

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

20 November 2023

Council working to bring empty homes back into residential use

As the number of long-term empty homes increases nationally, work is continuing apace in Fenland to help address the issue.

With housing in short supply, Fenland District Council has been taking action in a number of ways to help bring unused properties back into residential use.

The Council's dedicated Empty Homes Officer, with support from the Private Sector Housing team, has assisted in bringing over 280 properties back into use in Fenland since April 2020.

A new report published by the Local Government Association and the Empty Homes Network this week has revealed that the number of long-term empty properties has risen nationally by nearly 10 per cent over the past five years. Data shows that more than one million properties across England in 2022 were unoccupied, an increase of nearly 60,000 homes since 2018.

Bringing empty homes back into use is a top priority for Fenland District Council, as Cllr Sam Hoy, Cabinet member for Housing, explains:

“Unfortunately, some properties are left empty for long periods of time, often getting into a state of disrepair and attracting anti-social behaviour, when they could be providing much needed accommodation to people living in Fenland.

“We’re working hard to reduce the number of empty properties in Fenland, and tackling the issues associated with them. Not only does bringing homes back into use increase housing supply, but it also improves communities and provides a better quality of life for residents and neighbours who live near empty homes.

“We know there is still more work that needs to be done and we will be continuing to work closely with owners, landlords and the local community to identify other properties where we can offer help, to provide these homes with a new lease of life.”

The Council can offer a range of advice and assistance, including free property assessments, support with applications, approvals, lettings and sale processes, and can suspend the premium Council Tax charge on newly purchased properties which have been empty for two or more years.

The Council also has a Problem Property working group; a cross-team collaboration that meets to target more difficult empty properties in the district. The team explores the best powers and enforcement routes to break the impasse that leads to properties falling into disrepair.

Examples of empty homes brought back into use this year

Property A:

- An ex-rental, three-bedroom terraced house in Wisbech had been empty for nine months before being purchased in January 2023.
- Fenland District Council's Empty Homes Officer approached the new owners to support them with the renovation of the property.
- Fully renovated in four months, improving the property's Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) from an E to a C rating.
- Brought back into use in May 2023 as a rental property.

Property B:

- The Council's Empty Homes Officer had been working with the owner of a property in Whittlesey which had been empty for 20 years, and after 18 months of negotiation they agreed to sell the property at auction.
- The officer then engaged and supported the new owners with renovating the property to get it back on the market as soon as possible.
- The property was restored and renovated with a new extension in ten months.
- Brought back into use in June 2023.

Property C:

- A property in Friday Bridge had been empty for 18 months before being purchased by a new owner.
- The Council's Empty Homes Officer supported the owner with the renovation, which took five months to complete.
- Brought back into use in May 2023 as a rental property.

More information

- If you own an empty property and would like advice and support to bring it back into use, you can contact the Council's empty homes officer Lorraine Moore on 07729 638832 or via email at: lmoore@fenland.gov.uk, or visit the Council's Empty Homes webpage at: www.fenland.gov.uk/emptyhomes
- Are you being affected by an empty property? Report it to us! Please contact Lorraine on the details above or use the Council's simple online reporting form available at: www.fenland.gov.uk/emptyhomes

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Notes to Editors

For media enquiries, please contact the Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226 or email: communications@fenland.gov.uk