Oxford City Council is planning to introduce planning control measures so that landlords will have to apply for planning permission if they want to establish a new House in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

The new planning control is being introduced on Thursday 24 February but won’t come into force until next year as we are giving a year’s notice of the change.

There is a consultation period about the changes which will run until 18 March 2011. The new measures will come into force on 24 February 2012.

The changes relate to the change of use of C3 dwellinghouse to a shared rented house (C4 HMO).

Historically houses and flats were classified as C3 dwellinghouses in planning terms. However, from 6 April 2010 privately rented shared houses, with up to six unrelated tenants were reclassified under as new planning use class – C4 Houses in Multiple Occupation.

The previous government introduced a requirement in 2010 for changes of use from C3 to C4 to need planning permission. This was then overturned by the new coalition government. However, Government has given individual Councils the power to introduce such controls locally, where there is a need to manage the balance of dwellings and high concentrations of shared houses.

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader of Oxford City Council, says: “We want balanced communities in Oxford, and were desperately disappointed at the decision of the coalition government, without consultation, to overturn the requirement for new HMOs to get planning permission. This is the next best option.

“We suffer from an acute shortage of housing, with a high level of demand for both owner-occupied and rented accommodation.

“However, demand for different tenures of housing varies across the city, with some areas prone to higher demands for shared rental housing.

“This creates a situation where family dwellings are frequently converted into shared rented properties, leading to a shortfall in family accommodation and an unbalanced housing mix.
“We hope that this legislation will go some way in helping to ease this problem.”

The new C4 House in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) Class comprises any property (house or flat) which is rented privately by absentee landlords to groups of between three and six normally unrelated tenants, such as students, young professionals or others, and who would normally share at least some basic facilities, irrespective of whether or not they are friends living as a single household or in the form of bedsits.

The other class is C3 dwellinghouses class which includes family houses; small care homes; properties occupied by owners and/or their family members and their lodgers; and also in some instances shared houses with up to six residents living as a single household and managed/controlled by public bodies, such as the housing, police, fire, health or care authorities, housing associations, educational institutions or religious communities.

The existing situation, where no planning permission is required to change from a C4 HMO use to a C3 dwellinghouse, will continue to apply after the new controls come into effect. However once changed to a C3 dwellinghouse, planning permission will then be required for the reverse process to change back to a C4 HMO (eg. a shared student house).

Oxford has around 5000 existing HMOs in the city and these are now in the new C4 category.

Oxford City Council is currently consulting on the forthcoming planning controls. If you wish to make representations either visit the council’s website, www.oxford.gov.uk/consultation, or write to Heritage and Specialist Services, Oxford City Council, Ramsay House, 10 St Ebbe’s Street, Oxford, OX1 1PT.

The closing date for comments is 18 March 2011.

ENDS

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