



## **Dilapidation Bill**

**Youth Assembly Members' views**

**13 October 2025**

# Background

The Youth Assembly was established in June 2021. The current 90 Youth Assembly Members took their seats in October 2023. At the time of recruitment, they were in school years 9-12 which is approximately age 12-16. They are a diverse group. Membership includes young people from every constituency and recruitment was designed to ensure proportionate representation of Section 75 categories such as gender, religious background, race, care experience, sexuality, disability, and young people with caring responsibilities.

The Youth Assembly was established to perform three functions:

- To engage with the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly, specifically with Assembly Committees on legislation and inquiries relevant to young people;
- To undertake project work generated by the three Youth Assembly committees; and
- To enable consultation with government Departments and to participate in youth voice projects.

In October 2025, the Youth Assembly was invited to provide evidence to the Committee for Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs during the Committee stage of the Dilapidation Bill. To prepare for the discussion, the Youth Assembly team developed summary of the Bill, which is attached in Appendix One. Over a three-week period, Members reviewed the material before taking part in an online consultation session on 14 October 2025 with the Committee. Youth Assembly Members who were unable to attend the session submitted their views in writing, which have been included in this report.

The online session provided an opportunity for young people to explore the Bill's potential impact on local areas, particularly around themes such as funding and implementation, safety, enforcement, and regeneration. Members engaged with the issues, drawing on personal experience of derelict sites in their own communities. While they raised a number of practical questions, particularly around funding, fairness, and the definition of "dilapidation," their overall view was positive. The Youth Assembly welcomed the Bill as a constructive step toward improving safety, community pride, and the appearance of towns and cities across Northern Ireland.

The Youth Assembly wishes to express their sincere thanks to the Chair of the Committee, Robbie Butler, MLA and the Committee Clerks for their time, patience, and generosity in sharing their expertise. Their contributions have been invaluable in deepening the Youth Assembly Members' understanding of the Dilapidation Bill and its implications.

# Youth Assembly Views

## Lack of Funding for Councils

Members immediately raised concerns about the cost implications associated with the Bill. The young people were worried that, without financial support, councils would be unlikely to have capacity or incentivisation to act.

*“All this responsibility’s being shifted to the Council... Councils have got enough to do. Will there be funding for a new role as such, or is there someone who already has a job that will automatically have them powers and the responsibility of doing it?”*

*“[Councils] really will need some incentive to start making the first steps on properties.”*

*“If you’re going to do this, then the Councils will need money, or need to find a way to make the initial money needed.”*

Furthermore, given the Bill’s discretionary powers, Members were concerned that there might be inequality between council areas, with some areas more likely to make changes than others. When asked whether the powers should be discretionary or mandatory, six Members responded. Four indicated that they thought the powers should be mandatory, one thought the powers should be discretionary, and one Member was unsure.

## Definition of Dilapidation

When asked what words came to mind when walking past a derelict building or empty site, Youth Assembly Members associated these spaces most strongly with the words “dangerous” and “dirty.” Other words included “depressing,” “eyesore,” and a “waste of space.” A word cloud reflecting the Members’ thoughts is represented in Appendix Two.

Members questioned the criteria for determining which buildings would qualify for notices. The discussion highlighted confusion around definitions, prioritisation, and what should qualify as a “reasonable” state of repair. Later, Members reflected on the tension between private ownership and public responsibility.

*“Who currently defines dilapidation?”*

*“Why do areas like buildings and land that are overgrown need a notice? Is it really that terrible if it’s just a bit overgrown? Like, it just seems a bit sort of silly to be like, ‘oh, you’re overgrown, pay us £500,’ when, like, what if they decided they wanted it overgrown? Who gets to decide that’s not right?”*

*“There might be quite a few areas that would be [affected]... How will the councils decide?”*

*“Why should the government have the right to choose what someone does with their property?”*

Members were asked to reflect on whether they were aware of any dilapidated buildings or sites in their local area. Of the 9 Members who voted, 78% (n=7) replied that they were aware, whilst n=1 was not aware, and n=1 was unsure about whether there were any dilapidated buildings or sites in their area. A graph reflecting their response to this question is presented in Appendix Three.

Members questioned whether research had been undertaken to understand the scale of the issue and suggested that this would be necessary in order to gauge both the extent of the dilapidation and the potential financial implications.

*“Are councils planning on doing research into how many dilapidated buildings there actually are... just so we have a better idea about how much it’ll cost?”*

*“Has anybody tried to look at how much this should, in theory, save the taxpayer?”*

Members reflected on the types of buildings that might fall within the scope of the Bill. One Member asked whether community value or local interest would influence which buildings were protected.

*“Is it just listed buildings or would it take into account if there’s any interest in repairing a building or if it was important to the community?”*

## Enforcement and Fines

The £500 fixed penalty drew strong reactions. Members felt that the fines should be scaled based on the site owner's resources and status. For instance, Members suggested that fines might be increased in instances of repeat offenders.

*"I think if you have a man and he owns a building and you give him a £500 fine, that makes sense. That's a good fine... But if you're a big business owner and you were to be given a £500 fine, that wouldn't really have an impact. So, it really does vary, and £500 might be the right price for some people, but not for all."*

*"The fine should be increased for people who refuse to repair the property."*

*"Is the fine the same for all types of notices? If so, can it be so that the fine is different based on the notice? For example, I think a maintenance notice is less severe than an emergency action."*

When asked what should happen if owners were unable to afford repairs, Members agreed that councils should have the options to acquire and restore properties.

*"It would be a good idea... As long as the buildings were used for public benefit."*

Members had differing perspectives regarding whether there should be financial support or exceptions for property owners unable to afford repairs. Some took a firm stance that ownership comes with responsibility, whereas others felt that circumstances should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

*"I wonder how someone able to afford a property or pay the tax on an inherited property but is unable to pay for repairs?"*

*"It depends whether a third party has damaged it or not, for example an arson attack."*

Members raised practical questions about how enforcement would work in reality, particularly regarding timeframes given to property owners to carry out repairs. They noted that some

buildings could take significant time to bring up to standard, depending on planning permission and the nature of the site.

*“How long would someone have their dilapidated building before it could be corrected?”*

Some Members also reflected on situations where it might be reasonable to grant exemptions or flexibility within the enforcement process. They recognised that not all cases of dilapidation are straightforward, and that environmental or practical consideration may justify an alternative approach.

*“What about wildlife that’s living in the dilapidation building or land?”*

*“Maybe there should be a permit you can buy that gives you an exemption to this rule.”*

## **Safety**

When asked how derelict or neglected sites affect their local area, Youth Assembly Members consistently identified safety as one of their biggest concerns. Many described feeling uneasy or even fearful when near abandoned buildings.

*“I feel unsafe because of people that hang around in those areas.”*

*“Makes me feel like I am about to be mugged.”*

Members linked these feelings of danger to wider community impacts, such as preventing people from moving to the area or feeding into negative stereotypes about Northern Ireland as a whole.

*“Make the local area look sketchy.”*

*“Discourage people from coming to an area.”*

*“Feed into stereotypes that Northern Ireland is an unsafe and dangerous place.”*

Members linked derelict sites to youth safety and antisocial behaviour. They felt that derelict or neglected spaces often attract unwanted activity, including trespassing, vandalism, and risk-taking, which can result in serious injury.

*“When I’m looking at this Bill, I think the one thing that really affects young people is trespassing on these grounds. I think [the Bill] will help that. ... A lot of young people do get really hurt by going into these kind of buildings, and it’s really quite common.”*

*“Less derelict spaces removes hangout spaces for antisocial behaviour a council can change the culture that young people invest into.”*

*“By using this Bill’s provisions, councils can change the culture of young people by removing area for antisocial behaviour.”*

Members’ reflections on the negative impact of dilapidated buildings are presented in Appendix Four.

## **Opportunities for Regeneration**

When asked what benefits could come from councils taking action to fix up derelict or neglected spaces, Youth Assembly Members identified a wide range of positive outcomes. The most frequently mentioned theme was that of community pride and safety. Young people felt that improved sites would help residents to *“have pride in their council”* and make local areas feel *“safer”* and *“more comfortable.”* Members thoughts about the benefits that could come from councils fixing up these spaces are reflected in Appendix Five.

Members suggested that councils and the government could play a role in encouraging the restoration of land and buildings. They highlighted the potential benefits of supporting individuals or developers who were willing to take financial or practical risks to improve dilapidated sites.

*“That’s what government could really help with... councils and government could really help people wanting to take risks to do up properties. It will pay off in the long run.”*

Members saw the potential for community and economic benefit, if the Bill were implemented. The discussion linked regeneration to tourism, employment, and civic pride. The Members suggested that young people could be involved in plans to transform dilapidated sites.

*“Councils should consult young people about what these buildings are changed into.”*

*“It would be good if the councils talked to young people about what young people want and let that influence what the buildings are developed into.”*

When asked what they would create if they could transform a run-down building in their local area, Youth Assembly Members expressed a strong desire for regeneration that meets social and community needs. The most common responses were *“homes for homeless people”* and *“a youth hub,”* highlighting their awareness of both housing challenges and the lack of safe, dedicated spaces for young people. The full range of their responses are presented in Appendix Six.

## **Conclusion**

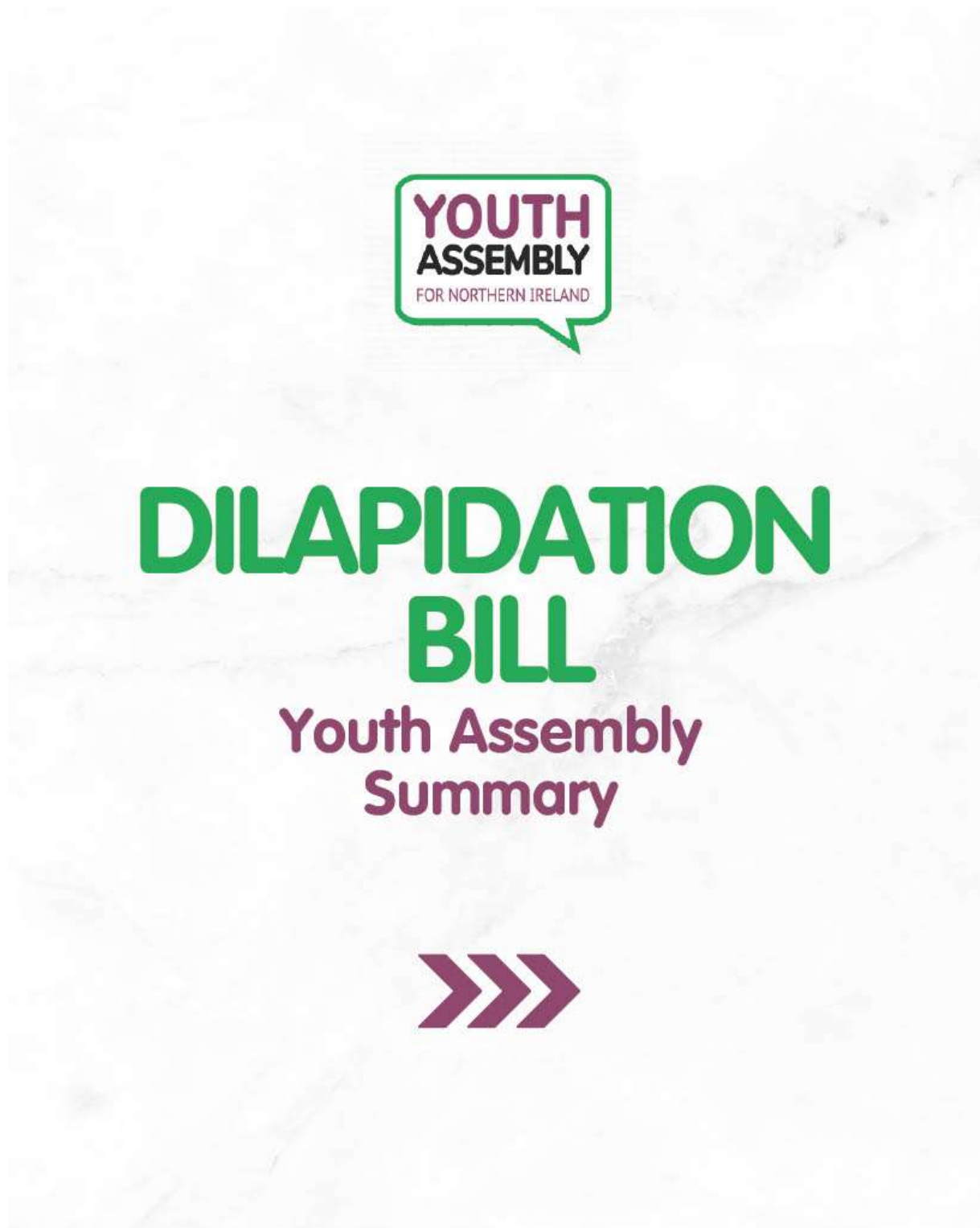
Overall, Members expressed support for the aims of the Dilapidation Bill. While they raised valid questions around funding, fairness, and consistency, the general view was that the Bill represented a positive step forward compared with the current system. Young people saw its potential to improve safety, restore community pride, and encourage regeneration across local areas.

*“We want to grow up in a safe area, so this Bill would be a good thing.”*

*“Keep pursuing this Bill. It will be helpful and will change the vibe of towns/cities.”*

# Appendices

*Appendix One: Youth Assembly Summary of the Dilapidation Bill*



# DILAPIDATION BILL

**Dilapidation:** the state or process of falling into decay or being in disrepair

## What is the purpose of the Bill?

A Bill is an idea for a new law

Some of our laws about empty land or unsafe buildings are **over 100 years old**, and don't work well anymore. This Bill wants to:

- Make towns and cities look better and feel safer
- Protect people's health and safety
- Save heritage buildings
- Help local businesses and tourism

## What's the background to the Bill?

Other parts of the UK already have better rules. Here, the law is a bit **messy, confusing, and some people think it's unfair**. There was a big public consultation in 2016, and almost everyone agreed that there should be a **new law introduced with stronger law enforcement**.

## Why does the Bill matter?

Councils will be able to act faster and more fairly to deal with dangerous and badly maintained land and buildings. It also means that the owner of the land/building, rather than the local taxpayers, will have to cover the costs.

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## The Bill will give councils more powers. But what types of powers will councils get?

The council will be able to give the owner of the building or land a notice

### KEY TERM

A notice is an official written order. It tells the owner of the building or land what's wrong, what needs to be fixed, and gives them a time limit to do it

Having been given a notice, the owner can either make the appropriate changes or appeal the notice in court

If the council do the repairs themselves, they can charge the owner. They can also issue a £500 fine if the owner breaches a maintenance notice or fails to provide information without a reasonable excuse

In the Bill, there are five different types of notices

1) Maintenance Notice - for small repairs or tidying

2) Dilapidation Notice - for bigger problems, including if the building needs to be knocked down

3) Dangerous Structure Notice - if the site is dangerous

4) Defective Premises Notice - if the building or land is bad for health or causing nuisance

5) Emergency Action - if a site is an immediate danger, the council can step in right away

Breaking a notice, blocking the work, or knocking down the building without permission is an offence

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# HAVE YOUR SAY... on the Dilapidation Bill

## Think about... Health and Safety

How do these sites make you feel?

Could dilapidated buildings/land affect people's health and safety? How?

Historic buildings get extra protection under the Bill. Is that fair?

Have you noticed any dilapidated buildings or land in your area?

Would fixing up dilapidated buildings/land have an affect on local communities?

## Think about... Your local area

## Think about... Communities

## Think about... Responsibility

Might this Bill impact young people in your area? How?

What impact might dilapidated buildings have on tourism?

Who should be responsible for fixing up dilapidated buildings/land?

Is it important that owners can appeal the notice?

## Think about... Rights

Do you think it's fair that councils can charge owners for repairs?

Should young people play a role in improving dilapidated buildings/land? What might that be?

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# A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS... On the Dilapidation Bill

The Dilapidation Bill is **discretionary**, not mandatory.

This means that councils will have the **choice** to act. They can get involved if they think they need to, **but they don't have to**.

## £500 fixed penalty

The Bill says councils can fine someone £500 if they ignore a notice or don't give the information needed. **Do you think £500 is a fair amount?** Is it enough to make owners take action, or could it be too harsh? What would be a fair penalty, in your opinion?

Do you think councils should **have** to step in every time, or is it better that **they can decide** when it's needed?

## PROS AND CONS

Are there any **benefits** to buildings/land being dilapidated? **What would the disadvantages of dilapidated buildings/land be?** Think about safety, antisocial behaviour, appearance, purpose, and so on.

The Bill gives councils the power to decide if a building is dilapidated. **But who should decide what counts as 'bad enough'?** Should it be the council, the community, experts (like engineers), or a mix? How would you decide if a building or land in your area was really dilapidated?

Councils can take immediate action if they think a site is dangerous. **Is that fair**, even if the owner doesn't get a chance to fix it first?

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# NEXT STEPS

## *What's happening now?*

The Bill has already passed its Second Stage at the Assembly. It's now at the Committee Stage, which means different groups of people will be invited to look at it and discuss it. **The Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (AERA)** want to know what people, including young people, think about the Bill.

## *What will happen next?*

If you'd like to have your say about the Bill, let the Youth Assembly Team know. We'll set up a meeting with the AERA Committee, where they will;

- Explain a bit more about the Bill
- Answer any questions you might have
- Listen to your views and ideas

After the meeting, the Youth Assembly will write up a short report highlighting their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. This report will be presented to the Committee, so that they can make sure the voices of young people are represented.

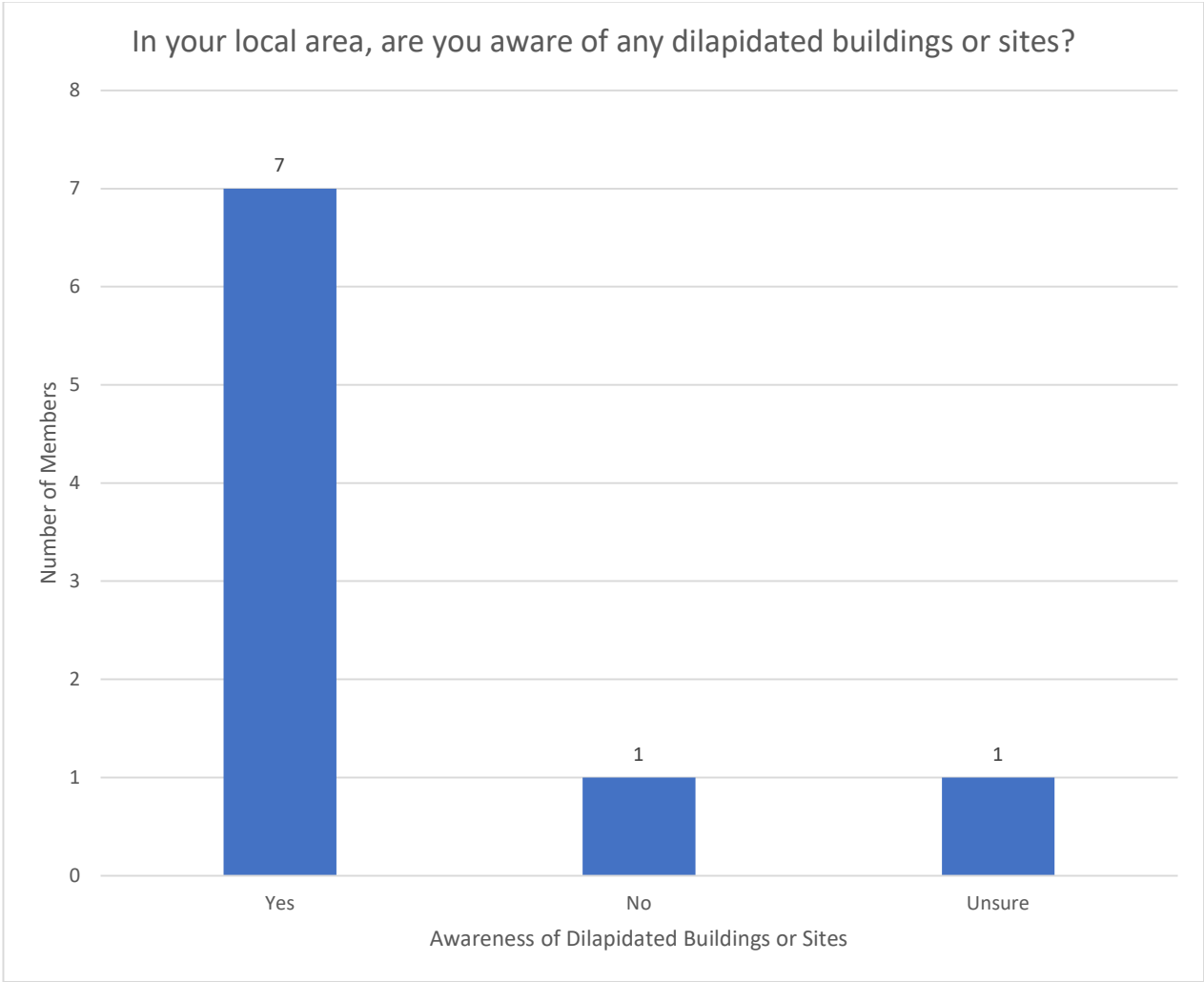
***Get in touch if you want to get involved!***

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*Appendix Two: Word cloud representing the question, 'When you walk past a derelict building or an empty site, what word(s) come to mind?'*



**Appendix Three: Table representing responses to the question, 'In your local area, are you aware of any dilapidated buildings or sites?'**



**Appendix Four: Mentimeter responses to the question, 'How do derelict or neglected sites affect your local area? Think about appearance, safety, community pride, etc.'**

- they discourage people from coming to an area
- I wouldn't want to live in a street with a derelict house on it
- Makes it look ugly to visitors
- They can feed into the stereotypes the Northern Ireland is an unsafe/dangerous place.
- I feel unsafe because of people that hang around in those areas
- Hesitant to approach
- Makes local area look sketchy
- Local derelict buildings are not only unattractive but also dangerous. They are used for dangerous activities I.e drugs. Dogging . Occult
- Looks like people don't care about their home
- Makes me feel like I am about to be mugged
- I agree with the mugging one
- People that live near these buildings may feel unsafe because of antisocial happening and the fear it might collapse
- Dangerous lots of homeless
- Local people are repulsed by the effect these buildings have on the environment

**Appendix Five: Mentimeter responses to the question, "What benefits could come from councils fixing up these spaces?"**

- people have pride in there council
- Buildings would be safer
- The space could be better used, so it would be beneficial to the community if it was a usable space
- People would feel more comfortable being there
- There will be less homeless people in the area
- Potentially better housing
- Safer
- It could be made into something new like houses for the homeless
- Slightly underrated benefit on the local youth . It could change standards or habits if young people no longer have places to inguage in antisocial behaviour
- Encourage productivity in a community
- Less likely to attract certain behaviours
- More people would want to visit
- Cost effectiveness- could be cheaper to fix houses/buildings instead of building new ones

*Appendix Six: A word cloud presenting Members' responses to the question, "If you could transform a run-down building in your area, what would you turn it into?"*

