

## The big read

# Hoteliers welcome move to crackdown on unregulated holiday homes

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**H**oteliers in Blackpool have welcomed government moves to strengthen controls over the growth of short-term lets such as holiday homes advertised on Airbnb websites.

Ministers have launched a consultation around potential new planning rules to restrict the spread of short-term lets, which are much less regulated than traditional hotels and B&Bs.

In Blackpool there are around 454 short-term lets operating, with many outside the traditional holiday areas.

The spread of tourist accommodation into residential neighbourhoods has led

to complaints about noise, anti-social behaviour, parking and rubbish collection.

Hoteliers group Stay-Blackpool is campaigning for its Blackpool Approved Visitor Accommodation Scheme to be made compulsory in the town, including for the short lettings sector.

Claire Smith, president of StayBlackpool, said she welcomed the consultation launched by the government.

She said: "This is most certainly a step forward although the government are just at the consultation stage so we're a long way off any actual action."

"I've read the papers and am really pleased that the government has a good grasp of all the concerns, issues and problems created by such platforms but, as with any new proposals, it's all in

the detail. StayBlackpool will respond and certainly part of that response will contain our absolute belief that a compulsory registration scheme is necessary.

"If it is anything less than we're back to the situation where only the "good" business owners comply or adhere.

"One of the main problems in the accommodation sector is that there is lots of legalities, compliances, rules and regulations to be followed, but if no-one is checking that a property is legal and safe then that leaves the industry open to those unscrupulous traders which reflects badly on us all.

"So, certainly a step in the right direction but we need to ensure that the government get this right and introduce a scheme that is fit

for purpose, without loopholes and definitely one that is compulsory."

Culture secretary Lucy Frazer said while short-term lets gave tourists more choice, it was important to get the balance right.

She added the consultation would "give us the data we need to assess the position and enable us to address the concerns communities face".

choose not to use the planning controls, and that they would only apply in England.

It said the register is being introduced through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill currently going through Parliament, while the planning changes, subject to the outcome of the consultation, would be introduced through secondary legislation later in the year.

The plans for a register follows a call for evidence on the issue. The consultation for that will be carried out by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer said: "This new world of ultra-flexible

short-term lets gives tourists more choice than ever before, but it should not come at the expense of local people being able to own their own home and stay local.

"The Government wants to help areas get the balance right, and today we have an incomplete picture of the size and spread of our short-term lets market. "This consultation on a national registration scheme will give us the data we need to assess the position and enable us to address the concerns communities face." Theo Lomas, head of public policy and government relations for northern Europe at Airbnb, said: "Airbnb has long called for a national register for

short-term lets and we welcome the Government taking this forward.

"We know that registers are clear and simple for everyday hosts to follow while giving authorities the information they need to regulate effectively. "The vast majority of UK hosts share one home, and almost four in 10 say the earnings help them afford the rising cost of living. "We want to work with the Government to ensure that any planning interventions are carefully considered, evidence-based, and strike a balance between protecting housing and supporting everyday families who let their space to help afford their home and keep pace with rising living costs."



House parties are popular at unregulated holiday homes.



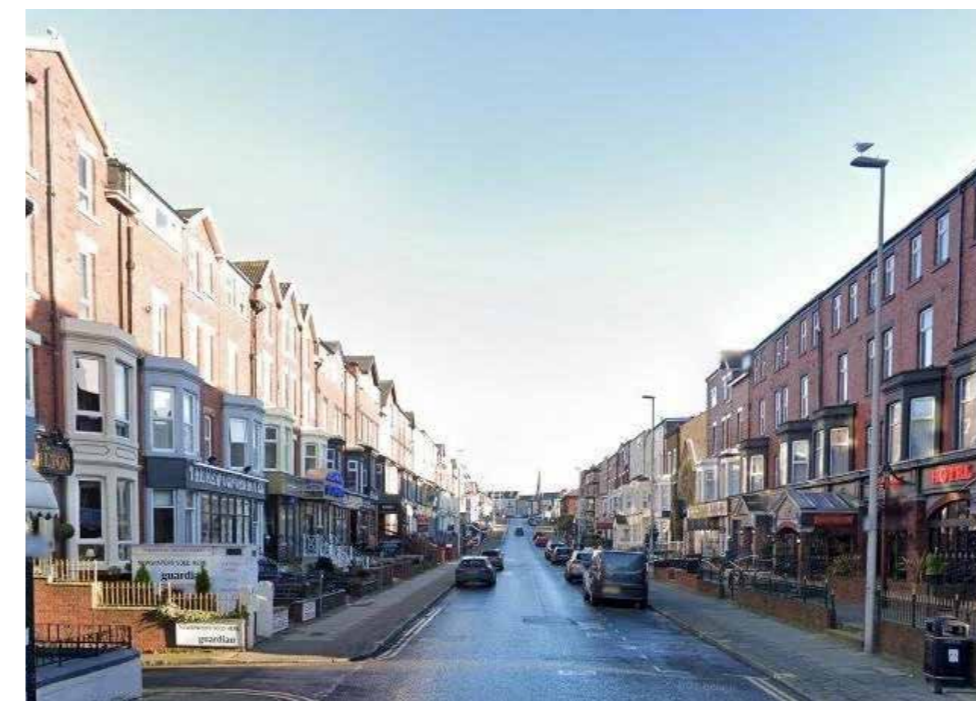
Short-term lettings threaten Blackpool's traditional hotels

## What the Government says

Converting homes into short-term holiday lets would require planning permission under Government plans to stop residents being "pushed out of cherished towns". The Government has said it will consult on the change and on another proposal for a registration scheme for short-term holiday lets. Airbnb welcomed the Government taking forward its plans for the register, but said it wanted to ensure any changes to the planning system "strike a balance between protecting housing and supporting everyday families who let their space

to help afford their home and keep pace with rising living costs". The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said it will consult on requiring planning permission for an existing home to start to be used as a short term let, as well as whether to give owners flexibility to let out their home for a maximum number of nights a year without the need for the permission. Communities Secretary Michael Gove said: "Tourism brings many benefits to our economy but in too many communities we have seen

local people pushed out of cherished towns, cities and villages by huge numbers of short-term lets. "I'm determined that we ensure that more people have access to local homes at affordable prices, and that we prioritise families desperate to rent or buy a home of their own close to where they work. "I have listened to representations from MPs in tourist hot spots and am pleased to launch this consultation to introduce a requirement for planning permissions for short-term lets." The Government said local authorities could



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## Airbnb is not going away, but it needs reining in

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It is that time of year where many of us are either planning for or looking forward to a summer holiday. Post-Covid, the UK tourism sector has been boosted by a rise in staycations, and this demand has continued in many areas – despite the lifting of overseas travel restrictions.

For resorts like Blackpool this obviously presents a great opportunity. However, the explosion in popularity of Airbnb properties has changed the landscape not just in Blackpool but in towns and cities across the UK. They offer, in the main, the same thing that has been offered for decades – the ability to rent a furnished property and the chance to live more like a local than you would staying in a nearby hotel.

But despite my support for them in principle, there are unquestionably less welcome aspects – and it wasn't hugely surprising to see Rishi Sunak target them for reform in a recent speech to crackdown on anti-social behaviour.

Many are let to stag and hen parties that disturb neighbours and add pressure to local facilities such as rubbish collections and even the local A and E. Yes, these lets contribute economically to a certain extent but they contribute far less than equivalent hotels. But those because they are often owned by non-residents who won't pay as much in taxes or employ as many local people either. The constant changeover of residents in a residential area also doesn't help any sense of community. And these aren't the only drawbacks. Many places where Airbnb is growing have seen owners operating without planning permission. Safety could

be an issue too, hotels must comply with far more legislation. Unofficial rentals avoid commercial rates and often have inadequate insurances. Like many in the sector, I've watched with interest the ongoing situation playing out in Blackpool where town hall chiefs seem determined to get a grip on the issue. For that they deserve credit. But the authorities must walk a fine line.

Yes they need to try and protect the local environment but they can't be seen as killjoys stopping people from enjoying the local nightlife. I think more emphasis needs to be put on the Airbnb franchise itself. Right now the company is piloting technology that may identify and block prospective renters who want to stage anti-social parties. The technology has already been tested for some months in Australia and is now being piloted in North America.

It analyses a prospective renter's history of past renting on the short lets platform, how far from home they want to rent, whether they're renting for a weekday or weekend, and other factors. There is no announcement yet from Airbnb about the technology being used in the UK, but the platform typically trials such innovations in some parts of the world before making them universal. It can't come soon enough in my view. In June this year the platform said its so-called 'party ban' – introduced in 2020 at the height of the pandemic – was to be permanent. That's good news too. It claims that there's been a 63 per cent drop in reports of parties in Airbnb host homes in the UK since the temporary

ban, with worldwide reports of parties at listed properties having dropped 44 per cent and more than 6,600 guests suspended last year for staging parties in contravention of rules. So this is a step in the right direction. But there is another problem playing out here too, which is not talked about anywhere near enough in this country. And that's how the spread of Airbnb properties is pushing rents up. Unregulated short-term lets mean landlords are switching properties out of the long-term lettings market to chase higher profits in the short-term lets. It's reducing supply and having an upward pressure on rents. This is a big problem, Airbnb has exploded onto the scene in UK cities, rural communities and seaside resorts over the past decade. Analysis by the Council for the Protection of Rural England found there had been a 1,000 per cent increase in short-term lets nationally between 2015 and 2021, removing 148,000 homes from the housing stock. Many of these are whole houses rather than spare rooms. So councillors in Blackpool are right to push for new planning enforcement powers to control the spread of such short-term lets. Yes, there is a place for Airbnbs, particularly in holiday resorts like Blackpool. But those entering, and profiting from the market, should be doing so in a more regulated marketplace. It is vital that the growth of Airbnbs doesn't come at the expense of locking out a future generation from one day owning, or even just renting, a place to call home.

**Jonathan Rolande is founder of the National Association of Property Buyers**