

Rats invade empty home left to rot for 17 years after owner abandons it

By Richard Smith, Mirror, 18 January 2016, Penarth, UK

Furious neighbours say the £250,000 home in Penarth has already been cleared of several infestations



Left to rot: The house has been empty for 17 years

Rats have invaded a home "left to rot" for 17 years.

Furious neighbours say the £250,000 home in Penarth has already been cleared of several infestations .

People living close by claim the house is full of rotten window frames, has an "unstable" chimney stack" and a bowed front wall.

Council bosses from the Vale of Glamorgan said the power and water had both been switched off in the home in 1999.

Since then it has repeatedly been broken into and has become overgrown with several rat infestations.



Notice: Council bosses have served the owner with a legal notice

The Vale of Glamorgan council says it has been forced to clear it of rat infestations on several occasions and that its requests for action have been ignored by owner Mari James.

The local authority said Ms James, a former devolution campaign leader and public affairs consultant, has twice been prosecuted in the courts for failing to respond to its demands.

Tammy Ryan, 37, and her husband Kevin, 55, who live next door with their two children, say the property's decay is now beginning to cause problems in their home.

"We moved into our house 18 months ago, but neighbours say next door has been vacant since 1999," said Mrs Ryan.

"It's not very nice to look at, we'll give it that, but people have also broken-in on several occasions – and last year the council had to clear the garden due to a rat infestation.



Notice: The owner of the rat-infested house has been ordered to take action

“In all honesty, that part doesn’t worry us too much – but there is damp coming in from next door into our bedroom, which we have no means of fixing.”

For Mrs Ryan, the state of next door’s roof is also a concern.

“The roof really troubles me, it’s in terrible condition, and the chimney stack looks like it could fall off at any moment,” she added.

“But the biggest risk is the brick wall at the front. If you look along it, you can see that it’s bowed.

“At some point soon, it will collapse and the likelihood is it could seriously hurt anybody who is unlucky enough to be walking by at the time.”

Elizabeth Marson, 74, and her husband have lived two doors down from the derelict property for 28 years, but said things have got so bad that it has become a daily source of frustration.

“That property has rats, damp – it’s a complete eyesore for us,” she said.

“Whenever it’s windy, we’re constantly left waiting for the chimney stack to come crashing through our roof.



Rat: Neighbours have been left horrified by the infestation

“I had a chap come round from the council, and he said the roof was in terrible condition.

"The windows will also fall out soon, because the wood holding them in place seems to have completely rotted away.

“To be honest, the whole place has just been left to rot.”

Owner Ms James has been involved in a legal battle with the Vale of Glamorgan council over the property.

Ms James who was previously the director of GJW Cymru Wales, a Cardiff-based public affairs company, is currently the chief executive of MJ Associates and is a PR representative for Community Pharmacy Wales.

In 1997, Ms James was a leading devolution campaigner and vice-chair of the Yes for Wales campaign in the run up to the devolution referendum, set up by her company when the Assembly came into being in 1999.

But the local council is threatening the former campaigner with future legal action, after its repeated demands to sell or restore the property have gone unanswered.



Legal notice: The council has now started legal proceedings

In 2014 and 2015, the council won two prosecutions against Ms James for failing to return information and preventing damage to the property from pests, resulting in fines and legal costs totalling £1,450.

On Thursday, the council confirmed the situation has now reached the stage where it is actively looking to secure the property through further legal action.

A spokesman said: "The council has received several complaints in relation to the overall condition and appearance of this long-term empty property.

"The property has been assessed as high risk under the council's Empty Homes Strategy, which means that we are proactively taking steps to bring it back into beneficial use.

"We have successfully prosecuted the property's owner on two occasions. Once in 2014 for a failure to return information requested and once in 2015 for failure to prevent damage by pests.

"In both instances, the property's owner received a fine and costs were awarded to the local authority.

"A third legal notice was served in November 2015. This prosecution is ongoing.

"We are currently exploring options for securing occupation of the property."

Despite numerous attempts to contact Ms James, she has been unavailable for comment.

