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Surrey praises Libraries of Things as Ewell scheme offers test borrowing

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Surrey County Council has hailed its growing network of “Libraries of Things” as a smarter and greener way for residents to borrow useful household items rather than buying them — even as the proposed full service at Ewell remains affected by unresolved questions over storage and lease arrangements.

In a release issued during Great Big Green Week, SCC said Libraries of Things were now operating in eight libraries and community spaces across the county, including Cranleigh, Dorking, Epsom and Ewell, Godalming, Guildford, Haslemere, Redhill and Woking.

The schemes allow residents to borrow items such as DIY tools, gardening equipment, kitchen items, leisure equipment and other household essentials. SCC said the service helps people save money, reduce waste and support local climate action.

Councillor Mark Nuti, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Health and Communities, said:

“Libraries of Things are a brilliant example of how we can help residents save money while also doing the right thing for the environment. They also show the power of working with local charities and community organisations to deliver practical services that really make a difference to people’s everyday lives.

“By sharing resources locally, we’re reducing waste, supporting our communities and making sustainable choices more accessible to everyone across Surrey.”

The Epsom and Ewell Library of Things website now states: “FULL SERVICE OPENING LATER IN THE YEAR”. It says test borrows are available by email appointment, with pick-up and drop-off on Thursday mornings at 10.30am from a temporary store.

The website describes the scheme as “just like a book library, except for things” and says Epsom and Ewell residents can borrow useful items such as carpet cleaners, DIY tools, gardening equipment and party gear “FREE OF CHARGE” rather than buying them new.

The borrowing process set out online invites users to become a member, browse the inventory, reserve an item, select dates and then collect it from the Bourne Hall Library issue desk with a reservation number and identification. Users must be at least 18 years old, and although the service is free, they may be required to provide valid debit or credit card details to cover loss, damage or non-return. Late return fees may also apply.

The website says the Library of Things is run by volunteers from Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network, known as eeCAN, in partnership with Ewell Library and supported by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and Epsom Repair Café.

However, the website also confirms that the issue of larger-item storage is not yet resolved. It states: “Large items are currently stored off site. We are in the process of organising storage for large items with access to Bourne Hall car park.” A further note says one week’s notice is required for items listed as large items and kept off-site.

That matches correspondence copied to the Epsom and Ewell Times, which shows that although a limited test system is available, the wider service remains dependent on agreement over storage at Bourne Hall.

As previously reported by Epsom and Ewell Times, the project has been delayed by disagreement over the respective roles of Surrey County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. SCC operates the library service at Bourne Hall, but the land and building are owned by EEBC. That has left the volunteers seeking clarity on who must approve, lease or authorise the external storage needed for larger items.

The latest correspondence suggests the matter will now go before EEBC’s Environment Committee on 23 June.

Cllr **Liz Frost**, an RA councillor for Woodcote and Langley Vale, wrote to William Ward of eeCAN on 10 June saying the lease would need to be considered by the committee. She said that, in preparing the report, officers had to take account of the council’s responsibilities “as both landowner as well as wider operational and site-related matters”.

She warned that the lease proposal would need to include conditions which were “likely to differ” from what the group had previously envisaged and “may have implications for the scheme as currently approved by planning”.

In particular, she said it was expected that any agreed arrangement would require “a smaller and more secure form of storage”, similar to more compact examples put forward as part of the Community Infrastructure Levy application.

Cllr Frost added that no works should be undertaken on site until a formal decision had been made and communicated by the council.

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In reply, William Ward, chair and co-founder of eeCAN, asked for an urgent meeting before the committee date so that councillors could be made aware of “all facts and options” before reaching a decision.

He said eeCAN had first asked for a meeting about the lease in December 2025 and had repeatedly sought discussions since March. He argued that “a two way conversation” earlier in the process might have avoided the present difficulty.

Mr Ward said volunteers had been working on the basis that the service would open to the public on Earth Day, 22 April, using a temporary store, with construction of the permanent store by volunteers planned for May. The website now indicates that the project has instead moved to test borrowing by appointment, with the full service still to come.

Mr Ward also said eeCAN had already spent more than £2,000 of an SCC grant on wood for the store to comply with a planning requirement for a green roof.

The group says it has local residents already signed up as members who are asking when they can borrow donated items.

Mr Ward said the approved store was intended not only for current large items but also to allow the service to expand as demand increases. He also referred to an SCC-supported “Borrow a Bike” scheme, saying the larger store had been designed to allow space for occasional-use items and bicycles.

He argued that because the service needs to be “fit for future use”, the decision should now involve the newly elected councillors for the future South East Surrey unitary authority area.

The correspondence also raises a financial concern for eeCAN. Mr Ward said the group’s Community Infrastructure Levy bid had been submitted before it knew that planning permission or a lease might be needed. If the current planning permission were now to prove unusable, he said the group would seek a refund of the £83 planning application fee.

The position remains that both councils say they support the Library of Things in principle. In the earlier joint response to Epsom and Ewell Times, Surrey County Council and Epsom and Ewell Borough Council said SCC Libraries enables external providers to operate Library of Things services across the county, while providers are responsible for organising off-site storage for larger items where necessary.

They said Ewell Library is located at Bourne Hall, which SCC leases from EEBC, and that EEBC, as both planning authority and freeholder, is responsible for approving external storage within the grounds.

The councils also said that eeCAN had been advised at an early stage that planning permission and landowner agreement would be required for an external store to house larger items. Planning permission was granted earlier this year and the proposal is expected to be presented to EEBC’s Environment Committee on 23 June.

The dispute therefore appears to have shifted from whether the scheme is wanted to what size and type of storage EEBC is prepared to approve, and on what lease terms. In the meantime, the Ewell website shows a partial service is available to residents prepared to book by email and collect by appointment.

For residents keen to borrow rather than buy, the county council’s Great Big Green Week message is clear: Libraries of Things are now part of Surrey’s environmental offer. For Ewell, the question is whether a test borrowing service can soon become the full service volunteers had hoped to launch earlier in the year.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Related report

Epsom “Library of Things” Delayed by Council Stand-Off

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