

EMPTY PROPERTIES

Cheers! White Lion's new life creates jobs and homes

by Trevor Sturgess

business editor

TIME may have been called on a derelict pub but it's about to be given a new lease of life as affordable homes.

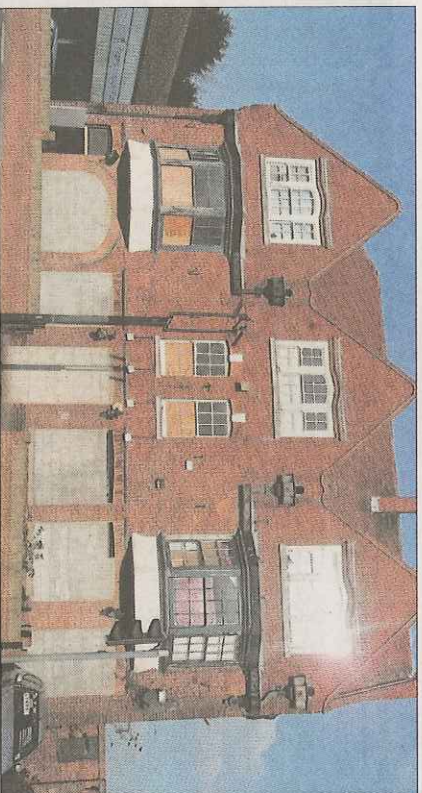
The White Lion in Cheriton, near Folkestone, which pulled its last pint five years ago, is one of several empty commercial properties in the sights of Kent County Council's pioneering No Use Empty (NUE) scheme. One – the Arcadian, Margate – has already been transformed.

The award-winning project, recognised in the partnership work and Renewal Awards, has already brought hundreds of homes back into use.

Now a £2m injection, with £795,000 from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and £1.2m from the Kent Regeneration Fund, will enable it to target larger properties.

The scheme aims to give jobs to local builders and tradesmen as well as eliminating eyesores that blight a neighbourhood.

The move follows KCC's link-up with AmicusHorizon, the social hous-



The former White Lion pub in Cheriton and, right, Steve Grimshaw of Kent County Council

Pictures: Andrew Scorgie

ing provider and management business based in Sittingbourne.

Under the new initiative, NUE – widely regarded as a UK role model – will offer interest-free loans of up to £250,000 (repayable in three years) to owners of large empty buildings who wish to transform them into affordable family homes.

Owners taking out a NUE loan must transfer the new homes to AmicusH-

orizon – winner of the 2012 KEiBA award for customer service and commitment – to let the homes, manage them and guarantee rental income for up to five years.

After the term, the owner is free to either extend the agreement with AmicusHorizon, or rent the homes privately.

With the economy struggling, declining house building, redun-

dancy and a shortage of property to rent in both private and public sectors, demand for affordable homes is rising. Bringing empty properties back into use is an important way of easing the crisis.

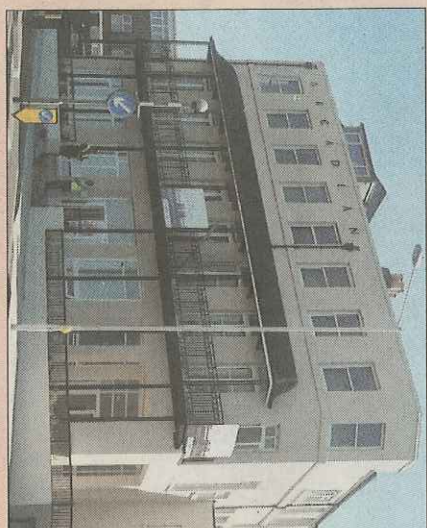
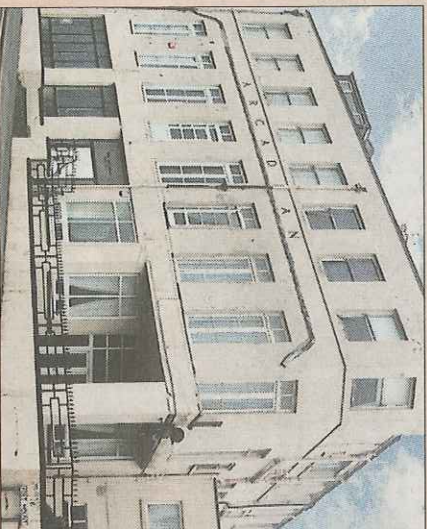
"We're looking for any building that's been empty for more than two years," said Steve Grimshaw, NUE project manager.

"The additional funding allows us to focus on larger properties such as pubs and hotels which are empty, and in many cases derelict, which can be converted into a number of new homes.

"Given the difficulties facing many first-time buyers, particularly in the South East, we are encouraging owners of larger empty buildings to create affordable family homes. The partnership with Amicus Horizon further reduces the risk for owners and developers as it essentially guarantees rental income for up to five years in what is a very difficult market."

Colleen Trickle of AmicusHorizon said: "This is a wonderful scheme that can get empty properties back into use very quickly.

"We already manage 7,000 homes in Kent and hope that our partnership with KCC will serve as an incentive for owners of larger buildings to convert them into affordable family homes, which in turn should have a positive impact on the street scene and create much-needed jobs."



Three No Use Empty scheme was used for the Arcadian Hotel, pictured here before and after renovation

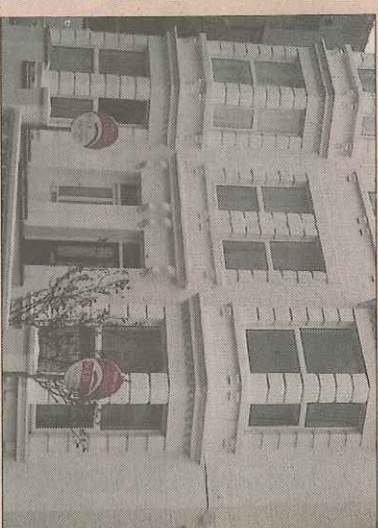
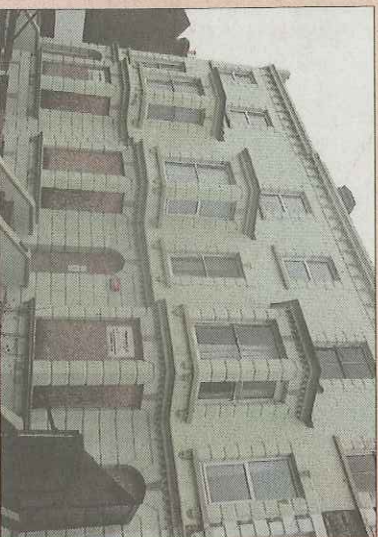
Journey from run-down hotel to award-winning building

The No Use Empty scheme transformed the Arcadian Hotel, Margate, into 14 flats.

The hotel was built in the late 1800s. Before the recent redevelopment by developer Geoffrey Berger, the block had been unoccupied and run down

to the point of dereliction, reducing a once iconic building to a local eyesore. Thanet District Council, a partner in the scheme, targeted the site for regeneration and worked with Mr Berger once he had acquired the site to raise the necessary finance for work to start.

No Use Empty provided an interest-free loan of £175,000, with Mr Berger providing the rest of the funding for the project. In May last year, the Arcadian was nominated for a Civic Society architectural award.



Another property transformed under the No Use Empty scheme in Norfolk Road, Cliftonville

Pictures: Andrew Scorgie

FACTFILE

- £18m - total investment in the No Use Empty scheme since 2005
- £25,000 - loan per unit repayable in 3 years
- £5.5m - loans issued by KCC since 2005
- £12.5m - Additional private funding leveraged by the KCC loans
- 7,057 - number of empty properties in Kent, 2,000 fewer than the original figure
- 450 - number of units brought back into use in 2011 against a target of 200