

APPLICATION NO:	25/00506/COU
LOCATION:	31 Balfour Street, Runcorn, WA7 4PH
PROPOSAL:	Proposed change of use from a 2-bedroom dwellinghouse (Use Class C3) to a 4-bedroom House in Multiple Occupation (Use Class C4) with ensuites to each of the rooms and a shared kitchen and dining room
WARD:	Mersey and Weston
PARISH:	None
APPLICANT:	Twenty Thirty Investments Limited
AGENT:	
DEVELOPMENT PLAN:	ALLOCATIONS:
Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (2022)	Primarily Residential
DEPARTURE REPRESENTATIONS:	No
RECOMMENDATION:	13
	Approve, subject to conditions

SITE MAP



1. APPLICATION SITE

1.1 The Site

The site subject to this application is 31 Balfour Street in Runcorn. It is a mid-terrace property located in a Primarily Residential Area, as designated in the Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan.

The site is surrounded by other residential streets of terrace properties, with Runcorn Train Station to the North of the site and Runcorn Town Centre also North of the site.

Planning History

There are no previous planning applications recorded at this address.

2. THE APPLICATION

2.1 Proposal

On the September 11th 2025, Halton Borough Council's Executive Board 1 (item 10a/b) approved an immediate article 4 within specified areas of the borough (including some areas of Runcorn, where the application site is situated), 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.

As a result planning permission is now required for such changes of use that would previously have been permitted development. A full planning application has been submitted proposing a change of use from a single-family dwelling (Use Class C3) to a 4-bedroom House in Multiple Occupation (Use Class C4) with ensuites to each of the rooms and a shared kitchen and dining room.

2.2 Documentation

The application is accompanied by an application form and a set of plans.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

Members are reminded that planning law requires for development proposals to be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

3.1 Delivery and Allocations Local Plan ('DALP') (adopted March 2022)

CS(R)1 Halton's Spatial Strategy

CS(R)12 Housing Mix and Specialist Housing

CS(R)15 Sustainable Transport

CS(R)18 High Quality Design

CS(R)19 Sustainable Development and Climate Change

CS(R)24 Waste

C1 Transport Network and Accessibility

C2 Parking Provision

HE7 Pollution and Nuisance

GR1 Design of Development

GR2 Amenity

RD3 Dwelling Alterations, Extensions, Conversions and Replacement Dwellings

RD5 Primarily Residential Areas

3.2 Supplementary Planning Documents ('SPD')

Houses in Multiple Occupation SPD

3.3 Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan (2013)

The following policies, contained within the Joint Merseyside and Halton Waste Local Plan are of relevance:

- WM8 Waste Prevention and Resource Management;
- WM9 Sustainable Waste Management Design and Layout for New Development.

MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Below are material considerations relevant to the determination of this planning application.

3.4 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied.

3.5 Equality Duty

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 created the public sector equality duty. Section 149 states:- (1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Officers have taken this into account and given due regard to this statutory duty, and the matters specified in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 in the determination of this application.

There are no known equality implications arising directly from this development that justify the refusal of planning permission.

3.6 Other Considerations

The application has been considered having regard to Article 1 of the First Protocol of the Human Rights Act 1998, which sets out a person's rights to the peaceful enjoyment of property and Article 8 of the Convention of the same Act which sets out his/her rights in respect for private and family life and for the home.

Officers consider that the proposed development would not be contrary to the provisions of the above Articles in respect of the human rights of surrounding residents/occupiers.

4. CONSULTATIONS

The following organisations have been consulted and any comments received have been summarised below and in the assessment section of the report where appropriate:

HBC Highways

Holding Objection

HBC Environmental Health

No Comments Received

Ward Councillors

Objection

HBC Open Spaces

No Comments Received

Cheshire Police

No Objection, recommendations made for different aspects of the property.

5. REPRESENTATIONS

This application has been publicised by 8 neighbour notification letters sent on 18/12/25. A site notice was also posted at the site on this date. From this publicity, a total of 13 objections have been received. The following points have been raised:

- Parking issues
- Development will generate more noise
- Concerns regarding who the future tenants will be
- House is not big enough
- Value of neighbouring properties will be reduced and negate potential sale of properties
- Quality of life will be impacted
- Impacts onto the character of the area
- High turnover rate of HMO will effect stability of the neighbourhood
- Approving this will set a precedent for other dwellings to be converted into a HMO
- Development presents a significant increase in intensity of use
- Congestion already created by the Co-Op will be increased

A Ward Councillor has also objected stating the following:

I am writing to object to the proposed change of use from a 2-bed dwelling house (Use Class C3) to a 4-bedroom House in Multiple Occupation (Use Class C4). I believe this proposal would have a negative impact on both the property itself and the surrounding residential area.

Over-Intensification of the Property

*The original property is a modest 2-bed dwelling designed for single-family use. Converting it into a 4-bed HMO, with each bedroom containing an ensuite, represents a significant **over-intensification of the building**. The installation of four ensuites drastically reduces the available communal living space, raising concerns about whether the property can provide a safe, healthy, and comfortable environment for future occupants.*

Loss of Residential Amenity

By prioritising ensuite bedrooms over shared living areas, the proposal undermines the quality of accommodation. Limited communal space often leads to increased use of external areas, noise spillover, and general disturbance to neighbours. This is especially relevant in smaller residential streets where properties are closely spaced.

Parking and Highway Impact

*A 4-bed HMO typically results in several unrelated adults living independently, each potentially owning a vehicle. This significantly increases the demand for parking compared with a standard 2-bed family home. The **extra parking required will place an additional burden on already limited parking spaces**, worsening congestion and creating further pressure on the surrounding streets. This raises concerns about highway safety, access for emergency vehicles, and the overall convenience for existing residents.*

Neighbour Concerns and HMO Saturation

*Local residents have already expressed their concerns and distress about **yet another HMO being proposed in an area that already contains multiple HMOs**. The cumulative impact of these conversions is becoming increasingly noticeable, and neighbours are worried about the long-term effect on the character, stability, and cohesion of the community. The addition of another high-occupancy property risks further tipping the balance away from family housing and towards transient accommodation.*

Waste Management Concerns

Higher occupancy levels inevitably generate more waste. Without sufficient internal and external storage space — already compromised by the addition of multiple en-suites — there is a risk of overflowing bins, clutter, and deterioration of the street scene.

Impact on Community Balance

The surrounding area is primarily composed of family homes. Introducing a high-occupancy HMO into a small residential street risks disrupting the established community balance. HMOs often have higher turnover rates, which can reduce neighbourhood cohesion and stability.

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above — including over-intensification, loss of living space, increased parking burden, neighbour concerns about HMO saturation, reduced residential amenity, and negative impact on community character — I respectfully request that this application be refused.

6. ASSESSMENT

6.1 Principle of development

The application site is an existing residential property (Use Class C3) located fully within a Primary Residential Area on the DALP policies map, as such the principal of residential development has been established.

Policy CS(R)3: Housing Supply and Locational Priorities states that during the period 2014 to 2037 provision will be made for the development of at least 8,050 (net) additional dwellings. It then goes on to state that they will be delivered from a variety of sources including small sites and windfall sites. The Council's Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD) states that "HMOs form an important part of Halton's housing supply adding to the choice of living for many residents. The principle of residential development at the application site is therefore established and considered acceptable with regards to Policy RD5.

Objections have been received with regards to the potential impacts of this development onto the character of the area. It is considered that the use as a HMO is consistent with the character of the residential area and the number of adults that could reasonably be expected live in the property (being four based on the legal space standards set out below) would not be substantially different to the number of occupiers in a 2 bed dwellinghouse.

6.2 Design, Scale and Layout

Halton Borough Council's Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD) was recently adopted in March 2025, and sets out the general principles for HMOs.

The HMO SPD states that rooms must comply with the minimum legal space standards set out below as defined in the 'Houses In Multiple Occupation Licensing Requirements And Amenity Standards' adopted document and The Housing Act:

Sleeping accommodation:

Rooms must comply with the minimum legal space standards set out below;

One person over 10 years of age	6.51 m ²
Two person over 10 years of age	10.22 m ²

However if no other private or communal living areas are provided the minimum sleeping room sizes that HMO's in Halton must comply with are;

One person over 10 years of age	10 m ²
Two person over 10 years of age	15 m ²

Where communal areas are provided in addition to the rooms used for sleeping the space standards for communal areas are 17.5m² based on a 5 bed HMO.

The application proposes on the ground floor both a kitchen measuring 8.35m² and a communal lounge area measuring 12.2m². Thus the proposed communal areas would exceed 17.5m² and the above Halton sleeping accommodation standards would therefore be 6.51m² minimum for a bedspace.

The Technical Housing Standards – Nationally Described Space Standards, sets out that in order to provide one bedspace, a single bedroom should have a floor area of at least 7.5m² and should be at least 2.15m wide.

Three of the bedrooms comply with this standard, and 1 of the bedrooms has a shortfall by 0.13m² when compared with the National Described Space Standards. The Council has not however adopted these standards into its planning policy and this shortfall is considered minimal. It is not considered that a refusal of the application could be justified given that the Council's Space Standards (6.51m²) are complied with and the size of the bedroom is considered reasonable. This was confirmed during a site visit.

The HMO SPD further states that planning permission will not normally be granted for new 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. A licensing and planning history search has been completed within a 50m radius of the application site and has confirmed that no HMO's currently lie within this radius at 31 Balfour Road.

The HMO SPD also states that 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 a HMO on either side. It is noted that as no other HMOs lie within 50m of the property, sandwiching is avoided.

It is further referenced within the HMO SPD that planning permission will not generally be granted for proposals that would result in a block of three or more adjacent HMOs. Again to reiterate the above, there is no other HMO's located within a 50m radius, hence a block of three HMO's is avoided.

The Ward Councillor has expressed concerns regarding HMO saturation in the area. A stated purpose of the Council's adopted SPD is to control the concentration of HMOs issues arising from it. It is considered that the proposals comply with the tests as required by the Council's adopted SPD and that the Article 4 in place allows the Council future control over numbers and potential saturation. Cheshire Police have also been consulted on the application and raises no objection. They have provided comments in reference to

recommendations for secure and well managed HMO provision. The security recommendations have been shared with the applicant and can be attached as an informative accordingly to any future planning approval if granted.

Overall, the proposed 4-bedroom HMO development is considered to be acceptable in terms of its design, scale and layout to provide suitable living standards. The proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable with DALP Policies GR1, CS(R)3 and RD5, and considered compliant with the HMO SPD Guidance.

6.5 Transport and highways

Policy GR2 (1e) of the DALP expects proposals to provide and maintain safe highway conditions for pedestrians, cyclists and motor vehicles, including ensuring there is appropriate parking, access and servicing.

Policy C2 of the DALP sets out parking requirements with proposed developments. The application proposes no in-curtilage parking, existing or proposed.

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF (2024 revised) also states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.

The Council's Highway Officer has raised a holding objection, highlighting the fact that the properties on this road rely on on-street parking. They state that the proposal will lead to intensification compared to a 2 bed family home and therefore a beat survey should be submitted to analyse parking pressures and capacity. Given the scale of the development it is not considered that this can be justified in this circumstance. On street parking is a common and established feature of this residential area and the potential for additional cars as a result of the development is considered likely to be limited. Further to this, the site is located in a sustainable location close by to the train station, bus stops and within walking distance to the town centre. In the absence of evidence that this proposal will lead to severe impacts and unacceptable highway conditions, refusal of planning permission could not be justified.

The Highways Officer has also requested details regarding cycle storage and bin storage. As required by the SPD, the applicant has provided details that waste storage and collection which will remain the same as present which is through the rear entrance onto the alley way. Given that the property is already within residential use with a secure rear garden area that can provide space for bins, it is reasonable to retain this waste strategy and it is considered appropriate. With regards to bike storage, the applicant has stated that that

bikes can also be stored in the secure rear garden. Given the scale of the development it is not considered that requirement for further provision can be justified.

Based on the above, in terms of traffic generation/parking accumulation, the proposal is not likely to lead to severe highway impacts that would warrant a refusal and is therefore acceptable.

6.7 Residential amenity

Policy GR2 of the DALP states that developments must 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.

No acoustic report was submitted alongside the application, and no comments have been received from the Council's Environmental Health Officer.

Given that the proposal does not include external alterations, it is not considered that this development will lead to a loss of light or a loss of privacy to neighbouring properties.

Concerns have been raised from neighbours with regards to noise and the potential impact of the HMO onto residential amenity. The levels of activity associated with the HMO would not be materially greater than that of a family dwelling of a comparable size, and there is no evidence to suggest that the future occupiers would generate noise beyond that which could be reasonably expected within a residential area. Any potential for noise and disturbance can be controlled through the appropriate management of the property and where necessary through existing Environmental Health legislation. A condition can be attached to restrict construction hours for any building works required for the conversion of the property.

Overall, the proposed HMO use is consistent with both the character of the area and is not considered to raise any concerns with regard to residential amenity and the proposal is considered to be compliant with Policy GR2 of the DALP.

Further issues not raised above

Concerns have been raised regarding the people who will reside in the property. Neighbours also state that a large turnaround of residents will impact the character of the area. The planning system does not exist to control the type of person or characteristics of future occupants of properties and it can therefore not be used as a material planning consideration in order to refuse the application. The property will be retained as a residential use and the future occupants will hold the same rights and responsibilities as any other resident in this area. If anti-social behaviour is to occur from this property following the grant of permission, this will be a matter for the property management and the

local police. There is also no evidence before the Council to prove that this development would result in a large turnaround of residents to justify refusal of planning permission.

Further, concerns have been raised regarding the impact of this development onto property prices. Similar to the above, the planning system does not exist to protect private interests and there is no planning policy to require the consideration of developments onto property values. This is overall not a material planning consideration and would not warrant a refusal of this planning application.

A neighbour has expressed concern that if this HMO is to be approved, then a precedent will be set for the area and other HMO's will be created. It should be noted that the recently introduced Article 4 direction was introduced to prevent the over concentration of HMO's being caused by the permitted development rights existing for small-scale HMO's. All planning applications will be assessed against the Council's policies and SPD guidance.

6.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is considered that the change of use from a single-family dwelling (Use Class C3) to a 4-bedroom House in Multiple Occupation (Use Class C4) is acceptable. The proposal is considered wholly compliant with the Council's adopted SPD for Houses in Multiple Occupation and no other harms have been demonstrated that would justify refusal of planning permission in this case.

The application is therefore considered to accord with Policies C2, CS(R)3, CS(R)5, CS(R)18, CS(R)19, GR1, GR2, HE7 and RD5 of the Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan.

7. RECOMMENDATION

Approved, subject to conditions.

8. CONDITIONS

1. Time Limit – Full Permission
2. Approved Plans
3. Hours of Construction

Informative:

Advice from Cheshire Police.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The submitted planning applications are background papers to the report. Other background papers specifically mentioned and listed within the report are open

to inspection at the Council's premises at Municipal Building, Kingsway, Widnes, WA8 7QF in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

10. SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT

As required by:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (2024);
- The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015; and
- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2015.

This statement confirms that the local planning authority has worked proactively with the applicant to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of Halton