

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – COMMUNITY 10 MARCH 2009

EXECUTIVE 24 MARCH 2009

DRAFT EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2009-2014

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of progress in the preparation of the Exeter Empty Homes Strategy 2009-2014 and advise about the proposed consultation. A draft of the Strategy has been placed in the Members' Room and is available on the internet.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Empty Homes Strategy outlines our approach to ensuring that the number of privately owned empty homes across the city is minimised. It also aims to reduce the time those properties are left empty. With over 6,000 households on the Housing Register, privately owned empty property is a valuable resource. The strategy builds on work done over the past 13 years when the Empty Homes Partnership was first formed.
- 2.2 The strategy recognises that unless there is continued intervention by the team:
- The downturn in the housing market and the credit crunch could mean some homes will remain vacant for longer than six months;
 - Some homes will become more difficult to let and/or sell and hence remain empty; and
 - Some renovation projects may have to stop or not begin at all due to lack of finance and the inaccessibility of loans;
- 2.3 As Exeter has a high demand for housing, there is also an increasing need to look at all sectors of empty property. This includes under-occupied homes, second and holiday homes and redundant commercial and public spaces such as flats over shops, warehouses, former-school buildings and deconsecrated churches. This approach mirrors work done in the last recession when empty office blocks were converted to social housing for rent.
- 2.4.1 The strategy explains the various tools the Council and its partners have at their disposal to bring empty properties and underused space back into use. This includes:
- Continue to staff and resource the Empty Homes Partnership (with contributions from Exeter City Council, Mid Devon District Council, East Devon District Council, Teignbridge District Council and seven housing associations);
 - Using new legal powers e.g. Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs);
 - Use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs);
 - Private Sector Leasing (PSL);
 - ExtraLet: management of private sector lettings;
 - Financial Incentives for property owners (capital and revenue);

- Acquisition of empty property;
- Financial incentives to encourage social tenants to downsize;
- Use of intelligence - encouraging the public to report empty properties to the Council;
- Lodgings scheme
- Improved publicity

2.4 The strategy recognises the achievements of the Empty Homes Partnership over the past 13 years:

- The Partnership is close to bringing its 1000th dwelling back into use.
- Extralet currently manages 70 properties;
- Private sector leasing of over 100 homes;
- Larger successes include the reuse of Old School Court, Topsham; the renovation of the former Admiral Inn public house in Alphington; conversion of several prominent office blocks in the city centre and the renovation of the Buddle Lane 'Laings' properties;

3. PROPOSALS

3.1 It is proposed that the draft Empty Homes Strategy go out for public consultation over the next two months with the final strategy being submitted for consideration by Members in the June 2009 committee cycle.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no additional financial implications over and above the Council's current commitment.

5. **RECOMMEND** that Scrutiny – Community supports and Executive approves:

(1) The draft Empty Homes Strategy

(2) That the draft strategy goes out for public consultation and the results and amended strategy are reported to Members in June 2009.

HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES

S:PA/LP/ Committee/309SCC5
24.2.09

COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:

Empty Homes Strategy 2009-2014