

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

21 July 2021

Council offers to suspend empty homes premium for new owners

New owners of long-term empty homes in Fenland could be given a six-month break from paying the empty property council tax premium to help them bring the property back into use.

Under Government legislation, councils are permitted to double the rate of council tax on homes which have been empty for two or more years – a premium of up to 100 per cent of council tax – to encourage owners to get properties occupied as soon as possible so they are not left empty and having a detrimental impact on communities.

The 100 per cent premium applies in Fenland, where 87 empty homes were transformed and brought back into use in 2020/21.

However, through the work of Fenland District Council's Empty Homes Officer over the past year, it has been recognised that the policy is particularly onerous on owners of listed buildings, inherited buildings and those genuinely renovating or trying to sell. In some circumstances, the increased rates have caused financial difficulties and removed valuable funds from renovation projects.

Now the Council is offering to suspend the premium charge for new owners of long-term empty properties, to incentivise those who are actively taking steps to bring properties back into use (the normal council tax rate will still be payable).

To qualify, owners must apply for the suspension within six months of purchasing the property, with the intention of renovating to sell, rent or inhabit the property, and complete the project within six months.

If projects are not completed within six months, the premium charge will be reinstated and backdated to the date the property was purchased, or, in exceptional circumstances, an extension may be granted.

Cllr Samantha Hoy, the Council's Portfolio Holder for Housing, said: "We are committed to reducing the number of empty properties in Fenland, and tackling the issues associated with long-term empty homes. When empty homes are left unmanaged, they become subject to vandalism, social issues and degradation, and with record demands for housing and growing social housing waiting lists, they are a waste of a scarce resource."

For more information, and for details of the Council's Empty Homes service, visit: www.fenland.gov.uk/emptyhomes. Alternatively, contact the Council's Empty Homes Officer, Lorraine Moore, on lmoore@fenland.gov.uk or 01354 654321.

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For more information contact Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226