



From Abramovich's frozen wealth to Epsom's Ashley Centre - support for Ukraine continues

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The Government has announced that £2.5 billion from the frozen proceeds of the sale of Chelsea Football Club by sanctioned Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich is to be directed towards humanitarian aid for Ukraine, following years of political and legal delay.

The money has been held in the UK since the forced sale of the football club in 2022, after Abramovich was sanctioned in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ministers have now confirmed that the funds will be transferred to a foundation dedicated to humanitarian support for Ukraine, with legal action threatened if the process is not completed.

Helen Maguire, Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell, welcomed the decision, describing it as "long-overdue action" and a step towards accountability. She said billions of pounds linked to sanctioned Russian oligarchs had remained frozen while Ukrainians continued to suffer the consequences of what she described as Putin's illegal war, and that she would continue to press the Government to ensure the money reaches Ukraine swiftly.

While £2.5 billion is a significant sum, it represents only a small proportion of the overall cost of the war's impact on Ukraine. According to the World Bank, the United Nations, the European Commission and the Ukrainian government, the estimated cost of recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine now stands at around \$524 billion over the next decade. That figure includes widespread destruction of housing, hospitals, schools, energy infrastructure and transport networks, alongside the long-term costs of healthcare, rehabilitation, psychological trauma and landmine clearance.

Direct physical damage to infrastructure alone is estimated at more than \$170 billion, while millions of civilians have been displaced and tens of thousands injured. The long-term health consequences of the war, including treatment for complex injuries and trauma, are expected to place a continuing burden on



Ukraine's public services for many years. Against that backdrop, the Abramovich funds amount to well under one per cent of the estimated total cost of rebuilding, though they could make a substantial difference to targeted humanitarian and medical programmes.

The announcement has renewed local focus on the role of Surrey Stands With Ukraine, a volunteer-run charity based in Epsom which has been providing humanitarian aid since the early weeks of the invasion. Operating under Harrop HR Missions Ltd, the group has sent more than 148 vanloads of aid to Ukraine and has supported both medical relief overseas and displaced Ukrainians in the UK. The charity has also been recognised in Parliament, with Helen Maguire MP praising its work in providing medical aid and rehabilitation support.

For nearly four years, Surrey Stands With Ukraine has maintained a highly visible permanent kiosk in the Ashley Centre near Waitrose, which volunteers describe as central to sustaining donations, public awareness and community engagement. The kiosk is due to close permanently on 1 January 2026 following a change in the Ashley Centre's policy on charity fundraising.

Under the new arrangements, Surrey Stands With Ukraine has been selected as one of a small number of charities allowed to operate a branded market stall inside the centre for limited periods each month. From January 2026, the charity will operate a stall near the soon to open Primark on a restricted schedule, typically four days per month. Physical donations will continue to be accepted at the charity's Ukraine Hub in Global House, accessed via the rear entrance to the Ashley Centre.

Surrey Stands With Ukraine will operate a fundraising and information stall inside the Ashley Centre on the following dates in 2026. The stall will be located near Primark.

January: Tuesday 6, Thursday 8, 15 and 22
February: Tuesday 3, Thursday 5, 19 and 26
March: Tuesday 3, Thursday 5, 19 and 26
April: Tuesday 7, Thursday 9, 16 and 30
May: Tuesday 5, Thursday 7, 14 and 21
June: Tuesday 2 and 16; Thursday 4 and 11
July: Tuesday 7, Thursday 9, 16 and 30
August: Tuesday 4, Thursday 6, 13 and 20
September: Tuesday 1, Thursday 3, 10 and 17
October: Tuesday 6, Thursday 8 and 15

Physical donations can also be made at the Surrey Stands With Ukraine Hub in Global House, accessed via the rear entrance of the Ashley Centre by pressing the "Ukraine Hub" buzzer.

The loss of a permanent stand is expected to reduce income by around £30,000 a year and significantly limit the collection of physical aid. A spokesperson for SSWU stated the daily presence allowed volunteers to build relationships with regular donors and served as a constant reminder of the ongoing humanitarian



crisis in Ukraine.

The Ashley Centre provides Surrey Stands With Ukraine with a suite of rooms and storage space in Global House, Ashley Avenue. The premises also are home to the Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network and is known as the “Ukraine Hub”. Previously a retail unit facing the mall was used by SSWU until the unit was re-let commercially. The Ashley Centre has not responded to questions from the Epsom and Ewell Times about the decision to remove the permanent kiosk.

Surrey Stands With Ukraine thanks the Ashley Centre for its ongoing support and confirmed it will continue its work, stressing that the reduction in visibility makes public backing more important than ever. The charity says it is exploring alternative ways to maintain a visible presence in Epsom town centre and is encouraging residents to visit the new stall dates in the Ashley Centre and to continue donating through the Global House hub.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly warned that Russia’s war against Ukraine is not an isolated conflict but a direct threat to the security of the whole of Europe, arguing that Moscow’s actions demonstrate a willingness to use military force to pursue imperial ambitions beyond its borders. Sustaining humanitarian support for Ukraine is essential in maintaining civilian morale, stressing that resilience among the Ukrainian population is a decisive factor in resisting aggression and deterring further expansionism by President Vladimir Putin.

The contrast between the scale of national and international funding announcements and the challenges faced by local charities has highlighted the continued reliance on community-level support to meet urgent humanitarian needs. While the release of frozen oligarch assets has been widely welcomed, organisations working on the ground say sustained public engagement remains essential as the war and its consequences continue.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Since the war began the 14th Ukraine Social and Music Evening will take place at the Epsom Methodist Church this Saturday 20th December. Helen Maguire MP will welcome guests and performers. See listing here for details.

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2 years on Epsom to gather in solidarity with Ukraine

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