# Ghost towns emerge across UK amidst housing crisis and rising vacancies



The sight of boarded-up shops and empty houses with untended gardens paints a stark picture of decline in certain communities across Britain. Often evoking images of abandoned locations in far-flung parts of the United States, the phenomenon of "ghost towns" is increasingly prevalent in the UK. This is especially striking when juxtaposed against the backdrop of a persistent housing shortage that leaves many individuals struggling to secure accommodation.

Experts highlight a staggering statistic: there are over 250,000 unoccupied properties in England. Harry Fenner, chief of Navana Property Group, notes that it is particularly disheartening that so many homes lie dormant while countless people are either homeless or unable to access affordable housing. Jack Malnick, managing director of Sell House Fast, echoes this sentiment of frustration, stating that it is difficult to rationalise such a high number of vacant properties in the face of expanding social housing waitlists and rising rental costs.

Interestingly, the prevalence of ghost towns is not restricted to economically disadvantaged areas; it can also manifest in more affluent regions. In places like Westminster and Chelsea, a notable number of properties sit empty, owned by wealthy individuals who reside elsewhere. As Malnick puts it, the growing trend of properties being marketed as second homes in rural and coastal settings exacerbates local housing issues, pushing prices beyond the reach of full-time residents. “In areas like St Ives and Whitby, house prices have surged considerably, far exceeding local wage averages,” he explains.

These vacant homes contribute to a broader narrative of community decay. As Daniel Mould, director of Tenant Angels Ltd, observes, the signs of decay extend beyond mere infrastructure; they reveal a fundamental failure to cater to the housing needs of actual residents. Daily, tenants face the harsh reality of rising rents, dilapidated living conditions, and the risk of being evicted, leading to dire consequences for entire regions.

An analysis of some of the UK’s ghost towns reveals alarming details about various localities, starting with **Liverpool**, which holds one of the highest rates of empty properties. There are over 11,000 unoccupied homes, many accompanied by derelict buildings and stalled regeneration projects that give parts of the city a deserted atmosphere. Areas like Toxteth exemplify this decline, with numerous Victorian properties lying neglected despite attempts at revitalisation.

Moving to **Kensington and Chelsea**, despite their prestigious reputations, these boroughs have experienced a decrease in resident populations. According to a local authority statement, unoccupied properties represent a wasted resource, both financially and socially. Asad Khan, an investor, highlights that many of these homes are treated as investment assets rather than places to foster community, contributing to lifeless neighbourhoods.

In the heart of **Westminster**, known for its political significance, over 4,000 residents have departed in the last decade, leaving large swathes of empty homes. In Mayfair, for example, it has been noted that more than half of the homes in specific areas remain vacant, often owned by millionaires preserving these properties as assets rather than living in them.

The issue extends beyond urban centres. **Gwynedd**, on the coast of Wales, ranks as one of the highest in the UK for empty homes per capita. The stark contrast between the beautiful scenery and the number of derelict cottages speaks to a seasonal tourist economy that has swollen housing prices beyond the capacities of locals. The village itself has faced pressures to bring these homes back into the market to combat the stark inequalities faced by prospective renters and homeowners.

Similarly, **Coventry** illustrates the effects of urban decline, with reports indicating a dramatic rise in boarded-up stores. Once a thriving locale, it now grapples with a reputation for being one of the most dangerous cities in the UK, causing long-term residents to flee as crime rates rise.

Other towns like **Harlow**, **Stretford**, and **Blackpool** reveal stories of past vibrancy turned to abandonment, capturing the struggles associated with empty homes and their impact on social fabric. Each of these sites illustrates a broader trend of neglect, where economic downturns and property market dynamics have conspired to transform lively towns into mere shells of their former selves.

In summary, the emergence of ghost towns, punctuated by an astonishing number of empty properties, underscores critical failures within the UK's housing policies. With communities suffering, and an estimated one million homes across the UK lying vacant, the call for innovative solutions to repurpose these properties grows ever more urgent. Ending this cycle of abandonment is not just about restoring buildings; it's about revitalising the communities that once thrived, ensuring that everyone has a place to call home.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 8
2. Paragraph 2
3. Paragraph 2
4. Paragraph 2
5. Paragraph 7
6. Paragraphs 4, 5
7. Paragraphs 6, 9

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## 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.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/24/more-stressful-than-prison-sharp-rise-in-the-number-of-empty-properties-in-england> - An article from The Guardian reports that nearly 250,000 properties in England have been left empty for months, prompting calls to repurpose them to alleviate the homelessness crisis. The number of long-term empty properties has increased by 24% over the past six years, with London seeing a 73% rise, now having over 34,000 empty properties. The charity Crisis estimates that up to 40,000 additional homes could be used to help tackle homelessness by 2028 if these properties were repurposed. The article highlights the urgent need for effective housing policies to combat homelessness in the UK.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/property/buying-selling/empty-homes-1-million-owners-dont-want-sell-property/> - The Telegraph reports that the number of unoccupied homes in England has surged to over one million, as owners are hesitant to sell due to fears of a potential house price crash. This marks a nearly 60,000 increase since 2018, with more than 4% of all properties in England now unoccupied. Experts suggest that factors such as an aging population and reluctance to sell inherited properties contribute to this rise. The article underscores the need for strategies to address the housing crisis and make better use of existing housing stock.
4. <https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/how-many-empty-homes-are-there-in-the-uk/> - An article from The Big Issue investigates the prevalence of empty homes in the UK, revealing that over one million homes are currently unoccupied. This includes 676,452 vacant properties in England, with 257,331 categorized as long-term empty homes, meaning they have been vacant for more than six months. The South West region has seen a 9% increase in long-term empty homes over the past year. The article emphasizes the missed opportunity to address the housing crisis by repurposing these vacant properties and calls for a national strategy to bring them back into use.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jan/30/wales-50m-derelict-empty-homes-back-into-use> - The Guardian reports that the Welsh government is investing £50 million to tackle the issue of derelict homes across Wales. The initiative aims to bring up to 2,000 long-term empty properties back into use, with grants of up to £25,000 available for homeowners to remove significant hazards and improve energy efficiency. The plan is partly designed to help younger people return to the places where they grew up, addressing the blight of empty homes in villages, towns, and cities across the country.
6. <https://www.propertyreporter.co.uk/greater-london-revealed-to-have-the-highest-volume-of-abandoned-properties-in-uk.html> - Property Reporter highlights a study by specialist lender Together, revealing that Greater London has the highest volume of abandoned and derelict homes in the UK, with nearly 290,000 standing completely empty as of 2023. These empty properties are valued at over £180 billion, and making them available to first-time buyers and home movers could play a significant role in easing the UK's growing housing crisis. The study also identifies the scale of crumbling civic and commercial buildings across the UK that could be repurposed as housing.
7. <https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/property/number-of-empty-homes-in-uk-equivalent-to-a-city-the-size-of-manchester-377548/> - An article from The London Economic reports that over one million homes are currently unoccupied across the UK, including 676,452 vacant properties in England. This number is equivalent to the entire housing stock of Manchester. The situation is particularly dire in areas such as the South West, which has seen a 9% increase in the number of long-term empty homes over the past year. The article underscores the critical issue in the nation's approach to housing policy and resource allocation, highlighting the need to address the housing crisis by utilizing existing vacant dwellings.