

In April, the Planning Committee approved a planning policy to control Houses in Multiple Occupation proposed as an interim position pending the inclusion of a policy in Fife's local plans. The approved policy is now a material consideration in determining planning applications for housing developments in the St. Andrews & East Fife Local Plan area. Below is the approved policy:

## **POLICY H-- HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION**

***The use of a new build house or flat as a house in multiple occupation (HMO) will not be permitted unless the development is purpose-built for that use. The Council will impose this restriction by applying a condition to planning permissions.***

***A change of use application for an existing property to be used as a house in multiple occupation will only be permitted if:***

- in the case of a flat with a shared internal stair or entrance, all other properties sharing the stair and entrance are already in multiple occupancy and have planning permission to operate as an HMO;***
- it will not be detrimental to pedestrian or traffic safety arising from car or bicycle parking;***
- it will not be detrimental to the established residential character and amenity; and***
- the property is not designated as affordable housing provided through policies requiring affordable housing (Policy H2 or the earlier policy equivalents).***

### **Reason**

This policy aims to:

- achieve some degree of balance between the competing demands for accommodation and the need to maintain balanced and mixed communities; and
- in the case of St Andrews, to have regard to the student community and the positive contribution it makes to the valuable character of the town.

Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) provide essential accommodation to many people including students living away from home. In St Andrews, for example, approximately half of the 7,000 students at the University of St Andrews find accommodation within the private sector. These 3,500 students make up around 20% of St Andrews' population. When property is in HMO use by students or others, it has an impact on the character and amenity of an area, due to the differing lifestyles and the transient nature of the occupants. It may put pressure on facilities, such as car parking, and can also lead to neighbour concerns within flatted and adjacent properties. It can also lead to the loss of a balanced, mixed community.

Part of the character of St Andrews in certain areas is that of a student community rather than a mixed community. To maintain a mixed community within the town, whilst catering for the specific needs of students and others seeking shared accommodation, it is appropriate to control occupancy of property by non-family groups. In recent years, much new development, particularly flats, within St Andrews has been purchased for use as HMOs. In some cases, mainstream housing has become exclusively HMO accommodation and this can add to difficulties for others who may wish to enter the housing market, particularly those who are denied access to a house in their home area. The University of St Andrews has a vision for future development of its estate and proposals for further student accommodation in line with planning policy will be supported to ease pressure on the housing market in the town.

The Council wishes to encourage the future development of purpose-built HMO accommodation which can specifically serve the needs of students and others in Fife who may benefit from this type of accommodation. At the same time the Council wants to protect new development from being priced out of the market for general needs, particularly as affordable homes.

Affordable housing provided as a result of policies requiring affordable housing contributions need to be safeguarded for that purpose to maintain that housing stock. These, too, are protected from change of use to HMOs.