facilities-showers, rooms and showers. Rude and unhelpful staff who had no idea about my booking. Some very dodgy looking blokes-vagrants? Very unfriendly and just a complete shocker. I was very lucky with my room mates-nice guys. Could not wait until the morning. I have been around the world and stayed in some poor quality accommodation in my time and this place must be in the top 5 hostels to be avoided. The kitchen alone deserves a visit from the local authority EHO-I know as I have managed restaurants and hotels for 35 years. AVOID!  
**Room Tip:** Want a good room? Go to another hostel.

*“Outrageous”*

Reviewed 26 August 2015

This was the worst hostel experience I've ever had. I have serious doubts about whether their rooms would pass a test for minimum safety and cleanliness standards. The room we were booked into was unsafe, dirty and way overpriced. The bathroom and kitchen were filthy. Plus the staff person who greet us was really rude in more ways than one. When we asked for a refund on seeing the room, they refused. I wouldn't recommend this place to anyone. I'd rather sleep in a park.

*“Cheap - but do you get what you pay for?”*

Reviewed 19 August 2015

I used this hostel in 1999 (called Ho Ho Hostel back then). It was cheap, crowded but ok. That was then. It was probably more crowded this time with people sleeping in the common room. The beds don't seem to have changed but the mattresses

are covered in plastic! The bathrooms would be ok if they were clean. But they are not. The kitchen is a disaster. Greasy, dirty and old food in the pots and pans. The fridges are complete chaos. I only dared leaving a beer in there - and it got stolen! Security is a joke. No lockers or anything and anyone with the code for the front door - which means anyone having been at the hostel at some time - can enter.

*“Better to sleep on the streets, I did!”*

Reviewed 19 August 2015

I have backpacked around the middle east and been in some pretty dire places, but nothing like this! I was a late arrival at 23:30 so I phoned ahead at about 21:00 and made arrangements. I was given the door code by text and told my room number, every thing can get sorted in the morning. On arrival the code did not work and I was locked out. Some passing police officers tried to help me out and eventually a guest came and opened the door. He seemed as bewildered by the door as me, so the guest showed me to where room 2 was (my room). On the way there the only staff member I met appeared, an elderly man who had obviously gotten out of bed. I said "Hello!" in a friendly manner and he started shouting at me for waking him up and breaking the door. After he stormed off, I found my own way to room 2 having had no success at getting useful information from the unpleasant old man. The room was what I would call a "Box-room" big enough for 1 bed comfortably, this was not however what was in the room. The room had 2 bunk beds jammed in to it, to the point of being difficult to climb one with out banging against the other. This was the least of the issues though. The room's floor was one inch to three inches deep in filth, food packaging, tissues and beer bottles as well as the standard non-scripted dirt one would expect in a crack den, and that is exactly what this seemed to be. There were three bodies in the room already, by the look and smell of them they had not washed (Ever) and been drinking a lot of alcohol. None of the beds had linen or sheets.

I closed the door and left never to return. NEVER EVER STAY HERE!

**Room Tip:** Look out for the needles.

*“Consider sleeping in the streets instead of here”*

Reviewed 19 August 2015

I think the only other hostel that comes close to this experience was a windowless, box-like backpackers hostel in Kuala Lumpur. Highlander Hostel has the guts to charge about ten times that amount, offers terrible and rude service, and provides absolutely nothing of value. To be a bit more specific, here are some more graphic details :))))))

Everything is worn down and dirt. The overall aesthetic impression is that the

building could have been something like a squatters apartment, drug den, brothel, or simply a combination of all.

Me and my boyfriend were placed in a 8 bed dorm, despite having booked a 4 bed room.

Rooms and toilets were not clean, with used band aids in the hand wash, dust and hair everywhere, no garbage bin, and plastic-wrapped mattresses. ( These are to battle bed bugs )

Wifi worked for brief moments, about 5 minutes at a time.

Cash was the only option for paying. The man working in the "reception" was incredibly rude, complaining, using curse words, mocking my name (???!?!?!?), and told that we had to make the beds ourselves. We suspected that he was a former prison guard of some sort.

Beds were squeaky and unstable, there was pigeon droppings in the window sill, and we did not even bother to use the kitchen. Instead we went up at 6 am, packed our stuff and left to never again return.

**Room Tip:** Leave while you still can

*“Terrible, disgusting and worst service ever”*

Reviewed 18 August 2015

We were shocked when we entered this hostel. It's dirty, it's run down, the staff is helpful nor friendly. Our group came to stay one night. After we arrived we tried our best to find another hostel or hotel in town, we were even prepared to accept the loss of the money we had already paid for this place (there no refund for obvious reasons). As everything else was fully booked we had no choice but to stay. The next morning we left at 6.30am as soon as we could. Unfortunately, we were in such a haste to leave that one of us forgot his camera under the bed. We discovered this while we were boarding our flight back home. He called the hostel about 10 times to ask whether it had been found and to arrange for someone to pick it up. They did NOT answer his questions and did not offer any help, told him to call back several times without result and thus proved what we already knew from the first moment: this is the most disgusting, terrible hostel and worst service you can imagine.

*“Disgusting!! Stay away!!”*

Reviewed 14 August 2015

I wish there was a way to give this place no stars. 1 star is giving them too much credit. The place is filthy, the beds are squeaky and broken. Don't visit the showers, you'll probably catch leprosy. I don't know how or why I stayed 2 nights. STAY AWAY!! The place is dodgy.

*“This is the worst European hostel I have ever stayed in!”*

Reviewed 1 August 2015

The hostel was disgusting! Smelled of smoke every where, which is an achievement considering smoking is illegal within all public buildings in the UK. Everything is dirty. Staff unhelpful and disinterested, with the added bonus of knowing nothing-couldn't even give me a taxi number to get me to the airport!

*“Terrible hostel ever”*

Reviewed 29 July 2015

This hostel is a worn out hostel! It's dirty and greasy. The beds are terrible - noisy and the mattresses is covered with plastic and you feel every single spring in it. We decided not to use the kitchen for foodmaking since it was unbelievable messy and greasy. We would not even dare to put food in the fridge! The doors are making a lot of noise making it hard to sleep. One of the showers was okay the other wasn't. The common room is not at all cosy and nice. The television is central placed and very loud and when it's closed the employees plays very loud music while they're playing billiard. It seems like they are trying to start up a party. I was shocked when we saw this hostel and when I told the reception boy that this is a very worn out hostel he replied that they had never had complains. I doubt...

*“It was immoral how gross this place was”*

Reviewed 27 July 2015

Stay far away from here, the one 'good' thing might be the location but considering the size of Inverness everything is really close to the city centre/train station anyways. Plus being located on high street made for a really noisy room especially since the windows don't close and there's clubs metres away from this place. The beds were these cheap plastic sacks and you have to put on your own bedsheets. The whole place reeked and everything was covered in grime, the bathrooms were too gross to use. The staff made me feel very uncomfortable and keep staring. Wifi wasn't sufficient to load emails. It was just a terrible place, I read the reviews and I knew it would be bad but I had no choice because there was no where else that had vacancies left. Having no option but to pay 20 pounds for a bed to sleep on was the worst rip off of my entire trip to Europe..

Was this review helpful?

*“Disgusting”*

Reviewed 26 July 2015

Extremely poor. Location good, but that's the best thing. Mattress are plastic coated mattresses which are very hard to sleep on, but lying in it first night had a very strong smell of vomit. Moved to opposite end of bed last night, and smell wasn't as intense. Taking off sheets on leaving noticed how strained the mattress was. Disgusting. No working shower on 1st floor. Hose missing. Just a trickle of water where hose should be. Definitely will not be returning....

*“Enough mould to grow cheese. More derelict than a war-zone.”*

Reviewed 20 July 2015

I am very surprised to find reviews giving this place more than three stars. I would not be surprised if that were the management creating accounts to try and get better ratings. After a full 7 days of camping around the Isle of Skye, my friend and I were really looking forward to spending a night between four walls and a ceiling before taking an early plane back home.

But to our surprise, we did not get into a hostel. Our first thought was that we arrived on a construction site. Things are messy, there were ladders and buckets around, dust as well. Maybe we got the wrong address? Turns out we did get to the proper location. It was just a mess.

We talked to the receptionist who was definitely not unfriendly. But I would definitely not call him professional. Especially as he found my name a bit difficult to pronounce (despite me telling him it was as easy as "Teebo"), he decided he'd call me by half of my last name instead, even when I said I'd rather not be called that. Great.

I try to put this past me as we head to our room, but it is quite difficult to forget the first sight of the room. It felt like we were in a very poor country in a war zone. The bunk bed frames, of cheap manufacture to begin with, were definitely second if not third hand, given the amount of disrepair they were in. I can understand a bit of wobbliness, but when two out of 4 screws are missing on a ladder, and that ladder is thus unstable and swinging around as you try to climb it, it is pretty unsafe, and proves a great lack of care for the main thing a hostel provides: beds.

Again, I try to put this past me, but then I see the window. It has a curtain rack, and approximately 10-15 gliders. However, only 2 slats of the blinds were left (instead of 10-15), which makes calling this whole thing "curtains" a joke. Again, showing a great lack of care.

I then really dread going to the ensuite bathroom. Given the shabbiness of the whole thing, I was really expecting the worst. To my surprise, both the toilets and the shower were of an almost perfect white. At least that! But then, I did the mistake of looking up on the ceiling,

What I found was enough mould to make your own cheese overnight. So many black and blue spots growing all around... Disgusting.

Also, I cannot be sure for certain, but given the smell of the walls of the bedroom itself, I'm pretty sure they are mouldy as well.

Anyway. We try to spend the night in this "hostel", which proved to be difficult given the poor quality of the old, plastic-feeling, spring mattresses they use (on top of noisy roommates, but that's not something that can be controlled by the hostel), and the noise throughout the hostel which you can easily hear thanks to paper-thin walls!

After managing 3-4 hours of rest (it's fairer to call it rest instead of sleep), we decide to leave early for we need to get to the airport early anyway.

I get my luggage out of under the beds (where I had put them), and notice what a big mistake that had been: the amount of dust that was on them easily put to shame the past week I had. I had managed to keep my rucksack somewhat cleanish during a rainy, muddy, swampy week on Skye, but it all got ruined by putting it under those beds.

I am not difficult. I've stayed in very cheap places with cheap everything.

But I cannot comprehend how in such a country, any decent and honest human being can own this hostel and think "Yes, the state of this hostel is great. There's absolutely no need to give attention to anything specific, and I am happy to charge people for providing a great service".

This derelict, dirty, mouldy, uncomfortable, noisy, broken and neglected hostel is NOT the place where you want to spend even £15 for a night, even after a full night of camping. Actually, camping is probably a far better option than spending the night in such a place.

Oh and, would you expect them to accept debit or credit cards? Of course they don't.

Whatever excuse they have for this, I am not inclined to believe a word of it.

All in all, I would be very happy to call this place a scam.

*"Glad i use trip advisor."*



Reviewed 5 July 2015

I like to book in advance and where we wanted to stay, wasn't available at cheapest rates so i gave this place a ring.. I asked if we could see rooms first before paying.i was told yes but there was no guarantee i could have a room that way and was advised to pay upfront. I mentioned comments from this site and was told that the place is clean.price was £25 pppn.again i said i would wait until viewing first but again told not advisable.that made me side with other reviews on here.

Have now found the location of this hostel and it simply isnt for us.looks ok if you want a place to crash after a few drinks.

I have managed since to get our preferred hotel for cheaper and i know that its a very comfy place to stay.

Thank you trip advisor.

*“Prison without the bars!”*

Reviewed 6 April 2015 via mobile

Haven't spent time in jail but imagine this would come close. Thankfully with friends and humour brought us through. I'm Scottish and its embarrassing that a place like this can exist in these times. Loads of other places out there, wish I'd checked this site before travelling.

...

*“Don't set foot in this place !!”*

Reviewed 6 April 2015

I really didn't think somewhere so dirty, smelly and bereft of basic human comforts and standards would exist in Inverness. A third world country perhaps but surely not here ?? Well, this place beggars belief. We were "greeted" by an odious, over familiar owner / manager who regaled us with boastful drinking stories, was very fond of the c word. and who was an out and out rascist of the worst type. When he showed us our room our worst fears were confirmed (having already seen the general dirtiness of the hostel and experienced the gut-wrenching smell) he must have noticed our collective look of disbelief when we viewed the stained quilts and pillows and immediately said we would be getting new bedding. He also chirpilly assured us "the mattresses are sprayed every day". Sprayed with what and for what ???!!! We had stupidly paid before viewing and the hostel's no refunds policy meant we were stuck with it. A trip to Poundland was required to buy air freshener and wipes as the toilets were as disgusting as the rest of the building. There were top bunks with no guard rail, sockets didn't work, window only opened a fraction, constant noise - the list goes on and on. This place is unsafe, unsavoury and unclean. It has no redeeming features whatsoever. Enter at your own peril.

*“No longer Highland. Had to walk out!”*

Reviewed 24 March 2015

We were shown the room but had to walk out as it was filthy. There were air fresheners everywhere in a vain attempt to hide the smell. You only have to look at the photos (we wish we had), it hasn't changed, even if the name has. We ended up at the SYHA which we had stayed at in Glenmore. Very good.

*“Never again.”*

Reviewed 5 January 2015

Got into Inverness really late last week after our rental car blew a tyre. Couldn't find any place to stay, except this one. Haggled our price down from 16p per person to 10p each for 5. Disgusting rooms, unusable kitchen. Poorly managed. Book at own risk! No heating!

*“I cannot recommend this hostel”*

Reviewed 30 October 2014

I booked this hostel for 4 staff members. Payment was taken from our business debit card upfront, however on arrival our staff were made to pay again! Despite, numerous phonecalls, emails and a phone call to the local police station to report these people, I have had no refund. This is theft by anyone's standards. DO NOT STAY AT THIS HOSTEL, they are an absolute disgrace.

*“Unless desperate, just don't”*

Reviewed 25 October 2014

For 14 pounds staying in around a 10 person mixed dorm, this is what you get. You get roll to take to your room so you can put on your own sheets and put a pillow case on a pint sized of cotton fluff they call a pillow here, the blanket case for a make shift blanket. This all screams that they don't seem to like to clean their rooms much or have a lazy way about it. None the less I didn't care too much about this.

Next up while you attempt to sleep you will be serenaded till 2 or 3 am by the karaoke at the bar down the road as you will hear them as plain as day as well and whomever may be walking down the the street at that time. Little to no sound proofness in this room, it's one thing to handle a person or two snoring in the middle of the night that is just standard issue deal with it when you sleep in a dorm but having to be kept up by people butchering Billy Joel and Guns and Roses till very late and night, that is not really so tolerable to me. However it I show it is.

Where all places I have stay that have looked better and worse than this place (yet all had clean sheets and bed linens) offered free storage for valuables or had storage lockers within the room this place did not, you would have to pay a pound for it and to me it didn't look at all trust worth. That is where the straw broke the camels back.

Also the kitchen is absolutely filthy.

With all that said I found the staff was very nice to me even though I only met one guy who seems to run the place, the location itself was also very good. The bathroom looks like it lacks a janitor's touch though I have seen worse and my expectations are fairly low of bathrooms as long as it is sort of clean and the shower itself is clean and it was and had hot water so that is fine with me.

That being said the noise and the bag security on top of lazy way of dealing with bed linens really drives the review down for me. In the end this is the cheapest place in town and I would only recommend it if you had no other choice like myself. I can't regret this because I had no choice and it was either this or pay 90 plus pounds for a hotel which is no where near my budget. If you can find somewhere else cheap then I say go for it

### *“Disgusting”*

Reviewed 19 October 2014

This is the most disgusting place I have ever seen...from the entry up a grotty stairway to the rooms minging..filthy..could not stay here even though I was going to have the whole 12 bed dorm to myself (wonder why!) I viewed and ran.....travelled 110 and came home

### *“Worst place I have EVER seen”*

Reviewed 1 October 2014 via mobile

Oh my goodness, where do I start with this place. This is thee worst place I have ever set foot in. Had there been any other option to have stayed I would have left straight away!!! The place was disgusting!!! So so dirty, we bought our own bedding to stay here. It was mingling from top to bottom. The guy on reception was trying to be helpful but was really just irritating! We didn't chance using the showers as I wouldn't wash a dog in that place!! Sitting on the toilet was a no no!!!! I did not feel safe in this place!! Only positive was there were cages under the

beds that we could lock away our belongings which we bought padlocks for. We wouldn't have left our stuff there any other way!!! Over all DO NOT STAY HERE!!!

### *“Well located but filthy”*

Reviewed 30 September 2014 via mobile

The man at the reception was very nice, but that's about it... Floors were disgusting, toilets horribly dirty, beds uncomfortable... Worst experience overall... We had a whole dorm to ourselves... No wonder why! Save your money, sleep in the streets or go somewhere nicer.

### *“This is the result of poor licsening laws”*

Reviewed 26 September 2014

I've spent 12 years travelling beyond Europe and thus have had the opportunity to visit many a hostel. I have never seen a hostel a poorly run or looked after as this. I won't list the complaints here but I will say that the building is a health risk and the staff are ignorant of basic serivce etiquette and unfriendly to the extreme. The owner of this business ought to be ashamed; would allow your children to stay here Mr Muhammad?

### *“Worst experience in my life: surreal”*

Reviewed 17 September 2014

Don't go to this hostel, no matter what, you're better off sleeping in the streets. This is the dirtiest, worst, filthiest place I've set foot in my life. The whole building was dirty and smelled weird and we were given some kind of bag that was supposed to contain clean sheets (how much clean I'm not sure). My room was packed with people and was noisy, cold and dirty; also the keypad to lock the door wasn't working, so anyone could come in and steal your stuff. But the worst thing were the bathrooms; they were terrible, I had to avoid contact with anything (if I could I would have flown): every shower was broken, every piece of thing in there was dirty and broken, there was no toilet paper and no bin, so everyone just threw out stuff (imagine what kind of stuff you may want to throw out in a bathroom) on the ground.

When I called to know if there were beds available I just finished the Great Glen Way, other hostels were full and I was so tired that I didn't check on Tripadvisor for advices; had I done that I wouldn't had this awful experience.

We were also informed that the hostel changed its name to "High Street Hostel", probably to avoid all the crappy reviews it deserves.

**Room Tip:** Avoid the hostel altogether, you'd better off sleeping in the street.

### *"Terrible hostel"*

Reviewed 9 September 2014

This hostel is terrible and they didnt provide the breakfast for their customer, toilet equipment are spoil, poor bed sheet. And it cost 17 gbp per nite. I willing to pay more for the hostel tat provide a better facility and equipment to their customer. No worth the value, worst hostel !!!!!!! The website shown they got the kitchen, but but the kitchen didnt have the cutlery. They just want to maximise the profit, and din care about their customer !

[View](#)

### *"Don't Stay There Ever"*

Reviewed 1 September 2014

This was the first time I had stayed at a Hostel and expected it to be basic but not filthy. It was soon apparent that the building had not been cleaned for some time. The only cleaning done if any were by desperate guests. I didn't expect to visit pound land to purchase Detox Spray and cloths to clean areas...

More

Was this review helpful?

### *"monstrosity among all hostels"*

Reviewed 27 August 2014

Wanted to stay 2 nights. Pre-payd the bunks. Mistake! When we stepped in we found plastic mattresses - I have never seen this before. The pillows are the cheapest ones you can get I guess. Furthermore red stains on bedding an the sanitary facilities were very dirty - you could say unhygienic. When I told the staff that I wanted my money back the answer was something like "I just can recieve payments. I don't know how to transfer money back. The hostel is run by some indian guy .... bla bla bla"

We had found another accomodation. I didn't want to get a disease in my holidays.

### *"Filthy"*

Reviewed 27 August 2014 via mobile

We had booked a full 10 bed room and paid for it in full they supplied a 12 bed room and when we returned from our first night out they had checked 2 people into our room.... we had trusted that this was completely ours as we had paid for it...they said it was a clerical error? The place was very very dirty, toilets showers

the main room. We met a couple of Italian girls who had travelled all over Scotland and they said this was the worst and dirtiest they had come across. The only decent thing I can say is it was central and cheap.

### *“Terrible”*

Reviewed 16 August 2014

Stayed here as it was located centrally and we were attending a concert nearby. First impressions were fine, though after finding our way to our room (which due to the size of our group was a private room) we discovered that our beds still had previous residents' linen on them and the room was covered in take away containers and general rubbish. After clearing our room of this, we proceeded to make our beds to find that the linen we had received was covered in stains and smelt beyond horrendous. Bathrooms dirty and you'd be lucky to get hot water. Even for £20 a night I would not expect such terrible conditions. If staying here I suggest taking a sleeping bag and spending minimum time in the hostel.

### *“Dirty and noisy”*

Reviewed 12 August 2014

We stayed here in a 12 bunk room as a group on a charity bike ride. The hostel was extremely noisy and dirty. There appeared to be a group of almost permanent residents and it certainly wasn't geared up to family groups. There were drunks sat on the door step and I didn't feel safe the whole time we were there and wasn't happy about eating anything we'd cooked in the dirty kitchen which was small and cramped.

### *“The kennels”*

Reviewed 11 August 2014

This place is akin to something dogs would be housed in. The rooms are just plain filthy and foul with so much junk left around it's evident that it's used by longtermers or junk is allowed to accumulate from previous (or deceased) travellers. The pillows are purely for symbolic value and offer no practical means of support or comfort. Hot water is sporadic at best, and the kitchen, oh my lord, has to be seen to be believed.... The staff are helpful enough to a point but they don't seem to be bothered by the squalor and are more content and preoccupied with making unnecessary criticisms on your planned itinerary around Scotland. The central location is the hostels ONLY redeemable quality, believe it or not though I've stayed in worse places, but for most of you unfortunates who have to bed here for a night this will possibly be the worst hostel you've stayed in.



*“Well located, and that is it”*

Reviewed 10 August 2014

The hostel is very well located. Near to the castle, in front of a Mc Donalds, good pubs and stores. However, the room that we stayed had no curtains and the bedding did not seem to be very clean. The 3 bathrooms at our floor were always dirty or flooded. The kitchen was a caos.

*“do NOT stay here!!!!”*

Reviewed 5 August 2014

They refused to refund us our money when we realized we had walked into the most disgusting place ever. I have stayed at many hostels, I have no problems with them but this place was dirty and unsafe. Band aids on the floor, cigarette butts, dust bunnies and clumps of hair. sTILL so angry that we lost 200\$ Canadian on this place. Now that I have checked all these reviews I realize we made a huge mistake.

*“I walked in had my camera stolen and walked out...”*

Reviewed 26 June 2014

I tried to get into another hostel but they were full so they recommended that I try Bazpackers (If only I'd listened). I went into the highlander and booked a room for 8 pounds and then recieved the grand tour. The tour included being explained that it is important to make sure the laundry door doesn't close behind me because it will lock and the light doesn't work in that room. The final straw for me was when she took me to my room and showed me the lock on the inside of the door and said 'When (not if, WHEN!!!) there are fights in the corridor you can just lock the door, but then again that means your locked in with the druggies in your room'. She left me too it and I left rather hastily.

I walked to the next hostel, Bazpackers. Where the staff were friendly and I shared a room with a nice guy who wasn't going to stab me. It was then that i noticed I had had my camera stolen during my 5 minutes at Highlanders. The only time I left my pack alone was in my 30 second walk to see the laundry when my pack was left in the reception.

Whoever reviewed this hell-hole as 'Excellent' are clearly being paid because this was the most disgusting accommodation I have ever staying in and I have the lowest standards of any backpacker!!!

**Room Tip:** Make sure to choose a room that isn't at Highlanders..

## *“The bare minimum”*

Reviewed 12 June 2014

I have been hosteling for years, I can sleep through an air strike and do not need much in the way of comfort or hospitality. Luckily for me this hostel offers neither, the staff would be better in a scottish remake of The Hills Have Eyes, they were rude, hostile, xenophobic (yes guys, foreign people will stay in hostels, annoying isn't it!!?), belligerent and seemed more intent on having a reputation for drinking records than hygiene standards. A bit of market research guys, most people staying in hostels in the Highlands are there for rambling, fishing, climbing, surfing, golf and other outdoor pursuits - not necessarily binging around town with yokels. Employ a cleaner, invest in things like toilet paper, soap, towels that can be rented without stains and tears, a vacuum cleaner, some classes in social aptitude and an idiots guide to the service and hospitality interest, primary school maths would also be helpful. Oh well, you can't win them all. I am sure this hostel will be shut down soon enough.

## *“Avoid!!”*

Reviewed 24 March 2014

I can't comment on the rooms as we never actually got that far! We arrived at 12.30pm, the check in was 1pm so we decided to go and see if we could check in a bit early. Some other guests were coming in at the same time so they lets us in using their code. We arrived at reception to find it the shutter down and no one there. There were quite a few, that looked like long term guests going about but they didn't speak much English. They managed to tell us that the owner was off and that we had to call the mobile number pinned to the wall. After trying the number for an hour and a half and not getting any answer we went looking for another hostel as we were only there for the night and didn't want to waste more time waiting. We found a hostel 5 minutes up the road for less than the Highlander and much cleaner. From what we saw of the kitchen and reception area it was filthy, in need of a good clean. The floor looked like it hadn't been washed for years. Luckily we had only paid a £12 deposit and not the full amount before arrival.

## *“Disgustful!”*

Reviewed 15 October 2013

We stayed here in october after we had finished the Great Glen Way. It's the worst hostel I have ever been to! Rooms and showers were dirty (not to speak of the kitchen!), toilet seats broken, the locks on the bedroom doors didn't catch, light

bulbs didn't work, the towels we hired @2GBP had large holes in them..  
I guess when an accommodation has mattresses which are wipeable it says it all!

### *"Beyond a joke"*

Reviewed 8 September 2013

The reception staff are abrupt and rude. Though I was told my card had been declined actually the card machine didn't work. The lock on the door to the bedroom didn't catch. The room was rammed with cheap bunk beds and an extra mattress on the floor for good measure. The duvet and pillows stank. Loud music and voices hammered through a thin wall. I was charged £2 for towel hire, and £2,50 for laundry and then told to do it myself but that I couldn't use it till after 9pm. When I did finally get to use it, the machine broke leaving my things floating about in filthy water. When I told the receptionist he looked at me as if I was stupid and said, "Just ring it out, it's washed isn't it?" (It should be noted he was in charge of doing the hostels washing). All the computers were broken. There was no hot water for a shower in the morning. The large, filth common room was completely miserable.

Arguably this place is in the so bad it's good category of thing. If you're like the masochist Bill Murray plays in Little Shop of Horrors, and deliberately want to stay in the worst Hostel ever then this place is quite entertaining.

### *"Awful"*

Reviewed 24 August 2013

Arriving in Inverness, I found all B&Bs seemed to be fully booked, so I went to this hostel. There were beds available, so I booked 2 nights @ £20 per night. I was handed a bundle of linen to make my bed and told which room I was in and the combination of the lock on the door (I didn't need it, as the door opened if you just pushed it). The room contained 5 or 6 bunk beds with rather worn mattresses and duvets.

Of the 3 washrooms on the floor, the taps produced only cold water, only one had a sink plug, in another the shower fitting was broken and in the third the toilet had its seat and lid broken off. Worst of all, there was no toilet paper! (There was in one on the second evening, but it was soon used up. Fortunately I had my own, being prepared for camping.) I had to pay an extra £2 for hire of a towel and £2 for breakfast. I had to move rooms for the second night. Both rooms were of mixed sexes.

The large common room was fairly conducive to social activity, with 2 pool tables and a selection of board games and books. There were kitchen facilities to store

and prepare your own food. The staff were adequately helpful.

I suppose the hostel's best feature is its centrality, being close to the bus and rail stations, tourist information centre, shops, etc. Try to avoid this place if possible, but if you must go there, be sure to take your own loo roll!

### *“Very poor”*

Reviewed 17 August 2013

I was taking a group of foreign tourists around Scotland, and wanted cheap accommodation whilst they stayed in a local B'n'B (very good). This place was rubbish. Really. I booked a place in a 3-person dorm via hostelbookers about five days before I turned up. When I got there:

- we have no notice of your stay.
- 'Can you show a print off?' I said I didn't have one. So they said go online and show the booking (fair enough). After 5 minutes of trying to get online while they dealt with another person I said I couldn't get online. They then gave me another internet connection and told the next guest their internet was off.
- I showed them the booking. They said they had no space there. Not even that they had given it away by mistake; they had no space and i could take a place left in the 8-bed dorm. I saved 2 pounds. Wooh.
- I went up and there was no pillow. i came back down and told them. After a sarcastic joke that they didn't have pillows they sighed and went to get one.
- It is right above a karaoke bar. Great.

I had no problem with the guests, but The Highlander Hostel is a perfect example of how the word 'backpacker' is used by hostels that don't care. As a Scottish person I felt it was a miserable example of accommodation in my own country.

### *“Horrible”*

Reviewed 1 August 2013

We are working up here and they had sent us to this hostel for 2 nights whilst our original hotel was fully booked. As soon as we walked into our bedroom it was a disgrace there was peoples socks left over in the bathroom, blood on the bed frames, bed's was full of stains, shower was disgusting. The 5 of us walked out and went to find anyoher b and b out of our own cost because it was that bad. Dont stay here its cleaner on the streets!!!!

### *“Oh the Horror”*

Reviewed 25 July 2013

This hostel was the worst smelling place I have ever stayed. The uncleanliness is

what struck me first. I stayed at the hostel with my husband, teenage daughter and her friend. When we arrived we were given a room with a bunk and two single beds. There were two rotten looking matters on the floor with holes. The stench in the room was unbearable and the windows would not open. There were work materials and discarded items on the upper wall. We decided to go to lunch and upon returning found two more mouldy mattresses in our room! We had booked two nights but decided to leave the next morning immediately. There were two girls cutting their hair in the bathroom sink and a man using drugs outside. Our room was previously used as a movie room. There are NO REFUNDS so be careful.

### *“the worst accommodation I stayed at”*

Reviewed 30 May 2013

Do not ever book at the Highlander Hostel. It was dirty (window, floor, toilets) and smelted badly, each floor of the toilets was totally wet like after a flood. There was no toilet paper in any of them. No waste bin in the dorm. the bed linen are old, very used and should have been replaced for a long time. I hardly met backpackers there, I think most of the guest try to settle down in UK. I totally agree with all of the negative ratings. I payed 20£ a night which was not worth it at all and there is the policy that you do not get any refunds. The best thing is: Just 1 min away, there is the visitor centre who helps you to find a new accommodation.

**Room Tip:** Do not book there

### *“SCAMMERS!”*

Reviewed 18 May 2013

when i phoned to book a room they took my payment that night - when i got my statement through i saw that they charged me when i checked in as well. i emailed them and was told they would investigate and get back to me which they never did! they are rude lying people and i would advise avoiding this place - unless you want to be charged twice with no reason!

the place was greasy, filthy and just horrible. you have to make your own beds and dont even bother using the filthy toilets let alone the showers.

horrible place and horrible SCAMMING people!

definitely use the other hostel because it is far nicer.

**Room Tip:** go somewhere else!

### *“Inverness Hostel”*

Reviewed 9 May 2013

I wasn't expecting much, so I wasn't too disappointed. The good points: the dorms were clean, the beds and bedding in good condition, the bathrooms OK, the location great, I had some great games of pool with some very nice Phillipino guys - a crew of them were staying there for an extended job nearby. The bad points: The kitchen and dining tables were a mess in the morning - there are people staying there long term and cooking big meals...? The bed-pricing seems a bit arbitrary: between £13 and £15 on the same night....and the yellow and light blue colour scheme is awful. But that is just being picky.

*“Avoid at all costs.”*

Reviewed 6 May 2013

Absolutely horrendous place, you'd be better off sleeping rough in a doorway somewhere. The wee receptionist guy was the creepiest dude you'll ever meet in your life. Despite us booking a 5 bed private dorm, we were put in a 10 bed dorm with the promise that no one else would be in there. Turns out he then went and sold the other five beds. Not really a problem, but there was a small child in our room which was slightly bizarre given we were all out on the lash and coming back in the early hours. The place was also stinking, dirty, the toilets were flooded with liquid, and there was a homeless guy who just seemed to live on the couch in the reception. Give this place a miss. Better still, get it demolished.

*# “Never ever go here”*

Reviewed 1 April 2013

This hostel was absolutely terrible. It smells bad, the bathrooms (toilet and shower in one) are disgusting. Additionally, there was no toilet paper and the people living in the hostel smoked in the bathroom. It was obvious that they peed in the shower and unfortunately, the showers didn't work properly. It looked like the place has not been cleaned in in the last few years. Besides from the good location (which you might consider not really good as the screaming people outside are perfectly hearable) the hostel made you wanna stay outside and not come back. Never ever go there

*“Good location”*

Reviewed 25 January 2013

Stayed there 1 night, in a 10 bed room. The room was big enough. Staff was nice. There is a kitchen on can use, with dishes and pans provided. Everything was a bit greasy. The location is good, close to the center of Inverness. In the common



room there are a few games available and wifi access. I paid about...

More

*“good location...”*

Reviewed 14 June 2012

if you plan to stay in city for your highland trip it is one of the best priced location you can ask for, in the heart of town centre with all things you can ask for nearest to you. the service and hospitallity offered was on average, could have been better, the rooms are not that comfy, but who cares...

More

Was this review helpful?

*“Very pleased”*

Reviewed 11 June 2012

I quite liked this hostel. The staff was incredibly friendly and helpful. Had a nice big cinema in it and a pool table. Only complaint was that it wasn't that easy to meet people in it based on the way it was laid out.

Was this review helpful?

*“Great value hostel!”*

Reviewed 1 May 2012 via mobile

My friend and I weren't expecting much from this hostel but when we arrived we were greeted by really friendly staff who helped us out heaps during our stay! We got our rooms upgraded and were able to use the managers own laptop to watch movies and tv shows. The bathrooms were really clean as were the rooms. The location...

More

*“Highly recommended!!”*

Reviewed 13 April 2012

Hostel is located in city centre, minutes from anything you need whether it be transport, attractions or food. Unbelievably cheap for what you're getting. Staff are so friendly! Made us feel very welcome an comfortable. Bathrooms are big and always clean. Overall great stay!!

Was this review helpful?

*“Most Friendly ...”*

Reviewed 10 April 2012

Reached the Hostel which is located in the centre of city and is the oldest hostel , found staff soo friendly and helpful always .(April 2012)

Was this review helpful?

*“My first stay in Inverness”*

Reviewed 31 March 2012

This hostel has recently been decorated and looks very modern and clean cut. The location is right opposite the town house in the middle of city, which meant we were one minute walk away from both the bus and train stations which meant trips to loch ness and further a field was very easy. The staff were friendly nice and...

More

Was this review helpful?

4.5

*“Not what I expected from all previous reviews!”*

Reviewed 19 March 2012

My 4 friends and I came to the hostel on the 3rd of March, expecting the worst hostel. Walk in and go upstairs and nice man greets us. We ask to see the hostel first of course, so we get a tour of the hostel. SPOTLESS bathrooms, SPOTLESS rooms, and generally a nice smell. Had late nights out and about,...

More

*“worst place ever!”*

Reviewed 1 March 2012

It was the most dirty hostel we ever stayed in. Never again!

*“Beware, bogans at large”*

Reviewed 22 January 2012

Stayed at this hostel on the night of Wednesday 19th October 2011. Awoken in the middle of the night by some druggie who had wandered in of the street and was going through my rucksack. Apparently this happens often (according to the staff), druggies/neds/chavs/bogans will get hold of the door codes and just wander in and help themselves to your...

More

Was this review helpful?

*“Very Poor!”*

Reviewed 17 August 2011

A large group of us headed for a weekend in Inverness last month so we all agreed to stay in this dive for two nights. We'd booked X 2 large dorms, neither of which had been cleaned before our arrival. We'd not long been in our rooms when the ignorant knuckle-head who checked us in, let himself into our room...

More

Was this review helpful?

*“DO NOT GO THERE! THIS PLACE NEEDS TO BE SHUT DOWN!”*

Reviewed 8 August 2011

This is the worst hostel I have ever stayed at. I would strongly recommend not to go there, I even wish Hostelworld took it off their listing. I booked a night in a 10 bed ensuite room for two people on Hostelworld, and required an early check in (10 am) since we were out of town until midnight. At 10 am,...

More

Was this review helpful?

*“Very bad hostel, be warned!”*

Reviewed 30 July 2011

I have stayed in Highlander Hostel on 22 July. We reserved over phone 10 days before and they confirmed the booking with banc card details. The day of arrival, I checked whether all was fine, and they confirmed. Upon arrival, suddenly they were surprised to see me. They decided to put us in the Albyn House, outside of the hostel....

More

*“Rude, aggressive and filthy. And thats just the staff...”*

Reviewed 25 July 2011

This hostel is dirty and seems to be run by people who insist on being rude and aggressive, from the first moment we spoke to reception till we left, it was just unpleasant. There was no handle on the toilet. We had to put our hand into the cistern to flush.... and thats just the good part! On our first morning we were woken up...

More

Was this review helpful?

*“the worst hostel in the UK”*

Reviewed 14 July 2011

I had the unfortunate experience of booking a bed with this hostel - and I can honestly say it was the worst hostel I have EVER seen. My 10 bed dorm was like a prison cell - with the toilets and showers contained in the same room. The beds stank, the floors were dirty - it was a hole, a...

More

Was this review helpful?

*“Bed Bugs--Go Somewhere Else, Anywhere Else”*

Reviewed 30 May 2011

The Highlander Hostel and their Bed and Breakfast is the worst place I have ever stayed. One morning I woke up covered in bug bites--bed bugs! When I told the proprietor he said that I should leave my things in the room, that he would release fumigation cans to kill the bugs (which he conveniently carries around in his car!)...

More

*“DUMP!!!”*

Reviewed 3 April 2011

this place is the worst place i have ever stayed in my life- me and my friends got a 8sleep dorm, there was only seven of us but we bought 8th bed so we could have room to ourselves. We returned from shopping (buying cleaning products to clean our disgusting bathroom and room) to find a random persons things on...

More

Was this review helpful?

*“Never ever again!”*

Reviewed 11 October 2010

We stayed for just one night and it was horrible experience.The hostel is very dirty ,all bathroms and toilets not cleaned for ages,also rooms are very stiffy.I would say it looks like in prison ,metal bunky beds,uncompfy mattresses and max overcrowded.The kitchen discusting dirty ,even so expensive staff is there such a oven,dishwasher and units.The living room good size with...

More

Was this review helpful?

*“DO NOT GO THERE.”*

Reviewed 15 August 2009

We booked a dorm of 4 after reading great reviews of the hostel online and were pleased with our choice. But when we finally got there it ended up being a walking cliché of all the bad stuff that can happen in a youth hostel. We hired towels and they were so stained with make up and stuff that I...

More

## Appeal Decision Notice

T: 01324 696 400  
F: 01324 696 444  
E: [dpea@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dpea@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)



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Decision by John H Martin, a Reporter appointed by the Scottish Ministers

- Planning appeal reference: PPA-270-2148
- Site address: Ho Ho/Highlander Hostel, 23A High Street, Inverness, IV1 1HY
- Appeal by Mr Ali Mohamed against the decision by Highland Council
- Application for planning permission (15/02631/FUL) dated 27 November 2015 refused by notice dated 18 December 2015
- The development proposed: change of use to House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) with ancillary use as a Hostel
- Application drawing: No.2015/GA/2/01B
- Date of site visit by Reporter: 26 April 2016

Date of appeal decision: 23 May 2016

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### Decision

I allow the appeal and grant planning permission for a change of use to a House in Multiple Occupation with ancillary use as a Hostel, subject to the 6 conditions listed at the end of the decision notice. Attention is drawn to the 3 advisory notes at the end of the notice.

### Reasoning

1. I am required to determine this appeal in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Having regard to the provisions of the development plan the main issue in this appeal is the effect of the proposed change of use on residential and business amenity in the High Street by reason of noise and disturbance.
2. I have a duty under section 14(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas)(Scotland) Act 1997 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural and historic interest which it possesses.
3. Adopted Policy HMO2 - HMO provision within Inverness City Centre - in the council's Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Guidance (which includes policy 33 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan) requires planning applications to be assessed against policy HMO3. To ensure that HMO provision does not have an adverse effect on the character and amenity of the city centre, the policy also requires the guideline to be reviewed if the concentration of HMO properties reaches 10% of all residential units in the city centre. Policy HMO3 - Assessing HMO Proposals - is the most relevant policy in this case, and sets out a range of criteria with which such proposals have to comply.

4. The appellant's property is a Category B listed, 4 storey former town house with shops on the ground floor that lies on the north side of High Street in Inverness City Centre. Access to the accommodation on the upper floors is through an archway that leads to pedestrianized Lombard Street to the rear where commercial uses on the west side face flats above shops opposite. Some of these flats gain access via a staircase (Stair 2) which also provides a fire escape for others, as well as a right of fire escape from the 1<sup>st</sup> Floor of the appellant's property.

5. The main entrance is on the west side of the archway where a hallway opens onto a grand staircase (Stair 1) that rises to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor with a more basic stair up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor. A new bin store for wheelie bins and recycling materials is to be formed at Ground Floor level in a fire-proofed cupboard under the main stair. The 1<sup>st</sup> Floor would have a reception area, a common room, kitchen, laundry, a 4 person room with separate shower-room and a small office, with access through to the Stair 2 fire escape from above and to below. The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor would have 2 x 4 person rooms (one with ensuite shower room), 2 x 3 persons rooms (one with ensuite shower room) and 1 x 2 person room, together with 3 x shower/WCs and a separate shower, plus access through to the Stair 2 fire escape. The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor would have 2 x 3 person rooms, 1 x 2 person room and 3 x 1 person rooms with 3 showers and 2 WCs and access to the Stair 2 fire escape. The application plan shows that these rooms would provide accommodation for up to 31 persons.

6. During my site inspection, which I carried out with the council's representative and appellant, it was apparent that he was in the process of carrying out extensive improvements to the rooms and facilities. The original layout of the building has been largely retained with few alterations, except where necessary to provide WCs and showers. Where rooms had previously been used as hostel bedrooms using bunk beds, they are now being prepared for fewer occupants as defined in paragraph 5 above. The new kitchen and laundry facilities on the 1<sup>st</sup> Floor should be more than adequate to serve the residents, while the common room would provide a useful communal amenity space for them to enjoy.

7. As far as I was able to ascertain, as a result of this work, the interior of the listed building would be restored but largely unchanged, while the lack of any external alterations would ensure that the building, its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses would be preserved.

#### *Main issue*

8. As a building providing a primary home for 6 or more unrelated people, the appellant's property would meet the definition of a HMO in the supplementary guidance. In the report of handling, the council accept that the concentration of HMOs in this Census Output Area, including the appeal premises, would amount to 6.9% of all the residential units in the city centre, which falls well within the recommended 10% threshold set out in policy HMO2. Although this suggests that there remains some capacity for this type of use, each application has still to be assessed on its own merits under policy HMO3. Paragraph 2.16 of the supplementary guidance states that there are also 3 Specialist HMOs for the homeless in the city centre contracted to the council and 1 used when required, but the appeal premises do not fall into that category.



9. The bunk beds I saw suggest that, when it was used as a hostel, many more people were in occupation in a more transient and difficult to control manner. Policy HMO3 will only support applications where it would avoid negative impact to traffic or pedestrian safety; it is close to public transport, social and community facilities; it will avoid negative impact on residential or business amenity, particularly with regard to noise and disturbance, and must provide refuse storage, garden ground and car or cycle parking and it will avoid materially altering the character of the area.

10. Although the property has previously been licensed as a HMO, which the council does not dispute, it has now to meet the policy criteria. Of these, the building lies on the principal pedestrianized shopping street in the City Centre where there is unlikely to be any conflict with traffic or pedestrian safety, while the report of handling accepts that in such a location parking provision would not be required. It lies in close proximity to public transport connections by bus and train, and social and community facilities are close by. Although there has been trouble in the past with noise and disturbance and inadequate refuse storage, the appellant would appear to have that under control with fewer residents in the new layout. There is no communal outdoor amenity space for the occupants to enjoy, but all the city's facilities and riverside are readily available. While there is no car or cycle parking available for residents and visitors, city centre car parks are nearby.

11. The principal objection revolves around the behaviour of the residents both in terms of business and residential amenity, particularly for those who live in the adjoining flats. In the past, hostel tenants appeared to have had a very casual attitude towards their neighbours and complaints about unsocial behaviour were common. In addition, hostel refuse was being stored under Stair 2, which does not belong to the appellant, where it regularly caused a nuisance through lack of proper storage which led to unpleasant odours and rubbish being spread out onto Lombard Street.

12. With this history, it is hardly surprising that the neighbours, both in business and residential accommodation, have serious reservations over the proposed use as a HMO. They are concerned about their amenity, safety and the public image of Inverness that relies on tourism as a major source of revenue.

13. To answer these concerns, the appellant is carrying out extensive works restoring the premises to attract a better class of tenant, and the quality of accommodation is being raised to a standard that most occupiers would find both attractive and convenient. Even though HMO accommodation is likely to be medium term while the residents seek more permanent places to live, each room would be their primary home, so the tenancies are likely to be longer than would be expected in a hostel that attracts more transient visitors.

14. I therefore take the view that, with number of persons limited to the 31 applied for, living in newly decorated rooms with updated kitchen, laundry and communal facilities, shower rooms and WCs, future tenants are more likely to form a greater attachment to their rooms and treat them with greater respect, particularly as the appellant intends to have a member of staff in residence. This should result in far fewer instances of noise and disturbance within the premises while proper control of the storage and collection of refuse should also remove the previous nuisance from scattered rubbish and odour.

15. Notwithstanding their previous use as a HMO, the application seeks a change of use presumably to place the premises on a sound planning footing. However, bearing in mind the concerns of local residents and businesses over the previous hostel use, and the number of bunk beds I saw in the rooms during my inspection, I share their concern that this ancillary use might revert to a full time hostel with a larger number of temporary residents and a return to the previous problems. For that reason, because the application is for a maximum of 31 persons in 12 rooms, I find it both necessary and reasonable to impose a condition that this number shall not be exceeded.

16. I therefore conclude that, subject to the conditions to be imposed, the proposed change of use would result in a considerable improvement in residential and business amenity in the High Street by reason of noise, disturbance and refuse storage.

#### *Material considerations*

17. Most of the points raised in submissions have been covered in this decision, so the previous problems experienced by the neighbours should now be addressed. I accept the Crown and City Centre Community Council's point that a single HMO can provide accommodation for many bed spaces, so the threshold percentage does not give a clear indication of the number of residential units involved. However, the council points out that the current policy counts the number of HMO households which is the standard used to measure the total number of HMOs with each census output area of the city, and that the application meets the policy criteria.

18. There has clearly been a problem with anti-social behaviour in and around this building in the past but, while I am satisfied that the appellant's current improvements should lead to an improvement in this regard, anti-social behaviour is not a planning matter and is the subject of other legislation. Similarly, the issue of a HMO Licence is separate from the grant of planning permission, although both are likely to be required for a development of this size.

#### *Conditions*

19. The council have suggested 4 conditions, should this appeal be allowed, to which the appellant has raised no objection, and I accept subject to minor amendments. These conditions will ensure that management and maintenance procedures and a Waste Management Plan are in place prior to occupation of the HMO, that adequate off-street storage for refuse is provided within premises, and not within adjoining Stair 2 which can only be used as a fire escape, and that refuse shall be placed outside only on the day of collection. In addition to these, I shall impose the condition, referred to in paragraph 15 above, to ensure that the approved number of 31 persons shall not be exceeded.

20. The council also requested that consideration be given to imposing a condition that limits the use of the HMO to avoid its simultaneous use as a hostel but, in the absence of any specific definition as to when such a use would prevail, such a condition would be insufficiently precise and enforceable to accord with the tests in Circular 4/1998. In any event, with proper supervision by staff and the limit on the number of persons residing on the premises, whether they are longer term HMO or short term Hostel tenants should not be relevant.

### *Conclusion*

21. My overall conclusion is that, in the light of the history of use of the property as a HMO, the alterations being carried out to the premises and the reduction in the number of residents would result in a major improvement in nearby residential and business amenity and, thereby, to the image of Inverness City as a whole.

22. I therefore conclude, for the reasons set out above, that the proposed development accords overall with the relevant provisions of the development plan and that there are no material considerations which would still justify refusing to grant planning permission. I have considered all the other matters raised, but there are none which would lead me to alter my conclusions.

*John H Martin*

Reporter

### **Conditions**

1. The maximum number of persons residing in the House in Multiple Occupation (HMO), hereby permitted, shall not exceed 31 persons in the 12 rooms shown on application Drg No: 2015/GSA2/01.B.

*Reason: To control the number of residents occupying the premises at any time.*

2. There shall be no occupation of the HMO until the management and maintenance procedures that are agreed with the Licensing Authority for this HMO have been submitted to and approved by the Planning Authority. Thereafter all management and maintenance procedures agreed to in this document shall be adhered to at all times.

*Reason: In the interests of protecting the amenity of neighbouring properties.*

3. There shall be no occupation of the HMO until a copy of the contract of the services referred to in the Waste Management Plan, submitted to the Council on 26 November 2015, has been submitted to and approved by the Planning Authority. The approved Waste Management Plan shall thereafter be adhered to at all times.

*Reason: To ensure that waste is properly managed in the interests of residential amenity.*

4. Before the HMO, hereby permitted, is brought into use, a scheme providing for adequate off-street storage and management of refuse shall be submitted to and

approved by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter, all refuse and recyclable materials associated with the development, hereby permitted, shall be stored within the approved bin store located on the ground floor under Stair 1 as identified on the Ground Floor Plan on application Drg No: 2015/GSA2/01.B

*Reason: In the interests of residential amenity.*

5. No refuse or recycling material shall be stored or placed for collection on the public highway or pavement, except on the day of collection.

*Reason: In the interests of residential amenity.*

6. For the avoidance of doubt, Stair 2 shall be used only as an emergency fire escape from the HMO, hereby permitted, and for no other purpose. No waste or refuse containers associated with the development shall be stored around or within the bin store located under Stair 2.

*Reason: To protect the amenity of adjoining premises and residents.*

### Advisory notes

1. **The length of the permission:** This planning permission will lapse on the expiration of a period of three years from the date of this decision notice, unless the development has been started within that period (See section 58(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended)).
2. **Notice of the start of development:** The person carrying out the development must give advance notice in writing to the planning authority of the date when it is intended to start. Failure to do so is a breach of planning control. It could result in the planning authority taking enforcement action (See sections 27A and 123(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended)).
3. **Notice of the completion of the development:** As soon as possible after it is finished, the person who completed the development must write to the planning authority to confirm the position.