

Appendix 1.

Principles for the Council's approach to empty homes

1. The Council wants empty homes to be used
2. The Council will encourage and facilitate their re-use (eg by providing advice, grants and loans)
3. The Council will take action to resolve specific issues caused by empty homes (where powers permit)
4. The Council will take action to secure re-use of empty homes where a business case exists.

Appendix 2.

Empty Homes Data September 2011

Time empty	Banbury	Bicester	Kidlington	Rural north	Rural south	Total by time empty	Total Empty for at least:	Banbury Empty for at least:	Bicester Empty for at least:	Kidlington Empty for at least:
6 m > 1 year	84	31	16	22	21	174	6 months: 567	222	88	57
1 > 2 years	58	30	23	29	23	163	1 year: 393	138	57	41
2 > 3 years	38	3	6	17	16	80	2 years: 230	80	27	18
3 > 4 years	16	12	3	14	14	59	3 years: 150	42	24	12
4 > 5 years	11	6	4	6	11	38	4 years: 91	26	12	9
5 > 6 years	5	2	3	7	5	22	5 years: 53	15	6	5
6 > 7 years	2	3	0	3	3	11	6 years: 31	10	4	2
7 > 8 years	7	1	1	5	1	15	7 years: 20	8	1	2
8 > 9 years	0	0	0	0	1	1	8 years: 5	1	0	1
9 > 10 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	9 years: 4	1	0	1
10 > 11 years	0	0	1	0	1	2	10 years: 4	1	0	1
11 > 12 years	0	0	0	1	0	1	11 years: 2	1	0	0
12 > 13 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	12 years: 1	1	0	0
13 > 14 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	13 years: 1	1	0	0
14 > 15 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	14 years: 1	1	0	0
15 > 16 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	15 years: 1	1	0	0
16 > 17 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	16 years: 1	1	0	0
17 > 18 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	17 years: 1	1	0	0
18 > 19 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	18 years: 1	1	0	0
19 > 20 years	1	0	0	0	0	1	19 years: 1	1	0	0
Total	222	88	57	104	96	567				

Appendix 3.

Text of standard letter to empty-home owners used in phase-1

Dear

Re:

I am writing to you about this property because we believe it has been empty for at least 2 years.

As you may know, there is national concern over the number of perfectly good homes that are standing empty when there are so many people seeking accommodation. Cherwell District Council shares that concern and wants to work with the owners of empty property to get them back into use. Once left vacant, properties almost always deteriorate and they can also cause problems for neighbours such as accumulating rubbish, rats and mice, vandalism and anti-social behaviour. As the owner, you are also missing out on a potentially significant source of income.

The Council can offer several different forms of financial assistance which you might like to consider:

1. Flexible Empty Homes Loan

This is a 5 year, flexible loan secured by a charge on the property. During the term of the loan, you can choose to make regular monthly payments, occasional payments or no payments at all. You can vary the arrangement at any time. The loan, plus outstanding interest, must be repaid on the fifth anniversary of the loan, or if the property is sold, – whichever occurs first. Interest rates are charged at 2% above Bank of England rate, subject to minimum and maximum rates.

After the necessary works have been completed, you may sell the property, let it or use it as your own residence.

2. Landlord's Home Improvement Grant ¹

This scheme provides grants for landlords towards the cost of improving properties which can then become homes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The grant will fund up to 50% of the cost of agreed works up to a maximum of £10,000. In return, landlords must offer tenancies for the grant-improved accommodation to people nominated by the Council. The period over which we exercise these nomination rights depends on the size of the grant awarded.

3. Private Sector Leasing Scheme

We are also introducing a new scheme through which we can arrange funding, project management of the work and then management of the property under a private sector lease. Owners only have to sign up for the scheme and a Housing Association, working in partnership with the Council, will do the rest.

In very brief terms, the property is inspected to assess whether it is suitable for the scheme, the scope and cost of the works required to bring the property up to an appropriate standard, and the level of rent which would be achievable.

Once terms have been agreed with the owner, the Council provides a secured low-interest rate loan to fund the required work. On completion, the property is let as affordable housing, the rental income is used to repay the loan over the period of the lease, and the owner receives the

¹ This grant is dependent on the location, type of property and the Council's needs at the time of application. We typically have a need for 1, 2 & 3 bed units in Banbury, Bicester & Kidlington.

net rent. At the end of the lease period the property is returned to the owner in appropriate condition.

We believe this is a 'win- win' deal for owners of empty properties because:

- No financial input is required from the owner
- The renovations are carried out to a high standard.
- During the lease-period the owner receives the net rent but doesn't have to deal with management of the property or pay the Council Tax.
- At the end of the agreement the loan will have been repaid in full and the property is returned in good order or, if the owner wishes, it can continue to be let.

I hope one of these options might encourage you to get your empty property back into use and would be very pleased to discuss options with you.

However, as I started by saying, the Council is concerned about the number of long-term empty homes. Although we would much prefer to work with owners to bring them back into use we shall in future be keeping under review all those homes which remain unoccupied for more than 2 years. That review will include consideration of whether we should be taking legal action to get them back into use. The range of possible actions includes Compulsory Purchase or the making of an Empty Dwelling Management Order.

Please get in touch with me to discuss your plans for this property and to let me know if you are interested in any assistance we can offer.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely