



The good from the bad and the ugly

KENT has bucked the national trend by bringing 2,000 empty properties back into use and safeguarding 300 jobs.

The county's pioneering No Use Empty campaign has boosted neighbourhoods and transformed empty shops, warehouses, a redundant chapel, an old school house and abandoned or unfinished homes.

For nearly seven years, a partnership between Kent County Council and district councils has created a scheme widely regarded as a UK role model. It won a Regeneration and Renewal Award for Partnership Working.

Since 2005, when 9,000 empty properties were identified, nearly 2,000 have been returned to use, helping an estimated 6,000 people.

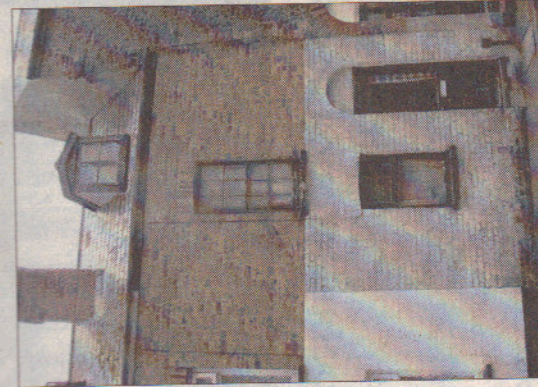
Steve Grimshaw, KCC's regeneration project manager, said it has made a significant impact and safeguarded 300 jobs.

"Empty homes are not only a drain on owners, they are a drain on the community as a whole, in that they often prove to be a magnet for anti-social behaviour and crime, decrease adjacent property prices and deter investment."

Around £5.3m has been advanced already, bringing in a further £10.9m, boosting total investment to more than £16m. Loans of £25,000 - £175,000 are available with 90% maximum loan to value.

So far, there have been no defaults. "It goes through a very rigorous process of application," said KCC's Andrew Lavender. "It delivers results and is very cost-effective. We get a large number of developers who can't access funding from the banks."

KCC and the districts are poised to bid for up to £10m to extend the scheme to 2018.



Turner Street, Margate, before and after renovation

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