



The campaign for Community Investment in areas with high levels of empty homes



Calling for action to end the waste of over 205,000 long-term empty homes in England at a time of national housing crisis

A cause of public concern which undermines efforts to deal with the most toxic impacts of the current national crisis of housing supply and affordability

The coalition for targeted investment in England's under-invested communities



The problem: The waste of over 205,000 long-term empty homes in England

In a country with an acknowledged housing crisis, where the Government has talked of the need to build 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s, the presence of a large and increasing number of empty homes is a wasted housing opportunity.¹

Recent research from Empty Homes found that neighbourhoods with higher levels of empty homes tend to be places where house prices are lower, residents tend to be on low incomes

and there are abnormally high levels of substandard private rented housing (not meeting the decent homes standard).²

Yet these neighbourhoods still exist in wider housing markets experiencing growth and which are seeing new build numbers rise in many cases. And building new homes across all tenures is crucial to ending the housing crisis, but so is making the best use of existing homes.



- 1 UK Government (2017) 'Autumn Budget 2017: Philip Hammond's speech': <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/autumn-budget-2017-philip-hammonds-speech>
- 2 Empty Homes (2018) 'Empty homes in England 2018': http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/final_ehe_2018_web.pdf

The evidence:

The latest Government data analysed by Empty Homes shows that English local authorities recorded over 205,000 homes long-term (more than six months) empty in their latest council Taxbase reports to Government – over 5,000 more than a year earlier.³

This 2.6% rise is the first increase since 2008, leaving the national proportion of England's homes which are long-term empty broadly stable at around 0.85%.

In our analysis 53 local authorities report 1.2% or more of their homes long-term empty, of these 70% or 37 are in the North, nine are in the Midlands, and seven are in the South. Whilst the highest proportions that were long-term empty were in the bottom council tax band, Band A (lowest value properties) - 1.51%.⁴

The majority of long-term empty homes in England are privately owned. This provides challenges for local authorities in using enforcement powers, which are often cumbersome to use or ineffective, particularly with respect to absent or disengaged owners; in a wider context of the limited resources available to local authorities. Empty Homes research amongst local authorities found:

- 97% of local authorities with generally high levels of empty homes cite owners' inability to fund repairs as a reason homes remain empty; in authorities with long-term empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods this was 89%; while 69% cited the impact of 'social problems such as anti-social behaviour'.

- 86% of councils with high levels of empty homes concentrated in particular neighbourhoods report 'Insufficient funding for regeneration schemes to tackle empty homes and other neighbourhood issues' as a major barrier to efforts to deal with the problem.

Amongst all local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes 87% said 'Central government funding/programme/s targeted at local authorities with high levels of long-term empty homes' ..'would most help [the] local authority to bring more long-term empty homes back into housing use'.

While 57% cited 'More power to take legal action against owners of long-term empty homes' and 'Speedier process for obtaining compulsory purchase orders on long-term empty homes'⁵

Crucially, Band A (the lowest value properties) has the highest number of long-term empty homes - 85,856 homes in the latest Government figures (42% of the national total); whilst the top band H, has the lowest number of long term empty homes (1,929) (although these figures do not include property occupied occasionally).⁶

The official empty homes data reported at the local authority level hides greater local concentrations in some neighbourhoods. It is in neighbourhoods like these, characterised by low property values, high levels of deprivation and more likely to feature high levels of sub-standard private sector rented housing, that action is being taken by organisations selected to be Empty Homes community-based demonstration projects.⁷ They give us valuable insights into the way community-based solutions can address the problem and build the case for investment.⁸

3 Empty Homes (2018) 'PRESS RELEASE 5th March 2018 Action needed as number of long-term empty homes rises for the first time since 2008': <http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/2018-03-05-final-ehe-pr.pdf>

4 Ibid

5 Empty Homes(2016) 'Empty homes: Why do some areas have high levels?' <http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/empty-homes-why-do-some-areas-have-have-higher-levels-final-pdf>

6 Empty Homes (2018) 'PRESS RELEASE 5th March 2018 Action needed as number of long-term empty homes rises for the first time since 2008': <http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/2018-03-05-final-ehe-pr.pdf>

7 Empty Homes(2016) 'Empty homes: Why do some areas have high levels?' <http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/empty-homes-why-do-some-areas-have-have-higher-levels-final-pdf>

8 Empty Homes Website (2017/18): 'Community-based approaches' <http://www.emptyhomes.com/community-based-approaches.html>



Change is possible - demonstrating how it is done:

Empty Homes demonstration projects show how community-based solutions can deliver real impact in neighbourhoods with high levels of long-term empty homes.

Alongside restoring empty homes to use to meet local housing needs and tackle homelessness, community-based organisations can work with other local agencies to address wider concerns in communities. Examples include providing meaningful training and employment opportunities in areas with high rates of people in receipt of welfare benefits, and addressing environmental and antisocial behaviour issues requiring enforcement action.

If left un-addressed such issues fuel a vicious cycle of neighbourhood decline, as the perception grows that these are not places many people would choose to live; and those with housing choices, in all sectors, then strive to avoid them.

Empty Homes' demonstration projects around England illustrate the effectiveness of community-based approaches which respond flexibly to local circumstances and utilise existing local assets. Yet currently, across England, many community-based organisations are limited in what they can achieve by lack of access to funding.

What we want:

We need a national programme of investment to support the best solutions possible in all England’s neighbourhoods blighted by high levels of empty homes.

Our campaign for community investment targeted at areas with high levels of long-term empty homes aims to build financial and practical support for community-based solutions in those areas.

- Alongside this we aim to promote and develop policy interventions and practical tools which facilitate action to tackle empty homes and their underlying causes at the local level:
 - Local authorities want to work with central government to make enforcement powers more effective and to streamline how these work.⁹
- However this needs to be matched by investment to reflect the difficulties faced in particular areas and with respect to particular types of property. Property often requires

investment to be brought back into use which the private market is ill-configured to provide, and which presents challenges of resource and implementation for local authorities.

- In responses to our 2016 research amongst local authorities with high levels of empty homes the absence of targeted government support for regeneration in these areas was cited as the major barrier to action on empty homes by over 80% of authorities.¹⁰
- Above all, we seek central Government action – investment in ending the waste of empty homes which will enable isolated examples of good practice to be turned into a nationally enabled programme of locally-led action to:
 - turn blighted areas around;
 - put in place preventative policy fixes which will reduce the future occurrence of concentrations of empty homes;
 - significantly reduce the waste of long term empty homes.



9 Empty Homes(2016) ‘Empty homes: Why do some areas have high levels?’ <http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/empty-homes-why-do-some-areas-have-have-higher-levels-final-pdf>

10 Ibid



We are building a coalition to campaign for change:

We want isolated demonstrations to be turned into a positive and de-stigmatised future for all England's neighbourhoods with currently high levels of empty homes.

We want to make a significant impact on reducing the number of long-term empty homes, so that these wasted assets can make a contribution to ending England's housing crisis and increasing the supply of affordable homes for those in housing need.

We want to do this through local action responding to local needs and priorities, underpinned by a national Government commitment to a housing economy that works for everyone, everywhere across England.

That is why Empty Homes has built a coalition to campaign for central government investment in community-based regeneration for areas with high levels of empty homes.

We are very grateful to our funder Oak Foundation for supporting this campaign. Further information on the growth of this significant waste of our national housing stock is available in our latest report on the issue, *'Empty Homes in England'* (2018).¹¹

For an examination of regional trends and local authority views including coverage of Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder areas see also our report *'Empty Homes: Why do some areas have high levels?'* (2016).¹²

11 Empty Homes (2018) 'Empty homes in England 2018': http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/final_ehe_2018_web.pdf

12 Empty Homes (2016) 'Empty homes: Why do some areas have high levels?' <http://www.emptyhomes.com/assets/empty-homes-why-do-some-areas-have-have-higher-levels-final-pdf> (pages 18-19 and Appendix G)

The coalition for community investment calls upon Government to play its part:

Solving the problem, now:

The coalition for community investment calls upon the Government to establish an investment programme targeted at areas with high levels of long-term empty homes to enable community-based organisations, local authorities, housing associations and other housing providers to:

Buy, lease and refurbish empty homes to provide affordable housing;

Alongside delivering wider neighbourhood improvements to tackle the underlying causes of empty homes in neighbourhoods with higher levels, for example improvements to the street environment, targeted action against anti-social behaviour; employment and training schemes.

Funding needs to be provided flexibly to support a variety of schemes developed locally.

- A fund, or finance facility, of £450million could reasonably be expected to bring up to 20,000 homes back into use (around 10% of current officially acknowledged long term empty homes - based on UK Government issued Council Taxbase Data)
 - Targeted regional funds of £25million could bring 1000 empty homes a year back into use in each region offered access to such a facility.
- Making a major impact on this significant waste of housing stock requires ambitious targets to deliver significant numbers of empty homes being returned to use for those in housing need; and in order to make a significant contribution to helping solve the current widely acknowledged housing crisis in England.
- This is above all an issue of 'investing to save', for national and local government.

Preventing the problem recurring:

- As a separate issue, consideration should be given to a fund which could be utilised to support investment in existing currently occupied housing stock in the target areas which is at high risk of becoming long-term empty or falling into dereliction – for example

exterior wall insulation and other sustainability investments for pre-1919 terraced housing. Such housing is often expensive and difficult to heat without such investment, leading to high levels of vacancy.

The coalition members – our contribution and our offer to government:

Core members:

ARLA/NAEA Propertymark: The Association of Residential Letting Agents and National Association of Estate Agents jointly set up Propertymark. Propertymark is the go-to organisation for any questions relating to property. Propertymark's focus is on helping people buy, sell and rent their homes. We help to protect and guide consumers through their property transactions, with all of our members meeting a higher standard than the law demands.

Propertymark sees empty homes as a wasted resource. More needs to be done to get vacant properties back on the market for would-be home buyers or landlords. We support the use of existing enforcement powers against those leaving property empty, but the Government must also look at ways to encourage and incentivise individuals, landlords, local authorities and community-based housing providers to bring empty homes back into use.

Federation of Master Builders: The Federation of Master Builders (FMB) is the largest trade association in the UK construction industry representing thousands of firms in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Established in 1941 to protect the interests of small and medium-sized (SME) construction firms, the FMB is independent and non-profit making. In its recent report 'Homes on our high streets' the FMB made several recommendations relating to the creation of much-needed homes from empty or under-utilised properties. This included a call for Government support where the market is not yet strong enough to make development viable, central government should make available low-cost loans, grants and fiscal incentives.

The FMB believes that this call for central Government support for areas with high levels of empty homes should apply equally to our approach to both commercial and residential property conversions. This work would be attractive to many smaller, locally-based builders and contractors, which would have a strong interest in ensuring good outcomes and would be better placed to work with local authorities and community groups to achieve these. Integrating these firms into these programmes would aid wider regeneration objectives by retaining spend within the local economy. It would also provide opportunities to build the provision of skilled jobs and training into local and smaller-scale regeneration schemes.

Locality: The national membership network supporting local community organisations. Locality supports community organisations to unlock the power in their community to build a fairer society. Its member network of over 600 community organisations creates the services their communities need, in spaces where everyone belongs. Every week their membership network supports over 400,000 people, helping to transform lives. Locality also delivers MHCLG's neighbourhood planning support.

Locality supports local community groups to develop community-led housing (CLH) and many members of its CLH group work to bring empty homes back into use. Locality support groups with an Early Stage Support Programme and brokers peer mentoring to help deliver successful projects. At the heart of Locality's approach is a belief that in areas featuring weak markets and under-investment community-led organisations have the power to build stronger neighbourhoods. Locality member and Empty Homes demonstration projects North Ormesby

Development Trust and Giroscope in Hull refurbish empty properties to create new affordable homes for rent. Support for volunteering as a pathway to work and creating training and employment opportunities are integral to many Locality members' refurbishment projects and Giroscope works with over 150 volunteers, most facing disadvantage and exclusion, to provide opportunities for tenants to participate in the development of their own homes.

The National Community Land Trust

Network: The National Community Land Trust Network: The National CLT Network is the official charity supporting Community Land Trusts in England and Wales. The Network provides funding, resources, training and advice for CLTs and works with Government, local authorities, lenders and funders to establish the best conditions for CLTs to grow and flourish. There are now 240 CLTs nationwide, having grown six-fold in the last six years.

National Community Land Trust Network members are working to create valuable and much-needed new housing supply through new build and the renovation of long-term empty and often near-derelict existing homes. One such, North Ormesby CLT in Middlesborough, is an Empty Homes demonstration project; another example is Granby 4 Streets CLT, whose architects Assemble won the Turner Prize for the work they have done with Granby 4 Streets CLT. In total, over 800 homes have already been built or brought back into use, and there are over 5000 CLT homes in the pipeline.

The Northern Housing Consortium:

The NHC is a membership organisation that works with its local authorities and housing

associations across the North to advance the cause of housing.

NHC's recent Commission for Housing in the North illustrates the importance of regeneration. Bringing empty properties back into use can support regeneration as part of a local response to housing market needs. The NHC is committed to making places that work in the North and believes there is a pressing need to tackle the quality of existing homes and places. The NHC will continue to support action to create housing of the right quality to meet local needs and demands.

The Residential Landlords Association: The RLA represents the interests of landlords in the private rented sector (PRS) across England and Wales. It provides support and advice to members, and seeks to raise standards in the PRS through its code of conduct, training and accreditation and the provision of guidance and updates on legislation affecting the sector. Many of the RLA's resources are available free to non-member landlords and tenants.

The Association campaigns to improve the PRS for both landlords and tenants, engaging with policymakers at all levels of Government, to support our mission of making renting better. The RLA supports support work to help property owners bring empty homes back into use and tough enforcement action against those wilfully leaving property empty. It is working with Empty Homes and others in the sector to support local authorities in creating a practical toolkit to take enforcement action on empty homes. The RLA also work to prevent homes becoming long-term empty through the provision of advice on responsible approaches for landlords of low value properties in challenging areas.



Other Coalition Supporter Organisations:

Organisations who support the campaign and have participated in developing the campaign direction and providing evidence to the coalition, include:

Crisis: Crisis aim is to end homelessness and works to influence policy and practice. As part of this work it produces briefings and responds to consultations on a range of policy areas linked to homelessness. Crisis believes that to end homelessness, it is necessary to understand and change the factors which cause it and make it worse, issues such as the availability of affordable housing, legislation and the benefit system are part of this.

National Housing Federation: The National Housing Federation is the voice of housing associations in England. The NHF's vision is a country where everyone can live in a good quality home they can afford. The NHF has launched an investigation into what makes a 'great place' and how housing associations can play a key role in regenerating areas in economic decline. Over the next 18 months the programme will build tangible recommendations looking at how residents, government, local

authorities, private companies and not for profit organisations can, together create, or rebuild, great places to live across the country.

Shelter: No-one needs to face bad housing or homelessness alone, this is why Shelter helps millions of people every year through our advice, support and legal services. We strive to give people the help they need, and we campaign relentlessly to achieve our vision of a safe, secure, affordable home for everyone. While 268,000 people in England are homeless, there is also a chronic shortage of affordable homes. England needs more affordable homes and unlocking the potential of empty homes could go some way to providing homes to those that need them most.

It is time to re-capitalise England's under-invested communities and stop failed regional housing markets trapping our citizens in sub-standard housing and condemning viable neighbourhoods to decline.

Let's end the waste of empty homes today and invest for tomorrow.



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If you want to support our work by taking out a monthly standing order or volunteering for the campaign, please visit our website for more details: <http://www.emptyhomes.com>

Empty Homes Week 2018

National Empty Homes Week 2018 is will take place from the 15th to 21st October. Every year local authorities, housing providers, community-led organisations and others see Empty Homes Week as an opportunity to organise events and put out information so that people know about their work to tackle empty homes. Empty Homes Week is also the chance to celebrate successes and reflect on what more needs to be done to bring empty properties back into use to help meet housing needs.

If you want to sponsor the event, or you simply want to find out more details, please email info@emptyhomes.com





empty homes

national campaigning charity



Let's end the waste of empty homes today and invest for tomorrow

www.emptyhomes.com

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