



CONSULTATION DRAFT

Supplementary Planning Guidance for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

November 2025



A High Quality Environment

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) form a vital part of the private rented sector, providing cheaper, flexible, communal accommodation for people whose housing options are often limited. Previously popular for students, there is now also a growing number of young professionals and migrant workers who choose to share. HMOs provide flexible accommodation for people with short-term housing needs, including people in-between properties, those employed on short-term contracts, and others who are saving to purchase a home.
- 1.2 However, not all properties are suitable for multiple occupation, and the risk of overcrowding and fire can be greater than with other types of accommodation. Some HMOs are occupied by the most vulnerable people in our society.
- 1.3 The relatively cheaper housing attracts businesses specialising in delivering HMOs. Unchecked, an over-concentration of HMOs may cause adverse impacts, out-pricing families in need of housing, and changing the character of neighbourhoods. Properties should be suitable for occupation by multiple households, with no adverse impacts for occupiers or neighbouring properties.
- 1.4 The Council introduced an Immediate Article 4 Direction across the whole of Rossendale on 19 September 2025. This means that from then all properties operating as an HMO in Rossendale will require planning permission.
- 1.5 This Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) has been produced to manage the provision of all new HMOs in Rossendale and ensure high standards of accommodation, whilst maintaining the amenity and character of local communities. It is intended to ensure that applicants, communities and other interested parties can gain further detail on what is likely to be permitted.
- 1.6 The policy will not affect existing HMOs, but it will be an important material consideration in the determination of planning applications for all new HMOs.
- 1.7 Although this planning policy links closely to the Council's Housing Standards for HMOs, (the most recent version of which was adopted by Cabinet in 2020), it will be necessary for applicants/owners to check compliance with other legislation, such as licensing and building regulations.

What is an HMO?

- 1.8 Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)¹ are properties occupied by unrelated individuals, who share basic amenities such as a kitchen and/or bathroom. For planning, HMOs can be large (with more than 6 occupants in the dwelling) or small (for 3 to 6 occupants). Please see Appendix 1 for definition.

¹ UK Government Guidance. House in multiple occupation and residential property licensing reform: guidance for local housing authorities, October 2019. Available at: [Houses in multiple occupation and residential property licensing reform: guidance for local housing authorities - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/houses-in-multiple-occupation-and-residential-property-licensing-reform-guidance-for-local-housing-authorities)

2. Policy and Legal Context

2.1 This section outlines the national and local policy context at the time of writing.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2025

2.2 The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England. To achieve sustainable development, it expects the planning system to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities. There is no specific reference to HMOs but local planning authorities are required to make provision for size, type and tenure of housing needs for different groups in the community, including those who require affordable housing, families, and people who rent their homes.

2.3 Chapter 11 of the NPPF promotes making effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Chapter 12 emphasises the importance of creating high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places to promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future use.

2.4 This SPG will support HMO developments to ensure mixed and balanced communities with a high standard of accommodation and amenity.

Local Policies in Rossendale

Our Place, Our Plan

2.5 The Council Valley Plan 2021-2025 (Our Place, Our Plan), has a vision that is supported by four strategic priority areas:

“To have a thriving economy, built around our changing town centres, creating a quality environment for all and improving the life chances of all those living and working in our borough”



**Thriving Local
Economy**
Our Future



**High Quality
Environment**
Our Valley



**Healthy and Proud
Communities**
Our People



**Effective and
Efficient Council**
Our Hearts

2.6 Under Healthy and Proud Communities, the Council emphasises that “having access to a good quality home to either rent or buy plays a fundamental part in our residents’ quality of life.” In order to achieve this, measures include:

- boosting the numbers of homes which are affordable for local people to rent or buy;
- having good access to facilities and services to improve both physical and mental wellbeing;
- support communities to be vibrant, sustainable and for people to be proud of where they live.

2.7 One of the Strategic Priorities is to increase the number of good quality new homes and associated infrastructure built through both direct provision and by working with Registered Social Landlords and private sector developers.

Rossendale Local Plan (2019 – 2036)

2.8 The Rossendale Local Plan 2019 to 2036, adopted December 2021, designates land and buildings for future uses to meet the Borough's needs and sets out how new development should look like and how it should fit with its surrounding.

2.9 The Local Plan's Vision states that

“housing and employment growth and a range of policies designed to enhance the built, natural and social environment, will boost the economic potential of the Borough and improve health and well-being of residents. The special character will be maintained whilst supporting and accommodating sustainable growth for the Borough, its residents and businesses”

2.10 The strategic objectives of the Rossendale Local Plan are to provide a greater choice and quality of housing by:

- Meeting housing and employment land needs in line with national policy whilst protecting the borough's natural and built environment, and;
- Improving housing choice and meeting housing needs for all groups, including specialist and affordable housing

2.11 Whilst there is no specific policy within the Local Plan relating to the development of HMOs, there is a concern that the recent rise in the number of HMOs in the Borough has the potential to impact the quality and choice of housing available. As a result, the Council introduced the Article 4 Direction requiring consent for all small HMOs and this supplementary planning guidance note is intended to help in the determination of such planning applications to ensure that suitable HMOs are delivered in the right places.

2.12 Policy HS5 of The Rossendale Local Plan requires that new housing development of more than 5 dwellings should have at least 20% specifically tailored to meet the needs of elderly or disabled residents or be easily adaptable in line with the Optional Standards M4(2) of the Building Regulations.

- 2.13 The Parking Standards set out in Appendix 1 requires new development to provide 2 parking spaces for new development with 3 bedrooms and 3 parking spaces for new development with 4 or more bedrooms. As HMOs contain individuals living independently of each other it is considered these standards could be applied, subject to any comments from LCC Highways.

Article 4 Direction

- 2.14 Although a large HMO always requires planning consent, a small HMO can be permitted development, unless these rights have been removed through the introduction of an Article 4 Direction². Rossendale Borough Council issued an Immediate Borough-wide Article 4 Direction on 19 September 2025.
- 2.15 The Article 4 Direction removes the permitted development rights for the change of use from Class C3 residential dwelling to HMOs for 3 to 6 occupants (Class C4). By requiring planning consent, the Council can ensure that this accommodation is established in appropriate properties in suitable locations.
- 2.16 This does not apply retrospectively. Any small HMOs that were in operation prior to the introduction of the Article 4 Direction will not need planning permission. HMO owners can apply to the Council for a Lawful Development Certificate to confirm this, providing evidence.
- 2.17 Rossendale has recently seen a notable increase in HMOs across the Borough. These areas include on the main road networks and in established residential areas, with the potential to cause transport issues and change the character of the housing stock. Several HMOs clustered in one area can have an unacceptable impact on the local amenity and upset balanced communities.

Licensing

- 2.18 This SPG relates to planning applications. All property owners, agents etc who let houses in multiple occupation may also need to apply separately for an HMO licence. Please view the up-to-date licensing requirements on the Council's website. (Please see [HMO application form | Rossendale Borough Council](#))³

Planning Service

- 2.19 The Council offers a paid pre-application service for applicants prior to the submission of a planning application. Further details are available on the Council's website at <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/planning-building-control/planning/4> This webpage also explains how you can apply for planning permission.

² Article 4 Direction requiring planning permission for small HMOs, introduced by Rossendale BC on 19 September 2025, [Article 4 Directions | Planning | Rossendale Borough Council](#)

³ <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/download/11076/hmo-application-form>

3. SPG for Houses in Multiple Occupation

Purpose and Scope of the SPG

- 3.1 The Council wants to ensure the delivery of good quality accommodation in appropriate premises and locations to meet accommodation needs, without resulting in undue harm to the character and amenity of local communities.
- 3.3 Rossendale's stock of HMOs forms part of the private rented sector, providing much needed homes and contributing to people's housing choice. Generally, HMOs are more affordable, flexible, and suitable for younger people and other households that are not living as families. As well as reducing housing costs for individuals, sharing homes can have positive social benefits for occupiers.
- 3.4 Trends in the housing market make it difficult, especially for low-income and single person households, to find suitable accommodation to meet and suit their needs and preferences. Hence there is a role for HMOs in the housing mix.
- 3.5 Whilst contributing to meeting housing needs, the increase in the number of HMOs can have the potential to create harmful impacts. Concentrations within neighbourhoods can lead to imbalanced and unsustainable communities and can damage the residential amenity and character of surrounding areas.
- 3.6 Harmful impacts associated with high numbers of HMOs can include:
- Reduced social cohesion resulting from demographic imbalance
 - Reduced housing choice resulting from housing type/tenure imbalance (e.g. from permanent family housing to more transient accommodation)
 - Reduced community engagement from residents resulting from an increase in the transient population of an area
 - Noise and disturbance resulting from intensification of the residential use;
 - Detriment to visual amenity resulting from poor or accumulative external alterations to properties and/or poor waste management
 - Highway safety and air pollution concerns resulting from congested on-street parking.
- 3.7 The increase in HMOs is not specific to Rossendale. Many communities across the UK have seen similar trends and councils are using a range of policy tools and housing and planning powers to tackle high concentrations of HMOs. One of the most typical has been through adoption of additional planning guidance.

SPG for Houses in Multiple Occupation

3.8 The following principles underly this policy:

- to ensure that new HMOs are delivered in suitable locations;
- to prevent over-concentration of HMOs order to safeguard communities, for example by ensuring a supply of housing for families,
- to protect the local character and amenity,
- to ensure the occupants of HMOs have satisfactory amenity, and
- to ensure that the development of HMOs does not impact on local character or the amenity of neighbours.

Policy 1 – Houses in Multiple Occupation

Houses in Multiple Occupation will be considered suitable where all the following criteria are met:

- (1) The HMO is not within 50m radius distance of an existing known HMO;
- (2) The development is within walking distance (within 250m) of a town centre;
- (3) There is sufficient off-street car-parking (unless the property is located in a very sustainable location with excellent access to public transport) development will not increase highway safety concerns
- (4) There is sufficient space within the curtilage for the provision of sufficient secure cycle parking;
- (5) There is sufficient space storage provision for waste and recycling containers in a suitable enclosure area within the curtilage of the property;
- (6) On submission of a planning application, the condition of the property must be of a high standard, and contributes positively to the character of the immediate locality with assurances that the condition of the property will be maintained following the change of use to HMO;
- (7) The increase in the number of residents will not have an adverse impact on the level of amenity neighbouring residents can reasonably expect to enjoy;
- (8) The development accords with the Council's latest version of Standards for Houses in Multiple Occupation⁴

⁴ <https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/downloads/file/18511/hmo-property-standards>

Explanation

3.9 The table below provides an explanation for each of the criterion listed above:

	Criteria	Explanation
1.	The HMO is not within 50m (radius) distance of an existing known HMO;	This is to avoid clustering and adverse cumulative impacts on neighbouring properties
2.	The development should be within walking distance (within 250m) of a town centre;	To be sustainable. Occupants are more likely to be reliant on public transport to access services.
3.	There is sufficient off-street car-parking parking (unless the property is located in a very sustainable location with excellent access to public transport) and the development will not increase highway safety concerns;	Where it can be expected that occupants are likely to have cars, there should be adequate parking so as not to impact on highway safety, in accordance with the Local Plan's parking standards and comments from the Highway Authority.
4.	There is sufficient space within the curtilage for the provision of sufficient secure cycle parking;	Occupants are more likely to rely on cycles, which need to be stored so as not to clutter streets or be stored inappropriately indoors
5.	There is sufficient space storage provision for waste and recycling containers in a suitable enclosure area within the curtilage of the property.	To ensure the amenity of the locality is not adversely affected by waste and recycling containers or litter
6.	On submission of a planning application, the condition of the property must be of a high standard, and contribute positively to the character of the immediate locality with assurances that the condition of the property will be maintained following the change of use to HMO ⁵	To ensure the amenity for residents is not adversely affected by poorly converted properties and that the amenity for neighbouring properties is maintained following the conversion. Please refer to Appendix 1 – Property Condition Standards Checklist of RBC's Standards for Houses in Multiple Occupation (2020) see 12th February 2020: Cabinet Rossendale Borough Council
7.	The increase in the number of residents will not have an adverse impact on the level of amenity neighbouring residents can reasonably expect to enjoy.	To ensure that issues such as excessive noise or increased access to services are addressed.
8.	The development accords with the Council's latest version of Standards for Houses in Multiple Occupation, published by the Environmental Health team ⁶	To ensure the HMO is suitable for people living in the property the policy addresses: • Legal standards – free from hazards • Management Regulations • Space standards / useable space • Washing facilities and toilets • Kitchens • Fire Safety • Waste disposal.

⁵12th February 2020: Cabinet | Rossendale Borough Council

⁶ 12th February 2020: Cabinet | Rossendale Borough Council

- 3.10 Policies from the adopted Rossendale Local Plan 2019-2036 (adopted December 2021) as well as other material planning considerations may also be relevant to the determination of a planning application for a house in multiple occupation.

Please visit the Council's website for details of the Local Plan
<https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/local-plan/adopted-local-plan>

For details of other planning policies which may be relevant please visit
<https://www.rossendale.gov.uk/local-plan/supplementary-planning-documents-spds-guidance>

APPENDIX 1 – Definition of an HMO

The full legal definition of an House in Multiple Occupation is given under s.254 of the Housing Act 2004.

The Housing Act 2004 clarifies the definition of a house in multiple occupation (HMO), replacing the definition under the Housing Act 1985.

The definition of an HMO is found in Part 7 of the 2004 Act.

To be defined as an HMO, a building, or part thereof, must fall within one of the following categories⁷:

- a building or flat in which two or more households share a basic amenity, such as bathroom, toilet or cooking facilities: this is known as the 'standard test' or the 'self-contained flat test'
- a building that has been converted and does not entirely comprise of self-contained flats: this is known as the 'converted building test'
- a building that is declared an HMO by the local authority
- a converted block of flats where the standard of the conversion does not meet the relevant building standards and fewer than two-thirds of the flats are owner-occupied: this is known as a section 257 HMO

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https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/legal/housing_conditions/hmo_standards/house_in_multiple_occupation_hmo_definition#reference-1