



# Church Stretton

## Town Council

Melanie Holland

Housing Strategy and Development Manager

Homes and Communities

Place Directorate.

13<sup>th</sup> September 2022

### **Church Stretton Town Council- Comment on the draft Empty Homes Strategy**

Dear Mel,

The Town Council are very grateful to receive the draft Empty Homes Strategy and having been given the opportunity to comment on this draft. The Strategy was reviewed at the most recent meeting of the towns Strategy Committee, and we have the following observations for consideration:

#### **Overall assessment:**

The committee felt that the layout of the document is confusing, which we felt was detrimental to such an important strategy. There are many actions within the Action Plan which are not mentioned within the earlier part of the document which entails a lot of flipping backwards and forwards to ensure nothing has been missed.

We are concerned that Shropshire Council will neither have sufficient enforcement resources nor the capacity to action this strategy. We also note that details and costings are missing in respect of the strategy.

The strategy is written in such a manner that appears focussed on enforcement. The relevant legislation is listed quite comprehensively but other matters contained within the strategy appear to be at an embryonic stage in their development.

#### **Objective 1.**

##### **To maintain relevant, accurate and current information relating to empty homes in the area.**

At paragraph 1.6 Central Government classes residential dwellings that have been empty for more than six months as long term empty dwellings. Within this objective the scoring matrix is not completed until after twelve months. We felt that the matrix could be started at the six month stage and run concurrent with the first conversations with the property owner.

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In Identifying empty homes, it may be worthwhile checking the electoral roll to see where there is no entry against a known property. This may be indicative of an empty dwelling.

Are Shropshire Council looking to identify second homes masquerading as “Holiday Lets” and claiming small business rate relief?

### **Objective 2.**

#### **Bringing empty homes back into use through encouragement, advice, and assistance.**

Where a dwelling is not suitable for bringing back into use as a dwelling for example it is a large or in a parlous state of repair are the council considering the option of demolishing such buildings to facilitate the re-development of the site into more affordable units?

Could the council offer the owners of dwellings that have not fallen into disrepair and wish to retain the property for private letting to access a “Rent Deposit Bond” where a bond from the Council enables tenants to rent a property without the need for a large cash deposit?

Is the Council seeking to allow inexperienced or reluctant landlords access to a “Private Sector” Leasing scheme, thus ensuring the landlord receives a guaranteed rent and the Council has the ability to let the property out at an affordable rent?

For those owners in residential care who own a property which will later be sold to pay for that care has consideration been given to develop a lease scheme, managed by the Council to provide a rental income for the owners to assist with care costs and reduce the impact of the residential care costs on the eventual sale of the property?

Are the Council able to reduce the length of time that an empty home can secure a rebate on the Council Tax from 6 months to 1 month? This may encourage owners to return empty home back into use more quickly.

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## Objective 3.

**Where all other negotiation has failed, consider options for taking appropriate enforcement action to ensure empty homes are brought back into use.**

Even though this is a strategy document it would be useful to include within the document a “Process map” detailing the stages to be taken. This would be beneficial in encouraging members of the public to take local ownership and give a clear of how the Council will deal with the blight of empty homes.

## Objective 4.

**Raise awareness of the Empty Homes Strategy with residents, dwelling owners, and Town & Parish Councils.**

This needs to be actioned once the processes are in place, or these groups will lose faith in the strategy.

The strategy does not stress the benefits to the community of dealing with long term empty homes, which can so quickly become an eyesore, such as:

- Reducing the opportunity for squatters.
- Detracting from the visual amenity of the area
- Reduction in fly tipping and rodent infestations in such properties
- Maintaining property values
- Improving the sense of pride in an area

Such a focus on community benefits may lead to greater reporting.

Appendix I timescales state that the web based reporting system is due to be introduced by April 2023 yet the media campaign advertising the reporting is not due until September 2023. Is this correct and if so, why the delay in advertising the reporting system?

Cllr. John Luck

Chair, Strategy Committee.

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