

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**County Council
22nd February 2018**

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Jonathan Wilkinson, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Countryside Services

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor William Powell

The National Assembly for Wales EIS Committee has recently reported that progress across Wales has been slow in delivering affordable, 'above the shop' style living. What is Powys County Council currently doing, with partner agencies, to make a decisive contribution to addressing this challenge within the County?

Response

There are many constraints surrounding vacant over the shop properties. In order to be let as homes it is normally necessary that there be a separate access so that tenants do not need to enter via the commercial property. Many do not have the possibility of such access.

Equally there are issues of lease arrangements, cost of refurbishment or re-design, planning and highways (parking) requirements, all of which add to the difficulty of making such developments viable even with grant support for a Housing Association. Cllr Powell will be aware of the long-standing issue of Liverpool House in Talgarth. We do, however, consider such schemes in detail.

Our Private Sector Housing team runs very successful loan funding schemes that have permitted many shop owners and landlords, including in Talgarth, to return their empty over the shop flats to use. However these are not always made available at affordable rent levels due to the cost involved to the landlord that would need to be recouped.

The Council offer a range of financial products, designed to encourage urban regeneration, in the form of sustainable revolving interest free loans. Whilst these are not aimed specifically at flats above shops or delivering affordable units, our Town Centre Loan scheme has been used to address such issues. The scheme not only allows for the renovation of redundant empty residential units above shops, but includes renovation of the retail space beneath, facilitating a 'whole building approach'.

Details of this scheme along with our other financial products are included within the attached Renewal & Property Improvement Loans leaflets.

