



Neighbour guide 1

Help! The house next door is empty

- Concerned about an empty house next door?
- Worried about disrepair from an empty home affecting your own property?
- Anxious about how a rundown empty property could affect the look of your area?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, this guide is for you.

This toolkit will help those affected by an empty home to understand:-

- what actions can be taken to find the owner
- what can be done to prevent an empty home affecting your own property

Why are homes left empty?

It can be hard to understand why a home is left empty. However,

homes become empty and stay empty for a range of personal reasons:-

- Relatives may have an emotional attachment to a late loved one's home, making it difficult for them to part with it.
- A home may need considerable repairs which the owner can't afford
- Or life circumstances can force owners to move without selling first.

What does the law say about leaving a house empty?

There is no law in Scotland to stop a home being left unoccupied. Whilst it is not illegal, the longer a home stays empty, the more likely it is to fall into disrepair. Owners are responsible for maintaining and securing their properties. When they are unwilling or unable to do

every home matters

so, this is when an empty home could cause problems for you and your community.

What sort of problems can an empty home cause?

Neighbours tell us about a range of issues they face including:



I think the home next door to me is empty. What should I do?

1. Try to contact the owner
2. Contact your local Empty Homes Officer (EHO)
3. Contact us at the Scottish Empty Homes Advice Service:-

 0344 515 1941

 emptyhomes@shelter.org.uk

fill in the details on our '[report an empty property form](#)'

If the empty home owner's circumstances mean they cannot visit they could be unaware of any issues. Informing them of disrepair issues quickly, if you know their whereabouts, will prevent small problems from getting worse and safeguard their property and yours.

Finding the owner can be a challenge, but action with an empty property is more likely with cooperation with the owner.

If your first attempts at contact are unanswered, and if the problem gets worse, you can politely remind the owner of their responsibilities and outline the steps open to you. This includes:-

- contacting your local council
- seeking legal advice

If you do not know who the owner is, or where they are, your local council may have an Empty Homes Officer (EHO) who can help. They have other ways to trace owners, and if the owner responds to contact, they will help them with their property.

Councils are not always aware a private property is empty until it is reported by neighbours. A list of EHO contact details is available [here](#).

Our Advice Service can provide further information, especially if you live in an area which doesn't have an EHO.

Can I find the owner myself?

Tracing an empty home owner involves detective work. This includes combining information from different sources. Here are our suggestions of where to start:-

Registers of Scotland (RoS)- Title sheet - This is the official document RoS provides relating to a particular property. Information includes:-

- property description,
- registered owners,
- securities or charges against the property.

Anyone can request a copy for a small fee. Title sheets aren't always

updated so may provide the owner's name but just the empty property address.

Registers of Scotland (RoS) - Sasines Register. This is the older type of register in Scotland. If you can't find the property listed on RoS online, it may still be on this older system. You can request a manual search of the register using RoS' property help service. As this takes more time, there is a greater fee attached.

Other online sources:-

Scottish Landlord Register - If the property was rented out the landlord might still be registered and, if so, their details, or those of an agent, will appear here

Social media – This may be more useful once you have gathered information from the sources suggested above

Companies House – if any limited companies were registered at the address then details of any officers linked to the company may help with tracing ownership

Council planning department or online portal – details for any planning applications linked to the property are usually searchable on the council's website. These may give details for the owner or an agent such as an architect working on their behalf.

Whilst it may seem like a lot of time and effort, establishing contact will hopefully encourage the owner to act.

Where empty properties have deteriorated significantly and there are concerns about public health, disrepair affecting adjoining properties, or danger to the public,

EHOs work with environmental health and building standards.

These departments assess the risks posed by an empty property.

For councils without an EHO, their capacity to investigate and follow up with owners may be more limited. Our advice service can advise further.

What will the local council do when I report the empty property?

The majority of local councils in Scotland have Empty Homes Officers (EHOs). They can use various methods to trace and establish contact with owners and encourage action to be taken with the property. Although EHOs can't give out owner details to neighbours, they can make the owner aware of any disrepair concerns. Timescales depend on how easy the owner is to trace and if they respond to contact. Empty homes will remain on EHOs' radar, and they will continue to use every avenue possible to work with the owner.