



SOUTH EAST
LOCAL ENTERPRISE
PARTNERSHIP

KENT EMPTY PROPERTY INITIATIVE NUE COMMERCIAL PHASE II – KENT DISTRICTS

The primary aim of the No Use Empty (NUE) Initiative is to improve the physical urban environment in Kent, by bringing empty properties back into use as quality housing accommodation and to raise awareness of the issues surrounding empty properties, highlighting the problems they cause to local communities.

However, over the years it has supported the conversion of vacant space above empty commercial units which have also been returned to use but without loan support.

NUE secured £2m from the Growing Places Fund (GPF) and will provide short-term secured **interest free loans** to bring empty commercial properties back into use for alternative commercial, residential or mixed-use purposes across Kent.

The GPF was established by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (formerly the Department for Communities and Local Government) and the Department for Transport (DfT) in 2011. The aim of this funding is to unlock economic growth, create jobs and ‘kick-start’ house building at stalled development sites.

The NUE Commercial Phase II project will build on the success of Phase I of the project which exceeded our expectations. A total of 15 empty commercial properties were brought back into use and 28 residential homes created.

The project will continue to focus on empty commercial properties in town centre locations (particularly in coastal areas of Kent), where secondary retail and other commercial areas have been significantly impacted by changing consumer demand and have often been neglected because of larger regeneration schemes.

The project has a target to return 18 empty commercial properties back into use and create 36 residential homes.

The project has a completion date of Spring 2026.

Loan amount to be discussed with the NUE team as this will be dependent on availability of funds as each new project is approved. The maximum loan term is 36 months.

Loan Applications will be processed by the NUE team.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This booklet details the property renovation loans to be made available through the Kent Empty Property Initiative. This is a scheme that has been developed to offer short-term secured interest free loans to bring empty commercial properties back into use for alternative commercial, residential, or mixed-use purposes across Kent. This booklet describes how the Loan Scheme will operate, how to make an application and the conditions that will be attached to the loans.

All loans approved will be subject to a few conditions to ensure that the loan fund monies are “recycled” to assist further empty property development schemes.

Any offer of a loan is not guaranteed until you have received formal approval from Kent County Council. Any works you undertake prior to this approval will be at your own risk.

Any queries relating to this scheme and loan conditions should be referred to Steve Grimshaw, Strategic Programme Manager, No Use Empty (Kent Empty Property Initiative), 2nd Floor Invicta House, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1XX Telephone no 03000 417084 or email steve.grimshaw@kent.gov.uk

2.0 APPLICATION FEES

An invoice will be raised to collect the appropriate fee amount. This must be paid prior to the release of the loan facility agreement and legal charge documents (subject to the approval of the loan). Details of how to pay will be provided on the invoice.

From 1st October 2021 the following fees will apply:

Administration Fee

An administration fee will be required as a contribution towards the costs of processing your application. Scale of fees applicable:

Loan Value	No of Units	Admin Fee	VAT (subject to current rate 20%)	Total amount due
£25,000	1	£450.00	£90.00	£540.00
£50,000 to £75,000	2-3	£550.00	£110.00	£660.00
£100,000 to £150,000	4-6	£700.00	£140.00	£840.00
£175,000	7	£900.00	£180.00	£1080.00
Loan discharge fee (per title) (Payable on repayment of Loan)		£125.00	£25.00	£150.00

Land Registry Fee

Our Legal Services provider are required to register a first or second charge on the property being offered as security of loan.

For loans up to £100,000.00 the fee is £60.00 per title.

For loans over £100,001.00 the fee is £80.00 per title.

In addition to the above, a Company applying for a Loan will also be required to pay a fee of £45.00 to cover costs associated with registering the charge at Companies House.

Valuation Fee

- All applications must be supported by a valuation report to be undertaken by a member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) on the property offered as security for the loan. The report should confirm current market value, potential value (on completion) rental income (if loan to let).
- The cost of the valuation is payable by the applicant and no application for a loan will be processed without this document.
- Please note that Kent County Council must be named as an interested party and the surveyor must note that KCC is relying on the valuation report for loan application.
- It is recommended that applicants source their own approved surveyor to carry this out. See Section 5.0 Loan Security for further information.

3.0 THE LOAN SCHEME

3.1 PURPOSE FOR WHICH A LOAN MAY BE APPLIED FOR

To renovate/or convert an empty commercial property into one or more units to the Decent Homes Standard, (as a minimum), so that it is suitable for immediate occupation, whether by for sale (loan to sell) or to let (loan to let) and retain/create commercial space.

Persons applying for the above loans may either be existing or prospective owners, but in either case must be able to supply security for the loan as detailed in Section 5.

3.2 ELIGIBLE WORKS

To be eligible works, the works must: -

- On completion, result in the property/units being suitable for immediate occupation as a dwelling(s) and provide commercial space
- Comply with all relevant Building Regulations; and
- Achieve the Decent Homes Standard - see Appendix D.

A schedule of works will be agreed with the applicant prior to the offer of any loan and will form part of the loan conditions.

Any costs, which would be eligible for assistance under an insurance claim or third-party claim, will not attract loan assistance. In exceptional cases a loan may be given on condition it is repaid out of the proceeds of any future claim.

Works outside the curtilage of the property are not eligible for assistance unless they relate to the provision of essential services such as water, gas or electricity.

3.3 LOAN ENQUIRIES

Enquiries for a loan can be made either by telephone, post or in person at the offices of the relevant local authority, through the Kent County Council contact centre, or the No Use Empty website, from which an enquiry form can be completed. All contact details are provided in Appendix A.

All enquiries for a loan will be acknowledged by letter and then subsequently dealt with in accordance with the Kent Empty Property Initiative's standards for empty property loans. A copy of the service standards is attached in Appendix B.

3.4 BUILDINGS NOT ATTRACTING LOAN ASSISTANCE

Loan assistance will not be available for the following: -

- Properties, which are not of a permanent nature such as houseboats and caravans.
- Sheds, outhouses and extensions such as conservatories, which do not have Building Regulations approval.
- Buildings not suitable for conversion to habitable dwellings.
- Buildings where at least 40% is used by the applicant and/or his family as their home.

4.0 THE APPLICATION

An application for loan assistance should be made on the forms provided through the Kent Empty Property Initiative. An application form has been included with this pack and further copies are available on request. A complete application should include the following: -

- A completed application form(s).
- Confirmation of ownership of the property. This should normally be an “office copy” and Title Plan provided by the Local Land Registry Office, www.landregistry.gov.uk
- Two itemised estimates and cost of any associated fees e.g., structural engineer’s fees, or project management fees.
- Supporting documentation for ID purposes.
- If a company application – you must provide last 3 years accounts.
- If you are an individual, you must provide your latest P60 and 2 payslips.
- If self-employed, you must provide 3 years accounts.
- Valuation Report (undertaken by a member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors - RICS).
- Specialist reports, Building Regulations, Planning Permission and plans where required.
- Any other details notified to the applicant before a decision is made as to whether to make the applicant a loan offer.
- Consent from first lender.

Kent County Council reserves the right to undertake a credit check on any person or limited company applying for a loan.

5.0 LOAN SECURITY

All loan applicants will be required to agree to a legal charge being placed on the property, which is the subject of the loan application, to secure the loan. Agreement may be made in exceptional circumstances to accept a charge on an alternative property.

We offer loans on a maximum loan to value ratio of 80%, including the value of the loan registered in favour of the first lender. We will consider loans on a loan to value ratio of 90% on a case-by-case basis.

All legal charges must be either first or (where Kent County Council receives confirmation from the first charge holder that it consents to a second charge) second charges. Third or subsequent charges will not be accepted.

Examples Loan to Value Ratio (with 1st Lender)

Preferred option - 80% Loan to Value Ratio

Property Value	£ 175,000
80 % Loan to Value	£ 140,000
1 st Lender	£ 100,000
Equity Remaining	£ 40,000

This would allow a charge of £25,000 to be registered in favour of Kent County Council, with consent from the first charge holder.

90% Loan to Value Ratio will be considered in exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

Property Value	£ 175,000
90 % Loan to Value	£ 157,500
1 st Lender	£ 132,500
Equity Remaining	£ 25,000

Whilst this would allow a charge of £25,000 to be registered in favour of Kent County Council, with consent from the first charge holder. If the project is not completed and there is a requirement to enforce the sale of the property, the Council would be at greater risk of not being able to recover their funds.

Where it has been agreed to accept a legal charge on an alternative property that is not the subject of the loan application, the alternative property must be in England and Wales. However, the additional legal costs associated with this arrangement must be covered by the applicant.

Any property offered as security for the loan will require a valuation prior to the advance of any loan. The valuation must be carried out by a surveyor who is a member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the cost of which will vary in accordance with the property being put forward and is to be paid by the applicant.

The valuation should include the current value of the property in its present condition, the potential future value (if the property for security is the one being refurbished) and potential rental income (if the property is to be let on completion of works).

The Council will be unable to decide as to whether to approve an application without this valuation document.

Where the property, which is to be offered as security for the loan already has a charge registered against it, written confirmation from the existing charge holder, confirming their

agreement to a further charge being placed on the property, will be required. (This is a Land Registry requirement).

A fee is payable to register the charge at the Land Registry, which the applicant will be required to pay when submitting the loan application and supporting documents to Kent County Council. Please see Section 2.0 for current fees charged. Should these fees be varied by the Land Registry, Kent County Council reserves the right to charge that revised fee.

Where the applicant is a company, a fee is also payable to register the charge at Companies House, which the applicant will be required to pay when submitting the loan application and supporting documents to Kent County Council. Please see Section 2.0 for current fees charged. Should this fee be varied Kent County Council reserves the right to charge that revised fee.

6.0 LOAN RISK ASSESSMENT

All applications for a loan will be subject to a risk assessment that will form part of any decision to approve a loan. Details as to how this assessment will be undertaken are provided in Appendix C.

7.0 NOTIFICATION OF LOAN APPROVAL

The applicant will be notified in writing whether the application for assistance is approved or refused. The notification will be provided as soon as reasonably practicable from receipt of a completed application including all relevant supporting documentation and in any case within ten weeks.

The approval will specify the amount of loan and the repayment period. The offer of a loan will remain open for 8 weeks from the date of the notification letter.

The amount of loan will be based on the lower of the two estimates received. However, in any instance where the estimates are found to be excessive by Kent County Council, the loan amount will be determined by Kent County Council based on what it considers to be the reasonable costs for the schedule of works.

On confirmation that the loan offer has been accepted, an instruction will go to our Legal Services provider to draw up two sets of the Loan Facility Agreement and Legal Charge documents. The Programme Manager at Kent County Council will issue these to the applicant. Both sets of documents must be completed and returned to the Strategic Programme Manager if the applicant wishes to proceed with the loan within 8 weeks from the date of the original notification letter.

On receipt of the completed documents our Legal Services provider will apply to the Land Registry Office to register the legal charge against the property. Where the applicant is a Company, the Council will also apply to Companies House for registration of the charge.

On confirmation that the Legal Charge(s) have been registered, the Strategic Programme Manager at Kent County Council will instruct KCC Finance to forward the loan monies in

accordance with any conditions which the loan approval panel have stipulated and recorded in the Loan Facility Agreement document. One original set of the Loan Facility Agreement and Legal Charge documents will be returned to the applicant including confirmation of the BACS reference number for the loan monies.

This is expected to be no more than 14 days after the registration of the Legal Charge(s).

A loan offer will expire 8 weeks after the loan approval notification letter has been issued. If after this time Kent County Council has not received the relevant documentation, the loan offer will be cancelled, and the applicant informed in writing.

In the case where an applicant ceases to be the owner of the property which is the subject of the loan application or it appears to Kent County Council that the applicant was not at the time of the application being approved entitled to the loan, no payment shall be made, and the loan will be cancelled.

Loans are not transferable either between applicants or properties.

8.0 CRITERIA AND LOAN ASSISTANCE

The loan amount to be discussed with the NUE team as this will be dependent on the availability of funds as each new project is approved. As a guide each self-contained residential unit created would attract up to £25,000 (per unit) which is in line with the main NUE residential loan scheme. The amount of loan concerning bringing the commercial space back into use as commercial to be discussed with the NUE team.

- The property must have been empty for more than 6 months
- Loans are interest free subject to conditions - please note if you do request funds for further projects additional charges will apply
- Loans will help landlords, owners and developers to meet the cost of repairs and improvements to bring their property back into use
- Loans to let - repayment period currently up to 3 years from the date a secured charge in favour of KCC has been registered
- Loans to sell - repayment period is on the sale of the first unit or within 24 months of a secured charge in favour of KCC being registered
- Properties must be brought back into use within the agreed project timescales and made available to rent within 12 weeks after the project has been completed (or marketed for sale).
- The loan will be made available as a 100% upfront payment (Larger loans are normally awarded on a phased basis)

9.0 SUPERVISION OF WORKS

The building contract will be between the applicant and the chosen contractor and will not include Kent County Council. An officer from Kent County Council or an agent acting on its behalf will check the works to ensure they are carried out in accordance with the specification of work and meets the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard and good building

practice. However, Kent County Council or its officers or its agents acting on its behalf are **not** liable for any poor workmanship, nor do they provide any guarantee.

Where appropriate, it is recommended applicants employ their own surveyor whose fees are eligible for loan assistance, subject to the loan maximum. Responsibility for supervision of the works rests with the applicant. Any works that have not been completed to an acceptable standard will be the responsibility of the applicant.

On completion of the works the applicant is to provide notification to Kent County Council/or its agent that: -

- The works have been completed to a satisfactory standard and in accordance with the loan offer and estimates, current Building Regulations and in accordance with the specification of works issued;
- Copies of certified guarantees and test certificates requested as part of the agreed schedule of works are made available for inspection; and
- The repair and renovation of the property complies with the “Decent Homes Standard”.

10.0 APPEALS AGAINST REFUSAL OF LOAN

Where an application for a loan is refused the applicant will be notified of the reasons for refusal in writing and informed of the procedure for an appeal against the decision.

If an applicant disagrees with the reasons for refusal, an appeal may be made in writing to the Programme Manager stating the reasons why the applicant disagrees. This appeal should be made within 14 days of receipt of the refusal letter.

The applicant will be notified, in writing and within 14 days of the decision. If the Head of Infrastructure does not allow the appeal, an applicant can make a further appeal within 14 days to a Loans Appeal Panel. The Loans Appeal Panel will sit within 28 days of this second appeal being lodged. An applicant may attend the Loans Appeal Panel to present their case.

The Loans Appeal Panel will inform the applicant in writing within seven days of their decision.

There is no further appeal.

11.0 REPAYMENT OF THE LOAN

All loans paid under this scheme will be repayable.

Where the loan approved is a ‘Loan to Sell’ the loan will be repayable immediately and no later than the date stipulated in the Loan Facility Agreement.

Where the loan approved is a ‘Loan to Let’, the loan will be repayable on the third anniversary of the date stipulated in the Loan Facility Agreement unless there is an earlier disposal of the property or the units within the property are divided, and all sold on the same day.

For example:

Loans secured on:	Loans to be repaid by:
30 September 2021	1 October 2024
30 September 2022	1 October 2025
30 September 2023	1 October 2026

Where the property is to be converted into units and there is a disposal of one or more units (prior to the fixed dates set out in the terms of the Loan Facility Agreement), then on each such disposal of a unit, the applicant must repay the lesser amount of the gross sale proceeds and the amount of the loan outstanding.

If, after all such disposals, monies are still outstanding under the loan, then the applicant must repay such monies on whichever occurs the earlier of the disposal of the final unit or the relevant date as set out in the loan agreement.

“Loan to Let” Example:

Mr Smith borrows £150,000 to renovate a large house and convert it into six flats. On entering into the loan agreement with Kent County Council, Mr Smith intends to let the flats out to tenants once the works are completed. The works complete on 1 March 2021 and soon afterwards Mr Smith begins to let all the flats out to tenants.

However, after a while, Mr Smith decides that he no longer wants to let out all the flats. Therefore, he sells one of the flats on 1 July 2021 for £100,000. On that date Mr Smith must repay £100,000 to Kent County Council. Mr Smith then sells another of the flats on 1 December 2021 for £110,000. On 1 December 2021, Mr Smith must pay Kent County Council the outstanding capital balance of the loan, which is £50,000.

If Mr Smith had not sold the second flat but had continued to let it and the remaining properties out, he would have had to pay the £50,000 on 31 March 2024.

If Mr Smith had instead sold **all** the flats on 1 July 2021, then he would have had to repay £150,000 on that date, even if the total sale proceeds of all the flats had not come to £150,000.

If, instead of selling any of the flats, Mr Smith had continued to let out all the flats, then he would have had to repay £150,000 to Kent County Council on 31 March 2024.

12.0 LOAN INTEREST

Kent County Council will provide the loan at 0% interest rate. However, should the loan not be repaid on or before the agreed contractual date, then default interest rate will be applied to the loan. This is currently 6%.

This effectively means that the applicant will benefit from an interest free loan, providing there is no default on the loan for up to 36 months.

Where any sum is required to be paid but is not repaid in accordance with the loan conditions, a breach of conditions will have occurred, and Kent County Council may demand immediate repayment of the loan and interest.

13.0 REPAYMENT UPON BREACH OF CONDITIONS

In the case of a breach of loan conditions any outstanding loan becomes repayable to Kent County Council.

In the case of a loan to sell, where the property is not made available for sale within 12 weeks of the date set for completion of those works (*or by date to be agreed for the Kent scheme if earlier*), a breach of loan conditions will be considered to have occurred.

In the case of a loan to let, where the property is not made available for let within 12 weeks of the date set for completion of those works, a breach of loan conditions will be considered to have occurred.

14.0 SECOND LOANS

Where a person has received a loan, second or subsequent loans may be permitted. However, subsequent loans will be offered on interest bearing terms.

Applicants will also be required to demonstrate that they have completed works relating to their first loan application and have successfully marketed and either 'let' or 'sold' the property before a second loan application is administered.

Kent Empty Property Initiative – Contact Details

Kent County Council:

Steve Grimshaw: Programme Manager

steve.grimshaw@kent.gov.uk

Tel: 03000 417084

Jake Body: Project Support Officer

jake.body@kent.gov.uk

Tel: 03000 417442

Please refer to page 12 of the 'Application for an Empty Property Loan' document for contact details of the Empty Property Officer in your area, or visit the contacts page on our website: www.nue.org.uk

Service Standards for Loans Procedure

These standards have been produced to:

Inform our customers of the standards and level of service they can expect from us.

Ensure all enquiries/applications are dealt with on an equal basis.

Service Standards and Procedure

On receipt of an enquiry within 2 weeks, a loan enquiry acknowledgement letter will be sent to the prospective loan applicant including a loan application pack which will include information on the Initiative, an application form, and most recent Newsletter.

An inspection of the property will be undertaken within six weeks.

On receipt of a completed loan application i.e., application form and all further documentation listed in Section 4 above, subject to these being satisfactory and receipt of the valuation fee, the applicant will receive within 10 weeks a loan offer.

If a loan offer is accepted, payment of the loan monies will be sent out within fourteen working days of KCC Legal Services confirming that the Legal Charge(s) have been registered.

Unforeseen works – where unforeseen works arise during the loan aided works, a decision (which may include a site visit) as to whether the works are to be included, will be made within five working days, following receipt of estimates.

KCC Programme Manager will write to you 12 weeks before a loan is due to be repaid to ensure that you have made the necessary arrangements to repay KCC the loan in full.

Risk Assessment Procedure for Empty Property Loans (v4- MAR-2019)

Whenever monies are loaned, there will be an element of both financial risk in that the loan is not repaid, and risk that should the delivery of the project not be completed it would fail to contribute towards the annual targets set for the Empty Property initiative

To ensure that these risks are minimised the following risk assessment procedure has been devised, against which each scheme will be evaluated to determine the level of risk (high, medium or low). Any project which scores 50 points or more will not be considered appropriate for a loan from KCC.

The empty property team would welcome the opportunity to discuss any proposed application with empty property owners/developers, but no commitment to approve an application or commit funding will be given until a completed application has been received and subjected to the following risk assessment procedure.

All applications will be initially vetted by the relevant District Empty Property Officer. This will be to confirm: -

- that the property has been empty for six months or more;
- that the works/conversion can be completed within a time scale to satisfy the Initiative's target; and
- approvals and/or consents (if any) required to undertake the works/conversion are held.

Delivery Risk

To minimise the delivery risk all applicants for loans will be required to satisfy the following criteria before their application will be considered. Documentary proof that the following criteria have been met should be submitted with the application form.

1. The property that is subject to the loan application has been acquired/already in the ownership of, the applicant.
2. All required consents for the works/conversion have been approved; these will include full planning permission, building regulation approval, listed building and conservation area consent, where applicable.
3. Confirmation that there are no legal constraints or restrictive covenants on the property that would prevent the proposed works/conversion from being undertaken.
4. Any requirement for a contaminated land investigation has been undertaken, and where any remediation works are required, these have been agreed with the relevant District contaminated land officer.

5. Confirmation that any additional finance over and above the KCC loan required to complete the project is readily available and evidenced accordingly.
6. The correct fees in force at the time of application are submitted with the loan application documentation required and are made payable to KCC

Once the above criteria have been satisfied the application will be assessed against the following financial risk assessment, which is based on the business case details supplied on the application form, to determine if the application should be approved.

Each of the questions listed below will be assigned a score and these individual scores will be totalled to give an overall score, which will then place the application in either a high, medium or low category.

Risk category	Points
Low	up to 20 points
Medium	between 21 and 35 points
High	between 36 and 49 points

Any project which scores 50 points or more will not be considered appropriate for a loan from KCC.

RISK ASSESSMENT FORM	SCORE
1. Credit rating	
All persons/companies applying will be subject to an insolvency check, credit check, which will be undertaken by the NUE team/or its service providers.	
Satisfactory credit check	0
Unsatisfactory credit check	50
2. Business Plan	
The applicant supplied a satisfactory business plan to demonstrate that the proposed empty property scheme is financially viable. The applicant's business plan does not demonstrate that the proposed empty property scheme is financially viable.	
Satisfactory credit check	0
Unsatisfactory credit check	50
3. Loan amount being applied for?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between £25,000 and £50,000 • Between £51,000 and £99,000 • Between £100,000 and £150,000 • Greater than £150,001 	1 3 5 10

4. Loan(s) to property value percentage?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed loan amount and any existing loan/mortgage on the property does not exceed 50% of the property value. 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed loan amount and any existing loan/mortgage on the property is between 51% and 70% of the property value. 	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed loan amount and any existing loan/mortgage on the property is between 71% and 80% of the property value. 	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed loan amount and any existing loan/mortgage on the property is between 81% and 90% of the property value. 	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed loan amount and any existing loan/mortgage on the property exceeds 91% if the property value. 	50
5. Proposed term of loan	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 24 months 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to 36 months 	3
6. Application From	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual(s) 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing Company 	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Company/Special Purpose Vehicle 	5
7. Existing Mortgage/Charges	
All loans are secured as a first or second charge on the properties identified as security of loan.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st Charge in favour of Kent County Council 	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2nd Charge in favour of Kent County Council 	10
8. Provision of references	
All applicants are requested to provide, where possible, evidence of two similar types of schemes to that proposed in the current application having been successfully completed.	
Satisfactory references supplied	0
No references available	5
Total Points	/50

The Decent Homes Standard

To achieve the Decent Homes Standard, a dwelling must comply with the following four criteria.

Criterion a: It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing

To be decent, a dwelling should be free of category 1 hazards as assessed through the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

Criterion b: It is in a reasonable state of repair

A dwelling satisfies this criterion unless:

- one or more key building components are old and, because of their condition need replacing or major repair; or
- two or more other building components are old and, because of their condition need replacing or major repair.

A building component can only fail to satisfy this criterion by being old and requiring replacing or repair. A component cannot fail this criterion based on age alone.

Building components

Building components are the structural parts of a dwelling (e.g. wall structure, roof structure), other external elements (e.g. roof covering, chimneys) and internal services and amenities (e.g. kitchens, heating systems).

Key building components are those which, if in poor condition, could have an immediate impact on the integrity of the building and cause further deterioration in other components. They are the external components plus internal components that have potential safety implications and include:

- external walls;
- roof structure and covering;
- windows/doors;
- chimneys;
- central heating boilers;
- gas fires;
- storage heaters;
- plumbing; and
- electrics.

Lifts are not considered to be a key component unless the lift or the lift shafts have a direct effect upon the integrity of the building.

If any of these components are old and need replacing, or require immediate major repair, then the dwelling is not in a reasonable state of repair.

Other building components are those that have a less immediate impact on the integrity of the dwelling. Their combined effect must therefore consider, with a dwelling not being in a reasonable state of repair if two or more are old and need replacing or require immediate major repair.

Old and in poor condition

A component is defined as 'old' if it is older than its standard lifetime. Components are in poor condition if they need major work, either full replacement or major repair.

One or more key components, or two or more other components, must be both old and in poor condition to render the dwelling non-decent on grounds of disrepair.

Components that are old but in good condition or in poor condition but not old would not, in themselves, cause the dwelling to fail the standard.

A building component, which requires replacing before it reaches its expected lifetime has failed early. Under the terms of the definition, this early failure does not render the dwelling non-decent.

Criterion c: It has reasonably modern facilities and services

A dwelling is considered not to meet this criterion if it lacks three or more of the following facilities:

- a kitchen which is 20 years old or less;
- a kitchen with adequate space and layout;
- a bathroom which is 30 years old or less;
- an appropriately located bathroom and WC;
- adequate external noise insulation; and
- adequate size and layout of common entrance areas for blocks of flats.

A kitchen failing on adequate space and layout would be one that was too small to contain all the required items (sink, cupboards cooker space, worktops etc) appropriate to the size of the dwelling;

An inappropriately located bathroom and WC is one where the main bathroom or WC is in a bedroom or accessed through a bedroom (unless the bedroom is not used, or the dwelling is for a single person). A dwelling would also fail if the main WC were external or located on a different floor to the nearest wash hand basin, or if a WC without a wash hand basin opens on to a kitchen in an inappropriate area, for example next to the food preparation area;

Inadequate insulation from external airborne noise would be where there are problems with, for example, traffic (rail, road, and aeroplanes) or factory noise.

Inadequate size and layout of common entrance areas for blocks of flats would be one with insufficient room to manoeuvre easily for example where there are narrow access ways with awkward corners and turnings, steep staircases, inadequate landings, absence of handrails, low headroom etc.

In some instances, there may be factors which may make the improvements required to meet the Decent Homes standards' challenging, or impossible, factors such as physical or planning restrictions. Where such limiting factors occur, the property should be assessed to determine the most satisfactory course of action in consultation with the relevant body or agency to determine the best solution. The outcome may determine that some improvements may be possible even if all are not.

A dwelling would not fail this criterion, where it is impossible to make the required improvements to components for physical or planning reasons.

Criterion d: It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

The definition requires a dwelling to have both efficient heating; and effective insulation. Efficient heating is defined as any gas or oil programmable central heating; or

- electric storage heaters; or
- warm air systems; or
- underfloor systems; or
- programmable LPG/solid fuel central heating; or
- similarly, efficient heating systems which are developed in the future.

The primary heating system must have a distribution system sufficient to provide heat to two or more rooms of the home. There may be storage heaters in two or more rooms, or other heaters that use the same fuel in two or more rooms. Even if the central heating system covers most of the house making a dwelling decent, under the HHSRS the home should be warm enough for the occupant.

Heating sources, which provide less energy efficient options fail the Decent Homes standard.

Programmable heating is where the timing and the temperature of the heating can be controlled by the occupants.

Because of the differences in efficiency between gas/oil heating systems and the other heating systems listed, the level of insulation that is appropriate also differs:

For dwellings with gas/oil programmable heating, cavity wall insulation (if there are cavity walls that can be insulated effectively) and at least 50mm loft insulation (if there is loft space) is an effective package of insulation.

For dwellings heated by electric storage heaters/LPG/programmable solid fuel central heating a higher specification of insulation is required: at least 200mm of loft insulation (if there is a loft) and cavity wall insulation (if there are cavity walls that can be insulated effectively).

An SAP rating of less than 35 (using the 2001 SAP methodology) has been established as a proxy for the likely presence of a Category 1 hazard from excess cold.