

High Street Rental Auctions - Frequently Asked Questions

North Northamptonshire Council is taking part in the Government's High Street Rental Auction (HSRA) initiative. The information below explains what this means for residents, businesses and property owners.

1. What is High Street Rental Auctions?

High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs) are a new power available to councils in England to help tackle long term vacancy on high streets and in town centres.

Where commercial premises have been empty for a long time, and voluntary efforts to bring them back into use have not been successful, councils can use these powers to help secure a short-term lease for a new tenant.

The aim is to increase footfall, support local businesses and help create more vibrant, active town centres for the benefit of local communities.

2. Why is the Council using High Street Rental Auctions?

Long term vacant premises can have a negative impact on the look, feel and economic health of town centres. Empty shops can reduce footfall, affect neighbouring businesses and discourage investment.

The Government introduced High Street Rental Auctions through the Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023 to give councils an additional tool to address this issue where vacancy has persisted.

North Northamptonshire Council's priority is always to work positively with landlords to bring properties back into use voluntarily. High Street Rental Auctions are intended as a targeted, proportionate option where other approaches have not succeeded.

3. Which premises can be included?

Only certain commercial premises are eligible. To be considered, a premises must:

- Be located within a designated high street or town centre
- Be suitable for "high street use", such as shops, services open to the public, offices, cafés, leisure or community uses
- Have been vacant for:
 - the whole of the previous 12 months, or
 - at least 366 days within the last 24 months
- Be assessed as likely to provide a positive economic, social or environmental benefit if brought back into use

Warehouses and premises last used solely for storage are excluded.

4. How does the High Street Rental Auction process work?

The process follows a set legal framework and includes several stages:

1. Identifying a vacant premises

The Council identifies a qualifying property within a designated area.

2. Working with the landlord

Landlords are contacted and encouraged to let the premises voluntarily wherever possible.

3. Serving formal notices

If vacancy continues, the Council may serve notices requiring steps to be taken to bring the premises back into use.

4. Running a rental auction

If voluntary solutions are not agreed, the Council may run a competitive rental auction to identify a suitable tenant.

5. Granting a lease

A short-term lease (typically between one and five years) is granted to the successful bidder.

The full process can take several months due to statutory notice periods and safeguards built into the legislation.

5. Will landlords lose ownership of their premises?

No. Landlords always retain ownership of their premises.

High Street Rental Auctions do not allow compulsory purchase and do not affect the long-term ownership of premises. They only allow a short-term lease to be granted where a premises has remained vacant for an extended period.

6. Can landlords still let their premises themselves?

Yes. Voluntary letting is always the preferred option.

Where landlords are actively marketing their premises or working to secure a tenant, the Council does not expect to use High Street Rental Auction powers. Officers will work constructively with landlords to support occupation wherever possible.

7. What High Street Rental Auctions are not

To provide reassurance, it is important to be clear about what these powers do not do:

- They are not compulsory purchase
- They do not remove property ownership
- They are not aimed at landlords who are actively trying to let their premises

- They are not intended to be used routinely or widely

They are a targeted tool to address long term vacancy where engagement has not led to occupation.

While there is no requirement to formally prove market demand, local authorities must be satisfied that a property is suitable for high street use and has a realistic prospect of being successfully let through the auction process. As a result, some properties - particularly larger or more complex units - may be less appropriate for these powers.

8. Why has Wellingborough been selected?

An initial assessment was carried out across North Northamptonshire's four main town centres: Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and Rushden.

This identified Wellingborough as having the highest proportion of long term vacant commercial units. As a result, it has been chosen as the first area for further investigation under the High Street Rental Auction initiative.

Further assessment will now take place to identify any individual premises that meet the Government's eligibility criteria.

9. Will only premises in Wellingborough be included?

At this stage, the focus is on the designated area highlighted on the map of Wellingborough. Other town centres or high streets may be considered in the future if appropriate.

10. What happens if a landlord does not engage?

Landlords are required to provide certain information as part of the HSRA process. Failing to provide information, providing false information, or carrying out prohibited works during notice periods may be an offence and could result in a financial penalty.

If a landlord does not select a successful bidder or refuses to enter into the required lease, the Council has legal powers to complete this step on the landlord's behalf. These powers are used only where necessary and in line with national legislation.

11. Earlier engagement NNC has already performed?

North Northamptonshire Council has already carried out public engagement on the High Street Rental Auction (HSRA) powers in November 2025.

An online engagement exercise was held to explain the new legislation, set out how the Council could use these powers, and gather feedback from residents, businesses and property owners. This engagement helped inform

the Council's approach to the scheme and provided valuable insight into local priorities and concerns, including the importance of supporting voluntary letting and maintaining a balanced approach to town centre regeneration.

You can view full details of the engagement activity, including background information and outcomes, on the Council's consultation platform:

High Street Rental Auction engagement page

<https://northnorthants.citizenspace.com/estates-and-facilities/high-street-rental-auction/>

12. What are the next steps?

North Northamptonshire Council is taking part in the programme as an early adopter.

Current work includes:

- Raising awareness of the scheme with residents, businesses and landlords
- Gathering local views
- Carrying out further investigations to confirm eligible areas and properties in line with Government guidance
- Any future use of High Street Rental Auctions will be communicated clearly and transparently.

Once the consultation closes, we will collate all responses in a report which will be included in an Executive Report at a later date.

Further information

You can find the Government's full guidance on High Street Rental Auctions on GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-street-rental-auctions-non-statutory-guidance>