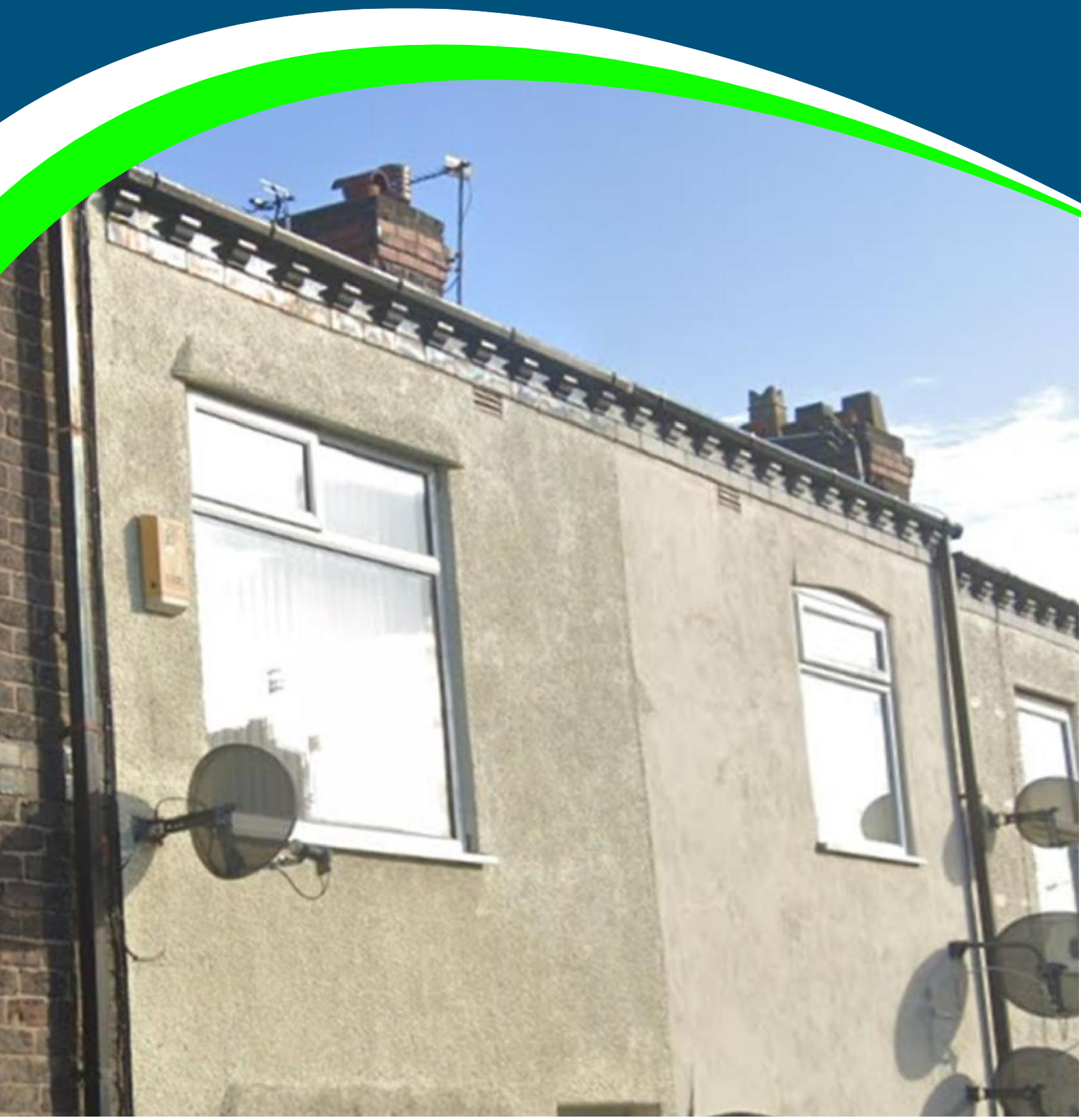


Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document (Amended)

September 2025



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Introduction

A House of Multiple Occupation, (HMO), is defined as a property occupied by 3 or more people who do not form a single household (i.e. not living in a family setting) and who share facilities such as a bathroom or kitchen. A HMO with more than 5 occupants must be licensed with the council in accordance with the Housing Act 2004.

HMOs form an important part of Halton's housing supply adding to the choice of living for many residents. They provide a flexible and affordable option for housing for many who may have limited options. A variety of residents are known to occupy HMOs including people on low incomes, students, young professionals and those on short term work contracts. HMO's can form conversions of existing buildings or be purpose built.

Article 4

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, 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.

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 Halton

On the 11th of September 2025, Halton Borough Council's Executive Board¹ (item 10a/b) approved an immediate article 4 within the specified areas of the borough, due to concerns of clustering of HMOs and the impact this has on local character and the amenity of neighbourhoods. Due to the constitutional process within the Council a call-in period is required, hence the official date of this Article 4 direction officially coming into effect on the 24th September 2025.

¹ [Halton Borough Council: Meetings & Agenda Information](#)

Parts of Appleton, Central & West Bank, Halebank, Mersey & Weston, Beechwood & Heath, Grange, Bridgewater, Halton Castle, Halton Lea, Norton North and Norton South & Preston Brook have been included within the Article 4. For more detailed information please use the map link on².

Information collected by the Council to inform the Article 4 direction found that there has been a sustained increase in the numbers of HMOs within the borough from the years 2018 to 2025. Without an article 4 direction, the planning department does not have control over the location of small HMOs that are used by 3-6 unrelated individuals, with negative impacts often stemming from when HMOs are clustered in close proximity with each other. The Council have identified areas of clustering within wards in both Widnes and Runcorn.

The Council is aware of the importance of HMOs within the dwelling stock. However, there is a concern around the impact of clustering on local character, community cohesion and residential amenity. With planning control, facilitated by an Article 4 direction, development management teams can mediate the issues that may come from HMO applications. Without this control, the Council risks development that would be prejudicial to the proper planning of the area or constitute a threat to residential amenity.

More information on the Council's article 4 direction and the National Policy on HMOs can be found at the following footnotes^{3/4}.

This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) acknowledges the evidence found for the Article 4 Direction and the emerging Housing Strategy and informs the reader of the key requirements of HMOs within Halton. This document aims to support the improvement in HMO accommodation that is provided and reduce detrimental impacts on the neighbours. The SPD provides an interpretation of national and local planning policy and outlines good practice for planning outcomes.

This SPD will apply to planning applications for the creation of HMOs, such as those:

- HMOs created through conversions of other buildings,
- Purpose built HMOs,
- The expansion of HMOs.

² [Article 4](#)

³ [Halton Borough Council: Meetings & Agenda Information](#)

⁴ [Housing Act 2004](#)

Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies and is a material planning consideration in planning decisions. It states that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The NPPF sets out that the Local Plan should meet the objectively assessed needs for housing, as far as is consistent with the policies in the NPPF. It should provide a mix of housing types to meet the needs of different groups in the community and create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities. It also seeks to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

Local planning policy

Relevant local planning policies are set out in the development plan for the area. The Development Plan for Halton comprises the Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (March 2022).

Halton Delivery and Allocations Plan does not have a specific development plan policies specifically relating to HMOs however the following policies are applicable and are summarized below and reproduced in full in the Appendix .

Policy CS(R)12 Housing Mix states that the Council will support the right type of housing to facilitate mechanisms. to meet the needs of Halton's existing population, address imbalances in the existing housing stock and ensure the homes provided can adapt to changing demographics.

Policy RD3 aims to raise the quality of design in Halton. A significant proportion of planning applications received by the Council relate to dwelling extensions, alterations and residential conversions and although most of the proposals are small scale, their impact on the local area can be considerable, particularly cumulatively.

Policy CSR18 addresses the design of places and spaces can have a profound effect on the way that we live, how we understand an area, the way that we treat an area and the way that we move through it. It is crucial for development design in Halton to be of a high quality, build upon an area's character, be adaptable to changing situations, and provide safe, healthy and accessible environments for all members of society.

Policy GR1 focuses on how design is not just about how a development looks but also whether it is successful in its context, whether it functions well, whether it is enduring and of high quality, and lastly, whether it contributes toward broader sustainability objectives.

Achieving appropriate high-quality design should be a key objective of all those involved in delivering sustainable development. Development should take the opportunities available to improve the quality and appearance of an area and the way it functions.

Controls on the Location and Distribution of HMOs

Forming part of the borough's housing supply and contributing towards meeting housing needs, HMO conversions can also enable the continued viable use of older housing and provide an effective use of land and buildings. However, HMOs typically intensify the use of properties, with more resident and visitor movements than a typical family home, and concentrations of them can impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties and the wider neighbourhood.

Therefore, in order to help ensure mixed and balanced communities and to ensure that new development does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on amenity and quality of life, this SPD sets out restrictions to limit the concentration of HMOs in small areas and to manage the siting of HMOs relative to other HMOs. This will contribute to retaining local character, help to ensure a mix of house types and tenures, and reduce potential residential amenity issues. To achieve this the council will apply three measures:

- A. Concentration Threshold
- B. Restricting the Sandwiching of Properties
- C. Restricting Three Adjacent HMOs

A. Applying a Concentration Threshold

Planning permission will not normally be granted for new HMOs, or for proposals to extend existing HMOs, where the proportion of HMOs exceeds, or will exceed, 10% of the properties (residential and commercial) within a 50-metre radius of the application property.

The radius will be measured from the mid-point of the front boundary of the application property and calculated through the inclusion of properties that have a Land and Property Gazetteer address point within that radius. Existing properties that have been sub-divided into flats will be counted as single properties for the purposes of the calculation, as some of the issues that can be associated with HMOs can also be associated with flat conversions. However, purpose-built flats will be counted on an individual basis, as they are not subject to the same constraints as flat conversions and issues should have been fully addressed as part of the planning process.

To identify those properties used as HMOs, the Council will utilise data held on the council's databases, which identifies HMOs from a variety of sources, including HMO licensing data, planning records, and council tax data. However, this may not be an exhaustive record of all HMOs in an area, because some HMOs may not be known to the Council, particularly if they are too small and were in place before Halton enacted an Article 4 Directive, in the specified locations as previously mentioned in this document. Further investigation may therefore be required as part of managing HMOs to ensure the principles of this SPD are followed.

There are limited circumstances where permission could be granted for an HMO that results in the 10% threshold being exceeded. They might include where:

- There is a strong physical barrier, such as a railway line, between the application property and established HMOs,
- There are a limited number of properties within the 50-metre radius, or
- The nature of the application property means that impacts will be lessened e.g., the property could be detached and have a substantial curtilage.

An example of applying the concentration threshold is shown in Figure 3.1.

A proposed HMO is shown in red and residential properties within 50 metres of the proposed HMO are identified. If the proportion of properties in use as HMOs exceeds, or will exceed, more than 10% of the properties within the 50-metre buffer zone, then permission will not normally be granted.

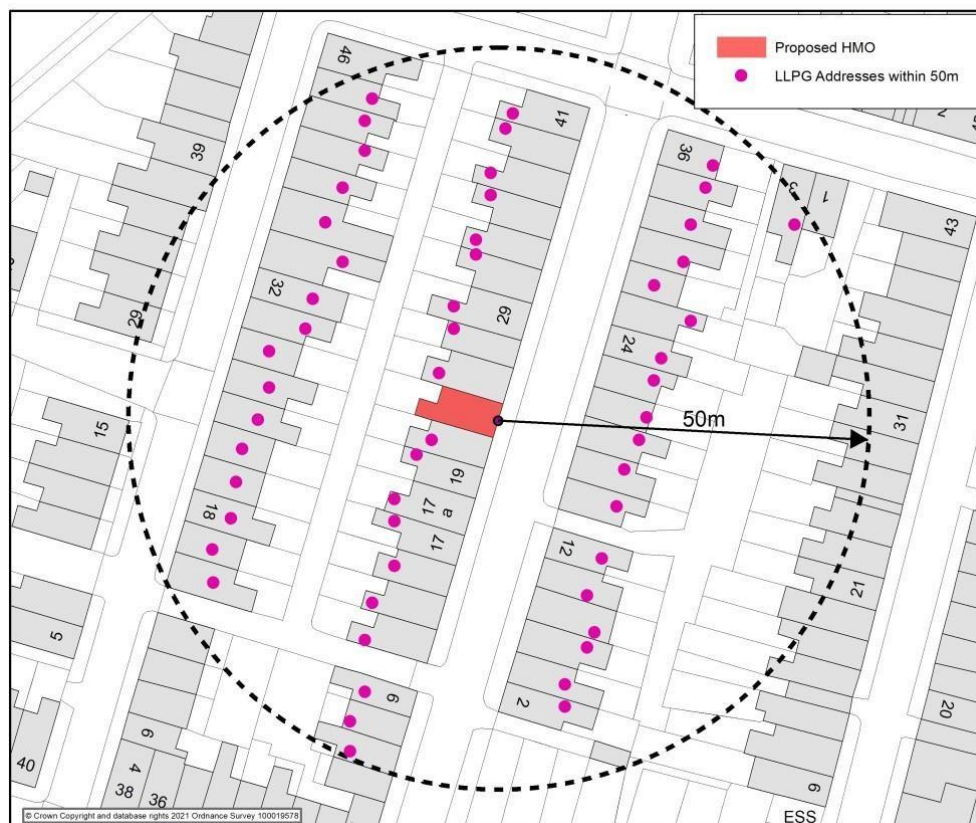


Figure 3.1 Applying a concentration threshold.

B. Restricting the sandwiching of properties

Planning permission will generally not be granted for the development of HMOs that lead to the 'sandwiching' of residential properties. Sandwiching occurs when a non-HMO residential property has an HMO on either side. This has the potential to lead to amenity issues for the non-HMO property due to the greater intensity of use of the HMOs.

Exceptional circumstances where permission might be granted for an HMO that 'sandwiches' a non-HMO residential property are limited but could include where there is a significant gap between the curtilages of the properties, or where properties are set within large gardens or curtilages.

An example is shown in Figure 3.2. The proposed HMO (in red) would result in the residential property at No. 33 being sandwiched between two HMOs. This would not normally be granted planning permission.



Figure 3.2 Restricting the sandwiching of property No. 33.

C. Restricting three adjacent HMOs

Planning permission will not generally be granted for proposals that would result in a block of three or more adjacent HMOs. 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.

Exceptional 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 curtilage.

Making a planning application

A HMO comprises a house or flat which is occupied by three or more unrelated people who share an amenity such as a kitchen, lounge or bathroom. It includes a range of different types of accommodation such as bedsits and shared houses.⁵

In 2010, changes to the planning regulations introduced a new use class - Class C4 "Houses in Multiple Occupation". This comprises a house or flat that contains between three and six unrelated occupants who share basic amenities. These are sometimes also referred to as "small HMOs".

HMOs comprising more than six sharing occupants are unclassified by the amended regulations (i.e., being "Sui Generis" (ii) and are generally known as "large HMOs".

Change of use to / from a large HMO (Sui Generis)

The change of use of a dwelling house (use Class C3) to a large HMO (shared housing defined as a HMO and occupied by more than six people) requires planning permission. The change from a large HMO (Sui Generis) to a dwelling house (use Class C3) also requires planning permission. Planning permission may also be required for a material change of use from a small HMO (use Class C4) to a large HMO (Sui Generis).

Change of use to small HMOs (use Class C4)

Under normal circumstances the change of use of a dwelling house (use Class C3) to a small HMO for up to six people (use Class C4) is 'permitted development' and no formal planning permission is required. However, Halton Borough Council enacted an article 4 direction on the 24th September, which removed this permitted development right. This means planning permission is required to convert a dwellinghouse (C3) into a small HMO (C4), in the areas outlined on the Halton Borough Council Article 4 webpage⁶.

Change of use from other uses to HMOs

A change of use from other uses such as a shop or office to a HMO (large or small) is also likely to require planning permission.

In all of the above situations we recommend that the [Planning Portal](#) is consulted and professional planning advice is obtained for the most up to date and applicable information.

⁵ The legal definition of an HMO is contained within Part 7 of the Housing Act 2004.

⁶ [Article 4](#)

How will planning applications for HMO's be considered?

The change of use from a dwelling to a HMO will not necessarily involve any physical internal or external alterations, but the material change of use in itself constitutes development requiring planning permission. This guidance will therefore apply to all planning applications consisting of:

- a change of use from a dwellinghouse (Use Class C3) to small HMO (Use Class C4)
- a change of use from a dwellinghouse (use Class C3) to a large HMO ('sui generis'); or
- a change of use from a small HMO (use Class C4) to a large HMO ('sui generis'); or
- a change of use from another use for example an office (use Class E) or shop (use Class E) to a large or small HMO that requires planning permission.

Issues to be considered in the determination of planning applications for a HMO are as follows:

Suitability of property for use as an HMO

The size of the dwelling and internal layout must be sufficient to accommodate any increased number of residents to protect the residential amenity of the occupants.

Appropriate means of storing and dealing with waste should be specified as part of the planning application. This must include provision for waste and recycling storage containers in a suitable enclosure within the curtilage of the property which will not impact negatively on the visual amenity of the area or the residential amenity of neighbouring residents.

Appropriate provision must also be made for suitable, covered and secure convenient cycle parking within the curtilage of the property where possible referring to Policy C2 Parking Standards as guidance. There should also be sufficient space for cars to park, within the residential curtilage of the property where possible. This should not, however (where practical/unless deemed unnecessary by HBC), result in the loss of front garden for hard standing for parking and refuse areas where this would detract from the existing street scene.

Proposed HMOs should meet the amenity standards set in the Delivery and Allocations Local Plan policies C1- Transport Network and Accessibility; C2- Parking Standards; RD3- Dwellings Alterations, Extensions, Conversions and Replacement Dwellings; GR2- Amenity; and any relevant standards set at a national level by national housing legislation and guidance.

Impact on local amenity

Any proposed change of use to a HMO should not place an unacceptable strain upon local facilities or have an unacceptable impact on local amenity. Consideration will be given as to whether the increase in the number of occupants within the property will have an adverse impact on noise levels and the level of amenity neighbouring residents can reasonably expect to enjoy. This is particularly relevant when considering the use of semi-detached or terraced properties, properties in narrow streets or densely developed areas where potential impact is likely to be more concentrated and directly affecting neighbouring residents. Applicants will be expected to demonstrate appropriate measures to mitigate potential impacts such as appropriate soundproofing to address noise transmission and impact issues. Consideration will also be given to whether the proposal would exacerbate any existing problems to an unacceptable level.

Display of advertisements

The Council recognises that in areas with high levels of HMOs there is the potential for a proliferation of signage which can detract from the street scene and adversely affect residential amenity.

The display of advertisements in England is primarily governed by the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007. Certain types of outdoor advertisements, including property 'for sale' and 'to let' boards benefit from 'deemed consent' under this legislation and do not require advertisement consent to be obtained from the Local Planning Authority, provided that the advert is displayed in accordance with the criteria set out in the regulations. Any board advertising a property for sale or to let must however be removed within 14 days of the completion of the sale/let.

HMO Amenity Standards and mandatory licences

All HMOs in Halton must comply with the Halton Amenity Standards and where necessary must be licenced. More information can be found at [Private Sector Housing](#).

Appendix A – Relevant Local Plan Policies

Policy CS(R)12: Housing Mix and Specialist Housing

1. On sites of 10 or more dwellings, the mix of new property types delivered are encouraged to contribute to addressing identified needs (size of homes and specialist housing) as quantified in the most up to date Strategic Housing Market Assessment, unless precluded by site specific constraints, economic viability or prevailing neighbourhood characteristics.
2. Proposals for new specialist housing for the elderly, including extra-care and supported accommodation, will be encouraged in suitable locations, particularly those providing easy access to local services and community facilities. Development proposals for specialist housing should provide adequate amenity space and parking.
3. Affordable housing provision in line with Policy CS(R)13 will still be required where the proposal for specialist accommodation provides self-contained dwellings.
4. There will be a presumption against further residential care accommodation resulting in or exacerbating an oversupply.
5. In order to reduce reliance on specialist housing in the future and to allow residents to live within their own homes for as long as they are able, the Council will encourage designs of dwellings that can be adapted should they be required.
6. Proposals for development that would result in the loss of special needs housing will only be granted permission where it can be demonstrated that there is no longer an established local need for this type of accommodation or adequate replacement accommodation will be provided.

Policy RD3: Dwelling Alterations, Extensions, Conversions and Replacement

Dwellings 1. Proposals for dwelling alterations, extensions, conversion and replacement dwellings outside the Green Belt will be supported where they:

- a. Retain the character of the existing property, its setting and the surrounding residential area;
 - i. This will include consideration of the siting, scale, design, and materials to be used.
- b. Will not have a significant adverse impact on the amenity and living conditions of occupants of neighbouring properties; this will include consideration of
 - i. The potential for overlooking and the preservation of appropriate privacy distances; and ii. The loss of sunlight or daylight to neighbouring properties; and iii. The dominance or overbearing nature of the extension.
- c. Enhance, provide or maintain safe highway conditions for pedestrians, cyclists and motor vehicles.
- d. Will not result in isolated residential development.
- e. Provide, or retain, sufficient parking within the curtilage of the property, where applicable.
- f. Provide, or retain, adequate storage for recycling, refuse and cycles.
- g. Retain outside access to the rear of the property; and they
- h. Provide, or retain, a reasonable amenity space.

Conversion

2. Residential conversions of existing buildings will be permitted where they meet all of the above criteria (1. a-h) and where it is demonstrated that the building to be converted is of a permanent and substantial construction; capable of being converted; and in the case of sub-division or intensification of the existing residential use:

- i. they would not create or contribute to a harmful concentration of such uses with regards to amenity and highways; and ii. it would not result in a loss of character.

Replacement Dwellings

3. Replacement dwellings will be supported where they meet all of the above criteria (1. a-h) and they will not result in over-development of the site, or the curtilage.

Change of Use

4. The conversion of buildings from non-residential to residential use will be supported where they meet all of the above criteria (1. a-h) and where it is demonstrated that:

- a. The building is of a permanent and substantial construction capable of being converted; and that.
- b. It will provide a satisfactory residential environment.

Policy CS(R)18: High Quality Design

1. Achieving and raising the quality of design is a priority for all development in Halton.
2. Development proposals, where applicable, will be expected to:

- a. provides beautiful and well-designed residential, commercial and industrial developments appropriate to their setting.
- b. enhances and reinforce positive elements of an area's character contributing to a 'sense of place', including the incorporation of public art where appropriate.
- c. respect and respond positively to their setting, including important views and vistas, landmark buildings, features and focal points that have been identified in a proper context appraisal.
- d. be flexible and adaptable to respond to future social, technological, economic, environmental and the health needs of the Borough.
- e. promote safe and secure environments through the inclusion of measures to address crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour;
- f. creates public spaces which are attractive, promote active lifestyles and work effectively for all members of society.
- g. incorporates appropriate landscape schemes into development designs, integrating local habitats and biodiversity.
- h. provides safe, secure and accessible routes for all members of society, with particular emphasis on walking, cycling and public transport; and
- i. be well integrated and connected with existing development.

Policy GR1: Design of Development

1. The design of all development must be of a high quality, and must demonstrate that it is based upon the following principles:
 - a. A clear understanding of the characteristics of the site, its wider context and the surrounding area.
 - b. Efficient and effective use of the site; and
 - c. The creation of visually attractive places that are well integrated with the surrounding buildings, streets and landscapes.
2. The Council will consider each of the following elements in determining whether the design is appropriate:
 - a. Local architecture and character.
 - b. Siting, layout, scale, height, proportion, form, grouping and massing.
 - c. Topography and site levels.
 - d. Orientation and appearance.
 - e. Materials, landscaping and green infrastructure.
 - f. The relationship to neighbouring properties and street scene; and
 - g. Reducing the fear of crime by promoting safe and connected environments.
3. Development proposals should make a positive contribution to their surroundings and ensure they contribute to the creation of a high-quality public realm that enhances conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Development must where appropriate:
 - a. Provide welcoming routes that are easy to use, well-lit and overlooked.
 - b. Create well-defined streets and spaces.
 - c. Where buildings are located on corners, ensure that they present a strong and active frontage to both aspects of the corner, and that the corners of the buildings themselves clearly define the corner in the streetscape.
 - d. Integrate car parking and servicing so as not to dominate the street scene.
 - e. Avoid detrimental impacts on existing infrastructure and natural features; and
 - f. Provide linkages to the wider neighborhood.
4. All major⁴ development proposals involving the construction of new buildings must demonstrate how sustainable design and construction methods will be incorporated to achieve resource efficiency and resilience to climate change in accordance with CS(R)19 taking into account the site-specific viability of the development, where appropriate.

⁴ Major development is defined as:

development involving any one or more of the following—

- (a) the winning and working of minerals or the use of land for mineral-working deposits.
- (b) waste development.
- (c) the provision of dwellinghouses where—
 - (i) the number of dwellinghouses to be provided is 10 or more; or
 - (ii) the development is to be carried out on a site having an area of 0.5 hectares or more and it is not known whether the development falls within subparagraph (c)(i);
- (d) the provision of a building or buildings where the floor space to be created by the development is 1,000 square metres or more; or

(e) development carried out on a site having an area of 1 hectare or more.

Policy GR2:

Amenity 1. All new development must be sited, designed and laid out to:

- a. Avoid detriment to the living environment of existing or planned residential properties and to ensure a high standard of amenity for existing and future users;
- b. Ensure that existing or planned residential development achieve and maintain the expected levels of privacy and outlook;
- c. Retain the character of existing buildings and spaces creating places that are safe, inclusive and accessible, promoting health and wellbeing ;
- d. Ensure that appropriate storage space is provided, in particular for waste and recycling;
- and e. Provide and maintain safe highway conditions for pedestrians, cyclists and motor vehicles, including ensuring there is appropriate parking, access and servicing.

2. In addition all new residential development must:

- a. Consider the orientation and design of buildings to maximise daylight and sunlight; and
- b. Ensure that adequate amenity space is provided.

3. Development must not prejudice the planned development of a larger site or area for which comprehensive proposals have been approved or are in preparation. A development proposal will be supported if, through its design and layout, it does not:

- a. preclude the development of adjoining land with longer term potential;
- b. lead to unacceptable piecemeal forms of development;
- c. seek to avoid planning contributions by limiting the size of the development to avoid relevant thresholds.

4. The redevelopment of residential areas will be supported where it would improve amenity, quality and the local environment.