

Bradford Empty Homes

Results of Bradford Residents' Survey

Introduction

Residents affected by empty homes were invited to give their views in an online survey. The consultation ran from 1 to 15 June.

Background

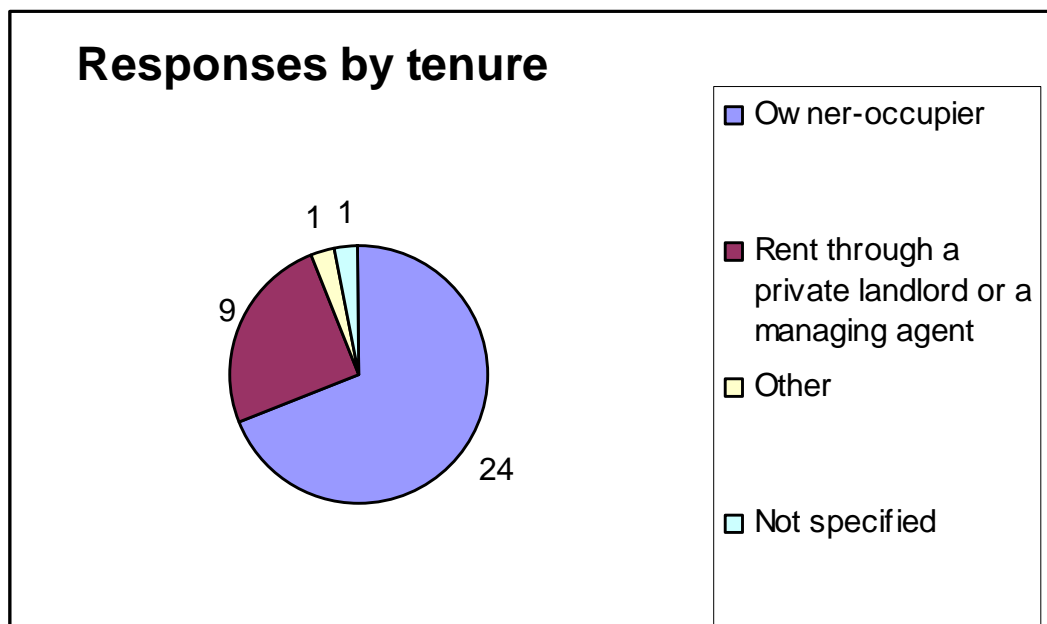
Bradford Council is currently drawing up new plans to bring more empty homes back into use and the survey responses will help to shape the strategy that is being developed.

Responses

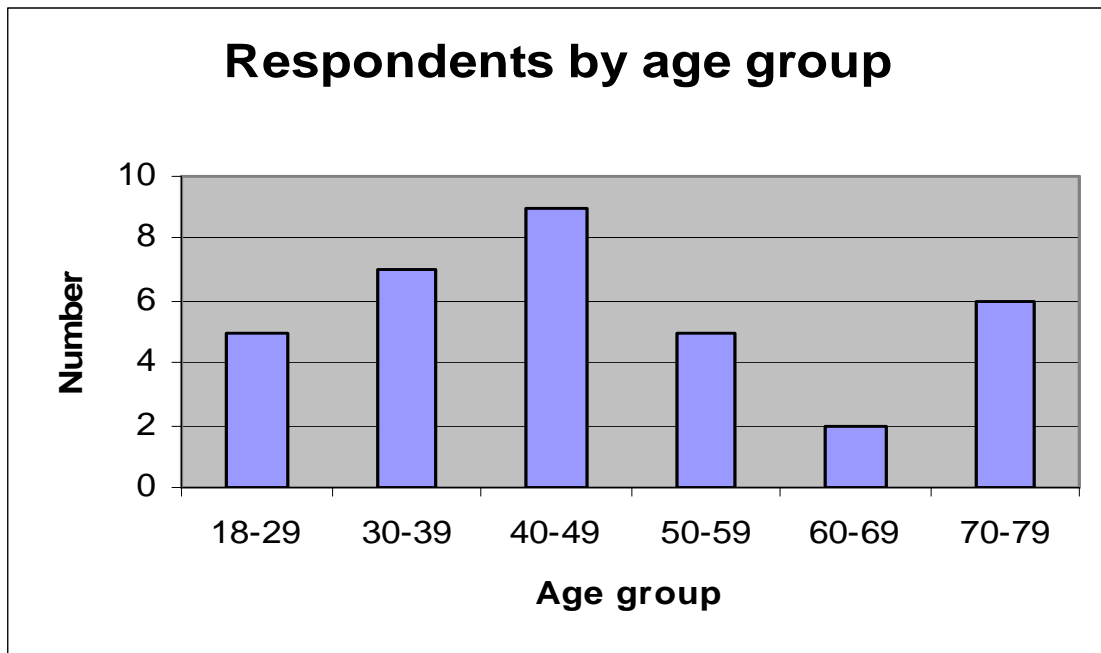
A total of 35 responses have been received. The low number of completed returns means we are unable to draw any representative conclusions from the consultation but they still offer an insight into the thoughts of those people taking part.

Respondents' profile

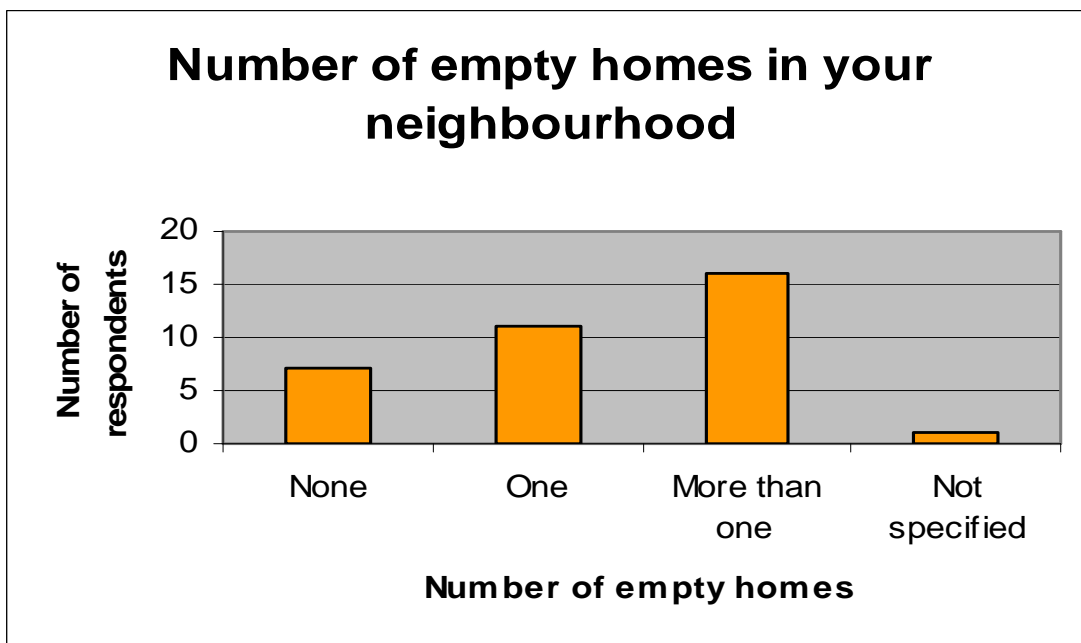
The responses we received are almost equally divided between men and women. Our respondents are predominantly white or white British (89%), most of them live in their own houses (69%) and some are renting privately (26%).



The respondents come from all age groups, the majority being between 40 and 49 years old, as shown on the chart below.



Most of our respondents have a personal experience of an empty home: nearly 70% had an empty home in their neighbourhood, some more than one.



Respondents who had an empty home in their neighbourhood felt quite strongly about their experience. One of our respondents said:

"<An empty home> has had an overwhelming impact on our physical and mental health ... the condition of the adjoining property is likely to take the roof from over our heads as vegetation and trees undermine the foundations of my home and pest problems increase."

Those who were not directly affected by an empty home still had some strong opinions:

"... I am aware of how many problems <empty properties> can cause BMDC and also seems to make new major applications for planning permission for big housing developments redundant when there are so many available."

"... I am struggling to get on the housing ladder and wondered if the council are considering this."

"... there are too many empty homes in Bradford and there are a lot of homeless people ... who could occupy those homes."

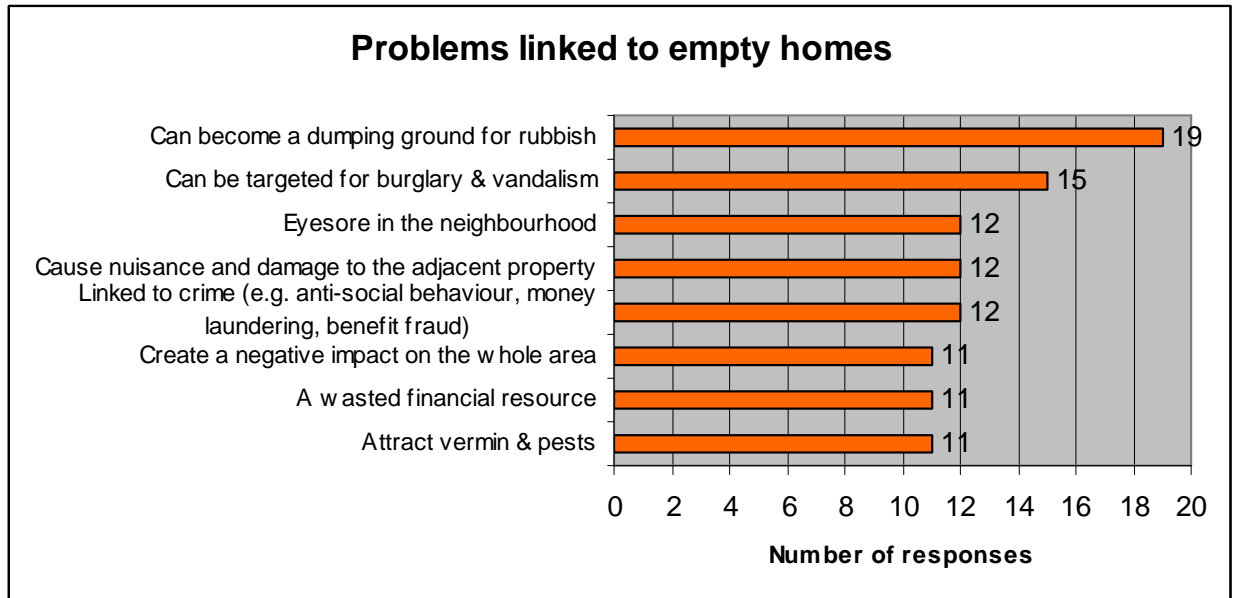
"... with the housing shortage <empty homes> should be brought back into use."

"... there is an empty home on ... the approach to Bradford, <which> gives a bad impression..."

"...I feel that there should be a more robust approach to dealing with <empty homes>. For example, if an owner cannot be traced within 12 months of the Local Authority being informed of the empty premise, the ownership should be transferred to the Local Authority without further expense to LA. If owner known and does not cooperate and put actions in place to bring property back into use within 6 months, ownership should be transferred to LA without further expense to LA. These properties could then be brought into a fit state and made part of a scheme for housing those people who find it difficult to obtain living accommodation via the normal routes."

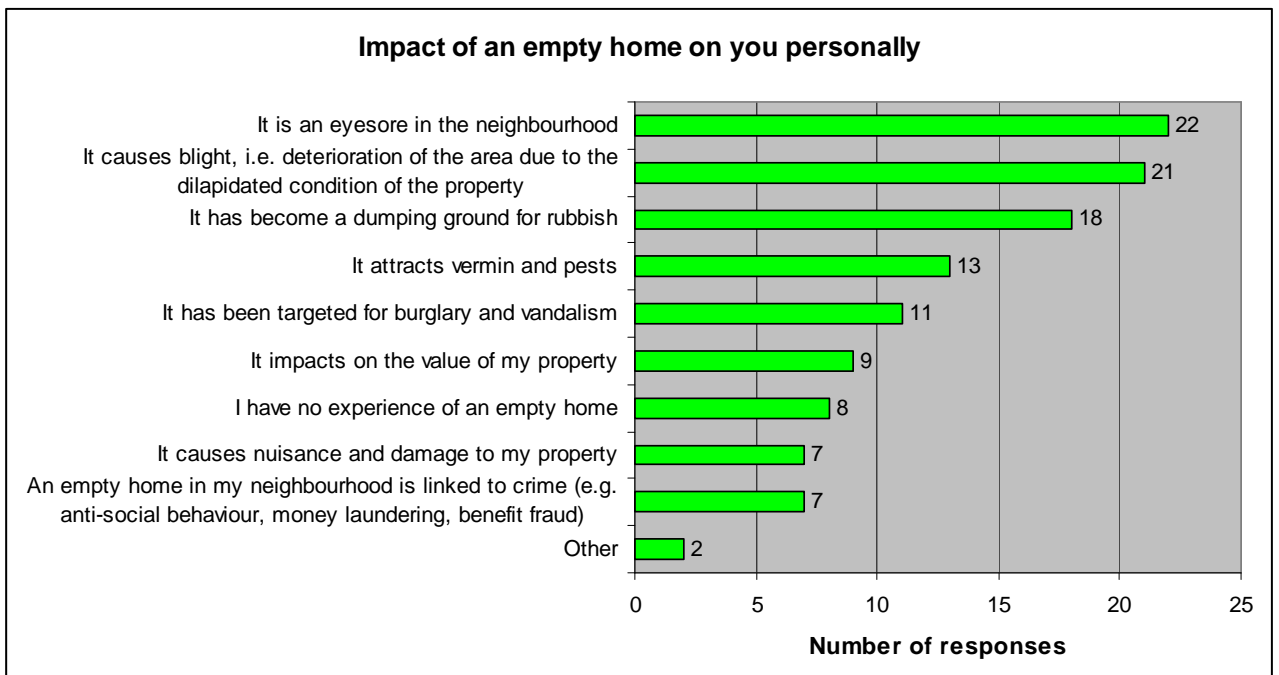
Problems associated with empty homes

Among the problems linked to empty homes that are of most concern to our respondents are that an empty property “can become a dumping ground for rubbish” (19 respondents) and that it “can be targeted for burglary and vandalism” (15) – see the chart below.



Impact of an empty home on our respondents

Those who are personally affected are most concerned by an empty property being “an eyesore in the neighbourhood” (22 votes) and that it “causes blight, i.e. deterioration of the area due to the dilapidated condition of the property” (21), as illustrated by chart below.



Awareness of Bradford Empty Homes Service

Prior to this survey, few were aware of Bradford Council's Empty Homes Team: 28 respondents out of 35 didn't know it existed.

Bradford Empty Homes Team objectives

The questionnaire outlined Empty Homes Team's objectives, which are:

1. To provide more affordable homes (making the best use of existing empty houses).
2. To tackle blight (i.e. to deal with the process of deterioration of an area due to the dilapidated condition of a property).
3. To enforce the statutory duty on empty home owners where the property is causing nuisance or is open to access.

The vast majority of our respondents (34 out of 35) felt that these objectives were relevant.

We asked for the residents' own suggestions and comments on the Empty Homes Team's objectives, this is some of the feedback we received:

"I'd like to see Bradford Council lead the way by helping ex forces personnel have a roof over their heads. There is a law saying they have a priority, but the majority of councils (including Bradford) don't comply with this"

"Make owners of empty properties rent their properties out at a decent, affordable rent and make sure they maintain them to avoid quick turnover."

"There needs to be a statutory duty on home owners not only to prevent there property becoming a nuisance but all taking the roof out from over the head of adjoining properties due to neglect. It's not OK to take someone else's home down with yours!"

"Where the Council is aware that there are problem properties, I'd like the Council to monitor the situation and take appropriate action, including influencing changes in the law to obtain rights to deal with issues affecting adjoining properties and the local community."

"If a house has been empty for 10 years, is there some way it can become available to the community again?"

"These should be brought back into use before granting companies permission to build on greenfield land"

"The problem seems to be that people do not want to buy the property because the price is too high."

“Planning control needs tightening up and enforcement followed.”

“... some of the private rented homes are not kept in good shape, gardens overgrown etc., are the landlords responsible for the look of the place? It makes the neighbouring houses less likely to sell!!”

“I think that it is disgraceful how many houses are empty when they could be filled with those who are homeless and those who are on low incomes, such as those who are on Jobseekers Allowance and also those who are seeking asylum in this city.”

More information about Empty Homes service needed

Our respondents would like to have more information about using the Empty Homes service:

“I would like to have more details of how to report empty properties, the timescale in which you can operate and all that - so I'd like better information available”.

Awareness of 100% council tax for empty homes

The Government is taking steps to discourage empty home owners from keeping their property empty for a long time: from April 2011 council tax for empty properties has risen to 100% from 50% - 74% of our respondents didn't know about this measure.

Next Steps

The outcomes of this survey will be used as evidence to support the new framework for bringing Bradford empty homes back into use.