

UPDATE ON EMPTY PROPERTY RELIEF POLICY IN NON-DOMESTIC RATES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 On 31 January 2019 the Scottish Government committed to devolving Empty Property Relief (EPR) to councils in time for the next revaluation. However both the revaluation and the devolution of EPR were delayed because of the pandemic and the go-live date for the devolved EPR became 1 April 2023. In October 2022 the Council's Policy and Resources Committee agreed that from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 the existing rules for Empty Property Relief would continue effectively mirroring the Scottish Government scheme and the scheme would be reviewed prior to 2024/2025 (this position is similar to many other Scottish Local Authorities).
- 1.2 In January 2023 the Scottish Government announced funding of £608,000 per annum for Argyll and Bute for each of the three financial years from 2023/2024 to 2025/2026 as a contribution towards the cost of EPR in our area. As at 1 April 2023 the cost of EPR awarded was £758,000 so we are running in deficit this year. The new policy for 2024/2025 onwards will be designed to maximise the use of these funds to revitalise local communities but costs will be contained within the funding provided by Scottish Government. There will be another revaluation of Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) from 1 April 2026 at which point the Scottish Government will review arrangements for devolved EPR. At this time they have not committed any funding beyond 31 March 2026.
- 1.3 This decision allowed the Council time to consult stakeholders on any new policy and the issues that they believe are important when considering empty business properties and the impact it has on their communities. A consultation with stakeholders ended on 4 August and the feedback from 506 responses has now been evaluated.
- 1.4 This update report summarises key findings from the consultation on the potential use of empty business properties in Argyll and Bute. The consultation engaged with a diverse group of stakeholders, including members of the public, property owners, community organisations and Elected Members. The report focuses on the location and profile of respondents, barriers and challenges to occupying empty properties, potential new roles for vacant buildings, incentives and support measures, and the community impact of addressing vacant properties.
- 1.5 The consultation received a total of 506 responses, with efforts made to identify respondents' locations. Notably, a significant portion of respondents did not provide location details. Of those who did, most were from Bute and Cowal,

particularly Dunoon, which influenced the evaluation of responses as much of the free-form comments were clearly particular to issues within that town.

- 1.6 It is recommended that the Policy and Resources committee consider the results of the EPR consultation and note that a revised policy will be brought to Council on 23 November 2023.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This update report summarises key findings from the consultation on the potential use of empty business properties in Argyll and Bute. The consultation engaged with a diverse group of stakeholders, including members of the public, property owners, community organisations and Elected Members. The report focuses on the location and profile of respondents, barriers and challenges to occupying empty properties, potential new roles for vacant buildings, incentives and support measures, and the community impact of addressing vacant properties.

3. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee –

- 3.1 consider the results of the Empty Property Relief Consultation and note that a revised policy will be brought to Council on 23 November 2023; and
- 3.2 note that a member's seminar will be held at the start of November to discuss the position and the options for a new policy.

4. DETAIL

- 4.1 On 31 January 2019 the Scottish Government committed to devolving Empty Property Relief (EPR) to councils in time for the next revaluation. However both the revaluation and the devolution of EPR were delayed because of the pandemic and the go-live date for the devolved EPR became 1 April 2023. In October 2022 the Council's Policy and Resources Committee agreed that from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 the existing rules for Empty Property Relief would continue effectively mirroring the Scottish Government scheme and the scheme would be reviewed prior to financial year 2024-25 (this position was similar to many other Local Authorities).
- 4.2 This decision allowed the Council time to consult stakeholders on any new policy and the issues that they believe are important when considering empty business properties and the impact it has on their communities. A consultation with stakeholders ended on 4 August and the feedback from 506 responses has now been evaluated.

The Current EPR Scheme

- 4.3 The current EPR scheme mirrors the Scottish Government scheme

1. All empty properties can get 50% relief from non-domestic rates for the first 3 months they're empty. They can then get a 10% discount after that.
2. Empty industrial properties can get 100% relief from non-domestic rates for the first 6 months that they're empty. They can then get a 10% discount after that.
3. Businesses can get 100% relief for the whole time a property is unoccupied, if:
 - it's a listed building
 - it has a rateable value under £1,700
 - it's owned by a trustee for sequestration, liquidation or executors
 - the company who owns it has been wound up
 - by law, the property cannot be occupied
 - it's under a compulsory purchase order
 - it has no buildings (empty ground)
 - the ratepayer is deceased

4.4 The consultation document issued to stakeholders is attached in Appendix 1. A comprehensive evaluation report is attached in Appendix 2.

Identifying Barriers and Challenges (Question 1)

4.5 Respondents highlighted regulatory challenges, including building standards compliance and property ownership issues. Addressing these hurdles requires regulatory reform and support for property owners.

4.6 High rent levels and potential rates liabilities were identified as significant financial barriers. Policy adjustments, financial incentives, and streamlined regulations are needed to address these challenges.

4.7 Stakeholders identified various barriers, such as owner disinterest, long-term leases, and access issues. Solutions include means-testing, property renovation grants, and penalties in the form of empty property charges for neglect.

New Roles for Vacant Buildings (Question 2)

4.8 The majority of respondents supported repurposing empty properties for alternative business use (73% i.e.- 369 of the 506 respondents ticked this predefined option). Other popular options included community use (65%), temporary pop-up use (63%), and spaces for artists and musicians (57%).

Incentives and Support (Question 3)

4.9 Allowing Artists to improve empty shop fronts with designs linked to the history or traditions of the towns the properties are in was seen as a good stop gap idea before a new business takes over the premises.

4.10 Stakeholders strongly endorsed financial incentives, including grants for building works, fixtures and fittings, and interior decoration. Tax breaks, rent-free periods, and grants to fully renovate empty properties were also popular.

- 4.11 A significant majority (65%) believed that consultancy support, such as an Empty Business Property Officer, would be valuable. Key support functions included local knowledge, advice and guidance, and a property matching service.

Community Impact (Question 4)

- 4.12 Respondents suggested a range of incentives, from maintenance standards enforcement to streamlined planning processes and improved infrastructure. Collaboration with local businesses and community engagement emerged as essential elements.
- 4.13 To support community organisations in bringing vacant properties back into use, stakeholders emphasised the need for financial support, knowledge sharing, collaboration opportunities, and incentives for property owners. Infrastructure improvements, council involvement, community engagement, and promoting local businesses and tourism were also highlighted.

Next Steps

- 4.14 There has not yet been any engagement with Housing or Economic Development on the outcome of the consultation. This engagement is crucial as we digest the feedback and consider the new empty property relief policy.
- 4.15 Members were given an opportunity to respond to the consultation, but to date two responses have been received. These responses will be considered with Economic Development and Housing Services before the preparation of the draft new policy
- 4.16 A members seminar will be held week commencing 30 October to cover the progress to date and show some options for consideration of the new policy.
- 4.17 A draft Empty Property Relief policy, informed by the consultation, engagement with professional officers in Housing and Economic development and robust factual data will be presented to the Council at its meeting on 23 November 2023.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The consultation provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with vacant properties in Argyll and Bute. Stakeholders across various backgrounds expressed a strong desire to revitalise these properties for the benefit of the community.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – This is a new policy for Empty property relief in non-Domestic Rates.
5.2 Financial – Financial implications of the not yet clear will be considered once draft policy is ready in December. However proceeding on basis that the new policy will be at least cost neutral for the Council.

- 5.3 Legal - None
- 5.4 HR - None
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty - None
- 5.5.1 Equalities – None
- 5.5.2 Socio-Economic Duty – None
- 5.5.3 Islands Duty - None
- 5.6 Risk – None.
- 5.7 Customer Service - None
- 5.8 Climate Change Implications - None

Anne Blue

Head of Financial Services

18 September 2023

Policy Lead for Finance and Commercial Services: Councillor Gary Mulvaney

Appendix 1: Copy of the Empty Property Relief consultation document

Appendix 2: Summary Consultation on Empty Business Properties in Argyll and Bute

For further information please contact Fergus Walker, Revenues and Benefits Manager Tel 01586-555237

APPENDIX 1: EMPTY PROPERTY RELIEF CONSULTATION

Dear Stakeholder

We are reaching out to ask for your valuable input and ideas on how empty business properties could be used to support Argyll and Bute's economic growth.

Long-term empty properties can have a significant impact on our towns and villages often falling into poor states of repair which can give a negative impression of a place, act as a focus for anti-social behaviour and cause maintenance problems for neighbouring buildings.

There are empty properties of different kinds across the area which we would like to see brought back into use, to create footfall in our town centres or turned into resources for our communities, affordable housing for example or other community benefits.

The Council has been given new powers which allow us to change the levels of relief available to empty business premises, please see the attached background information.

We would like to use these new powers to proactively help to bring premises back into use. To help achieve this we would like to hear your ideas for bringing properties back into use or creating new, useful roles for these buildings, as well as any barriers to using them.

We would appreciate you taking the time to answer four questions by 4 August please, by:

- Responding to our on-line survey (**add link**), or
- Downloading the form and sending comments to epr@argyll-bute.gov.uk or by letter at;
-

Argyll and Bute Council
Kintyre House
Snipefield Industrial Estate
Campbeltown
PA28 6SY

About you;

I am;

- An owner of an empty business property in Argyll and Bute
- An owner of an occupied business premises in Argyll and Bute
- Someone who has tried to let a business premises in Argyll and Bute but doesn't at present
- A member of the business community letting premises in Argyll and Bute
- Responding on behalf of a community organisation
- An interested member of the public

These are the four questions we would appreciate your views on:

1. Identifying barriers and challenges:

1. What are the main obstacles that prevent businesses from occupying empty properties? Please tick all that apply and add any details as necessary.
 - a) Regulatory issues?
 1. Health and Safety issues
 2. Environmental health standards
 3. Building regulations
 4. Planning/listed building consents
 5. Other regulatory barriers i.e.:- issues with property owner or tenants around the leases etc. Please state below
 - b) Financial issues;
 1. Rent level too high
 2. Potential Rates liability too high
 3. Other financial issues, please state below
 - c) Any other barriers or challenges preventing businesses occupying empty properties? Please state below

2. New roles for vacant buildings:

1. It will not always be possible for empty properties to be reopened for their original purpose. Whilst solutions will be different for each building, which of these alternative uses would you generally support? Please tick all that apply
 - a) Alternative business use
 - b) Storage
 - c) Community use
 - d) Housing
 - e) Temporary pop-up use
 - f) a hub for local music and arts
 - g) Other, please state

3. Incentives and support:

1. What types of incentives or support measures would encourage businesses to occupy empty properties? Please tick all that apply
 - a) Financial incentives
 1. Business start-up grants
 2. Tax breaks, VAT and/or Business Rates
 3. Rent free periods
 4. Grants to renovate empty property linked to new occupation
 1. Building works
 2. Internal decoration
 3. Fixtures and fittings
 5. Other financial incentive please state:

- b) Consultancy support, an Empty Business Property Officer to support businesses or business property owners to bring properties back into use. Providing
 - 1. Knowledge of all available business grant schemes
 - 2. An empty property and business matching service
 - 3. Provide advice, guidance, project management support to businesses going into empty properties.
 - 4. Other consultancy support, please state
 - 5. Is consultancy support required. Please tick yes or no
- c) Any other incentives or support measures that would encourage empty business properties to come back into use? Please state

4. Community impact:

- 1. What additional support would community organisations require to bring vacant properties back into use?

Next Steps

We will carefully analyse the feedback received and report on findings. We will consider routes for funding beneficial options and use this to guide future actions and policies.

We genuinely value your input, and your participation in this consultation will play a vital role in shaping the future of our area. Together, we can unlock the untapped potential of our empty business properties and build a stronger, more prosperous community.

Thank you in advance for your time and contributions.

If you would be willing to contribute to future policy development in this area please leave your name and contact details below;

Please see Data Privacy Notice [Consultations - Privacy Statement | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

Background:

The NDR (Scotland) Act 2020 stated that from 1 April 2023, empty property reliefs will be devolved to Local Authorities with relief for unoccupied property only available at the discretion of a local authority through local relief powers. The Council agreed that the current reliefs as set by the Scottish Government should be continued to 31 March 2024 to give the Council time to consider what it might want to do in terms of a new scheme that should incentivise business owners to bring empty properties back into use.

Argyll and Bute is home to 305 vacant business properties that, if brought back into use, have the potential to invigorate our communities, create employment

opportunities, and generate revenue for local businesses. By breathing new life into these vacant properties, we can foster an environment that supports entrepreneurship, encourages investment, and enhances the overall appeal of our towns.

Current scheme of Empty Property Charges

The current scheme is supported by legislation in sections 24 to 25 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1966, the Non-Domestic Rating (Unoccupied Property) (Scotland) Regulations 1994, and the Non-Domestic Rating (Unoccupied Property) (Scotland) Regulations 2018.

The law prescribes that;

1. All empty properties can get 50% relief from non-domestic rates for the first 3 months they're empty. They can then get a 10% discount after that.
2. Empty industrial properties can get 100% relief from non-domestic rates for the first 6 months that they're empty. They can then get a 10% discount after that
3. Businesses can get 100% relief for the whole time a property is unoccupied, if:
 - it's a listed building
 - it has a rateable value under £1,700
 - it's owned by a trustee for sequestration, liquidation or executors
 - the company who owns it has been wound up
 - by law, the property cannot be occupied
 - it's under a compulsory purchase order
 - it has no buildings (empty ground)
 - the ratepayer is deceased

APPENDIX 2 –

**CONSULTATION FEEDBACK ON EMPTY BUSINESS PROPERTIES IN ARGYLL
AND BUTE**



**Version1
18 SEPTEMBER 2023
FERGUS WALKER
REVENUES AND BENEFITS MANAGER**

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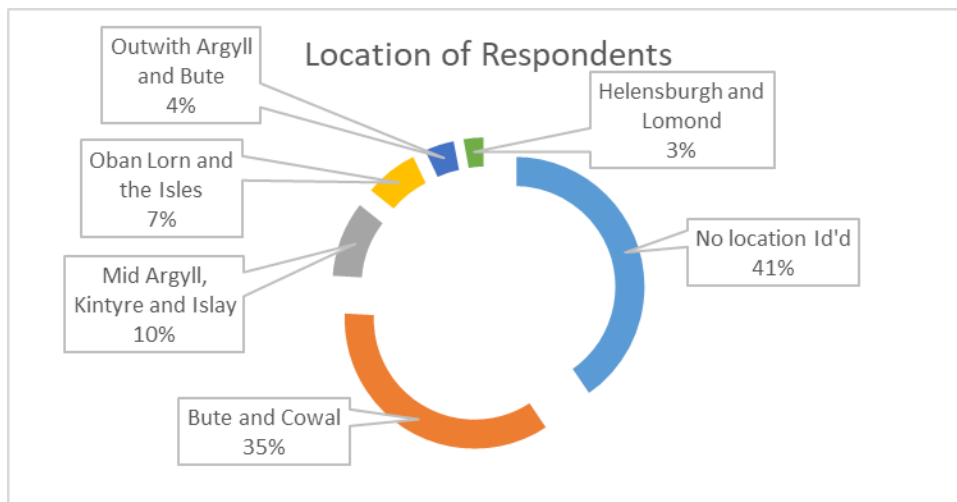
1. LOCATION OF STAKEHOLDERS RESPONDING TO THE CONSULTATION

The consultation into the potential use of empty properties in Argyll and Bute was circulated to just over 5,000 businesses locally via e-mail and was also communicated to the public via a social media campaign.

A total of 506 responses was received however 41% of respondents, did not leave their location details which is disappointing. Efforts were made to use the information given to identify the town or area the respondents were from and whilst we were able to identify about a dozen responses it did not have a significant impact on the overall sample.

The table and chart below shows the breakdown of respondents across our Administrative areas.

Town/Area	Count of Your address: Town
No location provided	205
Bute and Cowal	179
Mid Argyll, Kintyre and Islay	50
Oban Lorn and the Isles	36
Outwith Argyll and Bute	21
Helensburgh and Lomond	15
Total	506

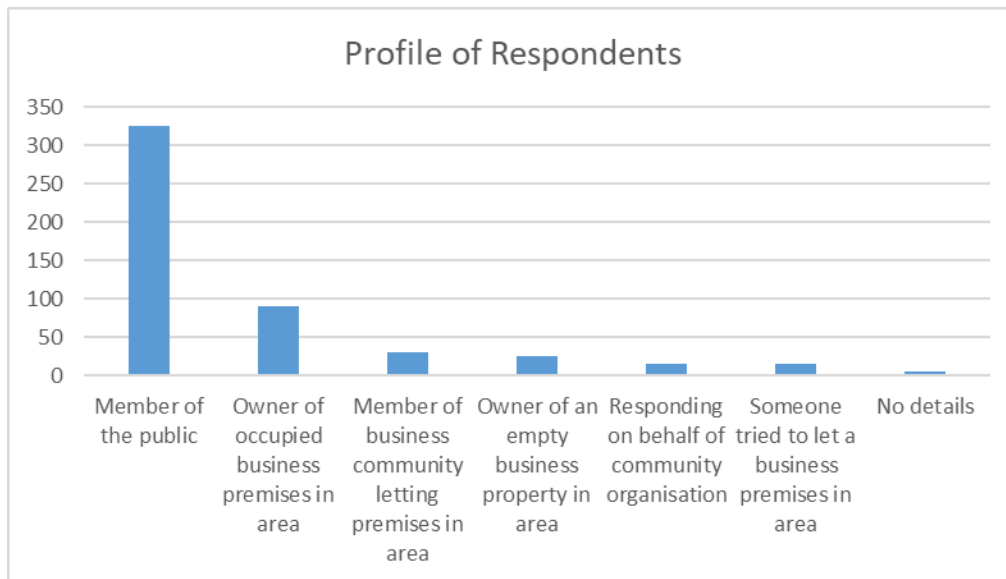


The most notable information here is that whilst many people did not identify their location, of those that did most were from Bute and Cowal, particularly Dunoon itself. This has inevitably had an impact on the evaluation of responses as many reflect the concerns of the people of Dunoon in particular.

2. STAKEHOLDER PROFILE OF RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION

The table and chart below shows the profile of people who took time to respond.

I am:	No.
Member of the public	326
Owner of occupied business premises in area	90
Member of business community letting premises in area	30
Owner of an empty business property in area	25
Responding on behalf of community organisation	15
Someone tried to let a business premises in area	15
No details	5
TOTAL	506



The majority of those responding classified themselves as interested members of the public, 64.4% 326 responses. A further 17.8%, 90 responses, were from people who own occupied business premises in Argyll and Bute. Approximately 10.9% were either members of the Business Community letting premises or they were owners of empty business premises in the area.

Circa 5.9% classified themselves as either someone who had tried to let an empty property but wasn't at present or they were responding on behalf of a community organisation. There was only a handful of people, 1%, who did not classify themselves on their returned form.

3. QUESTION 1 – IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Identifying barriers and challenges:

1. *What are the main obstacles that prevent businesses from occupying empty properties? Please tick all that apply and add any details as necessary.*

a) *Regulatory issues?*

1. *Health and Safety issues*
2. *Environmental health standards*
3. *Building regulations*
4. *Planning/listed building consents*
5. *Other regulatory barriers i.e.:- issues with property owner or tenants around the leases etc. Please state below*

b) *Financial issues;*

1. *Rent level too high*
2. *Potential Rates liability too high*
3. *Other financial issues, please state below*

c) *Any other barriers or challenges preventing businesses occupying empty properties? Please state below*

4. RESPONSE 1A REGULATORY ISSUES

Looking at question 1A respondents were given the option to tick any of 4 options for the type of regulatory issues that could be a barrier to occupying an empty business premises. The four options were, Health and Safety issues; Environmental health standards; Building regulations; Planning/listed building consents and a fifth option asked for any other regulatory barriers.

The table below shows the frequency that each of the four identified options were selected from the 506 responses in total.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Regulatory Issues	An interested member of the public	An owner of an occupied business premises in Argyll and Bute	A member of the business community letting premises in Argyll and Bute	An owner of an empty business property in Argyll and Bute	Responding on behalf of a community organisation	Someone who has tried to let a business premises in Argyll and Bute but doesn't at present	TOTAL
Planning, listed building consents	133	47	15	13	7	3	218
Building Regulations	108	39	6	6	6	3	168
Health and Safety	99	28	7	5	4	5	148
Environmental Health	77	21	4	3	2	5	112
	417	135	32	27	19	16	646

From the table we can see that the most commonly selected barrier from the use of an empty business property was Planning/listed building consents which was selected 218 times in total across all six stakeholder groups identified. Interestingly it featured as an issue in between 32% and 48% of cases in the first 5 stakeholder

groups (from interested member of the public, to responding on behalf of community organisations) but was proportionally less prominent 19% in the sixth group which is people who had actually tried to let an empty business premises in area so perhaps the thought of getting the relevant consents is worse than the reality.

Building regulations and Health and Safety regulations feature on 168 and 148 responses respectively and Environmental health issues 112 times. Like Planning and listed building consents the building regulations responses appear more prevalent in stakeholder groups 1 to 5 than in 6 whilst for the Environmental health issues the opposite can be said with more than 31% of people selecting these options as barriers compared to the others.

Where responders have taken the opportunity to talk freely of other regulatory barriers in Argyll and Bute reveal several common barriers preventing businesses from occupying empty properties have come through as follows:

1. **Regulatory Challenges:** Businesses encounter regulatory hurdles related to building standards and compliance, including issues like bats, private water supplies, and land title problems.
2. **Financial Constraints:** High costs such as rent, refurbishment, utilities, and rates, along with financial issues like drainage problems, pose significant challenges.
3. **Property Condition:** Many vacant properties are in poor condition, necessitating costly renovations, which can deter potential tenants.
4. **Ownership and Landlords:** Absentee landlords, inflated prices, and a lack of engagement from property owners hinder opportunities for businesses.
5. **Lack of Information:** Difficulty in identifying property owners, limited signage, and inadequate support in finding available properties contribute to the problem.
6. **Local Economic Factors:** Economic conditions, low footfall, and competition from larger retailers impact the viability of businesses in the region.
7. **Supply Chain and Logistics:** Challenges in accessing supplies and deliveries in rural areas can disrupt business operations.
8. **Regulatory and Compliance Costs:** Meeting regulatory requirements adds to the overall cost of occupying empty properties.
9. **Community Impact:** The presence of empty properties negatively affects towns' appearance and vitality, discouraging potential customers.
10. **Accessibility and Transportation:** Issues related to access, parking, and transportation can deter businesses and customers alike.
11. **Government and Council Policies:** High taxes, lack of support, and cumbersome processes related to property assessment and permits are concerns.

5. RESPONSE 1B FINANCIAL ISSUES

Looking at question 1B respondents were given the option to tick any of 2 options for the type of financial issues that could be a barrier to occupying an empty business premises.

Financial Issues	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL
	An interested member of the public	An owner of an occupied business premises in Argyll and Bute	A member of the business community letting premises in Argyll and Bute	An owner of an empty business property in Argyll and Bute	Responding on behalf of a community organisation	Someone who has tried to let a business premises in Argyll and Bute but doesn't at present	
Rent Level Too High	244	46	20	10	6	3	329
Potnetial Rates liability too high	213	58	19	5	5	3	303
TOTAL	457	104	39	15	11	6	632

From the table it is clear that both rent levels being too high and potential non-domestic rates liabilities being too high are seen as significantly financial issues. Rent was identified as an issue on 65% of responses and 60% opted for rates liabilities being high as well. The split across stakeholder groups was very similar for this question.

The feedback from various stakeholders in Argyll and Bute consistently emphasises the critical role of financial issues as barriers to businesses occupying empty properties in the region. These financial obstacles encompass:

1. **High Living Costs:** The cost of living and economic challenges, such as high living costs, are seen as significant barriers for both business owners and employees.
2. **Utility Expenses:** High electricity bills and utility costs are mentioned as substantial financial burdens for potential tenants.
3. **Rates Liability Concerns:** Concerns about rates (local taxes) and their potential impact on businesses are noted, highlighting the need for clarity and affordability.
4. **Regulatory Complexity:** Complex and confusing regulations can make compliance difficult and contribute to overall financial challenges.
5. **Compulsory BID Membership:** The requirement for compulsory membership in a Business Improvement District (BID) is viewed sceptically, potentially adding to the financial burden for businesses.
6. **Market Challenges:** Identifying profitable customer bases, availability of labour, and business inputs, infrastructure, and services are factors considered as challenges in creating a supportive business environment.
7. **Property Condition:** The condition of vacant properties and the costs associated with bringing them up to standard are significant financial hurdles.
8. **Property Ownership and Costs:** Property ownership issues, including unrealistic rent expectations and inflexible rates, are identified as barriers to property occupation.
9. **Funding Accessibility:** Difficulty in accessing funding for property renovations and start-ups is a common concern among stakeholders.
10. **Repair and Renovation Costs:** High renovation expenses, coupled with unreliable tradesmen and the need to address dampness and insulation, pose financial challenges.
11. **Council Tax Impact:** Double Council Tax charges for properties under renovation add to the financial burden for property owners.
12. **Operational Expenses:** Various operational costs, including utilities, business rates, and maintenance, are seen as barriers to business

profitability.

13. **Inheritance Tax Uncertainty:** Uncertainty regarding inheritance tax treatment for certain businesses is mentioned as an issue.

Comments typically reflected that the possibility of 1 year rent free and/or one year rates free would potentially attract new businesses to use empty properties.

6. RESPONSE 1C OTHER BARRIERS

This question allows stakeholders to respond freely and add any other barriers they think may present huge challenges to people who may occupy empty business properties in our area. The consultation feedback here reveals a multitude of barriers beyond financial issues that hinder businesses from occupying empty properties in the region. These obstacles include:

1. **Owner Disinterest:** Some property owners neglect their properties, making them unattractive for potential businesses.
2. **Binding Lease Terms:** Landlords impose long-term leases with full repair and maintenance responsibilities, leading to unexpected costs.
3. **Planning Rules:** Temporary dispensation for colourful window vinyl is proposed to enhance the town's appearance.
4. **Access and Road Infrastructure:** Access to properties and road quality are mentioned as barriers.
5. **Supply Business Regulations:** Rules for setting up supply businesses need review.
6. **Double Rates during Refurbishment:** Double rates during property refurbishment are seen as punitive.
7. **Landlord Attitudes:** Unwillingness to invest in property maintenance or negotiate rental terms is a challenge.
8. **Economic Uncertainty:** Uncertainty about property occupancy due to economic conditions is a catch-22.
9. **Rent and Overheads:** High rent and overhead costs deter businesses.
10. **Parking Restrictions:** Parking restrictions hinder business operation.
11. **Lack of Business Ideas:** A lack of innovative business ideas affects property occupancy.
12. **Property Neglect:** Neglected properties deteriorate, discouraging occupancy.
13. **Online Shopping Impact:** Online shopping reduces footfall, impacting businesses.

7. QUESTION 2 - NEW ROLES FOR VACANT BUILDINGS

1. *It will not always be possible for empty properties to be reopened for their original purpose. Whilst solutions will be different for each building, which of these alternative uses would you generally support? Please tick all that apply*
 - a) *Alternative business use*
 - b) *Storage*
 - c) *Community use*
 - d) *Housing*
 - e) *Temporary pop-up use*

- f) *a hub for local music and arts*
g) *Other, please state*

8. RESPONSES TO QUESTION 2 NEW ROLES FOR VACANT BUILDINGS

This question gives stakeholders the opportunity to tick one or more of 6 options linked to possible alternative uses for empty business premises. The number of ticks across the 506 responses are outlined in the table below. People were allowed to tick more than one option hence the fact we recorded 1,575 ticks in total.

Alternative Use	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL
	An interested member of the public	An owner of an occupied business premises in Argyll and Bute	A member of the business community letting premises in Argyll and Bute	An owner of an empty business property in Argyll and Bute	Responding on behalf of a community organisation	Someone who has tried to let a business premises in Argyll and Bute but doesn't at present	
Alternative Business Use	234	77	25	15	10	8	369
Community use	222	62	19	7	12	8	330
Temporary Pop Up Use	228	51	16	5	7	8	315
Hub for Music/Arts	201	51	16	5	8	6	287
Housing	119	53	14	14	9	4	213
Storage	20	19	8	10	3	1	61
TOTAL	1024	313	98	56	49	35	1,575

This table shows us that the most popular alternative use of an empty business premises was another business use ie:- a café turning into a flower shop for example, 73% of responses were for this option, 65% liked the community use option whereby we would engage with community organisations to consider alternative uses to support the community and 63% liked the idea of Pop-Up uses such as Advice services, emergency services, housing landlords, hospital provision, health advice etc to be joined up and delivered in that manner. 57% of stakeholders liked the idea of spaces for artists and musicians to paint, practice and play and 42% liked the idea of turning some empty business properties into housing in the right circumstances.

Broadly speaking all of these options were given support. The only option not really support was using empty premises for storage facilities, 12%, which possibly reflects the fact that storage is perhaps not as much use to the community in terms of revitalising town centres.

Where consultation feedback was free form it reveals a broad spectrum of innovative ideas and proposals for repurposing vacant buildings and offers insights into potential incentives and support mechanisms for revitalisation in Argyll and Bute. Alternative Uses for Vacant Buildings:

1. **Community and Arts Hub:** Interest in transforming vacant properties into local music and arts hubs for workshops, exhibitions, and creative activities.
2. **Temporary Pop-Up Use:** Suggestions encompass temporary shops, crafting groups, bookstores, escape rooms, meeting spaces, classes,

- bakeries, and gift shops.
3. **Housing:** Conversion into residential housing or affordable family holiday homes for young families is proposed.
 4. **Youth and Community Centres:** Ideas include creating safe spaces for young adults and children, housing youth clubs, and community projects.
 5. **Multi-Functional Spaces:** Proposals for versatile shared spaces serving various purposes such as teaching, local community radio, club meetings, and events.
 6. **Surestart-Type Centres:** Suggestions for centres supporting families, including play centres and activities for young community members.
 7. **Demolition or Refurbishment:** Recognising unviable buildings, some suggest demolition or refurbishment for other purposes.
 8. **Information Display:** Recommendations involve decorating exteriors with service information and promoting vacant properties through a dedicated website.
 9. **Unique Spaces:** Encouragement for creativity, such as converting former shops into gardens with benches or offering spaces for writers and creativity.

9. QUESTION 3 - INCENTIVES AND SUPPORT

1. *What types of incentives or support measures would encourage businesses to occupy empty properties? Please tick all that apply*
 1. *Financial incentives*
 - a) *Business start-up grants*
 - b) *Tax breaks, VAT and/or Business Rates*
 - c) *Rent free periods*
 - d) *Grants to renovate empty property linked to new occupation*
 1. *Building works*
 2. *Internal decoration*
 3. *Fixtures and fittings*
 - e) *Other financial incentive please state:*
 2. *Consultancy support, an Empty Business Property Officer to support businesses or business property owners to bring properties back into use. Providing*
 - a) *Knowledge of all available business grant schemes*
 - b) *An empty property and business matching service*
 - c) *Provide advice, guidance, project management support to businesses going into empty properties.*
 - d) *Other consultancy support, please state*
 - e) *Is consultancy support required. Please tick yes or no.*
 3. *Any other incentives or support measures that would encourage empty business properties to come back into use? Please state*

10. RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3A – FINANCIAL INCENTIVES AND SUPPORT FOR OCCUPYING VACANT BUILDINGS:

Question 3 gives stakeholders the opportunity to tick one or more of 7 options linked to other incentives and support to encourage people to occupy empty business

premises. The number of ticks across the 506 responses are outlined in the table below. People were allowed to tick more than one option hence the fact we recorded 2,132 ticks in total.

Financial Incentives	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL
	An interested member of the public	An owner of an occupied business premises in Argyll and Bute	A member of the business community letting premises in Argyll and Bute	An owner of an empty business property in Argyll and Bute	Responding on behalf of a community organisation	Someone who has tried to let a business premises in Argyll and Bute but doesn't at present	
Business Grants	246	67	20	12	8	6	359
Grants for Fix and Fit	132	40	11	8	8	7	206
Grants - Building works	159	46	14	17	7	10	253
Grants - Interior decoration	144	39	11	9	8	8	219
Renovation grants	265	78	23	18	10	14	408
Rent Free Periods	239	51	22	8	12	6	338
Tax Breaks	229	71	17	15	10	7	349
TOTAL	1,414	392	118	87	63	58	2,132

Offering new businesses grants was a very popular option in this area with 359 ticks in 506 responses 71%. This is probably not surprising given the level of business grant support given to businesses during the pandemic. Specific grants for building works, to cover the cost of fixture and fittings or for interior decoration received support on 50%, 43% and 41% of responses. However, the most popular option was grants to fully renovate empty properties which received support on 81% of responses. Both rent-free periods and tax breaks were also very popular being ticked on 66% and 69% of the returns.

Other ideas for financially incentivising people to take on empty properties came out in the freeform area to respond to this question. The responses included

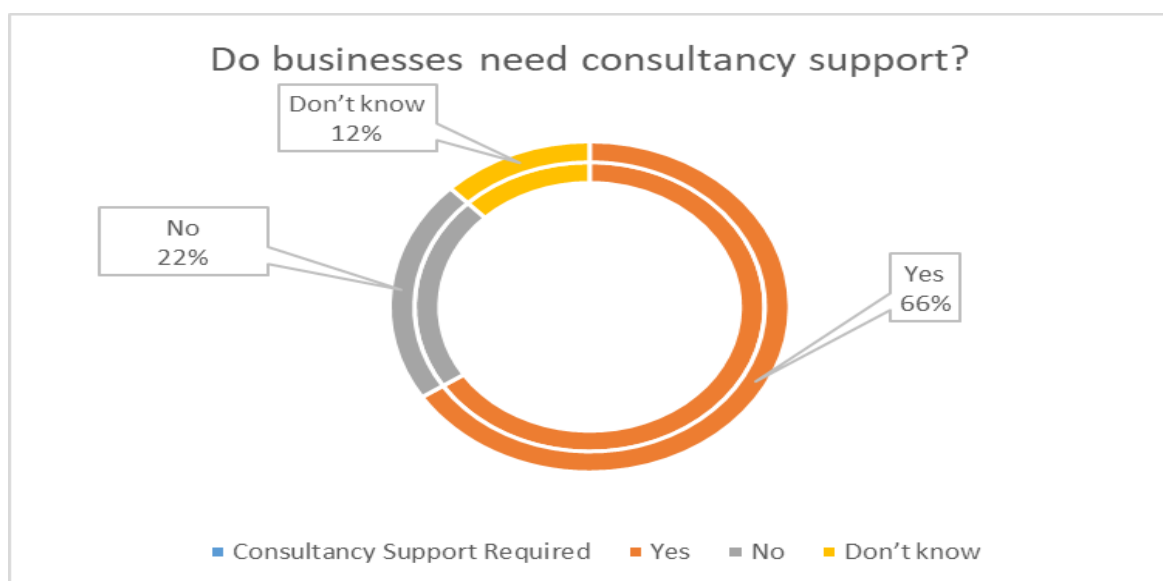
1. **Means Testing and Ownership Control:** Proposals for means-testing businesses and controlling property ownership to prevent neglect.
2. **Business Start-Up Grants:** Support for new businesses through start-up grants.
3. **Property Renovation Grants:** Grants linked to renovating vacant properties for new occupancy.
4. **Consultancy Support:** Providing consultancy support to confirm business viability.
5. **Child Support:** Assistance for parent shop owners, possibly in the form of child support.
6. **Energy Efficiency and Green Improvement Grants:** Grants for enhancing energy efficiency, renewable energy, and heating systems.
7. **Promotion and Advertising Support:** Aid with promotion and advertising to attract customers.
8. **Parking and Transport Vouchers:** Vouchers for free parking or bus travel for customers.
9. **Utilities Support:** Support for water and electric standing charges.
10. **Good Quality WiFi:** Provision of high-quality WiFi for occupants.
11. **Maintenance Requirements:** Ensuring property occupants maintain both

- interior and exterior aspects.
12. **Penalising Building Neglect:** Suggested penalties for neglect and misuse of properties.
 13. **Appealing External Appearance:** Encouraging appealing storefront appearances.
 14. **Permitting Creative Shopfronts:** Allowing artists to develop imaginative shopfronts without extensive permits.
 15. **Discounted Utilities:** Exploring agreements with utility companies to provide discounted utilities during the initial rental period.
 16. **Demolition Grants:** Financial incentives for demolishing vacant buildings when appropriate.
 17. **Subdivision of Units:** Suggestion to subdivide larger units for more flexible occupancy.
 18. **Double Council Tax Reduction:** Extended reduction or removal of double council tax during renovation.
 19. **Private Water Supply Assistance:** Providing help for properties with private water supplies.
 20. **Recognition of Seasonality:** Acknowledging the impact of seasonality on businesses.

11. RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3B – CONSULTANCY SUPPORT/EMPTY PROPERTY OFFICER FOR OCCUPYING VACANT BUILDINGS

Question 3b) floats the idea of the provision of consultancy support such as an Empty Business Property Officer to support businesses or property owners to bring these properties back into use.

We asked the question, do businesses need consultancy support in this area? The chart below shows that 65% of stakeholders said yes, 22% said no and, 12% didn't know.



When considering what sort of support would be useful 75% opted for a good level of

local knowledge re the sort of support being available to stakeholders about empty properties. Similarly 71% would want advice and guidance and a matching service was a good idea according to 57% of stakeholders. This would match empty properties to the people who may register an interest re taking them on.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Consultancy Support	An interested member of the public	An owner of an occupied business premises in Argyll and Bute	A member of the business community letting premises in Argyll and Bute	An owner of an empty business property in Argyll and Bute	Responding on behalf of a community organisation	Someone who has tried to let a business premises in Argyll and Bute but doesn't at present	TOTAL
Knowledge	247	77	17	19	12	9	381
Advice and guidance	259	59	15	14	10	8	365
Matching service	196	54	13	14	7	8	292
TOTAL	702	190	45	47	29	25	1,038

Looking at the details, responses regarding "Incentives and Support" demonstrate a range of opinions. Some respondents prefer tangible support over consultancy roles, questioning the necessity of additional staff positions. Concerns about budget constraints, redundancy, and existing schemes like the Business Gateway are prevalent. However, a few emphasise community use, while others suggest alternatives to hiring support officers, such as comprehensive websites or knowledge banks.

Scepticism about the need for consultants is also expressed, especially when information is readily available elsewhere. Enforcement of building standards and compliance is proposed, and financial concerns regarding high salaries of a potential Empty Business Support Worker are raised. Overall, there's a prevailing sentiment of scepticism regarding the necessity and cost-effectiveness of such roles.

12. RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3C – OTHER INCENTIVES FOR OCCUPYING VACANT BUILDINGS

Regarding "Other Incentives" from an interested member of the public, a wide array of recommendations is provided. This includes diverse uses for empty properties, maintenance standards enforcement, supportive rent schemes, streamlined planning processes, support for new businesses, improved infrastructure, and community engagement. The response reflects a comprehensive understanding of revitalising the local business environment, catering to various aspects, from property use to infrastructure improvements.

Various stakeholders' responses offer valuable insights into addressing empty business properties in Argyll and Bute. Recommendations span from penalties for property owners to streamlined regulatory processes, financial incentives, and improved infrastructure. Collaboration with local businesses, community engagement, and promoting tourism emerge as critical elements in revitalisation efforts.

13. QUESTION 4 COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 1. What additional support would community organisations require to bring vacant properties back into use?*

The feedback on "Community Impact" highlights key themes, emphasising financial support, knowledge and guidance, collaboration, incentives for property owners, infrastructure, and council involvement. Engaging the community, promoting local businesses and tourism, and efficient decision-making processes are also seen as crucial for revitalising areas affected by vacant properties.

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