



**For immediate release**

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**NEW HOUSING SUPPLY DOESN'T ONLY HAVE TO MEAN NEW BUILD:**

**Empty Homes charity highlights empty commercial property potential**

Creating affordable homes from empty commercial spaces can be both viable and attractive, according to case studies featured in a new research report [Affordable homes from empty commercial spaces](#) by the campaigning charity Empty Homes, funded by the Nationwide Foundation, and launched yesterday to a parliamentary audience hosted by Mark Prisk MP.

Although there are undoubtedly a number of challenges in successfully creating new housing through this route, there are also significant opportunities - not just in terms of affordable housing, but in terms of wider community benefits. These include reducing blight, improving the vibrancy of the local environment, and enabling owners to make better use of their property assets.

The research makes clear that where commercial property has a long-term viable future for its existing use, this should be maintained. The research does not suggest "poaching" property from the commercial sector to the residential sector. However, with high levels of long-term empty commercial space languishing in many areas where people are priced out of decent housing, conversion to affordable homes can make sense.

Interestingly, the research found few cases where structural issues created a major impediment to conversion to housing. More often, the challenges are around perceptions on the part of the owners of property, who may not realise its potential to be brought into housing use in an economically viable way.

The research draws on case studies which demonstrate the effectiveness and high impact of the 2011-2015 Government grant funding specifically assigned to empty homes. Even though these specific funding programmes have now ended, other routes to grant funding remain available. There is some evidence that local authorities and others have had their appetite whetted for this route to affordable housing creation as a result of the previous funding.

The case studies, including in Amber Valley, Ellesmere Port, Chesterfield, Hull, Plymouth, Bury St Edmunds, Maidstone, Lewisham, Camden and Croydon - cover a wide range of different scenarios, challenges and solutions. But all demonstrate how success was generally achieved through partnership and collaboration - typically involving local authorities, private owners, community-led housing organisations and housing associations.

The research concludes with a checklist of practical [recommendations](#) to local authorities, housing associations, large-scale commercial property owners, small-scale owners and leaseholders, lenders and town centre managers.

Commenting on the findings, report author Helen Williams of Empty Homes said:

"Our research showed that contrary to popular belief, dealing with structural issues to create suitable housing from former commercial property is not the main barrier. The bigger issue is in fact engaging owners of empty commercial property to recognise and realise the potential of their asset in ways that they often do not think exist or can easily be overlooked when the day job is running a business or in the context of a large property portfolio.

"One major target must be to raise awareness among owners that they can work with councils and other housing providers to bring commercial properties back into use in a way that supports their business goals, while enabling the work of those seeking to create homes for people priced out of decent housing in an area."

Leigh Pearce, chief executive of the Nationwide Foundation, which funded the report, added:

"To meet the demand for housing in the UK, local authorities must be encouraged to look at ways that not just empty homes, but also other empty properties can be renovated and adapted to deliver decent affordable homes. While there is a clear headline policy focus on delivering an increased supply of new build homes, it is important not to neglect giving attention to the other ways in which increased housing supply can be achieved. This research highlights how converting former commercial property can make an important contribution."

Graeme Hughes, Group Director Distribution at Nationwide, said:

"To meet the current housing challenge the UK will need to not only build more homes but also to make better use of what already exists. In response, both Nationwide and the Nationwide Foundation have highlighted the issue of empty homes and supported organisations working to bring empty properties back into use.

"Nationwide has also been considering extending this approach – looking at any surplus redundant spaces, including flats attached to our branches, where use as office space is unviable, which may be suitable for conversion to housing. We have been working with local partners to identify and complete such conversions in the last year – and we will continue to do so. Maybe other businesses could do the same?"

**For further enquiries, journalists can contact:**

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**Notes to editors**

1. Empty Homes is a national campaigning charity focused on promoting strategies for bringing empty property into use to create affordable housing. Find out more at [www.emptyhomes.com](http://www.emptyhomes.com)

2. The Nationwide Foundation is a charitable funder which aims to create decent, affordable housing for people in need. The grant of £79,950 to Empty Homes for this project is part of the strategic work the Nationwide Foundation does to support alternative affordable housing models, which can provide more homes. A key part of this work is that the benefits of these models become more widely recognised by policymakers and stakeholders.

[www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk](http://www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk) or @NationwideFdn

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