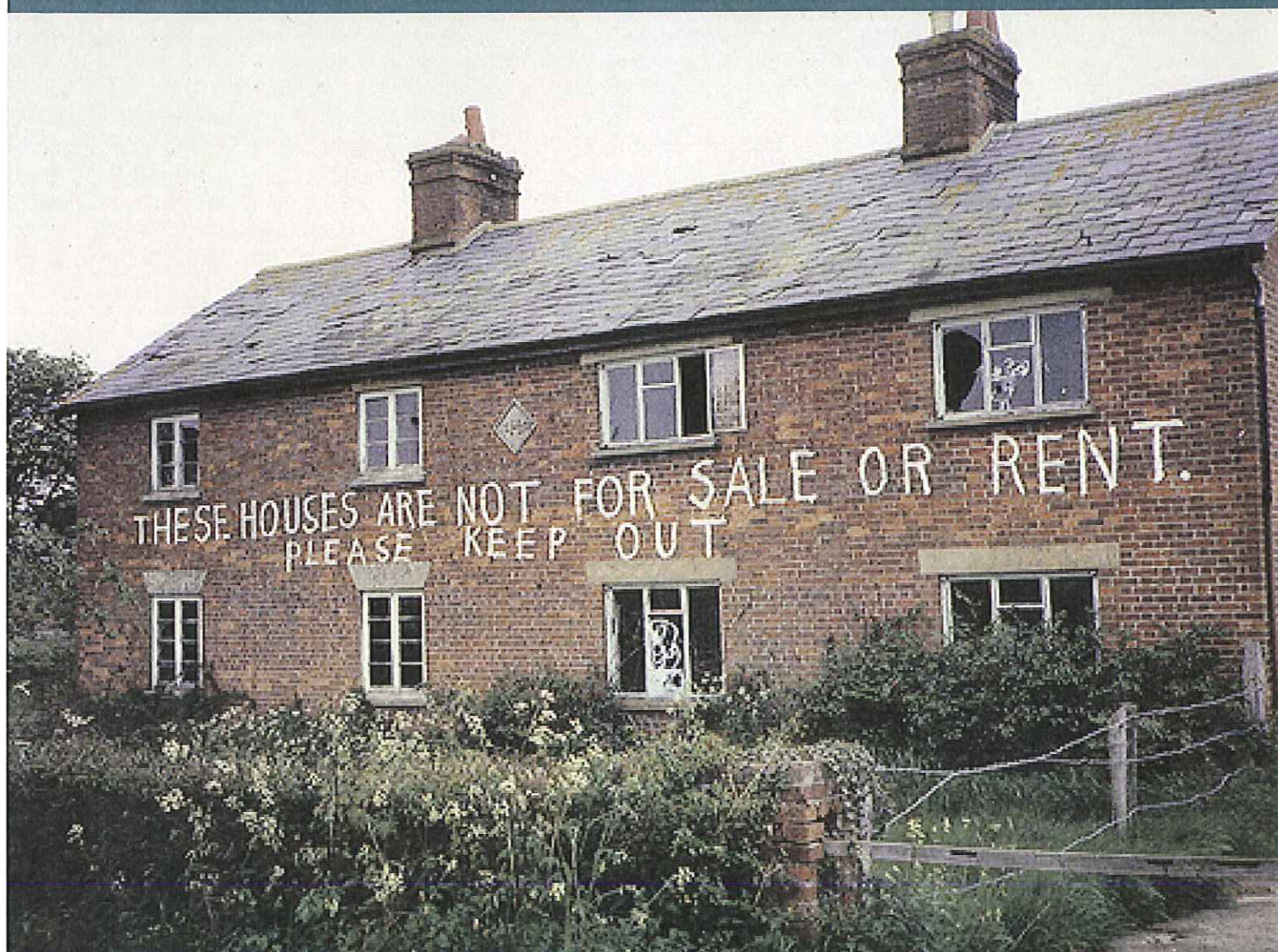


Empty Homes Strategy

A joint strategy between South Somerset District Council
and
Mendip District Council



www.southsomerset.gov.uk
01935 462462

www.mendip.gov.uk
01749 648999

MENDIP
DISTRICT COUNCIL

EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY



INTRODUCTION

By Ric Pallister, Leader of the Council



There are over 750,000 empty homes in England, not to mention other empty buildings, and nearly half of them have been empty long-term. Empty properties are a wasted housing resource, they can fall into serious disrepair, become unsafe and unsightly, an opportunistic place for squatters, vandals, burglars and anti-social behaviour. They can be a blight on the neighbourhood and can de-value neighbouring properties. The country is presently in the grip of a housing crisis with many homeless people who desperately need housing. There are currently over 5000 people on the housing waiting list in South Somerset who could make good use of all the empty property available. Our strategy is aimed at bringing as many empty properties as possible back into use to provide housing for local people.

WHAT ARE EMPTY HOMES?

In South Somerset there are over 2,500 homes registered as empty on the council tax data base of which over 1,000 have been empty for 6 months or more. The remainder are either in the process of being bought or sold or are subject to probate orders and will return to occupation in due course. A similar situation exists in the Mendip area. Both councils are concentrating their efforts in bringing back these long term empty properties into use. Both residential and commercial properties are being assessed.

WHY ARE HOMES LEFT EMPTY?

We recognize that many properties become vacant for understandable reasons such as the owner living temporarily abroad or due to complicated probate situations. Some owners allow their property to become vacant and deteriorate in the hope of redeveloping the site for more profit. Some owners for whatever reasons just can't be bothered to do anything with their property. We shall be concentrating on these properties and on those that have otherwise caused a nuisance or resulted in antisocial behavior.



EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

WHAT ARE OUR AIMS?

We aim:

- ✦ To identify all long term empty property in South Somerset and Mendip and to make contact with the owners of such property.
- ✦ To work with the owners and other interested parties to ensure that all such properties are brought back into use.
- ✦ To raise awareness of the issue and make details of our strategy known to owners and the wider community.
- ✦ To support owners and the community adversely affected by empty properties
- ✦ To work with other organisations and individuals to ensure that as much property is brought back into occupation as possible.
- ✦ To provide guidance explaining the rights and obligations of empty home owners.
- ✦ To maintain and monitor a data base of empty property.
- ✦ To maximise the income to the council from the New Homes Bonus and council tax (often unpaid on empty properties)
- ✦ To create affordable homes for local residents in housing need.

HOW WILL WE DO THIS?

- ✦ All empty properties brought to the Council's attention will be investigated.
- ✦ We are carrying out a door to door survey of all known long term empty property across the district.
- ✦ We are asking the public, parish councils and others to report to us any other empty property.
- ✦ Once identified we will contact the owners of such properties and discuss the reasons why the property is empty.
- ✦ We will seek to bring back the property into occupation by discussion and negotiation.
- ✦ We will offer low cost loans, advice and other assistance to achieve this.
- ✦ We will refer owners to our other agencies such as Somerset Care & Repair who are also able to help.
- ✦ If all else fails we will take enforcement action to bring empty property into occupation.



OUR CORPORATE APPROACH

Empty properties impact on the work of many parts of the Council. To successfully deal with the matter joint working across several departments is required. The following services are actively involved in dealing with empty property:

- Planning & Development control
- Building Control
- Housing Standards
- Housing Options
- Environmental Health
- Pest Control
- Street scene
- Council Tax



EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

WORKING WITH OTHER AGENCIES

Not only do empty properties bear heavily on the resources of the Council they also severely impact on the resources of our partner agencies such as the Police and Fire Service. The Council works closely with these agencies to effectively deal with empty properties that cause problems in the District.

In addition to working with other statutory agencies we also work with Somerset Care and Repair to help refurbish empty property. Somerset Care & Repair is a housing based charity that is able to give advice to the owners of empty property and to lease and refurbish their properties (see contact details on last page).



WORKING WITH OWNERS

The Council is keen to avoid the need for enforcement action and will try and work with owners in order to promote a satisfactory outcome. We can offer advice and guidance on a how best to repair and refurbish empty properties, the availability of grants and loans and advice on planning and building regulations. We can put property owners in contact with Somerset Care & Repair and other Registered Social Landlords who may be interested in refurbishing and leasing their properties from them.



LOANS FOR EMPTY PROPERTIES

South Somerset and Mendip work with Wessex Home Loans to provide low cost home loans for landlords to bring empty property into use.

It should be noted that there are conditions attached to these loans requiring the applicant to remain the owner and give nomination rights for tenancy for a period of five years. For further advice on their availability, please contact Private Sector Housing on 01935 462462

ENFORCEMENT ACTION

In the event that negotiation fails to bring empty property back into use the council has a range of enforcement options it can use. Robust action will be taken to ensure that extreme and persistent cases are dealt with. This action may include the use of:

- Planning Enforcement
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders
- Enforced Sale Procedures
- Compulsory Purchase

The Council will seek to fully recover any costs incurred should any enforcement action be necessary.



EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY

CONTACT POINTS

Private Sector Housing:

South Somerset District Council

The Council Offices

Brympton Way

Yeovil BA20 2HT

E-mail: private.housing@southsomerset.gov.uk

Tel: 01935 462462

For independent housing advice contact:

Shelter

Castle Walk, Taunton

Somerset TA1 4PW

Freephone: 0800 1690317 or 01823 259961

Citizen Advice Bureau

40 - 42 Hendford

Yeovil

Somerset

BA20 1UW

Telephone: 01935 421167

Email: CAB@southsomcab.org.uk

Somerset Care & Repair

Barley house

The Old Brewery

Charlton Estate

Shepton Mallet

BA4 5QE

Tel: 01749 345379

Email: www.somersetcareandrepair.co.uk



Wessex Reinvestment Trust

Heatherton Park Studios

Bradford-on-Tone

Taunton TA4 1EU

Website: www.wessexhil.co.uk



For advice on Planning, Building Regulations, Council Tax, Housing Benefits contact:

South Somerset District Council

The Council Offices

Brympton Way

Yeovil BA20 2HT

Tel: 01935 462462

For advice on rent deposit schemes contact:

South Somerset District Council

Housing Options

Petters House

Petters Way

Yeovil BA20 1EA

Tel: 01935 462462

If you are in the Mendip area please contact:

Mendip District Council

Cannards Grave Road

Shepton Mallet

BA4 5BT

Tel: 01749 648999

If you would like this document translated into other languages or into Braille, large print, audio tape or CD, please contact: 01935 462462 (8.45am to 5.15pm Monday to Friday)

Dokument ten jest na życzenie udostępniany w językowych polskim.

Este documento encontra-se disponível em Português, a pedido.

