

Cabinet

30 January 2024

Community Asset Transfer Policy Review

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Assets and Property

Local Councillor(s): N/A

Executive Director: J Britton Executive Lead for Place

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

Dorset Council's Community Asset Transfer Policy seeks to recognise and maximise the benefit of devolution of assets to local communities, particularly to Town and Parish Councils. This policy supports the delivery of this devolution by providing clear guidance and support for applicants. Dorset Council aims to increase local control over assets, enabling assets to further meet the needs of local communities and enhance local neighbourhood plans.

This review of the Community Asset Transfer policy and processes was required to incorporate it into existing reporting and decision-making processes within Assets and Regeneration. Proposal for changes to make the process simpler for applicants and ensure the process is transparent.

Recommendation: The committee recommend to Cabinet that the revised policy and processes for assessing and determining Community Asset Transfer applications be agreed.

Reason for Recommendation:

1. To enable the Community Asset Transfer applications to be assessed and governed in line with other property/asset decisions and as part of the emerging Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP).

2. Provide transparency on the assessment of Community Asset Transfer applications.
3. Introduce a refreshed and more agile two-stage process, (Expression of Interest (EOI) and Business Case), to allow applicants to assess against a set of pre-set criteria if an asset is potentially suitable for Community Asset Transfer in advance of writing a full business case.

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2021 a new Asset Transfer Policy was brought to Cabinet which is the basis of this revised policy. However, it has become apparent that the current policy and associated processes are increasing the time taken to get decisions on applications.
- 1.2 There is no current procedure for initial assessment of assets for their suitability for Community Asset Transfer which means that even if an asset is unsuitable, the Council must take the application through the entire process. The introduction of an EOI stage will allow unsuitable assets to be filtered out early giving applicants a decision quickly to be able to look at alternative solutions.

2. Revised Policy

- 2.1 The revised policy aligns with more agile procedures within Assets and Regeneration which will mean Community Asset Transfers would now be governed as per other asset transactions/decisions, i.e. disposals and acquisitions.
- 2.2 The revised policy includes a new transparent assessment matrix for each stage of the application so that applicants can see how the Council will assess their application.
- 2.3 The revised policy sets out how the Council will use best endeavours to ensure that assets stay in community use and all future proposed transfers where there is a substantial value involved will be on the basis of leasehold rather than freehold for Community Asset Transfers. Assets of a de minimis value will be considered for freehold transfer.
- 2.4 The revised policy will be updated on the website and EOI applications will be submitted via the website. The additional guidance, template business case and assessment matrices will all be digitised and available online.

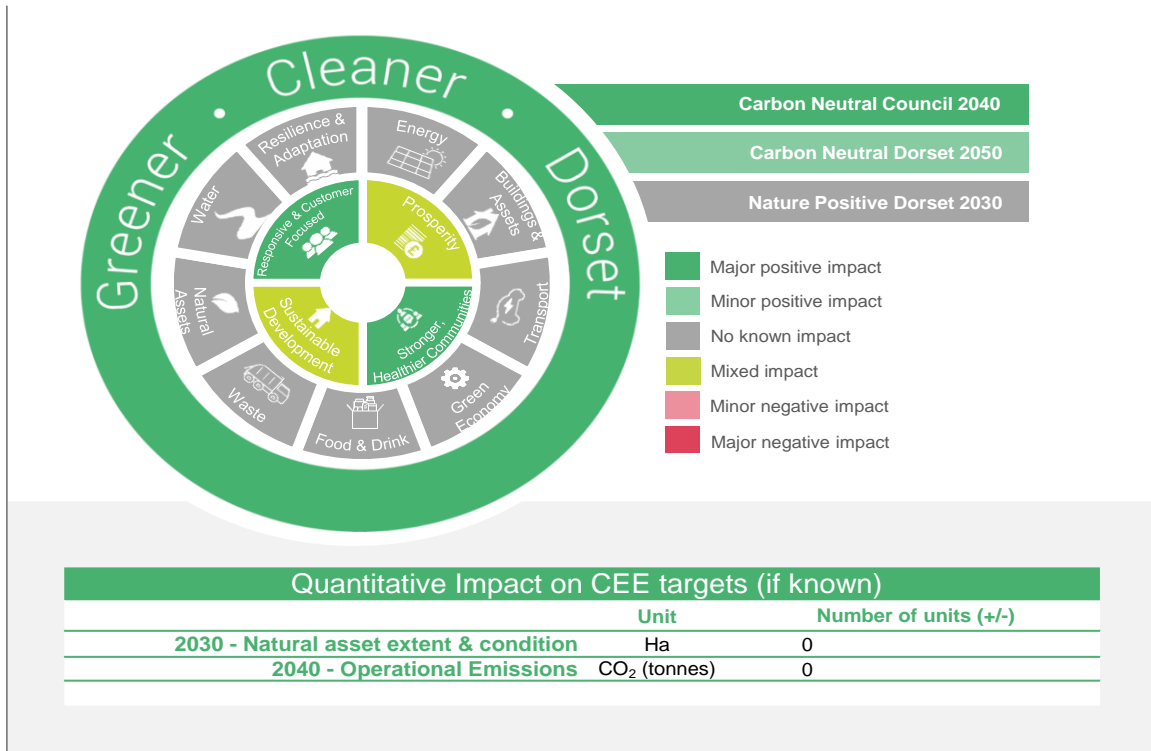
- 2.5 The revised policy also reserves the right to charge the applicant for the Business Case stage of the application. This will cover the cost of specialist work including valuation of the asset and legal fees to transfer the asset if the application is successful. In addition, a notional charge will be made to cover officer time in administering the application from enquiry to handover.
- 2.6 The guidance and forms will be refined by communications and digital teams to ensure they are accessible and easy to understand in advance of going live on the webpage. Therefore, if agreed we anticipate the revised policy going live in April 2024 to allow time for this work to take place.
- 2.7 This policy should be reviewed and updated to ensure it stays aligned with the Councils priorities in the future. Anticipate review required whenever a revised or new Dorset Council Plan launched.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 Will be considered on an asset-by-asset basis when an application is received. However, there is a principle that assets will be transferred in their current state and without additional funding.

4. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications

- 4.1 Overall, the policy aims to have a positive impact by allowing communities to have local control of appropriate assets and providing space for communities to provide initiatives that have a beneficial impact.



ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact
Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Prosperity	neutral
Stronger healthier communities	strongly supports it
Sustainable Development & Housing	neutral
Responsive & Customer Focused	strongly supports it

5. Well-being and Health Implications

- 5.1 Potential for assets being utilised at a local level to increase community togetherness and therefore reduction of social isolation.

5.2 Individual applications will be assessed on their ability to provide well-being benefits for the local community.

6. Other Implications

6.1 Individual applications will be assessed on their ability to provide social, economic, or environmental benefits for the local community.

7. Risk Assessment

7.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium/Low

Residual Risk: Low

8. Equalities Impact Assessment

Anticipate potentially no impact because we cannot know what assets will be requested. Therefore, each application will be assessed on merit. Equalities Impact Assessment completed with action plan to monitor overall uptake and assessment of individual applications.

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix A - Dorset Community Asset Transfer Policy (revised) plus appendices (in draft form to be further developed before launched)

10. Background Papers

10.1 [Cabinet Asset Transfers report.pdf \(dorsetcouncil.gov.uk\)](https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/cabinet-asset-transfers-report)