

**Media Release: Wednesday 10 January 2018**

## **From Art classes to Zumba: Village Halls Week celebrates rural culture**

- **22-26 Jan declared #VillageHallsWeek by Action with Communities in Rural England**
- **Writer and broadcaster Ian McMillan offers support with specially written poem**
- **National Rural Touring Forum partners to highlight cultural events**

**The rich variety of activities that take place in village halls and the volunteers that support them are to be celebrated this January in the first ever #VillageHallsWeek.** Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and their 38 member organisations will use the week to celebrate the diverse network of 10,000 community buildings at the heart of England's rural communities and the volunteers who work tirelessly to keep them open for all.

**To mark the occasion, renowned poet, writer and radio presenter Ian McMillan has written a brand-new poem.** In his inimitable style, McMillan's *A Teapot as Big as the Moon* highlights some of the cultural events that village halls often host, from gigs to dance classes. The poem was commissioned by the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF), the membership organisation for rural touring schemes which work with volunteers in halls across the country to bring professional performance art – from theatre to dance to magic to music – to rural audiences.

Other activities being staged by NRTF members during the week include performances of wartime drama *Think of England* in Sixpenny Handley Village Hall in Dorset and a gig by Welsh folk trio Alaw at **Bulkington Community Centre in the West Midlands. These events are typical of those staged by NRTF members at halls all over the countryside every week.**

**Richard Quallington, Executive Director of ACRE said** "Starting 2018 with a celebration of these wonderful hubs, which offer so much to their local community, is a fantastic way to start the year. Residents in rural communities rely on local availability of services such as childcare, health services, social meetings and entertainment – village halls host all such services. They are flexible, multi-use community spaces which have stood the test of time and saying thank you to the volunteers who keep them going is the least we can do. Please do join in with #VillageHallsWeek on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and celebrate your local hall and show them your appreciation."

**Speaking about their support for #VillageHallsWeek Tom Speight from NRTF and a village hall chair himself, said** "They may sometimes be a bit below the radar but village halls really matter to local communities. They bring people together to share, be it watching a fantastic performance or using the local post office or keeping fit with a Zumba class. NRTF is delighted to support #VillageHallsWeek and fully endorses the ACRE Network messages of celebration

and thanks that rural communities can access such versatile community assets locally.”

**#Villagehallsweek (22-26 Jan) is an initiative started by ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England)**, the national voice for the country’s largest rural network, formed of 52,000 grassroots organisations in 11,000 rural communities.

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#### **Opportunity for radio stations:**

Ian McMillan will be based at BBC Radio Sheffield, available for interview and to read his poem on Wednesday 24 January. If you would be interested in doing a live broadcast for #VillageHallsWeek, or a pre-record for another show during the week please contact Chris Cowcher at ACRE to arrange a time slot. Ian’s schedule will be limited and interviews will be granted on a first come first served basis.

#### **Attachments:**

- “A teapot as big as the moon” a poem by Ian McMillan, written for #VillageHallsWeek 2018 – ***EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE ON 24 JANUARY 2018***

#### **Social media accounts:**

- #VillageHallsWeek on Twitter via **@VillageHalls\_Wk**
- #VillageHallsWeek on Facebook via **@ACRE\_National**
- #VillageHallsWeek on Instagram via **@acrenational**

#### **Contact details:**

- **National #VillageHallsWeek Contact:** Chris Cowcher, ACRE Community Manager [c.cowcher@acre.org.uk](mailto:c.cowcher@acre.org.uk) or 01285 653477
- **National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF):** Elin Morgan, Mobius PR, [elin@mobiusindustries.com](mailto:elin@mobiusindustries.com) or 0203 195 6269

#### **Notes to editors:**

- ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) is the national body for the 38 ACRE Network members. We speak up for rural communities on the national stage and deliver projects that enable our communities to find innovative solutions to the challenges they face <http://www.acre.org.uk/>
- The National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) is a member-led organisation that works strategically with partners to develop work and deliver high quality art experiences that strengthen rural and other communities <http://www.ruraltouring.org/> The most recent figures available demonstrate that in a 12 month period over 330,000 people watched over 2,750 shows in 1,600 venues across the country, with box office value to the rural economy of just over £1million.