

**DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY COUNCIL**  
**COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER (CAT)**  
**DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24**

## **1. Introduction**

This is the 2023/24 Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Annual Report for Dumfries and Galloway Council.

Our CAT Strategy is about empowering local people to make use of their assets to provide services to help our communities thrive. Community groups across Dumfries and Galloway have embraced the opportunity to manage and acquire land and buildings and CATs continue to be a key method of supporting community empowerment.

The Strategy Objectives are about the Council putting the customer first, minimising bureaucracy and supporting communities to develop their creative local aspirations. They are about responding to customer feedback and developing supports and systems that respond to customers' needs. Councillors endorsed the Strategy in 2017 and the challenge has been to put these very sound and progressive Objectives into practice and sustain this approach.

Our Council continues to work on changing its culture to become more engaging and empowering with its local communities. It works alongside communities to enable them to thrive at a time of fiscal restraint. CAT is part of that empowerment. We are having conversations with our communities about their priorities and inviting them to a more participative, community led relationship.

During 2023/24 Elected Members have again supported a wide range of Business Plans for community use of assets - everything from a Tennis Club in Kirkcudbright to a Former Primary School in Langholm. Communities are becoming increasingly more confident and creative in their aspirations, visions and use of local assets.

### **Legislative Requirements**

Section 95 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires the Council to set out, in a published annual report, how it has promoted and supported Community Asset Transfer, numbers of community asset transfer requests received and the outcomes of these requests. Specifically:-

- Promotion of Community Asset Transfer (CAT) - anything the relevant authority has done to promote the use of asset transfer requests and support community transfer bodies to make requests.
- Number of CATs received and those agreed/ refused/ appealed with reasons.

## 2. Council CAT Strategy

### 2.1 Proactive Support for CAT

The Council's Community Asset Strategy states:

*Community Asset Transfer (CAT) is not just about the transfer of land, buildings and structures; rather it is part of a wider picture in helping communities meet their shared aspirations and visions. It is about helping and empowering communities make best use of their local assets to become resilient, entrepreneurial; and thriving in a fiscal climate where the capacity for councils to continue to deliver services in the traditional manner becomes challenging.*

*Our Council values local empowerment, respects our communities, works in partnership and with communities to sustain services. We do not want to do things "to" communities but rather want to "work with" them so they can 'do it for themselves'.*

### 2.2 Listening to Community Groups and Stakeholders

The Council continues to reflect on its CAT process by working with Third Sector expert advisers such as Community Ownership Support Service (COSS), Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS) and other councils; this has proved extremely important particularly where complex CATs are being progressed. In addition to the Council benefitting from the strengthening relationship with COSS / DTAS, these agencies have also stated that they have benefitted and learned from the nature of the complex CATs the Council has managed recently.

Through the CAT process officers and managers meet with Community Transfer Bodies to evaluate the effectiveness of CAT and the CAT Procedure. Learning from these meetings is analysed and improvement actions planned and implemented.

### 2.3 Peer Learning

The CAT Procedure has been live now for a number of years and during that time officers, Members and community groups have been on a learning curve. We now have many groups that have been through the process and as a result have built new capacities and increased their confidence in designing their Business Plans, consulting their communities and navigating the process. They have begun informally to share learning with each other and officers are keen to help facilitate that process. Groups are now also more familiar with national organisations such as COSS and DTAS and have found them helpful for guidance and advice:

COSS – Community Ownership Support Service

DTAS – Development Trusts Association Scotland

COSS have developed specific CPD training for Relevant Authority Officers to ensure that the most current learning and support is made available to relevant

Authorities such as Local Authorities. Dumfries and Galloway Council is actively participating in the training.

Community Empowerment is an important aspect of our Council's Plan and "Support our communities" is one of the key principles. This is defined as being about:- Empowering Communities and individuals: empower customers, communities and staff and build skills and confidence to enable people and communities to achieve their ambitions; along with the commitment to: Work in Partnership; Focus on local and Place; and Invest to Enable Change. CATs contribute to all four of these areas

### **3. Support in 2023/24 for community groups**

#### **3.1 Clear Procedure**

In developing our original Procedure, we engaged with groups that had previously undergone CAT to seek their views on how we could improve the historic process. In summary applicants wanted: a conversation and a local point of contact they could talk to. They wanted a simplified, less bureaucratic process for applying for asset transfer. These views were included in the design of the procedure and accompanying materials in the website. They were also reflected in the approach the Council takes to CAT which is based around dialogue and face to face support, building confidence and community capacity to take on challenges. There is a willingness to keep bureaucracy to a minimum. These approaches build community confidence in the process and help promote CAT and this approach was specifically highlighted and commended by COSS during the Audit, Risk & Scrutiny Review.

#### **3.2 The Community Asset Transfer website**

Feedback from service users tells us that community groups value the website as it invites applicants to a discussion, minimises use of jargon and bureaucracy and offers a single point of contact. The website contains all required advice and proforma for making an application. It also invites community groups to have a conversation and offers a single point of contact via their local Ward Officers.

#### **3.3 A single point of contact**

Community Transfer Bodies tell us that they value the support provided by Ward Officers. In particular, they appreciate having a source of support to help them navigate the Council so that they do not have to contact several individual Services for information. All Ward Officers have received and continue to receive sound training in the process and ways to support communities from internal and external sources.

#### **3.4 Promotion**

3.4.1 The Council's CAT Procedure continues to be promoted on social media links to the CAT website are promoted through the Council's Facebook and Twitter pages. Word of mouth is perhaps the greatest PR tool in our region and

the success of a number of CAT groups is well known and inspires other groups to take the CAT journey.

3.4.2 Ward Officers are in each Council Ward. The Ward Officer actively promotes CAT and builds the confidence of local groups in accessing and progressing through the CAT Procedure.

#### 3.4.3 Support from Third Sector Partners

Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway was actively involved in updating the Council's Procedure, works closely with the Ward Officers, trains in the Council's CAT Procedure and promotes CAT to community groups.

#### 3.4.4 Support from Elected Members

Elected Members are increasingly familiar with CAT, take a very active interest and are informed of every application in their Ward.

#### 3.4.5 Engagement and Listening

Our Council has active discussion with all applicants and improves the information available on our website based on customer feedback. Word of mouth is particularly important in rural communities and potential applicants gain confidence from hearing of other groups' experiences.

#### 3.4.6 Liaison across Council Services

There is ongoing training and active learning for Ward Officers and Colleagues from across the Council, and in particular for and with Property, Estates and Programmes and Legal Services.

There is also liaison with Property, Estates and Programmes and Legal Services through dialogue in a Strategic Asset Board Working Group. This group provides the opportunity for Colleagues to become aware early of Expressions of Interest and Validated Requests and enables Ward Officers to present 'wicked issues' at the earliest stages of the process.

### **4. Community groups views on the support offered**

3 community groups which have successfully progressed through the transfer process were asked three specific questions: 3 responses were received.

Q1 Please comment on the support you have received to work through the Community Asset Transfer process?

Excellent:	2
Very Good:	1
Good:	0
Satisfactory:	0
Weak:	0

Comments:

- We benefitted from an extremely helpful and supportive Ward Officer who made it easier for us by directing our questions to the correct people and

sharing past knowledge and experience which was invaluable. He pulled the right people together at the right time for us to ensure appropriate connections were made and conversations had.

- We were put in touch with another group that had already been through an asset transfer. This was helpful.
- In one instance the Ward Officer was sent a personal note of thanks for their support.

Q2 If you used the website, was it useful and easy?

Excellent:	1
Very Good:	2
Good:	0
Satisfactory:	0
Weak:	0
Didn't Use	0

Comments:

- The website was useful and had the forms we needed.
- Most of the information is all online albeit it was a bit cumbersome at points and you would sometimes need to know the correct key words to search for to ensure you would get the information you were looking for.

Q3 Did you get a timely response to your request for Community Asset Transfer?

Excellent:	2
Very Good:	0
Good:	0
Satisfactory:	1
Weak:	0

Comments:

- The Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway helped with getting our Governance documents right for Community Asset Transfer.

## 5. Number of Community Asset Transfers

The Council's CAT Procedure works on a Stage 1 and Stage 2 process. Stage 1 is simply an expression of interest. It signals to the Council a community interest which allows us to check title and collate information which is of use to the community transfer body in developing its business plan. This information includes such items as condition surveys, running costs, planned repairs etc. It also triggers allocation of officer support to the group for six months, with a review after that time to check the viability of the Application and assess necessary support.

Not all Stage 1 applications progress to CAT. Applicants may decide to withdraw for a variety of reasons. There are no prohibitions on the Council selling or leasing the asset during the Stage 1 period.

Stage 2 is a formal application for a CAT, accompanied by a business case, an indication of social return on investment and a financial plan demonstrating how the CTB will sustain responsibility for the asset.

Once a Stage Two application has been validated, the Council cannot sell or lease the asset. Council officers, mainly the Ward Officer work with the CTB to access funding and encourage them to make a financial contribution to the Council for the asset. A Social Value Return on Investment is also now undertaken on all CAT applications to provide full financial information on the benefits to the Council and community.

The Finance, Procurement and Transformation Committee makes the final decision after a recommendation from the Area Committee.

The Ad Hoc Community Asset Transfer Sub Committee considers any appeals to decisions made.

### **Summary of Community Asset Transfers Received, in Progress and Completed for the year 2023/24**

#### Application Decisions

#### **Full Transfer of ownership**

No. of applications for Community Asset Transfer 4

No of Community Asset transfers agreed 3

No. of Community Asset Transfers refused 1

No. of appeals agreed 0 - included in total above.

#### **Community Asset Transfers Agreed / Applications Decided 2023/24**

Kirkcudbright Tennis Clubhouse & Courts, St Mary's Street, Kirkcudbright	Kirkcudbright Tennis Club	FPT – February 2024
Former Outdoor Activity Centre Carlingwark, Castle Douglas	Castle Douglas Development Forum	FPT – 20 June 2023
Langholm Old School, Thomas Telford Road, Langholm	Langholm Alliance	FPT – 20 June 2023

#### **NOT AGREED**

Lochside Caravan park, Castle Douglas	Castle Douglas Development Forum	FPT – 20 June 2023
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## Summary of Community Asset Transfers Received and in Progress for the year 2023/24

Community Asset Transfers by Ward as at 31 March 2024

### **No. of Stage 2 applications in progress: (11)**

#### Ward 1 – Stranraer & The Rhins

Enterprise House & Vacant Plot at Enterprise House

#### Ward 2 Mid Galloway & Wigtown West (4)

Unit 1 (1-5), Unit 2 (2 & 3) Industrial Block Minnigaff

Minigaff Pavilion, Newton Stewart

Old Town Hall (Clock Tower), Newton Stewart (2)

#### Ward 3 Dee & Glenkens (3)

Sea Angling office, Kirkcudbright

Multi Games Area, St John's Town of Dalry

The Mill on the Fleet, Gatehouse of Fleet – The Mill on the Fleet

#### Ward 6 – North West Dumfries

North West Resource Centre, Dumfries

#### Ward 7 – Mid and Upper Nithsdale

Queensberry Garages, Sanquhar

#### Ward 11 – Annandale North

Former Caravan Site, Lockerbie

## **6. Social Value**

Value is not measured by financial figures alone and when deciding on CAT applications our Elected Members consider the social value brought to local communities by the business plans presented by CAT applicants. This involves consideration of how the plans assist the delivery of Council Principles: Safeguarding our future, supporting our citizens, supporting our communities, being a responsive council. All of these things help our communities thrive and bring value.

## **7. Monitoring and Reporting**

In addition to this Annual Report, the CATs are reported to the four Area Committees in the six monthly and End of Year Communities Business Plan Performance Monitoring Report, so that Elected Members and residents know of these developments in their locality.