

## Annex A

### Press Release

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 1200 hrs ON MONDAY 15 DECEMBER 2008**

#### **ENVIRONMENT MINISTER LAUNCHES HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION PLAN FOR BELFAST**

Environment Minister Sammy Wilson, today launched a new plan to manage the number of multiple occupancy houses in Belfast shared by students and single people.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Subject Plan for Belfast will set limits on the number of houses in areas across the City that will be used for multiple occupation.

#### **The Minister explained:**

**“The Belfast Subject Plan offers a progressive approach to tackling the issue of multiple occupation houses and has been identified as an example of good planning practice by the Department for Communities and Local Government.**

**“The plan limits the number of houses that can be used for multiple occupation to 10% throughout most of the city and 30% in designated areas where such accommodation has already become concentrated.**

**“However, HMO development will continue to be encouraged in other places where it can make a contribution to regeneration. The Plan also promotes the development of purpose built student housing outside traditional residential areas.”**

The HMO plan seeks to address concerns in Belfast about the increasing number of such properties and the adverse impact they could have on residential areas such as the Holylands.

The plan also aims to protect residential areas while accommodating the need for multiple occupations and contributing to regeneration.

The subject plan supports the development of more purpose built student accommodation to ease the pressure on housing in the University area of the city.

Mr Wilson said the issue of HMOs could not be tackled by the Planning Service alone.

He added:

**“Joint working with other agencies, residents and landlords will be imperative if all the issues are to be addressed.”**

**The Minister praised the joint approach established by Belfast City Council which included the council, the Planning Service, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the universities and other agencies.**

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

1. HMOs are dwellings (flats or houses) which are occupied by 3 or more unrelated people as defined in the Planning (Use Classes) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004 and The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.
2. The issue of Houses of Multiple Occupation has received considerable media attention in the past, particularly in respect of the Holyland area of South Belfast.
3. Lifestyle choice and increases in house prices have led to a significant increase in multiple occupation. It tends to occur in larger and older properties closer to the City, e.g. South Belfast. Students, young singles and migrant workers are attracted to this market.
4. Copies of the Plan can be obtained from

Planning Service,  
Bedford House,  
Bedford Street,  
Belfast  
BT2 7FD  
Tel: 02890 252944

Alternatively the Plan can be viewed the Planning Service website  
<http://www.planningni.gov.uk/>

5. For media enquiries please contact DOE Press Office 028 9054 0014 or out of office hours, contact the EIS Duty Press Officer on pager 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.