

**PRESS NOTICE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**JUNE 23, 2011**

**CONTACT: Denise Moffatt on 01865 384232**

## **BUSINESSES SAY EMPTY PROPERTY IS A BLIGHT ON TOWN CENTRES**

**Oxfordshire businesses say that empty property is causing a blight on local town centres according to survey by Oxfordshire Business First.**

They identified empty properties as one of their top business issues and claimed that it is an obstacle to business growth.

The survey was conducted by Oxfordshire Business First, which has been set up to represent the voice of business in the county and works in conjunction with many other business organisations.

The topic is one that often raises strong emotions in the business community. Many feel that local authorities, some of which are landlords of town centre properties, could do more to keep town centres thriving and bustling.

Several of the county's market towns have seen major town centre redevelopments which has arguably brought in new visitors but in some instances changed shopping patterns.

"The vitality of market towns relies on an appealing mix of shops and places to eat with car parking, in a pleasant environment that people want to visit," comments David Williams of commercial property agents Meeson Williams.

"Once shops begin to close in a town, then it becomes a downward spiral which can be hard to stop. Generally speaking, shops remain empty because either there has been a significant change in the town which has affected the trading position making it unviable, or the outgoings no longer support the turnover.

"Over the last year we have been working for retail clients across the country in towns and cities like Hereford, Shrewsbury, Worcester, Mansfield, Crewe, Chester, Bradford, Liverpool, Nottingham and Coventry as well as in Oxfordshire and we have seen a lot of run down areas with empty shops. In many cases the barrier to re-letting has been a realistic approach by the landlord to rental allied with the poor physical condition."

(more follows)

Iain Nicholson, director of countywide business network, Oxfordshire Town Chambers Network (OTCN) said:

“A huge amount of work has gone into maintaining the vitality of Oxfordshire’s market towns through these challenging times. This has involved our member business groups, town partnership teams and colleagues in local councils.

“ A number of our towns have very few empty shops; many are operating below the national average number. But this survey shows that we need to maintain the momentum by having the right policies and initiatives on issues like parking and promotion, so that this strong position applies across all of our towns.”

One of the towns that is addressing the issue successfully is Banbury. When the recession first hit hard in 2009, there were a number of empty shops in and around the main retail part of Banbury town centre, including some in the prime Castle Quay Shopping Centre development.

Chartered surveyor Malcolm Nutt is a member of Banbury Chamber. He reports that in the last 12-18 months there has been a gradual reduction in the number of empty units in Banbury Town Centre and this is now half the level it used to be. Shoppers and retailers are coming to terms with the best places to find value for money, taking into account the Internet, out-of-town centres and the main traditional town centres.

“There is no doubt that landlords have adjusted their aspirations in respect of rent, taking into account the current economic conditions and the offers being put forward by retailers, “ he said.

“This has led to an encouraging take-up in empty shop space. In recent months we have let shops in High Street, Church Lane, Parsons Street and George Street, all to new ventures. It is a question of finding the right rental level to satisfy both landlords and tenants so that shops do not remain empty for too long. Landlords are keen to move empty shops so as to avoid the punitive empty rate liability which the Government has imposed.”

(ENDS)

---

**Contacts:**

<b>David Williams</b>	<b>Meeson Williams</b>	<b>01865 349011</b>
<b>Iain Nicholson</b>	<b>OTCN</b>	<b>01869 35022</b>
<b>Brian Whitford</b>	<b>Banbury Chamber</b>	<b>01295 760322</b>