

NO USE EMPTY



ISSUE ONE SPRING 2006

LATEST NEWS FROM THE KENT EMPTY PROPERTY INITIATIVE

CALLING ALL EMPTY PROPERTY OWNERS

To the owners of the thousands of empty houses in East Kent, the message is loud and clear: **It's No Use Empty!** The four District Councils of Dover, Shepway, Swale and Thanet have teamed up with Kent County Council to launch a hard hitting campaign to bring empty properties back into use.

No Use Empty: the Kent Empty Property Initiative was launched in November 2005 to enthusiastic audiences of housing officers, Councillors, private developers, home owners and landlords across East Kent. With such encouraging support, and the website – www.no-use-empty.org – already receiving over 10,000 hits, the campaign has got off to a flying start.

No Use Empty has been launched as a proactive response to the recurring

problem of empty housing in East Kent. The initiative will complement the work already being carried out in Dover, Shepway, Swale, and Thanet, and it is hoped to roll out the campaign across the rest of Kent at a later date.



empty houses are a waste of valuable housing resource.

Kent County Council Cabinet member Graham Gibbens leads the rallying call,

“Empty homes are a terrible and unnecessary waste. Not only is it losing the owner money, but it is depriving people of much needed homes. Bringing empty properties back into use is a win-win situation for everyone, and with the support of the community, this campaign can make a real difference and help create new homes across east Kent”

This is the inaugural newsletter of No Use Empty, which aims to give an introduction to the campaign; why it has been launched and how it can help. Future editions will provide useful information and updates of the campaign's progress. We welcome your feedback.

CONSULTATION WITH HOME OWNERS AND DEVELOPERS

With the campaign up and running, the team is committed to working closely with owners to help achieve the goal of bringing vacant properties back into use.

The team is embarking on a consultation programme with owners of empty properties to help gain a better understanding of the requirements and support needed to turn these properties into homes.

Forming part of this consultation will be exploring different options available to offer owners of empty properties financial support. Recent research shows that while the majority of empty properties in East Kent are in good condition, there are many which require repair work and renovation to bring them into a habitable condition.

Securing funding to provide owners with financial support, for example in the form of an interest-free loan, is a complex procedure. The team is already in discussion with a number of organisations who could potentially help deliver such financial support.

A questionnaire for owners of empty properties has been produced, which is available on the No Use Empty website www.no-use-empty.org or by telephoning the campaign hotline: **08458 247605.**

PARTNERSHIP IS THE KEY TO OPENING EMPTY HOMES

David Ireland of the Empty Homes Agency commends the approach of local authorities in tackling the problem of empty property:

"Across the country one in thirty homes are empty. In the context of the current level of housing need this is extraordinarily wasteful.

Empty homes act as magnets for petty crime encouraging fly-tipping graffiti and providing a playground for local jobs. They shout out neglect and decline and even devalue neighbouring properties. And yet with less energy and less money than building from new they could become worthwhile homes.

It is a common myth that empty homes are a problem found only in cities in the North. The truth is they are found everywhere, even in Kent. Whether the problem is owners who cannot afford repairs, obsolescent buildings or failed investments, the common thread is a failure of the housing market. It needs help. At their best local authorities can be great agents for returning empty homes to use: intervening helping and encouraging. But the problem is too big for them to solve on their own.

Across the country it is very clear to me that local authorities working

together and with others achieve the best results. The Kent initiative "No Use Empty" is a unique and exciting partnership of County and District councils. It aims to understand the problem and reasons for empty homes and provide and promote the right range of solutions. Already it is achieving tangible results with many new homes created from empty properties. But the ambition is to do more. There is the very real possibility that what is being built here is a model that other parts of the country will seek to follow."

*David Ireland
Empty Homes Agency*



David Ireland is the Empty Homes Agency's policy advisor and author of the book, "How to Rescue a House", and was advisor of the BBC TV series of the same name. David believes that the No Use Empty campaign is a blueprint which other Councils across the country could follow.

WHY YOU SHOULD ACT



Empty house in Swale (left) and Thanet, which are in the process of being brought back into use.

So what's all the fuss about? Why are empty properties such a big problem and what is the argument for bringing them back into use? The key messages of the campaign are:

- An empty house is a financial drain on owners, who are missing an opportunity for income through rent, or a significant lump sum through a sale
- Empty houses are a waste of a valuable housing resource and deprive people of a much needed home
- Empty housing attracts anti-social behaviour and can devalue surrounding properties
- The cost of bringing a property back into repair and in a condition fit to be placed on the market is often less than owners might think
- There is FREE help and advice available to owners

There are many more reasons why empty properties are bad news all-round, for more information please visit the No Use Empty website: www.no-use-empty.org.uk

MAKING HEADLINES



The campaign is receiving the support of the media, who are recognising the importance of the empty house issue, and the role of the campaign in helping to tackle the problem. The campaign has relieved coverage across the region's media, and housing and regeneration press, and has also been featured on radio and television. A great way to get the message out!

MEET THE MANAGER



No Use Empty is delighted to announce the appointment of the campaign's project manager, Susan Pledger. Previously Group Leader for Housing and Environmental Protection at Dover District Council, Susan will be working closely with the four District Council empty property officers to co-ordinate the campaign to help bring empty houses back into use. Susan brings with her a wealth of experience in housing and area regeneration and renewal. She has worked in local government for over twenty years, building extensive knowledge of empty property issues. Susan will be spending much of her time working across the four Districts.

Susan is delighted with her new role, she said: *"The No Use Empty campaign is such an exciting, unique initiative which can make a real difference to bringing empty properties back into use across east Kent. The key to the campaign is partnership. We have a great team on board, and we're all looking forward to tackling the issue head-on and building on the excellent work of the empty homes officers across the four District Council's".*

NO USE EMPTY HITS THE ROAD

The No Use Empty team hit the road last November, hosting a series of high profile launch events across East Kent to showcase the campaign and spread the message that

empty properties are No Use Empty! Attended by housing officers, Councillors, private developers, landlords, and the local media, the events

provided a platform from which to launch the campaign. The people who attended could talk to the No Use Empty team and discuss how the campaign can make a difference.



The no use empty campaign is launched across East Kent.



MEET THE TEAM...

CONTACT FILE

Contact the relevant person where the empty property is located from the list below and they will be happy to advise you on what to do next.



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HOW WE CAN HELP

Under the No Use Empty banner, experienced empty housing officers at each District Council together with the initiative's specialist delivery partner Professional Partnership Services plc, can provide

- Free impartial advice of the options available to you.
- Expert advice and guidance on to property owners on subjects ranging from renovation, letting and grant funding.

- Opportunity to discuss whether you could qualify for support from a Housing Association or Council Grant.
- Referrals to housing associations and letting agents who can provide further advice or opportunities for letting and sales.

NO USE EMPTY HOTLINE 08458 247 605
WWW.NO-USE-EMPTY.ORG

