

Petition 2 – 142 signatures

QInA.C.



**CHANGE OF USE OF EMPTY RETAIL & COMMERCIAL PROPERTY
IN MONMOUTH TOWN CENTRE**

**PETITION TO THE COUNCILLORS OF MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY
COUNCIL (MCC)**

We, the undersigned, are supporting There's NO PLACE Like Home proposal to MCC to undertake a review in 2024 of empty retail & commercial property in Monmouth Town Centre to ascertain suitability for change of use to Domestic & Residential, thereby increasing accommodation stock in the town.

The number of retail and commercial properties which are unoccupied in Monmouth have increased considerably over the past few years. While these properties lie empty, the number of households making homeless applications for social housing has been steadily increasing with 347 applications MCC had a homeless duty to provide accommodation for in the period 1st April 2023-31st December 2023.

Of these, 169 households were provided with B&B accommodation, whilst 185 were in temporary (not always suitable) accommodation. The average time priority groups (Band 1) spend on the Homesearch Housing Register is 10.7 months – many spend much longer. In addition to this cohort, 1,041 households received housing support.

At the end of January 2024, an additional 50 households are in B&B accommodation, and a further 85 households are waiting for housing support. Yet, properties which could potentially be adapted for residential use, in a fairly short time period, lie empty year after year. B&B and temporary accommodation is extremely costly, both to the taxpayer financially, and for the households involved in terms of their physical and mental well-being.

Children in these households may suffer from 'outsider syndrome' attending multiple different schools as they have no stable home base. They are more likely to be bullied at school and find it difficult to form friendships, something that often stays with them for life. Overall, they are extremely vulnerable making them easy targets for abusers and organised criminal gangs.

A review is long overdue to address these issues, working in conjunction with Social Housing providers, to deliver much needed housing stock where it is needed. In the short term, desk research will identify empty properties – location, length of time vacant, etc., followed by primary research to evaluate potential cost of refurbishment of the properties to meet the standard required for residential housing, and plans drawn up to achieve this standard. It is feasible for this activity to be completed in less than the average time households spend on the Homesearch Register, with budgets allocated for refurbishment work to begin in the next financial year, factoring in the cost-saving from not using B&Bs or temporary accommodation.