

Empty Homes Bulletin

Edition 1
May 2022

A Warm Welcome

Conwy County Borough Council are delighted to bring you the very first edition of our Empty Homes Bulletin. It seems fitting this is being launched in Spring, the season of new beginnings, resurrections, regrowth and rejuvenation as that is something the Empty Homes Service are trying to achieve within the existing, unused housing stock in the County and also with the Service itself. This bulletin has been created to update you on our vision; our successes so far, and to encourage further interaction and discussions about all aspects of Empty Homes and the role they can play in helping to alleviate the housing crisis and ensuring the residents of Conwy have access to affordable, appropriate and good quality accommodation that enhances their quality of life. If there is something you would like to see included in future editions, please do not hesitate to give us your comments and ideas, our contact details can be found at the end of this bulletin.

The Empty Homes Team



The Empty Homes Service

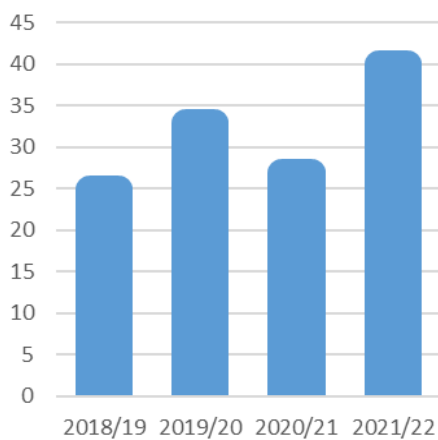
There are around 1500 privately owned *empty* properties in the Conwy county at any one time. Although many of these are in transition and will come back into use naturally, there are others that will remain empty for longer periods of time and it is these properties the Empty Homes Service is targeting. To do this we are extending the Empty Homes Service and putting more emphasis on trying to bring these wasted resources back into use. We have developed strategic plans to increase marketing, staffing and communication in a bid to engage further with the community, empty home owners, landlords and first time buyers, to offer advice and solutions to encourage these long-term empty properties back into occupation. The service is flexible to suit the individual property, the reason it is empty and the circumstances and wishes of the owner. There is not 'one solution' for every property and while some may require straightforward assistance, others will require significant involvement over a long period of time to get a positive outcome.



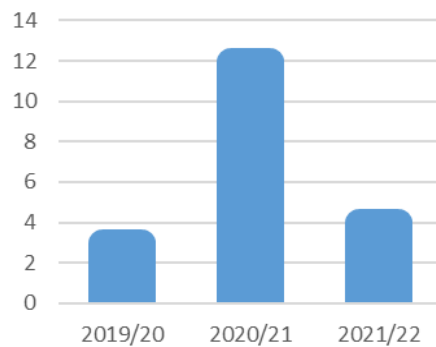
Results

Results are monitored by an Empty Homes Working Group, consisting of Elected Members, officers from other departments who are involved with empty homes, and representations from partner agencies. In addition, we are required to report annually to Welsh Government on the number of long term empties which have been brought back into use following relevant involvement of the Council, and the number of new homes created by bringing empty properties back into use. We also report within Conwy on the number of empty properties that are brought back into use as affordable housing, as the provision of affordable housing is a key priority for the Council.

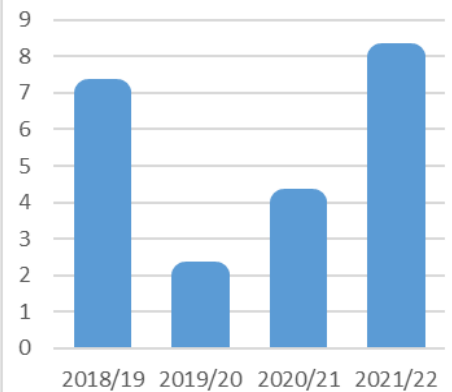
Long-term empty dwellings returned to occupation following a relevant intervention



Number of new homes created by bringing empty properties back into use



Number of new affordable homes created by bringing empty properties back into occupation



Did you Know...

In Wales, Councils can charge up to 300% Council Tax Premium on an Empty Property.

In Conwy, the Empty Property Premium is currently 50% and this is charged on top of the usual liability for the address.

Occupants of a property are responsible for Council Tax so let us help you get your empty property occupied and you can save yourself more than just pennies.

Empty Home Owners

We can offer tailored assistance to suit the needs/circumstances of the empty property and its owner.

Whether it's help and guidance, motivational support, local knowledge/contacts, information on property standards, financial support for refurbishment (subject to eligibility and availability), help with renting or selling, or anything else you seek in relation to an empty property, please do get in touch and we can discuss how we can best assist you.





Empty Property Grants

In 2020/2021, the Empty Homes Service submitted two bids to Welsh Government for funding to offer grants to help bring empty properties back into use. Both bids were successful and a scheme was developed to offer grants of either 70% or 75% of the cost of the eligible works, up to £20,000 per property. In return for the grant, property owners are required to enter into an agreement for the Council to use the property as affordable housing for a 5 year period, to assist with current pressures on households who are in an urgent housing need. Many property owners have reported difficulties finding contractors to quote for the work, so take up of the grants has been slower than expected. However, Welsh Government have enabled the funding to be carried over into the 2022/2023 financial year, so we are once again able to consider new applications for eligible empty properties.

So far, one empty property which was improved with the grant funding is now occupied, and work to a further five properties is in progress.

Houses into Homes Loans

Funded by Welsh Government, Houses Into Homes provides interest-free* loans to support an owner of a long term empty home with the cost of bringing it back into use, or the costs of converting a non-residential property into residential accommodation.

Loans up to £35,000 per unit of accommodation will be considered, up to a maximum of £150,000 per applicant. Once the property has been brought up to a specified standard, the owner has a choice either to sell (and repay the loan within two years or on sale of the property, whichever happens sooner), or to rent, (and repay the loan by regular instalments, or in full at the end of the 5 -year interest-free* period).

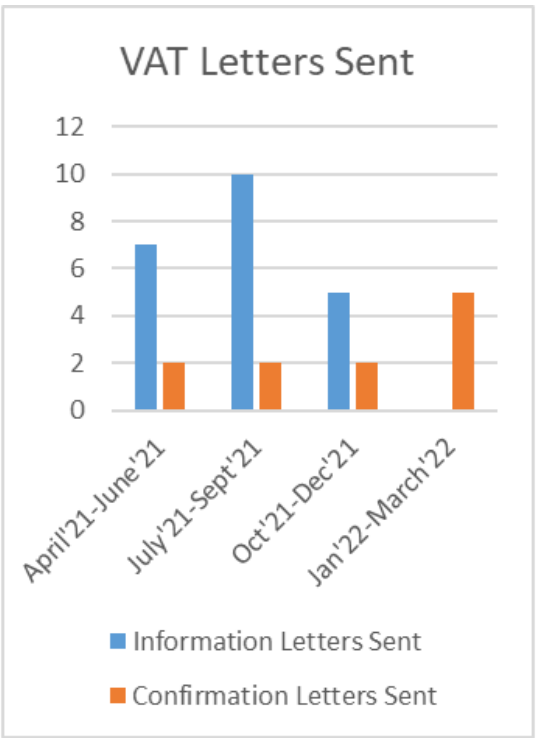
There is an application fee for this loan to cover administration charges.

*Interest is charged at 6% if the loan is not repaid on the due date or if there is any breach of contract.

Reduced rate VAT

Property owners who intend to renovate an empty property could be eligible for reduced rate VAT at 5% on renovation costs. To be eligible, the property has to have been empty for at least two years before the renovation work starts. HMRC guidance indicates that a letter from the Local Authority confirming that the property has been empty for at least two years before the renovation work starts, would be acceptable evidence.

The number of letters we have sent to empty property owners asking them to make contact as they may be eligible for reduced rate VAT; and the number of letters sent confirming the property has been empty for two years or more for the owner to use as evidence to obtain the reduced rate VAT, are shown here





Town Centres

A key priority for Welsh Government is the revitalisation of town centres, many of which are facing challenges from changes in shopping habits, but made even worse by the Covid pandemic and series of lockdowns that impacted badly on the retail sector.

In an attempt to breathe new life back into town centres, Conwy County Borough Council applied for funding from Welsh Government to offer interest-free loans to bring redundant buildings in town centres back into use and contribute to the Transforming Towns Programme.

The funding can be used in eight of Conwy's main/larger towns to help both private owners and Local Authorities to improve and/or repurpose their commercial or empty town centre premises.

As you can see from the Chart, there is significant funding still available so please get in touch if you would like to discuss this in more detail.

Community Assistance

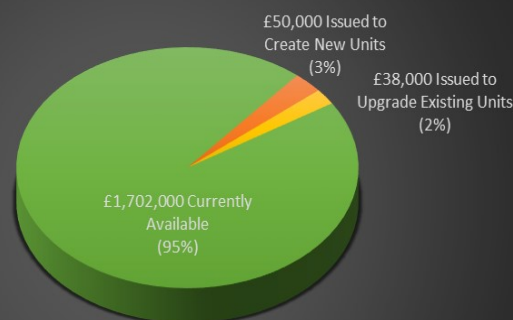
If you are aware of an empty property in the Conwy county, you can report it to us.

We will investigate and ensure the property is empty before attempting to engage with the owner in order to offer our assistance in bringing it back into occupation.

If the property is causing problems, we will ask the owner to resolve any issues themselves ahead of considering whether enforcement action is appropriate.

Town Centre Loans

£1,790,000 funding was awarded to Conwy from Welsh Government to provide loans for properties located in town centres



■ £50,000 Issued to Create New Units
■ £38,000 Issued to Upgrade Existing Units
■ £1,702,000 Currently Available



Enforcement Action Plan

Conwy currently have 17 properties on an Enforcement Action Plan, a plan which is being supported by the Welsh Government. These are long-term empty properties that are in poor condition and that are subject to various complaints from the public/neighbours. Such properties are often a magnet for rodent infestation, crime, anti-social behaviour, drug use, squatters and arson attacks, which in turn, lead to increased pressures on emergency services/resources, complaints and community unrest. We have attempted to engage with the owners of these properties in order to support them and assist them in doing any necessary work required. These attempts have not been successful so far and we are therefore looking at what Enforcement action could be taken in order to resolve the issues and bring these problematic properties back into use.

Local Authorities have powers to take action where properties pose a health and safety risk to members of the public, this could be as a result of falling debris, damp affecting an adjoining occupied property or pests and vermin etc.; or where the empty property is having an adverse effect on the amenity of an area. Such actions could result in Enforcement Notices, Empty Dwelling Management Orders, Compulsory Purchase Order or Enforced Sales and we would therefore encourage all property owners to take action themselves before their empty property becomes problematic and the Council have to step in.

Contact us

For general enquiries regarding any aspects of empty properties you can contact

emptyhomes@conwy.gov.uk

or if you prefer to contact the Empty Homes Officer for the area/property you wish to discuss, please use the following:



Area 1

Anna Williams

✉: anna.williams2@conwy.gov.uk

☎: 01492 576274

1. Llanfairfechan LL33
2. Penmaenmawr LL34
3. Conwy LL32
4. Henryd LL34
21. Caerhun LL32
22. Dolgarrog LL32
24. Trefriw LL27

Area 2

Jeremy Grant

✉: jeremy.grant@conwy.gov.uk

☎: 01492 574235

- Llandudno Junction LL31
- Deganwy LL31
5. Glan Conwy LL28
7. Rhos On Sea LL28
8. Mochdre LL28
9. Colwyn Bay LL29
11. Old Colwyn LL29
12. Llysfaen LL29
20. Eglwysbach LL28
23. Llanddodged & Maenan LL26
27. Llanrwst LL26
28. Bro Garmon LL26
30. Cerrigydrudion LL21
31. Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr LL21
32. Llangwm LL21

Area 3

Lynsey Blackford

✉: lynsey.blackford@conwy.gov.uk

☎: 01492 574633

6. Llandudno LL30
- Penrhyn Bay LL30
10. Betws Yn Rhos LL22
13. Llanddulas & Rhyd Y Foel LL22
14. Abergele LL22
15. Towyn LL22
- Kinmel Bay LL18
16. Llanfairtalhaearn LL22
17. Llanefydd LL16
18. Llansannan LL16
19. Llangernyw LL22
25. Capel Curig LL24
26. Betws Y Coed LL24
29. Pentrefoelas LL24
33. Ysbyty Ifan LL24
34. Bro Machno LL24
35. Dolwyddelan LL25

