

# *EXETER EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY*

## *2009-2014*

*DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION*



**Exeter City Council**

*EXETER EMPTY HOMES SERVICE*

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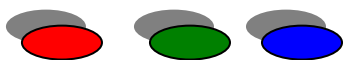
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## FOREWORD

Exeter City Council has always taken the issue of empty homes seriously. Exeter is lucky in that it does not have streets of derelict and boarded-up properties like those found in some parts of the country. However Exeter does have a serious shortage of housing, with thousands of people currently on the housing register. As such, Exeter City Council has to make the best use of all the homes available and cannot afford to leave them standing empty unnecessarily.

Exeter was consequently one of the first local authorities to appoint an Empty Homes Officer, back in 1996. Since then its work has been recognised five times in the national Empty Homes Agency awards. But more importantly, the partnership has helped to provide hundreds of homes for those who need them.

This has been achieved by working together with others. The original partnership between the City Council, the William Sutton Trust and Sovereign Housing Association has grown and flourished. There are now seven housing associations and three other local authorities involved. The initiative has expanded to cover Mid Devon, East Devon and Teignbridge as well as Exeter, making it the first one in Britain to involve four local authorities. Sharing resources, skills and ideas makes for a better and more efficient service to the community.

For many years Exeter's empty homes work has been an important feature of the Housing Strategy. However, an initiative where so many different departments of the Council and outside partners all work together really deserves special recognition, so for the first time Exeter City Council has produced this separate Empty Homes strategy document. The aim is continuous improvement – so if you have any comments please let the Empty Homes department know.

### 1.1 Exeter Empty Homes Strategy - Mission Statement

*To create a better environment and provide more housing by bringing empty homes back into occupation and making better use of wasted space in existing buildings.*



## *THE SCOPE AND AIM OF THE STRATEGY*

### *2.1 Introduction*

The aim of the strategy is **to help make better use of all properties, both commercial and residential, in and around Exeter that might realistically provide more housing than they do at present.**

The strategy sets out the local and national pictures in respect of empty homes and also the tools and legal powers available to local authorities and their RSL partners in dealing with empty dwellings. It is also part of a wider suite of strategies for the Exeter and Torbay Housing Market Assessment Area (ETHMA).

Consequently the scope of this Empty Homes Strategy is deliberately wide. It includes:

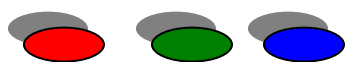
- Public sector properties as well as those in the private sector;
- Homes that are under-occupied as well as those that are completely vacant;
- Second homes and holiday homes as well as mainstream housing;
- Redundant commercial space that could be converted to homes e.g. shops, warehouses and industrial sites etc.

The strategy also seeks to clearly set out the on-going accomplishments of the Empty Homes Partnership and what is being done to alleviate the problem of empty homes in the Exeter Area. The strategy also seeks to bring those buildings that are historically important for future generations to the attention of the public.

By making the general public aware of empty homes and the problems they cause and encouraging them to report any potential long-term empties Exeter City Council can help speed up the process of bringing them back into use.

### *2.2 A Word from Cllr Rob Hannaford*

### *2.3 A Word from Steve Warran*



## WHAT IS MEANT BY EMPTY HOMES?

### 3.1 True Empty Homes

For many people, “empty homes” conjures up images of boarded-up, semi-derelict properties in run-down neighbourhoods but the real picture is very different. Thousands of properties will become empty at some point during the year as part of the normal operation of the housing market e.g. between lettings in the rented sector or as part of the process of being bought and sold. These properties are known as “**transactional empties**” and make up the majority of properties empty at any one time. For example, according to government figures, of an estimated **675,000** empty properties nationwide in January 2008, **447,000** fell into this category.

It is only when properties stay empty longer than six months that they are normally regarded as “**problematic empties**”. Most of these are in the private sector and are an important target for the Empty Homes Strategy. They are discussed in more detail in the section *Why are properties empty?*

The Council and its housing association partners make every effort to bring its own properties back into use as quickly as possible because of the pressure on housing and the cost of providing temporary accommodation to homeless households. On average, council homes currently remain empty for only **25** working days between lettings.

However other public and private bodies are not as focused on bringing their empty dwelling stock back into use and may need encouragement from the local authority to make better use of them.

### 3.2 Under-occupied Homes

The Empty Homes Strategy has no intention of interfering with people’s choice to live in properties bigger than they strictly need. However there are reasons why people might want to make better use of their home in a way that could help meet local housing need. Where possible the Strategy will facilitate this and encourage people to:

- ✓ Sell a larger property (ideally to a household that has a greater need for the size of the home). This can release capital for other purposes. Downsizing can also reduce outgoings such as council tax and other bills thus leaving more disposable income.
- ✓ Let a room to a lodger. This can provide valuable income and in some cases it might also help overcome loneliness. Some lodging schemes such as those provided by Exeter Homeless Action Group involve providing support to those in need of it, offering help for the wider community and a sense of fulfilment to the host.
- ✓ Sub-divide the home to create additional flats that could generate a rental income or enhance the capital value of the property.

### 3.3 Second and Holiday Homes

These properties share the common characteristic that they are furnished but are no-one’s principal home. For the purposes of this strategy they are distinguished as follows, but note that these are common sense and not legal definitions:

- **Holiday homes** are properties run mainly as a business to generate income from lettings (though owners may stay there from time to time). Some holiday homes have restrictions that mean they cannot be occupied for the whole of the year. Some may also be classed as business properties and thus do not appear in council tax statistics.



- **Second homes** are furnished properties used mainly by their owners and their families (e.g. as a weekend retreat) but which are not the owners' principal residence.
- The strategy also recognises **dwelling used occasionally by employees**. These are homes provided on a temporary basis to employees who normally live elsewhere. Health Trusts for example may have homes available for doctors on call and some rural properties may only be for use by agricultural workers. There are only a handful of such properties in the Exeter area.

In most cases these properties will not merit intervention or assistance through the Empty Homes Strategy. However, as with under-occupied homes, there can be exceptions:

- ✓ A holiday home may not generate the desired volume of lettings and the owner may prefer to switch to long-term renting to obtain a more guaranteed income stream.
- ✓ There may be little demand for a holiday home outside of the high season and the owner might want to rent it out as normal housing during the off-season.
- ✓ A second home may no longer be used very much because of the owner's changed circumstances; the owner may prefer to derive income from it instead e.g. by letting it out.
- ✓ Changed personal circumstances might require the owner to derive more income from their asset or to sell it.

Given the amount of housing need in the area, these possibilities must always be kept in mind and the Empty Homes Officer must be alert to any opportunities that may arise. There is already evidence that the reduction in council tax discount on second homes is causing some owners to review their position.

### 3.4 Wasted Non-residential Space

This covers a wide range of situations. Sometimes an entire building is no longer viable in its previous use. This can apply not only to **offices** and **warehouses** but also to **schools** and **churches**.

In other cases, the lower floors of a building may still be viable e.g. as shops, but upper floors are empty or under-utilised. Each case must be taken on its merits.

Encouraging conversions is an important part of an empty homes strategy. There is more scope to create new homes through conversions than there is through bringing long-term empty homes back into use and it is often easier to do so.

The Government's report *Empty Properties: Unlocking the Potential* notes:

*"In addition to those properties that are recognised as 'empty', there is also a significant body of commercial space that is under-utilised. This includes office accommodation and space above shops.... In these cases, owners are often unaware of the potential to free up space and the possibility of viable conversion to a residential use... it is estimated that, in England alone, empty and commercial properties, including space above shops, have the potential for over around 420,000 new homes."*





### 4.1 Challenges for Owners and the Community

- ✗ Empty properties cost their owners money – in council tax, insurance, repairs, security etc. – yet produce no income. It has been estimated that keeping a family-sized home empty costs the owner an average of £10,000 per annum (taking into account lost income).
- ✗ The fabric of the property can deteriorate. This is likely to happen much more quickly than in an occupied property. Neighbouring properties can also be affected e.g. by damp caused by water leaks. In the worst cases the property may become structurally unsound and therefore dangerous to the public.
- ✗ If the property is of historic interest a part of our heritage is threatened. Poltimore House has become a famous example of an historic property falling into increasing disrepair. Recent developments have seen English Heritage join with the Friends of Poltimore House to discuss the future options for the estate. (See *Historically Important Empty Homes.*)
- ✗ An empty home may become a target for vandals or fly tipping. It can attract vermin. It may become an eyesore. It may even become a target for arson. All this affects the quality of life for neighbours. It has also been estimated that a long-term empty property can reduce the value of neighbouring properties by 10%.
- ✗ Empty properties can become a target for squatters. Although the property is being used as housing, it is not a long-term solution and depending on the nature of the squatters, there can be a negative impact on the local community. The house itself might also end up being damaged.
- ✗ Some of the above problems will require the local authority, the Police or the Fire Service to step in and take action. Sometimes this will be at the taxpayers' expense. Costs cannot always be recovered from the owner. For example, Councils can deal with the worst empty properties through Compulsory Purchase Orders, but these normally cost several thousand pounds each in fees and officer time.
- ✗ In some parts of the country (fortunately not in this area of high housing demand) if a cluster of properties becomes empty in a small area they can quickly begin to establish a spiral of decline, as confidence is lost.

### 4.2 A Wasted Resource - Local Housing Need

But perhaps the most important aspect of empty properties is that they are a **wasted resource** when so many people desperately need a decent home. In Exeter:

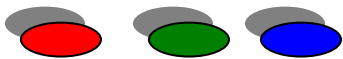
- In October 2008, there were **190** homeless households in temporary accommodation.
- In October 2008, there were **6,142** households on the Council's housing register.

Yet at the same time there were **287** properties in the area that had been empty for over six months.

Empty properties offer a good opportunity to help ease the pressure on local housing, whether by bringing existing empty homes back into use or by creating new homes through conversion of under-used space. This is the main driver behind this Empty Homes Strategy. By leading the Empty Homes Partnership, the Council and its partners are in a



good position to make sure that when properties come back into use they are made available to those most in need.



## TAKING IT SERIOUSLY: GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Government has taken a number of steps in recent years to help address the issue of empty properties.

### 5.1 Financial Incentives & Government Assistance

- |   | <i>From</i>                |
|---|----------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing</b> encourages local authorities to “...develop positive policies to identify and bring into residential use empty housing and buildings in line with local housing and empty homes strategies and, where appropriate, acquire properties under compulsory purchase procedures.”</li> </ul> <p>It also sets a target of 60% for developments on previously developed land.</p> | 29 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2006  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provisions allowing local authorities to take control of empty properties through <b>Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs)</b> were passed in the Housing Act 2004.</li> </ul>  | 2006                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Local authorities can now charge up to 100% of full council tax on furnished second homes.</li> </ul>  | 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2004 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Local authorities can now charge up to 100% of full council tax on unfurnished, long-term empty homes.</li> </ul>  | 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2004 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Personal information (such as owner’s names and addresses) held for council tax purposes can now be used for empty homes strategies.</li> </ul>  | 18 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2003  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ODPM have published <b>Empty Homes - Unlocking the Potential, An Implementation Handbook</b> for local authorities, empty property owners and others.</li> </ul>   | 2003                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Government master plan <b>Sustainable Communities</b> calls for “<b>Better use of the existing housing stock, especially empty properties.</b>”</li> </ul>   | 2003                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ VAT has been reduced to 0% on refurbishment of properties empty longer than 10 years (if sold).</li> </ul>   | 1 <sup>st</sup> Aug 2001   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ VAT has been reduced to 5% on refurbishment of properties empty longer than 2 years.</li> </ul>  | 12 <sup>th</sup> May 2001  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ VAT has been reduced to 5% on conversions of properties.</li> </ul>  | 12 <sup>th</sup> May 2001  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 100% capital allowance has been introduced on many conversions of upper floors back to residential use, if the new dwellings are then let.</li> </ul>  | 12 <sup>th</sup> May 2001  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The period during which owners are eligible for council tax discounts on “uninhabitable” properties is now limited to six months.</li> </ul>   | 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2000 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ HM Revenue &amp; Customs “Rent-a-Room” measures offering tax relief on up to £4,250 of income from rooms let to lodgers.</li> </ul>  | Long-term                  |



The theme has also been picked up in regional policy. The **Regional Housing Strategy** calls on local authorities to develop empty homes strategies; and the **Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10)** has as one of its six housing objectives;

*“bringing empty homes back into use and promoting the conversion of existing buildings within urban and rural areas in preference to the development of greenfield sites”.*

## 5.2 Government Policy and what it Does

<b>Section 17 &amp; 18, Housing Act 1985</b>	The council has the power to acquire land, houses and property to increase the number of homes available or improve the quality of the housing stock. This can be used to take control of empty dwellings and sell to a private sector developer, owner-occupier or registered social landlord.
<b>Section 16, Local Government (miscellaneous provisions) Act 1982</b>	Local authority can request information relating to an empty property from any one it suspects may have it or have an interest in the land.
<b>Section 29, Local Government (miscellaneous provisions) Act 1982</b>	Allows local authorities to carry out work on unoccupied buildings to prevent any unauthorized access or prevent it from becoming a danger to the public.
<b>Section 77, Building Act 1984</b>	Allows the local authority to deal with dangerous buildings. The local authority can apply to the Magistrate's Court to get an order for the owner to renovate or demolish the property. If this fails they can take the work on by default.
<b>Section 78, Building Act 1984</b>	Allows local authorities to deal with buildings posing immediate danger. Local authorities can carry out remedial works to remove the danger without obtaining permission from the owner.
<b>Section 79, Building Act 1984</b>	Allows local authorities to deal with ruinous and dilapidated buildings and structures and neglected sites in the interest of amenity.
<b>Section 215, Town and Country Planning Act 1990</b>	Allows local authorities to deal with unsightly land or the external appearance of the property.
<b>Section 226, Town and Country Planning Act 1990</b>	Allows local authorities to take control of land they need to put into place community strategies and local development. This also includes being able to take over land for redevelopment.
<b>Section 330, Town and Country Planning Act 1990</b>	Local authority can request information about the ownership of an empty property from anyone with interest in the land.



<p><b>Sections 79-81, Environmental Protection Act 1990</b></p>	<p>Allows local authorities to require abatements of statutory nuisances. This can apply to the accumulation of rubbish and any damp affecting adjoining properties. If the owner does not complete the works, the local authority can undertake them by default.</p>
<p><b>Section 54, Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990</b></p>	<p><b><i>“A local authority may execute any works which appear to them to be urgently necessary for the preservation of a listed building in their area.”</i></b></p> <p>The local authority can be authorised to compulsorily acquire a listed property and any relevant land if they feel it has been deliberately left or has fallen into a bad state of repair.</p>
<p><b>Enforced Sale Procedures, Law of Property Act 1925</b></p>	<p>Where a local authority has issued a charge against a property they have all the legal right of a mortgage lender and can repossess the vacant dwelling for housing needs.</p>

### 5.3 Other Government Incentives

#### Capital Allowance for living over the shop

These measures were brought in with the Finance Act 2000. They state that property owners and occupiers can claim up-front tax relief on the whole of their capital spending on the renovation or conversion of underused space above shops and commercial properties in order to provide flats to rent.

For a property to qualify it must have:

- Been built before 1980.
- No more than five floors (including loft conversions but excluding any basements).
- Been originally used for residential property above the ground floor.
- A ground floor which was used for commercial purposes when work started. (Either retail, financial or professional services, food and drink, industrial uses or medical and health.)
- Been unoccupied above the ground floor or used for storage for at least one year before conversion.

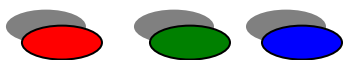
For more information see: [www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/camanual/CA43000.htm](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/camanual/CA43000.htm)



### 5.4 Redfield Sites

There are calls by the Empty Homes Agency and David Kidney MP to add 'redfield' sites to the list of green and brownfield sites. These are recycled sites where an empty property is brought back into use for the local community.

A recent study by the Empty Homes Agency showed that reusing an existing empty property generated less than 1/5 of the carbon dioxide created in the building of a new house and cost considerably less (the normal costs for the initial infrastructure used to build a new home amounts to between £35,000 – £40,000). The proposal is that instead of knocking down buildings and commercial units on brownfield sites to build new homes, existing buildings can be converted and brought back into use.



## 6.1 The Empty Homes Partnership

The Empty Homes Partnership is a coalition of Exeter City Council, East Devon District Council, Mid Devon District Council, Teignbridge District Council and seven housing associations. It is the first empty homes partnership in the country to involve four local authorities.

This fits in with Action Point 10 of the **South West Regional Housing Strategy 2005-2016** which aims to “**Promote through events and good practice examples, awareness of Government policy on empty homes, the private rental sector, RTB reforms, and Housing Benefit reforms.**”

The partnership works with the Homes and Communities Agency, which provides capital funding for affordable housing. All the partners contribute revenue funding.

The partnership was first established in 1996 as the Exeter Empty Homes Initiative (although the City Council and housing association partners had been active in developing empty homes schemes before that). Since then it has continued to evolve. In 1999 the growing size of the partnership led to a formal *Joint Commissioning Protocol* being established. This governs the roles of the partners, defines how opportunities would be shared between them and so on.

The partnership works through mutual assistance and respect between those involved. It has been set up in such a way that each local authority area has its own Empty Homes Strategy. **This means that the local community can adopt its own priorities and approaches** rather than having to fit in with a “one-size-fits-all” model.

The Empty Homes Services are run from one central office in Exeter, sharing resources and expertise and allowing flexibility such as staff cover. The taxpayer gets better value from this approach.

### 6.2 Partnership in Action – Private Sector Renewal

This is a good example of the benefits of working in partnership. The South West Housing Body allocated extra money to private sector housing renewal and invited innovative bids. A single bid was submitted from the South East Devon Empty Homes Initiative (now Empty Homes Partnership) on behalf of the then three local authority partners. It built on a pilot scheme developed in Exeter and works as follows:

- ✓ The Council leases properties from private sector owners.
- ✓ The properties are refurbished to bring them up to the “Decent Homes Standard”. This can be done in one of two ways:
  - ⇒ the owners refurbish the properties before they are leased to the Council; or
  - ⇒ the Council refurbishes them itself after they are leased.
- ✓ The properties are let to homeless households awaiting permanent housing.
- ✓ The properties are leased to the Council at a level lower than the normal rent. In this way, the Council recovers 70% or more of the cost of the works or value of the grant.
- ✓ The money recovered as described above is ploughed back into private sector renewal.





Exeter City Council



6.3 Development of the Empty Homes Partnership

**1996 Exeter City Council, Sovereign Housing Association and the William Sutton Trust (now Tor Homes) form a partnership.**

First 3-days a week Empty Homes Officer appointed.

Housing Corporation makes first grant allocations for "Empty Homes" to individual housing associations.

**1997 Magna Housing Association joins the partnership.**

3-days a week Empty Homes Assistant appointed.

**1998 Signpost Housing Association and Exeter Housing Society join the partnership; Western Challenge and Orbit Housing Association become "supporters".**

**1999** Formal joint commissioning arrangements set up between partners and the Housing Corporation. First grant allocations of money to the Partnership instead of individual housing associations.

Commended in **Best Living over the Shop** category at national Empty Homes Awards for seven separate conversion schemes.

**2000 Orbit Housing Association joins the partnership.**

**2001** Joint working around asylum seekers commended in **Most Innovative Partnership** category at the Empty Homes Awards.

**Turnworth Court** (Signpost Housing Association) commended in **Best Conversion Scheme** category at the Empty Homes Awards.

**2002 Sarsen Housing Association joins the partnership.**

**Jubilee Court** (Orbit Housing Association) scheme voted **Most Innovative Conversion** at Empty Homes Awards.

**2003 Mid Devon District Council and East Devon District Council join the Partnership.**

New **Private Sector Leasing** schemes set up in East and Mid Devon.

**Topsham First School** (Exeter Housing Society) voted **Best Housing Association Scheme** at the Empty Homes Awards.

**2004** Extra money awarded to the Partnership by South West Housing Body for Private Sector Renewal of Empty Homes.

**2006 Devon & Cornwall Housing Association join the partnership.**

**2008 Teignbridge District Council joins the Empty Homes Partnership making it the first partnership to cover four local authorities.**



### 7.1 How are Empty Homes Created?

An in-depth study of private sector empty properties was carried out by the Department of Environment in 1996 (*Vacant Dwellings in the Private Sector*). A government discussion paper followed this, *Empty Homes: Temporary Management, Lasting Solutions* (September 2003). The studies found that:

- The commonest reasons for problematic empties becoming vacant to start with were the previous occupant:
  - ⇒ Passing away;
  - ⇒ Moving to a hospital or institution;
  - ⇒ Being evicted or repossessed;
  - ⇒ Being unable to rent the properties due to maintenance or value issues.

These reasons accounted for **77%** of owner-occupied properties and **62%** of rented ones.

- In more than **80%** of cases the end of the vacancy involved a change of ownership.
- In only a small percentage (**6%**) of cases did the condition of the property **cause** it to become vacant; but disrepair was a significant cause of properties **remaining** empty (**40%** where the property was previously owner-occupied, **30%** where it was previously tenanted).
- Where properties remained vacant even after changing hands, serious disrepair or renovation of the property was the most common reason (**80-90%**) for this.
- Pre-1919 properties and terraced properties were disproportionately likely to become problematic empties due to the repairs needed on older buildings.
- Nearly all the properties were brought back into use by the private sector. In only **10%** was any grant aid received from the public purse.
- Whilst the value of work undertaken by local authorities was recognised, the report also noted that it **“brought back into use a relatively small number of vacant dwellings and...the work undertaken...has been resource intensive and often abortive”**.

The 12 years of experience accumulated by the Empty Homes Partnership confirm the foregoing points.

### 7.2 How does this affect the Strategy?

Although each case must always be taken on its individual merits, some general conclusions can be drawn from the research:

- ✓ Any initiative that reduces disrepair and unfitness in the private sector is also likely to help **prevent** homes becoming empty.
- ✓ Assistance with repairs and renovation of empty property should help bring them back into use more quickly.
- ✓ It is appropriate to encourage and support the private sector in bringing empty homes back into use.
- ✓ Encouragement to owners to sell vacant properties should often be the first option to consider.



- ✓ It is important to be realistic about what local authorities can achieve. Resources are not infinite and should be directed to where they can have the most beneficial impact.

### 7.3 Where does the Information come from?

The best statistical source available to Exeter City Council for information about empty homes is council tax records. The information is reasonably up-to-date and a record exists for most dwellings in the district. There are however exceptions which can cause the information to be incomplete in certain circumstances.

Council tax data does not identify any properties that could be converted to create new dwellings and it also does not take into account individual units within a house such as bedsits, which would be counted as one dwelling if they are not self-contained. There may also be dwellings within the city that have been empty for so long that they do not show up on the council tax register.

### 7.4 Issues of Reliability

Whilst people liable for council tax are responsible for keeping the council up to date with changes in their circumstances, this does not mean that data is completely reliable. Nor is it always easy to extract the necessary information because council tax systems are designed to help collect council tax, not to record information about empty properties. Here are some factors that may have an impact on figures:

**Time delays** – When people stop being responsible for council tax they have a financial incentive to let council tax know as soon as possible; however the opposite is true for the people newly liable (e.g. the new owner of the property) and there may be a delay before they notify the council tax department that they are liable. In the council tax database therefore, a property may pass through the following stages:

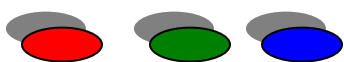
- ⇒ “old owner liable”
- ⇒ “liability unknown” (usually treated as occupied)
- ⇒ “new owner liable”.

On a snapshot report (i.e. a report that reflects the state of the system on the day the report is run) if all “liability unknown” cases are treated as **empty**, this will **overstate** the number of empties; if they are treated as **occupied** this will **understate** the number of empties. A solution to this is to run an “historic” after-the-event report to allow the information to become more up-to-date e.g. to run a report on the state of the system six months ago after late data has come in. However, this requires much more sophisticated computer software. In Exeter, where there has been a considerable investment to develop specific reports on empty properties, running an “historic” report six months after the event could significantly increase the number of empties.

### 7.5 Challenges

Empty properties may not be as simple as they first appear. Properties which may appear empty may in fact be a second home and occupied infrequently, space above shops can be essential storage for a small business without any other resources and there are also instances where properties are empty awaiting planning grants and renovation. These are frequent occurrences where empty properties are concerned but there are also other issues which arise:

**Deliberate misrepresentation** – In the past, discounts for empty properties meant that some owners might claim that properties were empty when they were in fact occupied. Now that discounts have been virtually removed for second homes and long-term empties, some owners might claim that only one person occupies the property. This gives them a 25% discount. There is anecdotal evidence that some owners of second homes may be using this tactic e.g. by claiming that the second home is the “principal residence”



of a member of the family. However, this is less likely for unfurnished empties because there is still a 100% discount for six months on such properties and the owner would either have to forego this by leaving the property furnished or would have to re-furnish the property after the exemption had expired. There is unfortunately no research to indicate how frequently misrepresentation of this sort occurs.

**‘An Englishman’s home is his castle’** – Some landlords and owners can be uncooperative when it comes to their empty properties. They believe that the property belongs to them and the council does not have the right to force them into action. These are the properties which are most likely to be left empty for several years and this is one of the issues which EDMOs aim to deal with.

**Issues over ownership** – In some cases there are complicated patterns of ownership which need to be unravelled. The property may be part owned by a housing association or property developer, or by another member of the family who may have differing plans for the site. Property can also be caught up in court proceedings and especially in divorce settlements.

**Probate** – If the previous owner has died and a property is going through probate it is exempt and cannot be brought back into use until the legal proceedings have ended. For some properties, this can take years.

**Land Registry issues** – It may come as a surprise that registration of property with the Land Registry is not yet entirely compulsory. Since 1990 they have actively widened the compulsory zone and encouraged voluntary registration however there are still properties from the 1940s and 1950s which remain unregistered because they have not changed ownership.

**The owners have disappeared** – In some cases it is not immediately apparent who the owner of the property is. This may be due to owners moving away or a property being left to a relative who is unaware of ownership. In this instance the council has to employ council tax records, land registry data, probate records and often the help of neighbours in order to find the registered owners. Even then however, the property owner may not want anything to do with it and an EDMO will need to be served. In some cases, the council will also have to work closely with the police to trace these individuals.

**Squatters, drug users and crime** – Empty properties are often a target for squatters and crime because they are less secure than an occupied property. Arson in particular is a problem which the fire services often come across in relation to empty properties. It is the council’s priority to secure these buildings to prevent further misuse and to notify and work with the owners. The council will also work closely with the police and emergency services in these instances.

**Intentional Empties** – Properties are sometimes kept empty intentionally by their owners for specific reasons e.g. they may remain empty for a member of the family, often an elderly relative in a care home in case they wish to return home or can no longer afford the fees. In some cases families may buy properties to give to their children after they finish higher education. This is rare, but it is a possibility and such properties can be empty for up to four years.

An empty property may also come about due to fluctuations in the market, the ‘credit crunch’ being a fine example. If an owner cannot sell a property at the price they want they may prefer to leave it vacant and keep it on the market until the right offer comes along. Some properties are also acquired for speculative investment and in this case the owner often does not worry about it being empty. It is then the task of the local authority to work with the owner and attempt to bring them around to the idea of development.



## 8.1 The Recent Local Picture

So far it has not been possible to conduct an in-depth study of empty properties in 1.1. [Exeter](#), however there are up-to-date statistics on the total dwelling stock. Terraced housing counts for 33% of the houses (compared to a national average of 28.9%) and much of it is pre-1919. This means there is a higher probability of disrepair.

Total dwellings	48,203
Owner occupied	31,000
Private rented	17,203

Detached	4,266
Semi-detached	9,045
Bungalow	4,068
Terraced	15,918
Purpose built flats	4,384
Converted flats	1,819
Local authority	5,088
RSL	3,615

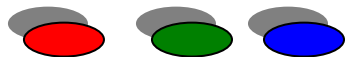
However Exeter council tax data does provide reasonably up-to-date information about empty properties in the area. Records exist for most dwellings in the district<sup>1</sup> and there are **exemption codes** that give some indication of why the properties are empty. Council tax visiting officers have the job of checking that claims for exemptions are valid.

The current council tax figures for exempt properties are as follows:

<i>Empties exempt from Council Tax</i>	<i>Under 6 months</i>	<i>6 months and over</i>
<b>Exempt for limited periods of time</b>		
Unfurnished empty dwellings (up to six months).	200	8
Dwellings needing major repair works or under-going structural alteration (up to one year).	35	52
Unoccupied dwellings being part of the estate of a person who has died (up to six months after grant of probate or letters of administration).	81	50
<b>Exempt as long as they remain empty</b>		
Dwellings where the owner is a student who last lived in the dwelling as their main home.	0	0
Dwellings left unoccupied by people who are in prison.	2	3
Dwellings left unoccupied by people who have moved to receive personal care.	3	2
Dwellings left unoccupied by people who have moved to provide personal care to another person.	0	0
Annexes which cannot be let separately from the main dwelling.	2	7
Dwellings where the liable person is a trustee in bankruptcy.	0	0
Dwellings where occupation is forbidden by law, or which are kept unoccupied because of impending compulsory purchase.	0	0
Dwellings awaiting occupation by ministers of religion.	0	0
Dwellings taken into possession by a mortgage lender.	13	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>126</b>

Source Council Tax system

<sup>1</sup> The exception is individual units within a house arranged as bedsits: the house will normally count just as one dwelling unless the bedsits are self-contained; this is also true of "shared houses" such as student houses.



The current figures for non-exempt empty properties are as follows:

<i>Non-exempt empty dwellings</i>	<i>Under 6 months</i>	<i>6 months and over</i>
Unfurnished empties (> 6 months empty – no exemption).	7	280
“Second homes” (furnished empties).	131	414
<b>Total</b>	138	694

*Source Council Tax system*

## **8.2 Exemption Categories**

There are several reasons for empty properties to be exempt from council tax and as such remaining empty for a prolonged period of time:

- According to government legislation, unfurnished empty dwellings are exempt for up to six months. This allows any legal proceedings after the sale of the property or death of the previous occupier to be completed.
- Any empty dwellings currently undergoing extensive structural repair or alteration are exempt for up to a year to allow works to be completed.
- Any dwellings owned by a student who last occupied the building as their main home are exempt. Students do not pay council tax whilst they are in full-time education.
- Any dwellings unoccupied whilst their owners are in prison are exempt.
- Any dwellings unoccupied by those who are receiving professional care elsewhere are exempt.
- Any dwellings empty due to their owners providing care for another are exempt.
- Annexes that cannot be let separately from the main dwelling are exempt.
- A dwelling where the liable person is a trustee in bankruptcy is exempt.
- Dwellings that cannot be occupied by law or which are undergoing compulsory purchase are exempt.
- Dwellings awaiting occupation by a minister of religion are exempt.
- Dwellings taken into possession by a mortgage lender after repossession are exempt.

## **8.3 Second Homes**

According to the latest government housing report there are around **242,000** households who own second homes in England. Many of these second homeowners are between 45 and 64, which accounts for **145,200 (60%)** of all second home ownership. Second homes tend to be found in the countryside (except for Westminster which sees the highest numbers of urban second homes) and the most popular region for these is the South West. Only **10%** of the total UK households live in the South West, however it accounts for **24%** of all second homes and according to Council Tax figures over **400** are found in and around Exeter alone.



The impact of second homes on local rural communities is huge. Those on low incomes who may have lived in villages for most of their lives are consistently priced out of the market and move away. This creates increased pressure on larger urban areas. In some extreme cases, over **50%** of villages are empty for half the year and this leads to the loss of services and local amenities and also the downturn of local businesses.

There are plans to curb second home ownership in the most sought after places such as Devon by recommending that Local Authorities have the power to prevent outsiders buying local property. Those looking for future second homes may have to apply to the Council for permission and could be refused if permission would exacerbate the closure of village services.

### ***8.4 Exeter's Need***

According to the 2007 Housing Market Assessment, Exeter city will need around 8,000 new houses within the next five years to satisfy local demand and the demand of migration to the city. The population of the city, according to the Office for National Statistics, is also predicted to rise to 143,900 by 2029, representing a 20% rise over a 25 year period. Not only should the local authority therefore be looking to provide new affordable housing to meet this need, but according to this report, should ***“purchase existing satisfactory properties or renovate vacant housing in the area in order for them to be rented to social tenants.”***

The Audit Commission's **KLOE (Key Lines of Enquiry)** sets out the ideal local authority strategic approach to housing, regeneration and renewal and states that a local authority needs a:

***“clear and effective strategic approach, with partners at a district and sub-regional level, to meeting its objectives that recognises the inter-relationship between housing, health, prosperity and sustainability. Its strategic approach to housing recognises that by making best use of the existing housing stock it will reduce the need for new housing, including new affordable housing.”***

With the creation of the Empty Homes Partnership, Exeter City Council is well on the way to achieving a cohesive partnership and intervening constructively in the Housing Market at a district and sub-regional level.



## 8.5 Location (By Ward) of Empty Properties 2008



## 8.6 2008 Statistics

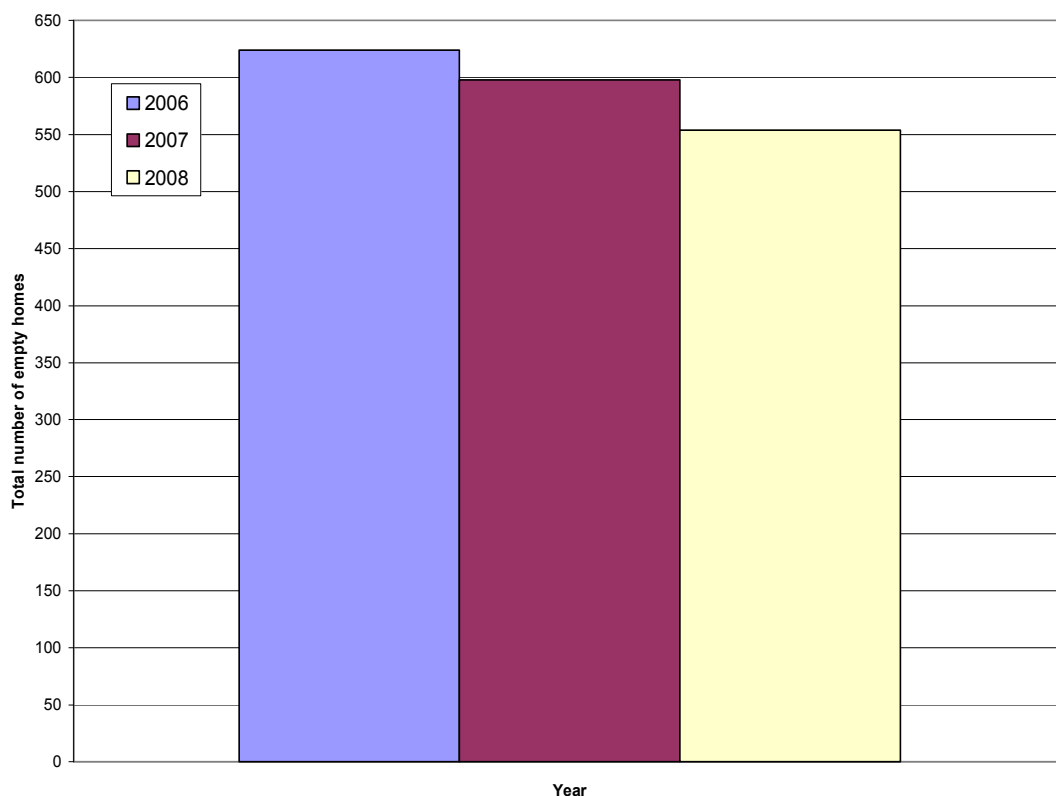
Ward	Empty less than 6 months	% empty less than 6 months	Empty over 6 months	% Empty over 6 months	Total
Alphington	16	42.1%	22	57.9%	38
Cowick	6	35.3%	11	64.7%	17
Duryard	4	66.7%	2	33.3%	6
Exwick	13	56.5%	10	43.5%	23
Heavitree	15	53.6%	13	46.4%	28
Mincinglake	10	58.8%	7	41.2%	17
Newtown	22	40.7%	32	59.3%	54
Pennsylvania	9	47.4%	10	52.6%	19
Pinhoe	10	47.6%	11	52.4%	21
Polslloe	22	55.0%	18	45.0%	40
Priory	12	41.4%	17	58.6%	29
St Davids	20	33.9%	39	66.1%	59
St James	19	55.9%	15	44.1%	34
St Leonards	25	58.1%	18	41.9%	43
St Loyes	10	52.6%	9	47.4%	19
St Thomas	20	62.5%	12	37.5%	32
Topsham	18	35.3%	33	64.7%	51
Whipton Barton	16	66.7%	8	33.3%	24
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>267</b>		<b>287</b>		<b>554</b>

Source Council Tax System



## 8.7 Exeter Empty Home Trends

Total Exeter Empty Homes July 2006-2008



The evidence available for 2006 to 2008 suggests that the number of empty properties in Exeter has decreased steadily in recent years from 624 empties (including those empty less than six months) to 554. The average percentage of properties empty less than 6 months has also decreased from 59.7% to 50.6% however the percentage of properties empty for more than six months has seen a marginal increase from 40.3% of the total to 49.4%. This suggests that there are increasingly more properties staying empty after a change of ownership. Overall in Exeter however there are only 554 (1.1%) empty properties of the 48,203 total dwellings. This is comparable to cities of a similar size such as Plymouth and Worcester, which have 1.2% and 0.8% respectively of their total dwelling stock empty. This reflects a buoyant housing market and relatively low level of empty homes to start with. The highest number of empty properties can currently be found in St Davids, Newtown and Topsham, whilst the lowest numbers are situated in the wards of Duryard, Mincinglake, Pennsylvania and Pinhoe – two of which are popular student areas.

Factors that can affect the overall number of vacant properties include the proportion of “buy-to-let” transactions compared with owner-occupier transactions. The majority of owner-occupiers move into properties the day they acquire them, in which case the property might not become empty at all if the previous owner moved out the day before. But if an investment landlord bought the same property it would be very rare for them to have their property tenanted straight away, especially if they plan to rent to Exeter’s growing student population. Very few properties are bought already tenanted. So a higher number of buy-to-let purchases would be expected to translate into a greater number of short-term empty properties. In the Department of Environment study, **48%** of new owner-occupiers moved into their empty property straight away, whereas none of the landlords had tenants moving in immediately.

For more information on statistics for previous years please see the [Appendix](#).





## 8.8 What do we need to know most?

In order to make the best use of Exeter's empty homes there are several things Exeter City Council needs to know:

### 8.8.1 Types of Empty Properties

- Council tax provides us with the estimated figure of empty properties in Exeter, but there are inevitably some which are not properly registered and some which have been empty so long that they do not appear on council tax records. The only way to be sure would be to conduct a house-by-house survey throughout Exeter.
- The number of empty properties which are grade I, grade II\* or grade II listed. These will need special attention and materials if they are to be brought back into use and may be eligible for various heritage grants.
- The areas of wasted commercial space within the city. This could include disused factories and warehouses, empty school buildings and deconsecrated churches but could equally refer to empty shops and the flats above them.
- The size of the properties. This will have an impact on their eventual use.
- How many flats are vacant above shops and commercial premises?

### 8.8.2 Why the properties are empty

- By contacting landlords of empty properties we should be able to discern why the properties are empty. There could be issues over probate, repairs, access or specifically with letting or selling the property.
- If the landlords cannot be contacted the council will refer to any complaints or notices made against the property, available council tax records and environmental health call-outs to establish how long the property has been vacant and why.

### 8.8.3 What is being done about them?

- By contacting the landlord the local authority can find out if anything is being done to the property and whether they would be eligible to apply for any available renovation or improvement grants.
- In extreme cases where landlords fail to bring their properties into use and negotiations fail, the local authority can issue a CPO or EDMO in order to be able to use the property to alleviate homelessness.

### 8.8.4 What funds are available to deal with empty properties?

- Although each property is dealt with on a case-by-case basis, Exeter City Council will need to have an idea of the grant available internally for empty properties and also from the partnered RSLs.
- There may also be grants available from national and regional bodies. The Regional Development Agency may have funds available and there are also conservation grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage for listed developments.



## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

### 9.1 Resources

#### The Exeter Empty Homes Service

The running costs of the Exeter Empty Homes Service are funded by an annual contribution of around £16,000 from the Council plus contributions from the seven partner housing associations. This covers

- ⇒ Two-days a week Empty Homes Partnership Officer (including all on-costs).
- ⇒ Around 6 hours a week input from the Empty Homes Partnership Manager.
- ⇒ Advertising and other publicity budget.

#### Social Housing Grant

This is money given by the Homes and Communities Agency to housing associations to help them deliver affordable housing. The Empty Homes Partnership bids for money specifically for empty homes. This can be used on conversions or purchases of existing empty properties. Under the EHP protocol, money not spent in one local authority can be transferred to another.

- ⇒ £505,000 to East Devon by Housing Corporation 2006-08.

#### Local Authority Capital Grant

This is similar to Social Housing Grant (SHG) but is money from the Council's own capital resources. It can be used alongside SHG on joint-funded schemes but can also be used independently. When used in joint-funded schemes, Homes and Communities Agency rules would apply; but used independently, the Council could set its own criteria e.g. rent levels, nomination arrangements and so on.

#### Private Sector Renewal Grant

Council grants can be used to tackle homes that do not meet the Housing Health and Safety Rating System or Decent Homes standards. This can help prevent properties becoming empty in the first place or help bring back into use empty properties that have fallen into disrepair.

### 9.2 Tools and Actions

#### Information, support and advice

Owners of empty homes need clear information about the options available to them. With longer-term empties, owners need to be approached regularly to encourage them to take action. Wherever appropriate, owners will be pointed towards the necessary professional advice e.g. from accountants, solicitors, building surveyors etc.

The Empty Homes Service has a dedicated 0845-telephone number with a 24-hour answering service created to ensure information is easily accessible by landlords. There is also an information pack available which is sent out in response to any enquiries which sets out how the council can help bring the property back into use.

#### ADDLETS

This is a monthly email which sets out the targets for new and existing developments across Exeter. This is circulated, updated and discussed in detail and actions are assigned to the appropriate people and departments.

See [Appendix](#) for December 2008 ADDLETS.

### Publicising the help available

Having information and support available is little use if people don't know it's there. Therefore publicising the existence of the Empty Homes Service and the schemes on offer is essential.

- "Empty homes" page created on the Exeter City Council website.
- Information packs distributed to local solicitors and accountants on a regularly updated basis.
- EXtraLet adverts placed in the local paper regularly.

### Encouraging the private sector

Private letting is often the best solution where owners do not want to sell a home or live in it themselves. Some owners are reluctant to let their homes out and there is a particular value in explaining what is involved and making sure they are supported. This means encouraging high standards in the private rented sector with knowledgeable and professional landlords' organisations and letting agents.

### Use of enforcement powers

Where an empty property creates problems for the community, enforcement powers can and should be brought into use. A wide range of such powers exist under Planning, Housing, Environmental Health and Environmental Protection legislation. In many cases, the local authority can take action in default if the owner refuses to respond and have the right to recover costs from the owners. Prosecutions can also be brought and EDMOs served.

Landlords of empty properties will not be unfairly targeted but nor will they be ignored if they own long-term empties.

### Enforced Sale

Where a debt exists in respect of an empty property and the owner fails to pay this off (e.g. after works have been carried out in default, as described above) the Council may recover the debt by enforcing the sale of the property through the courts. This can ensure that the property is brought back into use.

### Compulsory Purchase

The powers for compulsory purchase can be found under the Acquisition of Land Act 1981 and can be used in worst case scenarios by local government, local authorities and bodies such as the Environment Agency and Urban Regeneration Agency to buy land and any dwellings on it. Land is usually acquired as part of a wider urban regeneration project however local authorities can also use them to bring empty properties back into use where other negotiations have failed.

CPOs are a lengthy process but have been proven to be effective and are usually structured along these lines:

- **Formulation** – proposals and negotiations are carried out to see if a CPO is justified.
- **Resolution** - the local authority decides to serve the order.
- **Order** – CPO submitted to local government and the Secretary of State.
- **Objections** – the owner and local residents have a chance to object.
- **Inquiry** – if needed there is a public inquiry.
- **Decision** – the order is confirmed.
- **Possession** – this usually takes a minimum of three months.



- **Compensation** – the owner is compensated for the loss of the property.

### Financial Measures

The Council has the power to decide the level of council tax discount to be offered on both second homes (furnished empty properties) and long-term vacant properties.

- Discount on second homes reduced from 50% to 10%.
- Discount on long-term empty homes reduced from 50% to 10%. Councils are entitled to charge 100% of council tax on second homes and long term empties.

### Leasing Schemes

Leasing schemes involve an owner letting their home to the council (or housing association). The council is a “blue-chip tenant” able to offer a guaranteed rent and take care of any damage to the property. The council sub-lets to someone in housing need (normally awaiting permanent housing).

Leasing schemes are particularly appreciated by absentee landlords – those living abroad – whose main priority is a guaranteed income without the hassle of organising repairs. These landlords might otherwise be reluctant to let out their properties.

### EXtraLet

EXtraLet manages properties on behalf of the landlords, charging a low figure of 8% for management. These properties are brought up to the decent homes standard and are let to families who are threatened with homelessness. This is one of the Councils tools to help prevent homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation.

### Private Sector Grant Schemes

These provide finance to bring properties up to a better standard. This can be important where properties are standing empty because of their poor condition. Such schemes can also be used as an incentive to attract landlords to leasing schemes.

Private Sector Renewal grant was established following a bid to the South West Housing Body (see Pg. 13).

The grant funding is used to enable landlords to bring properties up to the Decent Homes Standard, including installing gas central heating, replacing windows and improving insulation.

### Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs)

The Housing Act 2004 introduced new powers allowing councils to take control of empty properties and then rent them out if owners persistently turn down offers of help by local authorities. These work on the principal that an empty property represents a property in decline that the council should be able to use to help alleviate homelessness. As such, it can be taken on temporarily to meet housing need without the owner’s permission.

There are two types of EDMOs:

- ⇒ An interim EDMO can be obtained by application to an independent tribunal, who will hear both sides of the case and then make a decision regarding the property. If an EDMO is granted it can last for up to one year but the local authority cannot put a tenant in the property during this time unless the owner agrees. The order is revoked if at any time the owner decides to sell, let or reoccupy the property.
- ⇒ A final EDMO is considered only if all attempts have failed to get the owner to bring the property back into use. This can last up to seven



years and gives the local council management of the property. The owner has the right to appeal against this decision at any time.

An EDMO allows the council to:

- Enter a property to inspect it if the owner has refused entry. The council will give the owner at least 24 hours notice and if the owner prevents the officer entering, a warrant can be obtained from the court;
- Request certain information such as the details of the owner etc;
- Serve a hazard awareness notice so that all parties concerned understand the dangers associated with the property;
- Serve improvement and work notices where there needs to be renovation;
- Enter the property and carry out work if the owner has not done so. The costs are then recovered from the owner's eventual rent;
- Take over management of the property on the owners behalf;
- Close the property off and prevent anyone living there if it is seriously substandard and presents a real hazard;
- Order the demolition or clearance of the property.

EDMOs do not apply to any property where there are plans to sell, rent or renovate. Properties are also exempt where the ownership is being resolved through probate and are exempt for a further six months after that.

These would only be used as a last resort, but providing the government gets the regulations right these powers should be very important in helping councils tackle problem empty properties. They may also prove a large deterrent for owners keeping their properties empty.

There is commitment from the Empty Homes Partnership to feed into any government consultation on the detailed regulations to ensure they are workable and can be used effectively by all local authorities.

#### **Affordable Housing Schemes**

Using Social Housing Grant and/or Local Authority Capital Grant (see **Resources** above) development costs can be subsidised to allow an affordable rent to be charged.

#### **Living over the shop**

The name given to conversions of space above commercial premises such as shops.



### 10.1 A Mutual Solution

The Exeter Empty Homes team aim, where possible, to bring all empty properties back into use with the cooperation of the owners and will attempt in all cases to make this happen. Landlords may decide to rent or lease the properties privately or sell to a housing association or private developer. There are also options available within the council in the form of private sector leasing (PSL) and EXtraLet, which house families in need of accommodation.

### 10.2 EDMO Properties

All properties obtained through EDMOs will be used by Exeter City Council to help alleviate housing need and go some way towards making sure that there is a home for everyone living within the city. The properties taken on will be used for the most part by Private Sector Leasing (PSL) and EXtraLet. For all properties, the council will pay close attention to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and endeavour to remedy all category one and two hazards.

### 10.3 Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

Any property brought on by the council will need to be thoroughly assessed through the government's Health and Safety Rating System, which is a list of **29** potentially fatal hazards which should be corrected to make the property habitable. The officer assesses the severity of each hazard on a case by case basis and all category one and two hazards (combinations which could most likely result in death) must be corrected.

The main hazards concerning empty properties are:

- Damp and mould growth, there could be water leaks, inadequate damp course etc;
- Excess cold. This can be caused by poor insulation or a lack of adequate heating;
- Excess heat. This can be caused by poor ventilation;
- Asbestos;
- Biocides (chemicals used to treat timber and mould);
- Carbon monoxide fumes caused by burning gas, oil and solid fuel;
- Lead. Usually found in pipes or paintwork;
- Radiation. Usually caused by poor ventilation or poor condition of flooring;
- Volatile organic compounds (chemicals which produce fumes, for example, glues);
- Security. Can someone break in easily?
- Inadequate lighting;
- Domestic hygiene, pests and refuse;
- Food safety (including easy-to-clean surfaces and space for a fridge and freezer);
- Sanitation and drainage (including hot and cold water and washing facilities);
- Access to domestic water supply, including access to clean water;



- Falls associated with baths (including a suitable non-slip surface in the bath);
- Falls on the level (including properly-constructed floors and paths);
- Falls associated with stairs and steps (including handrails);
- Falls between levels (for example, from windows and balconies);
- Electrical hazards;
- Fire;
- Hot surfaces and materials. This could include exposed hot pipes;
- Collision and entrapment;
- Explosions caused by faulty appliances;
- Ergonomics e.g. bad positioning of cooking facilities or wall cupboards.
- Structural collapse and falling objects such as roof tiles, ceilings and staircases.

### 10.4 EXtraLet

The government's strategy 'Homes for All' highlighted the importance of the private rented sector and required Local Authorities to reduce homelessness by offering a wider range of preventative measures and increase access to settled homes. As a result, the Empty Homes team developed a property management service in 1996 similar to that of a high street lettings agency.

EXtraLet works closely with private sector landlords to improve access to private sector tenancies, building a portfolio of homes that are made available to families who might otherwise become homeless. Not only is EXtraLet an invaluable resource in reducing the number of families needing to be accommodated in temporary accommodation but also a useful tool for offering tenants improved standards of accommodation and more choice.

The ending of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy accounts for 10% of all homelessness acceptances and is the fourth most common reason for homelessness presentations. Most people becoming homeless as a result of the ending of an AST will already have been managing successfully in the private sector prior to the tenancy coming to an end. The aim of the scheme is to offer such people better opportunities to secure settled accommodation within the private rented sector before they become homeless.

Consultation with landlords invited their opinions of the Council, their concerns, what incentives would influence their decision to join the scheme and the type of advertising they would most likely respond to. We currently charge an 8% management fee that offers landlords extra benefits such as:

- A rent and damage deposit guarantee to the value of six months rent;
- Guaranteeing 50% of the rent during void periods up to two months;
- Arranging and paying for the annual gas safety checks;
- Arranging and paying for the initial electrical safety check;
- Arranging and paying for the asbestos survey;
- A fast tenant referral system;



- A free referencing service;
- Regular management inspections;
- A comprehensive inventory together with digital recording.

In addition, landlords that sign to the EXtraLet scheme have access to Private Sector Renewal Grant to assist with bringing the property up to the Decent Homes Standard and often bring long term empty properties back into use.

EXtraLet continues to be a success and has been praised by both tenant and landlord. In a recent customer satisfaction survey 100% of EXtraLet landlords and tenants said that they were either very or fairly satisfied with the overall level of service with 92% of landlords stating they would recommend ExtraLet to another landlord.

To date, EXtraLet has prevented more than 70 families becoming homeless and currently manages over 60 properties.

**For the EXtraLet information pack, contact the empty homes negotiators on:**

**01392 265833 or [empty.homes@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:empty.homes@exeter.gov.uk)**

### ***10.5 Private Sector Leasing (PSL)***

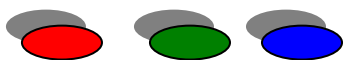
Private Sector Leasing works slightly differently to the EXtraLet scheme. The landlord rents the property to the council, who then sub-lets it to the chosen tenants. This means the landlord is guaranteed a monthly income.

The Private Sector Leasing team's interest in properties is dependent on need but they are available to help landlords with larger homes bring them back into use through negotiations with housing associations and other contacts within the private sector. As with EXtraLet, all the properties taken on through this scheme must be unfurnished.

All properties are used for homeless households and tenants are paid a standard amount per household. As a consequence the rents are lower than a landlord would obtain on the open market; however it is a guaranteed rent which will not default.

All properties are subject to initial checks to decide what needs to be done to bring it up to a decent standard. Every PSL property needs to come up to the new government Housing Health and Safety Rating System (see above) and anything highlighted in NICEIC electrical, CORGI gas and EPC checks will need to be remedied before the property can be let. In order to complete this, landlords have access to private sector renewal grant which can be used for:

- Repairing defects in the structure of the building.
- Replacing defective windows and doors.
- Rewiring and installation of hard wired smoke alarms.
- Installation or upgrade of a heating system.
- Thermal efficiency measures including insulation.
- Addressing any safety issues brought up by checks.
- Replacing any defective kitchens and bathroom suites.
- Renewing decoration and carpets/vinyl.





- Carrying out asbestos checks.

The landlord will also need to provide proof of ownership and insurance documents, permission from any mortgage lenders and a maintenance contract on the boiler.

Once the property is signed over, the landlord has no direct dealings with the tenants and all works are taken care of by the council and billed accordingly. Exeter City Council takes care of and pays for three minor works a year up to the value of £80 each and makes good any damage tenants have caused to the property at the end of the tenancy.

**For more information on PSLs contact the empty homes negotiators on:**

**01392 265833 or [empty.homes@exeter.gov.uk](mailto:empty.homes@exeter.gov.uk)**



### 11.1 The Corporate Approach

To deliver an effective Empty Homes Strategy many different parts of the Council have to work together.

#### Council Members

- Providing strategic leadership.
- Setting the Council's budget and determining the amount of revenue and capital funding available for the Empty Homes Partnership.
- Establishing policy around council tax discounts for second and long-term empty homes. Currently tax is charged at 90%.

#### Housing & Enabling Services

- Overseeing the operation of the Private Sector Leasing scheme.
- Working with Housing Associations to identify possible empty homes affordable housing schemes.
- Being the champion of the Empty Homes Strategy within the authority.
- Running the private sector renewal grant scheme.
- Running EXtraLet.
- Providing capital funding and supporting bids to the Homes and Communities Agency for social housing grants etc.

#### Environmental Health (Private Sector Housing)

- Taking enforcement action on problem properties.
- Identifying problem empties and referring them to the Empty Homes Team.

#### Council Tax Section

- Providing statistical information about empty properties.
- Providing details of owners where this contributes to the empty homes strategy.

#### Legal Services

- Advising on the legal aspects of new schemes and initiatives.
- Progressing enforcement actions such as EDMOs, compulsory purchases and enforced sales.

#### Housing Benefit Section

- Ensuring timely processing of housing benefit claims to facilitate private lettings to those on lower incomes.
- Advising on the housing benefit aspects of new schemes.



**Planning Services**

- Ensuring appropriate planning policies to help bring empty properties back into use. This especially applies on houses split into bed-sits and self-contained flats and also on properties that could become houses in multiple-occupation.
- Advising owners about appropriate and inappropriate development options for their empty properties.
- Taking enforcement action in respect of empty properties that fall within planning powers.
- Identifying planning regulations for all listed empty properties.

**Conservation Officer**

- Identifying empty historic “buildings at risk”.
- Helping owners’ deal with empty buildings of historic importance including access to some grants and appropriate contractors for stone work, wood work etc.

**Building Control**

- Taking enforcement action in respect of empty properties that are dangerous structures.

**Customer Services**

- Referring empty property owners to the right service.



## 11.2 OTHER EXTERNAL PARTNERS

### The Empty Homes Agency

The Empty Homes Agency is an independent national charity set up in 1992 to highlight the waste of empty property in England. It lobbies the government and works with others to devise and promote solutions to bring empty properties back into use.

Its aim is 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.”**

This national charity receives funding from the government, the National Lottery and other sources to support empty homes initiatives and develop empty homes policy.

➤ [www.emptyhomes.com](http://www.emptyhomes.com)

### The National Association of Empty Property Practitioners (NAEPP)

Formed in May 2001, this is an organisation that brings together all the professionals and organisations in the empty homes world to exchange good practice. The Empty Homes Partnership provides many of the secretarial functions for the group, including maintaining its email exchange and membership records.

➤ [www.naepp.org.uk](http://www.naepp.org.uk)

### The South West Empty Homes Forum

Hosted by the Empty Homes Partnership, this brings together local authority and housing association officers to encourage the mutual exchange of information. The six-monthly forum also focuses on new Government Legislation in an attempt to discuss and encourage improved knowledge in these new areas.

### South West Empty Homes Conference

Hosted annually by the Exeter City Council Empty Homes Service to bring together and share the experiences of empty property practitioners throughout the country.

### Homes and Communities Agency

Formerly the Housing Corporation, they provide funding to local authorities for affordable housing, bring land back into productive use and improve quality of life by raising standards for the physical and social environment.

➤ [www.homesandcommunities.co.uk](http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk)

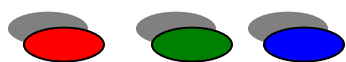
### Government Office South West

Works to achieve sustainable growth and to develop safe and prosperous communities that meet the diverse needs of everyone who lives and works here. GOSW puts Government policy into practice at local level, implementing key programmes and initiatives in partnership with regional and local organisations and provides feedback to central Government that helps inform future policy.

➤ [www.gosw.gov.uk](http://www.gosw.gov.uk)

### Devon Strategic Housing Group

A strategic housing partnership comprising the seven District Councils, Dartmoor National Park, Torbay Council, Exeter and Plymouth City Councils, Devon County Council and Housing



Associations and the Community Council of Devon working together to improve the delivery of affordable housing in Devon.

- [www.dshg.org.uk](http://www.dshg.org.uk)

Devon and  
Cornwall Training  
Network

A partnership of Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords to anticipate, facilitate and provide quality housing training events in Devon and Cornwall.

- [www.dctn.org.uk](http://www.dctn.org.uk)



## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

### 12.1 Owners

If you own an empty property, either residential or commercial, there are many different options that could be open to you. **Contact the Empty Homes Service for further information and assistance.**

There is also a useful guide produced by Communities and Local Government on what EDMOs are and how they work in relation to empty property.

*Empty Dwelling Management Orders - Guidance for Residential Property Owners (June 2006)*

- [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/152870.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/152870.pdf)

### 12.2 Members of the Public

If you know of an empty property that is causing problems to surrounding dwellings or where the owner seems to need help to bring it back into use, report it to the Empty Homes Service. This can be done via telephone on the number below and also on the Internet by going to [www.exeter.gov.uk/housing](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/housing) and following the links:

- Housing
- Exeter Empty Homes Service
- Empty Homes Reporting

### 12.3 Feedback on this Strategy

The Exeter Empty Homes service aims for constant improvement, so if you have any comments about this strategy please let the council know.

### 12.4 Empty Homes Service Contact Details

The Empty Homes team can be contacted by:

**Telephone: (01392) 265865**

**Fax: (01392) 265859**

**Web: [www.exeter.gov.uk/housing](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/housing)**



### *13.1 What the Empty Homes Service does*

The Exeter Empty Homes Service aims to bring all empty properties in Exeter, both commercial and residential, back into use in order to provide housing for local people in housing need. Each identified property or submission is considered on a case-by-case basis and funding can be agreed jointly with the seven partner RSLs. The service provides details of all available grants and suggests various schemes, such as EXtraLet, which could prove beneficial to landlords.

### *13.2 Customer Service Standards*

Here in Exeter customer service is very important. The Empty Homes Service aims to provide a high standard of customer service and to that end endeavours to:

- Answer incoming telephone calls within six rings.
- Reply to voice mail messages within two working days.
- Reply to written communication within five working days.
- Reply to email communication within two working days.

All our customer information is held on a database that is data protected.

Every six months the Empty Home Service sends out a customer service questionnaire on customer service standards. Returned forms are carefully scrutinised and suggestions to improve the services seriously considered and implemented where applicable.



## 14.1 Associated Strategies

### *Housing Strategy 2007-2012*

- [www.exeter.gov.uk/media/pdf/m/q/Housing\\_Strategy\\_document\\_screen.pdf](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/media/pdf/m/q/Housing_Strategy_document_screen.pdf)

### *Homelessness Strategy 2008-2013*

- [www.exeter.gov.uk/media/pdf/l/0/Final\\_Copy.pdf](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/media/pdf/l/0/Final_Copy.pdf)

### *Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2008-2009*

- [www.exeter.gov.uk/media/doc/q/b/policy\\_2008-09.doc](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/media/doc/q/b/policy_2008-09.doc)

### *South West Regional Housing Strategy 2005-2016*

- [www.gos.gov.uk/gosw/peoplesc/housing/](http://www.gos.gov.uk/gosw/peoplesc/housing/)

### *Exeter Vision (Community Strategy)*

- [www.exeter.gov.uk/media/pdf/5/n/exeter\\_vision\\_1.pdf](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/media/pdf/5/n/exeter_vision_1.pdf)

### *Environmental Strategy 2007-2012*

- [www.exeter.gov.uk/media/pdf/t/5/Environmental\\_Strategy\\_2007\\_-\\_2012.pdf](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/media/pdf/t/5/Environmental_Strategy_2007_-_2012.pdf)

## 14.2 Who are the Partners?

### *14.2.1 Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)*

As part of the Empty Homes Partnership, Exeter City Council has a strong relationship with seven Housing Associations. This group meets six monthly to discuss issues, strategies and the progress of Empty Homes' schemes.

**Magna Housing Group** – Magna Housing Association operates in Dorset, Devon, South Gloucestershire and Somerset. As of December 2007 they had 5,764 homes to let, plus 68 currently under construction.  
[www.magna.org.uk](http://www.magna.org.uk)

**Signpost Housing Group (Spectrum Housing)** – Signpost Housing Group has recently merged with Spinnaker Housing Group under the larger Spectrum Housing Corporation. Established in 1990, Signpost Housing now owns nearly 4,500 homes and develops approximately 500 homes a year throughout the south and south west of England by working in partnership with local authorities, housing associations, local communities, and voluntary and statutory agencies.  
[www.spectrumhousing.co.uk](http://www.spectrumhousing.co.uk)

**Cornerstone** – As Exeter's first housing association, Cornerstone have worked for 80 years within the city and currently own over 1,000 homes, growing at a rate of 30 units per year. They are the largest Exeter-based association.  
[www.cornerstonehousing.net](http://www.cornerstonehousing.net)





**Sovereign Housing** – Formed in 1989, Sovereign Housing own and manage more than 11,500 homes in the south and south west of England. They are also responsible for 25 sheltered housing schemes.

[www.sovereign.org.uk](http://www.sovereign.org.uk)

**TOR Homes** – Based in the South Hams, Tor Homes owns and manages 3,000 rented homes and builds new homes for rent and shared ownership.

[www.torhomes.com](http://www.torhomes.com)

**Sarsen Housing** – Sarsen owns or manages around 6,000 homes for rent and shared ownership across the South West, including Wiltshire, Swindon, Bristol, Gloucestershire, Bath, North Somerset, Devon and Cornwall.

[www.sarsen.co.uk](http://www.sarsen.co.uk)

**Devon & Cornwall Housing** – Devon & Cornwall Housing manages 17,000 properties throughout Cornwall and Devon and builds about 250 new homes each year. They also run a "care & repair" home improvement agency across the two counties.

[www.dcha.co.uk](http://www.dcha.co.uk)

#### ***14.2.2 Other Local Authorities***

Exeter City Council works in partnership with East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Council as part of the Empty Homes Partnership, meeting with the Councils and RSL's on a six-monthly basis, as above.

#### ***14.2.3 Private Landlords and Agencies***

Exeter City Council host Landlord's Forums on a six-monthly basis that assists landlords with grant information. These Forums also act as a very important information provider for any new legislation relating to landlords and their properties.

#### ***14.2.4 Community Groups***

Where relevant, local communities are consulted over how the council identifies empty properties and the potential schemes underway. Empty homes issues can also be brought to the Housing Strategy forum.



## *WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY WANT?*

### *15.1 Priorities and Policies*

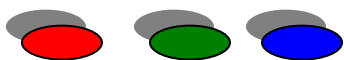
- To raise awareness of the issues of empty homes.
- To maximise the re-use of empty homes.
- To improve the existing built environment in line with the Government's Decent Homes Standard.
- To provide good quality affordable housing.
- To support area regeneration programmes.
- To ensure programmes meet a range of housing needs.
- To support the Housing Strategy, Corporate Strategy and Local Plan.

### *15.2 Resources*

- Partnerships with other Local Authorities.
- Partnerships with Registered Social Landlords.
- Empty Homes Service Team.
- Housing Corporation Funding.
- Private Sector Renewal Grant Funding.

### *15.3 How consultation was carried out - to Follow*

### *15.4 Results of consultation - To Follow*



# EMPTY HOMES ACTION PLAN WITH TARGETS

## 16.1 Empty Homes Action Plan 2009-2014

				LEAD	PROGRESS
ACTION	TARGET	PRIORITY	RESOURCES	OFFICER	AS OF FEB 09
<b>STRATEGY</b>					
1	Review the Empty Homes Strategy.	Medium	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager	Scrutiny committee on 10 March 2009 / Consultation / Executive committee on 16 June 2009
2	Empty Homes Action Plan.	High	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager	Jan 2009 : Done
<b>PROGRAMME</b>					
1	Return properties empty for more than six months to use.	Medium	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager / Empty Homes Negotiator	5 properties brought back into use in January 2009 and 10 more in the pipeline
2	Negotiate with the Homes and Communities Agency to secure funding for empty homes grants.	Medium	Staff time / capital funding	Strategic Housing Manager / Empty Homes Partnership Manager	9 units completed at Fountain House with 11 units projected per year through to 2014.
3	Negotiate with internal council departments for renovation grant funding.	Low	Staff time / capital funding	Strategic Housing Manager / Empty Homes Partnership Manager	Under negotiation
4	Identify funding in the council's Affordable Housing Capital Programme for use on empty properties.	High	Staff time / capital funding	Strategic Housing Manager / Empty Homes Partnership Manager	10 properties being investigated
		High	Staff time / capital funding	Strategic Housing Manager / Empty Homes Partnership Manager	1 home purchased and 1 in the pipeline
		High	Staff time / capital funding	Strategic Housing Manager / Empty Homes Partnership Manager	1 home purchased
		High	Staff time / capital funding	Strategic Housing Manager / Empty Homes Partnership Manager	7 homes on site
5	Identify funding for the EXtraLet scheme.	Low	Staff time / capital funding	Strategic Housing Manager / Empty Homes Partnership Manager	£50,937 spent on 40 properties since April 2008 (as of February 2009)
6	Maintain Empty Homes Partnership for the Strategic Housing Market Assessment Region	High	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager	Maintained
<b>INFORMATION</b>					
1	Obtain and review council tax lists to identify empty properties.	Medium	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager / Empty Homes Negotiator	First list requested January 2009
2	Identify long term empty properties (over 2 years) which could be brought back into use using enforcement powers from the Housing Act 2004 (Empty Dwelling Management Orders).	High	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager / Empty Homes Negotiator	4 properties currently under investigation



<b>INFORMATION CONT.</b>						
3	Conduct street surveys to identify vacant units over shops and empty buildings.	Fore Street, Heavitree / Cowick Street, St Thomas to be thoroughly surveyed by 31 March 2011	Medium	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager / Empty Homes Negotiator	First survey September 2009
4	Ensure the Empty Property database is kept up to date in order to establish the capacity for linking the data to broader regeneration.	Monthly	High	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager / Empty Homes Negotiator	On going
5	Remain abreast of changes in legislation and best practise as discussed by the Government, the Empty Homes Agency and the National Association of Empty Property Practitioners.	Continuous process	Medium	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager	On going
6	Empty Homes Partnership Newsletter	Every 6 months	Medium	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager	First issue sent Jan 2009
7	Advertising	Under review	Low	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager	On hold
<b>ADMINISTRATION</b>						
1	Aim to reply to all calls / emails relating to empty properties within 2 days.	200 per month. Subject to number of messages	High	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager / Empty Homes Negotiator	Jan 09: 239 calls
2	Secure revenue funding for the administration of the Empty Homes Partnership beyond 2011 subject to Local Government reorganisation of Devon.	7 Resident Social Landlords and 2 District Councils plus Exeter City Council by 2011	Low	Staff time / capital funding	Empty Homes Partnership Manager / Empty Homes Partnership Officer	Funding secure up to April 2011 except for Magna Housing who have been written to
3	Continue to host the Empty Homes Partnership meetings.	Every 6 months	Medium	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager / Empty Homes Partnership Officer	Next meeting April 2009
4	Continue to host the South West Empty Homes Forum.	Every 6 months	High	Staff time	Empty Homes Partnership Manager / Empty Homes Partnership Officer	Next forum June 2009



## EMPTY HOMES PARTNERSHIP SUCCESSES

### 17.1 Old School Court, Topsham, Exeter

Old School Court was an imaginative scheme to convert the grade II listed 18<sup>th</sup> century Quaker Meeting House into 10 affordable homes. Formerly Topsham First School, the old site – part of which stands on a Victorian Wesleyan Methodist Church burial ground – had stood unused since a new school was built in 2001.

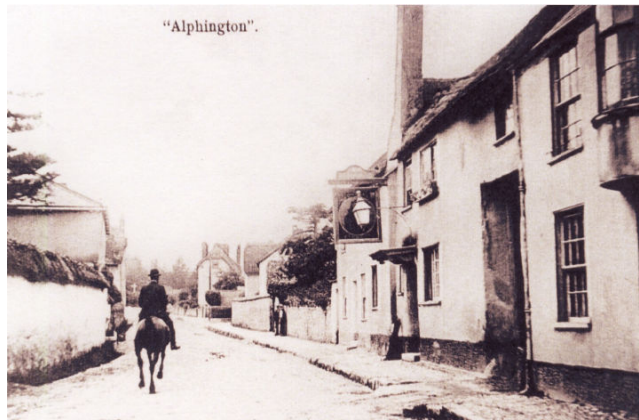


Using grants from the Housing Corporation via the Empty Homes Partnership (the Housing Corporation providing £347,896 and Exeter City Council a figure of £277,896), Exeter Housing Corporation employed Gibbs & Lugg Ltd to complete the £1 million development.

It became Topsham's first affordable housing development in 12 years and has provided housing for 36 local people. It has also become the first residential development in Exeter to fit a sprinkler system. This prestigious scheme scooped the Best Housing Association Scheme 2003 at the Empty Homes Awards.

### 17.2 The Admiral Inn, Alphington, Exeter

Formerly the Bell Inn in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and then the Admiral Vernon during the 17<sup>th</sup> century (named after the Admiral famous for taking Porto Bello with six ships in 1739), this was once a thriving local pub. It stands on a parcel of land once owned by the prestigious Courtenay family and during the cattle and horse fairs held since the early 1600s the pub would cater for the influx of people from all over Devon. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century one of its uses was a makeshift Court for criminal and parish cases and in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Charles Dickens is even reputed to have drunk there.



Although the original inn and cottages were burnt down in 1871, the site is of huge historical importance and had stood empty for over two years before being bought by Cornerstone Housing Association. With funding from Exeter City Council and the Housing Corporation, the main building was converted into four flats and the old cob barns behind into three cottages to provide much needed affordable housing in Alphington.



During the acquisition stage the development was given listed building status. This made the project more challenging and the conservation of the damaged cob had to be carefully overseen by conservation officers, archaeologists and cob specialists. Skilled carpenters were also employed to renew the rotting hand carved roof rafters.



### *17.3 Stepcote Hill, The West Quarter, Exeter*



From the Old English word for 'steep', Stepcote Hill is one of the oldest surviving parts of the city, having been in use since Roman times. It served as the main route into Exeter before the building of New Bridge Street and in 1688, when William of Orange took the throne from James II he landed at Brixham and rode up Stepcote Hill and into Exeter. The narrow street has had many varied uses from being the wealthy merchant centre in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century to the poverty-stricken slums of artisans and labourers in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Records exist of the cholera epidemics that ravaged the street and the filth from the abattoir that used to run down the central channel.

In March 2008 Signpost Housing, with grants from Exeter City Council and the Housing Corporation, bought and extensively refurbished a property on Stepcote Hill to provide affordable rented

accommodation. The schedule was tight; the project aiming for a 12-week turn-around and to bring the property up to decent living conditions the outside toilet was converted into storage and the second bedroom into a bathroom. As with the Admiral Inn, the property needed special care as parts of the walls are incorporated into the medieval city wall. The roof has been completely renewed and the timber windows have had separate double-glazed panels installed for heat efficiency. During restoration an old fireplace was also uncovered.



Exeter City Council is also now in negotiations for another property on Stepcote Hill which will provide another affordable home for a local family.



## 17.4 Buddle Lane Estate, Cowick Street, Exeter



The Buddle Lane Estate was built with the Laings Eastern Building System and consequently, due to defective construction techniques the buildings are considered in need of urgent refurbishment. In the late 1990s an agreement was reached with Sovereign Housing to take on these properties as and when they became vacant, usually when the occupants died. Sovereign Housing takes the properties at a 'less than best' price and with grants from Exeter City Council and their own fund completely refurbishes both internally and externally.

These transferred properties have recently been used to build extensions and create larger family homes for those on the Home Choice register and a number have also become fully adapted disabled properties. These conversions have been made possible using the Housing Corporation Grant.



## HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT EMPTY HOMES

### 18.1 Poltimore House, Poltimore, Exeter

There has been a house at Poltimore since the creation of the Domesday Book in 1086. The first manor was a gift to Haimerius de Arcis, one of the officers in William the Conqueror's army before passing to the Poltimore's. The house was sold on around 1280 to Simon, Lord Montacute and then to William Pointington, one of the canons of Exeter Cathedral, who in turn gave the house to his protégé John Bampfylde in 1306. The property stayed in the ownership of the Bampfylde's and in 1550 the building of the Tudor mansion began, parts of which still remain. In 1646 Poltimore was also the site of the signing of the Treaty of Exeter that ended the Civil War in the South West.



Over the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the house and grounds saw significant rebuilding and landscaping and in 1921 it was sold, ending 600 years in the Bampfylde family. The house became a girl's school and then the home for the evacuees of Dover College before becoming a hospital. After 1975 the house fell into disrepair and has currently stood empty and decaying for 20 years.

2000 saw the forming of the Poltimore House Trust and the Friends of Poltimore House, which have partnered with East Devon District Council and English Heritage to help restore Poltimore to its former glory. In 2003 it featured in the first series of the BBC's 'Restoration' and in 2005 substantial work began to dry out and stabilise the building. Some of the feasible uses currently being considered include the house becoming a venue for weddings; dances, theatre and concerts as well as more commercial ventures which may help prevent the house becoming derelict in the future.



For more information visit the Trust's website at [www.poltimore.org](http://www.poltimore.org).



## APPENDIX

### 19.1 Recent Empty Property Statistics and Charts

Below are the council tax empty property statistics for 2007 and 2006 for each ward of the city:

#### 2007

Ward	Empty less than 6 months	% empty less than 6 months	Empty over 6 months	% Empty over 6 months	Total
Alphington	30	78.9%	8	21.1%	38
Cowick	10	52.6%	9	47.4%	19
Duryard	6	46.2%	7	53.8%	13
Exwick	25	71.4%	10	28.6%	35
Heavitree	21	61.8%	13	38.2%	34
Mincinglake	5	41.7%	7	58.3%	12
Newtown	10	27.8%	26	72.2%	36
Pennsylvania	17	70.8%	7	29.2%	24
Pinhoe	7	43.8%	9	56.2%	16
Polsloe	15	39.5%	23	60.5%	38
Priory	19	55.9%	15	44.1%	34
St Davids	44	57.1%	33	42.9%	77
St James	34	77.3%	10	22.7%	44
St Leonards	26	59.1%	18	40.9%	44
St Loyes	26	81.3%	6	18.8%	32
St Thomas	22	64.7%	12	35.3%	34
Topsham	21	41.2%	30	58.8%	51
Whipton Barton	14	82.4%	3	17.6%	17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>352</b>		<b>246</b>		<b>598</b>

Source Council Tax System

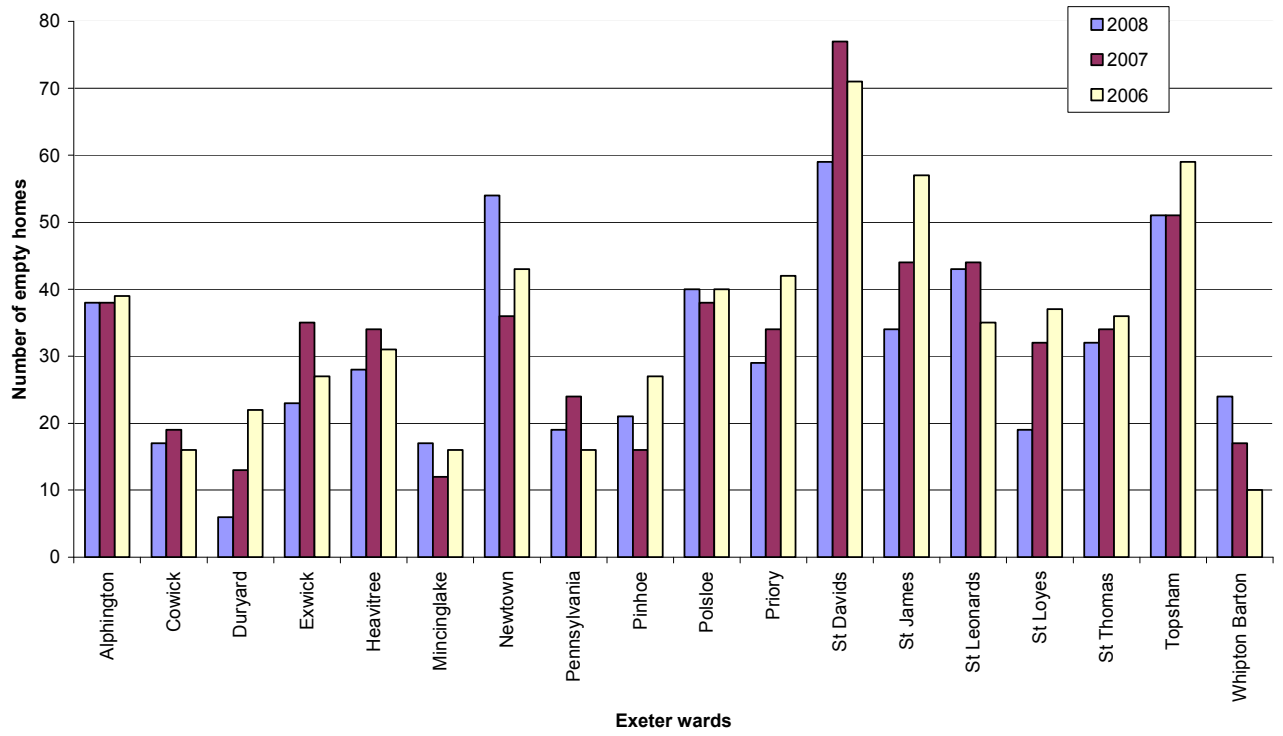
#### 2006

Ward	Empty less than 6 months	% empty less than 6 months	Empty over 6 months	% Empty over 6 months	Total
Alphington	30	76.9%	9	23.1%	39
Cowick	8	50.0%	8	50.0%	16
Duryard	3	13.6%	19	86.4%	22
Exwick	21	77.8%	6	22.2%	27
Heavitree	19	61.3%	12	38.7%	31
Mincinglake	9	56.3%	7	43.8%	16
Newtown	27	62.8%	16	37.2%	43
Pennsylvania	9	56.3%	7	43.8%	16
Pinhoe	19	70.4%	8	29.6%	27
Polsloe	26	65.0%	14	35.0%	40
Priory	13	31.0%	29	69.0%	42
St Davids	34	47.9%	37	52.1%	71
St James	35	61.4%	22	38.6%	57
St Leonards	21	60.0%	14	40.0%	35
St Loyes	33	89.2%	4	10.8%	37
St Thomas	27	75.0%	9	25.0%	36
Topsham	35	59.3%	24	40.7%	59
Whipton Barton	6	60.0%	4	40.0%	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>375</b>		<b>249</b>		<b>624</b>

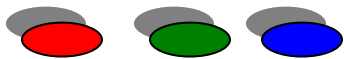
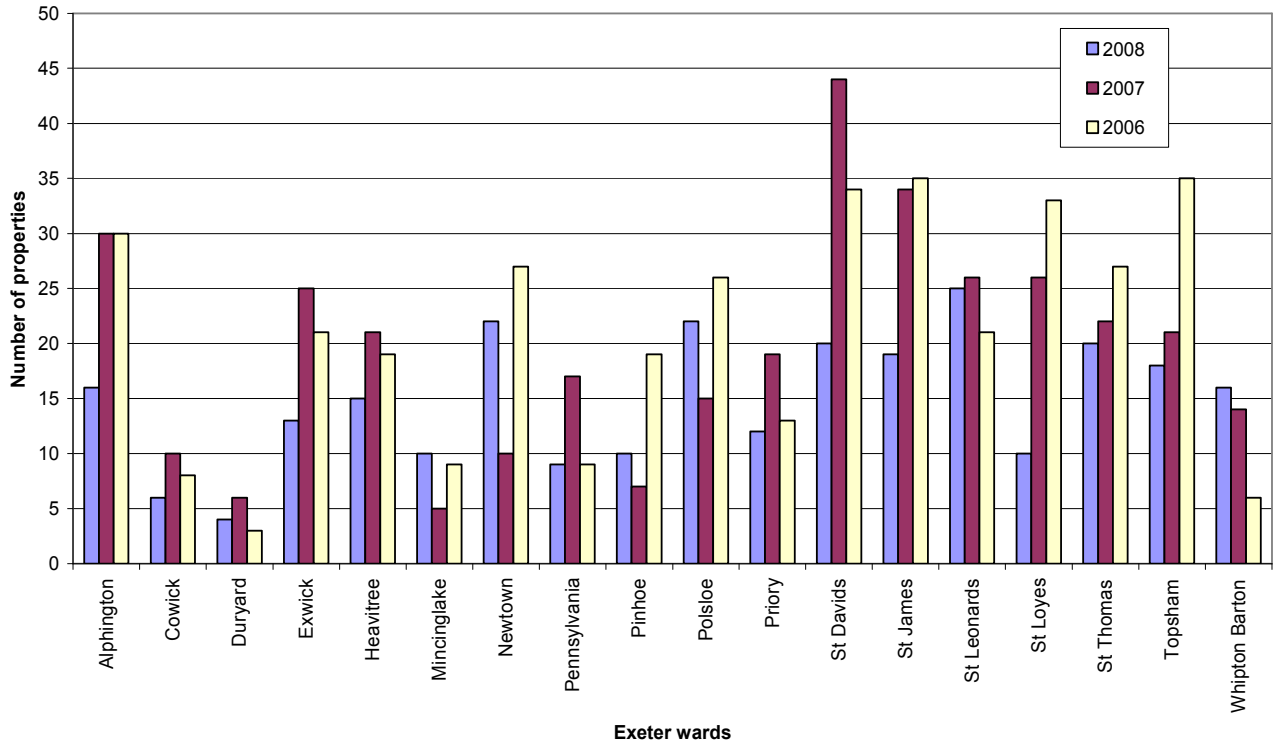
Source Council Tax System



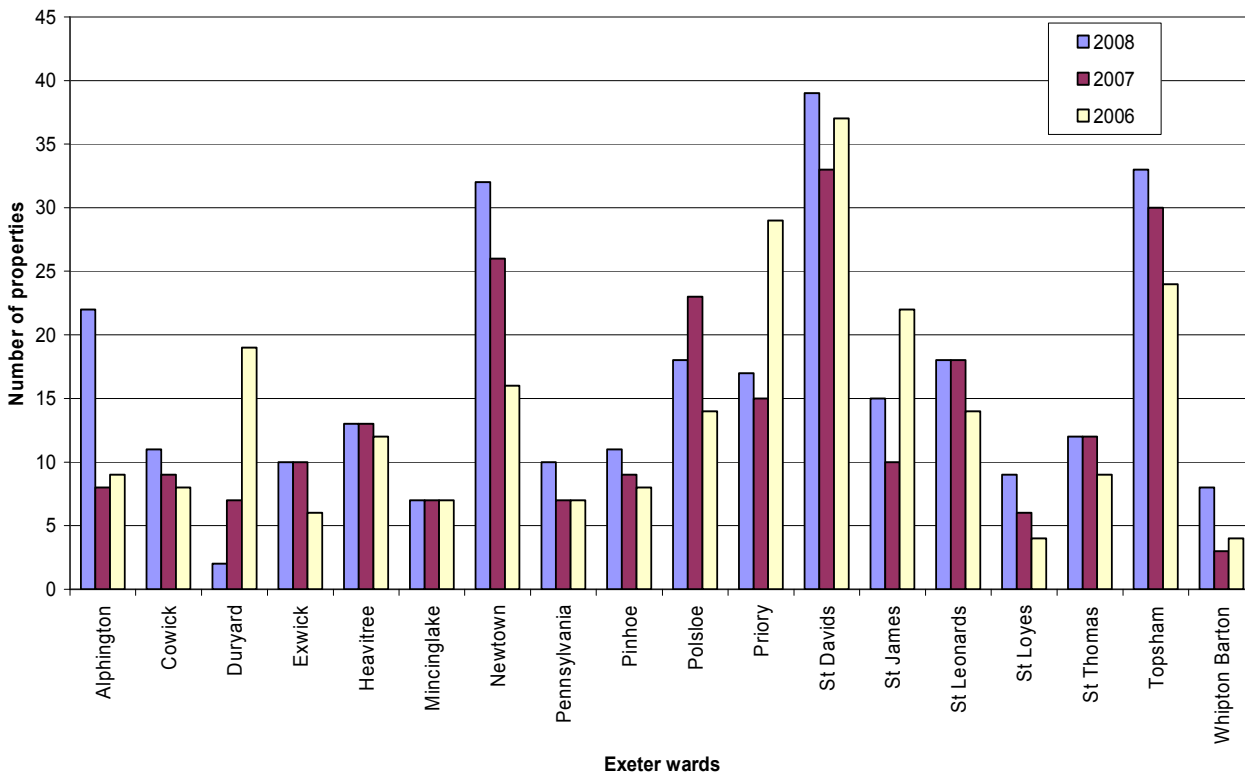
Empty Homes in Exeter 2006-2008



Properties empty less than 6 months 2006-2008



Properties empty over six months 2006-2008



**19.2 Long-term Statistics for Empty Homes  
Exeter City Council Performance Before and After 1996**

Below are the figures for how many empty properties Exeter City Council has helped to bring back into use since 1990.

YEAR	PERMANENT				LAINGS	TEMPORARY				Totals
	OTS RENT		OTS SO			PSL	EXtralet	AST HA Lease	Private Owner	
	ST	NB	ST	NB						
01/04/1990 - 31/03/1991				27						27
01/04/1991 - 31/03/1992				14						14
01/04/1992 - 31/03/1993	21									21
01/04/1993 - 31/03/1994				6		1				7
01/04/1994 - 31/03/1995						4		15		19
01/04/1995 - 31/03/1996			3	12		5				20
01/04/1996 - 31/03/1997			8		40	2	1			51
01/04/1997 - 31/03/1998			13		18	6	3	17		57
01/04/1998 - 31/03/1999			42		13	9		50		114
01/04/1999 - 31/03/2000			20		11			33	6	70
01/04/2000 - 31/03/2001			49		4			4		57
01/04/2001 - 31/03/2002			11			4		21		36
01/04/2002 - 31/03/2003			54			17	1	36		108
01/04/2003 - 31/03/2004			50		2	55		31		138
01/04/2004 - 31/03/2005	1		9			41	1	24		76
01/04/2005 - 31/03/2006			34		1	57		4		96
01/04/2006 - 31/03/2007			11		1	17	17	10		56
01/04/2007 - 28/10/2008			10		5	12	37	17		81
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1048</b>

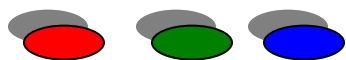


- OTS – Off the Shelf Properties
- SO – Shared Ownership
- ST – Street Properties
- NB – New Build
- PSL – Private Sector Leasing
- AST – Assured Shorthold Tenancy
- HA – Housing Association

### 19.3 Empty Homes Completions by Ward

Exeter Ward	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	TOTALS
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
Alphington									1		3			1	1			1	7
Countess Wear									2				3				2		7
Cowick							2		4	1						1			8
Duryard	12								1									1	14
Exwick	15	14			1	1	3	3	6	2			2	9	5	1	8	12	82
Heavitree						1	1	3	12		1		4	6	4	7	6	4	49
Mincinglake				1		1	2	2	11			1	3	5	6	2	1	2	37
Mount Pleasant													1				6	7	14
Newtown								3	1			1		1	1		1		8
Pennsylvania											1				6			1	8
Pinhoe							1	1	1			1		2				1	7
Polsloe								2	3	2		5	2	7	5	5	5	5	41
Priory					1			5	6	1	2	13	10	9	6	2	2	2	59
St Davids									42	14	12		34	30	8	2	3	2	147
St James								3		33			1	9		31	1	4	82
St Leonards					1	12						13	7	9	8	1	1	8	60
St Loyes										2	1		3	8	5	1	5	5	30
St Thomas				6		1	1	15	5	3	1	1	10	24	11	9	13	19	119
Topsham														12		9			21
Whipton Barton					1	1	2	1	6	1	3	1	7	3	3	2	2	3	36
Unaccounted			21		15	3	40	18	13	11	33		21	2	8	21	1	5	212
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>1048</b>

The above table shows the distribution of properties brought back into use since 1990. Those which are 'unaccounted' for refer to those properties taken on in large housing scheme developments across the city and are not registered under any particular ward.



## 19.4 ADDLETS - Additional Lettings Plan for Existing Homes, December 2008

2	EXISTING HOMES				
	COUNCIL	Purpose	Homes	Lead	Budget and Action
2A	Conversions	Increase the size of Council properties to meet the needs of larger households  Divide suitable homes into 2 flats	3+	ATM (NS)  ATM (NS)	Budget: £100,000 + Several properties lined up especially to create 4 beds 3 properties completed 1 property on site  Consider
2B	Extensions	Extend Council properties to meet needs of larger and disabled households	3+	ATM (NS)	Budget: £160,000+ HRA. Extra £75k agreed 3 properties on site
2C	Under-occupation	Promote packages of incentives to free up family sized lettings through downsizing	15+ per year	HOHS	Budget: HRA Underway. In Insight and the Estate Management Officers are promoting
2D	Ground Floor Flats	Encourage tenants living in ground floor flats or in flatbed lift access to move to free up flat for someone who does need it	Assess	HNM	No budget or agreed proposal Phase 1 - move those overcrowded Phase 2 - incentives for remainder? Requires investigation
2E	Mutual Exchanges	Encourage moves that enable tenants to swap and meet their needs in a better way	Unknown	HNM	Underway. Home-swapper being used now
2F	Conversion of Sheltered	Are any of our sheltered blocks under-used/hard to let?	10+?	HOHS HEM	Investigation underway and near complete Investigate potential to convert
2G	Laings - can we accelerate the programme with Sovereign HA?  Create larger homes	As well as transferring naturally occurring void properties, try to persuade under-occupiers to move using incentive schemes.  Voids have 4 bed potential	3+ pa	TLM EHM	Potential in 2009-11 budget which can be brought forward. Deal with on an adhoc basis as voids occur.
2H	Lodgers	To encourage tenants to use spare room for lodger(s)	?	EHM	Draft leaflet on Resident Landlords done. Consult. Put on Council website. Publicise by 31 March 09
2J	Illegal sub-letting	Identify homes that could be repossessed from illegal occupiers	?		Some potential? Being successfully done in London (Southwark, Camden, Newham, Islington). No Action.

3	EXISTING HOMES				
	HSG ASSOCIATIONS	Purpose	Homes	Lead	Budget and Action
3A	Conversions and Extensions	Increase the size of housing association properties to meet the needs of larger households  Divide suitable homes into 2 flats or convert shared houses back to family use.  Bring empty homes back into use.	3  2  11	EHM	Budget allocated 31/07/07. Residual budget moved to HRA Extensions. 2 properties completed - Signpost 3 properties in the pipeline  Howell Rd - Sanctuary HA - 11 bedspaces - being investigated.
3B	Under-occupation	HAs to promote a package of incentives to free up family sized lettings through downsizing	20	HEO (BS)	Budget: Now using commuted sum to create revenue budget. Scheme redrafted. Has signed up: Cornerstone, Magna, DCHA, Sanctuary. Signpost considering.
3C	Tackle Restrictive Lettings Practices	Persuade some HAs to change practises that restrict the letting of flats to people with children	20 per year	HNM	Some work done with the HCA
3D	Ground Floor Flats	Encourage tenants who are living in ground floor flats or in flatbed lift access to move to free up flat for someone who does need it	Assess	HNM	No Budget Needs investigation
3E	Mutual Exchanges	Encourage moves that enable tenants to swap and meet their needs in a better way	Assess	HNM	Is this included in new Council scheme?
3F	Convert shared ownership to rented	To make use of hard to sell shared ownership homes  Prevent homelessness?	Assess	HEM	Needs investigation: Quayside possible with Signpost
3G	Lodgers	To encourage tenants to use spare room for lodger(s)	?	EHM	Get HA co-operation Draft leaflet done, see 2H
3H	Illegal Sub-letting	Identifying homes that could be repossessed from illegal occupiers	?	?	Investigate



4 EXISTING HOMES					
	PRIVATE SECTOR	Purpose	Homes	Lead	Budget and Action
4A	Second Hand Street Properties	Look for good details in the second hand market and create: - <b>Intermediate Rent</b> - <b>Social Rent</b>	10	HEM	Prospects Hostel: Home Office to decide to use EHM looking for 10 homes to buy: 7 two beds, 3 three beds. Magna has 10 properties in mind. Needs HCA funding. Bid ASAP.
4B	EXtraLet	Manage private sector lets and control occupancy  Divert more potentially homeless people into the private sector	80 homes by 31 Mar-09	HEO (JW)  HEM/EHM	Budget £80,000. Accelerate to 5 a month.  64 properties currently in management, of which: - <b>3-1 beds, 13-2 beds, 47-3 beds, 1-4 bed</b> - <b>17 in the pipeline: 7-2 beds, 10-3 beds</b> To date, 72 families prevented from being homeless. Business Plan to go to Exec Jan 2009
4C	Intermediate Rent	Create private sector tenancies at circa 80% market rent	10	HEM	Redgrave House completed
4D	Under-occupation: Private Sector	See if owners will downsize in exchange for grant	Assess	ENHM	£15k offered to owners willing to downsize and sell to Has. Needs re-examination: properties too expensive.
4E	Empty Homes and Vacant Sites	What about EDMOs? What about CPOs on vacant land e.g. petrol stations?	5+	EHM	Part of HCA Grant Pot.
4F	LetStart (Provisional Name)	Persuade potentially homeless people to take a private letting: - <b>Rent in advance</b> - <b>Deposits</b> - <b>Guarantees</b>	Assess	HNM	8 Lettings done (ASTs)  Incentives to secure private sector lets. Housing Advice Team delivering on case by case prevention of homelessness basis.
4G	Lodgers	To encourage tenants to use spare room for lodger(s)	?	EHM/Temp	Get owners' and tenants' co-operation Draft leaflet done. See 2H.
4H	Discriminatory Letting Practises	Prevent Landlords not letting to families with children	?	EHM/Temp	Research into why landlords are advertising flats/houses but "no children" underway. 1st draft done.

