

EMPTY PROPERTIES

An empty property is a home that has been vacant for six months or more. An empty property can cost its owner thousands of pounds each year through council tax, insurance, security and maintenance. In the worst case an empty property can fall into serious disrepair and attract anti-social behaviour and complaints from local residents.



Councils have statutory powers to deal with this problem including; Empty Dwelling Management Orders and Compulsory Purchase Orders. While the council will endeavour to work with a property owner to bring properties back into use, should these attempts fail, the council may seek to use these powers.

BRINGING AN EMPTY HOME BACK INTO USE HAS MANY BENEFITS

Owners benefit from:

- Rental income or better sales potential
- Help with finding suitable tenants
- Security against vandalism
- Property management
- Long-term investment.

Neighbouring residents benefit from:

- Reduced risk of attracting anti-social behaviour and infestation
- The additional security that having neighbours can bring
- An uplift to the neighbourhood.

People looking for a home benefit from:

- Having a wider choice of properties to rent
- Access to good quality, affordable homes

The community benefits from:

- Bringing back into use a wasted resource
- Reducing the need to develop housing on 'greenfield' sites
- Reducing Island housing need.

CONTACT

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HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

If you have a question about Customs, Excise, VAT or any other taxes or duties:

- please call 0845 010 9000 (+44 2920 501 261 outside UK)
- or visit www.hmrc.gov.uk



If you have a visual impairment or need help understanding this document please contact us on (01983) 821000 and we will do our best to help you.

BRINGING EMPTY HOMES INTO USE

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The Isle of Wight Council's priority is to identify properties that have remained vacant for a long period. Working with the owner, local residents, community and other partnerships to help them to decide on the best option for the property.

WHAT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO PROPERTY OWNERS?

If you are the owner of an empty property, the following options may be available to you:

- Sell privately or to a Registered Social Landlord
- Demolition and sale of plot
- Letting privately or through an agent
- Leasing to a managing agent or the council.

SECURING YOUR EMPTY PROPERTY

Managing your empty home

It is important that you ensure that your empty property does not deteriorate and that it does not become a nuisance to neighbours. At the least you should ensure that the property is secured and maintained even if it is in good condition.

An empty property is more likely to be at risk of vandalism and criminal damage, and to have higher maintenance costs than an occupied property.

To reduce the likelihood of damage and vandalism we recommend that you:

- Check the property regularly
- Maintain gardens and exterior spaces
- Repair any accidental damage
- Hang curtains or blinds so the property looks occupied
- Ensure property is adequately insured
- Leave a contact telephone number with neighbours

During the winter months there are a number of increased risks which could go unnoticed for some time. For example water pipes can freeze and split, causing damage to both your, and neighbouring, property.

To avoid this kind of damage:

- Insulate your loft, water tanks and pipes
- Fix dripping taps
- Make sure you know where your stop tap is and that it can be turned off easily in an emergency
- If you think that your property may be vacant for some time, you should consider draining the system down, to avoid the possibility of burst water pipes.

You should note that many insurance policies are invalidated if the property is left empty for one to three months or more.

You should check your insurance policy to confirm that you remain insured and that you will not be personally liable for any damage sustained to your empty property. If you have a mortgage you are legally obliged to have home insurance, so we recommend that you contact your insurer.

It is also a good idea to register with a flood alert service (via the Environment Agency), so that you will receive a warning if there is a forecast of extreme weather that may put your property at risk of flooding.

BE AWARE OF PROPERTY FRAUD

As buildings are usually the most valuable assets people own they make attractive targets for fraudsters; and this becomes considerably more likely when a property is empty. There are many different types of property fraud. These can range from an empty property being used to obtain loans and credit cards, to a fraudster claiming ownership of an empty property to raise money from mortgaging or selling it.

There are a number of things you can do to prevent fraud or forgery in relation to your empty home:

- **Ensure your details on the Land Registry are up to date.**
If an application is received concerning your property, the Land Registry will send notices and letters to the address you have previously provided – if your contact address is out of date you won't receive this correspondence.
- **Be careful if you are asked to sign documents.**
Take professional advice if you are not sure what you have been asked to sign and what its legal effects might be.
- **Make regular inspections of your property.**
Check that your property is not being occupied without your knowledge or used as a correspondence address for persons you do not know.
- **Keep your details up-to-date with your utility providers.**
Fraudsters may change the utilities into their name in order to obtain 'proof of address' documents which may then be used to apply for credit.

TAX INCENTIVES

For property owners who need to do repairs, conversion or reconstruction, there are HMRC Tax incentives to encourage the re-use of properties that have been empty for longer than two or ten years.

Please note: The empty period timescale is measured from when the property was last occupied to the date when the works started. You can only claim when the construction or conversion of the building is completed and for up to a maximum of three months after completion. If you cannot make a claim within the three months allowed by law, you should write to HMRC explaining the reason for the delay.

More details of these measures and how to claim can be found on the HM Revenue and Customs website www.hmrc.gov.uk

The evidence of completion can be:

- A certificate or letter of completion from the Local Authority, for Building Regulations purposes
- A habitation certificate or letter from the Local Authority
- A valuation rating or Council Tax assessment
- A certificate from your bank or building society.

Proof

If you hold a letter from an Empty Property Officer certifying that the property has not been lived in for over two or ten years, you do not need any other evidence.

Listed Buildings

Any works to Listed Buildings must be approved and a certificate issued by the planning authority (Conservation Officer).

Refund

You should receive acknowledgement of your claim by letter from the HMRC within ten working days and if there are no queries a date will be given by which you should expect to receive your refund.

Examples of people who cannot use the refund scheme are those refurbishing buildings for business purposes. These include: developers, landlords, bed and breakfast, care homes and membership clubs and associations.