



Report to

Council

Meeting Date: 4th January 2022

Public/Private*: Public

Title: **Economy, Enterprise & Housing Portfolio Holder's Report**

EMPTY HOMES

During 2021 Carlisle City Council are very pleased to state that there has been a very significant 35% reduction in empty homes within the district (one of the highest in the country). In November 2020 there were 1014 empty homes listed (without exemptions) and by November 2021 this had been reduced 656.

Carlisle City Council continues to strive to reduce empty homes, which are a blight on communities, across the district. Current support, action and initiatives include:-

- Providing a dedicated Empty Homes Officer working (3 days a week) operating proactively as well as reactively regarding Empty Homes
- Offering a Council backed empty homes grant offer. The grant targets homes that have been empty for two years or more and the letters sent offering the grant also outlined all other support available from the Empty Homes Officer
- An Increase of Premium Council Tax rates has been introduced in 2021. Properties that are now empty for 2 - 5 years will pay double annual Council Tax rate; properties empty for 5 -10 years will pay treble the annual Council Tax rate and those properties that have been empty for 10 years plus will be required to pay quadruple the annual Council Tax rate.
- Proactive independent and unannounced visits are undertaken to properties that have been empty for two years or more – to assess condition and to take action where necessary
- The Empty Homes Officer also works with the Homelessness Department – identifying potential homes and introducing owners
- Procurement activity has been undertaken to reach an agreement through a company called NBe to provide a bespoke 1-2-1 Empty Homes Service for our owners in the Carlisle district. NBe will provide assistance such as providing quotes, obtaining contractors and overseeing all aspects of a renovation/refurbishment project. They can also provide assistance with financial support

- Where owners are not compliant to resolve negative issues then enforcement activity is taken. The increased use of enforcement includes the use of Community Protection Notices, Enforced Sales process, Disamenity action (Sect 215), Abatement Notices, etc.

The Council introduced a positive initiative to reduce empty properties in the Brampton and Hallbankgate areas last year, in partnership with Brampton Rural Housing Trust (who have been providing affordable homes for local people in the Brampton area since 1926). The scheme provides grants of 40% towards the purchase price and 50% of refurbishment costs, to bring homes that have been empty for more than six months back into use, to be let at affordable rents to local people. The grants are funded through affordable housing 'commuted sum' funding held by the Council, provided by developers through planning obligations, with the balance provided by Brampton Rural Housing Society.

CITY CENTRE FOOTFALL

December saw significantly higher footfall levels as the high street benefitted from the Christmas season. The month saw footfall levels rise by 32% above the September - November average. In total, the footfall counter recorded 465,002 people passing through Scotch Street. The highest daily footfall recorded for the year was on Saturday, 18th December 2021 which saw a footfall count of 27,261. High footfall figures have also been seen outside of December, with Saturday, 13th November 2021 recording the second highest footfall figure of 23,081 and Saturday, 28st August recording the third highest footfall figure of 22,587 (in part due to the effect of the international market).

UKREiiF

Carlisle City Council Economic Development Teams will be attending the UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum annual event for the first time in Leeds in May. This will be an opportunity to promote Carlisle's offer alongside over 100 other exhibitors. 5,000 delegates have already registered to attend in person number with over 1,000 scheduled to join virtually. Over 250 speakers and showcase stands featuring national and international brands will attend as part of the three-day programme. This event is the platform for the public sector to showcase the scale of developments in their areas and set out potential investment opportunities to investors, developers and occupiers from around the globe that are based here in the UK. The Corporate Director for Economic Development will be speaking as part of the programme which will include a breakout session all about Carlisle for delegates to attend. Our Economic Development team are working on the content and presentations to feature all of the investment opportunities here in Carlisle and ensure we raise our profile to an audience of key players, influencers and decision makers within the investment and real estate markets while connecting and facilitating new relationships to drive economic growth through regeneration and development.

“JUST MESSIN”

“Just Messin” is a creative play centre from baby to age 11, a new business which opened during the pandemic, and is situated in Botchergate.

It hosts a baby and toddler booth with a bespoke wooden wall track and wall toys encouraging babies to stand, a Lego and Craft Station, outdoor themed role play area complete with stage, dress up area and an older children’s Chill Zone.

“Just Messin” also provides bespoke birthday experiences with different themed parties and regularly hold events in the school holidays such as Princess Singalongs, Rainbow Wishes Foundation, Craft Events, Magic Shows and Animal Encounters.

Autism friendly sessions are also regularly held, both midweek and weekends, as it was felt that there were few places in Carlisle that cater for this.

Bee Unique Autism Charity became aware and offered support to run the sessions and provide a subsidy to help those families in need.

The Charity are pleased to work with “Just Messin” to provide a much needed and valued service in Carlisle.

THE LANES

A number of local businesses will be taking space within the Pop Up Shop at The Lanes in the coming months. The space enables small local companies to sample trading within a store environment in Carlisle City Centre. Businesses confirmed for March and April include Fairy Sawdust, Manor Barn Organics, Spot and Bear Interiors, JK Photography, Natural Collective and Soluna Wax”.

CITY CENTRE TASKFORCE

- The first meeting of the Town Centre Task Force was held in November 2021 and was attended by representatives of the various sectors within the city centre - hospitality, transport, retail etc - and voluntary / community representatives
- The taskforce has met a second time in February and discussed the upcoming events in the city centre and the strategy and projects for developing the visitor economy