



H O M I N G I N O N T H E E M P T I E S

**Wandsworth Council's strategy
for dealing with empty properties**

Wandsworth Council
Technical Services Department



HOMING IN ON THE EMPTIES

Currently the demand for accommodation in London is very high. To try and ease the pressure, Wandsworth Council is committed to reducing the number of empty properties and increasing the supply of housing to help meet the varying needs of all residents.

There is no doubt that empty properties are a wasted resource. In London it is estimated that nearly 100,000 privately owned homes are currently empty, with 4,600 of those in Wandsworth. This represents just above 4% of all of the Borough's private homes.

To increase the focus on empty properties the Council have published this leaflet; 'Homing in on the Empties'. The information in this leaflet is designed to offer help and assistance to two groups of people.

- Owners of empty properties who may benefit from an awareness of the different options available to deal with their vacant property.
- Residents of the borough who are being affected by a vacant property.

This leaflet has been published to coincide with the launch of the revised Wandsworth Empty Property Strategy and the National Week on Empty Homes between May 19th and 23rd 2003.

In the leaflet you will find advice and information on how to;

- Access different vacant property funding schemes.
- Rent your property.
- Offer a property for leasing.
- Maintain an empty property in a safe condition.
- Report an empty property.
- Organise works on vacant properties.



Wandsworth Council Grants

There are several different Council schemes where owners can receive funding for vacant property renovation. The grants may change with time and here is a summary of current schemes.

Vacant Property Grant

- The residential property needs to have been empty for over two years.
- The maximum grant is £10,000 per existing residential unit.
- Works that can be grant aided include property repairs, or new facilities. Ineligible works are those of development or improvement.
- A condition of the grant is that you offer nomination rights to the council or to a Housing association for a period of 5 years.
- For more information and the vacant property pack contact Environmental Services on 020 8871 6127.

Town Centre Improvement Scheme

This scheme aims to improve selected town centres and shopping parades in the borough by directing funding at commercial businesses.

- Funding can be by interest free loans or grants at 25% of eligible costs normally from £4,000 up to £13,000.
- The works include improvements to shop fronts, the front of buildings and security measures.
- Improvements include structural or internal works, and bringing vacant floors back into use; including separate access.
- For more information contact the Economic Development Office on 020 8871 8039.

Conservation and Enhancement Grants.

If the property falls within a conservation area you may be able to get help towards the cost of restoring important historic features. For more information contact the Conservation team on 020 8871 6645.



Renting your property

A large number of properties in Wandsworth are currently let out to tenants. Managing your own property can be difficult and time consuming but provides a valuable housing option to many people.

To assist owners, the Council has produced a landlord's guide, which consists of 10 leaflets. These leaflets cover property standards, property management and tenancy issues. The full set of guides and fact sheets are listed below;

Guide 1. Landlords tenants and the law.

Guide 2. Money Matters.

Guide 3. Finding the right tenant.

Guide 4. Property Matters

Guide 5. Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO).

Guide 6. Fitness for Human Habitation.

Fact Sheet 1. Fitness for Multiple Occupation.

Fact Sheet 2. Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regs 1998.

Fact Sheet 3. Housing (Management of HMOs) Regs 1990.

Fact Sheet 4. Powers of Local Authorities.

If you would like a copy of any of these leaflets then contact Environmental Services on 020 8871 6127.



HOMING IN ON THE EMPTYES

Offering the property for leasing

If you do not feel confident about letting the property, there are a couple of schemes that exist where the management responsibilities can be undertaken for you.

Housing Association Leasing Scheme

This is a scheme where a Housing Association takes over the day to day management of the property. Other features;

- 3 to 7 year lease arrangements made to suit the owner.
- Property returned vacant and in good order.
- Tenants are found by the housing association.
- Rent levels guaranteed.
- Inspections completed by the HA for the owner.

The Private Sector Housing Initiative

The Council manages a letting scheme. The owner must agree to allow the property to be used for over 12 months. Other elements include:

- Tenant finding service.
- Rent and deposit in advance.
- Support with housing benefit service.
- Advice on property management and standards.

For more information on these schemes please contact the Housing Advice Centre on 020 8871 6839.



Maintaining empty properties in a safe condition

Whilst the main focus of this leaflet is to help bring empty properties back into use, we recognise that sometimes there may be reasons why that cannot be achieved in the short term. In such circumstances, owners should maintain their property in a good condition to minimise nuisance to the public.

Owners should, however, be aware that the Council can take enforcement action if the properties remain empty for an extended period. The Building Control service has the legal authority to take action without first informing the owners where the property has been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that it becomes immediately dangerous.

Owners of empty properties need to inspect them regularly and undertake maintenance as properties left alone deteriorate quickly and impact on the appearance of a neighbourhood. In some cases they become unstable, a target for vandals and / or squatters, attract rubbish dumping and pest problems including rats and foxes. If this happens the council will generally take enforcement action.

Reporting an Empty Property

The council receives regular complaints about the condition of empty properties. The council then visit and make contact with the owner. There are a number of departments that can be contacted, depending on the issue;

- For pest control problems, nuisance issues, disrepair or accumulations of rubbish, contact Environmental Services on 020 8871 6127.
- If you are concerned about potentially dangerous conditions, or the poor security of the building then contact Building Control on 020 8871 7620.
- If you feel that the appearance of the building detracts from the general appearance of the neighbourhood or a building in a conservation area is being neglected, then contact the Planning Enforcement on 020 8871 8418.



HOMING IN ON THE EMPTIES

Organising Works on Vacant Properties.

Most empty properties will require works of repair or improvement before they can be reoccupied. With proper planning and preparation, these projects can be easier than you imagine. So that they proceed safely and smoothly the Council recommends:

- On larger projects or in cases where you do not feel confident employ the services of an architect or surveyor.

Contact Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors: 020 7222 7000.
Royal Institute of British Architects: 020 7580 5533.

- Take care when selecting contractors. Some contractors belong to national organisations representing the building trade. More information on these can be obtained from Environmental Services (through our contractors information sheet) or the organisations below;

Gas : Council of Registered Gas Engineers: 01256 372200

Electrical: Institute of Electrical Engineers: 020 7240 1871.

National Inspection Council for Electrical Contractors: 020 7564 2323

Federation of Master Builders: 14 St James Street, London WC1N 3DP

Before engaging a contractor check to see whether you need approval from anyone else, for example,

- Approval from your mortgage lender landlord or insurer,
- The agreement of neighbours if the works will affect them or their access,
- Approval from one or more of the following Council sections:
Planning (Permission) on 020 8871 6639
Conservation on 020 8871 6645
Building Control on 020 8871 7620.
- Check that there are no covenants on the title of your property which would affect your project.

Environmental Services have a leaflet produced by the Office of Fair Trading called 'Need a plumber or builder....?' If you would like a copy contact Environmental Services on 020 8871 6127.



HOMING IN ON THE EMPTIES

Further copies of this leaflet 'Homing in on the Empties' or advice about empty properties can be obtained from;

Environmental Services, 78 Garratt Lane, Wandsworth, SW18 4DJ.
Telephone 020 8871 6127. Minicom 020 8871 8640.
www.wandsworth.gov.uk

Also available in large print

Empty properties can be reported at:

Esd@wandsworth.gov.uk or telephone: 020 8871 6127.

London Empty Property Hotline: telephone: 0870 901 6303
(managed by the Empty Homes Agency)

English

If you have difficulty understanding this in English please contact the Wandsworth Interpreting Service at Bedford House
215 Balham High Road
SW17 7BQ
Tel: (020) 8672 1043/3649

Bengali

এই লিফলেটটি বুঝতে অসুবিধা হলে
দয়া করে যোগাযোগ করুন:
ব্যান্ডসওয়ার্থ ইন্টারপ্রিটিং সার্ভিস
Bedford House
215 Balham High Road
SW17 7BQ
ফোন: (020) 8672 1043/3649

Gujarati

જો તમને અંગ્રેજીમાં સમજાવી ન શકાય માટે
મુશ્કેલ છે, તો મહેરબાની કરી અંધ
સંપર્ચો:
બેન્ડસવર્થ ઇન્ટરપ્રિટિંગ સર્વિસ
Bedford House
215 Balham High Road
SW17 7BQ
ટેલિફોન: (020) 8672 1043/3649

Punjabi

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੈਲ ਨੂੰ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਵਿਚ ਸਮਝਣ
ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਸਹੀ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਿਲ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ
ਕਰਕੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ:
ਬੈਨਡਸਵਰਥ ਇੰਟਰਪ੍ਰਿਟਿੰਗ ਸਰਵਿਸ
Bedford House
215 Balham High Road
SW17 7BQ
ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ: (020) 8672 1043/3649

Hindi

यदि आपको इसे अंग्रेजी में समझने में
कठिनाई होती है, तो कृपया सम्पर्क करें:
बैन्डसवर्थ इन्टरप्रेटिंग सर्विस
Bedford House
215 Balham High Road
SW17 7BQ
टेलीफोन: (020) 8672 1043/3649

Urdu

اگر آپ کو اسے
انگریزی میں سمجھنے میں
مشکلات ہیں تو براہ کرم
اتصال کریں:
بندسوارث انٹرنیٹنگ سروس
Bedford House
215 Balham High Road
SW17 7BQ
ٹیلی فون: (020) 8672 1043/3649

