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Part 1: Core Fire Safety Principles for HMO Project

Before diving into the report's contents, the design must first be built on these foundational principles, which should all be referenced and addressed within your Fire Strategy Report:

- **Critical Separation (60-Minute Standard):** The most fundamental requirement for a building of this type is robust compartmentation between the shop below and the HMO above. The ceiling of the shop and the floor of the HMO must provide a minimum of **60 minutes fire resistance** to prevent a fire in the commercial unit from spreading into the residential area.
- **Protected Escape Route (30-Minute Standard):** The internal stairway and corridors forming the sole escape route for the HMO residents must be protected. This is achieved through **30 minutes fire-resisting construction** (walls, floors, ceilings, and doors). This route must be kept sterile: clear of all storage, utilities (gas/electric meters), and must not pass through high-risk rooms like kitchens or lounges.
- **Fire Detection and Alarm System:** A suitable fire detection and alarm system is an absolute requirement for HMO licensing and for the building regulations. The standard for a two-storey HMO is typically a **Grade D, LD2** category system. This means mains-powered, interlinked smoke alarms in the escape route, lounge, and a heat alarm in the kitchen.
- **Fire Doors and Self-Closing Devices:** All doors leading onto the protected escape route—most importantly, the flat entrance doors (if the HMO is self-contained) and the kitchen door—must be **FD30-rated fire doors** (offering 30 minutes protection) with **intumescent strips and cold smoke seals**. These doors **must** be fitted with a **self-closing device** to ensure they are never propped open, which would compromise the protected route

Part 2: Essential Contents of Your Fire Strategy Report

Your Fire Strategy Report is the 'master blueprint' that documents how your design achieves the above. It is a vital document for Building Control and future building managers. It should be a detailed, structured document. The following is an essential checklist of sections to include, tailored specifically for a two-storey HMO over a shop.

Section 1: Project and Building Description

Provide a clear baseline for the design strategy. This section should include:

- The full project address and a description of the proposed development (conversion of upper floors to a 2-storey HMO above an existing shop).
- The key dimensions: gross internal floor area, building height, number of storeys.
- The proposed maximum occupancy and a description of the resident profile (e.g., 6 students / young professionals).
- The construction type (traditional masonry) and any features that impact fire safety.

Section 2: Applicable Regulations and Standards

Clearly state the legal and technical framework guiding your strategy:

- **Building Regulations 2010:** Specifically Part B (Volumes 1 & 2), Regulations 38 (Fire safety information), and 39 (Smoke alarms in HMOs).
- **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005:** To inform future management responsibilities for the 'Responsible Person'.
- **Approved Document B (Fire Safety):** The primary guidance document. You should refer to both Volume 1 (for the dwelling) and Volume 2 (for interactions with the shop).
- **British Standards:** This includes BS 5839-6 (Fire detection and alarm systems for dwellings) and BS 9991:2024 (Fire safety in residential buildings).

Section 3: Means of Escape Strategy

This is the core life safety section, detailing how occupants can exit safely. It must cover:

- **Evacuation Strategy:** For a small HMO, the strategy is **simultaneous evacuation**. Upon alarm, all residents leave the building immediately.
- **Escape Routes and Travel Distances:** Provide a marked-up plan showing the primary escape route, including details on travel distances (e.g., from furthest bedroom door to final exit). These must comply with ADB (typically 7.5m in a dead-end condition, 18m in a corridor).

- **Protected Route Specification:** Detail the construction of the stair enclosure and corridors, specifying the fire rating (30 minutes) and the requirement for self-closing FD30 fire doors. State clearly that the escape route does not pass through a kitchen or lounge.

Section 4: Compartmentation and Fire Resistance

This section details how the building is divided into 'fire cells' to contain a fire. It must specify:

- **Commercial vs. Residential Separation:** State the requirement for **60 minutes fire resistance** between the shop and HMO, including fully fire-stopping all penetrations and maintaining fire resistance of external walls where close to boundaries.
- **Internal Compartmentation:** Detail the **30-minute fire-resisting construction** for walls and floors separating the escape route from other parts of the building. This includes the requirement for **FD30 fire doors** and frames.

Section 5: Fire Detection and Alarm System

Provide a detailed specification for the fire alarm system based on the occupancy and layout of the HMO. This should include:

- **System Grade and Category:** Specify a **Grade D** (mains-powered with battery backup) and **Category LD2** system (covering escape routes and all circulation areas that form part of the escape route, as well as high-risk rooms like the kitchen and any living room).
- **Component Specification:** Provide a detailed schedule of devices, including interlinked mains smoke alarms in the escape route and living room, and a mains heat alarm in the kitchen. You should also mandate a remote test/hush facility for tenant use.
- **Power Supply:** State that the system must be wired on its own, non-switchable fused spur connected to the landlord's electrical supply, not a tenant's pay-as-you-go meter.

Section 6: Firefighting Provisions

Though simple, this section is necessary to show consideration for firefighter safety and basic firefighting equipment:

- **Firefighting Access:** State the building's provision for fire appliance access to the front of the premises and that a dry riser is not required (due to low height).
- **Firefighting Equipment:** Require a fire blanket in the HMO's kitchen, located away from directly above the hob, in accordance with BS 5306, Part 8.

Section 7: Smoke Control

For a building of this size, the strategy is naturally aspirated:

- **Ventilation:** Specify opening windows for smoke clearance from the escape stair and corridors. For internal corridors, you may need to specify a dedicated smoke ventilation system.
- **Smoke Control Plan:** Include a drawing marking the location of all permanent ventilators or opening windows.

Section 8: Management and Maintenance (Regulation 38)

This section bridges the gap between design and occupation, fulfilling the duties of the Principal Designer under Regulation 38 to hand over fire safety information. It should include:

- A requirement for a **Fire Risk Assessment (FRA)** to be carried out by a competent person prior to first occupation and reviewed annually.
- A logbook requirement for the landlord to record all system tests, maintenance, and drills.
- Requirements for the landlord to provide fire safety instructions to tenants upon move-in.

Part 3: Technical Specifications & Installation Details

To ensure a robust final design, your strategy must also specify the exacting standards for installation. The following are key technical points to include:

- **Airtightness of Fire Doors:** FD30 fire doors and their frames must be installed with **intumescent strips and cold smoke seals**. Letterboxes must be fire-resisting and arson-proof.
- **Door Ironmongery: Mortice escape locks** or night latches that can be opened from the inside without a key are required. The self-closing device must be correctly rated to close the door fully into its frame from any angle.
- **Escape Windows:** In bedrooms or living rooms where a protected route is not provided, escape windows may be required. These must have a clear opening of at least 0.33m², be no higher than 1100mm from the floor, and be unobstructed.
- **Electrical and Gas Safety:** All electrical installations must meet IET Wiring Regulations (BS 7671), and any gas appliances must be serviced annually by a Gas Safe registered engineer. These certificates must be kept on file.
- **Emergency Lighting:** Emergency lighting is not always required for a small, simple layout with good borrowed light. However, in a building with an enclosed stairway with no natural light, or where there are changes in level, a maintained emergency lighting system may be necessary. The strategy document should justify your choice either way.

Part 4: Post-Construction Information for the Building Owner

A crucial part of your duty as Principal Designer under CDM 2015 is to ensure that the building owner receives a **fire safety information pack** at handover. This pack, required under **Regulation 38 of the Building Regulations**, must include all the information the 'Responsible Person' (the building owner) needs to manage fire safety. It should include:

- A copy of your final **Fire Strategy Report**.
- 'As-built' drawings, including the locations of all fire-resisting walls and doors.
- Operation and maintenance manuals for the fire alarm system, emergency lighting, and any other installed equipment.
- A schedule of all fire doors with their certification.
- The final **Fire Risk Assessment (FRA)** for the building as it was built.

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By handing over this comprehensive pack, you ensure the building can be safely managed for its entire lifespan, closing the loop on your design responsibilities.

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