



**ST HELENS**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# **HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMOs)**

## **SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT**

**Adopted Jan 2026**

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# 1. Introduction

## Purpose of this document

- 1.1 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are documents that build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies contained in an adopted Local Plan. SPDs cannot introduce new planning policies, nor can they add unnecessary financial burdens on development. SPDs are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the Development Plan. The requirements for producing SPDs are set out at the current time, in Regulations 11 to 16 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
- 1.2 This SPD sits alongside the St Helens Borough Local Plan up to 2037 (2022) (the 'Local Plan'), which was adopted in July 2022. The purpose of this Houses in Multiple Occupation SPD is to set out St Helens Borough Council's (the 'Council') approach to better manage the provision of new Houses in Multiple Occupation throughout St Helens. It provides guidance in relation to the interpretation and implementation of policies in the Local Plan, in particular, Policy LPC01: Housing Mix, along with Development Management policies such as LPD01: Ensuring Quality Development and LPD02: Design and Layout of New Housing of the Local Plan.

## What are Houses in Multiple Occupation?

- 1.3 A House in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) is a dwelling (house or flat) that provides small, affordable and flexible accommodation for a wide variety of people including single people, students, low salaried workers, seasonal workers and those on short term contracts, and are therefore an important part of the housing market. They can also offer temporary accommodation for people who are saving to purchase a home. HMOs can be purpose built, but most in St Helens have been created through the conversion of existing properties that were in residential or other uses.
- 1.4 HMOs provide accommodation for at least 3 people who are not all members of the same family (or 'household') but share facilities like a bathroom and kitchen. They are sometimes known as 'house-shares'. Most conversions to HMOs require planning permission for the change of use. The exception is a conversion from a dwellinghouse to an HMO that has 6 or fewer occupants; this can be carried out under permitted development rights<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1987/764>

1.5 Figure 1 illustrates the various residential use classes in terms of individuals sharing a property. A dwellinghouse used by a single person or two people sharing falls under Use Class C3 (dwellinghouses). Planning permission to change to Use Class C4 (houses in multiple occupation for between 3 and 6 residents) is allowed under development permitted rights. Planning permission is not required to change the use from Use Class C4 to Use Class C3. For seven people or more occupying an HMO, the use does not fall within Use Class C4 and is classified as 'Sui Generis'.



**Figure 1 – HMO Use Class Classification**

1.6 Nationally, there has been an increase in HMOs as a form of housing. In response to this, other Local Authorities have set out a range of policy tools, utilising both housing and planning powers to tackle high concentrations of HMOs. One of the most typical has been through adoption of planning guidance, such as SPDs.

1.7 This SPD sets out how the Council intends to manage the development and provision of HMOs throughout the Borough. It will be used in the determination of any planning application for the development of these properties within St Helens and will help improve the standards of the accommodation that is provided and reduce potential detrimental impacts on neighbours. It assists in the interpretation of policies within the Local Plan and sets out guidance and good practice for planning applicants to enable the delivery of better planning outcomes.

1.8 The SPD is an important material consideration in the determination of planning applications for new and expanded HMOs. The work involved in a conversion of a house to a HMO, will also require Building Regulations approval and an HMO licence. Please note that both these elements are totally separate requirements to a planning consent.

## St Helens Borough Overview

1.9 The majority of HMOs in St Helens are well managed and provide decent homes, but poorly managed or badly designed or located properties have the

potential to lead to issues for both occupants and neighbours. Some of the most common concerns expressed in the Borough in relation to HMOs relate to:

- reduced social cohesion resulting from demographic imbalance and unsustainable communities;
- pressures upon parking provision;
- increased levels of noise and nuisance in the local area;
- growth in the private rented sector at the expenses of owner-occupation;
- the provision of inadequate living accommodation for occupiers; and
- refuse.

1.10 Between April 2017 and December 2025, the Council have determined 62 planning applications and certificate of lawfulness applications for HMO development. Of those applications, 47 have been approved, 7 refused and 8 withdrawn<sup>2</sup>. The type of properties put forward for HMOs varies between terraced, semi-detached and detached dwellings, public houses and commercial buildings. The majority of planning applications and certificate of lawfulness applications are concentrated in Newton-le-Willows West, St Helens Town Centre, West Park and Windle wards across the Borough.

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<sup>2</sup> As of 4 December 2025.

## 2. Policy Context

### Housing Act 2004

2.1 The full legal definition of a HMO is given under the Housing Act 2004. Types of living accommodation defined include:

*“One or more units of living accommodation within a building or part of a building not consisting of self-contained flats occupied by more than one household as their only or main residence with at least one person paying rent and two or more of the households sharing one or more basic amenities (or the building lacks an amenity) such as a bathroom, toilet or cooking facilities.*

*A self-contained flat within a building occupied by more than one household as their only or main residence with at least one person paying rent and two or more of the households sharing one or more basic amenities (or the building lacks an amenity) such as a bathroom, toilet or cooking facilities.*

*A converted building where new living accommodation has been created since its construction that is not a self-contained flat or flats and occupied by more than one household as their only or main residence with at least one person paying rent.*

*A building or part of a building which has been converted into self-contained flats where the conversion works did not comply with 1991 Building Regulations and more than one third of the flats are not owner-occupied.”*

### National Planning Policy and Guidance

2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (the ‘NPPF’) 2024, sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these should be applied. The NPPF does not include any specific policies on HMOs, however, Chapter 5 includes a range of policies covering general housing issues including the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups within the community, including for those who require affordable housing, families, older people, students, people who rent their homes, etc.

2.3 Chapter 12 of the NPPF further emphasises the importance of creating high-quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places which *“...promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.”*

2.4 The NPPF is also supported by more detailed planning guidance set out in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG); however, there is no specific guidance on HMOs contained within the PPG.

## Local Planning Policy

2.5 In circumstances where planning permission is required for HMO development, **Policy LPC01: Housing Mix** of the Local Plan and Development Management policies including **Policy LPD01: Ensuring Quality Development** and **Policy LPD02: Design and Layout of New Housing** are the most relevant.

2.6 Part 6 of Policy LPC01 identifies that:

### **Policy LPC01: Housing Mix (Part 6)**

*Proposals for the change of use or sub-division of existing buildings to form flats or Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) will be granted permission provided they would:*

- a) retain a suitable mix of housing types to meet needs in the area;*
- b) avoid harming the character and / or appearance of the area;*
- c) avoid harming the amenities enjoyed by occupiers of neighbouring residential properties;*
- d) provide satisfactory levels of amenity for their future occupier(s) in terms of outlook and natural light; and*
- e) comply with parking standards referred to in Policy LPA06 and to be set out in the future review of the Council's Ensuring a Choice of Travel Supplementary Planning Document.*

2.7 The sub-division of existing dwellings into flats or to form HMOs can make an important contribution to meeting specific needs, for example for single persons or couples. However, it is important that such proposals should be consistent with the latest evidence of housing needs in the area and avoid causing an unacceptable loss of family housing. It is also important that they avoid harming the character or appearance of the area for example by leading to excessive hard surfacing of garden areas to form car parking. Such proposals should also be suitably designed to provide acceptable living conditions for their occupants, for example in terms of outlook and daylight/sunlight, adequate outdoor amenity space and avoid harming the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers.

## Article 4 Directions

2.8 For smaller HMOs (properties shared by 3 to 6 people) the Government allows the change of use of dwellinghouses to small HMOs under permitted development rights (i.e. without the need for planning permission) in Schedule 2, Part 3, Class L of the Town and Country Planning (General permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended). However, the Council, as a Local Planning Authority, has the power to introduce Article 4 Directions<sup>3</sup>, which remove certain permitted development rights. Where these have been introduced, it requires development which would normally be considered permitted development (and therefore not requiring planning permission) to submit a planning application for determination by the Council.

2.9 An Article 4 Direction can only be made where the Local Planning Authority is satisfied that it is expedient that development that would normally benefit from permitted development should not be carried out unless planning permission is first granted on an application through the formal planning process. As such, an Article 4 Direction should only be made in exceptional circumstances where evidence suggests that the exercise of the permitted development rights would cause planning harm.

## Article 4 Directions in St Helens

2.10 The greatest concentrations of HMOs in the Borough are in the Newton-le-Willows West, St Helens Town Centre, West Park and Windle wards. Although, the Council has yet to introduce an Article 4 Direction for the purposes of HMO development, the Council will periodically review whether permitted development rights need to be restricted, and it may consider the use of Article 4 Directions in the future. In such circumstances, planning permission would be required, and any application would need to adhere to policies in the Local Plan and this SPD.

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<sup>3</sup> Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)

# 3. Planning Requirements and Standards

## Avoiding Concentration

3.1 St Helens Local Plan Policy LPC01 (Part 6) specifically states that planning permission will be granted provided the proposed HMO would retain a suitable mix of housing types to meet the needs of the area and would avoid harming the character and / or appearance of the area. Therefore, to ensure new HMO development does not have an unacceptable effect on the existing housing mix provision or a negative impact on the residential character of the surrounding neighbourhood, and based on Council records, planning permission will not normally be granted for new HMOs or for proposals to extend existing HMOs, where the proportion of HMOs exceeds or, due to the proposed HMO, would exceed 10%<sup>4</sup> of all residential properties within a 50-metre radius of the application site.

### *Applying a concentration threshold*

3.2 In determining whether there is or will be an overconcentration of conversions to HMOs, the Council will undertake the following approach:



Figure 3.1: HMO permitted as less than 10% in 50m buffer



Figure 3.2: HMO not permitted as more than 10% in 50m buffer

<sup>4</sup> The 10% method within a 50m radius is considered an appropriate approach, which is widely used by other Local Planning Authorities. If there are fewer than 40 dwellings within the 50m radius then a maximum of 3 HMOs will be allowed.

### Step 1

- A 50m radius from the application property will be plotted using the address point of the property (as defined by the Council's Local Land and Property Gazetteer, plotted at the centre of the dwelling).
- The radius will be measured in a straight-line distance from the curtilage of the subject property.
- If any part of the HMO property boundary, falls within the 50m radius, that HMO property will be included in the calculations (as shown in figures 3.1 & 3.2 above).

### Step 2

- Identify the total number of existing properties that have been converted to HMOs (either through the planning application process or through permitted development rights - if known) and the Council HMO licence records within the defined area.

### Step 3

- Determine whether an over-concentration of conversions to HMOs already exists in the defined area, or the proposal would result in an over-concentration.

3.3 In regard to step 2, it is important to emphasise that it may not always be possible to ascertain a complete and accurate record of all properties that have converted to HMOs as many properties may have been converted under permitted development rights. As such, the Council may not be aware of these HMOs, and a licence is not required for those of less than 5 persons. The Council will only be able to apply this limit using the information that it has available. The Council will consider other information available to them that concludes that a property is in use as a HMO, such as the advertising/marketing of properties (on websites such as Rightmove).

3.4 In some limited instances, planning permission may be permitted where the 10% threshold is exceeded. Such instances might include where:

- There is a strong physical barrier, such as a railway line or a major road, between the application property and established HMOs.
- There is already a breach of the 10% threshold and the proposed HMO would not result in a materially greater impact on the existing immediate area.
- There are a limited number of properties within the 50m radius.

### *Restricting three adjacent HMOs*

3.5 Planning permission will not normally be granted for proposals that would result in a block of three or more adjacent HMOs (see Figure 3.3). Streets can sometimes become dominated by HMOs, which has the potential to lead to amenity issues for the non-HMO properties, particularly those opposite or adjacent, due to the greater intensity of use of the HMOs.

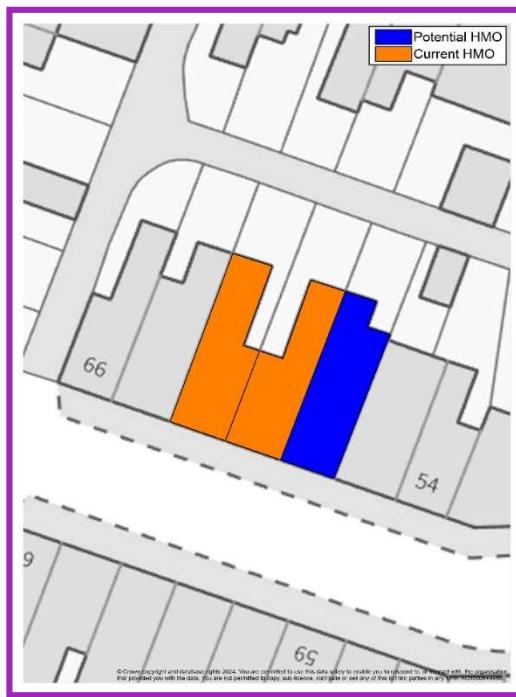


Figure 3.3: Not acceptable - 3 in a row HMOs

3.6 Circumstances where permission might be granted for a proposal that would result in a block of three or more adjacent HMOs are limited but might include where there is a significant gap between the curtilages of properties, or where properties are set within large gardens or curtilages.

### **Safeguarding the Amenity of Neighbouring Residents**

#### *Restricting the sandwiching of properties*

3.7 In addition to the impact on the local area, the conversion of a dwelling into an HMO has the potential to adversely impact its immediate neighbours. This is due to the potential increase in the comings and goings, internal noise transfer, parking issues, refuse disposal and other residential amenity issues that could occur. It could also introduce shared living spaces, such as kitchens and living rooms next to a bedroom in an adjacent property. Policy LPC01 of the Local Plan states that applications for an HMO should avoid harming the amenities enjoyed by occupiers of neighbouring residential properties.

3.8 Therefore, the Council will not permit a single dwelling<sup>5</sup> to be 'sandwiched' between two converted HMOs. This restriction applies across the whole Borough for proposals to convert to HMOs that require planning permission. The following diagrams below indicate how this principle would be applied:



Figure 3.4: Unacceptable example of HMO sandwiching



Figure 3.5: Unacceptable example of HMO double sandwiching

### *Waste storage and disposal*

3.9 Applications for HMOs must clearly demonstrate that adequate space for waste storage will be provided. The bin storage space must be sufficient to store waste and recycling containers on the property. HMOs are issued with one 240 litre brown refuse bin as standard, collected fortnightly, and a full set of recycling containers, collected weekly. Please see our website for more details on the recycling service: <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/recycling>.

3.10 Bins and recycling containers should be presented at the kerbside by 6.30am on the collection day and returned after collection by a resident or other 3rd party. If an HMO needs more than one standard refuse bin, they should apply for an additional bin through the Council's website. Landlords need to ensure that residents must be participating fully in the recycling service and must clearly state that the application is because the property is an HMO and needs a bespoke service. To check if the HMO is eligible for additional refuse bins

<sup>5</sup> This restriction applies to all dwelling types, including terraced, semi-detached and detached properties.

Council officers may undertake a waste audit the day before the collection day to ensure everything is being recycled and the number of people in the property.

- 3.11 All bins will be charged for, the cost of which will be covered by the management company, landlord or resident. It is also advisory to identify bins with the relevant number of the property to avoid bins being taken accidentally by neighbouring properties.
- 3.12 It is the responsibility of the tenants and landlord to manage household waste. It should also be noted that disposal of waste is a mandatory condition of HMO licensing; therefore, applicants are advised to seek further advise from the Council's Environmental Health team in relation to household waste. Where adequate bin provision is not provided or has been provided and is not used, enforcement notices under licensing can be served.
- 3.13 For more information on recycling and waste services, collections dates etc. please visit <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/rubbish>.

## Achieving a Good Standard of Accommodation

### *Internal space*

- 3.14 All HMOs shall be large enough to provide sufficient space for living, sleeping, food storage and food preparation. Communal living space should be provided within the main structure of the building and not within conservatories due to the inferior noise insulation and consequent effect on amenity of neighbours. Insufficient communal areas increase the time occupants must spend in their individual bedrooms and can, therefore, hinder social cohesion within the property.
- 3.15 All rooms shall be of a convenient and usable shape for their intended purpose. Where the ceiling height is less than 1.5m the floor area is not counted. Space that cannot be used because of its shape, location or if it forms an ensuite facility must not be included when calculating room size to meet the space standards.
- 3.16 The tables below show the minimum rooms sizes and facilities required based on the number of people occupying the HMO.

### **Bedrooms**

	1 person unit	Double rooms
Bedroom	10m <sup>2</sup>	11m <sup>2</sup>

## Rooms shared by Occupants

Requirements												
<b>Kitchen</b>	<p>7m<sup>2</sup> if used by 1 - 5 persons and should not be less than 1.8m across the narrowest point.</p> <p>For over 5 persons an additional 3m<sup>2</sup> per person sharing the kitchen.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Maximum number of individuals allowed to share kitchen</th><th>Number of sets of kitchen facilities</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>5</td><td>1</td></tr> <tr> <td>6-10</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr> <td>11-15</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr> <td>16-20</td><td>4</td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Maximum number of individuals allowed to share kitchen	Number of sets of kitchen facilities	5	1	6-10	2	11-15	3	16-20	4
Maximum number of individuals allowed to share kitchen	Number of sets of kitchen facilities											
5	1											
6-10	2											
11-15	3											
16-20	4											
<b>Dining Space</b>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup> per person (for those sharing the space).</p> <p>Any dining space (shared for the exclusive use) shall be suitable, and conveniently located (normally not more than one floor from the living unit).</p>											

## Bathroom and WC Facilities

<b>Up to 5 persons sharing</b>	<p>One bathroom containing fixed bath/shower.</p> <p>One separate w/c with wash hand basin.</p>
<b>6 to 10 persons sharing</b>	<p>Two bathrooms each containing a fixed bath or shower and two water closets each with a toilet and wash hand basin are required. However, one of the toilets, with its associated wash hand basin, may be contained in one of the bathrooms. Where this arrangement is not practicable, two bathrooms each containing a fixed bath or shower, water closet and wash hand basin may be permitted.</p>
<b>11 to 15 persons sharing</b>	<p>Three bathrooms containing a fixed bath or shower together with three separate WCs &amp; wash hand basins are required.</p> <p>Two of the WCs &amp; wash hand basins may be contained in two of the bathrooms.</p> <p>Any bathroom space (shared for the exclusive use) shall be suitable, and conveniently located (normally not more than one floor from the living unit).</p>

### *Internal amenity*

3.17 No staircase, landing, passage, kitchen, bath/shower or WC room shall be used for sleeping accommodation, and no more than two persons shall occupy any room for sleeping.

3.18 To ensure the occupiers enjoy a high standard of amenity, layouts of floors should take into consideration the potential of stacking. Consequently, a communal kitchen or lounge would ideally not be located directly above or below a bedroom, as this can have significant amenity impacts.

### *Outlook and natural light*

3.19 All habitable rooms should have access to a good level of natural daylight, including kitchens, living rooms, dining rooms and bedrooms, and achieve a good level of light penetration. It is particularly important to ensure that private bedrooms in shared accommodation have a good quality of natural light and outlook, given that residents are likely to spend more prolonged periods of time than the occupiers of general housing in private bedrooms.

3.20 Proposals should optimise daylight and solar gain by the organisation and layout of fenestration. In most cases basements are unlikely to be considered acceptable for conversion to HMO accommodation although basements can be used for bathrooms, storage, laundry rooms, bicycle storage or other uses. However, where this is proposed, it is particularly important that sufficient light penetration is achieved. If it is considered that the light levels within a scheme would be particularly low, further assessment will be required. One indicator of light penetration is the use of the 25-degree rule guide. Where the use of basements is proposed in Flood Zones 2 and/or 3, a Flood Risk Assessment will be required in accordance with guidance in the NPPF (Annex 3), as bringing additional occupants in or seeking to create habitable rooms in the basement may result in an increased risk of flooding. Advice should be sought from the Council in this respect. Floor plans should be provided to show the proposed use of basement areas.

3.21 The 25-degree rule helps to establish the effect of existing properties on the building, and determines whether design should be altered to improve quality of daylight reaching rooms:

- If the obstruction angle is less than 25 degrees, conventional window design should deliver reasonable results.
- If the obstruction angle is between 25 and 45 degrees, enlarged windows or changes to room layouts should be considered in order to provide adequate daylight.

- If the obstruction angle is between 45 and 65, adequate daylight would not be provided unless very large windows are used.
- If the obstruction angle is more than 65, it is often impossible to provide reasonable daylight, even if the whole wall is glazed.

3.22 There are some simple ways a design can be improved when daylight is limited and internal layout restrictive. Window sizes should be increased to maximise natural light and ventilation. It is more effective to do this by raising the window head height to allow more light to enter and the light to be distributed into the room. It is recognised however that such solutions will not be appropriate in all circumstances.

3.23 When considering whether there is a reasonable outlook from a window in a habitable room in a basement, the Council will consider the function of the space to which it looks onto. For example, it would not be considered appropriate if the window looks directly onto a bin storage area or where cars will be parked. Consideration will also be given to the impact necessary boundary treatments around lightwells, and basement windows can have on the outlook and natural light to such windows. The Council would expect a minimum distance of 3m from a habitable window to an area of bin storage or car parking.

3.24 More generally, internal floor levels should not be more than 1 metre below the existing ground level from outside (it will not be acceptable to excavate land in order to provide a reasonable outlook). This is to prevent accommodation from being dark, gloomy and damp.

3.25 The same principles apply to roof space accommodation as to other accommodation. Habitable rooms within the roof space area must provide a reasonable outlook. Roof lights that only face the sky are not considered to provide a reasonable outlook and prospect. If a roof light is providing the main outlook in a habitable room, it must be positioned at a minimum of 1.5m from the floor level.

### *Outdoor amenity space*

3.26 It is important that residents have access to an area of private outdoor amenity space. This is usually provided as a communal area that is available for all residents of the HMO to use but should not be accessible to the public. This space should be designed to provide an area for residents for informal recreation, gardening, drying clothes and socialising. It should be low-maintenance and details of its upkeep should be addressed in the management plan.

3.27 The suggested minimum requirement for amenity space for Houses in Multiple Occupation is 10m<sup>2</sup> per occupant. However, it is appreciated that for larger HMOs this may not be achievable or even appropriate. Therefore, the amenity space for anything larger than a 10 person HMO will be capped at 100m<sup>2</sup>.

3.28 The amenity space must be accessible to all residents and be of high quality. The standard can be met either by provision of a communal area, such as:

- a rear garden; or
- a communal roof terrace (subject to no harmful effect on neighbours); or
- a private space (such as a balcony, subject to no harmful effect on neighbours); or
- a combination of these.

3.29 Areas to the front of a building that is not private, and areas intended for parking and bin stores will not be included in the calculation. Narrow spaces (typically less than 2.5m wide) will not be included in a calculation of available amenity space as they are not considered to provide useable space.

3.30 Applicants must take all opportunities to provide the minimum amenity space requirement within the proposals. This may include the removal of existing extensions and outbuildings and/or the inclusion of appropriate roof terraces (where this does not result in detrimental harm to the living conditions of neighbouring residents or the character of an area). The Council will not permit insufficient amenity space if all opportunities to maximise the amount of space have not been taken. Extensions to properties to increase accommodation will not be permitted if this would result in an inadequate amount of amenity space.

3.31 Furthermore, if the required amount of amenity space cannot be met the Council would expect the applicant to reduce the number of occupants to be accommodated. If the proposal is not providing the full amenity open space standard, it is the responsibility of the applicant to clearly demonstrate why a lower standard should be accepted. This should be demonstrated in a statement submitted with the planning application. It should not be assumed that the Council will accept a shortfall in the amount of amenity space, and it is the responsibility of an applicant to demonstrate to the Council's satisfaction that a shortfall of amenity space would, on balance, still achieve in a high quality and sustainable development.

### *Cycle storage*

3.32 HMO proposals should provide adequate provision for cycle storage. This is especially important due to the low levels of car ownership associated with

HMOs. Storage should be secure, covered and shown on plans submitted as part of any planning application. Corridors, bedrooms or landings will not be considered as adequate provision for cycle storage and residents should not be expected to carry a cycle upstairs.

3.33 Unless the applicant/developer can demonstrate to the Council's satisfaction that this is not possible, one cycle space should be provided for every bedroom or self-contained flat within the building.

### *External alterations*

3.34 Where appropriate, it is important that HMOs retain existing residential features, such as boundary walls and window openings, to contribute to a residential feel for the occupiers. Where possible, external alterations such as the addition or removal of windows should be avoided to minimise harm to the character of the street. However, modest alterations and the addition or relocation of window and door openings may be appropriate in some cases, for example, where they would improve privacy for local residents or future tenants. Desirably, these would be discussed as part of the pre-application process and would be considered having regard to relevant policies of the Local Plan and other design guidance.

3.35 Particular care and attention to detail is required if an HMO proposal is located within a conservation area and applicants will be required to ensure that proposals accord with policies on conserving and enhancing the historic environment. This may require features such as original timber windows and chimneys to be incorporated into conversion schemes.

### *Entrance and approach*

3.36 The entrance and approach to an HMO is an important part of how it functions in relation to its surroundings. When HMO entrances are at the side or rear of a property, sometimes accessed along rear alleyways and/or by separate external stairs, they can cause a range of amenity issues for both neighbours and residents. Designing entrances to be visible from the street will mean that HMOs are more secure. HMOs should therefore normally be served by a main entrance at the front of the property.

### *Car Parking*

3.37 HMOs and shared housing tend to attract occupiers with lower-than-average levels of car ownership compared to the general population. Furthermore, car

ownership in the Borough is significantly low, with car ownership data<sup>6</sup> from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) showing that 23% of all residents in St Helens do not have access to a car and within St Helens the breakdown of car ownership by tenure, based on Census data for 2021<sup>7</sup>, shows that 57% of residents of flats/apartments etc did not have access to a vehicle (this included all residents, both homeowners and those renting). Therefore, information available shows there is less reliance on car usage within the Borough.

- 3.38 Many HMOs are conversions of existing properties with differing existing parking provisions, accessibility levels and other location specific services often restricted. Therefore, it is not possible to have a 'one size fits all' approach to parking that is suitable for all HMOs. It is important that the existing demand for car parking close to a proposed HMO is considered, together with the availability of nearby public transport services.
- 3.39 Where the parking standards requirement for car parking as set out in table below cannot be provided off-street, applicants should carry out a Minimum Accessibility Standard Assessment (MASA) in accordance with Chapter 7 of the Council's Transport and Travel SPD and should demonstrate the availability of on street parking by providing thorough parking beat surveys. These should be carried out by an independent survey company, in accordance with the Lambeth methodology<sup>8</sup> which provides guidance on the time and extent of the observations to be included. A snapshot parking beat survey should be undertaken on two separate weekday nights (Monday to Thursday inclusive) between 00.30 and 05.30 over an area within a walking distance of 200m from the application address. Further details of the area to be considered are included within the guidance together with the information that should be presented.

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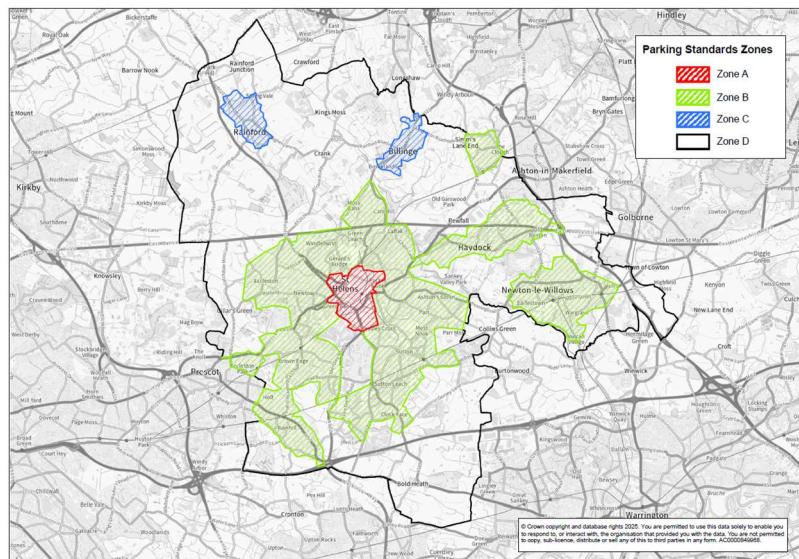
<sup>6</sup> Office for National Statistics "Car or Van availability" Census 2021 [Car or van availability - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>7</sup> Office for National Statistics "Table A47" Census 2021 [Percentage of households with cars by income group, tenure and household composition: Table A47 - Office for National Statistics](#)

<sup>8</sup> Lambeth Council "Parking Survey Guidance Note" 2021 [LAMBETH TRANSPORT PARKING SURVEY METHODOLOGY](#)

No. of bedrooms	Maximum number of parking spaces for HMO properties, by location			
	Zone A: Town Centre and Central Spatial Area	Zone B: Key Towns & Other Settlements	Zone C: Villages & Parishes	Zone D: Rural
2	0	1	1	2
3	1	2	2	3
4	1	2	3	4
5	1	3	4	5
6	2	3	4	6
7	2	4	5	7
8	2	4	6	8
9	3	5	7	9
10	3	5	7	10
11	3	6	8	11
12*	4	6	9	12
<p>* Proposals providing over 12 bedrooms should be discussed with the Local Highway Authority prior to the submission of an application to establish the number of parking spaces required.</p> <p>The geometry of the parking spaces should be in line with guidance in Table 36 of the Transport and Travel SPD, noting that all spaces should be independent and tandem spaces which result in blocking/double parking would not be permitted.</p>				
Blue Badge Parking	6% of the number of beds or 3 spaces, whichever is greater. <i>Further considerations to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis; where lettable rooms are designed for disabled access, disabled parking should be provided at a ratio of 1 space per room.</i>			
EV Charging	All parking spaces should have active EV charging facilities			
Bicycles	1 secure covered space per bedroom to be provided at ground floor level in a secure and covered store in compliance with LTN 1/20 <sup>9</sup> .			

<sup>9</sup> [Cycle infrastructure design \(LTN 1/20\) - Cycle Infrastructure Design](#)



3.40 The Local Plan is clear that HMOs should avoid harming the character or appearance of the area for example by leading to excessive hard surfacing of garden areas to form car parking. Therefore, the replacement of traditional front gardens with open hard standing and the removal of front and side boundary walls will be resisted. Removal of these elements can negatively impact on existing character of the street and, in some cases, exacerbate localised flooding.

3.41 All applicants for HMOs should set out the parking provision that is proposed as part of their scheme at the planning application stage. The appropriate level of parking provision will need to be agreed with the Council's highways team based upon:

- The availability and suitability of parking within the curtilage of the property, and / or a Minimum Accessibility Standard Assessment (MASA) and Beats Survey if required.
- The sustainability of the site in relation to services and amenities.
- The availability of public transport and access to bus stops and cycle routes.
- The availability of existing parking provision in the surrounding locality.
- Parking demand compared to the use of the building as a standard residential property.

3.42 Discussions between the landlord and tenants regarding car usage and parking expectations should also be encouraged. A balance must also be made between the provision of space for car parking and other needs, such as waste storage, cycle storage and the provision of outdoor amenity space.

## Management Plans

3.43 The Council will require the submission of a Management Plan as part of the planning application process. The agreed Management Plan will need to be adhered to by the landlord, and the use of the property as an HMO implemented in accordance with the agreed details. The Management Plan will be expected to cover matters such as:

- Arrangements for the management and maintenance of all communal areas within the site and the building.
- Methods to be deployed by the landlord to address and prohibit any potential nuisance or annoyance caused by tenants.
- Management proposals for the servicing, storage, transfer and collection of waste and recycling ensuring that appropriate arrangements are made.
- If appropriate, how adequate parking and cycling storage will be provided on site.
- Details of an on-site person/s should any complaints arise, including their name and contact details, and details of a complaint's procedure.

3.44 The submission of a Management Plan will ensure that there is a visible statement provided as part of the planning application process that provides greater clarity / detail about the arrangements in terms of the management of the property. This should not prove onerous for good landlords and will allow them to highlight good management practices.

3.45 In order to ensure legal compliance, there are specific management regulations, which set out the way in which HMOs should be managed. This legislation places certain duties on the individuals managing the property and non-compliance with these regulations may result in a prosecution and/or fine (including a civil penalty). Further information can be found at: <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/article/5206/What-is-a-house-in-multiple-occupation>.

## 4. Further Information

### Making a Planning Application

- 4.1 Prior to submitting any proposals or planning applications, applicants are advised to engage in the pre-application process provided by the Council. As part of this process, an applicant could request a meeting, discussion, site visit and letter (dependant on the scale of proposed development). Internal consultation will be carried out with the Council's relevant departments to establish what information and details would be required to ensure a policy compliant acceptable development. Further information can be obtained at <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/article/3481/Your-guide-to-planning-building-Control>.
- 4.2 In addition, it is strongly advised that applicants engage with the local community and neighbouring properties prior to submitting a planning application. This pro-active approach has been proven to be beneficial, given the local opposition some HMOs can receive. This could help address any concerns early on and may reduce opposition when the formal application is submitted.
- 4.3 Applications will need to be accompanied by the relevant supporting evidence. This will include, but is not limited to:
  - A site location plan.
  - Internal layout / floor plans showing:
    - The internal measurements for each room (bedrooms and communal spaces) indicating what each room will be used for.
    - For bedrooms, indicate if they are intended to be single or double, and any areas of reduced ceiling heights.
  - External layout plans showing the location, size and design of the:
    - Waste storage area to be used for the storage of waste and recycling bins.
    - Outdoor amenity space.
    - Areas for drying clothes.
    - Bicycle parking and storage.
    - Car parking (if on site).
  - Elevation plans where any extensions or new opening such as windows and doors are proposed.

- Supporting statement including details of proposed parking provision (car and bicycle) and/or a Minimum Accessibility Standard Assessment (MASA) and Beats Survey if required.
- A Management Plan.
- Any supporting evidence such as pre-application discussions and consultations with the local community and neighbouring residents.
- Where appropriate, a Local Employment and Skills Statement.

4.4 When submitting an application for the conversion to a HMO, the application description must specify the **maximum** number of occupants that will occupy the HMO, rather than the number of units. For example, 'six person HMO'.

4.5 In some cases specific additional requirements may be triggered as a result of assessing an application such as noise surveys, parking assessments etc.

4.6 Applicants need to be aware that other Local Plan policies and SPDs may be relevant, which this SPD does not reiterate. The St Helens Borough Local Plan up to 2037 and all adopted SPDs are available to view and download here <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/article/3775/Adopted-plans-and-policies>.

### *Certificate of Lawful Use*

4.7 A landlord may be eligible to apply for a 'Certificate of Lawful Use' to regulate an existing HMO property that is not lawful under the Council's planning records. A 'Certificate of Lawfulness' can be applied for, to regulate a large or small HMO. To receive a certificate, the application must demonstrate ten years of continuous occupancy as a HMO or that the change of use was lawful at the time it occurred, such as from a dwellinghouse to small HMO. Evidence will be required to the Council's satisfaction which demonstrate the lawful occupation of the HMO.

### *HMO Licensing and Management Regulations*

4.8 This SPD relates to planning matters and planning applications. Irrespective of planning, all property owners, letting agents and property managing agents who let houses in multiple occupation may need to apply for an HMO licence. You can view the licensing requirements, (separate to those required in order to submit a planning application) on the Council's website at <https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/article/5207/Mandatory-licensing-laws-for-HMOs> (Please refer to the Council's website for the most up to date HMO licensing requirements).