

The empty property strategy for Herefordshire 2010 – 2013



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Foreword

Since Herefordshire Council published its last Empty Property Strategy, a great deal has changed in the housing market across the country. Herefordshire remains an area where high house prices and low household incomes create a large affordability gap. The shortage of housing in the county and the level of house prices and rents across all tenure types, has resulted in many households, particularly young single people and families, being unable to buy or rent suitable and good quality accommodation. The number of people registered for housing through Home Point has increased putting more pressure on affordable housing, which remains in short supply.

When looking at the need to increase housing supply as part of our strategic housing role, it is important that we make the best possible use of existing housing by taking action on the number of homes that are left empty for long periods of time. Unused housing in sustainable neighbourhoods is a wasted resource that can be brought back into occupation to assist people in housing need.

In a county where housing demand exceeds housing supply it is difficult to understand why homes are left empty, disused and deteriorating. An empty property is an opportunity to provide housing, alleviate pressure to build new homes and can reduce homelessness.

The Empty Property Strategy forms part of wider housing strategy to ensure we seek to maximise housing delivery and provide affordable housing through every opportunity. Herefordshire Council is committed to developing a range of approaches to ensure that these properties are appropriately used, ranging from informal advice, practical measure like leasing schemes and enforced measures like compulsory purchase. By working with property owners we can apply a number of solutions to facilitate bringing empty properties back into use.

The Empty Property Strategy sets out what Herefordshire Council aims to achieve to ensure empty properties are proactively targeted to bring them back into use to improve communities and to provide much needed housing for the people of Herefordshire.

By Councillor J. Jarvis

Cabinet Member for Environment and Strategic Housing



Part One

Executive summary

The Empty Property Strategy for Herefordshire is effective from November 2010 and sets out how the council, with the support of its partners, will reduce the number of empty properties in Herefordshire up to 2013. The strategy brings together the issues surrounding empty properties and will identify the means by which Herefordshire Council will improve housing provision and choice and improve communities.

The aim of this strategy is to:

‘examine how existing properties can be used to accommodate households with a range of needs, in particular to reduce demand for social housing, but also to ensure that the existing offer is utilised to meet the needs of the community as a whole’.

To deliver this strategy the preferred approach is to offer advice and assistance to encourage the owners of empty properties to bring their property back into use. Through partnership working a number of schemes are supported by the council to bring empty properties back into use to assist in meeting housing need. Where partnership working does not achieve the desired result the council will act accordingly to take the appropriate enforcement action.

To achieve the aim of this strategy 6 key objectives have been adopted taking into account the views of our stakeholders and the outcome of the review of our last strategy. This will ensure the greatest impact is made on reducing the number of empty properties by focusing activity, targeting resources effectively and developing effective partnerships.

In April 2010 council tax records identified 1923 empty properties of which 978 have been empty for over 6 months. Around half of these are in the rural areas of Herefordshire, quarter in Hereford City and the remaining quarter split between the market towns.

With limited resources, the priority is to target empty properties in Hereford City and the market towns where the housing need is the greatest with rural properties being targeted that can meet a specific identified need or are causing a particular concern to the community.

The council set challenging targets every year and for the period of this strategy the aim is to bring 390 properties back into use of which 120 will be classed as long term (>6 months). Over the past three years the targets set have been exceeded.

Although the number of empty homes in Herefordshire is below the national figure as a percentage of overall housing stock, Herefordshire does have a shortage of housing so it is important to ensure that existing stock is utilised.

This strategy has identified a number of actions that need to be completed over the course of this strategy to improve the way in which empty properties are identified and utilised to ensure that we consistently improve results year on year.

The strategy and the action plan will be reviewed on an annual basis to incorporate changes in both local and national policy.

Introduction

Herefordshire is a rural county and covers some 840 square miles. The population stands at approximately 179,300 (Office for National Statistics 2008 mid year estimate, published in August 2009) with most people living in and around either Hereford City or one of the 5 market towns. There are many developments creating new businesses and new housing and yet, housing need continues to exceed supply and many people cannot afford to rent or buy a suitable home. There remains a need for more housing of all kinds.

Future housing was identified in the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) as being a requirement for 18,000 homes in Herefordshire between 2006 and 2026. It is anticipated that half of these homes would be in Hereford City, as a recognised 'Growth Point' and the other half across the rest of the county. (The RSS was revoked on 6th July 2010 but this figure is still accepted as the target for Herefordshire).

At the same time, a significant number of existing properties remain empty, a majority of which are privately owned.

The council recognises that it has a strategic role in understanding how the housing market must develop in order to provide good quality affordable housing for local people.

The Government, working with the Empty Homes Agency, encourages local authorities to adopt measures to bring public and privately owned empty properties back into occupation as part of their strategic action approach, through engaging with owners to find solutions and offering incentives such as grants, loans or advice on selling, leasing and tax issues.

The council aims to proactively work with owners, through a range of initiatives including incentives and enforcement, to

help bring Herefordshire's empty properties back into occupation.

Empty properties are often a blight on a neighbourhood and an unused resource in an area where demand for housing is high. Bringing an empty property onto the rental market provides an opportunity for households that either, cannot afford to access home ownership, do not qualify for affordable housing or need to be mobile for work or other reasons, to access good quality accommodation. Bringing an empty property back onto the open market is an opportunity for a household to purchase a home and for a community to remain vibrant and sustainable.

The council has had increasing success in recent years and for the period 2003-2010 a total of 661 empty properties have been brought back into occupation (*page 12*).

This strategy sets out how the council will continue to work with owners of empty property, and with local communities to bring empty properties back into residential use. It demonstrates how the council have, and will continue, to develop a proactive approach to send out clear messages that existing housing must be effectively maximised.

Having an empty property strategy and actions to tackle the problems of empty properties make an important contribution to housing supply. In addition to housing, this strategy links in with the wider organisational and corporate strategies for planning, regeneration, social inclusion, homelessness and economic development. It is therefore important to ensure we have corporate commitment, to bring empty properties back into use across all departments.

The strategy and the action plan will be reviewed on an annual basis to incorporate changes in both local, regional and national policy.

How is an empty property defined?

The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) explains that there is no single definition for an empty property but generally the concern is to ensure that problematic empty properties i.e. those that are not subject to a transactional* process, are brought back into occupation.

It is important to recognise that a certain level of vacancy is necessary for the market to function, and also that different reasons for vacancy may require different solutions.

*Properties termed as being in a transactional process are those that will remain empty for a short period of time, generally between occupants or due to market forces, refurbishment or due to probate. There will always be a percentage of homes that fall into this category.

Properties that have been empty for less than 6 months are more likely to be transactional and are reported separately to the CLG by local authorities. Statistics show that over half of all empty properties are vacant for less than 6 months. The majority of the remainder, vacant for over 6 months, are likely to be problematic¹.

The CLG classes problematic vacancies as those that are inactive in the housing market and have been empty for more than 6 months.

Definition of a long term empty property

For the purposes of this strategy, an empty home or empty property is defined as

“a dwelling that has remained unoccupied for 6 months or more”

This includes; residential properties, furnished properties that are unoccupied (which may be registered as second homes but not used as such) and empty properties that may not be registered on the valuation lists as in a poor state or disrepair.

Aim

To examine how existing stock can be used to accommodate households with a range of needs to reduce demand for social housing, and to ensure that all existing stock is utilised to meet the needs of the community as a whole.

It is important to maximise the use of existing housing stock. This could then make significant progress in reducing waiting lists, providing additional move on and supported accommodation and reduce the use of temporary accommodation through a well planned approach.

Key objectives

The council have 6 key objectives:

1. To improve the assembly of relevant, accurate and up-to-date information.
2. To reduce the number of empty properties to provide a range and choice of homes by making use of existing housing stock.
3. To offer advice and assistance to the owners of empty properties, to those who are looking to develop empty properties and to those who are experiencing problems living in the vicinity of empty properties.
4. To raise the awareness of empty property issues, and promote a partnership approach to deal with the issues.

¹ (clg.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagementcare/emptyhomes)

5. To work in partnership across public services and externally to drive forward the implementation of this strategy and improve communication.
6. To minimise the impact of empty properties on the communities in which they are located.

(Detailed further in part 4)

Location	No. of empty properties	% of total
Hereford City	176	20.1
Bromyard	38	4.12
Kington	29	3.12
Ledbury	37	4.2
Leominster	48	5.14
Ross	53	6.0
Rural	497	56.9
Total	874	100%

Part Two

Our current position

This strategy has regard for national, regional and local policy which is explained in more detail in appendix A.

On 1st April 2010 there were 1923 properties on the Council tax records identified as being empty. A majority of these properties will be transactional and will be empty for less than 6 months. Of more significance is the number of long term empty properties (more than 6 months) which totalled 978. Most of these properties are privately owned. Council tax records have 80,910 residential properties registered in Herefordshire, therefore empty properties represent 2.3% of the housing stock, compared with the national and regional average of approximately 3% (source: Empty Homes Agency statistics 2008² - see appendix B)

Of the 978 long term empty properties, 874 are in the private sector and can be broken down as follows:

Of these 874 properties, there is an understanding why a majority of them are included on the council tax records as being un-occupied, following contact with the owners. The reasons are illustrated below:

Reason for being empty	No. of properties	% of total
Renovation	169	30.3
For sale	160	28.8
Occupied*	111	20.0
For rent	39	7.0
Used for business purposes	23	4.1
Redevelopment	20	3.6
Second home	20	3.6
Probate	12	2.1
Holiday homes	3	0.5
Total	557	100%

**(Properties are actually occupied and have yet to be removed from council tax records)*

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In addition to these properties, there are a further 40 properties where the landlord cannot be located; these continue to be investigated, and there are 19 properties when the owner has not engaged with the council and potentially enforcement action will be the next step.

When considering the number of empty properties which require the council's intervention to ensure they are utilised, it is apparent when considering the information above that the actual figure is far below 978 which was initially extracted from the council tax information.

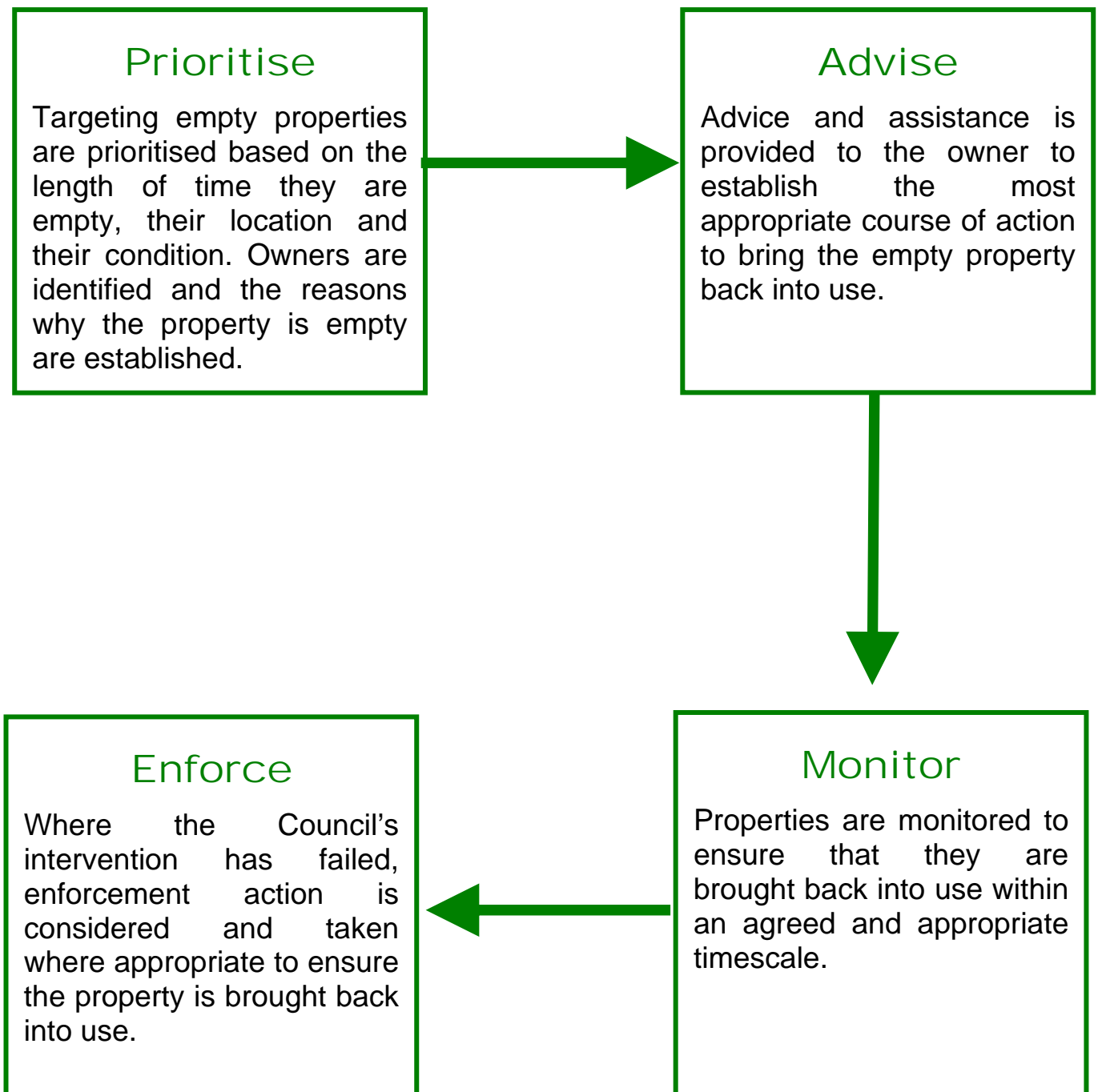
Benchmarking

The council work closely with other councils in the West Midlands to share best practice. A comparison can be made with those councils to give perspective to the challenges that Herefordshire face.

Whilst the average number of long term empty properties is relatively low compared with the national and regional average, Herefordshire has a housing need which needs to be supported. It is important to remember that a priority of the council is to bring empty properties back into use to assist in developing mixed and sustainable communities and although some initiatives focus on bringing forward affordable housing units, landlords are also encouraged to bring empty properties back onto the open market and the private rented market.

Council	Base line 09/10	Long term empty (LTE)	Target for overall empty (LTE & short term empty)	Target for LTE	Overall target as percentage of base line figure
Herefordshire	2139	963	120	40	5.6
Nuneaton & Bedworth (2007 figure)	1536	909	128	76	8.3
Newcastle (Staffs)	1800	990	Not available (n/a)	50	2.8
Sandwell	2376	998	n/a	68	2.9
Dudley	3930	1488	100	n/a	2.5
Redditch		903	90	90	n/a
Stafford	800	600	n/a	20	2.5
Wolverhampton	2600	2600	200	200	7.7

Our methodology



How are we bringing empty properties back into use?

Partnership working

The council actively engages with a number of Registered Social Landlord (RSL) preferred partners, letting and estate agents to deliver a variety of schemes to provide options for the owners of empty properties to bring them back into use. These schemes support the Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2013 as in many cases households can be taken out of temporary accommodation and placed back into empty properties, brought back into use through this strategy.

Leasing schemes

The council work with the private owners of empty properties to provide temporary accommodation for those in housing need. In return the owner is provided with a guaranteed rental income and security against any damage to the property. The properties are managed either by an RSL or a letting/estate agent with nominations provided by the council.

Temporary social housing scheme (TSH)

This scheme is designed to help the owners of properties that are empty and in need of some refurbishment to bring them up to a habitable standard. In exchange for grant assistance, the owner is required to lease the property to an RSL for a minimum of six years to provide temporary accommodation. Nominations are provided by the council and the property is managed by the RSL.

Purchase and repair scheme

This scheme enables an RSL to buy private properties for sale on the open market through funding via the council or direct from the Homes and Communities Agency

(HCA). These properties are then incorporated into the rented housing stock of the RSL thereby providing a permanent solution for empty properties, and in turn providing suitable homes for those in housing need.

Purchase of newbuild empty properties

Due to issues associated with the current housing market, the council are supporting RSLs to purchase unsold and empty new build properties from developers for affordable housing, with the support of the HCA. This is subject to meeting minimum energy efficiency and design standards

Rent deposit scheme

In order to assist individual households the council's Homelessness and Housing Options Service provide deposits and/or a month's rent in advance to assist households to secure accommodation through private landlords. Through this scheme households are assisted into available empty properties, which in turn bring them back into use.

Bond scheme

The council is also developing a Bond Scheme which is similar in nature to the Rent Deposit Scheme. Under this scheme, instead of a cash deposit, the council issues a bond against any possible damage or other loss to the landlord.

Do it yourself shared ownership (DIYSO)

The council operate the DIYSO scheme in partnership with an RSL to assist households into home ownership. Empty properties can be purchased where refurbishment is required. This can also improve the sustainability of neighbourhoods.

Information and advice

Dedicated resources

A housing development officer is currently dedicated to bringing empty properties back into use across Herefordshire and provides a single point of contact and an experienced resource for all matters relating to empty properties.

West Midlands Empty Property Officer's Forum

The Housing Development Officer is a member of the West Midlands Empty Property Officers Forum who meet regularly to share best practice and knowledge on bringing empty properties back into use across the West Midlands region.

Independent advice

The council provide an independent advice service to owners of empty properties regardless of the course of action they wish to take, providing that action is taken to bring the empty property back into use. Advice can include signposting individuals to landlords associations, a range of services including the citizen's advice bureau or council departments such as building control or planning services, for more specialised advice and assistance. In some cases, third party introductions are facilitated, for example with estate agents, to assist the individual in taking positive action.

Advice pack

Information and advice is available on all aspects of residential letting, selling, leasing and grant funding opportunities through a comprehensive empty property information pack (*An Owner's Guide – Bringing Empty Properties back into Residential Use*). This pack is sent out on request and provides a useful starting point for owners of empty properties to consider their options. The

guide is also available on the council's website.

Letters and questionnaires

Letters are sent directly to the owners of empty properties containing information and questionnaires to establish why properties are empty, to advise owners of their options and to begin the process of bringing empty properties back into use. This process also assists in prioritising the information received from council tax records to focus resources where required. For example letters containing information about VAT reductions can then be targeted to the appropriate owners of empty properties which require refurbishment or renovation.

Herefordshire council website

The council's website provides a resource on empty properties and how the council can assist in bringing them back into use.

There is also facility on the website to report empty properties to the council. (www.herefordshire.gov.uk/housing/empty-homes/1544.asp)

Landlords' focus group

The council facilitate a landlords' focus group that provides effective links with the private rented sector in Herefordshire and is a resource for consultation. This group assists in raising awareness of empty properties in the private sector and meets several times per year.

Landlords' event

Events have been held to promote the private rented sector and to provide a venue to exchange information on services and best practice. The council's obligations to bring empty properties back into use are promoted through these events to encourage and assist the owners of empty properties and also existing landlords.

Landlords' newsletter

The landlords' newsletter is published periodically through the landlords' focus group and provides information on council initiatives and any changes in legislation that may affect the private rented sector. Copies are available on the council's website.

Empty property newsletter

An empty property newsletter is published annually and targeted at the owners of empty properties advising them of the council's role in ensuring empty properties are utilised and to inform them of initiatives and options that are available to assist them. Copies are available on the council's website.

Information events

Through engaging with rural communities to identify the need for affordable housing, an opportunity is provided to allow individuals to learn about how the council can bring empty properties back into use and how they can report rural empty properties.

Accreditation scheme for landlords

If an empty property is brought back into use as a rental unit, the owner is encouraged to join the council's accreditation scheme to assist them in becoming a good landlord, particularly if they haven't had any previous experience. The scheme offers benefits to landlords in the form of additional security and energy efficiency measures for their properties. For all of the schemes that the council offers, landlords are expected to be registered under the accreditation scheme to meet the standard that the council promotes; which in turn assists in endorsing good landlords, promoting their services and also engages landlords in raising standards.

Enforcement

Enforcement action is not considered until all other means to resolve a situation have been exhausted. The council's approach has always been to work with people in order to achieve outcomes without resorting to formal

means. Enforcement works best alongside a support package which can assist the owner in exploring potential solutions, depending on their circumstances.

There are a number of pieces of legislation which can be called upon to address the issues associated with empty properties and these are detailed in appendix D. The legislation can be enforced by various departments of the council dependant on what the issues are and under which departments' jurisdiction they fall.

There are some primary pieces of legislation that can be used to assist in bringing empty properties back into use. The council are committed to using these powers, where necessary, to ensure that empty properties are utilised.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders

To assist local authorities in their empty property work, the Housing Act of 2004 introduced new powers – Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO), which are designed to allow an authority to take over the management rights of a property for the purpose of bringing the property back into use. The new powers were awarded to local authorities to enable them to take over the management rights of a property should the property be empty for more than 6 months, and where the owner has not demonstrated any clear plan to bring the property back into use in the near future. The management of such properties is undertaken by a local registered social landlord through a management agreement.

It has become apparent to local authorities across the UK that just the threat of applying for an EDMO can encourage owners to bring their property back into use. Once a landlord realises the scope of the EDMO and its implications, they are more likely to take action to bring the property into use and benefit from it themselves, rather than lose this option.

In October 2006, Herefordshire Council Cabinet Member for Environment and Strategic Housing granted approval for EDMO’s to be undertaken, should that course of action be required. As yet, it has not been necessary to undertake any EDMO’s.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) can be used where a property remains empty for a considerable length of time and is causing detriment to neighbouring properties and the surrounding area. In exceptional circumstances, if it is not possible to bring a property back into use by utilising other options available, including an EDMO, the compulsory purchase of a property should be considered.

In August 2007, Herefordshire Council Cabinet Member for Environment and Strategic Housing granted approval was granted for CPOs to be undertaken, should that course of action be required.

Enforced Sale

In some cases the owner of a property may have a debt against the empty property with the council, for example, in relation to work that has been carried out to secure the property whilst it is empty, or as the result of an EDMO where the full costs of renovating, managing and maintaining the property has not been recovered through the rental income received.

Such debts are registered by the council in the form of a charge under Part 2 of the Local Land Charge Register, and are payable by the owner within a specified time limit once the council has served the appropriate notices. If the owner does not comply with the notice, the property can be sold to recoup the council’s costs.

What we have achieved!

A positive impact on empty properties

Since the last strategy was published in 2002, the council has continued to apply more challenging targets to bringing empty properties back into use assisted by the introduction of additional initiatives to assist owners of empty properties to find a solution that is appropriate to them.

Table 1

Year	07/08		08/09		09/10	
Length of vacancy	< 6 mths	> 6 mths	< 6 mths	> 6 mths	< 6 mths	> 6 mths
Advice Assistance	Not available	26	Not available	21	0	11
Leasing Scheme		1		1	14	8
TSH grant		7		12	2	9
Purchase & repair		4		7	1	3
Rent Deposit					113	15
Sub total	107	38	112	41	130	46
Total	145		153		176	

Table 1 above illustrates that in the last 3 years, 474 empty properties have been brought back into use. This has been achieved against challenging targets of 100, 110 and 120 units respectively, and demonstrates the commitment and the resources that the council has directed towards empty property work in recent years.

It is apparent that the most successful route to bringing empty properties back into use is through comprehensive advice and assistance. The leasing scheme and the temporary social grant scheme also provide effective schemes to bring properties back into use but also assist in meeting housing need by providing temporary accommodation.

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Our performance from 2003-2010

Fig 1

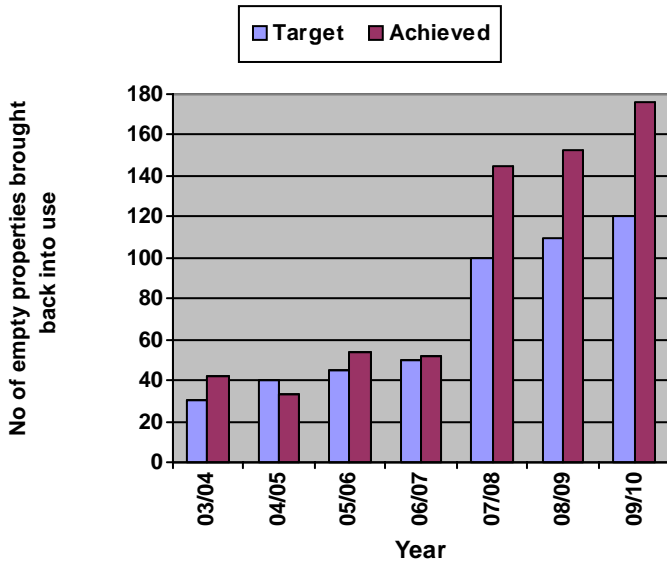
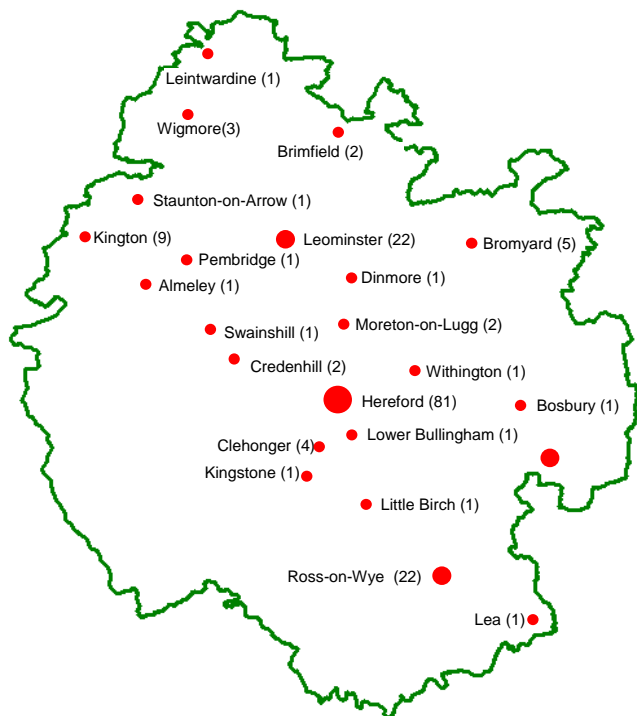


Fig 2 – 2009/10 locations where empty properties have been brought back into use



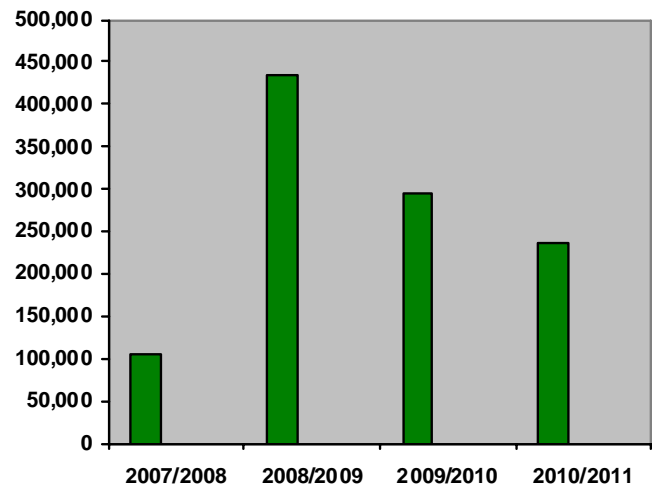
Our Financial Commitment

Where funding is required, the total budget commitment for schemes to bring empty property back into use for the last 3 years was:

2007/2008	£105,207
2008/2009	£434,758
2009/2010	£295,798

For 2010/2011 the allocated budget is:

2010/2011	£237,715
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It is important to ensure that this momentum is maintained and that the council continues to work positively, through the support of this strategy, to bring empty properties back into use.

Empty property activity can produce direct savings and efficiencies for local authorities and assist them to demonstrate that they are achieving value for money through investing resources in such activity

Performance indicators

The Local Authority use a number of performance indicators to measure and record the number of empty properties that are brought back into use:

- National indicator (NI)
- Local Performance Indicator (LPI)

Indicator	
NI 155	This national indicator is set by the local authority and agreed and reported to the CLG and relates to the number of affordable homes delivered and is designed to promote an increase in the supply of affordable housing. It measures total supply of social rent housing and intermediate housing. Bringing empty properties back into use to provide affordable housing contributes to this figure.
LPI1	This local performance indicator (LPI) records the <i>“empty properties brought back into use that have been empty for 6 months +”</i>
LPI2	Following the end of the national “best value performance indicator” BVPI64, the council continues to monitor empty property activity using the same criteria and definition ³ ; government advice is to continue to monitor performance under this indicator.
Both LPI’s provide a clear message of the importance the council places on monitoring empty property activity in ensuring its contribution to the wider housing requirement and sustainable communities.	

Part Three

When is an empty property not an empty property?

It is important to note that in some instances a property may be empty or appear empty but is outside the remit of this strategy. A property is not classed as empty if it is:

- a second home or a holiday home;
- a property which is part of wider regeneration programme and could be in the process of being developed or marked for demolition;
- a property which has pending planning permission, could be waiting refurbishment or could be waiting for new occupants to move in;
- a property which appears empty due to an overgrown garden or through lack of maintenance or repair but which could in fact be occupied;
- a property where a for sale/to-let board or where contractors equipment is evident could demonstrate that a property is in the process of being brought back into use;
- one where the owner is living elsewhere to provide or receive personal care (illness, old age, disablement, drug or alcohol dependence or mental disorder);
- one where the owner is a serving member of the armed forces and is absent as a result.

In all of these scenarios, information is always sought to confirm the situation and monitored where appropriate.

It should also be recognised that in circumstances where individuals are illegally occupying a property, action under this strategy cannot be taken until the property is unoccupied.

³ “number of non-local authority-owned vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished during the financial year as a direct result of action by the local authority”.

Why are properties left empty?

In order to develop an action plan to tackle empty properties it is important to understand the reasons why they are left unoccupied. The circumstances behind this can often be complicated and very often requires a diplomatic and sensitive approach by the council.

Although it is important to be mindful of transactional empty properties in case they fall into the category of long term vacant, it is likely that resources will be directed to those properties that have been vacant for a longer period of time.

Properties can become long term vacant properties for the following reasons:

- the owner may struggle to let or sell the property causing it to remain vacant (if the property is in a low demand area);
- in some situations it could take some time before certain legalities are resolved to then enable the property to be reoccupied (if a property is abandoned or repossessed);
- there can be an oversupply of certain property types, for example, if a new development supplies the market with a particular type of property over a short period of time, it may take longer for those properties to become occupied;
- if capital appreciation is the owner's only aim, they will not have an interest in utilising the property for any other means;
- some owners may have a fear of letting a property to a tenant although do not want to sell which leaves the property under utilised, particularly if the property has been inherited;
- if the property is in a poor state of repair, the owner may be unable to

afford to bring the property up to a habitable standard.

- particularly in the current market, many owners could be waiting for the market to improve before selling the property;
- unresolved ownership following death/probate can often take some time to resolve leaving a property standing empty;
- bankruptcy of an owner of a property can often take some time to resolve;
- owner is hospitalised/institutionalised which can cause uncertainty as to whether they are going to return to the property;
- the owner may not appreciate the financial benefits of bringing an empty property back into use and doesn't think it matters that the property is being unused.

There is a course of action that can deal with any of these scenarios whether it be the provision of advice, encouragement, a council initiative or as a last resort, enforcement action. The feasibility of bringing an empty property back into use needs to be assessed in deciding, with the owner, what the best course of action and outcome should be.

It must be understood however that there will be a small percentage of properties that remain empty for a longer period of time where a short term course of action cannot be taken (if the occupant has been hospitalised is an appropriate example). If this is the case, an ongoing review of the situation is adopted to ensure an appropriate course of action is taken when circumstances allow.

How do we locate and identify empty properties?

The council's principal resource for identifying empty properties is through council tax records; held by Benefit and Exchequer Services – Resources. They have a record of all properties in the county that are empty. This information is received by the Housing Development Officer on 1st April every year followed by quarterly updates and is sorted and prioritised in order that subsequent actions can be prioritised. Other means by which empty properties can be located are as follows:

- information can be received from parish councils;
- information can be received through the process of undertaking a local housing needs survey where respondents are asked to report empty properties in their parish;
- the general public can report empty properties at affordable housing consultation/information events and are encouraged to do so;
- through the Empty Homes Agency website;
- through the council's website;
- individual reports received from council officers/councillors;
- by means of the electoral register;
- individual reports received from members of the public;
- individual reports received from organisations such as community groups, the police or the fire service.

When an empty property is reported, as much information as possible is collected to assist in identifying its location, its state or repair and its ownership. These reports can then be followed up by the Housing Development Officer visiting the property

and looking for signs of non occupation; such as broken windows or a generally dilapidated appearance. An initial inspection is always carried out following an individual enquiry prior to any further work being undertaken.

What problems can an empty property cause?

If a property is left empty for a considerable length of time, in many cases it can cause problems for the owner, the local authority and the surrounding community by:

- detracting from the quality of environment as empty properties are very often poorly maintained and can very quickly deteriorate
- empty properties can attract vermin as a safe and dry space in which to take residence;
- an empty property can become damp and the main fabric of the building can very quickly deteriorate causing substantial damage which can be very costly to rectify. This can also effect adjoining property;
- an empty property can be a magnet for vandals, squatters, drug dealers, arsonists which can cause a deterioration to the property and the community in which its located;
- an empty property can attract fly tipping;
- a deteriorating property can become a health and safety hazard due to factors such as falling tiles or loose glass from broken windows;
- The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) estimate that adjoining properties to empty properties can be devalued by an average of 18%.

What are the benefits of bringing an empty property back into use?

To the community:

- enhancing the local environment and assisting in creating sustainable communities;
- can reduce vandalism and anti-social behaviour which can be detrimental, particularly to adjoining households;
- to meet local housing needs.

To the owner:

- correct maintenance of the property can prevent further deterioration;
- can turn a costly empty property into an asset and increase its value;
- opportunities to receive a regular income and relinquish management responsibility through incentives offered by the council;
- could provide a rental income, or capital if the property is sold;
- a maintained and occupied property will provide security against anti-social behaviour;
- the property may be suitable for development, either conversion or there may be opportunity to develop the site.

To the local authority:

- can assist in meeting the housing needs of local people and can increase the provision of housing;
- can reduce the need to build new dwellings;
- can generate additional revenue through council tax;

- can prevent anti-social behaviour and adverse comment;
- can promote the enabling role of the local authority;
- can be a catalyst for wider regeneration by building property market confidence;
- can assist in regenerating run down areas/improving communities;
- can improve housing stock condition.
- can help to tackle homelessness by reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by providing homes for people in housing crisis;
- can increase the availability and range of rental properties.



What are the challenges to bringing an empty property back into use?

There can be a number of challenges which make it difficult for the council to encourage owners to bring empty properties back into use. This strategy will assist in developing tools to overcome these challenges, which include:

- properties which are empty but beyond economical repair;
- a stagnant market forcing owners to leave properties empty, particularly in the current economic climate when they are trying to sell or let;
- properties which are situated in an area of low demand and therefore the options for bringing them back into use may be limited;
- the property may be subject to certain legalities with no action being able to be taken until resolved;
- the owner may have difficulties communicating or their personal circumstances make it difficult for them to engage with the local authority;
- difficulty in identifying owners if, for example, they have moved overseas;
- properties that are exempt from council schemes or enforcement.



How do we prioritise which empty properties to bring back into use?

With the limited resources the council has available to focus on empty properties, it is important to prioritise which empty properties are targeted to have maximum impact. A balanced approach is adopted where some resources are directed towards those properties which can be brought back into use relatively easily, for example by providing advice to the owners, to those which require quite intense involvement, particularly if enforcement action is required. The following factors are considered when prioritising empty properties:

- focus on sustainable locations, particularly those with key services and transport links;
- demand and housing needs of local people;
- condition of the property – if beyond economical repair, the property enters the remit of planning services;
- length of time empty; a balance is sought between shorter and longer term empty properties;
- the size of the property, which could influence its potential to meet a housing need;
- whether the property is freehold or leasehold, which could effect the tools and actions available to the council;
- impact on local community, particularly in terms of anti social behaviour or health and safety concerns;
- owner's current circumstances which could affect the tools and actions available to the council.

The funding and resources for the period of this strategy will continue to be focussed on Hereford City and the market towns where the need for housing is the greatest. In rural areas, properties will be targeted that are causing a particular problem for the community or where a specific need can be met.

Part Four

How will we deliver our objectives?

In order to ensure the aim and objectives of this strategy are delivered, a number of activities have been identified in the action plan which will need to be undertaken over the course of this strategy. The success of these activities will be measured by set targets.

An evaluation of the strategy will be undertaken annually to monitor the targets, to make any changes necessary for the proceeding year and where appropriate, to set new activities and targets.

Our Aim

To examine how existing properties can be used to accommodate households with a range of needs, in particular to reduce demand for social housing, but also to ensure that the existing offer is utilised to meet the needs of the community as a whole.

Our Key Objectives

- 1. To improve the assembly of relevant, accurate and up-to-date information.**
 - To develop processes to manage the identification and prioritisation of empty properties for action.
 - To develop robust monitoring processes to enable performance to be accurately monitored.
- 2. To reduce the number of empty properties to provide a range and choice of homes by making use of existing housing stock.**

- To prevent vacant properties in the county falling into disrepair and attracting anti social behaviour.
- To bring 390 units of accommodation back into use by 2013.
- To annually reduce the number of empty properties within the county.
- To assist in the provision of a range of good quality rented housing to people in housing need.

- 3. To offer advice and assistance to the owners of empty properties, to those who are looking to develop empty properties and to those who are experiencing problems living in the vicinity of empty properties.**

- To ensure a range of solutions are available to assist in bringing empty properties back into use.
- To ensure targeted advice and assistance is provided to maximise available resources.
- To ensure the processes and systems are in place to assist with the reporting of empty properties.
- To ensure opportunities in the private sector for bringing empty properties back into use are supported and maximised.
- To ensure that properties in the private sector meet the decent homes standard.
- To ensure the standards for private houses in multiple occupation are achieved.
- To ensure social landlords take action when they have an empty property.

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4. To raise the awareness of empty property issues and promote a partnership approach to deal with the issues.

- To work in partnership with owners/private landlords involved with empty properties.
- To raise awareness of empty property issues across the county.
- Raise awareness of empty properties including how to report an empty property and how to bring an empty property back into use.
- To promote the work on empty properties through provision of information on the council's/other partnership websites.

5. To work in partnership across public services and externally to drive forward the implementation of this strategy and improve communication.

- To work in partnership with other agencies involved with empty properties by raising awareness of the issues and what actions that can be taken to address the problems.
- To provide a strategic fit with other corporate objectives and to create effective cross-departmental working relationships.

6. To minimise the impact of empty properties on the communities in which they are located.

- To deal effectively with any problems associated with empty properties.
- To support sustainable regeneration.

- To improve the existing built environment.
- To ensure economic stability of rural communities and economic development and growth of urban communities.



Action Plan

Objective 1: To improve the assembly of relevant, accurate and up-to-date information

Ref	Action	Timescales		Success Criteria	Resource	Lead Officer	Support required
		Start	Finish				
EP1	To research alternative ICT methods for recording and monitoring empty properties	1 Apr 10	30 Sep 11	To have a robust system to record empty properties	Within existing resources	Housing Development Officer (HDO)	Admin , ICT services, Revenues, Electoral Registration
EP2	Set up procedure for mapping empty properties on GIS	1 Jan 11	30 Dec 11	To have properties mapped on GIS	Within existing resources	HDO	Housing Development Co-ordinator (HDC), ICT services
EP3	Monitor annual feedback questionnaires to take action where appropriate to enable resources to be prioritised and outcomes to be achieved	1 Apr 11	31 Mar 11	Feedback published in review of strategy	Within existing resource	HDO	Admin
EP4	Improve customer satisfaction surveys (link to Strategic Housing Service Plan SH5)	1 Jan 11	30 Jun 11	Surveys established	Within existing resource	Housing Needs and Development Officer (HN&DO)	Admin, HDO

Objective 2: To reduce the number of empty properties to provide a range and choice of homes by making use of existing housing stock

Ref	Action	Timescales		Success Criteria	Resource	Lead Officer	Support required
		Start	Finish				
EP5	To bring the following number of empty properties back into use:			To achieve target	Within existing resource	HDO	Homelessness & Housing Options Team, Orbit, HDC, Planning Services
	10/11 125	1 Apr 10	31 Mar 11				
	11/12 130	1 Apr 11	31 Mar 12				
	12/13 135	1 Apr 12	31 Mar 13				
EP6	Of the above, the following should be long term empty (over 6 months):			To achieve target	Within existing resource	HDO	Homelessness and Housing Options Team, Orbit, HDC, Planning Services
	10/11 40	1 Apr 10	31 Mar 11				
	11/12 40	1 Apr 11	31 Mar 12				
	12/13 40	1 Apr 12	31 Mar 13				
EP7	Of the above, the following should be problematic long term empty (have required significant resources):			To achieve target	Within existing resource	HDO	Legal Services Private Sector Housing
	10/11 5	1 Apr 10	31 Mar 11				
	11/12 5	1 Apr 11	31 Mar 12				
	12/13 5	1 Apr 12	31 Mar 13				
EP8	EDMOs – review the implications and opportunities this presents for both empty property actions and contributing to providing affordable housing options	1 Jan 11	30 Jun 11	Report published on the evaluation of the EDMO's	Within existing resource	HDO	Private Sector Housing

Ref	Action	Timescales		Success Criteria	Resource	Lead Officer	Support required
		Start	Finish				
EP9	Investigate alternative methods of bringing rural empty properties back into use	1 Oct 11	31 Mar 12	Findings published	Within existing resource	HN&DO	HDO
EP10	Investigate vacant premises above shops and the extent to which they can be utilised and brought back into use	1 Apr 11	31 Dec 11	Scheme developed and access funding to bring empty premises above shops into residential use ⁴	Within existing resource	HN&DO	HDO, Planning Services, Economic Development
EP11	Investigate initiative to work with homeless families ⁵ (self help housing) – perhaps link with TSH	1 Apr 11	31 Dec 11	Scheme developed to assist homeless families	Within existing resource	Homelessness Strategy Co-ordinator (HSC) HN&DO	HDO, Homelessness and housing options team
EP12	Investigate schemes to assist first time buyers to access housing market by purchasing and improving empty properties, who would otherwise be excluded from the market	1 Apr 11	31 Dec 11	Development of 'homesteading scheme' where RSL acquire property and improve to basic structural standard and then sell to first time buyers at discounted rate to enable them to fit out internal fixtures and fittings	Within existing resource	HN&DO	HDO, Registered Social Landlords
EP13	Investigate 'short life housing co-operatives' to provide accommodation to households that would otherwise be excluded from the market	1 April 11	31 Dec 11	Vacant property tenanted to household for low or nil rent in exchange for property to be maintained and occupied	Within existing resource	HN&DO	HDO

⁴ www.livingovertheshops.org (resource)

⁵ www.canopyhousingproject.org (example scheme)

Ref	Action	Timescales Start Finish	Success Criteria	Resource	Lead Officer	Support required
EP14	Investigate the use of equity release schemes to bring empty properties back into use	1 April 11 31 Dec 11	Report published on findings and scheme implemented where appropriate	Within existing resource	HN&DO	Private Sector Housing, HDO
EP15	Assist homeless households into the private rented sector to utilise an empty property by promoting a tenant finder service for private sector landlords in conjunction with the rent deposit/bond scheme	1 Apr 10 31 Mar 11	Scheme established	Within existing resource	HDO	HSC
EP16	To investigate, through ART Homes Limited or similar, the potential to provide loan finance to owners of empty properties to bring them back into use	1 Apr 11 31 Aug 11	Findings published on finance option to assist owners of empty properties to bring them up to decent homes standard	Within existing resources	HN&DO	Private Sector Housing

Objective 3: To offer advice and assistance to the owners of empty properties, to those who are looking to develop empty properties and to those who are experiencing problems living in the vicinity of empty properties.

Ref	Action	Timescales Start Finish	Success Criteria	Resource	Lead Officer	Support required
EP17	Review information packs	1 July 11 30 Sep 11	Pack updated and comprehensive and up to date info is provided on enquiry	Within existing resource	HDO	Admin support
EP18	Ensure empty property information on council's website is up to date	Ongoing	Comprehensive information on website	Within existing resource	HDO	Admin support

Objective 4: To raise the awareness of empty property issues, and promote a partnership approach to deal with the issues.

Ref	Action	Timescales		Success Criteria	Resource	Lead Officer	Support required
		Start	Finish				
EP19	Update Council website to include link to Empty Homes Agency for reporting empty properties and ensure its up to date	1 Jan 11	31 Mar 11	Clear link on website to Empty Homes Agency	Within existing resource	HNDO	Admin support
EP20	To facilitate one Landlords Partnership Event per annum (link to Strategic Housing Service Plan action SH13)	Per annum		Event delivered	Within existing resource	Principal Home Improvement Agency Officer (PHIAO)	HDO
EP21	To produce 2 landlords newsletters per annum	Per annum		Newsletters published	Within existing budgets	PHIAO	Admin support/HDO
EP22	To produce 1 empty property newsletter per annum	Per annum		Newsletter published	Within existing budgets	HDO	Admin support
EP23	To facilitate the landlords' focus group – 3 per annum.	Per annum		Meetings held	Within existing resource	PHIAO	HDO/HSC

Objective 5: To work in partnership across public services and externally to drive forward the implementation of this strategy and improve communication.

Ref	Action	Timescales		Success Criteria	Resource	Lead Officer	Support required
		Start	Finish				
EP24	To produce clear policies and procedures for all service delivery areas and review annually	1 Jan 11	30 Apr 11	Procedure file produced with clear direction on empty property activity	Within existing resource	HDO	HDO
EP25	Monitor strategy	Annually		Mechanism in place to monitor actions achieved and ensure remains a working document	Within existing resource	HDO	Private Sector Housing, Admin, HN&DO

Ref	Action	Timescales Start Finish	Success Criteria	Resource	Lead Officer	Support required
EP26	Review and update empty property strategy annually	Annually	Revised strategy published	Within existing resource	HDO	Private Sector Housing, Admin, HN&DO
EP27	Create links with Shropshire Council to improve WHMA empty property work	June 10 Dec 10	Lead to developing joint initiatives and attracting funding to sub region	Within existing resources	HDO	
EP28	Improve links with the Police, Fire Service and South Wye Regeneration Partnership to identify problem long term empty properties	Jan 11 Dec 11	To be able to target resources on problem empty property that have been identified as a priority	Within existing resource	HDO	Private Sector Housing

Objective 6: To minimise the impact of empty properties on the communities in which they are located.

Ref	Action	Timescales Start Finish	Success Criteria	Resource	Lead Officer	Support required
EP32	Investigate the use of National Affordable Housing Programme in acquiring financial support to bring empty property back into use	1 Apr 10 31 Mar 13	Develop a number of different schemes in partnership with Registered Social Landlords to utilise empty property	Within existing resource, NAHP	HDO	Partner RSLs
EP33	Investigate mechanism to advertise private rented properties through Home Point	1 Apr 12 31 Mar 13	Properties being advertised through Home Point	Cost implication	HN&DM	Home Point Manager

Part Five

Glossary

Affordable Housing:

Affordable housing includes social rented and intermediate housing, provided to specified eligible households who cannot access open market housing.

Registered Social Landlord (RSL):

Also known as Registered Providers, this is the technical name for social landlords that are registered with the Tenant Services Authority - most are housing associations, but there are also trusts, co-operatives and companies.

Homes and Communities Agency (HCA):

The Homes and Communities Agency is the national housing and regeneration agency for England, with an annual investment budget of more than £5bn. The HCA was formed on 1 December 2008 along with the Tenant Services Authority (the regulatory body for Registered Social Landlords). The HCA is a non-departmental public body and their sponsor government department is Communities and Local Government (CLG).

Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA):

The purpose of this appendix is to bring together statistical information relevant to the formulation of Local Housing Strategy.

Tenant Services Authority:

The Tenant Services Authority is the regulatory body for RSLs and was set up as a result of the 2008 Housing and Regeneration Act. The Act increases the TSA's powers over the regulation of social housing.

Empty Homes Agency:

The Agency is an independent campaigning charity which aims to raise awareness of the potential of empty homes in England to meet housing need and devise and promote, with others, sustainable solutions that will bring empty homes back into use.

Communities and Local Government:

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) is the UK Government department for communities and local government in England, established in May 2006. The department originated in 2001 as the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Appendices

- A: Policy framework
- B: Empty Property Statistics
- C: Useful Websites
- D: Enforcement Legislation
- E: Consultees
- F: Case Studies
Feedback Form

Appendix A Policy framework

National

National policy reflects the need to utilise existing housing stock. Local authorities have a duty under Section 7 of the Local Government Act 2003 to maintain and enhance the health of the housing market across all housing tenures.

The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) reports that the underlying number of private sector homes in England, empty for more than 6 months has remained relatively constant in recent years at around 1.6 per cent of the private housing stock, (289,000 dwellings). It is estimated that up to a quarter are empty for at least two years⁶.

The Housing Green Paper, Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable (July 2007) sets out the governments proposals to improve the housing fabric of our society and to work with partners to provide more homes to meet growing demand, well designed and greener homes and more affordable homes to buy or rent. Empty homes are specifically mentioned in Chapter 4 with the expectation for councils to do more to bring long term empty homes into use. Specific mention is made to the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant and Empty Dwelling Management Orders to assist local authorities to take positive action.

The Government has made it clear that it expects local authorities to make the best use of existing housing as part of its wider work to create sustainable communities. It states that new housing delivery should take

place alongside the effective use of the existing stock; particularly empty homes and the CLG has consulted on how to make this a factor in the allocation of the housing and planning delivery grant (HPDG). This grant was established in 2007 to reward local authorities for improved delivery of housing and other planning outcomes as part of their strategic place shaping role and to provide more support to communities and local councils who are actively seeking to deliver new homes.

The Government has put measures in place to assist local authorities in their work to bring empty properties back into use including:

- VAT reduction to encourage renovation of long term empty homes;
- increased funding to support the Empty Homes Agency;
- giving local authorities the freedom to divulge information on empty properties;
- new guidance to unlock the potential of empty properties (e.g. *empty property: Unlocking the potential: A case for action and an implementation handbook*);
- ending council tax discount on empty properties;

The Housing Act 2004 introduced further powers for local authorities to tackle the problem of empty properties with the introduction of empty dwelling management orders (EDMO).

The new Coalition Government formed in May 2010 has expressed a commitment to explore a range of measures to bring empty homes into use. Further detailed guidance is yet to be issued to build upon previous policy documents.

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(www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingmanagementcare/emptyhomes)

Regional

- **West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy 2005**

This Strategy is the basis for informing ministers on strategic housing investment policies within the West Midlands region, with the aim of making housing policy more localised and therefore more relevant and specific to an area's needs.

The strategy states *'Existing housing stock is also a key resource in meeting the changing needs of West Midlands communities'* *'Empty properties are wasted assets. The re-use of these through empty homes properties strategies is an important way of increasing the supply of affordable housing'*

- **Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands 2008 (revoked on 6th July 2010)**

Policy CF4: The reuse of land and buildings for housing states *'local planning authorities should optimise the opportunities for recycling land and buildings for new housing development.'* It states that the Regional Planning Board, through its monitoring role, should ensure it takes account of *'the action taken by local authorities to reduce vacancy rates (e.g. by using Empty Homes Strategies) and the Government's target to reduce them'*.

Policy RR2, part C (iv) emphasises the need *'to providing affordable housing to meet local needs, in existing settlements, wherever possible, and making full use of the existing housing stock'*.

- **Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2008 (SHMA)**

The West Housing Market area includes both Shropshire and Herefordshire. Through working in partnership a

comprehensive strategic housing market assessment has been completed in accordance with CLG guidance, to assess the housing markets for affordable and market housing to ensure the market is balanced. The SHMA recognises the necessity to have a targeted programme to reduce empty properties as a contribution to meeting the overall housing need.

Local

- **The Herefordshire Sustainable Community Strategy 2010-2011**⁷

The Herefordshire Sustainable Community Strategy is the overarching strategic framework for Herefordshire Council and its public, private and voluntary sector partners. The Strategy provides a framework for local groups and organisations to plan their work and a focus for developing plans and strategies.

The Community Strategy divides its vision into 6 themes:

The 6th theme, Stronger Communities has the objective to *'develop stronger communities where everyone is included, people enjoy a good quality of life and feel that they have a say in the decisions which affect them.'*

One of the outcomes of this objective is to deliver *'affordable housing appropriate to people's needs and less homelessness with support for vulnerable people to live independently'*.

This strategy takes full account of the Herefordshire Sustainable Community Strategy along with the Corporate Plan 2008 – 2011 which sets out how the council intends to achieve the shared vision for Herefordshire.

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<http://www.herefordshirepartnership.com/strategy.pdf>

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- **The Corporate Plan 2008-2011⁸**

The Corporate Plan has 7 themes and of particular relevance to this strategy is theme six:

Sustainable communities '*enabling the supply of sufficient affordable housing and employment*'

One of the key commitments in ensuring there is affordable housing for local people is setting annual targets for bringing empty properties back into use and to ensure that the initiatives that bring empty properties back into use are regularly reviewed.

- **Housing Strategy 2005 – 2008⁹**

The Housing Strategy is currently being updated and details four main priorities for Herefordshire:

- to achieve a more balanced housing market;
- to address the increasing levels of homelessness;
- to ensure that vulnerable people needing housing linked to support have their needs met in all parts of the area;
- to improve housing conditions in Herefordshire across all areas.
- the strategy explains the importance of bringing long term empty properties back into use to assist in meeting Herefordshire's housing targets and in turn assists in achieving the above.
- Priority 1:19 of the action plan states the need to review the current empty property strategy.

- **Homelessness Strategy For Herefordshire 2008 – 2013¹⁰**

The aim of the Homelessness Strategy is to reduce or prevent homelessness across Herefordshire. The overall objective of the strategy is to achieve 6 outcomes, three of which are relevant to this strategy:

- The prevention of homelessness through the effective targeting of housing options and services.
- To end the use of bed and breakfast as temporary accommodation and to continue to reduce the overall number of households in temporary accommodation.

To ensure sufficient accommodation and support is available for people who are, or who may become, homeless

By delivering a number of solutions to bring empty properties back into use, this strategy will assist in providing a range of affordable housing options to assist in creating a balanced housing market.

- The homelessness strategy action plan has a number of key actions and objectives which support the empty property strategy

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http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/council_gov_democracy/council/1855.asp

http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/docs/Housing/Housing_Strategy.pdf

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http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/docs/Housing/homelessness_strategy_2008-2013.pdf

- **Housing Renewal Policy 2009-2010¹¹**

The Regulatory Reform Order 2002 introduced a new wider discretionary power to allow local authorities to provide a range of financial and other assistance for repairs, improvements and adaptations. The intention is to allow greater flexibility and discretion in delivering housing renewal to address local needs.

The Housing Renewal Policy identifies a number of initiatives that can be accessed by the owners of empty properties to assist them in bringing their properties up to a particular standard so they can then be rented out.

Landlords Accreditation Assistance is provided to owners who intend to let out their property and wish to be accredited by the council. The available grant provides assistance with the security of the property and energy efficiency work. The criterion for accreditation requires that the property meet a certain standard before it can be let out.

Empty Property Assistance is also available to the maximum value of £5,000 per property providing the property is rented out to tenants that access the Council's rent deposit scheme.

The Housing Renewal Policy has a number of key issues that need to be addressed, two of which are:

- The Decent Homes Standard¹²

- A high level of disrepair and relatively high level of non-decent properties in the private sector

This strategy supports the Housing Renewal Policy by ensuring that owners are aware of these options and the initiatives that the council have available that can assist them in bringing their property back into use. Initiatives such as the leasing schemes also require that the landlord be accredited in their qualifying criteria.

- **Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan March 2007¹³**

The Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (UDP) was adopted on 23rd March 2007 and guides development within the county. The UDP has been prepared to ensure consistency with Government Planning Statements, the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Community Strategy for Herefordshire.

The UDP has the status of a Development Plan document. It is operative on part of the Local Development Framework and most of its policies have now been 'saved' until they are superseded by other emerging Development Plan Documents in the Local Development Framework.

An important part of the Plan's strategy is to give priority to the use of previously developed land for housing, including empty homes.

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http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/docs/Housing/Housing_Renewal_Policy_Herefordshire_2009-10__version_2.pdf

¹² The Decent Homes Standard is a minimum standard set by the DCLG (formally ODPM). For more information visit www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/decenthome

¹³ <http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/housing/planning/29815.asp>

Appendix B

Empty Property Statistics

	Total Housing Stock	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Herefordshire	78,144	2246 (2.9%)	2373 (3.0%)	2340 (3.0%)	2378 (3.0%)	1784 (2.3%)	1906 (2.4%)	1780 (2.3%)	1843 (2.4%)	1905 (2.4%)
West Midlands	2,299,011	77,622	78,956	75,024	72,724	75,276	76,096	78,835	72,135	72,329
% age	3.4	2.9	3.0	3.1	3.3	2.3	2.5	2.3	2.6	2.6
England	22,086,133	748,778	744,179	704,288	690,597	664,610	656,433	663,328	672,924	697,055
%age	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3

2007	Total Empty Homes	% of homes empty	Owned by LA	Owned by HA	Other public body	Private Landlord	Private homes empty >6m	Number of properties brought back into use
Herefordshire	1,843	2.33%	6	168	34	1,635	772	52
West Midlands	72,135	3.11%	3,208	4,647	174	64,106	31,071	1,651
England	672,924	3.02%	40,963	38,178	6,554	587,229	279,281	30,021
2008								
Herefordshire	1,905	2.37%	0	112	42	1,751	858	145
West Midlands	72,329	3.09%	4,124	4,613	233	63,359	34,511	-
England	697,055	3.10%	36,944	42,039	4,802	613,270	303,285	-

Source: Each year the Department for Communities and Local Government collects data on the number of empty homes from each local authority in England through HSSA statistics. These figures have been extracted from the Empty Homes Agency website

Appendix C

Useful websites

Business Link	www.BusinessLink.gov.uk
Communities and Local Government	www.communities.gov.uk
Directgov	www.direct.gov.uk
Empty Homes Agency	www.emptyhomes.com
Herefordshire Council	www.herefordshire.gov.uk
Homes and Communities Agency	www.homesandcommunities.co.uk
Joseph Rowntree Foundation	www.jrf.org.uk
National Association of Empty Property Practitioners	www.naepp.org.uk
Shelter	www.shelter.org.uk
Tenant Services Authority	www.tenantservicesauthority.org

Appendix D

Enforcement legislation

Problem	Legislation	Action
Dangerous and dilapidated buildings or structures.	Housing Act 2004 s20, s21, s43	Can prohibit the use of buildings if a cat 1 or 2 hazard exists under the HHSRS ¹⁴ .
Property that has remained empty for more than 6 months where negotiations with owner have failed to bring property back into use.	Housing Act 2004 s132, s138	To grant the Council the power to manage the property under an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO).
Long term vacant property that is detrimental to an area.	Housing Act 1985 s17	To grant Council the power to compulsory purchase.
Vacant property with debts owing to the Council for works undertaken or for unrecovered debts from an EDMO.	Law of Property Act 1925 s30, s101	To grant Council authority to enforce sale for debts for which have been registered under part 2 of the local land charge register.
To find out who owns a nuisance property.	Local Government (miscellaneous provisions) Act 1976	Requisition for information to determine the owners and other interested parties in respect of a given property.
Unsecured property where there is a risk that the property will be entered and suffer vandalism or arson.	Local Government (miscellaneous provisions) Act 1982 s29	Allows Council to carry out work to an unoccupied building to prevent unauthorised entry.

¹⁴ Housing Health and Safety Rating System

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Problem	Legislation	Action
Unsightly land and property affecting the amenity of the area.	Town and Country Planning Act 1990 s215	Requiring improvement of unsightly buildings.
	Building Act 1984 s79	Empowers Council to deal with ruinous and dilapidated buildings and structures and neglected sites.
	Public Health Act 1961 s34	To remove waste from the property.
Dangerous and dilapidated buildings or structures.	Building Act 1984 s78, s77	Allows Councils to deal with properties that pose an immediate danger – Council can carry out works to remove danger.
Blocked or defective drainage or private sewers.	Building Act 1984 s59	To need the owner to address obstructed private sewers.
	Local Government (miscellaneous provisions) Act 1976 s35	
	Public Health Act 1961 s17	
Vermin or risk of vermin.	Building Act 1984 s76	Requiring owner to deal with or prevent infestations of vermin.
	Public Health Act 1936 s83	
	Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 s4	
Remove various statutory nuisances.	Environmental Protection Act 1990 s78 – s81	Allows Council to require the abatement of statutory nuisances (can include rubbish or dampness effecting neighbouring property).
Power of entry.	Under relevant section of each piece of legislation.	To gain access to a property where attempts to arrange access have failed.

Appendix E

Consultees

A draft version of the Empty Property Strategy was circulated to various contacts during December 2009 for comment and revisions were made to the final version as necessary.

- Agents who manage Agent Managed Leased Scheme properties
- Benefit and Exchequer Services, Herefordshire Council
- Building Control, Herefordshire Council
- Corporate Policy and Research Team
- Councillor Jarvis – Cabinet Member for Environment and Strategic Housing
- Empty Homes Agency
- Environmental Health, Herefordshire Council
- Head of Strategic Housing Services
- Herefordshire Landlords' Focus Group
- Herefordshire Registered Social Landlord Development Sub Group
- Herefordshire Registered Social Landlord Housing Management Sub Group
- Home Point Manager, Home Point, Herefordshire
- Homelessness and Prevention Team, Herefordshire Council
- Jennifer Watkins – Consultant
- Landlords of Private Sector Leased Scheme properties
- Performance Improvement Officer, Herefordshire Council
- Peter Brown – Housing Partnership for Herefordshire (Chair)
- Planning Enforcement, Herefordshire Council
- Private Sector Housing Team, Herefordshire Council
- Private Sector Housing Team, Shropshire Council
- Regeneration Directorate – Senior Managers
- Rural Housing Enabler, Herefordshire
- West Mercia Constabulary
- West Midlands Empty Property Officer Group

Appendix F

Case studies

Advice and Assistance



Location: - Hereford City

Background:

This property had remained empty for several years and was brought back into use by advice given by the council to the landlord. The property has now been updated and is being let on the open market

Private Sector Leasing Scheme



Location: - Hereford City

Background:

This property had been empty for over 6 months and was brought back into use through the private sector leasing scheme and now provides accommodation for families in housing need.

Temporary Social Housing Grant (TSH)



Location: - Leominster

Background:

These properties were developed through TSH grant funding and now provide 11 affordable units of accommodation for people in Herefordshire.

Partnership Working



Location: - Leominster

Background:

Conversion of existing coach house into 7 x 2 storey houses supported by Strategic Housing and Developed by a partner RSL

Grant Funding: Part of a scheme funded through the Homes and Communities Agency.

Feedback form

The development of the Empty Property Strategy is an ongoing process and will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains relevant and up to date.

It is important that the views of our stakeholders are taken into consideration for future strategies; if you would like to give your views on this strategy, please complete and return this feedback form.

1. Any comments about the format and style of the Strategy

2. Any comments about the contents of the Strategy

3. Any comments about the action plan and targets

4. Name and contact details (if you wish to provide them)

5. Any further comments

***Please return to:
Housing Needs and Development, Herefordshire Council, Garrick House, Widemarsh Street,
Hereford HR4 9EU***

Herefordshire Council
Sustainable Communities Directorate
Housing Needs and Development
Garrick House
Widemarsh Street
Hereford
HR4 9EU

Tel: 01432 260269

Email: housingdevelopment@herefordshire.gov.uk

www.herefordshire.gov.uk

This strategy will be made available upon request in Braille and on audiotape. Anyone who would like an explanation of the strategy, or any part of the strategy in a language other than English will be invited to a meeting along with a council officer and an interpreter.

For further details of this service or any other information provided in this document, contact Housing Needs and Development on the contact details above.

