

Renovating your empty home: An overview



This leaflet provides an overview of the things you need to think about when renovating your empty property and the support and guidance that is available.

Identifying the work to be done

Your Empty Homes Officer can provide guidance on checking your property. However depending on the condition of the property, you may need a professional survey to assess exactly what work you should have carried out.

Checking the building

You can carry out an assessment of the property yourself. Externally you must ensure that the property is wind and watertight and is structurally sound before planning any internal works.

The list below identifies building elements which should be checked when assessing works required.

Roof

- **Roof Covering:** look for damage, missing tiles or slates or blisters or cracks on felt roofing.
- **Flashings:** cracked or missing sections of flashings along chimney bases, walls of adjoining properties and the apex of the roof.
- **Chimneys:** cracked, missing or decayed stone or render, gaps in pointing, bulging or leaning sides, loose chimney pots.
- **Gutters and downpipes:** rust, cracks, missing sections or loose fixings. Leaks may be indicated by damp patches on walls. Blockages in the gutter may be indicated by vegetation growth.

External Walls

- **Lintels:** Cracks or decay in stonework above doors or windows.

- **Cills:** Cracks or decay in stonework below windows.
- **Stonework:** loose stonework, cracks, flaking or decaying stonework.
- **Pointing:** Gaps or crumbling joints in the stonework.
- **Render.** Check for Loose or flaking render
- **Bulges/Leaning Walls:** Areas where the external wall protrudes, bulges out or leans, this can indicate structural problems.

Windows

- **Timber Windows:** check for damage or decay to the frame. For traditional sash and case windows check the cords and pulley systems are working correctly. Missing/flaking putty should be replaced. Windows can often be refurbished and draft-proofing introduced.
- **Double glazed units:** check for blown seals leading to misting between the panes of glass. Missing/blocked trickle vents. Ensure they open and close correctly with a tight seal.

Roof Spaces

- **Joists/rafters, joints between roof and other visible surfaces:** Signs of water damage, e.g. water staining, damp patches, stains, moulds, rotten timbers, insect attacks.
- **Water tank:** Any tanks or pipes should be insulated to prevent freezing. Water tanks should be covered and you should also check for lead pipes.
- **Insulation:** For the latest standard on roof insulation, visit the Energy Saving Trust website at www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/scotland

Inside the property

- **Top floor rooms:** Check the walls and ceilings for signs of water damage, e.g. damp patches, staining, mould possibly caused by roof defects.
- **Stairs & passages:** cracks developing between stair treads and uneven or excessive wear. Loose or missing balusters or rails, cracked or loose plasterwork, broken or inadequate locks on main doors, broken or rotten stair windows.

- Rooms with an outside wall: check for damp patches, stains or mould, possibly caused by damage to external stonework or pointing or defective downpipes.
- Rooms at ground level or below: check for damp patches, stains or mould, particularly at low level. This is potentially caused by damage to the stonework, pointing or rising damp.

Outside the property

- Air vents: Should be clear of the ground and covered to stop vermin getting in or debris collecting.
- Drains and Grating: Check for any collapse, blockages and remove any debris.
- Railings and Boundary walls: check for any repairing issues.
- Paths: check for trip hazards
- building, telephone or power lines.
- Trees: check for trees that could damage the building. Once the survey is complete you can start to plan refurbishment works

External works should be carried out prior to any internal refurbishment. Consider whether you can undertake the works identified during the survey yourself or whether you need to appoint a contractor.

Planning permission & building warrants

If you are making physical alterations to the property, you should check with the Council's Planning and Building Standards departments whether the works need permission. If consent is required, Council officers can advise you on submitting your application.

You may need to employ an architect or engineer to design and draw your proposals.

Costing the works

You should get at least three quotes for the work that you need to have carried out. This will give you a clear picture of the cost of the work and the opportunity to select the best contractor for you.

Selecting contractors and other professionals

There are a number of ways to find contractors;

- You can search online or use the Yellow Pages
- You can use recommendations from a friend
- You can use a quote request website such as www.ratedpeople.com

- You can contact the relevant professional body for a list of people operating in your area.

Discounts, loans and grants

There are a number of financial supports available to owners of empty homes who are refurbishing their property to bring it back to use. It is worth investigating which of them will be available for your property, as they can bring a significant reduction in the cost of the works.

The main discounts for works to empty properties are set out below:

VAT reductions

If your property has been empty for two years, any renovation or alteration works carried out will be eligible for a reduced VAT rate of 5%.

If your property has been empty for ten years and you are renovating it for yourself or your family to live in, the works may benefit from zero-rated VAT. Further information on VAT for building projects is available online at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/vat/sectors/builders/construct ion.htm>

or telephone on 0300 200 3700.

Energy efficiency funding

There are a number of loans and grants for the installation of energy-efficiency measures and renewable technologies, for example full or part funding for loft insulation and installation of central heating.

Empty Homes Discounts

South Ayrshire Council has negotiated discounts for Empty Home owners with a number of national builders merchants.

See the separate leaflet available from the Empty Homes Officer for more detail on all the above discount schemes.

What if I can't afford the work?

If you can't afford to carry out the work that is needed to bring the property back into use, you still have a number of options.

- The simplest option may be to sell the property in its current condition. See the Empty Homes leaflets on selling your property for more information.
- You could look for a loan to cover the cost of the works – perhaps releasing equity through remortgaging.
- South Ayrshire Council has an Empty Homes Loan fund available to empty home owners who wish to bring their property into use as an affordable rented home.

- Some companies will carry out renovation works at no upfront cost to the owner, and recover the costs and take their fee at the point of sale or through the rental income. Your Empty Homes Officer may be able to supply a list of companies operating in your area.

Contact your local Empty Homes Officer

**For further information please contact
your Empty Homes Officer:**

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