

Midlothian council to cut rates relief for empty buildings

Owners of empty town centre buildings in Midlothian will have rate relief cut in a bid to persuade them to find tenants.

The move comes after it was revealed more than half of all commercial units in Penicuik lay empty for two years despite hundreds of enquiries from people keen to take them on.

Plans were approved at a meeting of Midlothian Council to stop Empty Building Relief for most non-domestic properties after three months, bringing in an estimated £500,000 extra a year.

And council officers said they would work with private landlords and owners to encourage them to bring the building back into use instead of leaving them vacant.

The meeting heard that while some of Midlothian's main town centres had a couple of vacant units over the last three years, Penicuik was particularly hard hit.



With 22 commercial units in the town centre, 11 stood empty in 2020/21, rising to 12 the following year.

Last year the number fell to five empty units which still equated to over 20 per cent of all businesses.

Cllr Connor McManus said he hoped the end of long periods of rates relief for empty building owners would be the start of a victory for Penicuik.

He said: "Hopefully it does start to see some of the empty To Let units be filled. I am sure that will be good news for residents in Penicuik and other areas which have this similar problem."

And Councillor Colin Cassidy said there was a public misconception that the council owned the properties with To Let signs up but often they were owned by "pension funds who are just sitting on them."

He said: "Hopefully this will push them into renting them out again."

The meeting heard that during the three years that units lay empty the council received around 400 enquiries from people keen to take on empty buildings with nearly half of them from retailers

Councillor Willie McEwan said he had been 'alarmed' by the figures in Penicuik and was told officers would be working with private landlords to encourage them to bring properties back into use.

Councillors were told: "We have quite a high waiting list of enquiries for economic development for use of those properties so we would then be taking the list and talking to private landlords and owners about how we could help them fill the properties with potential tenants."

The new policy was unanimously approved and will come into effect from April next year.

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter