



Opportunities and Challenges of Vacant Above the Shop Units for Residential Use in Ireland

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An Ghníomhaireacht
Tithíochta
The Housing Agency

Vacancy in Ireland



- Widespread & politicised amidst hot real estate market & housing crisis
- Diverse forms, geographies, processes & circumstances
- VATSUs are unique with particular set of challenges



Objectives



- Assess barriers to accessing VATSUs for residential use
- Learn from best practice
- Identify useful policy mechanisms, capabilities, powers and resources
- Consider scaling/ systemic responses



Methodology



1 Literature & Policy Review

- Governmental approaches and policy interventions encouraging reuse and conversion in Ireland
- Public policies, incentives and resources in other contexts specifically targeting VATSUs
- Studies, reports and research addressing VATSUs from academia and civic/ policy organisations

2 Multi-disciplinary Workshops

3 workshops with 20+ stakeholders and experts in property development, social housing provision, construction, sustainability, fire safety, disability access, quantity surveying, national and local government, relevant academics.

3 Case Study Interviews

- 5 case studies of successful conversions
- Feasibility studies for 2 VATSUs by Dublin Simon



Findings



Preliminary caveat: VATSUs (and vacancy for that matter) have different geographies, built forms & conditions, owners, and local amenities/needs, etc.

Also, not all VATSUs can (or should be) residential.

Report offers **general insights** across three moments:

- Identifying & Unlocking
- Bringing into Use
- Scaling & Coordinating



Findings: Identifying & Unlocking



- Viability of VATSU renovations is important, but not only in financial terms
- Need to understand VATSU owners' motivations, circumstances, perceived risks and support needs
- Many challenges surrounding the acquisition of VATSUs for residential use
- Public supports are available but impact, beneficiaries, and public benefit should be reviewed
- Importance of well-resourced public points of contact for non-financial support



Findings: Bringing into Use



- Complicated and intensive renovation processes, with multiple uncertainties
- Finding suitably skilled and experienced individuals to provide support with all stages of renovation is essential
- Planning, regulation and certification are flexible, but approvals can be time consuming and disconnected
- Need for guidance on different ways of renovating and innovative approaches
- Opportunity to further integrate supports and guidance for vacancy with sustainable building and retrofit as well as conservation and heritage



Findings: Scaling & Coordinating



- Need to move beyond focusing on individual units, and seek opportunities to scale renovations across multiple units and buildings
- Support for VATSU renovations need to be complemented with investment in local amenities and infrastructures to ensure quality town and city centre living
- AHBs are not best placed to lead on scaled renovation of VATSUs of residential use as circumstances exist currently



Findings: Case Studies

**Repair & Lease by
an 'Ordinary
Person'**

**AHBs and VATSUs:
Feasibility Studies**

**Development
Professional
in the Market
for a
Challenge**

**Promoting Above
Shop Living in
Dublin City
Centre**

**Family Renovation
in a Small Town**

**Architect Thinking
Beyond the Unit**



Recommendations



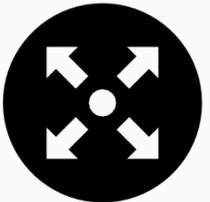
Review public supports' contribution to housing and beneficiaries



Extend and integrate public oversight and support



Improve and broaden information



Look beyond individual units



Create partnerships to target and scale VATSUs for social, affordable and/or cost-rental housing

