

WATERFORD LEADS THE WAY On Repair And Leasing Scheme

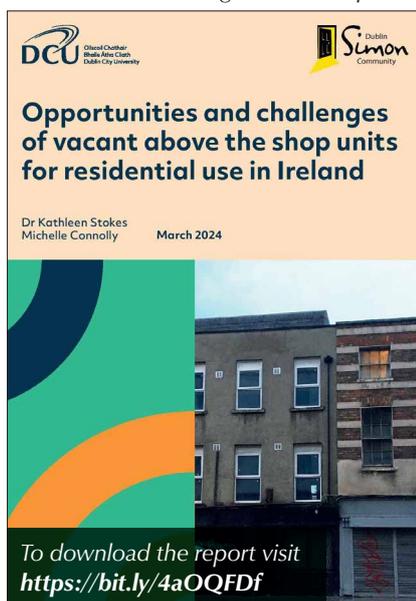
A new report, which addresses the challenges, opportunities and processes presented by the conversion and reuse of vacant above-shop units for residential use, has showcased Waterford City and County Council as an example of where a local authority can activate and encourage the reuse of such spaces due to its widespread take-up of the Repair and Leasing Scheme.

The report entitled ‘Opportunities and Challenges of Vacant Above the Shop Units (VATSUs) for Residential Use in Ireland’ has been jointly published by Dublin City University and the Dublin Simon Community.

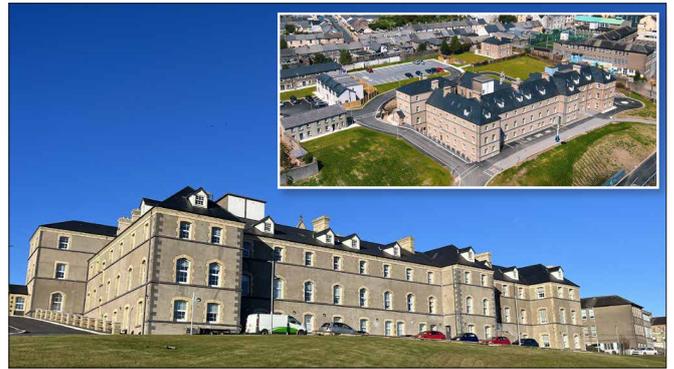
According to the report, VATSUs (Vacant Above the Shop Units) are particularly complex units to bring into reuse, which require significantly more flexibility, resources, risk mitigation and absorption, contingency planning, and multi-disciplinary work than other types of vacant units.

Waterford City and County Council has featured prominently in the report as an example of where a local authority can activate and encourage the reuse of vacant above-shop units and spaces due to its widespread take up of the Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS).

“Property owners are working closely with local government officials to renovate vacant properties, including VATSUs, and to increase social housing stock in the process. “One business owner



has renovated two of their properties using RLS in recent years. Along with stripping both buildings back completely ‘from the floor to the roof’, renovations included putting in new walls, ceilings, floors, rewiring, replumbing and kitchens. They also had to take out and rebuild the rear wall on one of the buildings, as it was in a poor state of repair, and put in a vented bin store outside each building,” the report notes.



The largest RLS project to date in Waterford is at St Joseph's House on Manor Hill, where 71 homes have been created in a previously vacant convent in a city centre location.

THE LEADING LOCAL AUTHORITY

The continued uptake and delivery through the RLS were outlined, with Waterford accounting for a substantial number of dwellings brought back into use. According to Minister for Housing Darragh O'Brien, Waterford City and County Council is the leading local authority in delivering units under the Repair and Lease Scheme.

“It participated in the original pilot scheme, commencing in October 2016. To end 2023, Waterford has delivered 312 homes under RLS, 56% of national delivery. This includes the largest RLS project to date at St Joseph's House on Manor Hill, where 71 homes have been created in a previously vacant convent in a city centre location,” the Minister pointed out.

In June 2023, the Minister who cut the ribbon on the age-friendly housing development at the landmark site on Manor Hill, said that the local authority was leading the way in delivering new social and affordable homes and tackling vacancy “which to be frank is a scourge in many villages, towns, and cities across the country”.

The former convent has been transformed with 50 dwelling units located within the main building with 21 units located in the various out-building clusters on the site, while the former chapel on the site has been repurposed as a community space for multiple uses by tenants.

Over €4.9 million, approved through the Repair and Lease Scheme, was funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage under the Government's ‘Housing for All’ plan for Ireland.

The scheme has been pioneered in Waterford and is now driving the provision of high-quality affordable housing solutions, while at the same time addressing and delivering the return to use of vacant buildings in Waterford. In Co. Waterford, 48% of homes provided to the end of 2023 by RLS were one-bed units, with a further 37% providing two-bed homes.