



EMPTY HOMES



NEWSLETTER 2012 : ISSUE 1

Welcome to the first edition

Welcome to the first annual edition of Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Empty Homes Newsletter, celebrating National Empty Homes Week from 26 November to 2 December 2012. It's packed with useful information and advice for anyone interested in bringing any of the District's 500 long-term empty homes back to life.



Our Empty Homes staff, Carol Roberts and Val Harris, are keen to hear from any empty homes owners and anyone affected by the consequences of empty homes in their neighbourhood.

Call them on 01789 260866 or email: PSHT@stratford-dc.gov.uk to get the most up to date information and advice about Empty Homes or discuss any of the 500 long-term empty properties in Stratford District.

Far left: Val Harris. Left: Carol Roberts

Council's Empty Homes Assistance Grant scheme boosts affordable housing

Working in partnership with empty home owners and local businesses, Stratford District Council has helped to turn 4 empty properties in Stratford, Studley and Southam into 7 homes with rent set at Social Housing rates for local people this year.

The District Council's Empty Homes Assistance Grant scheme, managed by Carol Roberts and Val Harris, has proved the essential catalyst that has made this possible. In return for a contribution towards renovations, the owners have agreed to rent their properties to local people nominated through the District Council's Home Choice Plus housing scheme for a period of time.

By targeting the market towns and reducing the number of empty properties in the District, this work is providing affordable homes where the need for affordable housing is most concentrated. Councillor Maurice Howse, Enterprise, Housing & Revenues Portfolio Holder for the District Council recently said "We have made a good start on this project and look forward to more owners coming forward for our help in this valuable work. With well over 100 people bidding for some properties on the Home Choice Plus system, there is clearly a need to make the best possible use of the houses we already have so we can reduce the demand to build more."

The project team at a recently renovated property in Stratford. Left to right: Val Harris (Stratford District Council), Liz Price and Frank Price (architectural services), Richard Webber (owner and landlord), Paul Dorries (resident), Lee Penton and Jason Parkes (contractor), Cllr Maurice Howse (Stratford District Council)



photo: Serena Mason



National Empty Homes Week 26 November to 2 December 2012

Attention all town centre businesses!

Zero VAT on flat conversions



Shipston-on-Stour town centre shops

Do you need to create additional income from your business premises? You may be surprised to discover that work to create flats above commercial premises, can usually be carried out free of VAT. Qualifying properties must date back prior to 1980 and be available for short-term letting. More information about eligibility for the scheme and how it can be applied is available on the HMRC website:

www.hmrc.gov.uk

... and cash available for flat conversions above shops in Stratford town centre

Stratford District Council is asking Stratford town centre businesses and commercial property owners to come forward with proposals for using £30,000 of developer

planning contribution (S106 monies). The cash is specifically to be used to fund the creation of residential accommodation over commercial premises in Stratford town centre. *Anyone who may be interested in applying and would like more information can contact Val Harris on 01789 260866 psht@stratford-dc.gov.uk*



...and even more cash available to give a lift to shop fronts in Stratford town centre



Chapel Street, Stratford-upon-Avon on the 'Historic Spine'

Shop keepers in Chapel Street, High Street and Henley Street can apply now for a grant of up to £10,000, to help improve and enhance the appearance of their shop fronts in keeping with the town's architectural heritage, enabled by the Council's 'Historic Spine' Shop Front Grant scheme.

Grants have already been awarded to several businesses to help them restore, repair, paint and even replace modern shop fronts and signage.

For further details contact Lana Long on 01789 260609 ana.long@stratford-dc.gov.uk



National Empty Homes Week 26 November to 2 December 2012

Fiction:

Empty homes are their owners' concern and have no impact on anyone else

Fact:

Empty homes can soon become an eyesore, spoiling the environment and reducing the value of adjoining properties by up to 20%.

Fact:

Empty properties can also cause damage to adjoining houses and attract criminal and antisocial behaviour such as arson, vandalism and fly tipping.

Fiction:

Empty Homes are an investment for their owners and increase in value over time

Fact:

In one year alone it costs the owner of an empty property upwards of £10,000, together with the cost of council tax, damage, deterioration and high insurance premiums together with lost rental income.

Renovating an empty property at no cost

Too good to be true? It can happen

If you have an empty property and don't want to sell it but also don't want the hassle of managing renovations, letting and maintaining it, a Housing Association may be able to help you.

The Government have released funds to some Housing Associations to help them work with property owners in order to provide more social housing through leasing schemes. At the end of the lease, they promise to return the property to the owner's control in good condition and free of cost. Reflecting that no two properties have identical circumstances, the lease agreements are negotiable and schemes differ slightly too.

Carol Roberts and Val Harris have more information on what is being offered and can arrange for anyone wanting to know more to speak directly with the Housing Associations running these schemes.

Thursday 17 January 2013

If you are thinking of letting your property or are already a landlord, mark 17 January 2013 in your diary and call us NOW! Landlords have clear legal responsibilities which have been defined in the 2004 Housing Act. To make it easier

for local people to learn about these, Stratford District Council has arranged for the Midlands Landlord Association to run its one day accreditation course in Elizabeth House. It involves no tests or exams and is packed with the information and guidance you need not only to satisfy legal requirements but also to be a responsible landlord.

There is a cost, but the District Council will balance this by providing a package of energy saving incentives for participants which can include paying for an Energy Performance Certificate: required for all properties rented since January 2009.

The course will help landlords to make the best income from their asset and reduce the risk of losing rent, incurring legal costs and fines.

Call Gary Callaghan the course administrator on 0121 288 2008, 07577 109690 talk@mlas.org.uk or contact either Carol Roberts or Val Harris on 01789 260866 psht@stratford-dc.gov.uk to book your place on this course.



Need hands-on help to get the best sale price or rent from your property?

Employing a property and interior design specialist to help you could be the best solution. The District Council's Empty Homes Team can provide advice and guidance in finding specialists who can advise and help people to spend a minimum amount to get the best overall improvement and ultimately the best sale price or rental value. This can be an attractive option for people who would like some practical assistance with the complex and often worrying process of transforming an empty property and bringing it back to life.



National Empty Homes Week 26 November to 2 December 2012

Renovating a property that's been empty for over 2 years?

Not a lot of people know this but ... did you know that properties empty for 2 years or more can be eligible for reduced rate VAT at 5% on works necessary to return them to use?

Contractors who are renovating residential properties that have been empty for at least 2 years can account for VAT at 5% on those supplies that take place on or after that date. More information is available from HM Revenue & Customs. Further information on this reduced rate can be found on their website www.HMRC.gov.uk in Section 8 of Public Notice 708 – VAT: Buildings and construction.

Whilst some Councils are charging for this service, Carol Roberts and Val Harris at the District Council will be happy to provide owners with the evidence required free of charge. They will also help you to determine how long your property has been empty if you're not sure.

National Empty Homes Week

National Empty Homes

Week 26 November to 2 December 2012 will be kicked off by a national conference to be held in central London. Throughout the UK, Empty Homes staff will be heading for the event to discuss all aspects of funding for Empty Homes work.

Recognising the importance of making efficient use of the nation's 350,000 empty homes to help address the housing crisis, Central Government has created a package of measures to encourage this to happen and it will be the main topic of conversation on the day. One of these measures is the New Homes Bonus scheme which rewards local authorities for increasing the number of occupied houses in their area.

Over the last 3 years, the number of properties empty for more than 6 months in the Stratford District has shrunk by 30% from 789 in October 2009 to 548 in October 2012, reaping significant rewards in New Homes Bonus. However 548 long term empty homes are still too many for comfort, so there is plenty of work to keep the District Council's Empty Homes Team very busy.



Useful contacts in Stratford District Council

Web: www.stratford.gov.uk

Empty Homes Team

Val Harris and Carol Roberts
Tel: 01789 260866
Email: psht@stratford-dc.gov.uk

Council Tax Enquiries

Tel: 01789 260990
Email: revenues@stratford-dc.gov.uk

Building Control Enquiries

Tel: 01789 260606
Email: buildingcontrol@stratford-dc.gov.uk

Planning Enquiries

Tel: 01789 260304
Email: planning.applications@stratford-dc.gov.uk

Historic Spine Grants

Lana Long
Tel: 01789 260609
Email: lane.long@stratford-dc.gov.uk

Other useful contacts

Midland landlord Accreditation Scheme

Gary Callaghan
Tel: 0121 288 2008
Mob: 07577 109690
Email: talk@mlas.org.uk

HM Revenues & Customs

Web: <http://hmrc.gov.uk>

Valuation Office

Tel: 03000 501501
Email: ctwest@voa.gsi.gov.uk
Web: www.voa.gov.uk



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