The Cost of Keeping it Empty

An empty home needs to be looked after in the same way as one which is lived in. An empty home costs money.

Excluding the cost of depreciation and vandalism, one official estimate suggests that an empty home costs its owner a staggering £135 a week, that’s £7020 a year.

In addition to the lost rental income which your empty home could be earning for you, you will need to insure it (if insurance is available) and pay full Council Tax (after 6 months of it being empty).

We want to work with you to bring your empty property back into use. Please contact our Housing Standards Team for an initial discussion and for free advice and support.

You should also have a look at the I own an empty property page on the Empty Homes Agency’s website at: http://emptyhomes.com/backintouse/iownanempty.html

Housing Standards Team
Telephone: (01978) 315300
Email: housing@wrexham.gov.uk
www.wrexham.gov.uk/housing

Having Building Work Done

- Budgeting - Make sure you work out a proper budget before you start refurbishing an empty home. The Empty Homes Agency suggests budgeting for a contingency sum of at least 10%, and if the property is very dilapidated, nearer 25%.
- Insurance - Building work may affect your home and contents insurance – contact your own insurance company.
- Legal Restrictions - It’s great to have imaginative plans for redeveloping an empty home, but if they won’t get planning approval or building control consent, you need to think again. Talk to our Planning Department sooner rather than later so you don’t waste time and money.
- Choosing your builder - Building work can be expensive and stressful, so it is important you choose the right builder to work for you. There are a number of websites that you can visit for advice on choosing your builder.

Chaired Institute of Building
www.ciob.org.uk/home

Federation of Master Builders including a downloadable “Plain English” contract and an Essential Guide to Home Improvement
www.fmb.org.uk

National Federation of Builders
www.builders.org.uk

Trustmark is a not for profit organisation support by the government which enables you to search online by postcode local tradesmen.
www.trustmark.org.uk
**Turn Your Empty Property Into a Home**

Empty property is bad news for everyone

- Empty properties can deteriorate quickly and attract anti-social behaviour like fly-tipping, squatters, vandalism, drug taking and arson. Neighbours have an increased fear of crime, and ugly boarded up properties blight the surrounding area and can devalue surrounding homes (by up to 18%).

It’s a worry

- You are losing sleep worrying about who is breaking in tonight.

People Need Homes

- Bringing your property back into use creates a secure home for someone who desperately needs it.

**Make Your Empty Property Work for You**

Why is Your Property Empty?

- It has fallen into disrepair and you consider it to be inhabitable?
- You cannot afford to do the works required?
- You imagine that letting the property may be difficult or complicated?
- You don’t know who to ask?
- You don’t know what to ask?

Whatever the reason, Wrexham County Borough Council can provide you with all the up to date advice and support to consider the options available to you.

**Financial Assistance**

Don’t rely on being able to get a grant, but do your research to see what is available.

- Assistance for Historic Buildings - If the home you are intending to rescue is listed, in a conservation area, or has some historical importance you may be able to apply for a grant to help rescue it. Try the Conservation Team at the Local Authority or CADW, the historic environment service of the Welsh Assembly Government.

- Energy Efficiency Grants - there are also lots of different Energy Efficiency schemes that run for limited times and operate in specific areas. You won’t be able to apply for large amounts of money but every little helps. The best place to find what’s available is to use The Energy Savings Trust’s grant finder tool.
What Power Does the Council Have?

Whenever possible we will try to improve housing standards by providing information, guidance and general support to landlords, leaseholders and owner-occupiers.

However, when your empty home is causing a nuisance and negotiations do not succeed, there are a range of powers which can be used to make sure that the property is reused.

The three main enforcement powers are:
- Enforced Sale
- Compulsory Purchase Orders
- Empty Dwelling Management Orders

Your Options

We can advise you on the various options available:

Sell It

Selling your empty property can be a highly profitable opportunity.

- Estate Agents: Most people looking to buy a property start by checking their local high street estate agents. There is no obligation to sell when getting your property valued and it is recommended you obtain three valuations for a balanced view.
- Auction: Auctions provide a quick and immediate way of selling; over 25,000 properties are sold annually by auction in the UK.
For more information visit: www.rics.org/propertyauctions

Improve It

- High street lenders can provide loans so you can improve your property and bring it back into use. This may be difficult if you have insufficient equity as loan security or if you have a poor credit rating. We may be able to help by signposting you to sympathetic lenders or, in some cases, identifying sources of grant funding.
- Mortgages: Mortgages for renovating empty properties can be hard to find. The problem is that derelict (run-down) properties aren’t worth much until they are renovated.

If you want to borrow money for both buying and renovating a property, you will be asking for more than it’s actually worth in its run down state.

Let It

Private Sector Leasing (PSL) provides a management service. Homes are let to a social tenant for an agreed length of time and a guaranteed rent is paid for the whole of the period. For further information contact our Private Sector Lease team on 01978 292928.

You could appoint a letting agent to find you a tenant and provide a management service. A percentage of the rent is usually charged and an initial letting fee. More reputable accommodation agencies are registered with one of the following:

Landlord Accreditation Wales
www.welshlandlords.org.uk

National Approved Letting Scheme
www.nalscheme.co.uk

Association of Residential Letting Agencies
www.arla.co.uk

National Association of Estate Agents
www.naea.co.uk

Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors who also have a guide about letting your property and choosing an agent. www.rics.org

You could find a tenant and become a landlord. The Council organises free Landlords Forum events providing up-to-date advice and information to owners of rented property and also have a free landlord pack available. The are also property guidelines available from the Council’s website.

The Landlord Handbook, produced by ANUK and LACORS is an essential read for all landlords and can be downloaded free at: http://www.anuk.org.uk/Information/LandlordHandbook/Landlord_trainingmanual_web.pdf
Before Letting Your Empty Home

Whichever way you choose to let your empty home, you may be required to consult and/or obtain the consent of other people such as:

- Your mortgage lender
- Your freeholder (if you want to let a leasehold flat)
- Wrexham County Borough Council’s Planning Department - Structural changes to a property, or a change in the way it is used, may require formal planning permission or constitute a change of use.

- Wrexham County Borough Council’s Housing Standards team. This team ensures that privately rented accommodation complies with the requirements of the Housing Acts and related legislation and will give advice as to whether any works are required to ensure compliance. This is particularly important for Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- The Council Tax Department.
- Your property insurance company.
- Your Tax Office or accountant.

Other Useful Contacts

- Empty Homes Agency
  www.emptyhomes.com

- Welsh Assembly Government
  www.wales.gov.uk

- Property Tax Issues
  www.property-tax-portal.co.uk

- Planning Application Issues
  www.planning-applications.co.uk

- Law on the Web
  www.lawontheweb.co.uk

- Information on Raising Finance
  www.mortgagemonitor.co.uk
  www.bbc.co.uk/homes/property/mortgagecalculator.shtml

- Landlord Information Website
  www.landlordzone.co.uk

- Health & Safety Executive
  www.hse.gov.uk

- British Standards Institution
  www.bsigroup.com

- Shelter Cymru
  www.sheltercymru.org.uk

- Wrexham County Borough Council Planning Department
  www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/planning_portal/plan_control/planning_control.htm
  01978 292017

- Wrexham County Borough Council Building Control
  www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/planning_portal/build_control/building_control.htm
  01978 292050

- Energy Saving Trust
  www.energysavingtrust.org.uk
  0800 512 012