

NO USE EMPTY



ISSUE
THREE
SUMMER
2007

LATEST NEWS FROM THE EAST KENT EMPTY PROPERTY INITIATIVE

ENFORCED SALE SHOWS CAMPAIGN IS NO EMPTY THREAT

Thanet District Council with the support of No Use Empty, the campaign which is helping to bring empty properties back into use across East Kent, has successfully completed its first enforced sale on a property in Cliftonville which has been falling into disrepair for over 20 years.

In what is believed to be the first case of its kind in Kent, the property at 77 Eastern Esplanade has been an eyesore on the sea front for years, attracting vandalism, squatters and antisocial behaviour.

The property had long been a key target for Thanet District Council to bring back into use, and following guidance and advice from experts in the No Use Empty team, legislation was invoked which enabled the council to take control of the property. The Law of Property Act 1925 states that a local authority with a debt on a property can, under certain circumstances, register the debt as a first charge with the Land Registry. This would even take precedence over a mortgage and the Council is empowered under law to enforce the sale

of the property, which has now been completed.

The building, which comprises of four flats, has been sold to one of the Council's preferred affordable housing partners, the Town and Country Housing Group, who will be refurbishing it over the next year, with the four flats eventually being offered on a shared ownership basis. Such affordable housing schemes allow people on a low income to own part of the equity of the property and acquire more at a later stage when they can afford to, thereby helping them on to the property ladder.

Empty Property Officer at Thanet District Council, Mike Thompson said: "The training we received, thanks to the No Use Empty campaign, gave us a far faster route to bring this property back into use. Hopefully this will send out a strong message to those owners with derelict properties in Thanet that the Council will take whatever action is required to bring them back into use, providing much needed homes for people."

Susan Pledger, project manager of the No Use Empty campaign said: "The No Use Empty campaign is designed to offer training and support to

IN THIS ISSUE

- How Thanet District Council completed its first enforced sale procedure
- No Use Empty's plans to role out across Kent
- Why Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Regeneration at Kent County Council thinks tackling the problem of empty property is so important



Mike Thompson, Thanet District Council, hands over the keys to the new property owners

the East Kent District Councils in cases such as these and help bring back into use empty properties which otherwise have a negative effect on neighbourhoods, and act as obstacles to wider regeneration. This is a great example of how Kent County Council has worked in partnership with Thanet to achieve something hugely beneficial for the community."

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

www.no-use-empty.org

or telephone the campaign hotline:

08458 247605.

DISTRICTS HIT THE TARGET

Empty property officers across the four partnering District Councils have had an outstanding year, bringing over 170 properties across East Kent back in to use, comfortably exceeding their target for the last 12 months.

Over the last year, the initiative has been busy providing free help and advice to owners of empty properties raising awareness of the widespread problems caused to communities by empty housing, and holding training sessions

and workshops for Empty Property Officers. This support and guidance has helped the District's to improve their performance, contributing towards and complementing their work in combating empty housing in their local communities.

Susan Pledger, project manager of the No Use Empty campaign said "These figures are extremely encouraging, and are testimony to the hard work of the Empty Property Officers across the four Districts. This is a truly pioneering scheme, the first of its kind in the

country. Our partnership approach of pooling the skills, knowledge and resources of the County Council with the Districts has had a significant

influence in recycling property; turning empty dilapidated houses into much needed new homes for local people."



STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS

FIRST LOAN AGREED

At the time of going to press the campaign is delighted to report that it has made its first offer of a loan to an owner of an empty property. The loan will help pay for renovations to restore a

four bedroom house on the High Street in Ramsgate. The loan scheme is funded by Kent Council's £5 million capital investment programme and the campaign hopes this will be the first of many loans

made to home owners to help bring empty properties back into use across the region.

CAMPAIGN TO GO WEST...AND NORTH AND SOUTH!

Having successfully reached, and substantially surpassed, its targets for 2006/2007 in helping to bring empty properties in East Kent back into use, No Use Empty is now setting its sights on new horizons!

The intention has always been to expand the scheme to all Kent District Councils once the initial campaign got up and running. Project manager Susan Pledger is now in

discussions with other Districts with a view to expanding the initiative across Kent.

Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Regeneration at Kent County Council: "We have proved the initiative is an effective and efficient approach to tackling empty housing in East Kent and now we are looking forward to expanding our work and welcoming new members to the partnership.



Augustus conubium santet quinquennalis fiducia suis.

We already have a good working relationship with Empty Property Officers in Districts from across the

county, and we hope that a number of them will join the campaign over the course of this year"

NO USE EMPTY IN ACTION

DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL GIVES EMPTIES A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

The campaign has helped Dover District Council bring a long term empty property, back into use. 11 Hardwicke Road, Dover has been derelict since 1988 and for years has been a blight on the neighbourhood, attracting vandalism and having a negative effect on the

surrounding properties. Notice was given to the owner warning him that a compulsory purchase would be carried out unless action was taken to improve the property. He was able to work closely with the No Use Empty campaign to advice and encourage the owner to

approach a local estate agent, who arranged the sale of the property within weeks. Cllr Sue Nichols, Cabinet Member for Dover District Council said: "This is a fantastic example of how Dover, working in partnership with Kent County Council under the

No Use Empty Initiative, is making a real difference. It is a credit to the hard work of all parties involved that, after nearly 20 years, this property will be given a new lease of life and become a home once again."

A UNITED FRONT THE KEY TO UNLOCKING EMPTY PROPERTIES

Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Regeneration at Kent County Council, explains why Kent County Council is so committed to tackling empty housing

The debate surrounding the lack of availability of affordable housing across the region repeatedly overlooks an important aspect of the equation. New homes are being built across Kent, but there is already a vast housing resource in the county going to waste - empty houses.

This campaign, by tackling the issue head-on, harnessing the experience and skills across our partner Districts and backed by a £5 million funding programme, is making a real difference to turning derelict, empty properties, into much

needed new housing. As well as the direct benefit of increasing the availability of affordable housing, the scheme will also play a critical role in the long-term regeneration of our coastal towns. As magnets for anti-social behaviour, de-valuing neighbouring properties, bringing such properties back into use will help improve confidence and act as a spur for regeneration and new investment into the East Kent area.

Kent County Council is fully committed to this initiative and is grateful to the support of its partner District Councils which has enabled us to create this unique partnership approach to creating much needed new housing across East Kent.



Roger Gough

SUMMER ISSUE

Brian George, Environmental Health and Empty Homes Officer for Swale Borough Council, operates across a district which is urban and rural and includes the North Kent Coast, Sittingbourne, Faversham, Sheerness and numerous villages with a total population of approximately 130,000.



Brian George

Empty housing is just one part of my overall job remit, and I try to devote one day a week bringing empty properties back into use. I work closely with Andrew Lavender from Kent County Council, who is a consultant to the No Use Empty initiative, and typically our day will begin with a meeting to plan the day ahead.

Our first port of call is the Isle of Sheppey to visit two long-term empty properties, one of which has been empty for eight years, and we have the keys to the front door! There is a mountain of mail in the lobby even though the letterbox is boarded up. The postman conveniently passes by and she says that due to the letterbox being boarded, all mail is returned to sender. Previously this property has been subject to entry by the Council as 'filthy

and verminous' when a warrant was obtained to enter the property - that's why we have the keys!

We know the owner's London address and I have contacted the London Borough concerned for verification. If no dialogue is forthcoming, which there has not been so far, then Compulsory purchasing the property may be an option. There are no outstanding charges on the property, so the Enforced Sale procedure may not be an option, more discussions with Andrew to develop a way forward.

Onwards and upwards to the next long term property on the Island, which has been vacant for ten years. I have the ownership details; there are complications with the Title - Land Registry, on which the owners are seeking legal advice. The owners live in Essex and are both wheelchair bound. I also have owners' son and a joint visit to the property is imminent to discuss how the property could be successfully brought back into use.

Our next appointment is a meeting with the owner of a property in Teynham. The owner is heavily in debt and we are in agreement that an Empty Dwelling Management Order may be

the best way of bringing the property back into use. We decide to draw up a schedule of works, contact all the companies who have a charge on the property and consolidate our case for presentation to the Residential Property Tribunal. Our purpose is to use the newly introduced Empty Dwelling Management Orders to help this owner resolve his financial issues so that the property can be brought back into housing use.

The three properties looked at today are all modern properties built from mid 70's onwards and not

dilapidated or in serious disrepair, but remain empty for different reasons. Back to the office to discuss the next properties on the "hit list". Some good news! An owner of a 1880's mid terrace which has been boarded up for ten years has agreed to sell the property (subject to contract) to the Council, having had an independent valuation carried out. The day has been interesting and new leads have been uncovered, working jointly with Andrew helps me to prioritise my workload and focus on empty properties for that day.

CONTACT FILE

Susan Pledger, Project Manager,
01622 696 814 susan.pledger@kent.gov.uk

Andrew Lavender, Project Consultant,
08458 247 605 andrew.lavender@kent.gov.uk

Brian George, Swale Borough Council,
01795 417 232 briangeorge@swale.gov.uk

Iain Cobby, Shepway District Council,
01303 853 349 iain.cobby@shepway.gov.uk

John Day, Dover District Council,
01304 872 302 johnday@dover.gov.uk

Mike Thompson, Thanet District Council,
01843 577 408 mike.thompson@thanet.gov.uk

NO USE EMPTY HOTLINE 08458 247 605
WWW.NO-USE-EMPTY.ORG