

Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund (the Fund)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Eligibility criteria in detail

1.1. The following legal entities **will be eligible** to apply for a grant from the Fund:

- Registered Charities
- Charitable Trusts
- Charitable Incorporated Organisations
- Community Associations which are registered Charities
- Multi-purpose Church Halls, Scout and Guide buildings are also eligible where they are open for the whole community, there is no alternative village hall in the vicinity, they are not single use and they are clearly advertised as multi- purpose.
- Charitable Companies
- Parish or Town Councils where they are the sole trustee of a charitable village hall.
- Parochial Church Councils where improvement works are being carried out to a church and where there is no village hall or other meeting place in the community. Capital works should be to enable the building to be used for a range of community activities.

1.2. The following legal entities **will not be eligible** to apply for a grant from the Fund:

- Community Interest Companies (CICs)
- Companies - Industrial and Provident Societies, Co-Operatives or Community Associations where no charity registration is in place.
- Sports Pavilions
- School Halls
- Parish Councils that are custodian trustees

1.3. Previous beneficiaries of a grant from the former Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund (2019-2022) or the Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund (yr 2023/24) **will not be eligible** to apply for Grant Funding.

- 1.4. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that their proposed project will achieve one or more of the following outcomes for their communities:
 - improved health and/or wellbeing and/or reduction in rural loneliness,
 - positive impact on the local environment, contributes towards net zero,
 - support for the local rural economy,
 - promotion of community cohesion.
- 1.5. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the proposed village hall is in a local rural area with a population of less than 10,000 people.
- 1.6. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that they have a freehold or leasehold interest in the village hall in place. If a leasehold interest, there must be at least 21 years left to run on the lease.
- 1.7. The total amount of capital funding that can be applied for can be no more than **20% of total eligible project costs**.
- 1.8. The minimum amount of capital funding that can be applied for is **£7,500**. The maximum amount of capital funding that can be applied for is **£75,000**.
- 1.9. The Fund shall be available to support **capital improvements only**, where projects aim to:
 - Upgrade facilities
 - Extend facilities
 - Improve facilities
 - Purchase capital items
- 1.10. The following are examples of project activity that could be considered **eligible** to be funded (it is not an exhaustive list):
 - Extensions
 - Internal reconfigurations
 - New roof and roof refurbishment which includes insulation
 - Improvements which help to increase energy efficiency
 - Refurbishment of toilets and kitchens
 - Damp proofing
 - New installation of communication systems
- 1.11. The Fund **shall not** be available for projects that solely seek to:

- Repair
- Maintain
- Renew

1.12. The following are examples of projects that would be considered **not eligible** to be funded (it is not an exhaustive list):

- Building projects **which have already started**
- New build village halls
- Work that is undertaken solely to ensure compliance with Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requirements.
- Routine maintenance, defined as simple, small-scale activities (usually requiring only minimal skills or training) associated with regular and general (daily, weekly, monthly) upkeep of a building, or equipment, machine, plant, or system against normal wear and tear.
- Improvements to car parks, parking areas, adjacent recreational areas, and landscaping.
- Capital expenditure which is not to do with the physical improvement of the hall
- Architects, surveyors and specialist survey fees.
- Costs for feasibility studies or planning applications or project managers' fees.

2. We received a grant from the Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund, can we apply to this Fund?

No, if you received a grant from the Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund (VHIGF) or the Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund in 23/24 you will not be eligible for this Fund. However, if you went through the process and were not successful or were unable to draw down the grant offered then you are eligible and can apply.

3. Why has the minimum grant been set at £7,500?

This is a new capital grant fund which is designed to help the volunteers running village halls to make capital improvements. This will help to deliver activities which improve health and wellbeing, address loneliness and isolation thereby creating greater community cohesion. Improvements will support energy efficiency in the hall and contribute to the local rural economy.

We need to set limits in order to manage the Fund. However, we have listened to feedback and opened a [Small Grants Fund](#).

A grant of £7,500 will be 20% of eligible project costs totalling £37,500.

4. The guidance indicates that priority will be given to applicants who already have most of their funding in place. Most of our funding is not yet in place. Will you accept our application now?

Yes, but it may affect the outcome of your Stage 2 application. We understand that some funders will only consider or approve an application when the remaining funding is in place (the “chicken and egg” situation) and that different funders operate to different timescales. If that is the case, please explain, in your Stage 2 application form the situation for outstanding grant funders, the expected date of remaining grant offers, and how any shortfall will be raised, so that we can take this into consideration when assessing your application.

Any grant offer would be conditional on raising the shortfall in funds for the project within 6 months of the offer of the grant being made and completion of the work by the deadline set out in the project’s terms and conditions.

The [Rural Community Buildings Loan Fund](#) may be able to assist in such situations.

5. We have a tight deadline to start work. Can you process our application more quickly?

If you have a tight deadline, you can email villagehallsfund@acre.org.uk and explain your situation. While we will endeavour to assist, we cannot guarantee this will be possible, particularly if there is heavy demand at the time. You will need to clearly set out the situation in your Stage 2 application.

6. Why is the fund only designed to assist improvement work, not repairs and maintenance, which can be costly on an old hall?

The project is to fund capital improvement projects rather than routine maintenance. We are looking to fund schemes that will enhance, upgrade, extend and improve halls, rather than schemes looking to repair, maintain and replace existing structures. The [Rural Community Buildings Loan Fund](#) is available to fund such work.

7. How important are the Funds stated outcomes? e.g. We just need to modernise our hall so that it is fit for purpose and we can maintain hire income, e.g. new toilets and kitchen equipment, redecoration

While we understand the need for halls to refresh facilities from time to time, the Fund outcomes are very important, and priority will be given to projects which address more than one of them.

The funding for the Fund has been provided by Defra and is restricted to capital works that enhance, upgrade, extend, improve, and construct rather than repair and maintain.

The Funds intended outcomes align with what village halls do in practice, bringing communities together through a range of activities from toddler groups to youth clubs, exercise classes, whist clubs and lunch clubs. As a result of such improvements new activities can take place such as community cafes, drop-in centres and dementia friendly activities.

Improving energy efficiency measures will address climate change and improves the financial sustainability of halls. Halls contribute to the local economy by increasing footfall into the community, providing space for small business providers and employing local contractors to undertake the works.

Your Stage 2 application will be scored on the outcomes; your local adviser can assist you.

8. Our hall is run by a Community Association, are we eligible?

Yes, a hall or community centre run by a charitable community association is eligible, providing it meets all the other eligibility criteria.

9. Are Village Halls run by Parish Councils acting as sole trustee eligible?

Yes, but they must be able to demonstrate that the hall is run and managed according to charity law. Applications will not be accepted from Parish Councils where the hall is not a charity and is run and managed according to local authority rules and regulations. Parish Councils would not be able to include the VAT in the eligible project costs section of the costs and funding form as they can reclaim it.

10. Are Village Halls run by Parish Meetings eligible?

We will consider such rare situations if the hall is the only community facility in the parish because we understand that it is the smallest, often most rural parishes, that do not have a Parish Council and instead have a Parish Meeting once a year. The Fund is otherwise only available to charitable halls.

11. Is a church or church hall eligible? What about Women's Institute halls, scout and guide halls?

Improvements to church halls or to guide or scout halls, WI halls or similar charitable halls which serve as the local village hall and can demonstrate they are available for, and used by, a wide variety of community activities and improvements to non-listed churches to bring them into use as a village hall will be considered if they will form the principle village hall type facility in the parish as a result of their

scheme. Note that in such cases any grant would be subject to a condition that the premises are made available for a wide range of community use for a minimum period of 21 years and would be repayable if this ceased to be the case.

12. Do we need to submit a separate application in order to apply for a loan from the Rural Community Buildings Loan Fund (RCBLF)?

Yes. Although both Funds are administered on behalf of Defra by ACRE and the forms are similar, each Fund has its own procedures. You may find you can copy and paste some information requested by this fund to the RCBLF form.

13. Why is there a population limit of 10,000 and how does it work?

This funding comes via Defra and is limited to rural areas, which are generally defined as having a population under 10,000, so halls situated in parishes of under 10,000 population will be eligible.

Most village halls in rural areas have historically been provided and managed by charities and they often provide the only multi-purpose community meeting place. These halls are the Fund's priority target. Some parishes have more than one village or include a small town in which different areas have their own distinct identity, problems or focus. If this is the case for your scheme please make it clear in your comment on the application so that we have a better understanding of the community served by the hall.

In urban areas community buildings were historically often provided by local authorities and can qualify for funding from other targeted grant schemes.

14. We are unable to obtain 3 quotes, or 3 comparable quotes – will you accept what we have?

We understand that it can be difficult to obtain 3 quotes for work, especially where it is a small piece of work or part of a bigger project, and that they may not be comparable. We will require you to provide all the quotes you have obtained and if you cannot obtain 3 for all elements of your project, to explain why.

15. Our project will cost more than £375,000. Can we apply?

Yes, but the maximum grant will be £75,000.

16. What is the last date when applications can be submitted?

There is not currently a closing date for Stage 1 applications, but we reserve the right to close it should the Fund become oversubscribed. We will assess Stage 1 applications strictly in the order that they are submitted.

If your Stage 1 application is successful you will receive information about how to complete Stage 2 of the process. Your Stage 2 application will have a short window to prepare for the first meeting of the award panel which is expected to be in July.

All project work must be completed before the end of March 2025.

Applicants should keep in touch with their local ACRE member and check the [ACRE website](#) as details of dates will be made available there.

17. Can we apply if our lease expires in under 21 years? Can we apply if we are still negotiating lease extension or renewal terms?

You will not be eligible if your Lease is less than 21 years. Please speak with your local ACRE member for support and guidance.

18. How do we find out if a hall is leasehold or freehold?

Usually, the governing documents will include a lease or, for freehold property, a conveyance or Deed of Gift or Indenture. If the governing document is a Charity Commission Scheme it should contain a reference to the property itself and the documents which give the charity title to the property. Alternatively, a search could be done of the Land Registry.

19. When will we receive the grant, how long do we have to spend it, and will you need to see invoices for the work or other proof of payment and completion of work?

The grant offer will be subject to conditions that will be set out in the Terms & Conditions provided to you with your grant offer. When we are satisfied these are met the grant will be paid in full.

There will not be a requirement to submit receipted invoices before the grant can be drawn down.

All work must be completed, invoices submitted for audit purposes and any other requirements met e.g. reopening the hall by the deadline set out in the project's terms and conditions. Grant funding will be repayable on any work not completed by that date.

All projects supported under the scheme will need to have completed the funded activity by 31 March 2025.

20. One of the questions asks about the hall's "Capacity" How do we find this?

This is the figure normally set for public events covered by a hall's Premises Licence (if there is one). Alternatively, it may have been calculated as part of the Fire Risk

Assessment or you could contact your local Fire Officer. Please see **Appendix 2** for a formula for calculating your capacity.

21. Where can we find the population of the parish, town or village?

ACRE Network members may hold the OCSI data, from the 2011 census, which we can accept. The Parish or District Council may have a more recent figure. It is also possible to use a search facility (such as Google) or look it up on Wikipedia.

22. Will a hall with few community activities be less likely to receive a grant?

Not necessarily. This information will help inform the application and the business case for the work. Halls in small villages often have fewer activities than those serving larger villages, and it is understood that in a very rural area this may make retaining the hall and improving facilities and use extremely important. It is up to the applicant to make the case.

23. Why are there questions about broadband and WiFi? Should applicants be encouraged to increase their online presence?

In operating this fund, we wish to help applicants fulfil their potential to be financially sustainable and providing access to WIFI at the hall will help fulfil this aim. Lack of broadband will not rule out an award and if local broadband connectivity is an issue we would take that into account. Information given in response to this question will help our understanding of the project and the halls rurality.

Holding an opening event, with attendant publicity, is a mandatory grant requirement. We would like you to invite your local MP if possible.

24. What kind of community consultation is expected? How effective does it need to be?

Consultation can take the form of informal discussion with user groups and residents, public meetings, Parish Council meetings, articles in local newsletters or press, Facebook or other social media, house to house survey, hall committee meeting minutes, meetings with specific user groups or prospective users, open days, parish plans and Neighbourhood Development Plans.

It is acknowledged that not all are appropriate in every circumstance and that it can be difficult to evidence consultation which has taken over a very long period. A summary (or timetable showing what took place when), with a focus on the last five years and an example to evidence it will be acceptable e.g. article, poster, minutes of meetings. It is appreciated that people can become jaded by consultation fatigue, but we are keen to hear how any consultation helped shape the project.

25. Is a School Hall eligible? Is a village hall charity that uses a school eligible or village halls which are used by local schools?

School halls are not eligible. They are outside the scope of this Fund including schools that are held on a charitable trust. Where a village hall charity has use of a school, the hall charity would need to satisfy the usual criteria of having a minimum 21 years left to run under a lease on that part of the property used by the hall charity. Village halls which are used by local schools for lunches and performances for example are eligible.

26. What kind of answer is expected to the Project Management question on the Stage 2 application?

This will depend on the nature of the project. Clear lines of communication, delegation and financial accountability are required. It is important to show how spending will be managed to avoid cost over-runs. Trustees usually set up a working party or sub-committee to oversee a building project and people with relevant skills should normally include the Treasurer. For a larger project an architect or surveyor supervising builders and other contractors would normally report to the working party or sub-committee, via a nominated trustee who acts as contact point for small decisions/adjustments. For some larger projects, a project manager might be appointed.

27. If a project is rejected at Stage 1, can it re-apply?

Yes, but the reasons for rejection should be taken account of and addressed if re-applying.

28. Is there any flexibility on planning consent being in place, if needed?

While a Stage 2 application could be submitted without planning consent, we do not wish to encourage applicants to do so unless there is a clear timescale of only a few weeks for an application to be determined, as otherwise it could raise false expectations and cause wasted effort if it were forwarded to ACRE and then not capable of consideration.

29. Why are you asking about other village or community halls and other facilities in the parish?

The reason is that we need to understand what the business case is for the project. This is particularly relevant in situations where there is more than one community hall and a range of other facilities available in the local area. If distance to other facilities and very infrequent public transport services are an issue this can be covered in making the case for a grant.

30. Will a grant cover Fixtures and Fittings?

A grant will only be awarded towards eligible capital expenditure. Removable fittings and equipment are not classed as capital expenditure. The priority for this Fund is assisting with capital buildings works, which tend to be harder to fund, whereas match funding and donations in kind tend to be more easily obtained for such smaller items. Check the eligible and ineligible list of items in Appendix 1.

31. Can we sign the application using an electronic signature?

Yes.

Appendix 1

Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund - ELIGIBLE AND NON-ELIGIBLE ITEMS

This list provides supplementary detail to the Guidelines and Eligibility Criteria. The emphasis is on capital improvement work which makes a difference to the use and/or energy efficiency of a hall. Only where items that would ordinarily be classed as maintenance form an integral part of a larger improvement project, or making good, can these be included.

HMRC Notice 708, section 13, will normally be the point of reference for determining whether an item would ordinarily be incorporated in building work.

Eligible items of expenditure include:

- Extensions
- Internal reconfigurations
- New roof and roof refurbishment which includes insulation
- Refurbishing toilets and kitchens including fixtures
- Damp proofing
- Electrical works and installation of broadband or Wi-Fi
- Guttering, repointing and drainage as part of an improvement project
- Replacement of external and/or internal doors, floors and windows
- Fixtures installed as part of improvement works (eg electric sockets and light fittings, security alarm systems, TV aerials and satellite dishes, central heating boilers and radiators, plumbing installations, fitted kitchen units, fitted hobs and oven, kitchen tiling, wall mounted plumbed in hot water boilers, toilet pans, sinks, urinals, cubicles and tiling, built in cupboards or shelf units)
- Energy generation equipment (eg Heat Pumps, PV panels, wind turbine)

Non eligible items include:

- Purchase of land or buildings

- Architects, surveyors, and other specialist fees (including feasibility studies, planning fees or project management fees)
- New builds: Most new charitable village and community halls are eligible for 0% VAT and therefore will not be eligible for this fund
- Building projects which have already started
- Routine maintenance normally associated with regular and general upkeep of a building (except making good, or addressed as part of, an improvement project). Removable fittings and equipment e.g. carpets, curtains and curtain rails, mirrors, plug in or battery-operated appliances, microwave ovens, refrigerators, freezers, tables, chairs and other free-standing furniture, lamps and lampshades.
- Improvements to car parks, parking areas, adjacent recreational areas, landscaping, except where making good the consequences of eligible improvements e.g. laying drains across a car park.
- Projects which do not show a clear outcome other than updating a building
- Buildings where the ownership is not established or where there is a lease in place of 21 years or under
- Expenditure which is not part of a physical improvement of the hall building, e.g. fixtures and fittings in part of the building which is not being improve

Appendix 2

Calculating capacity for Village Halls Fire Safety Risk Assessments.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 is the governing legislation for fire safety at village and community halls. Whatever numbers are specified in the Fire Risk Assessment will be the maximum numbers of people permitted in each area of the premises. The Fire and Rescue Service may reduce the numbers if they consider they are inappropriate. As capacity is not related to different types of activity, but the time it takes to evacuate people from the hall, it follows that the capacity figure applies not just to activities covered by a hall's Premises Licence, but all use of the hall.

A useful guide is as follows:

Measure the hall in square metres, then to assess how many it can hold allow .5 sq metre per person for standing, 1.1 sq. metre seated. If half the hall is used for standing/dancing and half for seating, then aggregate it out. When you've done that, mentally discard the widest exit and make sure that your numbers can escape safely using the other exit(s). A standard single door can allow 100 people to escape in 2.5 minutes, a double door can take 300. If however the door opens inwards it can only take a maximum of 60, however wide. If the figure that you arrive at through door widths is lower than the capacity that you originally measured out you must use the lower figure.

Its also useful to note from an ACRE member:

"The evacuation times for village halls will be divided into 3-time categories.

- i) An all light weight totally combustible construction (Using the old style Scout Hut construction):- 2 minutes maximum for evacuation.
- ii) Traditional brick & stone walls with plaster internal partitions and ceilings with timber floors and staircases: - 2.5 minutes for evacuation.
- iii) Traditional current day substantially built all non combustible construction, built to modern Building Regulations standards: - 3 minutes for evacuation.”

When disabled people use the premises additional thought is needed i.e., the capacity may need to be reduced to allow for additional evacuation time.

If capacity is exceeded then any claim against the Hall's Public Liability Insurance will be diminished, possibly laying the trustees (Committee) open to a civil claim. Exceeding fire risk capacities could lead to prosecution. The capacity numbers should be provided in the hall's hiring agreement so that hirers take the responsibility for ensuring they are not exceeded. However, it is also important that hirers understand why they apply.

Further information is also given in the Guide to Fire safety Risk Assessment in Small and Medium Places of Assembly (which includes Village Halls), available on the GOV.UK website. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-safety-risk-assessment-small-and-medium-places-of-assembly>