

**North East Derbyshire District Council**

**Growth Scrutiny Committee**

**11 April 2019**

**Empty Property Update**

- **Long Term Empty Property in Clay Cross** – The empty property officer worked with the owner of this property – which had been empty for 13 years and had been causing a nuisance – to help them to sell it and become reoccupied. This was a challenging case and demonstrates the difficulty and time it takes to bring empty properties back into use. The owner lived in Spain and had limited access to a phone and internet signal, which made communication challenging. The empty property officer managed to build a good relationship with them and made them realise that the only option was to sell the property. After much deliberation and discussion, the owner agreed to put the property to auction with a reserve price that would cover their outstanding mortgage – the property sold for £8000 above the reserve price which meant that the mortgage was paid off and the owner had some money left over. The new owner moved in at the beginning of December and commenced work straight away.
- **Landlord Forums** – 3 landlord forums have been held recently which focused on Universal Credit and how this affects private landlords and Fire Safety in private rented properties. Each session attracted approx. 10 landlords and whilst we hope that this number grows, they all found the sessions useful and informative. As a result of this, the Council have developed a good working relationship with the DWP and landlords also have a point of contact if they are experiencing difficulties with Universal Credit payments. Further sessions will run every 3 months and will focus on different subjects that affect landlords. We are the only Council in the area that are running these events.
- **E.ON 'Revive'** – The Council launched this empty property programme back in January to help owners bring their empty properties back into use. E.ON have received 11 empty property referrals to date and it is expected that these will be brought back into reoccupation by the end of 2019. It is also anticipated that this number will increase as we continue to promote the scheme. The scheme is a pilot and NEDDC are the first Council in the UK that have entered into partnership with E.ON – this has drawn widespread attention from other authorities around the UK who are keen to emulate our success.
- **Mail Shot** - The Council have written out to all of the owners of long term empty properties to promote 'Revive' and also to see if there are other ways in which we can help and to understand the reasons why properties are empty. To date, 50% of owners across the District have responded to us, which is a much higher response rate than other Councils who have rates as low as 4%. This exercise has also helped to make us aware of properties that are occupied, where the owners have failed to notify Council Tax – so far this has resulted in 21 properties now being registered as occupied, which will help to reduce the overall number that we have to report on and will hopefully increase the amount the Council receives in New Homes Bonus. Initially, there were 395 long term empty properties listed on the Council Tax data,

however this number reduced to 277 when the data was checked in January – this shows that at any one time; around 120 properties are going through the process of reoccupation. To date, 12 long term empty properties have been brought back into use through intervention from the empty property officer.

- **Action Housing** – 2 further empty properties have been leased through Action Housing's Sustainable Tenancy Project, as a result of intervention from the Council. Action Housing are in talks with the owner of an empty commercial building, to convert it into 13 apartments. It is expected that work will start on this project later this year. The Council are continuing to work with Action Housing to promote their leasing schemes to owners of empty properties.
- **Annual Landlord Event** – This is currently being planned and is planned for the 24<sup>th</sup> May at the Tangent in Shirebrook. Last year over 60 Landlords attended and the event received positive feedback from both Landlords and organisations that attended. Many organisations commented on the overall quality of the event and that it was the best attended event that they had been to in 2 years – this was from an organisation that attends these events on a national level. We are keen to build on this success by making this year's event even more successful.
- **EPCs** – The empty property officer has recently passed an EPC course. The Council are exploring the option of carrying these out for owners of private and Council owned properties; at a reduced rate to generate income and to help owners identify ways in which they can make their homes more efficient.