

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF UNDER- USED BUILDINGS IN IRISH TOWNS & CITIES



VACANT TO VIBRANT BUILDING ALLIANCE (VVBA)



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HOW?

1. Establish adaptive reuse programme offices in local authorities

Create multi-disciplinary “adaptive reuse” offices in local authorities to lead large-scale reuse of vacant and underused properties, including non-residential buildings.

Allocate responsibility for driving public acquisition, resolving title and ownership issues, delivering complex projects, and providing technical and financial support to private owners to local authorities.

2. Expand the Croí Cónaithe Initiatives

Expand the Croí Cónaithe initiatives to offer grants per residential unit to encourage more complex projects and address proven viability gaps, particularly with regard to over the shop spaces.

Expand the Croí Cónaithe initiatives to include financial support for mixed-use properties and business applicants. Provide up-front feasibility grants to support early project development.

3. Introduce time-bound targeted tax incentives and increase vacant tax

Use targeted time-bound tax incentives to encourage the reuse of vacant and derelict properties, including introducing a temporary Capital Gains Tax (CGT) exemption for owners selling vacant properties for residential reuse and a 9% VAT rate on construction products that deliver carbon savings.

Complement the tax incentives with a Vacant Property Tax collected by the Revenue Commissioner[i].

4. Improve planning processes, Building Regulations, and associated Technical Guidance Documents

Resolve inconsistencies in how planning policy, building regulations, and associated Technical Guidance Documents are interpreted and applied, reducing uncertainty and improving project viability.

Make all relevant guidance, dispensations, and certificates (e.g., fire safety, disability access) accessible and free of charge, develop additional clear, tailored guidance for adaptive reuse projects, including standard construction details (e.g., Acceptable Construction Details), and provide training and adequate resources for local authorities so Building Control and Fire Officers can effectively support reuse projects.

WHY?

- Housing and climate are Ireland's most pressing crises.
- Many urban and rural buildings lie vacant, derelict, and underused.
- Over 120,000 units can be provided in a short number of years.
- Renovating and adapting these properties will:
 - Address housing shortages, delivering homes faster than new builds[ii]
 - Revitalize towns and cities
 - Reduce carbon emissions cost-efficiently[iii]
 - Strengthen our communities

[i] To drive action, it is recommended to increase it by 5% per year (up to 15% over 3 years).

[ii] It is estimated that 120,000+ additional residential units could be delivered quickly, in the right location, and at a lower cost than new builds.

[iii] The embodied carbon emissions of a deep residential retrofit are approximately a quarter of those of a similar new build home. This percentage does not include the embodied carbon emissions of infrastructure associated with residential developments on green fields, which can be up to 30% higher than for comparable infill developments. Plugging into existing infrastructural systems (e.g., water infrastructure) not only represents cost and carbon savings, but it can also speed up the delivery of homes.

WHO WE ARE?

The Vacant to Vibrant Building Alliance (VVBA) is a cross-sectoral forum bringing together all key stakeholders to tackle vacancy, dereliction, and under-used buildings in Irish towns and cities.

It is a collaboration of business, civic, and built environment leaders and experts set-up in 2024 to create evidence-based solutions that make renovating these units affordable, viable, and accessible, and in doing so, ensure the delivery of residential properties at speed and in the right locations.

The Vacant to Vibrant Building Alliance (VVBA) is made up of:

- Philip Lee | Chair VVBA | Partner Philip Lee LLP
- Fiona Craven | Chartered Engineer | Programme Manager Adaptive Reuse Unit | Dublin City Council
- Finbarr Filan | Chair | ISME
- Dr. Alison Gilliland | European Climate Pact Ambassador | Former Chair Dublin City Council Housing Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)
- Tom Gilligan | Director of Services | Mayo County Council
- Ali Harvey | Associate Director – Planning | Jacobs
- Marion Jammet | Director of Policy & Advocacy | Irish Green Building Council
- Martin Markey | CEO | The Hardware Association Ireland
- Edward Mc Auley | Director of Practice & Policy at Society of Chartered Surveyors of Ireland | SCSi
- Genevieve McGuirk | CEO | Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers | IPAV
- Pranash Ramanundh | Practice Director | Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland | RIAI
- Nick Taaffe | Society of Chartered Surveyors of Ireland | SCSi