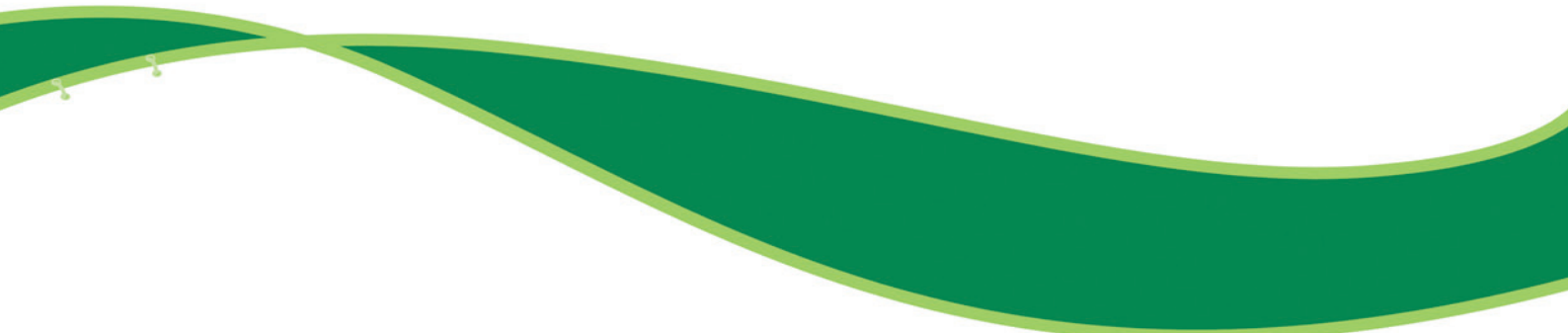




Rugby Borough Council

Empty Property Strategy 2010- 2015



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1.0 Introduction

At this time of huge housing need within the country, it is particularly unfortunate that there are so many wasted homes lying empty. Any housing market will always have some degree of empty property through transactional vacancies, but constantly high numbers of properties empty for more than six months continue to exist.

Across England there are just fewer than 300,000 properties that have been empty for more than six months and, across the board, the vast majority (86 per cent) of this empty property is within the private sector (Communities and local Government Web site). Looking at this situation within the context of Rugby, the over all void rate throughout the Borough is 2.0 per cent (679 as of March 2010), 73 per cent of this stock has been empty for more than 6 months (borough council Revenue records, March 2010).

Although Rugby is currently enjoying an overall growth in its economy there are still significant areas of deprivation and decline. These areas have been identified through recent research commissioned by the Rugby Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) through the Warwickshire County Council (WCC) Observatory and Rugby Borough Council (RBC) Neighbourhood Renewal Team (2009/10). Featuring figures from the 2007 National Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), the research demonstrates that low educational achievement, high unemployment, reduced life expectancy and significant levels of crime and anti-social behaviour are prominent issues within some wards of the Borough. These areas of social decline are visible and can be identified by their poor physical environment and concentrations of empty and derelict properties.

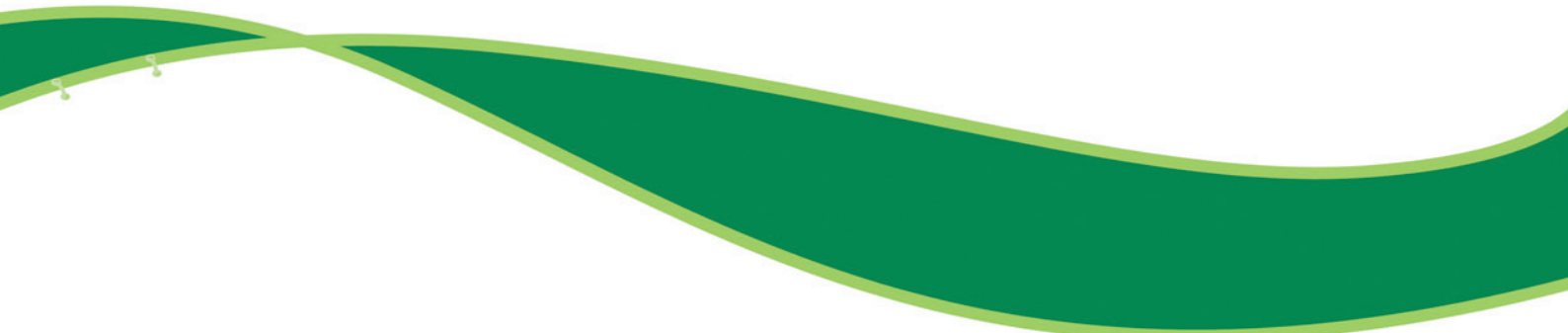
Inevitably there will always be a number of vacant dwellings across the borough in order to allow the housing system to function effectively and to facilitate both residential mobility and the improvement or redevelopment of the housing stock. However, vacancy turnover rates and numbers of long-term empty properties (empty for six months or longer) are higher within certain areas of the borough, having an adverse effect upon these communities. In 2008 the national average percentage of properties lying empty stood at 1.4 per cent (ONS 2008), in New Bilton Ward Rugby in 2009, empty properties made up 3.2 per cent of the housing stock, more than twice the 2008 national average.

Long-term empty properties tend to attract all manner of antisocial behaviour such as fly tipping, vandalism, arson, drug taking and other issues that impact on the health and well being of the neighbourhoods in which they are situated.

The market value of the existing housing stock is unfavourably affected and the decreasing neighbourhood population has an impact upon the economy of the local businesses that serve these areas. The decline of these communities is exacerbated and accelerated when the commercial and financial sectors also feel it is no longer viable for them to continue trading in these areas. Furthermore when there is a proliferation of such properties, they are a graphic indicator of failing communities and can deter inward investment. Long-term empty properties are therefore considered as counter productive to wider practices of neighbourhood renewal, which aim to make an area a thriving and desirable place to live.

Empty properties are a symptom of decline and deprivation but dealing with them in isolation will not be sufficient to turn around the fortunes of the areas in which they are most prominent.

In order to create demand for property across all tenure and ownership types and to rebuild sustainable communities within these disaffected areas of the borough, it will take a concerted



effort on the part of RBC and its partners at a strategic borough-wide level. Rugby Borough Council (RBC) recognises that the strategy for dealing with empty and derelict properties must be set within a wider regeneration framework and that an Empty Property Strategy needs to align with other emerging key issues, such as contributing towards the provision of affordable housing throughout the borough.

The following Empty Property Strategy and Action Plan sets out the detail of how Rugby Borough Council intends to address the problems of long term empty homes where ever they are situated. A particular focus is placed upon those communities that are suffering from high concentrations of empty properties and how the Empty Property Strategy will be a key component of the wider regeneration process within these areas. This document replaces the RBC Rugby Private Sector Renewal Strategy and sets revised targets, which are to be achieved by 2015.

2.0 Empty Property Strategy: Corporate Targets

At the core of our work in delivering the Empty Property Strategy are five corporate targets. These have been established through consultation with Elected Members, residents, landlords and other stakeholders including voluntary and community groups. They take into account our knowledge and information relating to the borough's current housing stock and empty property situation and wider Government objectives in addressing empty properties and improving the health and well being of the neighbourhoods in which they are situated.

To reduce the void rate across all tenure / ownership to not more than 1% of the total housing stock by 2012.

To ensure that no ward has a void rate of more than 0.5% above the Borough wide void rate by 2015.

1. To ensure the percentage of private sector homes that are vacant for more than 6 months is no more than 1.0 per cent of the total private sector housing stock.
2. To annually return to occupation not less than 10 long-term empty private sector properties as a consequence of the local authority's direct intervention utilising the BVPI64 criterion.
3. To monitor and regularly report achievement against targets in the Empty Property Action Plan detailed in the attached appendix. Periodically and at least annually review and update the Action Plan through the Empty Property Forum.

3.0 The Vision for the Strategy

'The Empty Property Strategy will assist the council's agenda in bringing the benefits of our prosperous, vibrant and attractive Borough to all the people and neighbourhoods of Rugby, by addressing the problems of all long term empty homes where ever they are situated and where ever they blight the neighbourhood in which they exist.'

4.0 Background

The Empty Property Strategy acts as a sub-strategy to tackle one of the priority themes identified in the wider RBC Private Sector Housing Strategy (2010-2015). The national, regional and sub-regional and local influences for the Empty Property Strategy are largely the same as those identified in the master strategy. This section provides a brief summary of those that relate directly to the Empty Property Strategy, however greater detail on each can be found in the Private Sector Housing Strategy.

4.1 The National Context

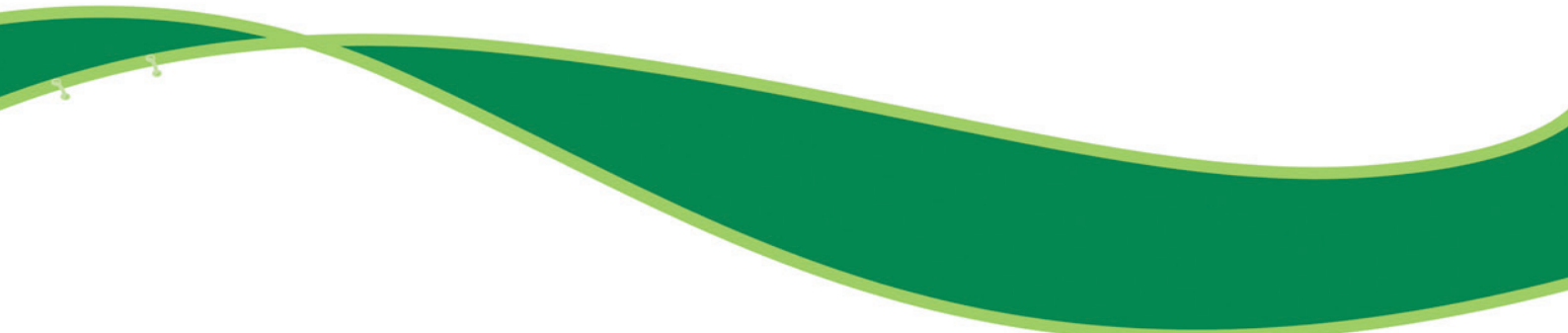
The Communities and Local Government Department (CLG) are responsible for shaping housing policy and overseeing the use of existing housing stock. The CLG states the importance of maximising the use of existing housing stock so that we can minimise the number of new homes that need to be built each year, particularly in areas of the country where housing demand is high, such as the south-east of England.

Empty homes not only restrict housing supply, they also detract from the quality of the local environment and can cause significant problems for local residents. Poorly maintained empty homes attract vermin, cause damp and other problems for neighbouring properties and often attract vandals, squatters, drug dealers and arsonists.

Empty homes are considered to be an important strategic issue nationally, as emphasised by the Urban White Paper in 2000, which contained many of the ideas proposed by the Planning Policy Guidance note 3, and the findings of the Urban Taskforce in their 'Towards an Urban Renaissance' report. The Planning Policy Guidance note 3 (1999) recommended maximising the re-use of previously developed land and the re-use of existing buildings within urban centres to bring life back into areas of low demand. The national target is for 60 per cent of additional housing to be built on previously developed land or provided through conversions of suitable commercial properties. There is increasing pressure on Local Authorities to develop effective Empty Homes Strategies and there have been proposals by the Empty Homes Agency, the Urban Taskforce, and MP David Kidney (in a Private Members Bill) to make them a statutory duty.

The Government, working with the independent Empty Homes Agency, encourages local authorities not only to deal with their own empty properties but also to adopt measures to bring privately owned empty homes back into use as part of their strategic housing approach. Local authorities are increasingly engaging with owners to find solutions. This can take the form of offering incentives such as renovation grants or loans or advice on selling, leasing and tax issues. This approach is dependent on good will and co-operation from owners and where this is achieved can be highly effective. However, local authorities may also resort to enforcement action where it has not proved possible to achieve re-occupation of empty homes through voluntary means. The Housing Act 2004 introduced a number of enforcement measures to require the sale or renovation of empty homes and addressing issues concerning low demand and problems with anti-social behaviour. The most commonly known powers are compulsory purchase and enforced sale. More recently, the Government has introduced an alternative last resort power, Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs)

The Government in 1998, in order to identify the causes of urban decline and to recommend practical solutions to encourage people back into urban areas, established the Urban Task Force. Recommendations by the Urban Task Force included: a reduction of VAT on conversion and refurbishment; changes in Council Tax rules to enable local authorities to impose higher charges on empty property owners, and the streamlining and consolidation of Compulsory Purchase Order legislation in order to facilitate accelerating the process.



The government's March 2001 budget supported this by encouraging builders and property developers to work on empty properties by cutting the VAT rate to five per cent for the cost of:

Renovating dwellings that have been empty for 3 years or more.
Converting a residential property into a different number of dwellings (eg converting a house into flats)

- Converting a non-residential property into a dwelling or number of dwellings.
- Converting a dwelling into a House of Multiple Occupation.
- VAT was removed on conversions for sale of properties empty over 10 years.
- 100 per cent capital allowance to create flats over shops for letting.

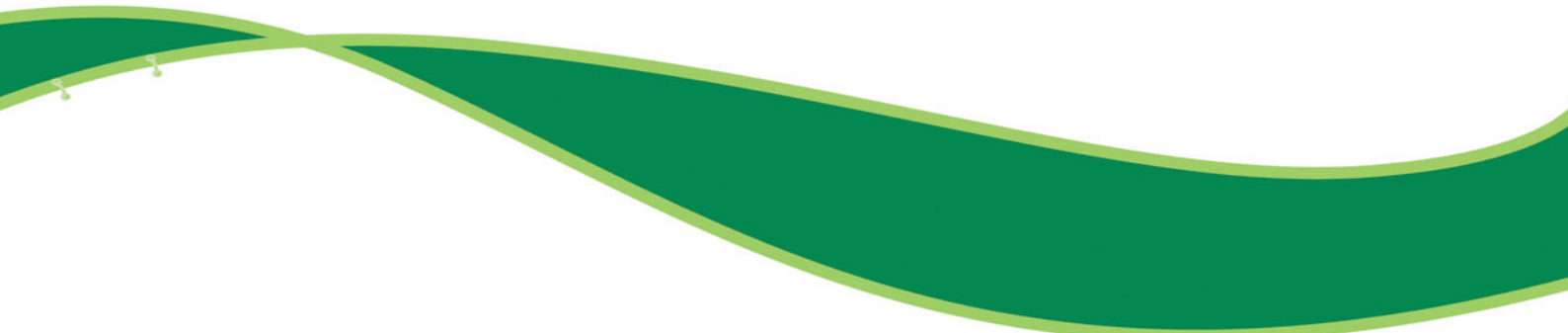
Preceding Rugby devising and implementing its Empty Property Strategy, the Government introduced its mandatory Best Value performance regime (BVPI 64) by which all local authorities are compared upon their performance either in returning empty private sector housing back into use or demolishing it through their direct intervention. The number of empty properties within the authority is also a criterion upon which the council's performance is judged under the Local Public Service floor target PSA7 and the Continual Performance Assessment measures.

4.2 The Regional and Sub-regional Context

The borough council's Community Strategy, Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing Strategy will contribute towards addressing locally the regional priorities set out in the: Action for Sustainability; Regional Planning Guidance (RPG); the West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy (2005); and the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy, (details of which can all be found within the RBC Housing Strategy (2008 to 2012)). The development of this strategy in particular reflects the broad priorities of the Regional Housing Strategy's focus on creating sustainable communities through the provision of decent homes by seeking to improve the quality of the Borough's housing stock, and the Regional Economic Strategy's focus on regenerating and creating thriving communities.

The Warwickshire Local Area Agreement (LAA) is a contract between Central Government, local Government and partner organisations including voluntary and community groups to deliver identified priorities for the local community. The LAA aims to 'narrow the gap' between the most and least deprived communities in the Borough and deliver sustainable communities through better outcomes for local people. In order to achieve this, the LAA has developed indicators to measure the implementation of the three-year agreement that are delivered through six cross cutting blocks:

- Children and Young People
- Safer Communities
- Stronger Communities (this is where most housing indicators lie)
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Economic Development and Enterprise
- Climate Change and Environment



The strategy is also linked closely with the Rugby Sustainable Communities Strategy (2007 to 2010), which sets out a long-term vision for the Borough in 2029 and provides localised contexts and targets for the LAA. Some of the key national indicators (NI) linking in with Private Sector Housing are:

4.3 The Local Context

The council Strategic Housing function is key to 'place shaping' (the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens). The outcomes of work within the private sector and tackling empty properties go beyond provisions of housing, regulation and enforcement. Incorporating the private sector fully into a strategic approach can maximise the sectors contribution to delivering corporate priorities across housing, health, education and employment targets, (eg. increasing decent homes; tackling homelessness; reducing empty properties; improving choice in housing type and tenure; reducing crime and anti-social behaviour; and area based regeneration).

The Empty Property Strategy will be firmly embedded within the Corporate Strategy (2008-2011) and wider Housing Strategy (2008 to 2011) and meets five of the council's corporate priority objectives as identified in the RBC Corporate Strategy (2008 to 2011):

Priority 2 - Meeting the housing needs of our residents now and in the future:

- Creating more affordable social housing for rent and for part-rent, part-buy
- Preventing homelessness for families and single people
- Improving the condition of all types of houses in the parts of Rugby that particularly need improving
- Giving people on the housing waiting list more choice about the homes they are offered

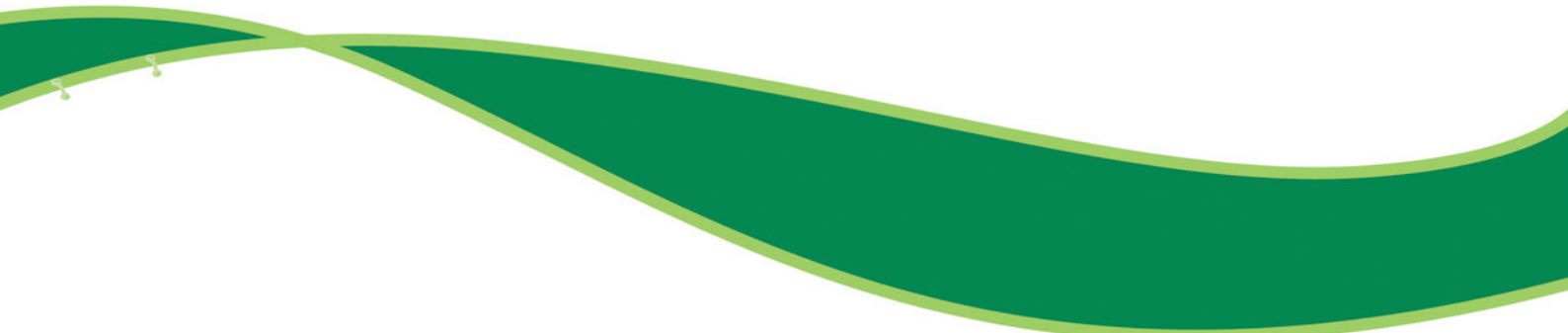
Priority 4 - Enabling and sustaining an environment which our residents can take pride in and which impresses our visitors:

- Develop an education and enforcement campaign programme to reduce environmental crime and anti social behaviour

In the wider context of regeneration, it is important that the Empty Property Strategy works closely in particular to support the emerging LSP Regeneration Strategy and its comprehensive plan of action for addressing the social issues that contribute to or intensify deprivation in our urban wards, in which empty properties are often a visible consequence. The strategy has already been written taking into account the Neighbourhood Priority Areas identified through the Private Sector Housing Strategy. It is likely that it will also compliment the identification of urban priority neighbourhoods in the LSP Regeneration Strategy, and become an integral part of the regeneration approaches to be adopted by the council.

The RBC Homelessness Strategy 2008 to 2013 recognises the importance of engaging with the private rented sector as a viable long-term housing option for homeless people. This work is essential in order to respond to the continuing reduction in the number of council property lettings if the Council is to meet its objective of enabling a secure outcome for households that are either homeless or threatened with homelessness.

A number of risks have been identified if the residual council lettings cannot be supplemented with those sourced from other tenures such as the private rented sector. It is likely that homeless people will need to spend longer in temporary accommodation before they secure a council/



housing association letting. The number of households placed in temporary accommodation would, in all likelihood, rise and this would mean additional costs being incurred by the council in having to increase its use of bed and breakfast accommodation. Under these circumstances, it is imperative that RBC endeavours to utilise every available property whether it be in the public or private domain and, to ensure that the Empty Property Strategy is both robust and able to bring back into occupation the wasted resource of long-term empty properties throughout the borough.

Finally, it is a key component of the Empty Property Strategy to contribute towards the provision of affordable housing throughout the borough. The Empty Property Strategy will contribute by encouraging long-term empty properties to be brought back into occupation within the targeted areas. These properties may be rented out by housing associations, or for first time buyers to access the market and it is likely that the private rented sector accommodation within these areas will also represent the most affordable rents within the borough.

5.0 The Strategic Objectives of the Strategy

- To continue to reduce the number of long-term empty properties (void more than 6 months) that are having a detrimental effect upon the communities in which they are situated throughout Rugby.
- To continue to identify the true situation with regard to the number, distribution and ownership of vacant property throughout the Borough, especially within the areas of decline and to establish if any trends exist as to the reasons for these voids.
- To establish, within the identified areas of high concentrations of empty properties, the prime reasons for their existence and their prolonged empty status, specifically with regard to the implications of the stock's condition / nature of the housing market and any associated problems such as crime, vandalism, housing market failure etc.
- To promote and support sustainable regeneration in the strategies targeted areas that overlap with identified regeneration priority areas through a multi agency / community involvement approach.
- To identify and maximise best practice and best value strategies to bring empty privately / publicly owned housing back into use, thereby minimising the need for future development of Greenfield sites.
- To assist the provision of good quality, affordable housing that meets the needs of Rugby citizens whilst providing a choice of accommodation and neighbourhood.
- To raise awareness of the issues surrounding empty homes.
- To continue to lobby Central Government for changes in legislation and policy to facilitate the revitalization of empty properties to provide further funding to address the ever pressing issue of the over supply which are viable and reflect the housing needs of the effected communities, the Borough of Rugby and the region as a whole.
- Seek to actively incorporate and raise the profile of the Private Sector Housing and Empty Property Strategies into the Rugby Borough Council's Corporate Plan and Housing Strategy.

6.0 Identifying Concentrations of Empty Properties in Rugby and Declaring Priority Areas

6.1 Ward level Numbers and Concentrations of Empty Property

In total, 517 properties within Rugby Borough are currently empty (May 2009 Council Tax records). The national average for long-term empty properties in March 2008 was 1.4 per cent (ONS 2008).

Rugby performed slightly better than the national average in 2008 with 1.2 per cent of its total dwelling stock empty, however as with all local authorities, there are pockets of neighbourhoods and electoral wards that have higher concentrations of empty properties than others.

Table 6.1(a) – Summary of total numbers of long-term empty properties (empty for six months or longer) per ward in Rugby.

Ward	Empty properties (Council Tax Records May 2009)	Total properties per ward (ONS Mar 2008)	Percentage of empties as percentage of all properties in ward
Admirals	22	2865	0.77
Avon & Swift	15	1869	0.80
Benn	52	3063	1.70
Bilton	8	2402	0.33
Brownsover North	13	1725	0.75
Brownsover South	16	1879	0.85
Caldecott	56	2548	2.20
Dunchurch and Knightlow	45	2496	1.80
Earl Craven & Wolston	29	2473	1.17
Eastlands	19	2389	0.80
Fosse	19	1620	1.17
Hillmorton	13	2395	0.54
Lawford & Kings Newnham	12	1523	0.79
Leam Valley	18	786	2.29
New Bilton	98	3132	3.13
Newbold	39	3082	1.27
Overslade	19	2450	0.78
Paddock	11	1569	0.70
Ryton-on-Dunsmore	10	837	1.19
Wolvey	3	856	0.35

Those highlighted in yellow indicate the wards that contain the Borough's highest numbers of empty properties, while those in red indicate the wards that experience the greatest concentrations of empty properties.

New Bilton ward has both the highest number of and the greatest concentration of empty properties in the borough. Empty properties here are 1.73 per cent higher than the national average, and 1.93 per cent higher than average for Rugby. Caldecott and Benn wards also contribute significantly to a large proportion of the Borough's long-term empty properties. Leam Valley, which accounts for just 3.5 per cent of total empties, has the second highest concentration of empty properties at ward level at 2.29 per cent.

6.2 Potential causes of Empty Property

Of the 517 properties that have been empty on the Borough for more than six months, 87 per cent are attributed to long-term emptiness. This may be as a result of cheaper priced housing in the Borough being purchased for buy to let housing and landlords under estimating the ability to secure tenancies for them; or inherited properties remaining unoccupied; or as a direct result of lack of movement in the housing market to sell at this time. Nine per cent of those that lay empty are uninhabitable, while repossessions and bankruptcy account for just 3 per cent and 1 per cent of all long-term empty properties respectively.

Table 6.1(b)– A count of the categories of empty properties in each Ward

Ward	Total long-term empty	Total repossessions	Total uninhabitable	Total Bankruptcy
Admirals	19	0	3	0
Avon & Swift	11	1	1	2
Benn	44	1	6	1
Bilton	7	1	0	0
Brownsover North	11	2	0	0
Brownsover South	12	1	3	0
Caldecott	51	1	2	2
Dunchurch and Knightlow	41	0	4	0
Earl Craven & Wolston	28	1	0	0
Eastlands	17	1	1	0
Lawford & Kings Newnham	15	0	4	0
Fosse	12	1	0	0
Hillmorton	9	1	2	0
Leam Valley	11	0	7	0
New Bilton	88	5	5	0
Newbold	34	1	4	0
Overslade	18	0	1	0
Paddox	9	0	2	0
Ryton-on-Dunsmore	9	0	1	0
Wolvey	3	0	0	0
Totals	449	17	46	5

This table highlights the three most accountable wards in each of the four categories in numeric terms (where applicable). Once again, New Bilton, Caldecott and Benn wards feature prominently for long-term empties. New Bilton also accounts for the highest number of empty properties as a result of repossessions in the Borough (29.4 per cent). Leam Valley has the highest numbers of uninhabitable empty properties, whereby 38.9 per cent of its total empty dwellings are uninhabitable. Avon and Swift, Caldecott and Benn wards are the only two wards to attribute bankruptcy as a cause of long-term empty properties.

6.3 Geographical Priority Areas to tackle the Problem of Empty Property

The Private Sector Housing Strategy identifies New Bilton and Newbold wards as priority areas for targeted intervention over the next five years. The two urban wards that the strategy identifies to create desirable neighbourhoods and choice accommodation also have significant wider regeneration needs. These needs emerge predominantly as a result of concentrations of low demand, low priced and poor condition housing found in these areas, which attracts a high percentage of privately rented accommodation, low income households and empty properties which blight the local neighbourhoods. The Empty Property Strategy will also prioritise Caldecott Ward for bringing long-term empty properties back into use and Leam Valley for assistance with dealing with uninhabitable empty properties.

Within the targeted priority wards of New Bilton and Newbold, the sustainability of micro housing markets appears to be fragile within certain neighbourhoods. House prices are being driven by the 'buy to let' market and the availability of finance from financial institutions to facilitate this sector of housing market investment. The recent increase in popularity of the buy-to-let market is predominant within all the areas of low house prices throughout the borough. The danger is, that with this increased opportunity for buy-to-let housing, long-term local resident owner-occupiers will sell up and move away, resulting in enhanced anti-social behaviour, crime associated with empty properties, and other factors which lead to the breakdown of a sense of community pride.

If this situation is not addressed, it could contribute to an even more transient population that have no vested interest in their communities or neighbourhoods. If left without further private sector intervention and regeneration activity, we may witness a downward spiral in these markets that could significantly undermine the efforts that have been made, so far, to achieve improvements.

7.0 Links to Wider Neighbourhood Regeneration

Empty properties are a symptom of decline and deprivation, dealing with them in isolation will not be sufficient to overcome the fortunes of the areas where they are most prevalent. In order to create demand for property across all tenure and ownership, and rebuild sustainable communities, the following wider issues need to be addressed in partnership through the emerging LSP Regeneration Strategy and the Private Sector Housing and Empty Property Strategies:

- Improving and then sustaining the quality of life in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, whereby success will be measured through a reduction in the factors of multiple deprivation that contribute to or intensify neighbourhood decline and loss of pride in the community.
- Developing and embedding new tools to control and, where possible, remove the underlying causes of persistent, repetitive and stubborn social and environmental problems that create neighbourhood blight and ensuring that regeneration schemes emerging across the borough are built on sustainable local foundations with resident involvement.

The emerging Rugby LSP Regeneration Strategy will develop area plans that highlight the needs of priority neighbourhoods throughout the borough. The work carried out by the Neighbourhood Renewal Team, Housing colleagues and the other contributory departments will include tackling environmental problems that arise through properties being left empty for long periods and which, in some cases, are bordering on dereliction. Intensive neighbourhood management will be key to the success of the Empty Property Strategy and where there is a strong overlap with the emerging LSP Regeneration Strategy priority areas, there will be opportunities for a joined up approach to address the wider issues identified with statutory partners.

8.0 Implementation and Delivery of the Empty Property Strategy

Both the Empty Property and Private Sector Housing Strategy will be implemented through the action plan attached to this document and will be reviewed annually to take account of any change to policy, nationally, regionally and locally.

Delivery of the strategy will require partnership working both internally and externally to meet the outcomes of the current action plan. The first year of the strategy will see the launch of several initiatives that will drive new actions from April 2011.

8.1 Empty Property Steering Group

To undertake successfully the task of rekindling the micro housing markets within the affected neighbourhoods with low house prices, RBC needs to have a concerted and corporate approach to resolving the inequalities of these areas.

To this end, an Empty Property Steering Group will be formed and attended by senior officers who have a corporate interest in ensuring the success of the strategy. This group will report to the 'Sustainable Communities' Portfolio Holder to ensure that their recommendations are taken on board and integrated within the Corporate Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy.

The Terms of Reference for the Steering Group will be:

- To co-ordinate and represent the corporate views of RBC on issues concerning the Empty Property Strategy.
- To draw upon the co-operation of all relevant agencies in order to deliver the Empty Property Strategy borough-wide.
- To consider the formulation of the targets that are to be set regarding empty properties for inclusion within the Empty Property Strategy and Corporate Plan and, to monitor progress on achieving these targets.
- To review performance against agreed targets within the various management areas and seek to identify and agree appropriate action to address under-performance.
- To ensure that the Empty Property Strategy is firmly embedded within the corporate priorities of 'narrowing the gap' and creating sustainable communities, and that this is reflected within any existing or forthcoming area based initiatives.
- To develop joint cross-departmental and divisional solutions to tackle the issues surrounding empty properties and areas of low house prices within the borough.
- To identify best practice in addressing the problems/issues surrounding empty properties and to ensure the 'roll-out' of any good practice throughout the Borough.
- To facilitate the formation of partnerships in order to deal with the issues of empty property and their regeneration, disposal or demolition.
- To consider the community safety issues surrounding empty properties, having regard for the requirement within Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder act 1998 and the impact that empty properties have upon the local communities - particularly within the targeted areas of low house prices.

8.1.1 Empty Property Forums

Creating 'local ownership' of the strategy will be achieved through the establishment of Empty Property Forums within the targeted areas of decline. A co-ordinated, multi agency / stakeholder and community partnership approach will be essential in addressing the problems associated with empty property. To facilitate this, an Empty Property Forum will be established which will aim to successfully draw together all the various 'stakeholders' within the strategy's identified target areas in order to ascertain the problems that are being experienced across all tenures and ownership. Notwithstanding this, these forums will also be utilised as a 'sounding board' and a 'mechanism' by which to gain agreement for the many proposals which have been put forward in formulating an all encompassing strategy that addresses the issues of empty property in a holistic manner.

Participants of the Empty Property Forum will include:

- Neighbourhood Renewal Team Leader
- Area Regeneration Officer
- Empty Property Officer
- Community Development Worker (for the specific target area)
- Housing Services
- Environmental Services
- Economic Development Department
- Registered Social Landlords
- Estate / Lettings Agents
- Private Sector Landlords
- Developers
- Elected Ward Members (for the specific target area) & MP
- Community Leaders / constituted Community and Voluntary Groups
- Warwickshire Police
- Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Community Safety Partnership
- Residents' representatives

8.1.2 The involvement and support of Elected Ward Members and MP

The influence of Elected Ward Members and the M.P is invaluable in changing attitudes towards the wider impact of long-term empty properties and in promoting the objectives of the Empty Property Strategy. They have been instrumental in the lobbying of Central Government to effect change by legislation e.g. the licensing of HMO's on a mandatory basis and enabling local authorities to have discretionary powers regarding selective licensing of the private rented sector within districts that are affected by low house prices and/or anti social behaviour. Locally their support for this strategy as a priority will assist in ensuring the necessary resources and efforts are focused on this work.

8.1.3 Linked initiatives with Residential Social Landlords operating within Target Areas

It is imperative that the Housing Associations that operate within Rugby 'signup' to the empty property strategy to demonstrate that they agree to address, with due urgency, any problems that are identified as a consequence of the complaint referrals that Rugby Borough Council receives, or any issues that are identified by 'on the ground' operational staff monitoring their empty property within the target areas.

8.1.4 Links with other Local Authorities and National Bodies

The sharing of information and ideas through the West Midlands Empty Property Forum and the National Association of Empty Property Practitioners (NAEPP) regarding the problems associated with empty property, is beneficial to the country as a whole and will undoubtedly assist the Government in updating its nation-wide Empty Homes Strategy.

It is essential that RBC be kept informed and updated regarding the development of any successful empty property initiatives that are put into effect by other Local Authorities and National Bodies. To this end, RBC is more than prepared to continue its associations with any of the above forums in order to share the experience and success stories that we have had in devising and implementing the 2010 to 2015 Empty Property Strategy for Rugby.

8.2 Identifying, Recording and Tackling Empty Properties

8.2.1 Empty Property Intelligence

A comprehensive database will be established and developed in order to ensure that accurate information is held regarding empty properties within the targeted areas and throughout the rest of the borough. The database will assist the targeting of resources in order to regenerate housing stock that is in poor condition, as well as aiding the forecasting of housing needs within the target areas. Furthermore, it will assist in the formulation and targeting of strategies which are designed to resolve some of the contributory causes of empty property eg. vandalism, crime and rubbish dumping etc. The database will also identify instances where a property has been empty for over 6 months and prompt a contact to be made with the owner / agent so that an offer of assistance can be made to facilitate getting the property back into use more quickly.

8.2.2(a) Tackling private sector empty properties

The Empty Property Officer will be responsible for the co-ordination of work and monitoring performance against the strategy's targets in each of its identified priority area. Work undertaken as part of the strategy's remit to tackle empty properties in the private sector includes:

- Pro-active identification of empty properties and their associated problems via the utilization of 'on the ground surveys' within the target areas and data obtained from council tax records and the Environmental Services Team's empty property enforcement database.
- Acting upon referrals from a range of agencies, including the police, fire service and borough residents, regarding empty privately owned properties that are open to unauthorised access and providing a rapid response to securing these dwellings, thereby reducing the risk of arson and other criminal activities.
- Pro-active use of information databases to prompt making contact with owners of long-term empty properties in order to offer advice and assistance to make their properties inhabitable again.

- Taking the appropriate proactive or reactive enforcement approach in dealing with long-term problematic empty properties, i.e. Enforced Sale Procedure, Compulsory Purchase Orders, Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Section 215 notices and actions around refuse and insecure empty properties.
- Coordinating enforcement work with that of the other enforcement officers within department and borough services in order to intensify the number of informal and formal actions taken against owners of empty properties to encourage renovation and re-occupation.
- Promoting of the Rugby Landlord Accreditation Scheme for the private rented sector, offering support to empty property owners to become accredited landlords.
- Arranging cost effective advertising of empty properties - for 'accredited landlords via 'Choice Based Letting'.
- Setting up an 'Investors in Rugby' register to match potential property investors with owners of long-term empty property in the Borough.
- Utilising various delivery vehicles such as promotional leaflets and the media, especially with regard to successful enforcement action and for establishing reporting mechanisms for residents to contact us with their concerns regarding empty properties.
- Evaluating the impact of long-term empty properties on communities and neighbourhoods in identified priority areas.
- Marketing best practice both within the community and within wider local authority and partnership networks.

8.2.2(b) Promotion of the Strategy to long-term Empty Property Owners

Owners of long-term empty properties are contacted by the council's Revenues Department Council Tax Officers as a matter of course and this will be utilised as an opportunity to promote the empty property strategy on a borough-wide basis. Furthermore, it is essential to maintain the established points of contact in order to deliver advice and solutions to the owners of long term empty property who make contact as a result of the correspondence initiated by the Council Tax office, as this will facilitate returning empty property back into use outside of the intensively managed target areas.

8.2.3 Tackling empty properties within the social housing sector

In February 2010 RBC had 3,926 housing units. On 31 March 2010 RBC Housing Services achieved the deadline set by Central Government in the Housing Green Paper (2000) for all social housing to meet the decent homes standard with regards to its own stock.

The council has already done a lot of good work in terms of its own empty properties; voids are weekly around 0.5 per cent of total stock at any one time (January to March 2010 Council Housing Records). Nevertheless, the council is starting to develop asset management strategies as part of their business plans and building cost models to outline future plans for all their stock, including stock within the mixed tenure areas. The council's capital programme outlines plans for maintaining stock to the decent homes standard and plans for sustaining or disposing of stock through right to buy, re-building or sale.

8.3 The use of Incentives and Disincentives to Tackle Empty Property

There are a range of initiatives that the wider RBC Housing and Private Sector Housing Strategies have developed which the Empty Property Strategy aims to use to incentivise or disincentivise the owners of empty properties to bring them back into use, and unlock the potential of these wasted resources.

8.3.1 Rugby Landlords' Accreditation Scheme

The purpose of the Rugby Landlords' Accreditation Scheme (RLAS) is to support responsible renting; ensure that landlords and tenants are aware of their entitlements and respective responsibility towards one another, and to promote good standards of accommodation and management.

The scheme encourages a more professional private rented sector within the Borough that is better able to fulfil the important niche of flexible and varied income accommodation options in the Rugby housing market. The Private Sector Housing Strategy and delivery of its action plan will offer support to empty property owners to become accredited landlords and promote the wider benefits of the RLAS, (including free advertising of property and free, comprehensive training for Landlords on the standards required of them).

8.3.2. Changes to council tax discounts on empty properties

In the 2003 Local Government Act, local authorities were given the discretionary right to abolish the long standing discount on council tax for an empty property, as it was argued that to continue with the discount would be a perverse incentive to encourage owners to keep property empty. We will be working with the Council Tax Dept to remove or reduce the current discount, as this will prove to be a powerful leverage tool within the Empty Property Strategy to encourage owners to make their properties available for occupation and contribute to both a reduction in homelessness and enhance the regeneration process within some of the worst areas of the borough.

8.3.3 Free advertising for long term empty property

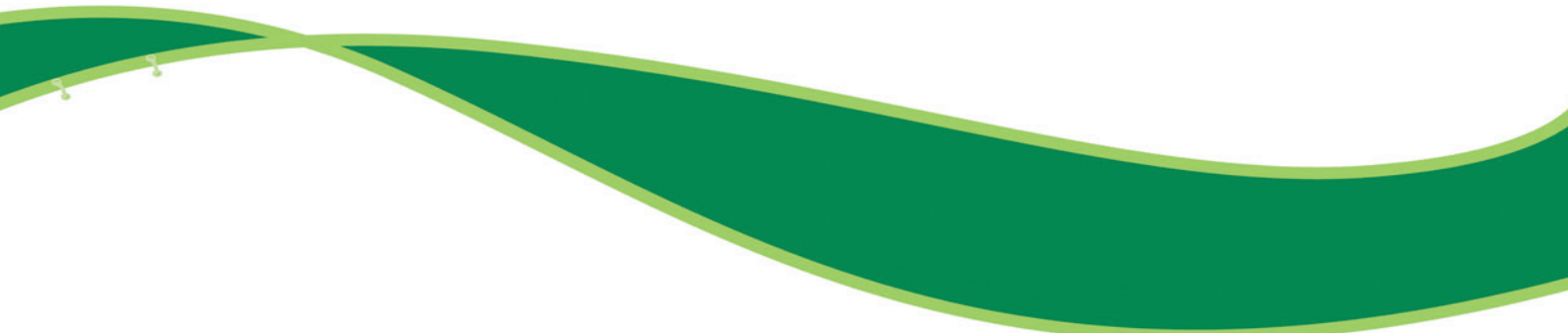
The strategy hopes to reduce the impact of empty properties within areas of already low house prices by offering free advertising to owners or agents of long term empty homes. This initiative will be implemented via the utilisation of for sale / rent notice boards located within community venues that are available within the targeted areas of low house prices.

8.3.4 The Rugby Homes - Choice Based Letting (CBL) Scheme

This scheme was originally set up by RBC and other Southern Staffordshire and Northern Warwickshire Local Authorities to provide prospective new customers with choice in the allocation of social housing. The scheme was established in order to ensure consistency and to help address the increased demand for housing. The initiative was devised to help address the issues of imbalance and to prevent concentrations of disadvantaged groups.

Since the scheme started in Rugby in April 2010 in the social housing sector, as a result of demand outstripping supply of social housing in the borough, it has been considered appropriate to include 'accredited' private landlords within the CBL service in support of a truly holistic approach to housing provision throughout Rugby.

There will be an opportunity for accredited landlords to advertise their properties free of charge to potential customers on the CBL scheme once it has embedded in the authority, (2011/12). This



will give the private rented sector the opportunity to be able to advertise on a weekly basis via the weekly-published flyer available in the council Town Hall and Library. It is hoped that owners of long-term empty properties within priority areas will also have the opportunity to advertise in the scheme in the near future.

8.3.5 The Investors in Rugby initiative

The Investors in Rugby Register is an initiative devised by Rugby Borough Council to match private landlords and developers seeking to purchase empty properties in suitable locations. The initiative is available to landlords and developers, approved or 'accredited' under the Rugby Landlords' Accreditation Scheme.

The initiative will consist of a register of selected investors who have expressed an interest in purchasing additional properties within Rugby into their portfolio. They will be asked to declare which wards within the Borough they are interested in investing in and the details will then be put onto the Investors in Rugby database. Owners of long-term empty properties will subsequently be contacted throughout the targeted areas and issued with an area specific schedule of the appropriate investors for them to consider contacting and negotiating the sale of their property with.

This initiative will prove to be an essential element to the council's Empty Property Strategy and it is hoped will result in many empty properties returning back into use.

8.4 The use of Statutory Enforcement Action

This will be determined by Environmental Services in line with their enforcement policy and the guidance of RBC legal Team.

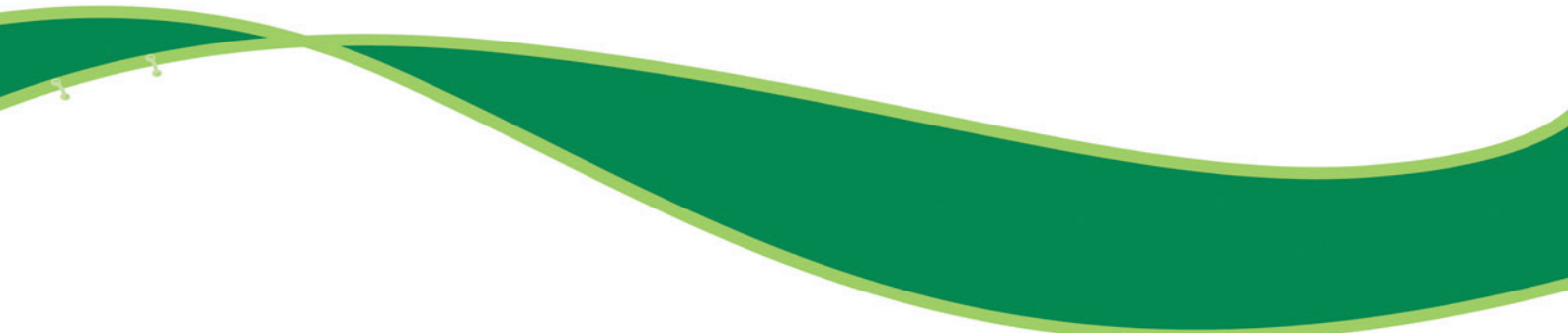
8.4.1 Enforcement Options for the Local Authority

The Neighbourhood Renewal Team, Environmental Services and the Planning Department have certain powers to deal with issues that are detrimental to property / locality. The ethos of 'joined up thinking' and a co-ordinated approach to enforcement action against long-term void and problematical properties is essential to the success of the Empty Property Strategy.

The Local Authority has a number of options with regard to enforcement actions that it can adopt in cases where persuasion, or the use of incentives have proved to be unsuccessful in dealing with the owners of empty properties.

Enforcement options range from securing open empty property against unauthorised access under Section 29 Local Government Act 1982; powers under Section 80 Environmental Protection Act 1990, Section 59 Building Act 1984 and Section 4 Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 which can be utilised in dealing with problems of statutory nuisance, building defects, rodent problems and refuse accumulations. Where property is deemed to be uninhabitable and not being capable of repair, a Closing Order or Demolition Order action can be taken. Building Control can utilise Section 79 Building Act 1984, which requires the owner to reinstate the property or demolish within 56 days.

Compulsory Purchase Orders are a useful device for Local Authorities, however, this type of action tends to shift the 'burden of responsibility' to the Council to resolve the under used property. Therefore, an alternative and quicker option is to pursue Enforced Sale Orders in cases where owners are reluctant to address the problems that their empty property is causing



the neighbourhood. The enforced sale procedure is a power given under the Law of Property Act 1925 (s103) without the need to go through the complicated procedure associated with Compulsory Purchase Orders. It can be used in conjunction with Works in Default where notices have been served on owners insisting the works be done. If these are ignored, then the local authority has the right to carry out the work in default of the notice served. However, Enforced Sale can only be utilised to recover this `debt' where there is an outstanding `priority' debt charge in favour of the Local Authority.

Planning and Environmental Health Officers, under their delegated powers, can deal with the condition of land / property that adversely affects the amenity of an area under Section 215 of the 1990 Town & Country Planning Act. This particular Act enables the Local Authority to serve a notice on a landowner or occupier, requiring that person to take such steps as are specified in the notice to remedy the condition of the land. However, it should be noted that the definition of "land" includes buildings and therefore it is a useful addition to the arsenal of legislation that can be utilised to address the problems caused by empty property. The notice requires the remedial action to be carried out within a specified time period, usually not less than 28 days and, if the notice is not complied with, the person is liable to prosecution in the Magistrates Court under Section 216 of the Act.

8.4.2 Enforcement Powers Granted within the Housing Act 2004

The Housing Act 2004 was implemented on 6 April 2006 and introduced a range of new enforcement options to allow Authorities to deal with hazards together with the ability to charge for its costs in taking enforcement action where this is appropriate. Many of the enforcement actions allow an Authority to undertake works if the enforcement notice is not complied with and to take action to recover its costs in so doing.

8.4.2(a) The Housing Health and Safety Rating System

The Housing Act 2004 introduced a new risk based system to assess the suitability of housing called the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). This replaced the old fitness standard, which had been the method of assessing housing for approximately 80 years (although this was subject to some amendment over that time).

HHSRS is based upon risk assessment against 29 defined hazards that may be found in a property. Housing practitioners are required to assess the likelihood of a hazard causing harm over a 12-month period and the health outcomes, should such an incident take place. Regard must be taken as to whether there are any vulnerable groups that may be affected by a hazard however, the methodology allows for a property to be rated whether it is occupied or not. The assessment leads to a score for a particular hazard and the score is then put into a series of bands ranging from A-J. Bands A-C are termed Category 1 hazards whilst bands D-J are termed Category 2 hazards. A Local Authority is under a duty to deal with any Category 1 hazards, whilst it also has the power to deal with Category 2 hazards. For example, extensive dampness in a bedroom increases the risk of exposure leading to illness (Category 1 hazard), which is a far greater risk to health than dampness found in a bathroom (Category 2 hazard).

Whilst predominantly applicable to occupied houses in order to protect the health and safety of residents, the HHSRS allows vacant properties to be assessed as to their impact upon health and safety and places a duty on Local Authorities to take action where Category 1 hazards exist.

8.4.2(b) Empty Dwelling Management Orders

The Housing Act 2004 introduced two types of management order in relation to empty dwellings – “interim EDMO’s” and “final EDMO’s”. The purpose of an interim EDMO is to enable a Local Authority to take steps to secure occupation of an empty dwelling with the consent of the owner.

A final EDMO is made in succession to an interim EDMO (or a previous final EDMO) for the purpose of securing that a dwelling becomes and remains occupied, whether or not the owner of the dwelling consents.

An interim EDMO does not have to be followed by a final EDMO. However, a final EDMO can only be made following an interim EDMO or a previous final EDMO. Under Section 134 of the Act, a Residential Property Tribunal may authorise a Local Housing Authority to make an interim EDMO in respect of a dwelling that is unoccupied (except where the relevant proprietor is a public body) if:

- It is satisfied that the dwelling has been wholly unoccupied for at least 6 months (or such longer period as may be prescribed);
- There is no reasonable prospect of it becoming occupied in the near future;
- That, if an interim EDMO is made, there is a reasonable prospect that it will become occupied;
- That the authority have complied with section 133(3) of the Act;
- That any prescribed requirements have been complied with; and
- That it is not satisfied that the case falls within a prescribed exception.

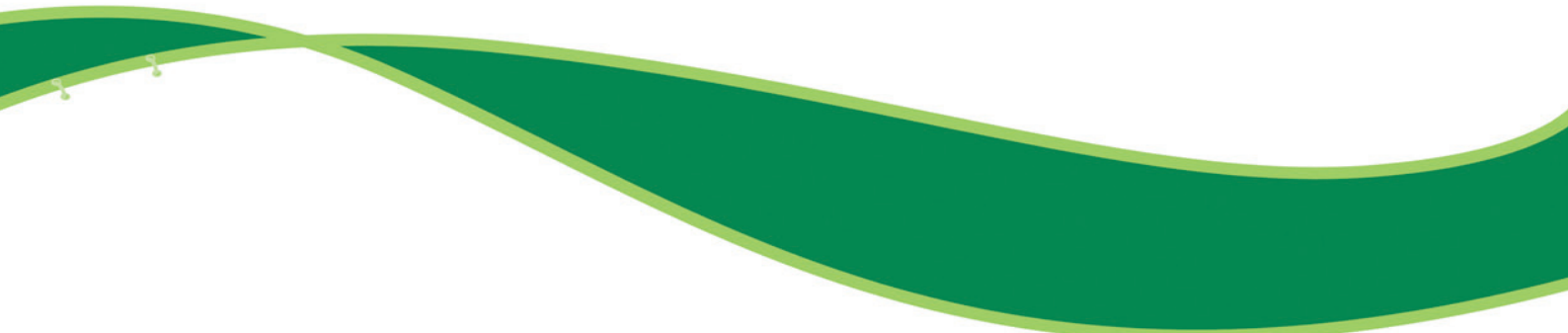
Under section 134(5) of the Act the “appropriate national authority” may by order prescribe the exceptions that the case may fall into, prescribe a longer time period that the dwelling must be unoccupied, and prescribe any other requirements that need to be complied with before an order may be authorised.

The Secretary of State is empowered to make such an order in relation to England. The Housing (Empty Dwelling Management Orders) (Prescribed Exceptions and Requirements) (England) Order 2006 (SI 2006/367) has been made under these powers. Once an interim EDMO is approved by a Residential Property Tribunal, it will usually last for a maximum period of 12 months.

A local authority cannot arrange occupation of the dwelling without obtaining written consent from the owner. Where such consent cannot be obtained, the interim EDMO may be revoked and replaced with a final EDMO made by the LHA. The making of a final EDMO does not require the approval of a Residential Property Tribunal. Once in force, it lasts for a fixed period of no more than seven years. The LHA does not require consent of the owner to grant occupation rights to the dwelling during the existence of a final EDMO.

EDMOs are designed to operate along similar principles to private sector leasing arrangements. However, it is not the Government’s intention that EDMOs should replace such arrangements. Indeed, it is expected that the availability of the power to make EDMOs will assist in procuring additional dwellings for leasing.

Leasing arrangements are important in that they provide many of the necessary administrative structures that a LHA would have to establish in order to manage a dwelling under an EDMO. It is therefore recommended that prior to considering using EDMOs, LHAs set up leasing arrangements. LHAs may seek partner arrangements with Registered Social Landlords or private



sector managing agents to facilitate leasing schemes. These same arrangements may be used in the management of dwellings under EDMOs.

Rugby Borough Council will consider the aforementioned legislation within the context of its existing enforcement powers and judge whether to adopt this option, especially within areas of high housing demand and housing shortage and in support of the Homelessness strategy.

8.4.2(c) Selective Licensing of the Private Rented Sector

The Government has given new discretionary powers to local authorities enabling them to license private landlords in all, or part of, their area. These new licensing powers are intended to add to the range of tools available to local authorities in tackling the problems of areas that suffer from antisocial behaviour and/or low housing demand. It is not a panacea but it should encourage landlords to take part in comprehensive local strategies to stabilise neighbourhoods that are in decline.

The Government's primary aims are to ensure that all landlords meet minimum management standards and participate with others in dealing with anti-social tenants; and exclude unscrupulous landlords who will not meet minimum standards (or appoint suitable agents to achieve this on their behalf), or seek to let their properties.

Local authorities can now seek the Secretary of State's consent for such schemes. In the context of empty properties this would normally be granted only for areas of low housing demand facing severe problems, though the Secretary of State would be prepared to consider a case for licensing in special circumstances outside such areas, if compelling reasons were advanced, i.e. neighbourhoods that suffer from an abundant number of instances of severe anti-social behaviour.

The ability to license private landlords is a welcome addition to the local authorities' powers to control the micro housing markets within their remit and, if utilised effectively, it could have a significantly beneficial impact upon all residents, landlords and agencies within the areas in which it is introduced. RBC will be preparing business cases for possible submission to the Secretary of State to introduce Selective Licensing within targeted areas.

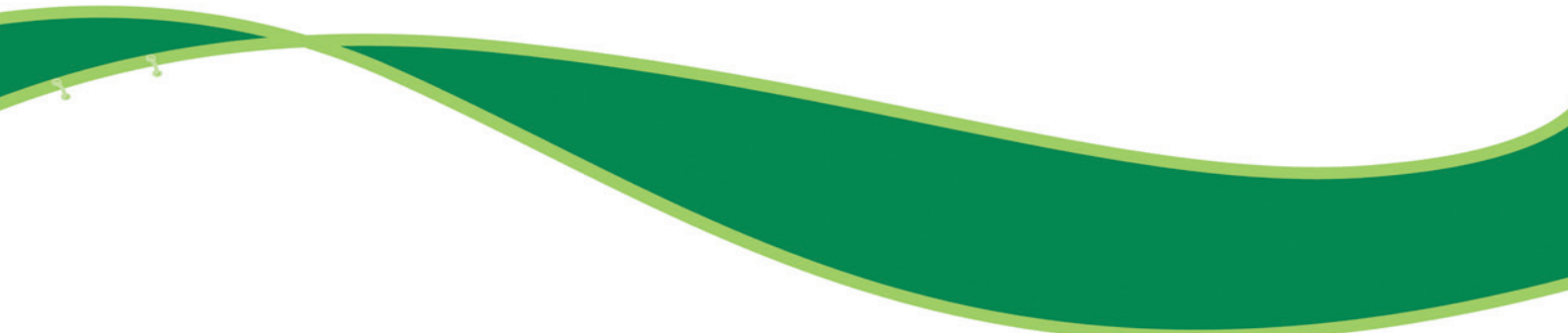
However, there are possible risks that should be considered. The anticipated long term benefits of implementing selective licensing may be adversely affected by the short term increase in empty properties that are generated by the landlords disposing of their investments prior to the licensing regime being introduced or, thereafter. There may also be reservations amongst financial institutions to lend money for investment purposes in such areas if viewed negatively. Having said this, the possible disadvantages of this 'short term pain' should be far outweighed by the 'long term gain', in that, the targeted areas for selective licensing should become more sustainable and balanced micro housing markets.

8.5 Community safety

8.5.1 Wider Community Safety Implications of Empty Property

A profusion of empty properties signal the decline of an area and can help to trigger an increase in criminal damage. Empty properties can be used by rough sleepers, squatters and drug users, which can lead to the accumulation of drugs detritus within the area.

The 'on the ground approach' to identifying empty property and any associated problems will play a vital and beneficial role in ensuring the safety of the general public. It will aim to facilitate the



early identification of rubbish accumulations which have historically been a problem within certain districts of the Borough and, the adoption of this strategy will also play an indispensable role in identifying potentially dangerous properties within the target areas and thereby lead to a much quicker response to the securing of empty properties that are open to unauthorised access.

8.5.2 Risks with Empty Properties from Arson Attacks

Empty Properties present a serious community safety issue that could potentially result in fatalities, particularly where the properties were built pre 1919. These are mainly terraced properties, which may not have a fire break wall within the roof void, and this could potentially facilitate fire spread between properties and in some instances entire terraces.

Furthermore, this type of construction presents the occupants with the serious problem of being vulnerable to burglaries because of the inter-linking roof void, which is accessible via the loft hatches within each adjoining household. Residents are therefore particularly vulnerable if a neighbouring property is empty and open to access.

At this time RBC has no records of the numbers of terraced properties in the borough that do not have fire break walls, as there is currently no legal requirement for owner-occupiers to notify us. This strategy hopes to work in partnership with the local Fire Service to raise awareness of the risks associated with the absence of terraced fire break walls.

Under normal circumstances, any empty private property that is open to access would have to have a notice served upon the owner under section 29 – Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976. The Local Authority cannot make arrangements to secure such property until the required 48 hours notice period has elapsed. However, the legislation does make provision for local authorities to act more expediently where it would be prejudicial to health not to do so. As most arson cases occur within 24 hours of an empty property becoming insecure, a prompt response is required in high-risk areas.

8.5.3 Raising the Awareness of Young Children to the Potential Dangers of Empty Properties

Forging links with local schools, community centres and youth groups within the targeted areas will facilitate the involvement of young people and children in the regeneration process of their neighbourhood. This is essential as it will engender a sense of 'ownership' and 'pride' by the children / youths. This exercise also facilitates getting the message across to the children regarding the problems and dangers associated with empty properties.

The issues around empty properties will be used as a 'vehicle' for various projects whereby children will gain a considerable insight into housing and environmental topics. Their 'outputs' will be utilised to form the basis of local exhibitions within the community and a 'community book' on the issues and dangers of empty property.

9.0 Issues being Debated Nationally, which if Implemented, may Impact on the Strategy before its Next Review in 2011

Central Government is continually looking at its strategy to address the issues regarding empty properties and to encourage a better use of the existing housing supply throughout the regions, thereby eradicating the wasted housing resource that long-term empty properties represent. The Government is giving consideration to the various proposals that are being put forward by focus groups and organisations.

9.1.1 Redfield Sites

It is generally accepted that the sustainable communities plan makes the case for new housing supply to meet the needs of a changing population and that current levels of housing need and demand cannot be met solely from within the existing housing stock. Building new houses is both essential and desirable; however, new housing comes at a cost.

Even the greenest housing has an impact on the environment: generation of carbon dioxide, production of pollutants and loss of habitats for wildlife. There can also be costs to existing communities with the loss of amenity space, increased traffic congestion and adverse impacts on the viability of existing towns; inevitably there is a high demand for new houses that are built, but this can be at the expense of existing housing which can see a reduction in demand.

A sustainable approach to meeting housing need must maximize the potential of the existing housing stock and encourage the reuse of empty buildings and a sequential approach to providing new housing can help achieve this.

Firstly, is it possible to provide housing from existing buildings? Returning empty homes to use, conversions of redundant commercial buildings, and more efficient use of existing buildings?

Secondly, is there potential for using previously developed land? And thirdly, only after the first two sources have been exhausted, consider the potential for greenfield site development.

There is already a target for the second of these options; the 60 per cent brownfield site target, but most housing strategists believe that the brownfield site definition is too broad and doesn't encourage the innovation and creativity needed to make the best use of existing buildings.

Therefore, there should be a further target to encourage creating housing supply from existing buildings i.e. a 'redfield' site target to emphasise the sequence of redevelopment / new development i.e. redfield, brownfield, greenfield.

9.1.2 VAT

One of the problems that exacerbates the reutilisation of redfield sites is that decisions are currently made within a skewed tax environment that favours new build housing over refurbishment.

While new build housing continues to attract a zero rate of VAT, refurbishment of most empty properties attracts the full 17.5 per cent rate of VAT. It has been long argued (by the Empty Homes Agency and Empty Property Practitioners) that there should be a level playing field that would remove this barrier to redevelopment of existing empty properties.

The Government has made some welcome changes to the VAT legislation in recent years in order to give an incentive to bringing empty properties back into use. They reduced VAT on refurbishment costs on homes that have been empty for between three and 10 years to 5 per cent and for homes empty for more than 10 years the VAT is zero-rated.

However, it is currently argued that this hasn't gone far enough as the refurbishment of the majority of empty properties still incurs 17.5 per cent VAT. It should be noted that 87 per cent of all empty properties in England have been empty for less than three years and, only 3 per cent have been empty for more than 10 years that could benefit from the zero rate VAT.

9.1.3 Capital Gains Tax

Nothing helps getting empty properties back into use like the change of ownership. However, property transactions mean potential buyers and sellers incur taxes, which act as a disincentive. A recent MORI poll (Market and Opinion Research International Ltd), showed 77 per cent of owners of empty properties did not want to sell their property, despite many of them having no other alternative plans.

Owners of empty properties are liable for Capital Gains Tax (CGT) on the increase in value of their asset from the initial purchase price if the property they sell is not their primary residence. This is for the simple reason that an owner can't claim the "main home" exemption.

With many empty property owners having purchased their property many years ago, the capital gain and therefore the tax, amounts to a sizeable sum. Illogical as it may seem, this acts as a strong disincentive to selling the property; owners often prefer to sit on an asset regardless of whether they can realise its value. The continuance of CGT on long-term empty property sales could create a perverse incentive for owners to keep property empty in order not to incur these costs.

9.1.4 Stamp Duty

Arguably, the most efficient developers of individual empty houses are prospective homeowners. With 90 per cent of the population aspiring to home ownership, there is potential for many people to resolve their own housing needs.

Redeveloping empty properties is difficult and expensive for many large developers. The diversity of the properties and their condition means they cannot realise the economies of scale that can be achieved on new-build developments. Individuals developing one property do not face these obstacles.

If prospective homeowners are to be encouraged to develop empty homes that are often run down / derelict, they need to be given the required incentive, in that, their costs need to be reduced relative to other routes into home-ownership. One way of achieving this is by removing stamp duty on long-term empty properties. This would encourage transactions of properties that would otherwise be unlikely to be sold.

9.1.5 Council Tax

The Local Government Act 2003 gave local authorities the discretionary right to abolish the long-standing discount on council tax on empty homes. However there are still two areas where The Empty Homes Agency and NAEPP believe changes could result in more empty properties being returned to use.

Firstly, they argue that the Government missed an opportunity when the recent changes were made - by not specifying that the extra revenue raised by the L.A.s should be 'ring fenced' in order to fund empty property work. The Empty Homes Agency and NAEPP are now urging them to stipulate that the additional revenue generated by these changes should be channelled into tackling empty property.

Secondly, there remains an exemption from council tax for properties that are considered uninhabitable. These are generally the worst eyesores that tend to attract vandals, fly tipping and other anti-social behaviour. Not only does the current council tax system give owners no incentive to deal with uninhabitable buildings, it arguably gives them an incentive to make their property uninhabitable so as to qualify for the exemption.

10.0 Benefits that could be gained by Adopting the Strategy

There are a number of desired outcomes which the adoption of the RBC 2010-2015 Private Sector Housing Strategy aims to achieve:

- A rise in the house prices within the priority area bringing them in line with similar house types throughout the borough.
- A more sustainable housing market within these areas.
- Improvements to the quality of life across a range of indicators that will start to attract inward investment - especially from the private sector.
- A reduction in the number of potential arson attacks on private domestic empty properties.
- Safeguarding the public investment that has been / will be expended within these priority neighbourhoods.
- Halt the spread of decline from empty properties to neighbouring housing stock and neighbourhoods.
- More stable and less transient communities within the targeted areas.
- Create more confident neighbourhoods whereby the resultant stabilisation and increase in population will boost the local economy and enhance the dynamics of the areas making them more viable and sustainable.

11.0 Consultation

Original development of the Empty Property Strategy involved wide consultation including initial discussion workshops developed by department service areas with elected members and external organisations which received cross-party agreement for the consultation proposals. Ongoing consultation has helped to identify some of the objectives, incentives, and new partnerships contained in the Private Sector Housing and Empty Property Strategy. The consultations were carried out in line with the guidelines laid out in the Warwickshire Compact agreement and have been ongoing since September 2009.

The depth and breadth of the consultation has been wide; below are some examples of the consultation that we have undertaken as part of this Private Sector Housing Strategy and Empty Property Strategy development:

We held workshops with elected members, private landlords, internal departments such as Environmental Services, Housing Benefits, Housing Services to compile a list of priorities for the Private Sector Housing Strategy and Empty Property Strategy.

We held two public consultation events in our proposed priority areas of Newbold and New Bilton with local residents in March 2010.

We held subsequent consultation events with Warwickshire County Council and the Primary Care Trust on the priorities for dealing with elderly and vulnerable groups.

We consulted with Kickstart on piloting a new energy scheme for solid wall properties within the borough and gain support for a pilot project which if successful will be rolled out across the West Midlands.

We have liaised with landlords and created a Rugby Landlords' Association and consulted on the details and criteria for the Rugby Landlords' Accreditation Scheme.

We have consulted with the Local Strategic Partnership and undertook a presentation identifying our objectives for the Private Sector Housing Strategy and how this will compliment the Regeneration Strategy as it is developed in 2010.

Through our consultation we have developed incentives for accredited landlords through the Mayday Trust and Housing Services.

Environmental Services have agreed to assist in the Private Sector Housing Strategy priorities and particularly the Empty Property Strategy assisting bringing empty properties back into use.

Briefing sessions will be held for members and key officers, as it is the council's intention to continue to consult widely over the implementation of both the Private Sector Housing and Empty Property Strategy, with another formal review taking place in June 2011.

Consultation with local residents and stakeholders have been an essential part of the Neighbourhood Renewal Team agenda and the borough council will continue to consult with a wide range of stakeholder agencies over the development and further amendment measures to assist in the delivery of the strategy in the future.

12. Review

This policy will be subject to regular monitoring and financial review and the borough council would therefore be pleased to receive views and observations on any aspect of this document.

A forum will be set up in November 2010 to review the action plan on a quarterly basis. The forum will consist of elected members, RBC officers, private landlords and residents. Anyone wishing to be involved in this forum should contact us at the address below.

You can contact the council in any of the following ways:

In writing to:
The Neighbourhood Renewal Team Leader
Rugby Borough Council
The Retreat
Newbold Road
Rugby
CV21 2LG

By e-mail: nrt@rugby.gov.uk
By telephone: (01788) 533891
By fax: (01788) 533829

