

# **Further information - Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)**

## **What is a HMO?**

HMOs are residential properties accommodated by at least 3 individuals, forming more than 1 household, and sharing at least a toilet, kitchen or bathroom facilities.

## **What does the Article 4 Direction do?**

Currently residential properties (Use Class C3) can be converted into small HMOs (Use Class C4) without the need for planning permission (under permitted development rights). This means the council has no power to ensure sufficient facilities are provided for the increased number of residents, particularly with regards to parking and refuse. This can negatively affect nearby residents and exacerbate parking problems, which are already severe across much of the town.

The Article 4 Direction takes away these permitted development rights and requires a planning application to be submitted for all conversions of residential properties to HMOs.

## **Why is an Article 4 Direction required?**

As a New Town, Stevenage's street layouts were not designed to accommodate multiple cars per unit. The Town already suffers from significant parking pressure on streets throughout the town. The Council has existing planning policy for new developments (including HMOs) to address these heavily congested areas. However, uncontrolled car parking arising from an increasing number of HMOs is exacerbating the problem.

An Article 4 Direction ensures that all proposals for new HMOs are passed through the planning system and existing policies can be applied.

## **Does this stop HMOs being developed?**

No. An article 4 Direction only requires planning permission to be sought; it does not automatically allow the Council to refuse HMO applications. Applications would be considered against current planning policy.

The Council recognises the benefits of HMOs within the housing market and does not wish to prevent HMO conversions, but it is important that controls are in place to mitigate any potential impact of these on residential amenity.

## **Why is an Article 4 Direction necessary?**

There have been reports that some of the HMOs in Stevenage are, at times, badly managed, with a large number of occupiers, which can result in anti-social behaviour and difficulties with parking provision, in particular.

## **I live in a HMO currently/I am a HMO landlord, will I be affected?**

No. The Article 4 Direction will only apply to new HMO conversions. Existing HMOs will not require retrospective permission. Existing HMOs will only be impacted if landlords decide to extend or redevelop the properties.

**I have recently bought a property I was thinking of converting to a HMO, can I still do this?**

Yes. The Direction does not come into effect until 20 September 2017. Until this time, property owners can still convert their properties without the need for planning permission. Once the Direction is in effect, it will not preclude HMO conversions, it just means they will be subject to planning controls.