

## Housing: An international challenge

### Part Five

## Making the best use of existing buildings

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### About:

The LGA's People and Places Board commissioned a short project to share good practice taking place internationally on housing. Examples are drawn from academic research, CECODHAS Housing Europe (the European Federation of Public, Cooperative & Social Housing) and through LGA international contacts.

Five themes were chosen to reflect key issues facing policy and lobbying priorities for local government:

- Raising finance to invest in affordable housing
- Land for building
- Building quickly
- Quality of building and quality of life
- **Making the best use of existing buildings**

### Making the best use of existing buildings

We need to make best use of our existing buildings, including those that are empty or in poor condition. Over 600,000 homes in England are empty, and over a third of these properties have been empty for over 6 months<sup>1</sup>. There are a number of reasons why councils take action to bring empty homes back into use. Long term empty homes have a negative impact on surrounding homes and areas, and while tackling empty homes will not provide a solution

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<sup>1</sup> Source: DCLG

to the need for new homes, it is an important part of making best use of the existing housing stock.

Councils also play an important role to support and encourage an increase in standards and quality across the current housing stock. This has included prioritising meeting, maintaining and exceeding the decent homes standard in social properties, encouraging and incentivising investment in privately rented accommodation and enforcing when standards are unacceptable.

## International examples

1. Homegrown Homes in **Canada** is a not for profit organisation that buys derelict buildings in city centres, refurbishes them for let to low income families at reduced rents. Homegrown Homes has approach each project creatively, using grants, donations, volunteers and the support of local businesses to complete projects without public subsidy. Labour costs are reduced by partnering with local prisons, which also help prisoners learn new skills.  
Finalist in the 2010 World Habitat Awards  
<http://www.worldhabitatawards.org/winners-and-finalists/project-details.cfm?lang=00&theProjectID=8A6E816D-15C5-F4C0-996D29C88618036C>
2. Self-Help Housing in **Germany** is a kind of home-steading programme for empty flats and is used to provide housing for young people. Self-help housing may operate for a limited time period until a permanent solution is found for the building and is often made affordable by using volunteers to complete refurbishments. In Berlin, more than 300 large blocks with around 5000 flats (often former squats) were refurbished in a Self-Help Programme, which included public funding for some of the repairs.  
Source: Building and Social Housing Foundation
3. An award winning model of affordable housing in **Germany** adds a new floor of housing to existing buildings. The “on top” timber module replaces the existing roof with a lightweight timber housing unit. A trial project is being run by a housing association, university and private builder.

More on the On Top award from the 2014 Solar Decathlon:

[http://www.solardecathlon2014.fr/ftp/docs/SDE2014\\_Projects\\_Profiles.pdf](http://www.solardecathlon2014.fr/ftp/docs/SDE2014_Projects_Profiles.pdf)

## **Further reading:**

Building and Social Housing Foundation

<http://www.bshf.org>

World Habitat Awards

<http://www.worldhabitatawards.org/winners-and-finalists/>