

Empty Homes

Unlocking the potential

A guide for owners of empty homes in Rushcliffe

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1. Introduction



What is an empty home?

An empty home is defined as a residential dwelling that has been unoccupied as a permanent residence for a period of six months or more. There are a number of reasons why properties become and remain empty, and Rushcliffe Borough Council are committed to working with owners to find solutions to the barriers in place, and bring their empty home back into use.

How to Identify and Empty Home

A long-term empty property can often be easy to identify, as it may appear neglected, in a state of disrepair, or having been the victim of crime or vandalism. Some easy to spot signs include:

- **A build up of uncollected mail on the doorstep**
- **Signs that the garden has not been maintained, or left to become unusually overgrown**
- **Limited access to the front door or rear of the property, due to overgrown plants and vegetation**
- **Signs of the property being in a poor state of repair, for example broken windows, a damaged roof or unconnected guttering/downpipes**
- **The property is partly or wholly boarded up**

Why do the Council get involved with Empty Properties?

The effects of an empty home, both on its neighbours and the surrounding community are immeasurable. Crime and the fear of crime, vandalism, local area decline discouraging investment in an area, can all stem from a single empty property.

We also get involved to ensure that properties owned by people who are not capable of maintaining or making decisions in respect of their property, have sufficient support and advice to ensure they are able to make the most of their assets.

The benefits of returning a property to use – As an owner

There are a number of benefits to owners and landlords when returning their property to use. These include:

- **Receiving an income from the property, whether through renting, leasing or selling the house**
- **Retaining the capital value of the property, which is more likely if the property is occupied and maintained**
- **Reducing monthly bills such as Council Tax, Gas and Electricity standing charges and mortgage payments**
- **Reducing the risk of the property becoming a target for criminals and vandals**

The benefits of returning a property to use – For the community

There are also significant benefits for the wider community when returning empty homes to use. These include:

- **Reducing the risk of vandalism, crime and the fear of crime, and squatting**
- **Maintains a buoyant housing market, and minimises the risk of neighbouring properties being adversely affected in value**
- **Encourages inward investment into an area**
- **Increases the supply of good quality and affordable housing**

How can an empty home be brought back into use?

An empty property can be brought back into use through a variety of ways; By renting, selling or occupying the property as the owner. Rushcliffe Borough Council offer a number of initiatives to support owners in bringing their property back into use, and can provide advice and assistance to do so.

Who can I contact for help, advice and support?

If you have any queries regarding an empty home, or you own a home that is likely to become empty in the near future and you require some advice as to what to do with it, please contact **0115 914 8314** or email **emptyhomes@rushcliffe.gov.uk**

2. VAT Discounts on Empty Homes

If you are in the process of bringing an empty home back into use that has been unoccupied for 2 years or more prior to the work commencing, and post completion will be used for residential purposes, you may be eligible for a reduced rate of VAT on the refurbishment.

What VAT discounts are available?

VAT Notice 708 (Building and Construction, HM Revenue & Customs) – Empty houses that have been unoccupied for two years can qualify for a reduced level of VAT (5%) on building works. This can provide a significant reduction in the overall costs of bringing the property back into use.

How can Rushcliffe Borough Council assist with reducing the VAT on my refurbishment?

Upon request, the Empty Homes Officer can write an official letter to the property owner or contractor, confirming the length of time the property has been empty and unoccupied. This letter can then be given to tradespeople and HMRC when requested, and the reduced VAT rate applied to any quotable works carried out.

Who can I contact for further information?

Telephone the HMRC Advice line on 0845 010 9000. Alternatively, view the information at www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-notice-708-buildings-and-construction

3. Refurbishing your property

If your property is currently inhabitable and in need of significant works, or simply requires a lick of paint in order to be made habitable again, Rushcliffe Borough Council are able to help plan, schedule and facilitate a programme of work in order to have your property brought up to a safe and habitable standard.

Things to Consider...

Tradesmen

Picking suitable tradesmen for your refurbishment is not only cost effective, but can also ensure that works are carried out to the required standards of housing and building control. It is also worth checking that your tradesmen are registered or accredited with their appropriate bodies, and also licensed to carry and dispose of waste legally.

Ongoing costs

Often overlooked through a refurbishment, ongoing costs such as Council Tax, Utility bills and home insurance will continue to be paid, so can't be forgotten. Some discounts are given in certain circumstances with regards to Council Tax, and a 200% premium charged once a property has been empty for over two years.

Home Insurance

If your property is unoccupied for a significant period of time your home insurance can often become invalid, with most insurance providers and policies stipulating that a property is only covered when occupied. It is worth checking your policy to ensure your terms and conditions are met.

Decent and Safe Homes Standard

Properties refurbished to the Decent and Safe Home Standard (DASH), are considered to be of a high standard and conforming of all building regulation and certificate standards. For more information, visit: [Shelter decent homes guidance sheet](#).

4. Moving into your property

If your plans involve you moving into your property, whether it be short or long term, Rushcliffe Borough Council can assist with the planning and preparing of your move, in order to have the property occupied as soon as possible.

Things to Consider...

Preparing the property

Make sure the property you are moving into is of a standard that is both healthy and safe to live in. Ensuring your utility connections are in place, and any preparatory works required to make the property habitable are done prior to moving in.

Utilities

Moving home can be stressful enough, so ensure your utility providers are aware that you will be moving into the property in advance, in order to have your bills transferred and accounts updated. These include Gas, Electricity, Council Tax and Home Insurance.

Council Tax

Ensuring that your Council Tax account is crucial to our records, as well as a legal duty to you as the owner. If your property is registered as empty and not updated after moving in, you could be liable for the additional empty homes premium if after two years it is still registered as empty.

The Home you're moving from

If the home you're moving from is going to become, or remain empty for a period of time, discuss the options available with the Council's Empty Homes Officer in order to make best use of your asset.

Timescales for moving in

If your planning on moving into your empty home, timescales could be agreed with the Empty Homes Officer to ensure that your property doesn't remain empty for any longer than necessary. If these are not met, enforcement action could be considered to ensure the safety and security of your asset.

5. Renting your property

If you are considering Letting your property, there are a number of routes in which this can be achieved, and Rushcliffe Borough Council can assist in ensuring that your asset reaches its full potential, both in value and 'letability'.

Letting your property through a Letting Agent

Local letting agents should be able to provide services to Landlords including:

- **Finding suitable tenants and reference checking**
- **Collecting rent and holding money and deposits in client accounts**
- **Arranging utility safety checks and handovers**
- **Arranging suitable contractors for routine and cyclical maintenance**
- **Conducting regular inspections of the property**
- **Dealing with all legal and administrative paperwork between tenant and landlord.**

Fees for the services of letting agents depend on the type of management arrangement product you decide to take, and typically charge between 10 to 15 percent of the monthly rental income. As the landlord, you will be responsible for insurance cover for the building and maintenance of the building, as well as submitting an appropriate tax return to the HMRC.

Letting your property Privately

If you choose to let a property privately, without the use of a Letting Agent, then the responsibility of carrying out the management functions a letting agent would normally do become yours. Being the only contact available for the tenant, you will have to ensure that the appropriate checks, legal documents and safety procedures are in place, and all certification where legally required.

Deposits and client accounts should be kept in order, to avoid disputes with tenants at a later date, and becoming accredited with an organisation such as the National Landlords Association (www.landlords.org.uk) is encouraged.

Whilst this route can often be more rewarding as a landlord financially, expect to be more hands-on, as the direct contact between you and your tenant.

Letting/Leasing your property to a third party/partner organisation

Housing Associations (or Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)) are continually looking to increase their available provision of housing stock, and to subsequently increase their number of properties to rent. RSLs are not only experienced in letting property, but also have the tools and resources available to them to effectively manage an increase in their available stock.

By offering a lease to a potential landlord, they are securing the use of a property for a definitive length of time, often with the condition that all maintenance will be included within the agreement, along with a guaranteed rental income.

Whilst such guarantees could come with a reduce rental income, this option takes away the hassle from the landlords point of view, and provides and 'hands-free' service which may be suitable in certain circumstances.

There may also be the opportunity to offer your property on a lease agreement to a charity or investor locally, who could provide the same opportunity as above, but their subsequent management and resources may be on a smaller scale to that of an RSL.

For more information and to discuss what options are available locally in Rushcliffe, contact the Empty Homes Officer.

Deciding on which route is best for you

With a number of different options and factors to consider, choosing the right route for you can be a difficult and complex decision to make. Our Empty Homes Officer can assist in this by assessing your needs and circumstances individually, and by putting together a tailored set of recommendations for you.

To discuss your options for renting your property, please contact the Empty Homes Officer.

6. Selling your property

If you are considering selling your property, there are a number of routes in which this can be achieved, and Rushcliffe Borough Council can assist in ensuring that your asset reaches its full potential, both in value and 'saleability'.

Selling your property through an Estate Agent

The process of selling a property can be made easier by using a private estate agent, who can help you by:

- **Valuing the property and advertising it in the best way, in order to target suitable buyers**
- **Arranging and conducting viewings of the property to show potential buyers around**
- **Receiving and negotiating offers from buyers**
- **Advising on any possible improvements in order for you to increase the saleability of the property.**

Estate agents generally charge a small percentage of the sale value as a fee, payable on completion.

Selling your property by Auction

Similarly to selling through an Estate Agent, but the final sale will be conducted at an open auction. This can often generate competition between buyers on the day, with property often selling for more than an asking or reserve price, dependant on the desirability of a property.

Reserve prices can be set, in order to stop a property selling for less than what you would like, although lower reserve prices generally mean an increase in exposure and potential buyers.

Selling your property to a third party/partner agency

Rushcliffe Borough Council have a number of third party partners and agencies who are interested in acquiring houses to increase their available stock. Housing Associations, Charities and Care Agencies are often on the lookout for suitable property, and this provides one of the routes to sale through a private agreement.

For further information on potential sale routes to third parties, get in touch with the Empty Homes Officer.

Selling your property to an Investor

The Council currently holds, and is building, a list of local investors who are interested in buying property privately, without the need to use Estate Agents or third parties. This can often be a popular route for vendors to sell property, as it removes the fees added by agents, and can often include deals where other costs are included and paid for by the buyer, such as surveyor and legal costs.

Using our list of investors, we can also carry out a 'silent auction', where investors offer their best price by a certain date, allowing the vendor to then accept the best offer that suits them.

Rushcliffe Borough Council is happy to act as a third party in circumstances such as those explained above, and don't take a fee for doing so.

Deciding on the right route for you

Whatever your circumstances, if you're considering selling your property and are unsure of which route would be best for you and your house to achieve its full sale potential, Rushcliffe's Empty Homes Officer is able to talk through your options, tailored to your circumstances, and help you through the process to completion.

7. Enforcement Action

Rushcliffe Borough Council takes a proactive approach to tackling empty homes, and our aim is always to work with the owners of empty properties in order to find a beneficial solution for all parties and the community.

Where it is recognised that an empty property is insecure, causing a nuisance or remains derelict, the Council's Empty Homes Officer will assess the property and its circumstances, and determine the necessary action.

Where possible, the Officer will work in conjunction with the owner and third parties to find the best solution, although where all avenues and opportunities have been exhausted, enforcement action will be considered.

The Council can take enforcement action under the following powers, and these may be used to bring an empty property back into use, or remedy immediate threats to public health, safety, and the integrity of an asset. These include:

- **Compulsory Purchase, Section 17 of the Housing Act 1985**
- **An Enforced Sale, to recover any chargeable debt owed to the Council, through the Law and Property Act 1925**
- **Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 80 and the Building Act 1984 Section 76, to deal with nuisance**
- **Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, Section 4 to deal with infestations of Mice and Rats**
- **Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, Section 29 and the Building Act 1984, Section 79 to deal with unsecured or dilapidated properties**
- **Town & Country Planning Act 1990, Section 215 to deal with unsightly land and properties**
- **Building Act 1984 Section 77 & 78 to deal with dangerous properties**
- **An Empty Dwelling Management Order, to take over the management of an empty property through the Housing Act 2004**

8. Contact Us...

If you...

- ✓ own an empty home...
- ✓ are buying an empty home...
- ✓ are selling an empty home...
- ✓ are unsure what to do with your empty home...
- ✓ are thinking of buying an empty home...
- ✓ live next door to an empty home...
- ✓ want to report an empty home...

...get in touch with us

- **emptyhomes@rushcliffe.gov.uk**
- **0115 914 8314**
- **www.rushcliffe.gov.uk**
- **The Empty Homes Officer**
- **Rushcliffe Borough Council**
- **Rushcliffe Arena**
- **Rugby Road**
- **West Bridgford**
- **Nottingham**
- **NG2 7YG**