

# **'FROM EYESORES TO ASSETS'**

## **Thanet District Council Empty Property and Derelict Land Strategy**

**July 2003**



## **FOREWORD**

Thanet has a rising number of empty and derelict properties, and vacant areas of land. These create an unsightly image for the district, to the detriment of both visitors and residents. Thanet District Council is taking a pro-active stance to tackle this issue and is now publishing its Empty Property and Derelict Land Strategy.

The strategy details the issues faced both nationally and in Thanet, and outlines proposals to address the situation. By working in partnership with a number of groups including private owners of empty properties, private developers, housing associations and a range of council departments we believe we can turn run down properties and vacant land into assets for the whole district to create homes, business and community premises.

The strategy will play an important role in Thanet's sustainability, as it obviously makes sense to re-use existing resources of land and property rather than building afresh.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 What is an Empty Property Strategy?**

1.1.1 An empty property strategy is a commitment by the local authority, indeed the local area as a whole, to work together to bring empty property back into use. The empty property strategy will have a vital role to play in the regeneration and development of Thanet. Bringing empty residential property back into use is an important part of ensuring that the people of Thanet have access to decent affordable housing that enables a good quality of life. Bringing empty commercial buildings back into use can provide extra residential dwellings, where appropriate, or provide suitable premises for new and existing businesses in the district.

### **1.2 Why have an Empty Property Strategy?**

1.2.1 Empty properties and derelict land can blight areas very quickly, resulting in social, economic and environmental costs to local neighbourhoods. The reasons for having an empty property strategy are numerous, but the main ones are:

- To encourage economic vitality – getting previously empty properties and derelict land back into productive use has a positive impact on Thanet regeneration
- To provide additional housing for those in housing need
- To discourage crime and vandalism
- To protect our green wedges by redeveloping brownfield sites, and making the most of the existing urban fabric
- To ensure community vitality and self-confidence – helping to ensure good public transport, vibrant shops and businesses, local schools and health services
- To discourage fly tipping which may attract rats and mice

- To reduce environmental enforcement costs
- To discourage local property price devaluation; neighbouring properties can be devalued by as much as 20%.

1.2.2 It is less expensive to the local community to ensure that empty property and derelict land is used than it is to leave it empty. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors has estimated that the average annual costs of keeping a property empty are in excess of £6000. This figure includes costs for council tax, insurance, repair costs (both by the owner and the local authority) and rent. In Thanet, we estimate there are approximately 3800 empty properties. If 1500 of the 3800 are empty year after year, Thanet is suffering an annual loss of in excess of £900,000.

1.2.3 Empty properties and derelict land are a disincentive to anyone staying in, or moving to an area. They are visually unattractive and create an impression of neglect and decline. Empty property and land reduces community confidence and self-belief.

### **1.3 Why do properties become and remain empty?**

1.3.1 There are a number of reasons why properties become empty. These include:

- Transitional empty properties pending a change of owner
- Owners not being aware or understanding the options available to bring properties back into use
- Properties which are left empty by the resident moving into residential care
- Properties where the owner has died and the state is awaiting the appropriate legal action
- Perceived problems with renting the property
- Extensive maintenance problems combined with low value of the property
- Owner awaiting an upturn in the market

### **1.4 Aims and objectives of the Thanet Empty Property Strategy**

1.4.1 The aims of the empty property strategy are to:

- Make effective use of derelict urban land to prevent it being an environmental nuisance and a source of fly tipping and vandalism
- Reduce the number of long term empty residential properties and increase the housing supply in Thanet by bringing them back into use
- Further increase the available homes in Thanet by working to bring other empty properties, for example shops and offices, into use as residential property where appropriate
- Provide a contact point and resource for both owners of empty properties, and members of the public concerned about empty properties

1.4.2 The objectives of the empty property strategy are:

- To reduce the number of long term empty properties, initially targeting on a 'worst first' basis.

- To assist the Council's Homelessness Strategy in ending the use of bed and breakfast accommodation other than in an emergency
- To minimise the number of properties becoming long term empty by identifying them early and working with owners
- To reduce the amount of land remaining long term empty in Thanet, thereby improving the amenity and safety of local communities
- To increase research into the nature and effect of the district's empty property and vacant land, and the impact of schemes as part of the district regeneration
- To ensure economic stability and development in Thanet

1.4.3 This is Thanet District Council's first empty property and derelict land strategy. As such, it intends to provide a summary of the national and local pictures, and details of the legislative context of empty properties. As the first such strategy, this document provides broad overall objectives to reducing the number of empty properties and vacant land.

1.4.4 It is intended that the strategy will be active, growing and evolving as further work to tackle the issue of empty property and land takes place. The strategy will be reviewed annually to assess whether amendments may be required.

1.4.5 It is anticipated that there will be a lead in period, whilst the initiative becomes established. The number of properties being brought back into use, therefore, should rise as the initiative progresses.

## **2.0 THE NATIONAL PICTURE**

### **2.1 Empty properties in England**

2.1.1 Empty properties are not only a found in large towns and cities; they are a feature of the landscape in many areas of the country. Across England, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2002, there were 729,770 empty properties. In the south east alone, on the same date, there were 84,106 empty properties.

2.1.2 In recent years the subject of empty properties and the negative impact they have on local communities has become a national issue. The importance given to empty property and derelict land by central government can be seen in the wide range of current legislation and the report of the Select Committee Enquiry into Empty Homes published in March 2002. In addition, the government provides funding to the Empty Homes Agency to campaign on the issue of empty properties and provide advice to local authorities and owners of empty property.

2.1.3 It is possible to make a difference, and the work currently underway has resulted in the number of empty dwellings in April 2002 being less than a year earlier. In April 2001, the number of empty properties was 753,188 whilst in the south east, the figure was 86,399. The number of empty homes in the south east, therefore, reduced by 2293 in a year.

### **2.2 Legislation**

- 2.2.1 There have been a number of announcements relating to empty property work in the last year. This is very much due to the Empty Homes Agency's continued campaigning on the subject, the Select Committee Enquiry into Empty Homes and consultation on council tax fees.
- 2.2.2 The Empty Homes Agency, an independent charity, has campaigned for many years on the use of council tax to help combat the problem of empty homes across the country. The first issue has been the discount for long-term empty homes that council taxpayers receive. Many consider that it is a perverse incentive in areas of high demand for housing to offer a discount for empty homes as it actively encourages the owner to keep the property empty.
- 2.2.3 The Government has recently announced that they intend to introduce the discretionary abolition of this discount, once the statutory vacancy exemption period has ended. The new Local Government Bill is currently going through Parliament and one of its effects will be to bring about this change, and it is hoped that the abolition of the discretionary discount will be applied from April 2004. Thanet District Council is negotiating with Kent County Council to have all or part of the extra revenue raised from this abolition of discount returned to the district for housing use. The District Council's commitment to the County Council would be that the monies returned to Thanet would be used to tackle empty property and derelict land.
- 2.2.4 Another issue has been the inability of local Councils to use council tax data for tackling the owners and agents of empty properties. Council tax departments hold a wealth of information about empty properties, but empty property officers have not been able to use this information to approach local owners, due to clauses within the Data Protection Act.
- 2.2.5 In the same announcement on council tax discounts, the Government said it was minded to allow councils to use council tax data in their empty property work. This is another proposal included in the recent Local Government Bill and it is anticipated that clear recommendations will be set out by central government to inform local authorities that they can now use this information.
- 2.2.6 The select committee enquiry commended the idea of compulsory leasing. This suggested scheme would allow local authorities to remove the control of the property from the owner, whilst allowing the owner to retain the legal ownership. The local authority will take control of the property, renovate it to a suitable standard and then let it to people in housing need at affordable rents.
- 2.2.7 The cost of the renovation will be recouped from the rental stream. The length of the compulsory lease, therefore, will need to be long enough to recoup the full renovation costs. At the end of the lease, the property returns to the owner in a well-maintained condition. The compulsory leasing scheme provides an 'in-between' option, allowing local authorities to take enforcement action, but without resorting to serving a compulsory purchase order, which would ultimately lead to the owner losing possession of the dwelling.
- 2.2.8 The ODPM has taken the idea of compulsory leasing a step further, and published a consultation paper on Empty Homes Management Orders (EHMO).

The paper discusses four possible EHMO options, which would enable the local authority to take over management on a long term empty property.

2.2.9 Under option one, leasing would remain a voluntary option. Option two would see EHMOs being linked to the physical condition of empty properties. Option three would see EHMOs being linked to housing need in the local authority area. Option four would see EHMOs being linked to both the physical condition of empty properties and housing need in the local authority area. Consultation on the paper is due to end in August 2003.

2.2.10 Thanet District Council is keen to see the introduction of EHMOs, as they would provide a real opportunity to bring empty homes back into use, providing much needed affordable housing.

### **3.0 THE THANET PICTURE**

#### **3.1 Empty properties in Thanet**

3.1.1 The Council's records indicate that there were 3895 empty residential dwellings on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2003

3.1.2 The figure of 3895 can be broken down further:

<b>Reason for vacancy</b>	<b>Number of properties</b>
Empty less than six months	807
Empty requiring structural repairs	83
Empty more than six months	2151
Second homes	854
TOTAL	3895

3.1.3 There are some properties that are of greater concern than others. The properties that have been vacant less than six months, for example, do not cause too much concern. In order for a housing market to work effectively, there must always be a number of properties that are empty, being bought and sold. Similarly, the second homes do not cause too much concern. It is the long term empty properties that are of most concern to the Council.

3.1.4 Thanet also contains a number of vacant commercial premises. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003 there were 733 empty commercial units in Thanet, 686 of which had been vacant for more than three months. Many of these commercial units are concentrated in one commercial space, for example there were 22 vacant units within the St John Business Centre, St Peters Road, Margate.

#### **3.2 Housing tenure**

3.2.1 The decline in the long stay holiday business has led to a number of hotels and guesthouses being given over to private renting and multiple occupation. Thanet has a high proportion of privately rented accommodation, 16.2%, compared to just 8% in the south east. Flat conversions make up 11.1% of Thanet dwellings,

whereas the south east average is 6%. By contrast, only 70.7% of properties are owner occupied, compared to 77% in the south east.

- 3.2.2 In conjunction with the fact that the vast majority of privately owned flats in Thanet are pre-1919, this has resulted in low market values and a downward spiral of poor maintenance and dereliction.

### **3.3 Condition of Housing Stock**

- 3.3.1 The 2002 private sector stock condition survey identified that older dwellings are particularly likely to be unfit – 15.8% of pre-1919 dwellings were considered to be unfit, compared with 2.3% of post-1964 dwellings. Of all unfit dwellings, some 63.8% were in the pre-1919 age group.
- 3.3.2 Given that 32.8% of all dwellings in Thanet are in the pre-1919 age group, it follows that repair costs in these dwellings are consistently higher. Standardised repair costs in pre-1919 dwellings is three and a half times that found in post-1964 dwellings. Of all empty properties, many are flats in converted houses and fall into the pre-1919 category.

### **3.4 Housing Need**

- 3.4.1 Thanet has experienced significant levels of economic decline in the past, which in turn has led to high levels of unemployment and deprivation in some areas. Information from the Council's Housing Strategy shows that Thanet has been ranked the 60<sup>th</sup> most deprived area in the country (out of 354 local authorities) and is the second most deprived area in the south east region.
- 3.4.2 The results of the housing needs survey carried out by Fordham in 2002 show that there is a great need for affordable housing, since the majority of those in housing need cannot afford market housing. Average weekly earnings in Thanet are below Kent and UK averages, and 30% of all Thanet households are in receipt of housing and/or council tax benefit.
- 3.4.3 The results of the Fordham's survey indicate a total requirement for new affordable housing of 4510 dwellings over the next five years, of which 91.3% should be social housing. Further work has identified an annual requirement of 228 one bedroom properties, 305 two bedroom properties, 249 three bedroom properties and 49 four bedroom properties.

## **4.0 EXISTING ACTION IN THANET**

### **4.1 Identifying empty properties**

- 4.1.1 Work initiated by members of the Council to identify empty properties in Thanet has already begun. A number of publicity articles have been placed in the local newspapers, which have encouraged members of the public to notify the Council of empty properties in their area. In addition, Council officers are encouraged to report empty properties to the empty property officer, as are elected members

and owners of empty property themselves. The Council is also keen to work with developers and estate agents.

- 4.1.2 Identified empty properties are currently recorded on a spreadsheet, with a view to setting up an empty property and vacant land database. This recording of empty properties will give indications of areas of high empty property density, and therefore enable future planning for tackling the issue.
- 4.1.3 The Council acknowledges that more investigation into areas of high numbers of empty properties, and the reasons why empty properties become and remain empty is required. Indeed, this falls in line with research recently started by the Empty Homes Agency, MORI and the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham; funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- 4.1.4 As Jonathan Ellis, Chief Executive of the Empty Homes Agency, has said, 'This research is innovative and exploratory using an independent organisation, MORI, to collect this information. If successful in soliciting responses, the research has the potential to challenge the approach to dealing with private empty homes in this country'.

## **4.2 Regeneration Areas**

- 4.2.1 Thanet District Council has set up a scheme to assist the regeneration of Margate Old Town and Ramsgate King Street, by supporting capital regeneration projects. The focus is for a combination of retail, creative industries and residential developments. There is an additional emphasis on the development of residential areas above commercial spaces.
- 4.2.2 In terms of funding, specific grants relate to each area. The Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund will be in force for Margate Old Town, together with the Single Regeneration Budget and European Regional Development Fund. Projects in Ramsgate King Street are supported by Single Regeneration Budget and European Regional Development Fund grants. There is also Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme (HERS) grant for Ramsgate upper High Street. The amount of grant depends on financial need and the extent to which the project fits with the overall regeneration programme.

## **4.3 Priority or Renewal Areas**

- 4.3.1 The Council is looking at creating a priority or renewal area for action on unfit properties and properties suffering disrepair, within the urban parts of Thanet. Whilst the majority of these properties are occupied, it is clear that the Area action and the empty property strategy action will need to interact. Both initiatives will be dovetailed to ensure that they drive urban renewal – improved housing, commercial activity, environmental and community activity in Thanet.

## **5.0 THANET EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY**

- 5.0.1 The Council has employed an empty property officer who is responsible for implementing and co-ordinating the empty property strategy. The empty property

officer provides a first point of contact for enquiries regarding empty properties and vacant space – either from owners of empty property or from concerned members of the public.

- 5.0.2 One of the main features of the strategy is to establish ownership of the empty property or vacant land. Whilst council tax records can provide information on the empty properties and land, the empty property officer cannot access information on the owners of the properties and land. Tracing some owners can therefore take quite some detective work, and can be time-consuming.
- 5.0.3 An empty property task force has been set up which is comprised of Council officers from the following departments: housing, planning, building control, legal, IT, regeneration, communications and estates. The councillors with the portfolios for housing and regeneration also attend. The task force allows a corporate approach to the empty property work, drawing on information from all officers who may have a dealing with empty properties. In addition, there is a smaller empty property enforcement group that is made up of officers from planning, building control, regeneration and housing.
- 5.0.4 The empty property officer attends the Kent local authority empty homes forum. This group comprises Council officers from Kent authorities who carry out empty property work. The group meets three times a year to discuss the issues across the county and discuss best practice.
- 5.0.5 In addition, the Council is a member of the National Association of Empty Property Practitioners (NAEPP). NAEPP is an organisation set up by empty property officers with the aim of raising the status and profile of empty property work, and empty property officers in particular. NAEPP promotes the development of professional standards through training and the dissemination of good practice.

## **6 BRINGING PROPERTIES BACK INTO USE**

- 6.0.1 By working with a range of partners, the empty property officer can assist owners of empty properties in a number of ways.

### **6.1 Advice on becoming a landlord**

- 6.1.1 First and foremost, the Council can give advice on bringing empty properties back into use. A range of advice on letting properties can be given, for example tenancy agreements, health and safety requirements, finding a tenant and landlord forum details.

### **6.2 Advice on planning applications**

- 6.2.1 In line with planning policy guidance note 3 (housing), the Council is keen to promote sustainable patterns of development and make better use of previously developed land. This will include the re-use and conversion of existing buildings, where appropriate, and locating housing where residents will be less dependant on cars to reach jobs, shops and local services. The Council's local plan takes

consideration that housing may have a significant role to play in overcoming the stagnation and urban decay of secondary commercial areas and stimulate confidence and investment.

- 6.2.2 The Council wishes to encourage bringing accommodation above shops and other commercial premises into residential use, where appropriate. The Council will therefore be able to provide advice on 'change of use' and other planning applications, and building regulations.

### **6.3 Registered Social Landlords**

- 6.3.1 Registered social landlords (RSLs), or housing associations, manage a number of properties in the district. Some RSLs are able to carry out developmental work to refurbish existing properties, or build new. The local authority will be able to refer developers to RSLs, to enable possible partnership working across the district.

### **6.4 Private Sector Leasing Schemes**

- 6.4.1 Private sector leasing (PSL) is a scheme whereby a local authority or housing association leases a property from an owner in the private sector, for a fixed period. During this period, the housing association or local authority takes on the management responsibilities of the property. The owner of the property, therefore, will not have to find tenants, deal with rent queries or arrange repairs. In most cases, the owner is guaranteed a rental return for at least 48 weeks a year, regardless of whether the property is occupied or not.

### **6.5 Working with partners**

- 6.5.1 As with the existing regeneration areas, the Council is keen to create partnerships in the private sector with developers, estate agents and also local building preservation trusts (BPTs). BPTs are charities that can be set up to preserve buildings of architectural or historic importance. BPTs are normally constituted as companies limited by guarantee and have charitable status.

### **6.6 Public Sector Property Concordat**

- 6.6.1 Public sector bodies in Thanet, including Thanet District Council, Kent County Council and the health service are looking to set up a public sector property concordat. The concordat will consider the property that is collectively owned, and the uses for that property. It may be that the uses and number of properties owned can be changed, providing Thanet with a more effective service delivery mechanism, whereby the public can access all public services at convenient local service centres.

### **6.7 Funding**

- 6.7.1 A budget of £100,000 has been identified for the empty property initiative. The budget will be used to assist a number of aspects of the strategy, including printing and publicity costs, and possible works in default.

- 6.7.2 The Council is proposing to use a proportion of the budget to assist owners on a gap funding basis, particularly in bringing empty premises back into use. This assistance may be considered where a scheme has been put together by the owner, with a schedule of works, costings and timescales. If the owner can show that the scheme is viable except for a shortfall in funds, the Council may consider a loan to assist the owner.
- 6.7.3 Following the introduction of the Regulatory Reform Order, the Council has been required to devise a policy detailing its proposals for awarding housing renewal grants and loans. This policy has been drafted and consultation has taken place. Owners of empty residential properties may be able to apply to the Council for assistance, under this new procedure.
- 6.7.4 If financial assistance is given, it will not cover the whole cost of the works. The individual circumstances of each owner and property will be taken into account when deciding if financial assistance will be given. Assistance will be subject to ownership and letting conditions for a period of time after final payment has been made, and interest will be payable on loans.

## **6.8 Enforcement action**

- 6.8.1 Unfortunately, not all owners will respond to positive encouragement. Where negotiation with an owner does not bring the property back into use, and where appropriate, therefore enforcement action will be taken. Although a firm stance will be taken with uncooperative owners, the main emphasis of the strategy will always be to work positively with owners.
- 6.8.2 The enforcement action will be fair and balanced, and will only be targeted to those owners who have no regard to their responsibilities as land or property owners. Action will be tailored to tackle individual circumstances, applying powers from both building and housing legislation. As a last resort, the Council may consider compulsory purchase.

## **7.0 MEASURING PERFORMANCE**

- 7.0.1 Best value performance indicator (BVPI) 64 measures the performance of local authorities, in regard of bringing empty property back into use. BVPI 64 measures the number of private sector vacant dwellings that are returned into occupation or demolished during 2003/04 as a direct result of action by the local authority. An authority should include any dwelling that it considers was re-occupied or demolished during the year directly as a result of action it undertook or initiated.
- 7.0.2 For the purpose of this indicator only, ODPM and the Audit Commission have agreed that “**Private Sector**” means **any non-HRA dwellings in the Local Authority area**. This includes both housing association stock and other public sector dwellings such as properties owned by government departments, NHS Trusts etc. In two-tier authorities properties owned by the shire authority will also count as private sector for the purpose of this indicator. The National Association

of Empty Property Practitioners issued this clarification in their guidance for the 2002/2003 indicator set.

7.0.3 The following is an indicative list of actions that would count towards the indicator. The list is not exhaustive and local authorities may include additional actions if they are satisfied that they genuinely contributed towards the dwelling being returned to use or demolished:

- grants, loans or other financial assistance either provided or facilitated by the authority;
- leasing arrangements;
- advice given to the owner which is followed and results in the empty dwelling being returned to use – for example, provision of advice on:
  - the authority’s empty homes strategy;
  - options on sale and letting issues;
  - grants, other financial assistance and availability of tax concessions;
  - landlord forum or accreditation scheme;
  - repairs, including details on building contractors meeting minimum standards;
  - referral to RSL or other intermediary with relevant expertise;
  - enforcement action, including repair notices, CPO, works in default, enforced sale;
  - enquiries made to establish ownership of property and follow-up action.

7.0.4 Where a vacant dwelling is converted into several flats or units, the number of flats that are subsequently re-occupied during the year may count towards the indicator. Where a non-residential vacant property is converted into a dwelling, that dwelling (or the number of flats or units in it) that are subsequently re-occupied during the year may count towards the indicator.

## 8.0 THANET EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

Action plan objective	Lead officer/ department	Timescales	Notes
Launch and promote empty property and derelict land strategy	Empty property officer	May/June 2003	
Collate empty property	Empty property	May/ June 2003	

information pack	officer		
Establish an empty property database on which all empty property enquiries are logged and updated	IT department and empty property officer	May/ June 2003	
Provide information about the empty property strategy on the Council's website	Empty property officer and E-business department	May/ June 2003	
To increase research into the nature and effect of empty properties and vacant land, and the impact of schemes as part of area regeneration	Empty property officer and empty property task force	Ongoing	
Reduce the number of long term empty properties, initially targeting on a 'worst first' basis	Empty property officer	Ongoing	
Participate in the Kent local authority empty property forum	Empty property officer	Ongoing	
To form partnerships with both private developers and housing associations	Empty property officer	Ongoing	
Review the empty property and derelict land strategy	Empty property officer and empty property task force	Annually	

# GLOSSARY

## **Best value**

Best value provides a framework for the planning, delivery and improvement of local authority services. In a best value review councils have to:

- challenge how, why and by whom they provide a service
- compare performance with other councils
- consult those using the service
- use competition to ensure the best service possible

## **Best value performance plan**

All councils have to produce one of these by 30 June every year. The plan is meant to include what services the authority will deliver and how, and what standard of service the authority already delivers. The plan also has to include information on how the authority is going to improve services, to what standard, and when that'll happen. Statutory best value performance indicators (BVPIs) have to be included in the performance plan. The government is also keen for councils to develop and include local performance indicators.

## **BVPI**

Best value performance indicator. These are performance indicators that the government asks to be gathered and submitted as part of a national set of measures. BVPIs have to be included in best value performance plans.

## **BPT**

Building preservation trust. A charity established to preserve buildings of architectural or historic importance whose survival is threatened and for which an economically viable solution is beyond the reach of both the original owner and the normal operation of the market. BPTs can be set up locally for either a rolling programme of properties, or for just one property.

## **Community strategy**

Local authorities have to take positive steps towards making their areas better places to live, and towards improving the quality of life of their citizens. And this improvement has to be sustainable. Councils do this by producing a community strategy. The strategy outlines the steps the council is going to take towards achieving sustainable improvement, and is reached by a process of community planning.

## **Compulsory Leasing**

A suggested scheme whereby local authorities remove the control of a property from the owner, leasing the property for a fixed period

## **Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)**

A forced sale of a privately owned property to the Council.

## **Concordat**

An official agreement

## **Council**

There are six main types of council in England and Wales – county, district/ shire/

borough, London borough, metropolitan, unitary and welsh unitary. Some local authorities, like Thanet, are part of a two tier system - responsibility for the provision of services in the area is split between the county council and the district council. The county council usually provides core services, such as education and social services. The district is responsible for more local services, like tourism, environmental health, and housing.

### **DTLR**

Department of transport, local government and the regions. Disbanded on 29 May 2002, this was the government department responsible for transport, local government and the regions, and with responsibility for elections, regeneration and housing. Local government is now part of the new Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), as is regeneration, housing and planning. Transport has its own department, Department for Transport (DfT). Elections will now be covered by the Lord Chancellor's Department.

### **EHA**

The Empty Homes Agency – an independent housing charity that highlights the issue of empty, wasted and under used homes and property throughout England.

### **Empty Homes Management Order (EHMO)**

A proposed scheme giving local authorities statutory powers to take over the management of some private sector empty homes

### **Green paper**

Consultation document on central government policy. The government may publish a green paper outlining policy on a matter and asking for feedback, before presenting it to parliament as a bill. A green paper is not a requirement of any bill.

### **Joined up working**

This happens when councils or council departments work with other public bodies, such as schools and hospitals, to identify and solve local problems.

### **NAEPP**

National Association of Empty Property Practitioners. An organisation for empty property practitioners which aims to raise the status and profile of practitioners, promote consistency and understanding and promote the development of professional standards.

### **Neighbourhood renewal**

The name given to the government's plans to remove the differences between rich and poor communities countrywide. Neighbourhood renewal focuses on basic services, such as health, education, the environment and crime statistics. The neighbourhood renewal unit at DTLR is responsible for implementing neighbourhood renewal.

There is a neighbourhood renewal fund of £800 million over three years for the 88 most deprived areas of the country. As part of neighbourhood renewal local authorities are developing local strategic partnerships.

### **ODPM**

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister – has responsibility for local government and the regions as well as housing, planning and social exclusion

**Performance indicator**

A way of measuring how a service is performing against its objectives. Performance indicators may be collected for local or national purposes.

**Private Sector Leasing (PSL)**

A scheme whereby a local authority or housing association leases a property from an owner in the private sector, under a voluntary agreement, for a fixed period.

**Stock Condition Survey**

A survey undertaken to assess the condition, repair, improvement and energy efficiency of the housing stock.

**Sustainable development**

Improving quality of life without compromising the future. A process of planning in local authorities which integrates social, economic and environmental perspectives, and includes discussion with the communities involved

**White paper**

Statement of central government policy. The government may publish a white paper indicating policy on a matter before presenting it to parliament as a bill. A white paper is not a requirement of any bill.