



# Village Halls

Rural communities benefit from owning well-maintained, multi-purpose facilities that provide opportunities for local social activity, sports, arts and recreation

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## Introduction

Rural communities benefit from owning well-maintained, multi-purpose facilities that provide opportunities for local social activity, sports, arts and recreation, alongside providing access to services and civic participation. A key factor is the provision of well resourced advice, information and support that ensures volunteer management committees succeed in helping their rural communities to be vibrant, healthy and sustainable

## Overview

Rural communities have traditionally owned and managed the assets in their communities, providing vital facilities, activities and services which would not otherwise be available.

This could be the village hall held in a charitable trust or the recreation ground, play area and village green owned and managed by the parish council.

More recently, communities have responded to local needs by setting up community owned shops, pubs and post office services; these are often co-located with existing village halls.

Rural communities have a huge potential for expanding their role in providing assets and facilities to meet current and future needs.

There are 10,000 village halls in England with a total asset value of more than £3bn, representing the largest network of community-owned facilities in rural Britain.

The term 'village hall' covers a range of rural buildings, including church halls and community centres, in which a variety of community activities

take place. The key to the continuing survival of Britain's village halls are the volunteer management committees who have to deal with an increasing burden of legislation yet, manage to keep their halls financially sustainable mostly by earning their own income and local fundraising.

Village halls often provide the only place to meet within a rural community, offering vital and diverse support to improve quality of life, particularly for those who are least able to travel to more distant centres of activity.

The ACRE Network supports and encourages communities in establishing and managing community assets through:

- Providing quality information, advice and support needed to manage public assets
- Building relationships with parish councils and public service partners
- Research that provides detailed data and information on issues affecting halls



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## Issue: Ensuring financial viability and sustainability

The availability of grant funding from local authorities and government continues to diminish leaving a gap in funding, particularly for major capital projects such as extensions, refurbishments and new builds

### Solution: Taking a fresh look at the alternatives

Research carried out by ACRE demonstrates that there is a huge dependence on fundraising to maintain the viability of community halls.

Nearly 80% of hall committees take part in fundraising activity to boost their rental income, enabling them to carry out essential repairs, upgrades and maintenance and also to offer subsidised activities.

Volunteers donate an average of 18.5 hours per week, at a notional rate of £7 per hour, which is worth around £6,700 per annum to the management of the hall.

Parish councils need to be more proactive in providing financial support for village halls. As the local statutory body, they are required to take the lead on issues affecting the interests of the community and its assets. They can provide regular funding through the local precept, as well as borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board which could support capital funding towards repairs or extensions.

Warcop Village Hall in Cumbria was unsafe and totally inadequate for the needs of the community. The community embarked on a project to sell the hall and land for housing for local people and, together with cash from the sale of an old Reading Room

(pictured), build a new hall. Defra's Rural Community Buildings Loan Fund (RCBLF), managed by ACRE, and a loan offer from Charity Bank meant the application deadlines for the Big Lottery Fund were met in advance of the sale.

Neenton IPS applied for an RCBLF loan to support their funding package of a combination of grants, sale of land to a developer for local housing and an ambitious community share offer. The project to renovate The Pheasant Inn, providing a community pub, also includes an extension that will become the community room. Support from ACRE Network member Community First, Hereford & Worcester has been an important factor in facilitating this project.



The Friends of Horspath purchased a disused Methodist Chapel for use as a community hub. It was designated as a community asset by South Oxfordshire District Council under the Localism Act 2011. They had six months to acquire funding under the Community Right to Bid and the RCBLF helped them to achieve their goal. The village hall committee and the Parish Council offered support for the Hub which will house a part-time outreach post office, a luncheon club and film club.

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## Issue: Good governance and support for volunteers

Managing buildings used for the provision of a variety of activities is complex. It requires volunteers to understand the legal arrangements and their responsibilities

### Solution: Providing quality support for village halls

The ACRE Network provides local access to the best available advice, information, training and advocacy for all hall management committees through a network of skilled advisers located in each RCC organisation and supported nationally by ACRE.

Hall management committees are encouraged to

strive for best practice through the **Hallmark** quality standards programme. The programme is based on a peer review system with the assessments carried out by teams of volunteers.

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## Solution: Providing quality support for village halls

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ACRE Network member Action in Rural Kent advocates Hallmark as a way of achieving a high standard of governance in a number of halls which, once reached, leaves them more time to focus on the 'harder to reach' halls.

Peer reviews are vital in helping to deliver advice to committees managing halls. ACRE Network member Humber & Wolds RCC has been instrumental in setting up the East Riding of Yorkshire Community Buildings Association, made up of volunteers from hall committees. They share good practice through meetings and a website forum and are kept up to date with legislation by paying for the RCC to deliver the secretariat.

ACRE Network member the Community Council of Devon has set up a Community Buildings Champion Scheme. It aims to support community buildings by establishing champions who support individuals and local networks of buildings. It builds on the experience of managing Hallmark and linking halls to share experience and skills for mutual benefit as well as experiences in other Counties and sectors.

The ACRE Network is one of four partners working with the Charity Commission to provide advice and guidance on land and property issues. ACRE's model documents for village halls are approved by the Charity Commission including the new Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) constitution for a village hall.

## Issue: Lack of provision of activities and services in rural communities

Rural areas are often isolated by geography, poor provision of public transport and limited access to broadband, making access to essential services difficult and expensive

## Solution: Responding to the needs of the community

Community spirit is alive and well in Ashton Keynes in Wiltshire where the church, pub and village hall are run and managed by local people. The hall, built in the early 1900s, is the focal point for community activity providing a rural cinema and a range of other social activities.

The community shop (pictured), an independent provident society managed by volunteers, moved into a newly added annexe to the hall in December 2011. The hall is also home to a doctors' surgery and the local pre-school. The committee is an active member of the Wiltshire Village Hall Association and has obtained Hallmark Awards.

Codsall Village Hall hosts the Richmond Fellowship, a specialist provider of mental health services, for two sessions a week. The service is part of



Staffordshire Accessible Mental Health Outreach Services and was set up in 2009 with Department of Health funding of £50,000. The hall also provides an NHS blood donor session the first Tuesday of every month, which is a common service provided by village halls across England.

Over 40% of the ACRE Network has investigated locating potential community digital hubs in village halls.

Tosside Community Hall is on the Lancashire-Yorkshire border and hosts the network hub for the community. This

has enabled local people to benefit from internet services of a higher standard than in towns and cities. Thanks to this service, farms and small businesses are now able to complete transactions online and fully embrace technology, while individuals are now able to consider home working as a realistic option.