

Details of a letter from James Brokenshire MP to a concerned local resident

I have contacted the Council to ask for their response to the issues you have raised. From the information I have received, there are a number of important points of clarification that are worth detailing.

The background on this is that around five years ago, national planning permission rules were modified to permit the creation of smaller HMOs, housing no more than six occupants under 'permitted development'. This removes the need for planning permission for this type of development. Bexley Council planning policy officers are actively reviewing the evidence base to see if a potential future Article 4 directive could be applicable in Bexley, removing national permitted development rights for smaller HMOs. Appropriate evidence is required in order for this to be approved.

More widely, the majority of London Boroughs do not have an Article 4 directive on HMOs in place, including both neighbouring Bromley and Greenwich. It may, however, be that other local authorities have used Article 4 to restrict other permitted development rights, such as the conversion of offices to residential use.

It is worth highlighting that the removal of permitted development rights under Article 4 would not preclude the right to submit a planning application, which would then be determined against relevant policies contained in the Council's Development Plan and other material considerations in the normal way.

In response to your comments on tenants, high prices in the current housing market mean that, in many instances, tenants are in fact young, single professionals and other individuals who do not pose the kind of threat to the community that you describe in your email.

The Council have also explained that they are looking into the possibility of HMO licensing and are examining the available evidence to support such consideration. Smaller HMOs of less than two storeys are currently exempt from the mandatory national HMO licensing scheme, however Council officers are exploring proposals for a discretionary, local HMO licensing scheme that might apply to the kind of smaller HMOs currently exempted.

I hope this serves to answer your questions and underlines the considered way in which the Council is engaging with this issue. I will, however, draw your concerns to the attention of the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and seek a response from him.

Yours sincerely,

James Brokenshire