

Ken Skates AC / AM
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Diwylliant, Chwaraeon a Thwristiaeth
Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Christine Chapman AM
Chair of Communities, Equality and Local
Government Committee

28 September 2015

Dear Christine,

Further Information about the Barcelona example you cited in relation to arrangements for dealing with vacant listed buildings, including the availability of powers:

I promised to send CELG Committee members a copy of the article I had seen in The Guardian where Barcelona City Council is fining banks with empty houses on their books, charging several banks over €60,000 in total for 12 homes that have been empty for more than two years. I attach a link to the article. However, I note that this initiative is not specifically targeted towards historic buildings.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/10/barcelona-fines-banks-60000-for-empty-homes>

As you are aware, in Wales, local authorities have a variety of tools to tackle empty properties. These range from advice and guidance to enforcement measures such as Empty Dwelling Management Orders and new powers under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. These are complemented by “Houses into Homes”, a national programme to tackle empty homes which provides property owners with loans to improve their property for sale or rent.

Any of these powers can also be used in relation to listed buildings, but there are also additional specific powers available for local planning authorities to deal with neglected buildings. For example if listed buildings are deliberately neglected they can be compulsorily purchased by the council and minimal compensation paid. If the property is unoccupied, the Authority can undertake the works to protect the building itself and recover the costs from the owner. I propose to strengthen these powers further through the Historic Environment (Wales) Bill by extending the scope of urgent works to occupied buildings where it does not unreasonably interfere with residential use and by allowing authorities to recover the costs of urgent works by placing a local land charge on the land, allowing local planning authorities to manage the financial risks associated with undertaking works.

In addition to more legislative powers for local authorities, it is also important to improve planning policy and guidance to support the effective and sustainable management of buildings for future generations. Alongside the introduction of the Bill I published in draft form three important documents:

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Wedi'i argraffu ar bapur wedi'i ailgylchu (100%)

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- a revised chapter 6 of *Planning Policy Wales*, planning and the historic environment
- a new *Technical Advice Note* on the historic environment
- *Managing change to listed buildings*

These set out the need to be flexible when considering the re-use and management of listed buildings at the same time protecting the character of the building as one of special architectural or historic interest

Yours ever

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Skates'.

Ken Skates AC / AM

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