

Planning and Housing

EMPTY HOMES UPDATE

AUDIT COMMITTEE 29-11-24



What is an Empty Home?

- Short Term (STE) – less than 6 months
 - Being sold
 - Renovated
 - Natural part of housing market
- Long Term (LTE) – more than 6 months
 - Owner not interested or in care
 - Stuck in probate
 - Lack of finance
 - Majority of issues in LTE
- Second Homes

Empty Homes – Why do they matter?

ASB

- Vandalism
- Fly-tipping
- Squatting
- Drug dens

Blight

- Eyesore
- Can cause damage to neighbouring properties
- Reduce value of neighbouring homes
- Reputational damage
- Community spirit

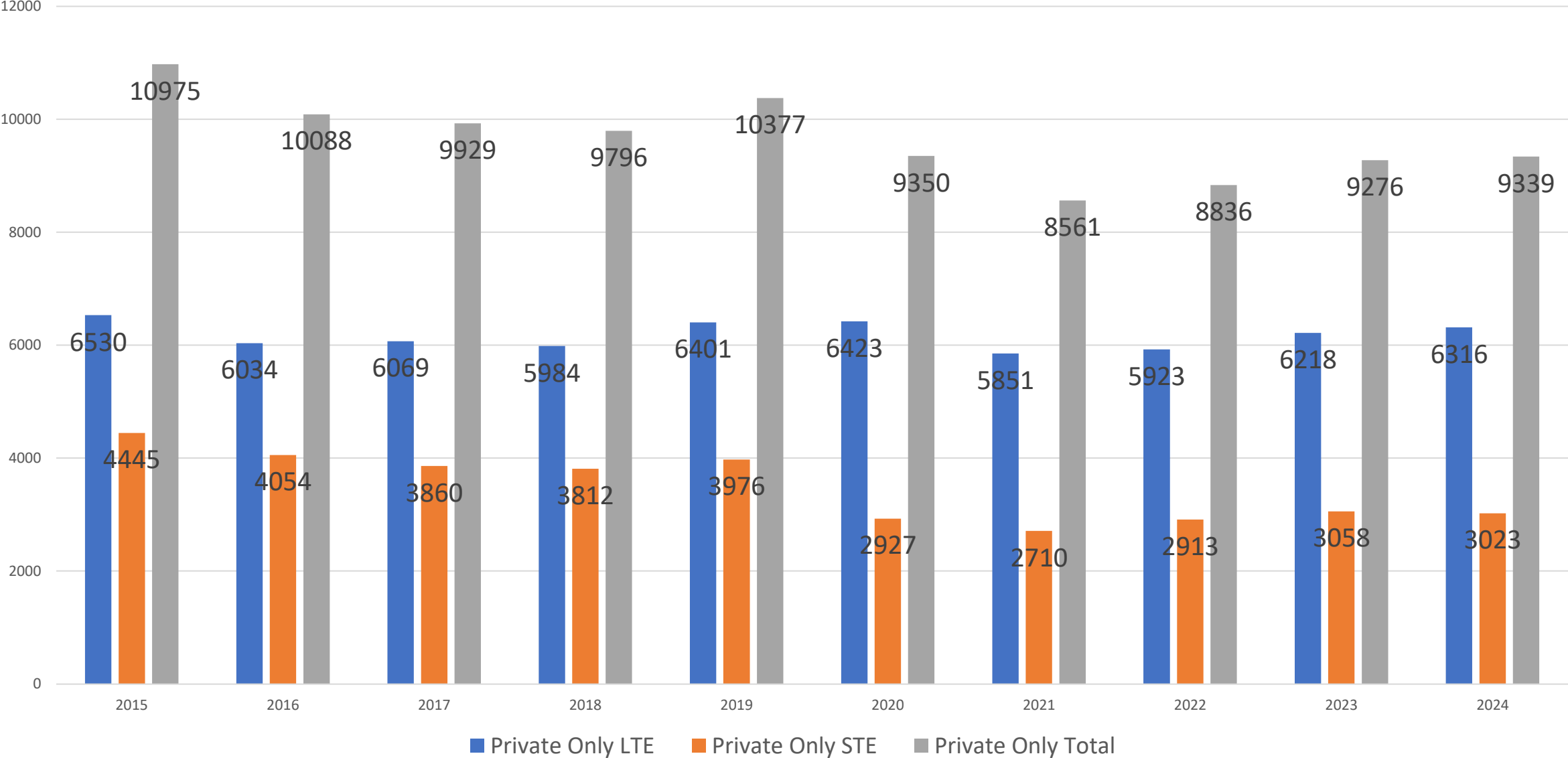
Resource

- Council services
- Fire
- Police
- Community

Other

- Wasted resource
- Increased renovation costs as deterioration occurs
- Safety

Empty Private Properties – County Durham



Context

National

- 25,300,000 dwellings in England
- 524,792 homes are not in primary residential use
- 261,400 homes that are long term empty (more than 6 months)
- 1.03% Long term empty

County Durham

- 253,322 dwellings
- 5746 not in primary use
- 4279 LTE
- 1.7% LTE

Regional

- 1,276,500 dwellings in North-East
- 28,276 homes are not in primary residential use
- 18,156 LTE
- 1.4% LTE

Data Summary

- LTE highest level since 2020
- Includes LTE and Second Homes
- Does not include those in probate
- Durham LTE higher than national and regional levels

Empty Homes Team

- Housing Regeneration Project Manager
- 5 x Housing Project Officers (4 FTE)
- 4 x Housing Project Support Officers
- Work in specific areas
- Aim to bring 200 properties a year back into use and have surpassed that every year apart from 2020-21 (covid)
- Targeted work using risk assessment to focus on those LTE that are causing the biggest to stakeholders including members, internal and external partner agencies and communities
- Team also deliver projects and interventions in Target Delivery Plan Areas

Bringing Empty Homes back into use



Engage and encourage owners

Advise
Support
Financial assistance



Enforcement

Enforced sale
Compulsory purchase
Empty Dwelling Management Orders
Council Tax Premium



Ensure database is current and robust

Council Tax
Land Registry
Case Management Records



Partnership work

Residents
Parish & Town Councils
Landlords
Police
Fire Service

Council Tax Premium

Period property is empty	Charge applied
Properties empty and unoccupied for up to 12 months	100% Council Tax charge will apply
Properties empty and unoccupied for 1 – 5 years	200% Council Tax charge will apply (includes 100% empty property premium)
Properties empty and unoccupied for 5 – 10 years	300% Council Tax charge will apply (includes 200% empty property charge)
Properties empty and unoccupied for more than 10 years	400% Council Tax charge will apply (includes 300% empty property charge)

NB: From 1st April 2025, Council Tax payable will increase by 100% on properties classed as Second Homes.

Common Problems with bringing homes back into use

- Probate
- Up to date data
- Tracing owners
- Owners not interested
- Complex and resource intensive enforcement procedures
- No or low demand due to stigma, outmigration, loss of employment source, older antiquated properties

Empty Homes Strategy

Being developed (April 2025 in line with Housing Strategy)

Links to Council Objectives

Vision 2035

Housing Strategy

Homelessness Strategy

Regeneration

Gives focus to bringing privately-owned LTE properties back into use

Advantages of having a focused Empty Homes Strategy

Reduction in anti-social behaviour

Reduces fear of crime and ASB

Reduced risk to emergency services

Provides income generation (council tax)

Recovery of debt

Reduced workload for council and agencies

Improves the existing built environment

Knock on effect on property prices

Helps meet housing need