

Welshpool Town Council, The Vicarage Gardens, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DD
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Title	Condition and Appearance of Town Centre Properties
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OFFICERS RECOMMENDATION

1. To note the concerns raised regarding the condition and appearance of properties within the Town Centre;
2. To ask that the Place Plan Working Group urgently identify commercial premises in the town centre whose external appearance would benefit from attention;
3. To authorise officers to write to property owners encouraging improvements to the external appearance of their buildings; and
4. To ask the Town Clerk to write to Powys County Council seeking clarification of its approach to enforcing the relevant provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Building Act 1984, and requesting consideration of enforcement action where appropriate.

1. Purpose

1. To consider concerns raised regarding the condition and appearance of a number of commercial properties within Welshpool town centre and the actions available to the Town Council to address these concerns.

2. Background

1. The Town Council has invested significantly in improving the appearance of Welshpool town centre through the Town Centre Improvement Programme and more recently through Pride in Place funding. However, the condition of some privately owned commercial properties continues to detract from these improvements.
2. Recent enquiries from residents have highlighted concerns regarding a number of properties, including the former Savers premises and other vacant or poorly maintained shops. Concerns generally relate to deteriorating paintwork, damaged shopfronts, neglected buildings and the overall appearance of the High Street.

3. The Town Council has already referred the condition of the former Savers premises to Powys County Council's Planning Enforcement team. However, the Town Council has limited powers to require private property owners to maintain their buildings.
4. With Welshpool hosting the start of a stage of the Tour de France on 4 July 2027, there is an opportunity to encourage improvements to these properties ahead of the event, particularly given the number of visitors expected in the town.

3. Statutory Powers

1. Responsibility for maintaining commercial properties generally rests with their owners. However, Powys County Council has a number of statutory powers which may be used where buildings have fallen into a particularly poor condition. These include:
 1. Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 - allows the LPA to require improvements to the condition of land or buildings adversely affecting the amenity of an area
 2. Sections 77 and 78 of the Building Act 1984 - provides powers to deal with dangerous buildings
 3. Section 79 of the building Act 1984 - provides powers relating to ruinous or dilapidated buildings.
2. It is proposed that the Town Council writes formally to Powys County Council to establish its current approach to using these powers, particularly Section 215 notices, and whether there is scope for greater enforcement activity within Welshpool town centre. This would also provide an opportunity to raise specific properties of concern and seek clarification on the circumstances in which Powys County Council would consider taking action.

4. Engagement

1. Whilst the Town Council cannot generally compel owners to improve the appearance of their properties, there is an opportunity to engage directly with landlords and encourage them to undertake maintenance and repairs.
2. It is proposed that officers undertake a review of commercial premises within the town centre to identify those where the external appearance would benefit from attention.
3. The Town Council would then write to the relevant property owners or managing agents, highlighting the concerns raised and encouraging them to consider improvements such as repainting, repairs to shopfronts and general maintenance.
4. The correspondence would also highlight the Tour de France in July 2027 and the importance of presenting the town in the best possible condition ahead of the event.
5. Powys County Council already administers funding through the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns programme, which can support improvements to commercial properties, subject to eligibility and funding availability. Where appropriate, property owners could be directed towards the County Council for further information.
6. The intention would be to encourage owners to take responsibility for their premises rather than for the Town Council to undertake or fund improvements to privately owned buildings.

5. Shopfront & Window Dressing Scheme

1. The Town Council has previously approved an Shopfront & Window Dressing Scheme, which aims to improve the appearance of vacant commercial premises through the installation of artwork in empty shop windows.

2. We will continue to progress the scheme and it will complement the proposed engagement with landlords, although it is recognised that artwork in windows will not address issues relating to the condition of the buildings themselves.

6. Financial & Legal Implications

1. There are no significant direct financial implications arising from writing to property owners. A fee of around £7 per document is required by HM Land Registry to release information of property owners. This would be covered under existing budgets.
2. Section 16 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 allows the Town Council to serve a notice on occupiers of land to provide details of their ownership in the land and any others with an interest in it. Failure to comply with the notice is a criminal offence with a fine of £5000.

7. Recommendations

1. To note the concerns raised regarding the condition and appearance of properties within the Town Centre;
2. To ask that the Place Plan Working Group urgently identify commercial premises in the town centre whose external appearance would benefit from attention;
3. To authorise officers to write to property owners encouraging improvements to the external appearance of their buildings; and
4. To ask the Town Clerk to write to Powys County Council seeking clarification of its approach to enforcing the relevant provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Building Act 1984, and requesting consideration of enforcement action where appropriate.

8. Decision

1. To resolve the recommendations as above.