

Petitioner:	Robert Sayers
Petition:	<b>Fix New Eltham Villages Eyesore</b>
Number of signatures:	451
The petition read as follows:	<p>The owners of Hungry Tums and Touchwood Pines 340 and 356 Footscray Road have left the shops and flats above vacant for over 20 years. They are both owned by Criterion Estates who have received petitions previously by New Elthams Business Associations John Killick and myself Rob Sayers.</p> <p>It's very clear the owners do not care as they have probably lost millions over the years in rent. Local residents, businesses and visitors to New Eltham all agree they are a eyesore and they are easy targets for vandalism.</p> <p>There are people who are homeless and in desperate need of homes, we believe there are 2/3 flats above both shops.</p> <p>Enough is enough, someone in authority needs to do something, Royal Borough of Greenwich Council needs to challenge the owners, there must be some legal action that can be taken.</p> <p>With new leadership Mr Anthony Okereke and his council needs to re-open this case and take it very seriously. Residents and business want action we want answers from the owners, there must be some legal action that can be take.</p> <p>Please sign this petition and let's work together to get these shops and flats up and running again.</p>

Cabinet Member:	Inclusive Economy, Business and Skills
Ward(s):	Eltham Town and Avery Hill
Directorate:	DRES

Submitted to Council on:	21 July 2022
Presented by:	Councillor Pat Greenwell

## I. **Petition Response**

- I.1 I am aware of the tremendous efforts Members, residents and indeed officers have made over the years to get these premises and flats re-let and back into active use. This has been an ongoing concern, especially in view of the number of enquiries and business interest in the space over this period.
- I.2 As you say, the owner Criterion Estates Limited (CEL) have not responded to enquires, appear to have no interest in letting the property and have been unresponsive to calls from Council officers. As you know, the Council has no powers to force the owner to let the commercial space.
- I.3 Both the respective properties at 340 and 356 Footscray Road are subject to non-domestic rates. There are currently business rates arrears totalling £16,360.12 on these premises, for the financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23, which is actively being pursued in line with the Council's debt recovery procedures.
- I.4 In January 2022, environmental health issues were raised by members, and officers undertook to inspect the premises. However, the evidence obtained from the inspection was insufficient to determine that the condition of the building is of a state that crosses the threshold for legal enforcement. However, officers continue to keep this matter under review.
- I.5 I and the Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Homelessness, will certainly commit to working with ward councillors, residents and officers to explore what policy levers and powers we can adopt to bring these empty properties and flats into use.
- I.6 Our ability to address issues such as these through the future Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, will be a litmus test of its effectiveness.

**2 Current actions being taken in relation to matter raised in petition**

- 2.1 DRES Officers will visit, review the site and subject to their findings undertake a valuation with a view to approaching the property owners.
- 2.2 Housing and Safer Communities officers will update the Empty Property Protocol which set out the steps the Council can take when it is made aware of long-term empty properties with absentee landlords to bring those into use. This will include reviewing the provisions of existing legislation and the Levelling Up bill.