

Success story

Tackling empty buildings

This briefing tells the story of Kings Lynn Civic Society's campaign to bring empty buildings back into use.

Background

As a contribution to Civic Day, King's Lynn Civic Society wanted to highlight properties and sites throughout the town which have been empty for a number of years and consequently blight their locality. It also wanted to show how these empty buildings have the potential to provide much-needed housing.

What

A “poster demonstration” was held by “heritage guerrillas” during Civic Day to highlight the number of long-term empty buildings and sites there are in this historic town. A number of prominent positions were selected and large red posters were printed stating how long each had been empty and giving an estimate of the number of people who, potentially, could be housed there.



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Why

Ken Hill, the Society's Assistant Secretary, whose idea it was said: *“King's Lynn is short of housing and the Government says we should try to fit 4,500 more homes into the town over the next decade. Greenfield sites have been suggested for new housing on the outskirts of town, but these will lead to fewer open spaces and more traffic jams,*

“Our society wanted to use Civic Day and the poster campaign to raise the profile of the empty buildings and to suggest a solution to this problem.

“At the same time, as with many other places, there are homeless people in need of accommodation. So we made the day a joint initiative and involved the Purfleet Trust, a local homeless charity.”

Involvement

Early on Civic Day morning members of the King's Lynn Civic Society put up the posters and then went to different locations to campaign and talk to people – mainly shoppers – about the twin problems: empty buildings and sites and the homeless. The Society has calculated that 427 people could be housed from the 10 long-term vacant properties and potential housing sites it targeted.

Success

While the initial focus of the campaign was on the owners of the buildings and sites, discussions have begun with the local authority following the Civic Day activities. A 'test case' using compulsory purchase powers over one long-term building is in train and, if successful, the Society hopes that more will follow. There is also an initiative planned to try to persuade the owners of other buildings in the borough to bring them back into housing use and to develop sites.

Kings Lynn Civic Society received a Civic Day award for its campaign which was presented at Civic Voice's AGM. The award, given by Civic Voice for Innovative Campaigning '*recognises the vital work done by King's Lynn Civic Society in campaigning to get action taken on an issue of local and national importance.*'

The society was also commended in the Marsh Civic Awards which are given for 'an outstanding contribution' to the civic movement'.



Ken Hill & Alison Gifford with awards

Media coverage

Local press and media gave the campaign full coverage on the day. Since the day, the Society has been contacted by New Start website, the Empty Homes campaign, and Channel Four, which during Empty Homes Week (Dec 4) has run two programmes on the theme of empty buildings.

There are 412 long-term empty homes in the borough, one of which has been empty for 43 years. The Society has also calculated that around 150 people could be housed in unused accommodation above shops in the town centre.

Contact

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