

## **RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **QUESTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10**

**COUNCIL – 19 JULY 2022**

#### **QUESTION A**

**Councillor Slinger to ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lowe:**

“Has the Council considered using various powers available to it, such as Article 4 Directions, to limit the number of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) where there is a high concentration of HMOs in certain streets or wards, and what was the outcome of any deliberations?”

**Councillor Lowe, Leader of the Council, to reply as follows:**

“The Council recognises that there has been an increase in the number of HMOs in recent years and that they are concentrated in certain streets and/or wards in the Borough. A report was commissioned for the cross-party Planning Services Working Party (PSWP), which was undertaken by consultants, to assess the number of HMOs, their geographical location and options for managing the spread in order to inform future planning policies for HMOs.

The findings of the study and the recommendations were presented to the PSWP on 13 January 2022. This study concluded that HMOs provide a specific type of low-cost housing to meet a need within the Borough. The use of Article 4 Directions, in specific areas was not considered justified, as the number of HMOs are not high enough to justify a high level of harm which is required by Government to impose such a sanction. Furthermore, the introduction of an Article 4 Direction could leave the Council open to compensation from homeowners and in itself would not adequately deal with the problem. HMOs for 6 persons or more already require planning permission. The imposition of an Article 4 Direction would only mean that those HMOs under 6 persons would also require planning permission and would not prevent their existence. In highly sustainable locations, adjacent to the town centre, there would be no sustainable planning grounds to refuse such applications if they were made.

PSWP therefore considered that the introduction of a radius based policy or a proximity based policy e.g no more than x% within a specific area should be the approach adopted by the Council. Such a policy would need to be introduced in a new Local Plan. Policies cannot be introduced by a Supplementary Planning Document because no SPD can be produced without a relevant policy being included within the Local Plan. The existing Local Plan does not have a policy relating to HMOs as the number of HMOs in the Borough was significantly less when the evidence for the Local Plan was produced in 2017/18.

Following the publication of the ONS figures on population growth, officers are working on a revised Warwickshire wide Housing and Employment Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) which will in turn inform the type of review needed to the existing Local Plan. A revised Local Development Scheme to reflect the type of review and the timescales for this review will be produced in the Autumn.

In the meantime, officers across the Council are currently reviewing available evidence to determine if a recommendation should be made to Council for selective or additional licensing for this type of private sector housing in some of the wards with the highest numbers of HMOs. However, this is unlikely to restrict numbers, but would ensure, if there is evidence to justify it, they meet required standards regarding quality, maintenance and some behaviour. It should be noted that in the borough the licenced HMOs are some of the highest standard private sector housing in the borough as they are regularly inspected.”