

Title of report: Empty Property Strategy for Herefordshire 2021-2024

Decision maker: Cabinet member Housing, regulatory services and community safety

Decision date: Thursday 29 July 2021

Report by: Empty Property & Housing Development Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

All Wards

Purpose

To seek approval of the Empty Property Strategy for Herefordshire, for the purposes of the report an empty property is a residential dwelling as per information provided to the Empty Property Officer by Herefordshire Council's Council Tax department.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) The Empty Property Strategy for Herefordshire, set out in appendix A, be approved by cabinet.**

Alternative options

1. Not have a strategy and without intervention the current number of empty properties risk falling into disrepair. The strategy gives the authority more power when looking to obtain a CPO - Compulsory Purchase Order or to assist colleagues in Environmental Health when they give an IMO - Interim Management Order

Key considerations

2. In January 2021, records held by Herefordshire council's council tax department identified 284 properties listed as long term empty - longer than 6 months within Herefordshire. Whilst this is below the national average there is a significant shortage of housing in Herefordshire. Studies show once properties are left empty for more than two years, they are less likely to be brought back into use. If the authority does not have a strategy, the properties currently empty will see no intervention and it is likely they will fall into disrepair.
3. A dedicated Empty Property Officer has been employed by the council to work with owners of empty properties to bring them back into use. A strategy will formalise the work the officer carries out and is measurable in terms of successes.
4. Processes will be implemented to support the strategy which will be available to the public when reporting empty properties, making the local authority's approach open and transparent. The processes will be implemented under delegated authority by the officer.

Community impact

5. In having an approved Empty Property Strategy the council is able to work with homeowners to bring long term empty properties back into use, increasing community moral where properties have been a blight on the community either by appearance or by attracting anti-social behaviour.
6. By working with Parish Councils the council will be able to demonstrate its commitment to tackling empty properties, whilst working with communities.
7. By bringing empty properties back into use this will increase the number of properties for habitation in Herefordshire, going some way to meet the housing need.
8. In the County Plan 2020-2024, the council has expressed an ambition to protect and improve the lives of vulnerable people and to build publicly owned sustainable and affordable houses and bring empty properties back into use. By approving the Empty Property Strategy, it goes some way to supporting this ambition

Environmental Impact

9. The priority for the strategy is to target the city and market towns, by bringing empty properties back into use in more urban areas this will reduce the need for cars and encourage people to use more sustainable means, reducing the carbon footprint.

10. When working with owners to bring empty properties back into use, the council will look to achieve the highest sustainable criteria that we are able to.
11. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.

Equality duty

12. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
13. There is no specific indication that any group with protected characteristics is negatively impacted by the policy.

Resource implications

14. There are no resource implications relating to the approval of the strategy, however a capital grant has been allocated to strategic Housing to enable the Empty Property Officer to work with private landlords

Legal implications

15. This is an Executive function under the Council's Constitution Part 3 Section 3 as it is a key decision and which in the opinion of the monitoring officer is likely to be significant having regard to the strategic nature of the decision and/or whether the outcome will have an impact for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards in Herefordshire) affected.
16. There is no statutory duty on the Council to bring empty properties owned by private landlords back into use for the benefit of the community, more specifically vulnerable people as referred to at paragraph 4 above. However the Council wish to do so through their County Plan 2020-2024 as there is a shortage of overall housing stock, and this strategy will support this. There are a number of ways that the Council can work with private landlords to bring empty properties into use, by utilising various grant schemes to help bring them upto an habitable condition to make them available. There are also various legislative enforcement provisions that the Council can utilise as a last remedy to bring the empty properties back into use, and these are listed in Appendix 1.

- 17. There are no legal problems in having a strategy for empty property and no other legal consideration

Risk management

- 18. Without an approved strategy to tackle empty properties in Herefordshire, the number would increase year on year, creating a blight on communities and creating a more significant risk in terms of properties in demise.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
The measures within the strategy are not achievable.	A review of the strategy will be undertaken annually. Risk to be managed at a service level.
The opportunity to work with owners and communities in bringing empty properties back into use creating greater cohesion whilst also going some way to providing affordable housing in Herefordshire	Monitoring of success and potential positive publicity. Opportunity to be managed at service and departmental level with publicity opportunities managed corporately.

Consultees

- 19. The Cabinet Member for Housing, Regulatory Services and Community Safety

Appendices

- 20. Appendix A: Empty Property Strategy for Herefordshire 2021-2024

Background papers

- 21. None Identified

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

CPO – Compulsory Purchase Order

IMO – Interim Management Order