

# NO USE EMPTY



# ISSUE FOUR SPRING 2008

**LATEST NEWS FROM THE EAST KENT EMPTY PROPERTY INITIATIVE**

## CAMPAIGN GOES WEST AND WELCOMES TRIO OF NEW MEMBERS

**The No Use Empty initiative has welcomed three new District Councils to the partnership to take the campaign against empty housing in the county to West Kent.**

Since the campaign was launched in November 2005, Kent County Council has worked alongside the District Councils of Dover, Shepway, Swale and Thanet to tackle the problem of empty housing in the coastal towns of East Kent.

Kent County Council is now joining forces with the local councils of Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, and Tonbridge and Malling to tackle the 1,360 empty properties in West Kent and bring as many as possible back into use. In the same way Kent County Council works with its East Kent partners, the initiative will complement the work already being carried out by the individual District Councils to

combat empty housing, providing an additional resource and expert advice for Empty Property Officers at each council.

Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Regeneration at Kent County Council, said: "It was always our intention to roll out the initiative across Kent and I'm delighted we've taken this significant step forward in engaging the support of the local councils in West Kent.

"We have already proved that the initiative is an effective and efficient approach to tackling empty housing in East Kent, and with the support of our new members I'm sure the initiative will make an equal impact in West Kent. The long term goal is for the

initiative to embrace the whole of Kent and we look forward to welcoming new partners from across the county very soon.

The three new councils were welcomed to the initiative at an event hosted by Kent County Council at East Malling Conference Centre. Attended by local councillors, housing officers, and local community groups, the event provided a platform from which to launch the event to West Kent, while giving a cross section of people the opportunity to talk to the No Use Empty team and discuss how the campaign can make a difference.

Councillor Catherine Mayhew from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council said: "We have seen the impact the No Use Empty initiative has had in helping bring empty properties back into use in neighbouring East Kent. We are delighted to be teaming up with Kent County Council to pool resources and knowledge among the districts of West Kent to help boost the fight against derelict housing in our region."

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

[www.no-use-empty.org](http://www.no-use-empty.org)

or telephone the campaign hotline on **08458 247605**.

### IN THIS ISSUE

- Thanet District Council brings Ramsgate Property back into use.
- 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.

### FULL HOUSE

Maidstone, Dartford, Gravesham, Canterbury and Ashford are set to sign up too!

Hot on the heels of welcoming three new councils from West Kent, another five Kent authorities have also followed suit and look forward to joining the No Use Empty partnership. As the initiative gathers momentum, No Use Empty is now becoming a truly Kent-wide campaign embracing all the county's district councils. Find out more about the fight against empty housing in Maidstone, Dartford, Canterbury, Ashford and Gravesham in the next issue of No Use Empty.



From left to right: Cllr Mrs Jill Anderson, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Cllr Mayhew, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Roger Gough, Cabinet member for Regeneration, Kent County Council, and Cllr Carol Clark, Sevenoaks District Council

# FIRST LOAN AGREED TO RESTORE PROPERTY IN RAMSGATE

The campaign is delighted to have approved its first loan which is paying for essential renovations to bring a derelict property on Ramsgate's High Street back into use.

The loan has been granted to the owner of a four bedroom house which has been vacant for almost five years, and will enable the owner to carry out extensive renovation works, including a new roof, re-wiring, central heating and new windows. The work is expected to be completed this Spring, creating a brand new family home in a prime location in Ramsgate

Mr Squirrel the owner of the property and beneficiary of

the loan said: "The loan we have received from the No Use Empty campaign has made the difference between the house falling into further disrepair, and turning the property into a new home. With No Use Empty's support we have been able to rescue this house and we would encourage other owners of empty properties to make the most of this scheme and apply for a loan."

Kent County Council Cabinet Member, Roger Gough, said: "This loan scheme highlights the commitment of the County Council and our District Council partners to tackling the problem of empty properties to help build stronger communities

across the region. We're delighted to have granted what we hope will be the first of many loans to owners of empty properties."

Councillor Zita Wiltshire, Cabinet Member for Housing at Thanet District Council said: "The No Use Empty initiative is very supportive of our own strategy to combat empty housing and we're delighted that the first loan has been granted to bring a property back into use in Ramsgate."

The campaign is currently processing further loan applications and looks forward to releasing further funds to successful applicants throughout the course of the year.



L-R Cllr Wiltshire, Mr Squirrel, Lois Maiga, Roger Gough

# NO USE EMPTY IN ACTION!

Thanet District Council gives empty property a new lease of life.

The campaign has supported Thanet District Council to bring another long term empty property back into use.

19, Turner Street in Margate was owned by an elderly gentleman who sadly passed away after having spent four years in care. A land registry search, probate registry search and the gentleman's will showed no beneficiaries of the property when Thanet District Council were alerted to it only last year by a neighbour. The property was in a derelict state, becoming a blight on the neighbourhood, attracting vandalism and having a negative effect on the surrounding properties. Thanet contacted the Government's Treasury Solicitors and the next step was to get a warrant for entry through the magistrates' court.

The property needs a good deal of restoration such as a new roof covering to the single storey bathroom extension as the ceiling has



been brought down by water ingress. The bathroom floor has rotted over the period of time - the WC pan has ended up in the cellar! An improvement notice has been put on the property to enable essential works to be carried out so that it can be sold. The rest of the works such as the modernisation works it so desperately needs will be covered by a Suspended Improvement Notice which will require the new owner to undertake these works within a given period of time. This ensures that the property will meet the necessary standards to provide good quality housing.

Mike Thompson, Empty Housing Officer for Thanet District Council said: "This is a fantastic example of how Thanet, 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 so many years, this property will be given a new lease of life and become a home once again."

# FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Regeneration at Kent County Council, explains how the campaign is gaining strength by numbers but warns of the hard work ahead:



As the campaign celebrated its second anniversary at the turn of the year, we can look back and be immensely proud at what we have all achieved. Initially targeting East Kent where the problem of empty housing is particularly acute, the partnership has worked incredibly hard in providing free help and advice to owners of empty properties, encouraging them to bring their properties back into use

and explaining the options which are available to them.

There has also been an important exercise in educating owners of the problems their properties are causing local communities. There is also the small matter of owners losing out financially, as they are depriving themselves of a valuable income stream through regular rent or a one off lump sum through a sale. On the other side of the equation, the team has also been working with local developers and housing associations who are interested in acquiring empty properties for renovation into new homes.

We have also held a number of very successful workshops for Empty Property Officers across Kent, which have included keynote speakers from across the UK. The aim of these sessions is to provide guidance on the latest regulation and legislation, to help equip officers with the expertise and skills to help

them achieve their targets for bringing empty properties back into use.

As part of our commitment to working with owners, the campaign launched its loan scheme which is providing loans to owners to help pay for renovations to bring their empty property back into use. Research shows that paying for expensive but essential renovation is one of the biggest obstacles to bringing empty properties back into use, so being able to provide such loans is a tremendous weapon in our fight against empty homes.

Since the campaign began, over 408 properties have been brought back into use, and scores more are in the pipeline. This is a result of the hard work and dedication of the team of empty property officers across Dover, Shepway, Swale and Thanet. Recycling empty properties can be a time consuming, and often frustrating process for the team, with a myriad of legal red tape and

bureaucracy to overcome. Patience, persistence and commitment are the qualities which the empty property officer must have in abundance to succeed, and we're fortunate in East Kent to have a fantastic team on board all pulling together.

Now we have proved that the initiative is an efficient and effective approach to tackling empty property in East Kent, we are confident of making a similar impact in West Kent. We are delighted to have welcomed on board the local councils of Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, and Tonbridge & Malling. We look forward to welcoming new partners throughout the year so as a county we can present a united front to recycling housing and creating new homes for people across Kent.

While tremendous progress has been made by everyone to date, we are under no illusions that this is just the beginning and there is a lot of hard work ahead of us.

## FIRST EDMO FOR SWALE PROPERTY

The Residential Property Tribunal Service (RPTS) has granted permission for an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) to be served on a property in Teynham. The decision which is the culmination of work by Swale Borough Council and No Use Empty has already brought this long-term empty property to bring it back into use.

When the Teynham property came to attention of Swale Borough Council, it had stood empty for over a year, falling into disrepair. The owner owed a significant amount of money and was

unable to sell up because the property was worth less than the debt. Neither was renting the property an option, due to its sub-standard condition.

No Use Empty worked in partnership with Swale BC and the owner to find a solution acceptable to all parties. It was agreed that placing an EDMO on the property would allow the necessary work to be carried out on the property which could then be let out on behalf of the owner and the money used to clear the debt.

The EDMO was formally agreed at the beginning of

November 2007, with refurbishment commencing soon after. By January this year these works were complete and the property has now been let to a young family.

Councillor David Simmons, portfolio holder for housing and health at Swale Borough Council said: "The No Use Empty initiative is very supportive of our own strategy to combat empty housing and we're delighted that this EDMO has been granted to allow the necessary renovations to be carried out and bring this property back into use."



# EMPTY PROPERTY OFFICERS

## GO BACK TO SCHOOL



Susan Pledger, No Use Empty Project Manager

**The campaign has hosted the latest in its popular programme of training courses for Empty Property Officers, aimed at increasing their knowledge and understanding of legislation to help them bring empty properties back into use.**

Shepway District Council hosted a seminar on the Residential Property Tribunal,

which was followed by a workshop on the Decent Homes Standard, hosted by Swale District Council.

The courses were attended by over 56 delegates from all across Kent, preparing officers for the Residential Property Tribunal hearings and how to achieve the decent home standard for empty property refurbishment. Further

courses of this nature have been arranged for early 2008 and will relate to the Housing Health & Safety Rating System, and enforcement of the provisions of the Housing Act 2004.

Susan Pledger, Project Manager of No Use Empty said; "The purpose of these courses is to provide an opportunity for empty

property officers across Kent to increase their knowledge and understanding of key legislation which in turn helps them in their work to return more empty properties back into use. The event also provided empty property officers from across Kent the opportunity to meet, share experiences and best practice and learn from each other."

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