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19th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Could you put Surrey Council's empty buildings or land to good use?

7 March 2026



Surrey residents could soon have the chance to take over unused council buildings and land under a new policy designed to put more local assets into community hands.

Surrey County Council is drawing up a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy, which would set out how community groups can lease council-owned buildings or land if they can prove it will benefit local people. The draft policy was backed by councillors this week and will be sent to the county's cabinet for approval in April 2026. Officers told councillors: "The community asset transfer policy has been intentionally designed to enable community participation in its simplicity."

Essentially, the policy would allow local organisations – such as charities, sports clubs or community groups – to take on council properties that are underused or no longer needed for services. Instead of selling them off or leaving them empty, the council could lease the assets to community groups, sometimes at below market value, if the social benefit outweighs the financial return. Council officers said the policy would give communities the opportunity to "reimagine, repurpose and reinvigorate" local spaces, meaning disused buildings could become youth centres, community hubs, sports facilities or spaces for local projects.

Under the proposed system, groups interested in taking over a building would first submit an expression of interest and, if the idea appears viable, they would then be asked to produce a business case showing they can run and maintain the asset long-term. Applications would be assessed against several criteria including the level of community benefit, the financial stability of the organisation and how the plans fit with the council's wider priorities. If approved, transfers would generally happen through leases rather than outright sales, with community groups responsible for maintaining the building.

Council officers stressed the policy is intended to make the process clearer and fairer because, although transfers can already take place, there is currently no single framework guiding decisions. During the meeting councillors broadly welcomed the proposal but raised concerns about volunteer-run organisations taking on complex legal responsibilities and the potential financial risks of maintaining buildings or signing long leases.

Cllr Edward Hawkins said: "I still feel that we are exposing residents to a liability which some will understand, but some will not." Another councillor suggested community groups should seek legal advice before committing to such arrangements. Officers responded that the council already provides hands-on support during the application process, including meetings and guidance, and would continue to help groups develop proposals. They added that every application would be carefully assessed to ensure organisations are capable of managing the asset before any transfer is agreed.

The CAT policy follows the approval of a motion by Cllr **Eber Kington** (RA Ewell Court, Auriol & Cuddington) to council on March 18, 2025.

Emily Dalton LDRS

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