

NO USE EMPTY



ISSUE
TWO
AUTUMN
2006

LATEST NEWS FROM THE EAST KENT EMPTY PROPERTY INITIATIVE

COUNCIL COMMITS **£5M** TO HELP OWNERS BRING EMPTY PROPERTIES BACK INTO USE

Kent County Council has allocated a £5 million capital fund to support the No Use Empty campaign. The funding is a major boost for the initiative which is helping to bring empty properties back into use in East Kent.

The campaign is raising awareness of the problem and helping to make owners aware of the positive options available to them to bring their

properties back into use. There is free help and advice on offer to landlords, developers and owners of empty properties.

Kent County Council Cabinet member, Roger Gough, says: "We are delighted to agree this substantial funding for the No Use Empty campaign. No one wants to see disused empty properties along their road or in their neighbourhood and this will

help to transform these houses into useful quality homes."

"The capital fund highlights the commitment of Kent County Council, and our partner District Councils Dover, Shepway, Swale and Thanet, and will make a huge difference to helping create stronger communities across East Kent. We are looking forward to using this fund to work with property owners and landlords to

IN THIS ISSUE

- How Dover District Council helped turn a derelict hotel into housing
- Details of the Kent County Council empty properties acquisition scheme
- The campaign website is relaunched with an exciting range of new services

bring empty properties back to life."

For further information on the No Use Empty campaign, visit:

www.no-use-empty.org

or telephone the campaign hotline:

08458 247605.

DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL HELPS TURN DERELICT HOTEL INTO HOUSING

Dover District Council has helped transform a dilapidated hotel in Dover town centre into new accommodation, providing 28 one and two bedroom flats (see 'after' photo on front page). Having remained derelict for some years, the Metropole Hotel was to be given a new lease of life after being purchased by new owners. However, they were unable to meet the necessary costs required to transform the hotel into new flats.

A significant contribution was made by the council to help meet the renovation costs and the first tenants are expected to move in later this year. The new accommodation, which will be managed by a local Housing Association, is an excellent example of how intervention from a local authority can help turn an empty building going to waste, into new, much needed housing for the local community.



The Metropole in Dover was recently renovated following financial support from Dover District Council. The former hotel had been out of use for over 15 years but has now been converted into 28, one and two bedroom flats.

LOAN SCHEME IN PLACE FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

Landlords, developers and owners of empty properties can now apply to Kent County Council for a loan to help with funding renovation and refurbishment works to bring empty properties back onto the market for rental or sale.

This will be a major boost to help with costly refurbishment and improvement projects and

it presents new options to empty property owners, who may need financial help, from new roofing works to replacing rotten timbers and windows.

This is the first scheme of its kind to be launched by a County Council.

The participating District Council will 'sponsor' applications for renovation

loans to property owners. This will allow landlords and owners of empty properties to discuss their proposals with the empty property officers at an early stage and get good impartial advice on how best to bring their empty properties back into use.

Property owners will need to ensure that relevant planning permissions and building

regulation approvals are already in place. They will also need to provide timescales for the completion of the schemes.

For further information, contact the

No Use Empty hotline on **08458 247605** or your empty property officer.

Contact details are supplied on the back page of this newsletter.



BRINGING PROPERTIES BACK TO LIFE

Vacant and dilapidated properties can act as a disincentive to attracting new investment in an area. To tackle this problem, a further fund has been set up from the capital funding money available. The Kent Empty Property Acquisition Scheme will enable KCC to buy empty houses in regeneration areas, to help bring new investment into key neighbourhoods.

This is a big opportunity

for Kent County Council, in partnership with the participating District Councils, to target specific empty properties as part of wider regeneration activities, such as Margate Old Town, Dover Pride, Swale Forward and The Creative Foundation in Shepway.

Once Kent County Council has purchased an empty property it will be renovated and sold on the open market.

The money made from any sale of a property would then be returned to the capital fund, to ensure the continuation of this process for years to come.

The ability for Kent County Council to purchase these types of properties directly is a huge community benefit and demonstrates a real commitment towards housing regeneration activities and sustainable growth in housing

and the community.

This fund will help support already existing and new regeneration plans, and contribute to a positive future for a vibrant and growing community.

If you would like to discuss selling your empty property to Kent County Council, or have vacant dwellings that you think KCC should acquire please contact the campaign hot line on **08458 247605**

WWW.NO-USE-EMPTY.ORG

No Use Empty has launched a new range of on-line services to help and encourage home owners to bring their empty properties back into use. www.no-use-empty.org has undergone significant development to deliver a range of user-friendly services, and is an invaluable resource tool for anyone with an interest in empty properties.

The easy to navigate website now provides information on empty properties in each of the four Districts of Dover, Shepway, Swale and Thanet, in addition to helpful advice to owners of empty properties, or potential landlords, on how to let out a property.

Susan Pledger, the Initiative's project manager, said: "The purpose of the website is to provide a one-stop shop for anyone and everyone with an interest in empty property. In addition to providing everything you need to



know about the campaign and empty properties across the four districts, the website also provides information on legislation,

powers of Local Authorities, details of the new Housing Act and latest reports and statistics. We are pleased that the

website is now a major resource tool for everyone interested in getting empty properties back into use".

VISIT NO-USE-EMPTY.ORG FOR

- Advice on carrying out renovations and refurbishment to properties
- Over a hundred and fifty useful links and contact numbers in the empty property sector
- A buy to let calculator which enables potential new owners of empty property to analyse the figures of purchasing a property and the return expected on letting.
- A form which enables people to report an empty property, and to make an inquiry if interested in buying one.
- Advice on how to find good quality building contractors

EMPTY PROPERTY MASTERCLASS

The No Use Empty campaign hosted a special seminar to help Empty Property Officers from across Kent increase their knowledge and understanding of the latest legislation, which can help bring empty properties back into use.

The one day seminar was attended by 37 empty property practitioners from all Kent District Councils. The day included presentations from a series of keynote speakers from across the country, who were able to deliver a national perspective on key

issues facing the sector.

As part of the £5 million capital fund, a Partnership Fund has been created which will provide additional resources for the four Districts to maintain proactive work in encouraging owners to bring their empty properties back into use.

This could include assisting District Councils with enforcement procedures to embark on a compulsory purchase of a property or an enforced sale. Such actions are always viewed as a measure of last resort, and not a plan of action that will be taken lightly by District Councils.

MEET THE TEAM

Each newsletter will feature a profile of a member of the No Use Empty team. For the autumn issue, Iain Cobby, Empty Homes Officer at Shepway District Council, takes the hot seat and talks us through a typical day at work ...

I'm in the office before 9.00am and spend the first part of the morning responding to e-mails, being busy on the telephone speaking to other officers, and updating my computer of yesterday's events.

I travel all over Shepway and carry out checks on the empty properties I am working on. This involves travelling to the farthest points of the district, Dungeness, Lydd and Brookland, however the majority of my work is centred on Folkestone.

I drive past a site where they are demolishing two buildings that have been empty for years, to make way for a block of nine flats. Great news! That's empty home work for you. Seeds are sown to reap a harvest for the future. Nothing is quick, you just have to bide your time and be patient.

After a quick sandwich for lunch, I take a call from a lady who owns an empty property in Hythe. I have received several complaints from neighbours over the condition of this 1960s semi and wrote to her some time ago to ask what her intentions were for the property, which was in need of some minor repair. She was calling to inform

me that the repairs had now been carried out, and because of my intervention, she was now in the process of selling the property.

What a result, the lady gets a fair price for her property and has money to put into another house for her son, the neighbours get new owners who will restore the house to its former glory and the price of property in the area increases. Furthermore, everyone gets a neighbourhood without the possibility of vandalism or a haven for drug abuse.

The life of an empty property officer can be a frustrating one. You need to be tenacious, yet patient, but ultimately it is a very important and rewarding job. I set off home satisfied with my day's work, and wondering what new challenges tomorrow will bring.



Iain Cobby



Susan Pledger, Project Manager, with guest speakers at the empty property seminar

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