# Greenbank Road residents battle rising tide of HMOs threatening community fabric



Residents of Greenbank Road in Darlington, County Durham, are increasingly alarmed by the transformation of their once-unified neighbourhood into a landscape dominated by Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The shift, marked by the conversion of elegant 19th-century townhouses into cramped lodgings, has not only altered the community’s fabric but also threatens to reduce property values, instil safety concerns, and erode the once-vibrant familial atmosphere.

Longstanding residents report that the charm and stability of their residential street have been undermined by property developers exploiting loopholes to cram multiple tenants into single homes—often accommodating as many as nine individuals in a single property. Matt Fisher, a father of four, lamented the dramatic change since moving to the area 15 years ago. "When we moved here, these were all family homes. Now, there's only four families left on our side of the street, with the rest being converted into HMOs," he said, highlighting a shift that has left him and his neighbours feeling increasingly isolated.

The situation reflects wider trends, as similar issues have surfaced in various UK cities. For example, Salford has experienced a staggering rise in HMOs, with neighbourhoods undergoing a significant transformation from family housing to transient living spaces. The Ordsall area alone saw an increase from just three HMOs in 2017 to 437 by 2023. This not only disrupts community cohesion but also puts additional pressure on local infrastructure and services, compelling councils to introduce regulations to limit further conversions.

In Darlington, local authorities have identified around 400 HMOs but suspect the actual number may be much higher due to insufficient regulations on properties accommodating fewer than six occupants. Residents on Greenbank Road are now clamouring for tighter controls, including a petition advocating for the enforcement of an Article 4 direction. This legal provision could require planning permission for all conversions from family homes to HMOs, a measure already adopted in nearby cities like Middlesbrough and Durham.

Grandfather Sandy Duncan, who has lived on Greenbank Road for 43 years, echoed residents' fears regarding declining property values and safety issues. He noted, "I worry about rubbish and bins overflowing, and the drainage. Can the pipes cope with nine showers in a morning? I doubt it." Such concerns are not unfounded; with multiple tenants comes a higher likelihood of incidents such as anti-social behaviour and a rise in drug-related activity, as reported by Fisher.

The local council acknowledges the dual nature of HMOs, stating they can provide much-needed affordable housing but may also lead to a concentration of unregulated properties that adversely affect existing communities. The council claims it is actively exploring measures, including enhanced licensing for HMOs, to balance the interests of residents and landlords. However, residents remain sceptical about the effectiveness of these efforts, with one neighbour describing her ordeal living next to a property undergoing transformative renovations, stating, "I've had the same neighbours for 40 years. Now I'll have nine people coming and going at all times of the day."

The issue highlights a growing conundrum across the UK regarding the management of HMOs. While they can offer affordable housing solutions, they invariably draw criticism for their impacts on local communities, from street cleanliness to overall neighbourhood spirit. Addressing these challenges is crucial for councils across the country, which must navigate the fine line between market demands for affordable housing and the need to maintain the character and integrity of residential areas.

As Greenbank Road’s residents continue to advocate for change, they face an uphill battle against structural forces driving the proliferation of HMOs. The situation embodies a wider unease among communities grappling with the implications of housing policies that allow for unregulated conversions amidst soaring housing costs, representing a significant challenge for the future of community cohesion.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14787169/We-lived-homes-years-neighbours-costing-thousands-race-family-standing.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.peaksons.co.uk/blog/item/28/challenges-and-opportunities-of-hmos-in-the-uk/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14787169/We-lived-homes-years-neighbours-costing-thousands-race-family-standing.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/massive-concentrations-hmos-creating-problems-29252886), [[5]](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/houses-multiple-occupation-hmos/hmo-impact-licensing-aims)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.anthonyjonesproperties.co.uk/news/understanding-hmo-growth-in-darlington-implications-for-homeowners-and-buyers), [[6]](https://www.darlingtonandstocktontimes.co.uk/news/23982562.durham-county-council-pledges-hmo-safety-crackdown/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14787169/We-lived-homes-years-neighbours-costing-thousands-race-family-standing.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/massive-concentrations-hmos-creating-problems-29252886> - Salford's neighbourhoods are facing challenges due to a significant increase in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The council reports that larger family homes being converted into HMOs are impacting social cohesion and placing additional pressure on local services. Between 2017 and 2023, Salford saw 1,254 new HMOs established, with the Ordsall area experiencing the most significant rise, from three known HMOs in 2017 to 437 by 2023. The council has adopted a new policy to limit new HMOs in certain areas to address these issues.
3. <https://www.anthonyjonesproperties.co.uk/news/understanding-hmo-growth-in-darlington-implications-for-homeowners-and-buyers> - Darlington Borough Council has expressed concerns over the growing number of HMOs in the area, with approximately 400 currently operating. Councillor Scott Durham highlighted that the conversion of family homes into HMOs could permanently remove quality family housing from the market and affect community cohesion. The council is considering additional licensing for HMOs and potential selective licensing in neighbourhoods with high concentrations of privately rented properties to address these concerns.
4. <https://www.peaksons.co.uk/blog/item/28/challenges-and-opportunities-of-hmos-in-the-uk/> - The proliferation of HMOs across the UK has sparked significant debate among local communities, policymakers, and property investors. While HMOs offer affordable housing solutions, they often face opposition due to concerns about community cohesion, street cleanliness, and anti-social behaviour. The article examines factors contributing to the growth of HMOs, challenges faced by landlords and tenants, and the need for a balanced approach to managing this sector.
5. <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/houses-multiple-occupation-hmos/hmo-impact-licensing-aims> - Oxford City Council acknowledges the significant presence of HMOs in the city, with an estimated one in five residents living in such accommodations. The council highlights that HMOs can negatively affect neighbourhoods due to issues like rubbish and anti-social behaviour, often aggravated by poor management. High densities of HMOs can also change the nature of an area and result in reduced community cohesion. The council continues to receive numerous service requests and complaints related to HMOs each year.
6. <https://www.darlingtonandstocktontimes.co.uk/news/23982562.durham-county-council-pledges-hmo-safety-crackdown/> - Durham County Council has pledged to investigate every property in County Durham without gas and electricity safety certificates after data showed hundreds had not been renewed. Gas safety checks are required annually, and electrical checks every five years. The council is carrying out further investigations of properties where records show that a gas or electric safety certificate may have expired and will take appropriate action if any breaches of legislation or licence conditions are found.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/houses-in-multiple-occupation-and-residential-property-licensing-reform-guidance-for-local-housing-authorities/houses-in-multiple-occupation-and-residential-property-licensing-reform-guidance-for-local-housing-authorities> - The UK government has extended the scope of mandatory HMO licensing to include properties housing five or more people in two or more separate households. This aims to ensure that HMOs are not overcrowded and do not pose risks to the health or safety of occupiers or blight local communities. The guidance for local authorities includes clarifying the minimum size for rooms used for sleeping accommodation in HMOs and requirements related to refuse disposal in licensed properties.