



EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Further to your information request FOI/EIR 21/22-272 please find your question and our response below.

Request:

This is a request for information, related to Business Rates, filed under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Please provide the following information in respect of properties that currently have an empty rate charge levied.

- The property addresses and property reference numbers.
- The ratepayer name(s) – excluding those exempt under Section 40 of the Act.
- Start date of the empty period for which empty rates have been levied.

Please note that I am only seeking information in relation to where an empty rate is being charged on a property and not for any properties that are empty and an exemption is being applied.

Response:

We do not release information of businesses or address of empty residential properties as we consider disclosing this information would make them a target of crime. Therefore, this information is exempt from disclosure under Section 31 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Section 31(1)(a) says that we do not need to provide information that would be likely to prejudice the functions of law enforcement – the prevention and detection of crime. We believe that releasing this information would increase the likelihood of:

- Empty properties being lived in by squatters. Squatting in a residential property is now a criminal offence.
- Empty properties being targeted by vandals or graffiti artists and stripped of materials such as roofing, cables or piping, or otherwise vandalised or damaged.
- Empty properties being targeted by criminals or terrorists for example allowing them to hide or store the proceeds of crime, or criminal or terrorist materials.

Factors in favour of disclosing

- There are general arguments in promoting the transparency and accountability of public authorities
- Raising the profile of vacant properties would help encourage public engagement and debate.

Factors in favour of withholding

- There is an inherent public interest in crime prevention. (Voyias and LB Camden EA/2011/0007)
- There is public interest in avoiding the costs associated with squatting, for example, repair, security and eviction costs.
- The negative impact of squatting affects the surrounding community and public authorities involved, not just the individual property.

We believe that the balance of public interest lies in upholding the exemption and not releasing the information.

This concludes your request FOI/EIR 21/22-272

If information has been refused please treat this as a Refusal Notice for the purposes of the Act.

If you disagree with our decision or are otherwise unhappy with how we have dealt with your request in the first instance you may approach foi@eastcambs.gov.uk and request a review. A request for review must be made in no more than 40 working days from the date of this email.

Should you remain dissatisfied with the outcome you have a right under s50 of the Freedom of Information Act to appeal against the decision by contacting the Information Commissioner, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow SK9 5AF.