

SOMERSET WEST PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

**Empty Properties
FACTSHEET EP/2 – Mar 2011**

Housing Act 2004

INTRODUCTION

Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership has introduced an Empty Property Strategy in a direct response to the Housing Act 2004 and consultation with the public in order to bring empty properties back into use as a priority. This will help the partnership increase the supply of good quality homes to people who require access to such housing. Encouraging the reuse of empty properties can also enhance the environment of a neighbourhood as often empty properties in poor repair attract crime and vandalism. By working with landlords and other organizations or owners of empty properties, the Partnership can offer various incentives to help bring the empty premises back into use quickly. Examples of these incentives include low cost loans, rent deposit scheme, and help with selling the property onto the open market (other options and advice can be viewed overleaf).

Do You Own an Empty Property?

It is estimated that an owner can save up to £5,000 a year by improving an empty property and bringing it back into use for residential accommodation.

Benefits to you as the owner can include:

- An increase in the value of the property and
- Possible access to a range of Local Authority funds.

Do You Live Near an Empty Property?

If you live near to an empty property, there are a number of benefits to you if this property can be brought back into use. These include:

- Enhancing the area by reducing eyesores.
- Providing Affordable Housing for local people
- Bringing life back into the towns and communities
- Reducing housing need in the district

- Reducing the costs to the environment and communities by making use of the supply of empty homes rather than building additional housing on Greenfield sites.
- Reducing the risk of squatting and vandalism

How Can the Council bring empty homes back into use?

The partnership is committed to working with private owners, landlords, housing associations and local communities to bring empty properties back into use. Our dedicated officer can provide guidance and support to property owners with up to date information and advice on letting and other options available.

The options that may be available include:

- Discretionary Council Low Cost Loans
- Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme
- Selling the property a Registered Provider
- Selling the property on the open market
- Letting the property yourself
- Letting the property through a commercial letting agent

Some housing associations offer a leasing scheme providing worry free letting, with the Association dealing directly with the occupiers on your behalf. Benefits of this include:

- Money may be available to improve or repair the property.
- Guaranteed rent for 52 weeks of the year
- No agency fee to pay
- Should any problems arise you have the back up of an experienced Housing Association
- Vacant possession at the end of the lease
- Property returned to you in good order
- Regular inspections and maintenance

Interested? Why not contact our dedicated officer for a chat?

Do You Know an Empty Home near you?

We need to locate all the empty properties in the partnership area so that we can provide advice and support to owners to bring them back into use. You can help if you own, or live near an empty property. Please contact our dedicated officer:

Nick Jobson - Empty Property Officer:

Direct Tel no: 01278 435289 or

Email: nick.jobson@sedgemoor.gov.uk

Latest Government News – New Homes Bonus

In February 2011 The Housing Minister Grant Shapps announced about almost £200M in the first wave of cash bonuses for communities that have decided to build new homes through the New Homes Bonus Scheme. Explaining how the scheme will work Mr Shapps said that the Government will match the council tax raised for new houses for the first six years, which for an affordable home will mean an extra £350 per house each year. Mr Shapps confirmed that the bonus will also apply to any empty properties brought back into use.

The Government have also confirmed that there will be £100m specifically to deal with empty properties and within the recent publication shown below.

“Local decisions: next steps towards a fairer future for social housing”

It is reported in this Government publication that the inclusion of empty properties within the New Homes Bonus was viewed as a bonus to local communities. The Government are currently working with the Homes & Community Agency on the production of an empty home tool kit and good practice guide which will be issued later this year. It is still to be determined on how this £100m is to be allocated. The Government will make a decision shortly.