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Eyesore Property Action

Allerdale Borough Council has secured a new tool in its bid to tackle the problem of eyesore buildings. The Council's Executive committee has agreed a recommendation to use empty dwelling management orders under the Housing Act 2004. These orders enable a local authority to "step into the shoes" of the owner of a long-term empty dwelling, to bring it back into occupation, where there is no reasonable prospect that this will occur otherwise. The authority does not compulsorily purchase or take ownership of the property but takes over management, and can arrange refurbishments and let the property to a tenant. The costs of any refurbishment and a management fee will be deducted from the rental income, with the remainder being passed to the owner.

Long-term empty dwellings are a national problem and it is the Government's ambition that no-one should have to live in a neighbourhood scarred by the blight of empty properties. The latest statistics from the Empty Homes Agency for 2007 indicate that there were 279,281 privately owned dwellings in England standing empty for more than six months. A total of 30,021 empty private dwellings were brought into use in 2006-07. In Allerdale there were 831 privately owned dwellings empty for more than six months in 2007 and 25 were brought into use in 2006-07.

ABC has had significant success in persuading owners to bring properties back into use; primarily as an indirect consequence of using legislation to tackle dilapidated and untidy properties. Councillor Margaret Jackson, Deputy Leader of Allerdale Borough Council and with responsibility for Regeneration, said: "Eddie Dawson, a senior technician in the Council's Housing Services unit has taken a lead on this work, using Building Act and planning powers and is hoping that this new legal tool will allow the root cause of the issue to be dealt with directly." There are several exceptions where empty dwelling management orders cannot be used, including, but not limited to:

- Holiday/second homes
- Where the occupier is temporarily working away from home
- Properties where the previous owner/occupier has died and probate procedures are underway
- Properties that are genuinely being sold or marketed for let on realistic terms.

In addition the authority must show that all reasonable efforts to persuade owners to bring their properties back into use have been unsuccessful. Allerdale Borough Council already has a short list of properties suitable for empty dwelling management orders and is in the process of preparing cases to proceed.



James II by Harvey Smith from Holme St. Cuthbert School

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