# Proposal to convert historic Old Steine building into 17-bedroom HMO sparks debate over housing and security in Brighton



The proposal to convert a prominent property at 47-48 Old Steine in Brighton into a 17-bedroom House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) highlights ongoing challenges and debates surrounding housing in the city. The planning application, submitted to Brighton and Hove City Council, seeks temporary permission for this conversion amid concerns regarding the property’s future occupancy and security. With the building's lease expiring shortly, the applicant notes that finding a new office tenant appears increasingly improbable given current market conditions.

In the application, the need for property guardianship is framed as a necessary measure to prevent squatting and maintain security in a potentially vacant, prominent site. The applicant asserts that the presence of guardians would help avoid the unsightly measures of securing the building with physical barriers, which could detract from the character of Old Steine, a historically significant area. The occupation of the building by these guardians, which allows for a flexible living arrangement rather than a full residential lease, aims to safeguard the property until a more permanent solution is realised.

Independent property analysts have echoed the challenges of attracting new office tenants to spaces lacking modern amenities. The opinion submitted with the planning application emphasises that prospective occupiers are increasingly discerning, favouring properties that meet elevated standards of quality, energy efficiency, and environmental sustainability. In this context, older office configurations, such as the one at Old Steine, face significant hurdles in appealing to modern businesses.

The conversion of larger residential buildings into HMOs is not without controversy in Brighton and Hove. Recent months have seen multiple objections from local residents to similar proposals, as seen in the case of plans for family homes in Portslade. Concerns centred on increased noise, parking shortages, and the potential alteration of the community's character. While developers argue that such changes will have minimal impact, local residents often highlight broader issues of property use and neighbourhood integrity.

Additionally, Brighton and Hove has been grappling with the quality of housing in HMOs across the city. A recent licensing scheme aims to address the often poor management and living conditions in such properties, targeting those with three or four occupiers. This initiative, launched with the intent of improving standards in the private rental sector, underscores a growing acknowledgment of the need for regulatory scrutiny as demand for affordable housing options rises.

Further complicating the landscape of property guardianship, reports have emerged regarding individuals being faced with eviction from their arrangements with little notice, leading to homelessness for many in the city. Such experiences illustrate the inherent vulnerabilities within this unconventional housing model. The UK government's guidance on property guardianship warns occupants that these arrangements are often less secure than traditional tenancy agreements and carry their own sets of risks.

The proposed transition of this historic building into a 17-bedroom HMO therefore embodies numerous themes affecting Brighton's property market today—accessibility, security, community impact, and the pressing need for quality housing solutions. As the planning process unfolds, it remains to be seen how local governance will strike a balance between the flexibility needed in evolving urban environments and the concerns of residents who cherish the character of their neighbourhoods.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. Paragraph 6
3. Paragraph 7
4. Paragraph 8
5. Paragraph 9
6. Paragraph 9

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25147768.brighton-regency-property-turned-17-bed-hmo/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/planning/planning-applications/find-and-comment-planning-applications> - Brighton & Hove City Council provides an online Planning Register where residents, businesses, and developers can view and comment on current and historic planning applications. The register allows users to search for applications by location, track progress, and set up alerts for updates. It also offers a map view to locate applications and provides information about agents submitting applications. To access the register, users need to create an account, which is separate from the council's MyAccount system.
* <https://www.brightonandhovenews.org/2024/04/02/dozens-object-to-plans-to-turn-family-homes-into-shared-houses/> - In April 2024, Brighton and Hove News reported on public objections to plans to convert two family homes on Eastbrook Road in Portslade into six-bedroom Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Residents expressed concerns about increased noise, parking issues, and the impact on the community's character. The planning applications argued that the changes would have a minor impact on the neighborhood, but local opposition highlighted broader debates about HMOs in residential areas.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c2q0rq5wx3ko> - In July 2024, BBC News reported on a new scheme introduced across Brighton and Hove to address poor property conditions and management standards in smaller Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The city-wide additional licensing scheme targets HMOs of two or more storeys with three or four occupiers, aiming to improve conditions in the private rented housing sector. Licence applications for property owners and managing agents opened on the same day, with a selective licensing scheme for certain private rented homes set to begin in September.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/property-guardians-fact-sheet/property-guardians-a-fact-sheet-for-current-and-potential-property-guardians> - The UK government's guidance on property guardianship provides information for current and potential guardians about their rights and responsibilities. It explains that property guardianship agreements are usually licences to occupy, differing from residential tenancies by requiring only 28 days' notice before eviction. The guidance emphasizes that properties used for guardianship are often not designed for residential use and may have health and safety hazards. It advises guardians to seek independent legal advice to fully understand their rights and responsibilities.
* <https://housingcoalition.co.uk/property-guardianship-evictions-scandal-brighton-dozens-made-homeless/> - In early 2024, the Housing Coalition reported on eviction notices served to dozens of property guardians in Brighton and Hove, leading to homelessness for many individuals. The article highlights the challenges faced by tenants in property guardianship schemes, where agreements can be terminated with short notice, leaving occupants vulnerable. The report underscores the need for better protections and support for individuals living in such arrangements, especially in cities with high housing demand like Brighton and Hove.
* <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/24308307.brighton-grade-ii-listed-building-offices-turn-hmo/> - In May 2023, The Argus reported on plans to convert offices in a Grade II listed building, Kingslake House in Union Street, Brighton, into a five-bedroom House in Multiple Occupation (HMO). The second floor of the building, which had been empty since 2023, was proposed to be transformed into a shared home with five bedrooms, two bathrooms, a utility room, and an open-plan kitchen and living room. The plans were approved by Brighton and Hove City Council, with the developer stating that the conversion would add to the city's vitality and vibrancy.