



London Housing Panel

Action on Empty Homes: Campaigning on vacant homes

Action on Empty Homes (AEH) works to:

- Raise awareness of the waste of long-term empty homes
- Campaign for changes to policy both at national and local government levels
- Support local communities in transforming their neighbourhoods
- Provide advice for those seeking to bring empty homes back into use
- Research and develop ideas for bringing long-term empty homes back into use for those in housing need.

Research and campaigning on the homes London needs

Between 2019 and 2020 the London Wealth Investment Project, funded by Trust for London, investigated the impact of wealth investment on access to housing in London and produced two reports, the first comparing policy responses globally entitled 'Homes Without Residents' and the final report 'Pretty Vacant'.

'Pretty Vacant' determined that London's development model favours investors over residents and Londoners in housing need. Its policy recommendations suggest we need to stop building 'the wrong housing' for London and re-prioritise through planning, through investment in housing for those in greatest need (homeless Londoners); and by controlling investment strategies which use residential property to yield returns without offering access to any residents.

These reports produced a set of policy recommendations including: the need to control, license and limit whole home Airbnb lets, which are estimated to have sucked as many as 70,000 homes out of residential supply in London while other investment strategies which do not require residents are responsible for up to another 70,000 empty homes. The report concluded that at least 125,000 homes in London are currently kept empty as a result of wealth investment strategies and weak enforcement powers.

'Pretty Vacant' makes the case that London needs a register of residential property ownership and usage, to ensure property is utilised and taxed appropriately. It also recommends changes to planning powers to ensure housing developments prioritise primary residential use and limit homes without residents including so-called 'second homes'.

Councils need stronger powers to take faster action on London's empty homes, and all councils need dedicated officers to appraise empty homes and second homes, and, where possible, to support owners in bringing them into residential use. Where owners do not co-operate, councils need enhanced powers to bring property into use, including improvements to Empty Dwelling Management Orders to allow them to be more effectively utilised.

AEH is continuing to campaign on these issues with a new strand of work based around public campaigns in London boroughs.

Bringing empty homes back into use

Action on Empty Homes runs projects which support community-led housing organisations bringing empty homes into use and gathers best practice. We are currently developing a toolkit to support this work through sharing best practice and encouraging local authorities to support community-led housing solutions. This work has already involved community housing organisations and local authorities in London and we hope to work toward developing a model that could allow such work to be developed to meet London's particular current housing challenges and to bring some of its 125,000 wasted empty homes into use for those in housing need in London.

We also coordinate a national lobby campaign the Coalition for Community Investment and work with a wide range of other organisations committed to ending the waste of empty homes.