

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

28 February 2022

Dear Mr Gove,

Re: Action on empty homes

National Empty Homes Week 2022 takes place from 28 February to 6 March 2022. Propertymark wants to see action on empty homes to maximise the use of existing housing stock and bolster much needed supply in the private rented sector and for those looking to move house or get on the housing ladder.

Propertymark is the UK's leading professional body for estate and letting agents, inventory providers, commercial agents, auctioneers and valuers, comprising nearly 18,000 members. We have long held the view that empty homes are a wasted resource and at a time when the housing market is in the grip of unsustainably low levels of stock for sale and for rent, it makes no sense that there are thousands of homes sitting vacant.

The latest UK Government data shows that vacant dwellings account for almost three per cent of the total dwelling stock in England. Over 235,000 homes have been empty for over six months and there are over 600,000 vacant homes, more than double the UK Government's annual housebuilding target.

Action is needed on empty homes as they can lower land values and make it harder to sell other properties nearby. Bringing empty homes back into use can also ease the pressure on existing housing stock and help improve local communities. In addition, we know that an increasing number of short-term lets in certain parts of the country are removing much needed homes to rent and buy.

Propertymark welcomes the measures outlined in the Levelling Up White Paper to address the issue of empty homes, but we believe there is more that can be done to tackle the issue. These include:

- **Restart the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme** - this was in place until 2015 and funded community groups to bring empty homes back into use. It is vital that there are avenues available for people and local authorities to buy, lease and refurbish empty homes as well as provide affordable housing. Additionally, many Councils report that there should be a speedier process for obtaining compulsory purchase orders on long-term empty homes. Consequently, more needs to be done to ensure local authorities can work with owners to bring properties back into use.
- **Introduce incentives to repair and improve empty homes** - owners' inability to fund repairs is often the main reason as to why homes remain empty. Consequently, it is vital that the UK Government introduce long-term financial incentives to encourage empty homes back into use. This must include removing VAT on home and energy efficiency improvements as well as

discounts or exemptions to Council Tax and Stamp Duty when empty properties are purchased and utilised.

- **Extend Levelling Up White Paper high street rejuvenation proposals** - explore a scheme to target owners of empty homes, similar to the one in the Levelling Up White Paper that sets out an intention to give councils powers that will place a requirement on landlords to find tenants for long-term vacant commercial properties in town and city centres. This way owners of long-term empty homes would be required to use the property to live in, rent out or put on the market for sale.

Additionally, we believe that supporting the conversion of suitable larger empty commercial premises to residential use, where there is housing need to do so, can play a valuable role in providing more housing options for people to buy and rent. Lack of supply in both the sales and rental markets is a major issue for the property sector, with Propertymark member agents reporting high demand outstripping historically low supply.

I would be grateful for a response to the points raised and for an opportunity to discuss this matter with the Department.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,



Timothy Douglas
Head of Policy and Campaigns
Propertymark