# Britain’s rising ghost towns expose empty homes crisis amid soaring demand



The landscape of Britain is increasingly marred by the emergence of ghost towns, a phenomenon that evokes images more commonly associated with the American West. From boarded-up shops to abandoned homes, these signs of decline bring into sharp focus the paradox of a chronic housing shortage despite a significant number of vacant properties. The situation is alarming, encompassing not only economically deprived regions but also affluent areas that have become shadowy reflections of their potential.

Recent statistics reveal that England alone has over 700,000 vacant dwellings, a number that has risen dramatically in recent years. Over 250,000 empty homes exist within the framework of a housing crisis where affordability is a looming issue for many. Harry Fenner, chief of Navana Property Group, highlights the absurdity of this surplus, commenting, “There are over 250,000 unoccupied houses in England, which is an incredible stat when you consider how many people cannot get on the housing ladder or are homeless.”

The national context underscores the severity of the issue. According to the Office for National Statistics, as of 2021, unoccupied dwellings accounted for 6.1% of homes in England, and this figure has shown an upward trend over the past decade. In regions such as London, the situation is more pronounced, with some of the most expensive areas, including Westminster and Chelsea, witnessing a drop in long-term residents. Homes in these prestigious locales are increasingly treated as investment pieces, often remaining vacant while their owners reside elsewhere, contributing to a sense of abandonment in these otherwise desirable areas. Asad Khan, a property investor, poignantly notes, “Properties in Chelsea and Kensington are treated more as ‘investment vehicles’ rather than places to actually live.”

The implications of these empty homes extend beyond mere aesthetics; they signify an urgent failure in housing provision that devastates community fabric. In parts of Liverpool, for instance, over 11,000 residential properties are vacant amid a backdrop of stalled regeneration. Liam Gretton, an estate agent in the region, points out that neglected areas lead to decreased property values and stagnation, trapping communities in cycles of decline.

The phenomenon of ghost towns is evident across various locations in Britain. Gwynedd in Wales has the highest rate of abandoned properties per capita, with around 5,300 homes vacant for every 100,000 residents. This trend is echoed in coastal towns like Blackpool, where seasonal fluctuations have left once-thriving neighbourhoods desolate in winter months, compounded by rising prices driven by short-term rental markets.

Coventry, often featuring in lists as one of the most challenged cities, reflects a similar narrative. Once a bustling hub, the city now grapples with a staggering 40% of its shops lying empty. This degradation is not isolated; multiple towns across the Midlands and beyond, such as Harlow and Stretford, demonstrate alarming rates of desolation, marked by forsaken homes and shuttered businesses.

In urban centres like Camden and Westminster, the story is but a microcosm of a national crisis. The number of empty council homes in Camden is notable, with properties often left vacant awaiting refurbishment that is financially prohibitive. Estimates suggest that the average high street may soon resemble a ghost town if present trends continue, illustrating a broader failure to utilise available resources effectively.

In closing, the growing number of ghost towns throughout the UK spotlights an urgent public policy dilemma. With many areas rich in potential yet hindered by vacant homes and failing businesses, experts advocate for innovative solutions to repurpose these properties, suggesting that rather than simply building new homes—which can be resource-intensive—we must urgently explore the intelligent reuse of existing structures. Amid rising homelessness and justifiable frustrations surrounding housing, addressing this complex issue could redefine community and housing dynamics in the UK for generations to come.

### Reference Map

* **Paragraph 1**: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/property/article-14734719/Britain-failing-ghost-towns-prices-plummeting-homeowners-sell.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/a01ca2e7-fe93-43b0-9c8f-f268804a1ee7)
* **Paragraph 2**: [[3]](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/housinginenglandandwales/latest), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/24/more-stressful-than-prison-sharp-rise-in-the-number-of-empty-properties-in-england), [[5]](https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/empty-homes-england-rise-nearly-10-cent-five-years)
* **Paragraph 3**: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/property/article-14734719/Britain-failing-ghost-towns-prices-plummeting-homeowners-sell.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/how-many-empty-homes-are-there-in-the-uk/)
* **Paragraph 4**: [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/a01ca2e7-fe93-43b0-9c8f-f268804a1ee7), [[3]](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/housinginenglandandwales/latest), [[7]](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/numberofvacantandsecondhomesenglandandwales/census2021)
* **Paragraph 5**: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/property/article-14734719/Britain-failing-ghost-towns-prices-plummeting-homeowners-sell.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/how-many-empty-homes-are-there-in-the-uk/)
* **Paragraph 6**: [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/24/more-stressful-than-prison-sharp-rise-in-the-number-of-empty-properties-in-england), [[5]](https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/empty-homes-england-rise-nearly-10-cent-five-years)
* **Paragraph 7**: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/property/article-14734719/Britain-failing-ghost-towns-prices-plummeting-homeowners-sell.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/housinginenglandandwales/latest)
* **Paragraph 8**: [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/a01ca2e7-fe93-43b0-9c8f-f268804a1ee7), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/24/more-stressful-than-prison-sharp-rise-in-the-number-of-empty-properties-in-england)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/property/article-14734719/Britain-failing-ghost-towns-prices-plummeting-homeowners-sell.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/a01ca2e7-fe93-43b0-9c8f-f268804a1ee7> - This article discusses the UK's housing crisis, highlighting the over 700,000 vacant dwellings in England as of October 2024. It emphasizes the need to repurpose these properties to address the housing shortage, suggesting that building new homes is resource-intensive and may not meet quality standards. The piece advocates for the intelligent reuse of existing buildings to provide sustainable housing solutions.
3. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/housinginenglandandwales/latest> - The Office for National Statistics reports that in 2021, 6.1% of dwellings in England and 8.2% in Wales were unoccupied. This equates to 1.5 million unoccupied dwellings in England and 120,450 in Wales. The report notes an increase in unoccupied dwellings compared to 2011, with London having the highest percentage at 8.0%.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/24/more-stressful-than-prison-sharp-rise-in-the-number-of-empty-properties-in-england> - This article highlights a 24% increase in long-term empty properties in England over six years, totaling 248,000 as of late 2022. It discusses the potential to repurpose these homes to alleviate homelessness, noting that the number of empty properties has risen in every English region during this period.
5. <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/empty-homes-england-rise-nearly-10-cent-five-years> - The Local Government Association reports a nearly 10% increase in long-term empty homes in England over five years, with over one million properties unoccupied in 2022. Despite efforts like the empty homes premium introduced in 2013, the numbers continue to rise across England, Scotland, and Wales.
6. <https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/how-many-empty-homes-are-there-in-the-uk/> - This article discusses the challenges in quantifying empty homes in the UK, noting that as of November 2023, there were 261,189 long-term empty properties in England. It also highlights the rise in second homes, with over 263,000 in England in 2023, and the impact of empty homes on the housing crisis.
7. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/numberofvacantandsecondhomesenglandandwales/census2021> - The Office for National Statistics provides data from the 2021 Census, revealing that 6.1% of dwellings in England and 8.2% in Wales were unoccupied. The report distinguishes between truly vacant dwellings and second homes, noting that 89.7% of unoccupied dwellings in England were truly vacant.