



Empty Homes Strategy

2017-2022



success





Welcome to the Council's new Empty Homes Strategy 2017-2022.

This Strategy sets out our approach for tackling empty homes in the Borough, which can blight local neighbourhoods and in some cases become a magnet for crime and anti-social behaviour.

The Strategy aims to reduce the impact of empty homes on local communities and minimise the wasted housing resource created by homes being left empty.

In line with our values, I believe this Strategy sets out key objectives and provides the framework to enable us to deal with empty homes, clearly setting out the Council's approach and commitment to tackling this issue over the next 5 years.

The Strategy will concentrate on 4 key objectives:

1. Encourage owners to bring empty homes back into use.
2. Bring problematic empty homes back into use through enforcement action.
3. Devise and explore new and innovative solutions to reduce the impact of empty homes on local communities and bring them back into use.
4. Develop a coordinated approach to help identify and tackle empty homes.

I look forward to reporting on the success and achievements in the near future.

Councillor Paul Mercer
Lead Member
Strategic and Private Sector Housing



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Charnwood's Empty Homes Strategy 2017-2022 sets out a clear direction and action plan to reduce the negative impact that empty homes can have on surrounding homes and areas, whilst making the best possible use of the housing stock

By tackling empty homes, we hope to:

- Improve housing conditions, the local environment and neighbourhoods.
- Reduce vandalism and associated anti-social behaviour.
- Contribute towards housing need by increasing housing provision and expanding the housing options available.

Empty homes can have a devastating effect on neighbourhoods and the environment and are a waste of valuable housing resource. For example, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) states "that an empty home reduces the market value of adjoining homes by up to 18%".

National Context

When the Coalition Government was formed it set out its aim for empty homes in the Housing Strategy for England (Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England 2014) part of which was to increase the number of empty homes brought back into use as a sustainable way of increasing the overall

supply of housing, and to reduce blight on neighbourhoods. The Government made a commitment to put in place the right incentives and levers, both practical and financial, to support local authorities, housing providers and community and voluntary groups.

This resulted in the 'income incentives' for local authorities to bring empty homes back into use in the form of the New Homes Bonus and the ability to charge 150% council tax for owning a long-term empty home.

There are currently 610,000 empty homes in England with 205,821 long-term vacant dwellings (homes unoccupied for over six months); (Homes from Empty Homes 2015).

Regional Context

Using the 2016 CBT1 data, the organisation Empty Homes calculated that across the East Midlands the proportion of homes that were empty for more than 6 months was 0.96% (at that time, the proportion within Charnwood was 0.84%) and for the whole of England was 0.86%.

The region with the highest proportion of empty homes was the North East with 1.34% and the region with the lowest was London with 0.60%.

The position within the Borough is therefore similar to that within the region.



Our Corporate Plan 2016-2020 sets out the Council's key themes, one of which is to make sure that Charnwood is a great place to live for families by *“creating a strong and lasting economy”*

A Great Place to Live for Families

Through this Strategy, Charnwood Borough Council aims to bring up to 250 empty homes back into use over the next 5 years, reducing the pressure on existing housing stock and providing decent family accommodation.

A Safe and Secure Environment

By tackling empty homes, we will reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour that can be associated with some empty homes, improve the lives of local residents and reduce pressure on emergency services and various Council services.

Achieving our Ambitions

In order to achieve our ambitions, this Strategy focuses on 4 key objectives:

1. Encourage empty home owners to bring empty homes back into use.
2. Bring problematic empty homes back into use through enforcement action.
3. Devise and explore new and innovative solutions to reduce the impact of empty homes on local communities and bring them back into use.
4. Develop a coordinated approach to help identify and tackle empty homes.



***Creating
a Strong
and Lasting
Economy***



Although the number of empty homes within the Borough is consistent with the East Midlands overall, and there will always be a number of empty homes within a fluid housing market, we want to ensure that longer term empty homes are not a wasted resource

The Current Position

In Charnwood, there are around 1,200 empty homes at any given time, some of which are undergoing renovation or awaiting probate. This figure includes social housing. We estimate that there are approximately 500 empty homes that have been empty for 6 months or more and of these 250 have been empty for 2 years or more.

Through this 5 year Strategy, we aim to bring long-term empty homes back into use.

There are a number of ways of defining what constitutes an empty home. One consistent measure of the extent of the number of empty homes in the Borough is the annual CTBI return (Council Tax Base Information) submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government. This data focuses on homes that have been empty for 6 months or more.

The tables below detail the number of empty homes in Charnwood between 2010 and 2016 and the percentage of empty homes regionally, nationally based on 2016 CTB1 data.

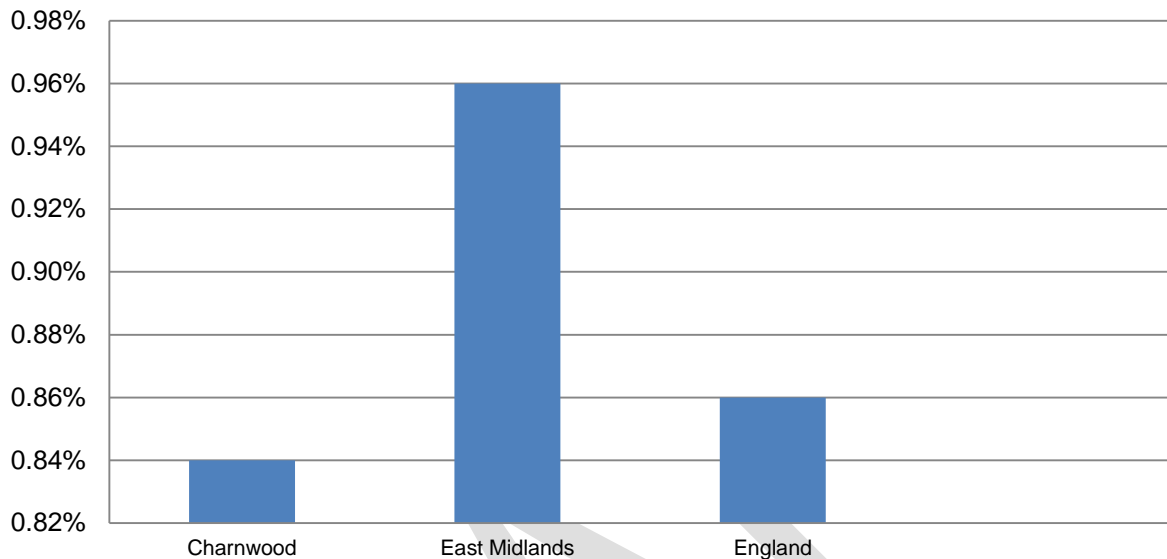
Empty homes in Charnwood between 2010 and 2016

Year	Number of empty homes for 6 months or more	% empty homes
2010	747	1.09%
2011	738	1.07%
2012	641	0.92%
2013	648	0.92%
2014	651	0.92%
2015	713	1.00%
2016	608	0.84%



Over the Past 5 Years

Empty homes as a % of all homes, locally, regionally and nationally (2016)



Corporate Plan Target

The Council have a Corporate Plan Target to bring 50 empty homes back into use each year.

The Council appointed an Empty Homes Officer in August 2016 and through the provision of housing advice and assistance, partnership grants and enforcement action brought 45 empty homes back into use in 2016-2017.



Charnwood Borough Council aims to bring 250 empty homes back into use over the next 5 years

Examples of empty homes brought back into use in Charnwood

Who benefits from bringing empty homes back into use?

Benefits from bringing empty homes back into use
The Homeowner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased income • Increased capital value • Reduced costs – e.g. Council Tax liability and empty home insurance
The Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision of additional housing options • Reduced negative impact on house prices (RICS) • Prevents anti-social behaviour including vandalism, arson, burglary, fly tipping and drug misuse
The Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased housing supply • Reduced costs in dealing with complaints about empty homes • Increase in New Homes Bonus payments • Recovery of debt owed to the Council, associated with empty homes



Encourage empty home owners to bring empty homes back into use

The Council’s initial aim is to provide help and advice to the owners of empty homes. The Empty Homes Officer provides advice and support, on a one-to-one basis, where each case is assessed on its merits. Assistance may be given with refurbishment, sales, lettings, health and safety matters and finding tenants.

Partnership Grants

The Council currently offers discretionary financial assistance in the form of a Partnership Grant. This financial assistance helps towards the cost of works to bring the home up to a lettable standard in exchange for nomination rights.



Tenant Finder Scheme

The scheme aims to support home owners to overcome the problems that can arise during the letting process, whilst providing good quality homes for families who need somewhere to live.

The service aims to simplify what can be a stressful experience. Tenant Finder will assist the empty home owner through the whole of the letting process, from introducing them to a prospective tenant to signing the tenancy agreement.

Private Sector Leasing (PSL)

Private Sector Leasing is a scheme where the Council enters into a lease with a private landlord. The Council uses the home to provide affordable accommodation for homeless families.

Advice on Repair Works and letting

The Empty Homes Officer can provide a Schedule of Works outlining what works need to be completed to bring the home up to a lettable standard.

Advice on Selling the Home

The Empty Homes Officer can offer advice on selling an empty home including access to discounted fees from estate agents and auctioneers.

ACTION
<p>Encourage empty home owners to bring empty homes back into use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the Partnership Grant qualifying criteria and conditions as part of the Private Sector Housing Grants Policy Review • Provide advisory events for empty home owners, with relevant guest speakers



Bring problematic empty homes back into use through enforcement action

Where all other approaches fail, or if there is an imminent risk to health and safety, the Council will consider a number of enforcement options. The options available include, but are not limited to:

Measures to bring empty homes back into use
Enforced Sale
Allows local authorities to force the sale of a home to recover debts owed to the Council that are registered as a charge on the home.
Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)
CPOs allows local authorities to apply to the Secretary of State for the compulsory purchase of an empty home.
Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)
EMDOs allow local authorities to secure occupation and responsible management of some privately owned houses and flats that have been empty for two years or more.

Enforced Sale

Enforced sale is a procedure that allows local authorities to recover charges, for example, where works in default have been charged to a property. Although this is not a tool for returning empty homes back into use, by forcing a sale to recover a debt, a home is often brought back into use as a consequence.

Where an empty home has debts owed to the Council secured against it as a Local Land Charge, or where the Council can apply to the County Court for an interim charging order (and if successful, then apply for a final charging order to enforce the sale of the home), Enforced Sale will comprise one of the actions considered in relation to the property.

Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)

Where a local authority is able to make a compelling case in the interest of the public for a home to be compulsorily purchased and where other methods of returning the home to use have been tried and failed, a CPO provides the final sanction to facilitate the renovation and reoccupation of the most problematic empty homes.

In making an application the Council must show (among other things) a clear intention for the use of the home and be able to show that it has the necessary resources available to follow through with the CPO.

Where an owner is not willing to sell by agreement, an application may be made under Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985, which allows for homes to be acquired for residential purposes if there is a general housing need in the area.

If using this provision, the Council must demonstrate a qualitative or quantitative increase in the housing stock.



Section 226 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 also allows local authorities to acquire land or buildings, if such acquisition will allow improvements or redevelopment to take place that contributes to the promotion and/or improvement of economic, social or environmental wellbeing.

It may be appropriate to acquire empty homes that adversely affect the street scene because of their condition.

Compulsory Purchase Orders
An application for a CPO will only be successful where:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It can be proved that the public benefit outweighs the private loss 2. That the Council is able to show there are clear intentions for the home/land 3. That the necessary resources are in place
The process is not without risk and the Council will first attempt to acquire the property through negotiation.

Owners of homes that are compulsory purchased may be entitled to compensation for the loss at a level equivalent to the open market value and may be entitled to additional compensation under certain circumstances.

Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO)

An EDMO can be made where an owner leaves a home empty and has no intention of securing its voluntary reoccupation. With an EDMO, the Council undertakes the management of a home for a set period of time, up to seven years, with the EDMO being reviewed after that time.

EDMOs are open to appeal at any stage and can be administratively burdensome, with the end result being the likely return of the home into the same ownership as that which left it vacant in the first instance.

In order to obtain an interim EDMO, an application must be made to the First-tier Tribunal (FtT) (Property Chamber), who must be satisfied that the home is not exempt.

Exempt properties include:

- Second homes
- Holiday lets
- Flats and houses normally occupied by students
- The owner is in prison
- The owner is receiving or giving care
- The owner is in the armed forces
- The relevant proprietor is temporarily residing elsewhere
- The property is on the market for sale or to let



The FtT must also be satisfied that the owner has been notified that the Council is going to apply for an EDMO, that the Council attempted to ascertain what steps the owner is taking to bring the home back into use (and those details) and that:

- The home has been empty for at least 2 years
- There is no reasonable prospect of the home being occupied in the near future
- By granting the order, there is a reasonable prospect of the home being brought back into use

If these matters are satisfied, the FtT will then balance the rights of the owner, against those of the wider community in making their decision.

Once granted, an interim order lasts for a maximum of 12 months, during which time the Council must take such action as they consider appropriate to ensure that the home becomes, and continues to be, occupied. This may include creating tenancies with the permission of the owner.

Where no such steps exist which are appropriate in order to secure the occupation of the dwelling, the Council must either make a final decision EDMO or revoke the interim order.

No further application to the FtT is required to make a final EDMO where an interim Order has been granted, but the owner may appeal to the FtT against the Council's decision to make such an Order.

Whilst a final EDMO is in force, the Council effectively becomes the landlord and may carry out renovation and maintenance work, create tenancies and will be responsible for the management of the home. Both interim and final EDMOs allow a local authority to collect rent and other payments from the occupant of a home and use it to meet any expenses incurred.

It is important to consider the likely income from the home, against the expenses likely to be incurred in bringing the homes up to a habitable standard and in managing the home through an EDMO.

An EDMO might be suitable where the cost of the works to bring the homes up to standard are not significant and may be recovered in the period of the order.

ACTION

Bring problematic empty homes back into use through enforcement action

- Develop an Empty Homes Enforcement Policy for dealing with problematic empty homes
- Finalise a scoring matrix to assist in the identification and prioritisation of problematic empty homes for appropriate enforcement action
- Set up procedures and template documents for CPO, Enforced Sales and EDMOs where the Council is able to show there are clear intentions for the home and/or land
- Take steps to establish the necessary resources required to consider enforcement action in appropriate cases



Devise and explore new and innovative solutions to reduce the impact of empty homes on local communities and bring them back into use

The impact of long-term empty homes on local communities can be exacerbated by anti-social behaviour, crime and vandalism, committed by those attracted to a vacant property because of its availability and lack of security.

In some cases, the harbourage of vermin in empty, neglected homes can impact on neighbouring properties.

On occasion, the impact of the appearance of an empty home can have a detrimental effect on the surrounding area.

The Council has powers to enforce the securing of empty homes and to remove vermin and items that may attract vermin (e.g. food waste or soft furnishings) and to enforce improvements when a property is having a detrimental effect on the amenity of the surrounding area, but the long term solution for such problems - to minimise their reoccurrence - is for the property to be returned into use.

As such, Charnwood Borough Council is committed to exploring innovative solutions to help reduce the impact of empty homes on local communities and bring them back into use.

The Council held a Consultation event in May 2017 to review the draft Empty

Homes Strategy and to identify actions that could be taken to meet its objectives.

A number of ideas were suggested by stakeholders which the Council are considering, detailed below:

Social Lettings Schemes

Establish a social lettings scheme to provide access to the private rented sector run on a commercial basis. The Scheme will help homeless and vulnerable people to access and sustain tenancies and generate income to cover operational costs.

Empty Homes Leasing Scheme

Similar to our existing Private Sector Leasing Scheme, the proposed scheme would focus on the voluntary leasing of empty homes by the Council over a sufficient period of time to ensure that rental income covers the costs of the remedial works required to bring the home to a lettable standard. Ultimately, returning the renovated home back to the owner.



Affordable Loan Scheme

An affordable loan offered directly or indirectly through a partner organisation, to owners of empty homes wishing to carry out essential repair works prior to occupation.

A Council Owned Development Company

The establishment of a Council owned Development Company, able to purchase empty homes at market value for refurbishment, development and occupation to meet the needs of homeless and vulnerable people.

Understanding of Minimum Energy Efficiency Requirements

From April 2018, properties rented out (new tenancies and re-lets) in the private rented sector must, generally, have a minimum energy performance rating of 'E' on an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). This will extend to all existing tenancies in April 2020 when it will be unlawful to rent a property which breaches the requirement (unless there is an applicable exemption). There is a risk that there will be an increase in homes left empty because they do not meet energy performance rating required.

ACTION

Devise and explore new and innovative solutions to reduce the impact of empty homes on local communities and bring them back into use

- Explore the potential for a Social Lettings Scheme
- Explore the potential for an Empty Homes Leasing Scheme
- Consider the establishment of an affordable loan scheme for those renovating empty properties for their own eventual occupation
- Explore the establishment of a Council owned development company
- Publicise incoming minimum energy efficiency standards for rented accommodation (2018) and assistance available for landlords to comply to minimise potential for an increase in the number of empty homes



Develop a coordinated approach to help identify and tackle empty homes

In order to contribute towards the growing demand for housing, together with tackling the blight of empty homes, the Council intends to work in collaboration with other service areas and external partners to help bring empty homes back into use.

Empty Homes Officer

The Empty Homes Officer will build on the close working relationship with Council Tax officers, with a view to replicating this with other service areas across the Council including:

- Building Control
- Development Control
- Environmental Protection
- Community Safety
- Government Agencies
- Registered Providers (Housing Associations)

The Hub

The Hub, the Council's internal Regulatory Services group, shares information and coordinates work across services. Problematic empty homes are brought to the attention of the group and the most effective course of action is taken. For example, securing a property from unauthorised entry, preventing damage by pests, removal of refuse accumulations or tidying the site where it is having a detrimental effect on the amenity or the neighbourhood.

Joint Action Group

The Joint Action Group attended by the Police, the Youth Offending Service, Loughborough University, Leicestershire County Council Adults, Communities Support Team and Housing meet to jointly tackle the concerns and issues of the Community. Empty homes that are attracting and exacerbating anti-social behaviour are discussed and the appropriate course of action agreed across the organisations.

Online Reporting Tool

Charnwood residents that are affected by issues associated with an empty home, or residents that are simply aware of the whereabouts of an empty home are able to report this directly to our Empty Homes Officer or report it online – through our specific empty home referral e-forms.

ACTION
<p>Develop a coordinated approach to help identify and tackle empty homes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create improved communication channels with relevant services and external bodies • Set up a proactive program to help identify empty homes and offer assistance • Consider the creation of working relationships with organisations in contact with empty home owners, including nursing homes and solicitors • Review current publicity arrangements and consider the production of a newsletter for stakeholders



empty homes strategy action plan 2017-2022				
	ACTION	LEAD ORGANISATION/S	OUTCOMES	DELIVER BY
1.	Review advice and assistance available to empty home owners including Partnership Grants and the Tenant Finder Scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charnwood Borough Council • Estate Agents • Letting Agents • Auctioneers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised Tenant Finder Protocol • Revised Partnership Grant Criteria and Conditions in line with consultation • Improved offer of sales and lettings packages for empty home owners 	August 2017
2.	Explore opportunities for empty homes leasing and Social Lettings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charnwood Borough Council • Registered Providers • External organisations e.g. charities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of the Private Sector Leasing Scheme to incorporate the potential leasing and renovation of Empty Homes as part of a Social Lettings Scheme 	August 2018
3.	Arrange and host advisory events for empty home owners with relevant guest speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charnwood Borough Council • Estate Agents • Letting Agents • Auctioneers • Solicitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed empty home owners • Increase in empty homes returned into use without the need for enforcement action 	First Event December 2017
4.	Review current publicity arrangements and consider the production of a newsletter for stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charnwood Borough Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a newsletter for Empty Home stakeholders 	February 2018



empty homes strategy action plan 2017-2022

	ACTION	LEAD ORGANISATION/S	OUTCOMES	DELIVER BY
5.	Develop an Enforcement Policy for dealing with problematic empty homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charnwood Borough Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of Empty Homes Enforcement Policy Methodical prioritisation of empty homes subject to enforcement action through a scoring matrix Establishment of necessary Empty Homes enforcement budget Improved conditions of empty homes Increase in number of problematic empty homes brought back into use as a result of enforcement action taken 	August 2017
6.	Consider the establishment of an affordable loan scheme for those renovating empty properties for their own eventual occupation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charnwood Borough Council External Funding Sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of an exercise to identify good practice in Local Authority Empty Homes Loan Schemes. Decision taken as to whether to introduce a loan scheme within Charnwood. 	July 2018
7.	Explore the establishment of a Council owned development company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charnwood Borough Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of Council owned development company Generation of funding to assist empty homes work, including enforcement 	December 2018
8.	Develop improved communication channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charnwood Borough Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened links with relevant internal and external services The creation of new working relationships focused on returning empty homes back into use 	December 2018
9.	Publicise incoming minimum energy efficiency standards for rented accommodation and assistance available for landlords to comply to minimise potential for increase in number of empty homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charnwood Borough Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness of and compliance with the requirements 	



In order to deliver the Empty Homes Strategy successfully, the Council will utilise all available resources across its own services and its external partners

The key resources required to deliver this Strategy include:

- Empty Homes Officer
- The Council Tax service's continued cooperation in providing the Empty Homes Officer with information to help identify empty homes
- A close working relationship with Development Control, Enviro-Crime, Environmental Protection, Community Safety, Electoral Registration and local Councillors
- Government Agencies
- Registered Providers (Housing Associations)
- A close working relationship with Legal Services. It is imperative and essential that legal action is taken promptly and in accordance with the law in problematic cases
- Funds to carry out marketing campaigns, projects (including grant assistance) and to implement enforcement action where required.



The effectiveness and delivery of the Strategy will be monitored throughout the Strategy period

The effectiveness and delivery of the Empty Homes Strategy will be monitored through the following forums:

- Performance Scrutiny Group
- Strategic and Private Sector Housing Management Team
- Private Sector Housing Team

In addition, following the Consultation event in May 2017, it was proposed that an Annual event will be held with Stakeholders to review the progress of the objectives and discuss developments and further opportunities to bring empty homes back into use.



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