

Empty Homes Conference
9th March 2017
Croke Conference Centre, Dublin

What can we do about empty homes?

David Gibbens

Policy Lead Empty Homes Network



Empty Homes Network

“Supporting the people who bring empty property back into use for housing”

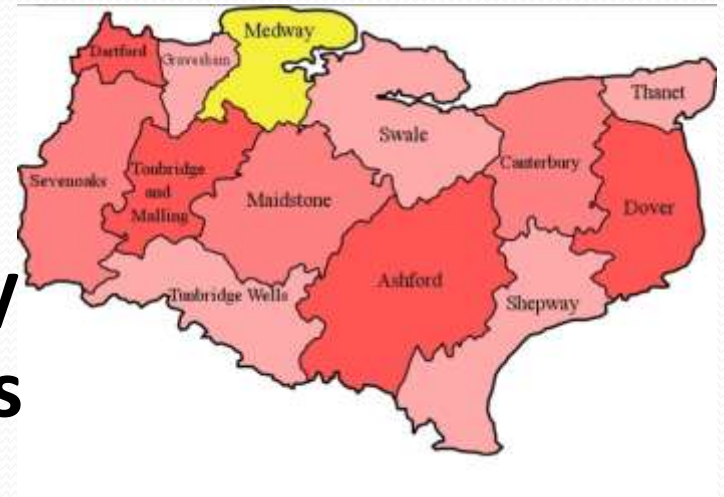
- **Established 2001**
- **First Empty Homes Officer – 1992 Southampton**
- **Focus on private sector empties**
- **Membership organisation, self-financing, c.525 members, 85% local authority...**
- **... + community groups, housing associations, private sector**
- **FOI – 33% LA’s have EHOs, 88 FTE**

Introductory

- **Not about what Ireland should do, but what has actually happened**
- **Based on GB mainland experience**
 - **England, Wales, Scotland, Kent**
- **Empty homes initiatives from 2 viewpoints:**
 - **the grass-roots perspective**
 - **the strategic perspective**

About Kent 'No Use Empty'

- Branded empty homes initiative
- 10-year partnership: County Council + 12 district councils
- Led by County
- What it does - exemplary but not unique



PART 1: Grass-roots perspective

What are we doing?

- **Advice, guidance, support to owners**
- **Interventions – enforcement**
- **Offers - schemes**

Advice, guidance, support to owners

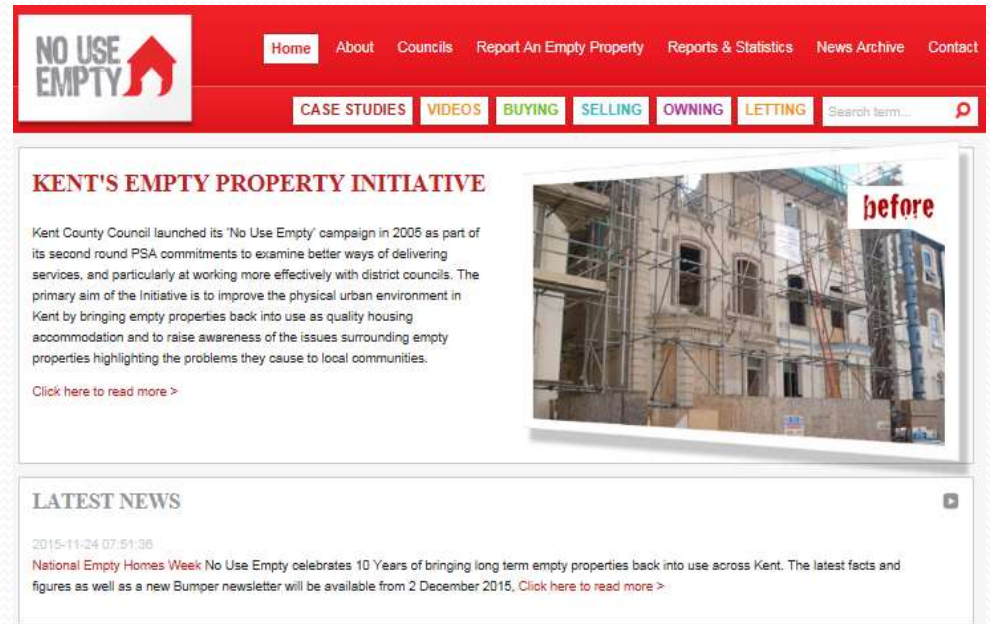
Supporting owners - general

- Newsletters, leaflets, mail outs
- Open days for owners
- Advice on VAT discounts
- Advice on selling or renting
- Auction: reduced fees
- Hand-holding
- Home improvement agency - lists of builders
- Guidance on planning: profitable reconfigurations



Supporting owners - website and hot-line

- One stop resource for property owners
- Hotline and web reporting of empties
- Extensive case studies
- Advertise property for sale for free



The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'No Use Empty' website. The header is red with the 'NO USE EMPTY' logo on the left and navigation links: Home, About, Councils, Report An Empty Property, Reports & Statistics, News Archive, and Contact. Below the header is a secondary navigation bar with buttons for CASE STUDIES, VIDEOS, BUYING, SELLING, OWNING, and LETTING, along with a search bar. The main content area features a section titled 'KENT'S EMPTY PROPERTY INITIATIVE' with a paragraph of text and a 'Click here to read more >' link. To the right of the text is a photograph of a building under renovation with scaffolding and a 'before' label. Below this is a 'LATEST NEWS' section with a date '2015-11-24 07:51:36' and a paragraph of text with a 'Click here to read more >' link.



‘Interventions’ (= enforcement)

Enforcement tools (1)

Address symptoms

- **Housing Act 2004: Improvement Notices**
- **Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949**
- **Environmental Protection Act 1990**
- **Building Acts 1984**
- **Town and Country Planning Act 1990**
- **Community Protection Notices (ASB Act 2014)**

Enforcement tools (2)

Address cause (temporarily)

- **Housing Act 2004: Empty Dwelling Management orders**

Address cause (permanently)

- **Compulsory Purchase Orders (Housing Act 1985)**
- **enforced sale – debt recovery (Law of Property Act 1925)**

Section 215: Town & Country Planning Act 1990

Before and after



**NO USE
EMPTY** 
THE KENT EMPTY PROPERTY INITIATIVE

emptyhomes
network

Housing Act 2004 - Before



Housing Act 2004 - After



Section 79 – Building Act 1984



**NO USE
EMPTY** 
KENT EMPTY PROPERTY INITIATIVE

emptyhomes
network

Section 78 – Building Act 1984



Followed by enforced sale



Completed Project – 3 Self Contained Flats



Enforcement characteristics

- often used to deal with immediate issues...
- ...best used as part of overall plan
- mechanism for engaging with owners
- incentivises longer-term action by them
- need to understand mechanisms, pros, cons
 - eg can costs be recovered?
- complex procedures varying from Act to Act
- needs advanced skill set

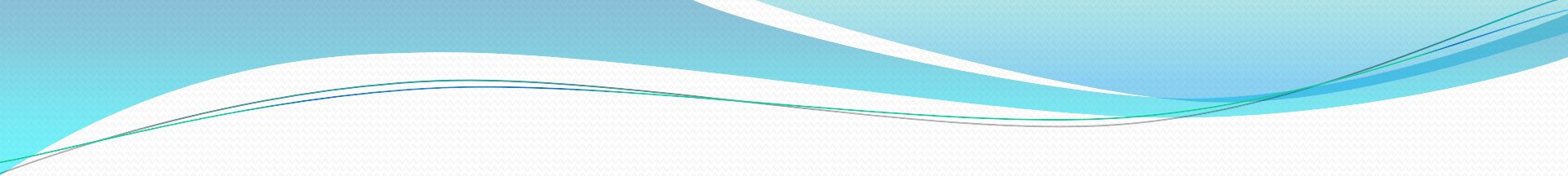
‘Schemes’ (= options for owners)

Public/voluntary sector 'schemes'

- Loan schemes
- Miscellaneous local authority grants
- Leasing (social hsg)
- Social letting agency
- Grant-aided affordable housing
- Match-maker schemes (owners/developers)
- Direct purchase
- Empty homes hot-line

Private sector options

- Property guardians
- Letting agents
- Estate agents
- Auction houses
- PS leasing scheme (finance attached)
- PS matching scheme 'Homesmatch'



Schemes

A couple of examples

Plymouth 'Matchmaker+' scheme

- Formal procedures – sealed tenders
- Property details circulated to list of interested developers / builders: offers invited
- Council holds keys, accompanies viewings and handles sealed offer
- No fees for owner
- Draws in reluctant owners – “nothing to lose”
- “Most Innovative Intervention” Award 2013

Kent / Wales Loan Scheme

- Loans - £25,000 per unit, max.£175,000 per applicant.
- Properties must be sold or let on completion
- Loan period, sale 2 years, let 3 years
- Not for owner occupiers (FCA)
- Secured as charge against property
- Maximum LTV 90%, independent valuation
- 100% of the funding provided upfront
- Properties expected to meet the 'Decent Homes Standard' on completion

Kent loan example – no enforcement




- Derelict Warehouse
- NUE Loan £175,000
- Developer contrib. = £161,000
- Total development = £336,000
- 6 x 2 bed apartments
- 2 x loft apartments
- high spec - private courtyard, allocated parking, security gates etc



Kent: Totals up to March 2016

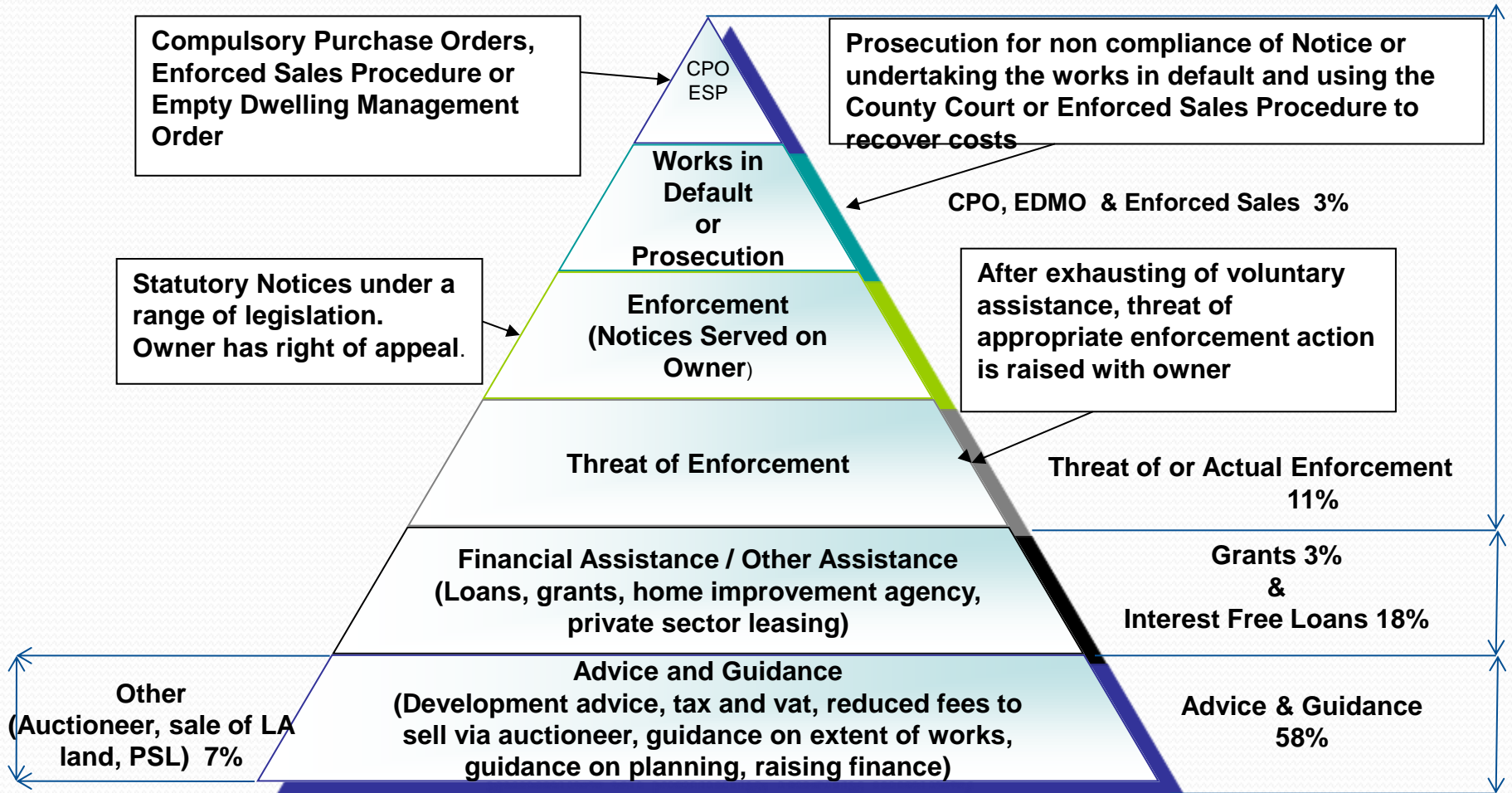
No. of Units	721
Value NUEI Loan	£16,044,597
Leverage	£23,196,777
Total Investment	£39,241,374

- **£1,900 net cost to Kent CC per unit**
 - **£1 spent on interest and administration**
- 
- **£20.63 spent in local economy (labour & materials)**

Why loans are important

- 'Loans' = money returns to pot
- can recirculate indefinitely
- not subsidised housing
- distinguish subsidised (social) housing outcomes from empty homes outcomes
- subsidy runs out

Achievements by Approach



Successful approaches in Kent

- **Advice and Guidance** 58%
- **Interest-free loans** 18%
- **Threat or actual enforcement** 11%
- **Other** 7%
- **Grants** 3%
- **CPO, EDMO, Enforced Sale** 3%

Enforcement & Loan to Rent

Wales: Houses to Homes Scheme



- Unregistered Land
- No known owner
- Imp Notices HA 2004
- Charge service of notice
- Enforced Sales LPA 1925
- Sold in Auction
 - Loan to Rent
 - (new owner)
- Loan amount £25,000
- PS Leverage £17,000
- Social Letting Scheme





PART 2: The bigger picture

Organising for success

VISION



PLAN



**DELIVERY
FRAMEWORK**



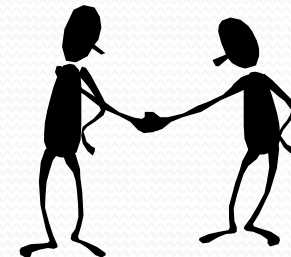
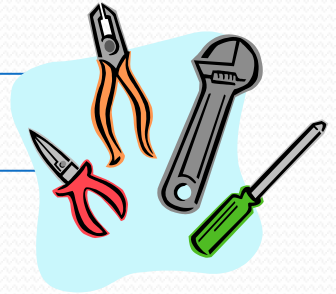
**DELIVERY
VEHICLES**



ENGAGEMENT



TOOLS



**Monitor
Review
Adapt**

LEVERS / TOOLS

Review and revise

Government levers – GB examples

- **Law - enforcement powers eg EDMOs**
- **Targeted capital funding streams (2012-15)**
 - Empty homes grant for affordable housing + ‘Clusters of empties’
 - special strand for community-led groups
 - Welsh, Kent loans funds
- **Revenue support: Scottish Empty Homes Partnership**
- **Property taxes – ‘Empty Homes Premium’**
 - +100% after 1 yr. - Wales, Scotland, +50% after 2 yrs. - England
- **VAT relief – repairs to long-term empties**
- **‘New Homes Bonus’ – LTEs treated as new homes if returned to use**



FRAMEWORK

Some hints and pointers


GB examples - Scotland

- **Scottish government revenue for partnership**
- **Led by Shelter Scotland**
- **PEOPLE-based – Empty Homes Officers**
- **taking roots, blossoming – now embedded in local govt.**
- **19 out of 32 have dedicated EHOs (some P/T)**
- **other measures following – law, capital - more revenue**

GB examples – Wales

- **Govt. capital funding for loan scheme £20M**
- **+ start-up revenue**
- **Involvement of Welsh Local Government Assoc.**
- **Regional organisation for local authorities to support best practice and distribute funding**
- **No centre = no leadership, less impetus**

Wales: regionalised: no centre

	Regional Groups	Local Authority
	<i>North Wales Regional Steering Group</i>	Conwy County Borough Council Denbighshire County Council Flintshire County Council Gwynedd County Council Isle of Anglesey County Council Wrexham County Borough Council
	<i>Mid & West Wales Regional Steering Group</i>	Powys County Council Carmarthenshire County Council Pembrokeshire County Council Ceredigion County Council
	<i>Gwent Regional Steering Group</i>	Blaenau Gwent County Council Caerphilly County Borough Monmouthshire County Council Newport City Council Torfaen County Borough Council
	<i>Swansea Bay Regional Steering Group</i>	Bridgend County Borough City and County of Swansea Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
	<i>Cardiff & Vale Regional Steering Group</i>	Cardiff Council Vale of Glamorgan Council
	<i>Cwm Taf Regional Steering Group</i>	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

GB examples (2)

Kent

- Careful project plan – market research – pilot with 4 LAs
- Loan scheme gives sustainability; other aspects followed
- Extensive partnership and skill building; KCC strong centre
- Detailed monitoring

England (how not to do it?)

- Short-term capital injection (affordable hsg) 2012-15
- ‘New Homes Bonus’ incentives for LAs, ‘Empty homes premium’ on property tax
- no strategy = postcode lottery, LA by LA
- practitioners self-organise in regional forums

Local authority has key role...

- Has the powers
- Has the duties and obligations to local community
 - environment
 - housing
- Has the overview of the local area

... but alternatives possible

HORSES FOR COURSES

Delivery vehicles

(Distinguish framework from delivery)

Big organisations might like....



Building photos Flickr/NIcobobbinus

But empties are individual...



Contract Taps



Mayfair Alpha



Mayfair Alpha
Lever



Profile Gold



Electronic



Thermostatic



Thermostatic
Blending Valves



Hygiene &
Public Use



Water Saving
Taps



Self Closing



Tap Packs



Tap Heads

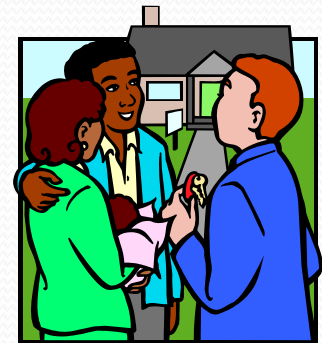


Bathroom
Taps Sale!

**BIG IS NOT
BEAUTIFUL**

.... and need specialist role

- flexible – able to tailor to individual circumstances
- understands the owner
- strong knowledge-base – property law, procedures, finance
- good negotiator
- self-starter
- ‘enabling’ mentality



To be avoided....





Can't be bothered

Too risky

You can't do that

Don't understand it

Meeting higher management

Community-led options

1. Value for Money

2. Localism

3. Tackling skills gap and youth unemployment

4. Rewarding volunteering

5. Solutions to wicked problems

6. Building strong, independent organisations & a vibrant community-led sector

✓ Making the Grant go a long way

✓ Inputs and Returns

✓ Doing things differently by being local

✓ Genuine pathways into work

✓ Mature construction workforce

✓ Volunteering to Homes

✓ Volunteering to Work

✓ Decent Homes for clients

✓ Offender resettlement

✓ Self-help that fits needs of vulnerable

✓ Tackling Blight and Anti-social behaviour

✓ Assets, balance sheet and cashflow

✓ Vibrant Sector, Going viral, networking

✓ Local Authority partners

VISION

Bigger picture

- Empty homes – bad for neighbours
- Empty homes – bad for communities – ‘broken window’ syndrome
- Empty homes – a wasted housing resource
- Empty homes – a waste of embodied carbon
- Empty homes – a moral affront if people are homeless

In the eyes of the public

- The public has a vision
- **GOOD NEWS STORIES:** doing something about empty homes
- **BAD NEWS STORIES:** doing nothing about empty homes
- An empty homes strategy: low hanging fruit for those in the public eye

Success is cheap

- Empty homes work unlocks wasted value of empty homes
- You can recoup costs from that value
- Loan schemes provide the ideal, sustainable platform e.g. Wales, Kent
- Multiplier effects in real economy – building work = more taxes

Success is easy

The models and experience exists

My message has been, 'Yes, you could'

I hope your response will be 'Yes, we can'

*'Whatever you can do, or dream you can,
begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and
magic in it.'*

(Not Goethe)

Former Warren Court Hotel, Margate: After



**Enforcement, Threat of CPO, Direct Purchase + grant
8 x 2 bedroom flats and 12 x 3 bed houses on
backland: all affordable rent.**

EHN CONTACT DETAILS

Telephone

+44 (0) 303 04 01 008 (leave message)

+44 (0) 7528 312932(direct mobile)

email: david.gibbens@ehnetwork.org.uk

web: www.ehnetwork.org.uk

Empty Homes Network,

PO BOX 703, EXETER EX1 9PX, U.K.