

**DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY COUNCIL**  
**COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER (CAT)**  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2020/2021**

## **1. Introduction**

This is the fourth 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 popular method of supporting 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 support and systems that respond to customers' needs. Councillors enthusiastically endorsed the Strategy back in March 2017 and the challenge for the four years 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 has reshaped to be in a better position to work 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 engage in a more participative, community led relationship. CAT is part of that process.

During the year 2019/20 we undertook our first Review of the Strategy and Procedure to ensure that it reflected our experience over the last three years. During 2020/21 and despite the challenges presented by COVID-19 restrictions the lessons learned have been acted upon. One of the key areas of development has been about how we evidence the social value a CAT brings to its local area and the introduction of a nationally recognised Social Value tool will add this perspective to reports for Members. Another development now well embedded is that Community Transfer Bodies that have been through the Council's CAT Procedure are now helping other groups embarking on the journey. Peer learning is becoming a more common feature of the CAT landscape with Groups being proactively encouraged to learn from each other.

Our continuous improvement approach to the Councils delivery of CAT continued in 2020/21 with a review of the long-term sustainability of CAT and complex CATs by the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee. The Recommendations from this Review were agreed by Full Council on 25 March 2021 ([click here](#)). and in summary it was found that Dumfries and Galloway Council's approach to CAT was progressive, particularly about complex CATs; and community focussed, but also that as CAT was only established less than four years ago, it was too early to determine the long

term sustainability of CATs. Some improvements to the CAT Procedure are being recommended for the future.

The CAT Procedure continues to involve learning for our Council and its partners. We have worked closely with Third Sector partners to develop ways of working that are complementary and we have all embraced this different way of doing things. Our Council continues to learn much from the communities themselves.

The Council's capacity and speed of response can be challenging as CATs continue to be complex in nature, and support from across Council in managing these cases is required, particularly for Legal Services and Property, Estates and Programmes.

Elected Members have again supported a wide range of Business Plans for community use of assets - everything from a Community Hub in Lochside to land for community housing in Upper Nithsdale. Communities are becoming increasingly more confident and creative in their aspirations, visions and use of local assets, many of which support the longer term aspirations of communities.

## **2. 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.

## **3. Council CAT Strategy**

The Council continues to support community groups to take on the ownership of land and buildings to benefit their local communities. Support has been built into the process from its inception four years ago. The following details the support currently provided by Dumfries and Galloway Council:

### **3.1 Proactive Support for CAT**

The Council agreed its Community Asset Transfer Strategy and Procedure on 7 March 2017. Promotion of Community Asset Transfer and support to community bodies to make asset transfers was considered to be very important by the Council throughout the development of the CAT Strategy and Procedure.

The 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’.

### **3.2 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. In formulating our CAT strategy and Procedure we listened to stakeholders who told us that good practice would address the following issues:

1. Making it easier and clearer how to go about having a pre-application discussion and making a request for an asset, including the specific roles of both the group and the Council; the Council's decision-making process (including the role of Committees) in relation to transfers; more visible web information about available assets and the process; funding routes; easy read style guidance and application forms including a Business Plan template (Plain English Crystal Mark would be the ideal);
2. A single point of contact for communities, Elected Members, partner organisations and staff to go to about potential asset transfers;
3. Procedures to deal with disputes/mediation and an appeal process;
4. Training for relevant staff about supporting organisations to apply for an asset Transfer to ensure a consistency of approach across all CATs;
5. Clear timescales for each stage of an application, from Validation to Decision to offers being made and missives being concluded;
6. Clear criteria about how the Council will assess an application (including for example the engagement with the wider community that an applicant is expected to undertake/evidence to demonstrate community buy-in to the proposal; sustainability of the applicant organisation; the viability of the Business Plan; environmental and financial sustainability of the asset);
7. Clarity about considering and allocating capital investment to assets of interest to organisations;

8. Improved promoting of assets, which may be available for transfer or are actively part of a CAT process;

9. Clearer criteria for any conditions to be included in the transfer agreement - for example in the event an asset ceases operation once transferred into community ownership / management; or prohibiting resale within a certain period; unsustainability of the community organisation.

We have adopted these approaches over the past four years and continue to refine and improve. We are beginning to see the fruits of some of the CATs, however some of the more complex plans will take several more years to become fully manifest and begin delivering results for their communities, particularly where delivery of outcomes are dependent on the CTB's securing external funding.

### **3.3 Peer Learning**

The CAT Procedure has been live now for four 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 (Community Ownership Support Service) and DTAS (Development Trusts Association Scotland) and have found them helpful in providing independent guidance and advice:

### **3.4 CAT Objectives to support and empower communities**

The Council agreed 4 Objectives for CAT which are both about promotion of CAT and supporting community groups through the process:

#### **Objective 1**

To promote CAT as a key aspect of community empowerment.

#### **Objective 2**

To support community groups throughout the CAT process

#### **Objective 3**

To ensure transparency and fairness in our decision-making

#### **Objective 4**

To put the customer first and respond to what our service users (CAT) groups and people supporting them are telling us about future improvements

### **3.5 Actions to Support Community Groups**

The resultant action plan to develop the Strategy included:

- the development of clear procedures
- training and development of key officers from other departments and ward officers to support communities.
- a website and easy- read guidance to assist applicants, training for ward officers to support communities through the community asset transfer process,
- signposting groups to other sources of support including Third Sector Interface and national organisations such as COSS and DTAS
- the setting up of an appeals panel comprising elected members not involved in the original decision making committee.

All of these Actions have been completed.

## **4. Support in 2020/21 for community groups**

### **4.1 Clear Procedure**

In developing our original Procedure, we engaged with groups that had previously undergone a 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 when 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 Committee Review.

### **4.2The Community Asset Transfer webpages.**

Feedback from service users tells us that community groups value the website as it is engaging, invites applicants to a discussion, minimises use of jargon and bureaucracy and offers a single point of contact. The site lists all property in Council ownership so that community groups can see what might be available for CAT. It 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.

Work was initiated during 2020/21 to reduce the amount of historical information contained on the CAT webpage to ensure that the page is navigable, and information is easily accessible. This work is ongoing.

### **4.3 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.

### **4.4 Promotion**

4.4.1 The Council's CAT Procedure continues to be promoted on social media links the CAT webpage is promoted through the Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts. 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.

4.4.2 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.

4.4.3 Information to Community Councils.- all Community Councils received information on CAT and the website link. Where Community Council look to take ownership of an asset through CAT they are supported to identify groups with appropriate governance structures in their locality, as they themselves do not meet the criteria to be an eligible CTB.

#### **4.4.4 Support from Third Sector Partners.**

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

#### **4.4.5 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; and are kept updated with progress through the monthly Ward Updates.

#### **4.4.6 Engagement and Listening.**

Our Council has active discussion with all applicants and improved 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.

#### 4.4.7 Liaison across Council Services

There is ongoing training and active learning for Ward Officers and colleagues from across the Council. There is also liaison with Property, Estates and Programmes and Legal Services through formal dialogue and monitoring of CATs, Leases and sales in a Strategic Assets Board Working Group. This Group provides the opportunity for officers to be aware early of Expressions of Interest and Validated Requests, and enables complex issues to be identified and addressed at the earliest stages of the process.

COSS have developed specific Continued Professional Development training for Relevant Authority Officers to ensure that the most current learning and support is made available to relevant Authorities such a Local Authorities. Dumfries and Galloway Council is actively participating in the training.

#### 5. Community groups views on the support offered

5 community groups which have successfully progressed through the transfer process in 2020/21 were asked three specific questions: All groups have provided feedback.

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

Four groups felt that the support offered by the Council was excellent, whilst the fifth group felt the support was weak.

Comments:

Our Ward Officer has been excellent and led us through every step of the process

We felt that the Council were unhelpful, less than forthcoming with information and obstructive.

Ward Officer went out of their way to support during a complex CAT  
Having single point of contact really helped understand what we needed to do.

We have only heard positive comments re support from the council. Both our Ward Officer and Councillor deserve a special mention for their help, guidance and advice.

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

Two groups found the website very good and found previous CATs from other groups very helpful and informative. One group found the webpage to be satisfactory with information hard to find. The two remaining groups did not use the webpage.



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

Four groups thought the time taken to respond to their request was excellent, whilst the final group found the timing weak and outwith the extension period agreed by both the Council and the group.

The negative issues are being investigated further to identify why problems were perceived by the Group and ensure that they are addressed for any future CATs

## **6.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 unless the process of sale or lease has progressed beyond preliminary negotiations. 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 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.

## **Summary of Community Asset Transfers Received, in Progress and Completed for the year 2020/21 (65)**

### Applications in Progress

No. of Stage 1 applications in progress: **48**

No. of Stage 1 applications withdrawn: **0**

No. of Stage 2 applications in progress: **17** (inc Agreed, Refused, Request for Review & Appeal to Scottish Ministers)



Application Decisions

**Long term Leases 3**

No. of long term leases requested: 3

No. of long term leases agreed 3

No. of long term leases refused 0

No. of appeals to decision 0

**Full Transfer of ownership 3**

No. of applications for full Community Asset Transfer 3

No of Community Asset transfers agreed 2

No. of Community Asset Transfers refused 1

No. of appeals to decision 1 (ongoing from decision in 19/20)

Community Asset Transfers by Ward as at 31 March 2021

**No. of Stage 1 applications in progress: (48)**

Ward 1 - Stranraer & the Rhins (5)

Enterprise House

Enterprise Workshop Hillside Drive Stranraer (x2)

Stranraer Clock Tower

Ward 2 - Mid Galloway & Wigtown West (13)

Blairmount Park Newton Stewart (x2);

Penninghame Centre (x2)

Wigtown Bowling Club

Kirkcowan Hall

Whithorn Visitors Centre

Minnigaff Industrial Units

Stronord Outdoor Centre

Minnigaff Playing Fields and Pavilion

Old Tourist Information Centre - Newton Stewart

New Luce Hall

Old Town Hall Newton Stewart

Ward 3 - Dee & Glenkens (6)

Gartshore Park (Allotments)

Land at Underhill Dalry

Auchencairn Public Toilets

New Galloway Town Hall

Glenlochar Community Centre

Carsphairn Heritage Centre

Ward 4 - Castle Douglas & Crocketford (1)

Carlingwark Outdoor Centre and Lochside Caravan Park

Ward 5 – Abbey (nil)

Ward 6 – Lochar (nil)

Ward 7 – Mid & Upper Nithsdale (6)

Sanquhar Library  
Land at Goosedubs  
Land as Scott Street Kelloholm  
Closeburn Gala Field  
Sanquhar Silver Band Hall (land only)  
Land at Sanquhar HWRC

Ward 8 – North West Dumfries (2)

North West Resources Centre & Lincluden House (2)

Ward 9 – Nith (8)

Noblehill Community Centre (2)  
Loreburn Hall (2)  
Old Maths Block, St Joseph's College  
Former British Linen Bank  
Land at Greensands  
Kingholm Quay Sluice

Ward 10 – Annandale South (1)

Anna Harbour Quay & Associated Land

Ward 11- Annandale North (2)

Land between D.S Smith & the 3G Pitch Lockerbie.  
Former Caravan Park

Ward 12 – Annandale East & Eskdale (4)

Former Gretna Registrars Officer  
Former Langholm Primary School  
Westerkirk Primary School  
Meikleholm Playing fields

**No. of Stage 2 applications in progress: (10)**

Ward 1 Stranraer & Rhins (1)

Playing fields, Ladies Walk Stranraer

Ward 3 Dee & Glenkens (3)

Kirkcudbright Tennis Club & Clubhouse  
Kirkcudbright Sea Angling Office  
Multi Use Games Area, Daly

Ward 4 – Castle Douglas and Crocketford (1)

Carlingwark Outdoor Centre and Lochside Caravan Park

Ward 5 – Abbey (1)

Former Dalbeattie Primary School

Ward 8 – North West Dumfries (2)

Lochside Industrial Units

North West Resource Centre

Ward 9 – Nith (1)

Land at Kingholm Quay

Ward 10 – Annandale South (1)

Former Annan Library

**Applications Decided (7)**

Ward 1 Stranraer & Rhins (1)

Kirkcolm Carpark - Transfer of ownership - Refused

Ward 2 Mid Galloway & Wigtown West (2)

Glenluce Lorry Park – Transfer of ownership - Approved

Woodside Industrial Units, Glenluce – Transfer of ownership - Approved

Ward 3 Dee & Glenkens (1)

Kirkcudbright Harbour Stage / Square – Long term lease - Approved

Ward 6 North West Dumfries (1)

Former Lochside Library – Long term lease - Approved

Ward 7 Mid & Upper Nithsdale (1)

Land at Niviston Road, Kelloholm – Transfer of ownership - Approved

Ward 12 Annandale East & Eskdale (1)

Springfield Pavilion – Long term lease - Approved

**Appeals to Scottish Ministers (1)**

Ward 1 Stranraer & Rhins

Portpatrick Village Hall – The Council was notified on 9 June 2021 that the Appeal had been dismissed by the Scottish Government Minister.

**Financial and Social Impact**

In total 6 assets have been transferred to communities through ownership or long-term lease. The majority of assets were historically surplus to DGC requirement or already being leased to the community.

**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 Priorities e.g. for Social Inclusion, improving the local economy, supporting anti-poverty objectives , helping our children get the best start in life and supporting local skills, learning and employability. All of these things help our communities thrive and bring value.

Since January 2020, the social value of all new CAT requests have been assessed and presented to Elected Members as part of the decision-making process. The level

of social value created through CATs and the delivery of the CTB's Business Plan varies and is very much linked to the outcomes the CTB are looking to improve upon. For the reporting period the average Social Value return on investment for the 6 approved CATs was £2.65.

## **7. Monitoring and Reporting**

In addition to this Annual Report, the CATs feature in the End of Year Community Planning and Engagement Services Business Plan Performance Monitoring Reports.