



Empty Homes

Community Protection Team
Public Protection
Shropshire Council
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY2 6ND

01743 25 5923/1811

emtyhomes@shropshire.gov.uk

www.shropshire.gov.uk/housing-services

Do You Own an Empty Property?

If you own an empty property in Shropshire and want to explore the options



to return it to use, our Officers are available to offer support, advice and guidance. Whatever the reason your property is empty, we can provide up to date information to help you consider all the options open to you.

If you would be interested in selling your empty property, the Team are often contacted by people looking to purchase properties in the area, and may be

able to put owners in contact with prospective purchasers. Many of these individuals are looking to take on properties in need of varying degrees of work to ultimately live in as their home.

So don't put it off! There are lots of options for empty properties and we're here to help you decide on the best way to make the best use of your property.

Useful information... VAT Discounts

Homes which have been empty for two or more years may be eligible for a VAT discount on the works necessary to renovate them for residential use.

Properties which have been empty for at least two years are eligible for a reduced VAT rate of 5%. Or if you're renovating a property empty for 10 years or more, you may be able to claim back all of the VAT. If you're renovating an empty property to sell, you may also be eligible

for a reduced rate of Capital Gains Tax payable.



It is important to be aware of what you are eligible for before you start any work as it can be difficult to re-

claim overpaid VAT retrospectively.

The Empty Homes Team can provide further advice on this, and provide supporting evidence to help obtain these discounts, such as a letter confirming how long the property has been empty.

The requirements and eligibility criteria for these discounts are detailed on the HMRC website, search 'HMRC VAT Notice 708', or contact the Team for more information.

Useful contacts...



- Planning** — 0345 678 9004
planning.comments@shropshire.gov.uk
- Building Control** — 0345 678 9004
buildingcontrol@shropshire.gov.uk
- Council Tax** — 0345 678 9002
council.tax@shropshire.gov.uk

Empty Homes Newsletter

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Special points of interest:

- Empty Homes Newsletter launched to mark West Midlands Empty Homes Week
- New Empty Homes Strategy for 2014-2017 adopted
- Council Tax policy changes to encourage return to use of empty homes
- Ex bank and night-club converted to provide much needed affordable housing
- VAT discounts for renovating empty homes

Welcome from the Empty Homes Team

Welcome to the first edition of the Empty Homes Newsletter. To mark the West Midlands Empty Homes Week 2014, Shropshire Council's Empty Homes Team are launching our first Empty Homes Newsletter which will be published quarterly.

Empty homes and other properties are a key issue in Shropshire, and a priority for Shropshire Council, and the Newsletter will bring you stories of Empty Homes projects, updates on the work we're doing and other useful information.

Shropshire is fortunate in that it does not have streets of derelict and boarded up empty properties, as can be found in other areas of the country. However, there is a shortage of housing and it is



therefore important to make the best use of the County's existing housing stock, ensuring a supply of good quality homes for local people to rent or buy.

The role of the Empty Homes Team is to work with property owners, local communities and

other stakeholders to enable better use of all properties in the county, both residential and commercial, that may be underutilised and able to contribute to the supply of housing in the county.

We hope you find this a useful and interesting insight into our work.

Empty Properties in Shropshire

Empty Homes are a national issue. It is estimated that there were 635,127 empty homes in England in 2013. In Shropshire there were 1571 long-term empty properties in October 2014.

Over recent years the government has recognised and prioritised the issue of empty properties, and is committed to getting empty homes back into use to contribute towards meeting housing need.

Returning empty homes to use can have a number of positive effects, addressing social, economic and wider public health issues, and this is why Shropshire Council prioritise empty homes work through the dedicated Empty Homes Team.

In Shropshire there are currently 5,286 households on the housing register for affordable housing (September 2014). Approximately 35% of these households have limited opportunities to access social housing.

Increasing the amount of affordable housing available through returning empty property to use can help to start addressing the lack of suitable properties for these households. Unsightly properties also often have a detrimental effect on neighbouring house prices and can also result in a lack of pride in the area.

The possibility of empty

properties attracting unwanted attention can also cause anxiety and concern for local residents.

Returning empty properties to use can help eliminate these issues and ensure that house prices in the neighbourhood are protected from preventable reductions.



Empty Homes Strategy 2014–2017

The Empty Homes Strategy for 2014-2017 was adopted by Shropshire Council earlier this month following a 90 day public consultation. The consultation received considerable interest with a total of 79 formal responses being returned.

The majority of the responses were extremely supportive of the strategy's approach and demonstrated the importance Shropshire's residents, communities, businesses and other stakeholders place on tackling the issue of empty property across the county.

On average 86% of re-

spondents agreed and strongly agreed with the strategic approach, and



some very positive and supportive comments were received.

A small number of amendments were made

to the proposed strategy in response to all feedback received to create the final version put forward for adoption.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who participated in the consultation process for your considered feedback and input into the approach of empty homes work in Shropshire.

The strategy can be viewed on the Council's website, or by request to the Empty Homes Team via phone or email.

Targets update

The Return to use and creation of new homes targets for the period April 2014 – March 2015 are:

Empty Homes returned to use - 75
Homes created from empty property - 10

Good progress is being made in reaching these targets, as shown in the table below. More information on current and future targets can be found in the Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2017.

	2014/15 Q1 (Apr/May/June)	2014/15 Q2 (Jul/Aug/Sept)
Empty Homes Returned to Use	19	11
Homes Created	3	3

Changes to Empty Homes Council Tax

Changes to Council Tax law in 2013 allowed Councils to apply a "long term empty property premium" of an additional 50% to domestic properties which have been empty for over two years.

This premium increases the council tax charge to 150% of the normal rate.



Shropshire Council began applying this premium from April 2014 on properties that hit the specified criteria as a means to encourage empty property owners to return their properties to use.

Some exemptions can be applied for defined periods of time, for specific reasons, but reasonable proof will be required on requesting such exemptions.

Any initial enquiries relating to the above can be made by contacting the Council Tax Team—see back page for contact details.

"Good progress made towards reaching empty homes targets"

Empty Homes Action Zones Update

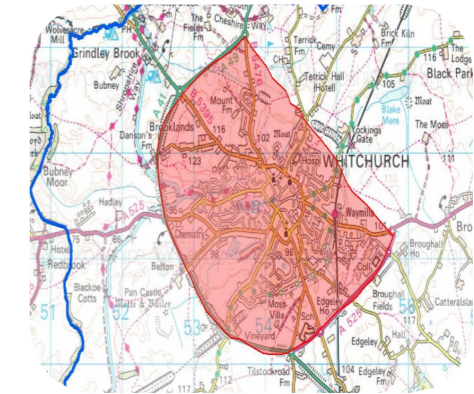
Action Zones are a focused approach to empty homes and regeneration work in Shropshire, targeting use of Empty Homes Incentive Grant funding in areas it is most needed.

In the two existing zones of Market Drayton and Oswestry work has progressed well. Empty Property Incentive Grants have integrated with existing regeneration and revitalisation programmes administered by the Town Councils and communities, and have incentivised a great deal of

work to return empty properties to use which is on-going. In Market Drayton there have so far been 10 new residential units created through the Empty Property Incentive Grants and a further four have been created in Oswestry.

The Empty Homes Action Zone for 2014/15 is Whitchurch, which has received a very positive reaction in the town.

Significant preparation work has been undertaken in recent months, working alongside the Town Council, local



members, community groups, residents and owners of empty property to identify projects in preparations for receiving the grant funding.

More information on Empty Homes Action Zones can be found in the Empty Homes Strategy 2014-2017.

"Whitchurch is the Empty Homes Action Zone for 2014/15"

New Lease of Life for Ex Bank and Nightclub

16 High Street in Market Drayton is a large former bank and nightclub which had stood empty for 13 years and fallen into a serious state of disrepair. During its time as a nightclub it was a focus for late night anti-social behaviour and throughout the 13 years it stood empty was highlighted by the local community as having a significant negative impact on the Town.



Council contributed £20,000 from its Market Towns Revitalisation fund.

The project set out to provide good quality affordable homes for local people and to act as a catalyst for the regeneration of the Town Centre and it has been successful in this.

Now only a few weeks away from completion, all of the flats have already been let and the building is no longer a blight on the surrounding area.

In April 2012 Shropshire Housing Alliance and Wrekin Housing Trust, in partnership with Shropshire Council, Market Drayton Town Council and the local community were successful in a bid to the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme run by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

This bid contributed £114,000 towards the renovation of the building to create six new affordable one and two bedroomed flats.

As Market Drayton is an Empty Homes Action Zone, Shropshire Council contributed £120,000 of Empty Property Incentive Grants to the project and Market Drayton Town

Several other projects have either been completed or are on-going with the involvement of the Empty Homes Team to return further prominent long term empty properties in the Town Centre to use, helping Market Drayton become a more attractive place to live, work and visit.