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Offers of loans to create homes

LANDLORDS are being offered a helping hand to bring empty buildings back into use in a bid to tackle the housing shortage.

For the first time, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is offering to support applications for interest-free loans by commercial and private landlords.



TOWN CENTRE EYESORE: Former cinema in Tunbridge Wells



Kevin Lynes, KCC Cabinet Member

The loans, ranging from £25,000 to £175,000, are funded by Kent County Council under its No Use Empty scheme.

The role of the borough council will be to provide its county counterpart with a steady flow of suitable candidates.

Kent County Council's cabinet member for regeneration and economic development, Kevin Lynes, said: "It is great news that Tunbridge Wells will now be participating in the loan scheme.

"We need to put empty homes to use to meet the increasing demand for quality, affordable housing across the county."

Derelict houses also have an impact on the price of nearby occupied properties and serve as a magnet for crime and antisocial behaviour, so returning them to use has a positive impact on the community as a whole.

"We welcome loan applications from owners of empty properties across Tunbridge Wells who want to take positive action."

The loans will be interest free for three years, although new borrowers in the current financial year will have to repay their loan by March 31, 2014.

Loans taken out during next year will be repayable on March 31, 2015.

In the event of a property being sold prior to the loan agreement date, the money becomes repayable immediately.

The scheme is primarily concerned with bringing residential properties back into use that have lain empty for six months or more.

However, the scheme will also support loan applications for commercial premises where planning permission has been given for conversion to residential accommodation.

Launched in 2005, the No Use Empty scheme has so far returned 1,729 empty homes to use with a further 600 envisaged by March 2013.

The No Use Empty team, which has been working with the Housing Renewal unit in Tunbridge Wells since the scheme's official adoption on June 28, will be attending the Landlords Forum, to be held at the offices of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council on October 3.

Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling, and Sevenoaks councils have all invited owners of empty properties in their areas to attend.