

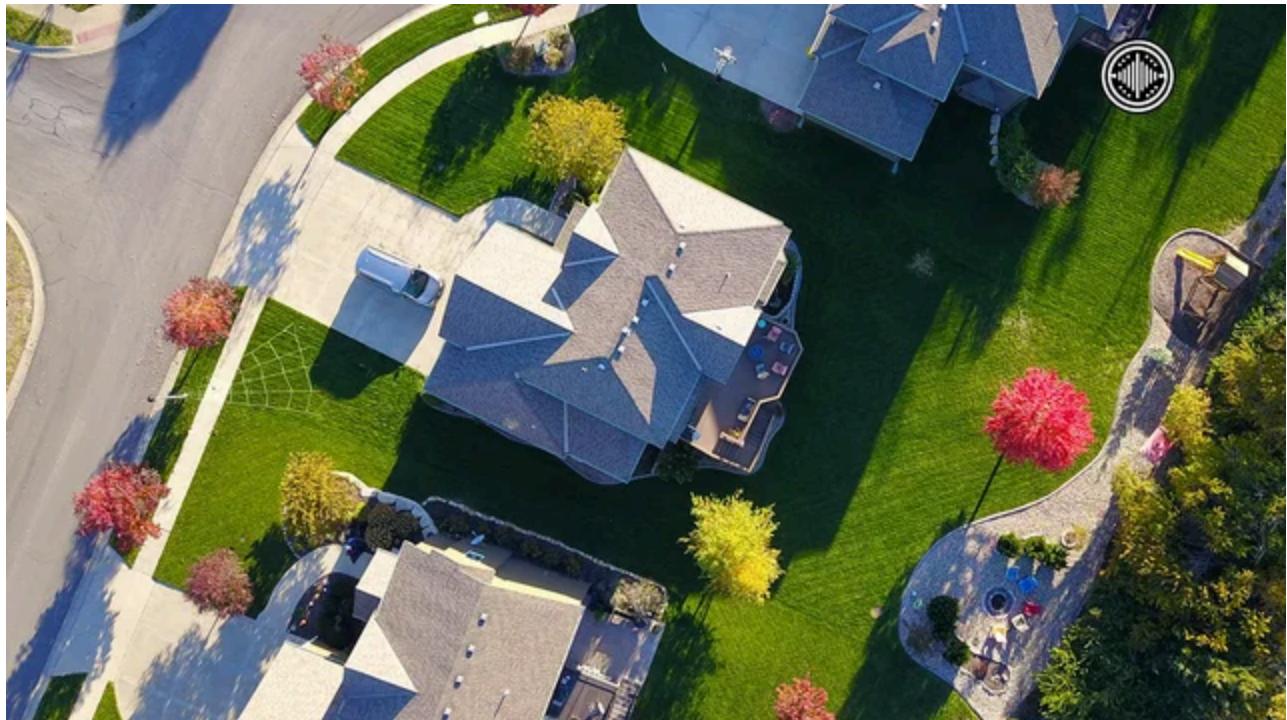
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## York's Housing Crisis Threatens Local Communities

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York's charm as a tourist magnet and student hub is undeniable, but for locals like Andrew Hay, a painter and decorator, the city's popularity is strangling its housing market. Standing on the street where his grandparents once lived and his father grew up, Mr Hay laments its transformation into a "ghost town" during university breaks, when student renters vanish. "This street, and others like it, are being neglected," he told us. "It's unrecognisable, and it's all down to student lets and holiday lets."

The surge in short-term rentals and student accommodation has gutted York's housing stock, driving prices to levels that exclude the next generation. Mr Hay's two sons, both in their 20s and working in York, face a grim reality: they cannot afford to buy within the city. "They'll have to commute back into York," he said. "They're saving for a property, but there's nothing in their price range here. Even surrounding towns are getting pricier as people are pushed out."

Mr Hay fears York's future is bleak without action. "If nothing is done, in 15 to 20 years, local people won't be living here," he warned. "It'll be all tourists and students." His concerns reflect a broader anxiety among residents that York is losing its community soul to transient visitors and speculative property markets.

The city's universities, York St John and the University of York, defend their role, claiming in a joint statement that students are "our future key workers and professionals" who "contribute hugely to the local economy, workforce, and cultural life." They argue for better planning to balance student needs with housing demands, but their words offer little comfort to those priced out.

Rachael Maskell, York Central's Labour MP, has been vocal about the housing crisis, particularly the impact of short-term lets. In a 2023 parliamentary debate, she noted around 2,000 Airbnb listings in her constituency, often turning family homes into "party houses." Maskell's private members' bill, set to return to the Commons this autumn, proposes licensing short-term lets to give local authorities control and generate funds. "Tourism is vital for jobs and showcasing our incredible city," she said, "but we must hold it in balance." Her initiative, while well-intentioned, faces a government that seems more focused on rhetoric than delivering tangible solutions.

Airbnb, a dominant force in York's short-term rental market, disputes claims that it fuels the crisis. A spokesperson argued that listings rented for 90 nights or more represent just 0.55% of York's housing stock. "Many hosts are everyday people renting casually to make ends meet," they said, adding that Airbnb travel injects £44m into the local economy, supporting nearly 700 jobs. Yet this fails to address the cumulative effect of entire properties being removed from the residential market.

Across the city, a conference at York St John University, hosted by Good Organisation, tackled sustainable tourism. Natasha Almond, the group's director, highlighted the housing strain: "Lots of people love York and want a second home here, knowing they can profit from

holiday lets. But this has tipped over, and we've seen an increase in homelessness." Good Organisation's proposed "Fair BnB" system would encourage renting out rooms rather than entire homes, preserving housing stock while allowing locals to benefit from tourism. "People could still earn money without taking whole houses off the market," Ms Almond explained.

York's £1.7bn tourism industry, drawing 9 million visitors annually, is a double-edged sword. While it fuels jobs and global recognition, it risks hollowing out the city's communities. Without robust intervention beyond the current government's lacklustre promises, York could become a city of transients, where locals like Mr Hay's sons are forced to the margins.