



Village Halls: understanding the present and looking to the future

Devon Village Halls Audit Analysis Report

Devon Communities Together, July 2024

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A word from our CEO ...

I am absolutely delighted to bring you this report, which is a culmination of 18 months' hard work and innovation from the staff team here at Devon Communities Together (DCT).



With over 60 years' experience in supporting Devon's Village Halls, we have a deep understanding of how much they mean to their communities, how intrinsic they are to the wellbeing of local people and how much potential they have to provide even more local opportunities. Yet, we have become increasingly aware that the intrinsic value of our Village Halls and the contributions they make to rural quality of life has not always been fully appreciated. Similarly, there was a general lack of appreciation of the level and nature of the challenges that our Hall committees and trustees face to keep these vital rural community assets running.

By visiting such a huge number of halls, representing 80% of all Devon Village Halls, DCT has been able to - for the first time ever - compile a county-wide central data base and online map of these vital community assets. When reading the report, we hope you will join us, not only in celebrating the amazing rural community resource our Village Halls are, but also in becoming inspired by the energy and future potential we uncovered. Whether it's going greener; increasing local access to services; addressing rural loneliness and isolation; providing opportunities for exercise and physical activity, or simply providing community celebration venues, with the right support and appropriate funding these spaces can continue to sit at the heart of their rural communities for decades to come.

Nora Corkery, CEO, Devon Communities Together

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS: WHAT DO VILLAGE HALLS NEED TO THRIVE?

1

Devon's Village halls require a system-wide funding approach that includes consistent investment, including capital funds to remain sustainable in the long term.

2

The future sustainability of Devon's Village Halls would be significantly strengthened by a county-wide, funded, specialist infrastructure support service. this would enable training in the key areas of grant applications, fundraising, governance, succession planning, diversifying income streams, accessibility, environmental improvements and marketing halls in a digital age.

3

A resourced county-wide network of rural community connectors would provide specialist capacity building, training, and support, as well as enabling place -based peer support networks.

4

Greater access to reasonably priced and reliable broadband connectivity is necessary for Village Halls to remain financially sustainable.

5

Village Halls are ideally placed to become rural community health hubs, reducing rural health inequalities, supporting the health prevention agenda, and providing community led place-based access to health and care services.

1) INTRODUCTION

Devon Communities Together (DCT) began carrying out the first ever audit of Village Halls across Devon in September 2022. The programme was funded by Devon County Council Public Health, One Devon NHS and DEFRA.

Our key goals were:

- to create a new and unique Community Asset Map of Devon's Village Halls.
- to update our intelligence on the legacy impact that Covid-19 has had on Village Halls.
- to establish an unprecedented central data set of information and intelligence around the activities and sustainability of the Devon Village Hall Network.
- to further understand the contribution Village Halls make in Devon's rural communities and the impact they have, and the challenges that they are currently facing.
- to enable communities, Village Hall custodians, local service providers and policy makers to make informed decisions about the sustainability, capacity, potential new uses and audiences for Devon's Village Halls and optimise their use as valuable rural community hubs.
- to gain a better understanding of current support needs.

2) CONTEXT

Devon Communities Together (DCT) has been supporting the Village Hall Network in Devon since 1961, with the aid of Defra Grant Funding. DCT is a member of our National Network ACRE's (Action with Communities in Rural England) Specialist Community Buildings Adviser Team with access to a broad range of specialist resources and information around the following key areas of Village Hall Governance:

- ✓ Funding applications
- ✓ Community consultation & engagement
- ✓ Health & wellbeing projects
- ✓ Social enterprise and community business
- ✓ Energy advice and oil buying schemes
- ✓ Community and neighbourhood planning, inc. affordable housing
- ✓ Community transport
- ✓ Environmental projects



- ✓ Volunteer management
- ✓ Village hall governance
- ✓ Digital inclusion

50% of the **339** audited Devon Village Halls are members of DCT enjoying the benefits of free/discounts on training sessions, support with funding applications, model policies and newsletters including up to date funding opportunities, largely funded through DCT membership fees, DEFRA and Devon County Council grant funding. DCT's Community Buildings Specialist Advice Service is on hand to support member Village Halls with any questions or issues that might arise. Membership also gives halls a presence on the DCT Village Hall Network website page www.devoncommunities.org.uk/community-buildings

What is a Village Hall?

A Village Hall is a charitable community facility. Village Halls are charitable because they are held on trust to be used for purposes set out by the Recreational Charities Act 1958 with the object of providing facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare and to improve the conditions of life for people of the village. Many Village Halls were built after the First World War. Set up in a concerted national effort to develop social and educational provision in rural areas, they have adapted their community roles over the years.

The object clause of Community Centres is generally wider and can cover a more extensive variety of activities or be restricted to a particular section of the wider community.

Village Halls are run by a management committee generally made up of between 5 and 12 trustees. The committee are responsible for hiring out the building, fire and general risk assessment, data protection and safeguarding. They are also

responsible for finances such as setting hire charges, fundraising, grant applications etc. and they report annually to the Charity Commission.

A Village Hall charity will usually have a second set of trustees, appointed to hold the land or property on behalf of the charity. These are the holding (or custodian) trustees. Their sole function is to hold the title to the property.

Surprisingly, Village Halls have no consistent government funding, despite the vital role they play in our rural societies. Available national funds/loans over recent years include:

- Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund provided £3m nationally between 2019/2022.
- The Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Fund is providing £3m 2023-2025.
- Capital grants are being offered for energy efficiency measures to qualifying Village Halls through Groundworks.
- ACRE continues to offer the Rural Community Building Loan Fund.



13 of Devon's Village Halls have benefitted from some **£201,218** worth of DEFRA funding (delivered by ACRE) since 2019, with support from Devon Communities Together.

During Covid-19, additional grant funding was made available to halls. This enabled Village Halls to survive the long period of inactivity and in some cases, carry out building works that had been planned for when finances allowed. This funding has skewed the optimism that some halls expressed during the audit process, in their financial security, particularly those audited at the beginning of the project.

DCT conducted a Village Hall survey during Covid-19. Some of the findings can be seen below:

COVID-19 SURVEY

87 respondents.

56 out of the 87 were members of the DCT village halls network.

86 out of 87 respondents were fully/partially closed. Most are fully closed.

A total number of 40 out of 87 respondents had applied for funding, 33 had been successful/awarded grants from diverse sources.

KEY ISSUES

- Concerns about Covid-19 secure risk assessment management and reopening guidance.
- High probability of being at a point of failure should the lockdown continue for more than 6-12 months.
- Detrimental effects of closing Village Halls on community life/individual wellbeing.
- Need for further specialist advice and assistance to apply for grants and funding to off-set costs such as insurance and post covid costs.

DCT has hosted an online portal via the DCT website since 2005, with a facility for individual Village Halls who are members of Devon Communities Together to promote their halls and revenue generating facilities. www.devoncommunities.org.uk/community-buildings



3) METHODOLOGY

Between September 2022 and March 2024, DCT carried out **339** Village Hall Audits, this equates to **80%** of all of Devon's Village Halls. All have been visited on-site, in order to gather intelligence and insight from the community volunteer custodians managing the halls.

The audit takes a comprehensive look at a range of different aspects of current Village Hall capacity and sustainability such as:

- Financial status
- Digital connectivity
- Governance
- Purpose & use
- User demographic
- Accessibility
- Heating & ventilation
- External space

The audit was co-designed with a wide range of stakeholders and was promoted via the DCT website, social media channels, local press, radio and television. The data gathered is both qualitative and quantitative, providing a clear picture of the status of Devon's Village Halls.

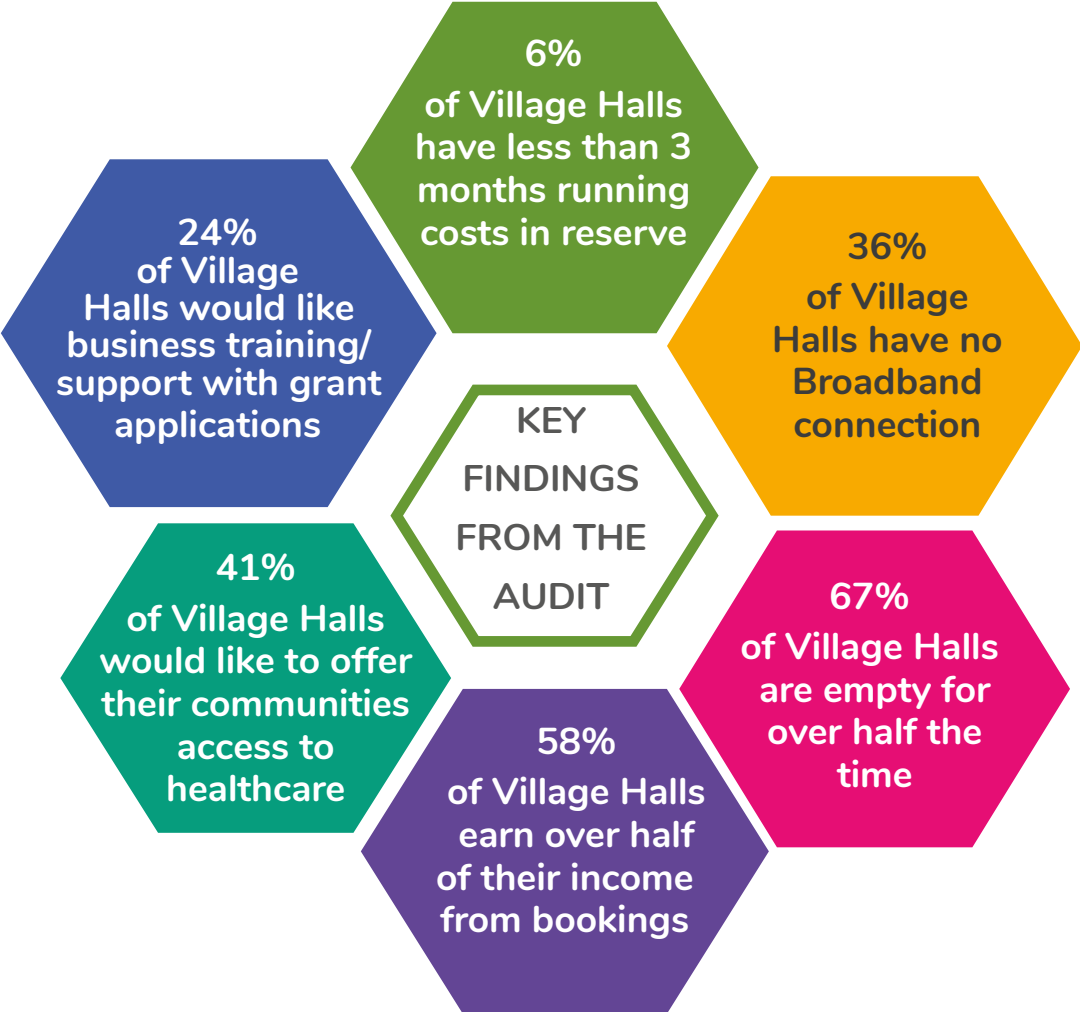
By formulating the data into percentages, the impact of and need for our Village Halls can be clearly demonstrated. By reviewing the qualitative data, we obtained a better understanding of Village Hall committees experiences.

Between October 2023 and April 2024 we created an interim report as well as a report for each of Devon's Districts. These have been sent to all participating Village Halls in that area as well as funders, District Councils, Dartmoor National Park Authority and other stakeholders and interested parties.



4) KEY AUDIT FINDINGS

From the Devon Village Hall Audit, we've learnt that:



16 Devon Village Halls chose not to engage with the audit. Reasons given included feeling that the audit wouldn't be beneficial for small halls and the volunteer committee members feeling so stretched that they didn't have the capacity to engage with us. The halls that DCT has audited are diverse in age and stature, but all are managed by committees made up of local volunteers.

As you read this report, please consider the following key question:

What would happen to our rural communities if they had nowhere for people to meet?

Based on the audit data, it's clear that Village Halls in Devon offer their rural communities social, recreational, physical and mental wellbeing activities on their doorstep. With an ageing population, such local opportunities to socialise/exercise/be creative can be a lifeline to reduce loneliness and social isolation. With so many closures of rural pubs, shops and post offices the social interactions that used to naturally take place when queuing for your pint of milk no longer happen. Without a Village Hall, the last of these social lifelines would be lost.



5) KEY FUNCTIONS OF VILLAGE HALLS

Village Halls provide facilities for recreation, social welfare activities and they undoubtedly improve the lives of the local people they engage. The role of these local assets varies according to the needs of their community but have similarities in the fact that they aim to support their communities, reducing rural isolation and loneliness.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Our Village Halls need increased levels of specialist training and support to continue their current offer, building sustainability and adapting for the future.
- 2 Village Halls are underutilised assets with huge potential to provide place based support as rural community hubs, but additional support is required to enable them to facilitate outreach services to their communities.
- 3 Hall committees need help in community engagement and co-production activities, to find out what their community needs/wants from its Village Hall.
- 4 Working together in hubs is one way that hall committees can feel less isolated and more supported in their efforts, but these hubs need to be backed up with formal training and information and advice services.

5.2 KEY FINDINGS

- 71% of Village Halls provide physical activities
- 55% of halls put on regular social activities
- 16% of halls regularly hold learning opportunities in the form of talks or workshops
- 5% of Village Halls told us they provide a post office or library service
- 7% have a community shop, market, community fridge or food bank



How village halls support their communities:

“By having the activities. Many people say without the activities we have here they would be completely lost. It’s what makes a village, a community.” (Teignbridge)

“Our role as an important hub of the community means that we always try to respond to any particular ideas or needs of the village that might arise where the Village Hall might have a role to play.” (East)

“There is something on most weeks. It is the social hub of the community.” (West)

“Hall provides bar / pop up pub as the pub has closed in the village.” (North)

“Have made an effort to make the outside spaces at the back of the hall more attractive and welcome people to use it (leave gates open, so people can access).” (Mid)

Village Halls try to be inclusive:

“We hold a Goodwill Club once a month on Sundays for people that might feel lonely- we hold lots of activities, but this particular one is important to ensure everyone feels included in village activities.” (South Hams)

“Would like to put adult sized play equipment in the field so that people with disabilities can use it.” (Torridge)

“The coffee mornings are really nice we get a good turn out. We started doing them because some people don’t really get out. Some people only go out as a couple but they come to this and the film night if they aren’t. Being in a rural community can be quite isolating so getting together is good.” (North)

Village Halls support their community’s wellbeing:

“Farming is a lonely occupation, and this is a good community hub and good for wellbeing generally.” (Torridge)

“People meeting together. Have been driving really hard to bringing the community back together after Covid. It was underused and now it is bringing the community in, being used by the village.” (East)

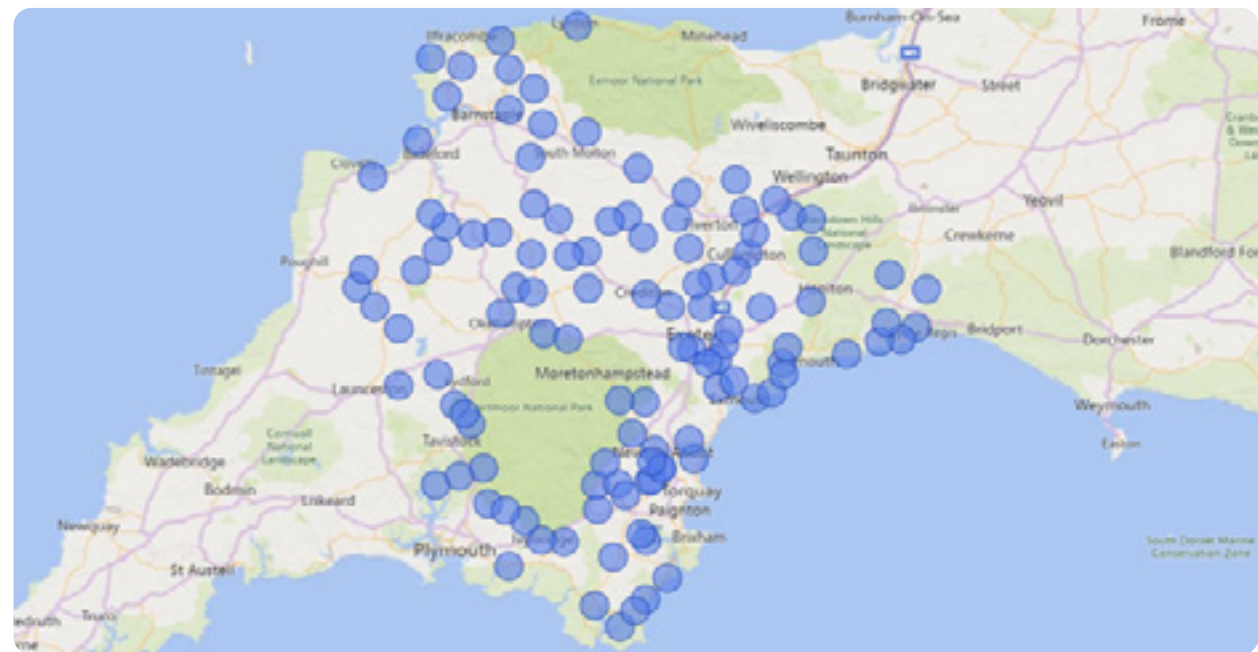
“It brings people together and everyone who comes to an event has a great time. We have no pub in the village so it’s a chance for everyone to get together.” (South Hams)

“Have a stay warm grant to provide coffee mornings, from North Devon council. This has evolved into the group doing other activities including trips out and crafts. Some of the residents from a nursing home are now coming too.” (North)

Village Halls are designated places of safety in an emergency:

34% of Devon’s Village Halls are designated places of safety in an emergency (see map below).

This means that the hall can provide hot drinks, warmth and a safe space for the community if there is a localised crisis, incident or threat (for example a flood event).



5.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

The following analysis is taken from DCT’s newly created Devon Village Hall central data bank. The data demonstrates that Devon’s Village Halls provide their communities with physical, social, recreational, arts and learning opportunities. They also act as a village focal point when other vital services no longer exist and help to retain a sense of community in our villages and rural hamlets.

5.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

Village Halls are the last community-owned asset in many of Devons rural communities. With the closure of village shops, post offices, pubs and withdrawal of the rural mobile library service last year, Village Halls are in many cases the only place for people to meet. Our halls often step in to fill the gap when local facilities/organisations cannot reach rural and remote rural areas or are no longer accessible. At a time when loneliness is rife in our society, Devon’s Village Halls really are vital to the mental wellbeing and social connection of many in our rural communities, particularly as populations age and an increasing number of older people live on their own.



6) FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

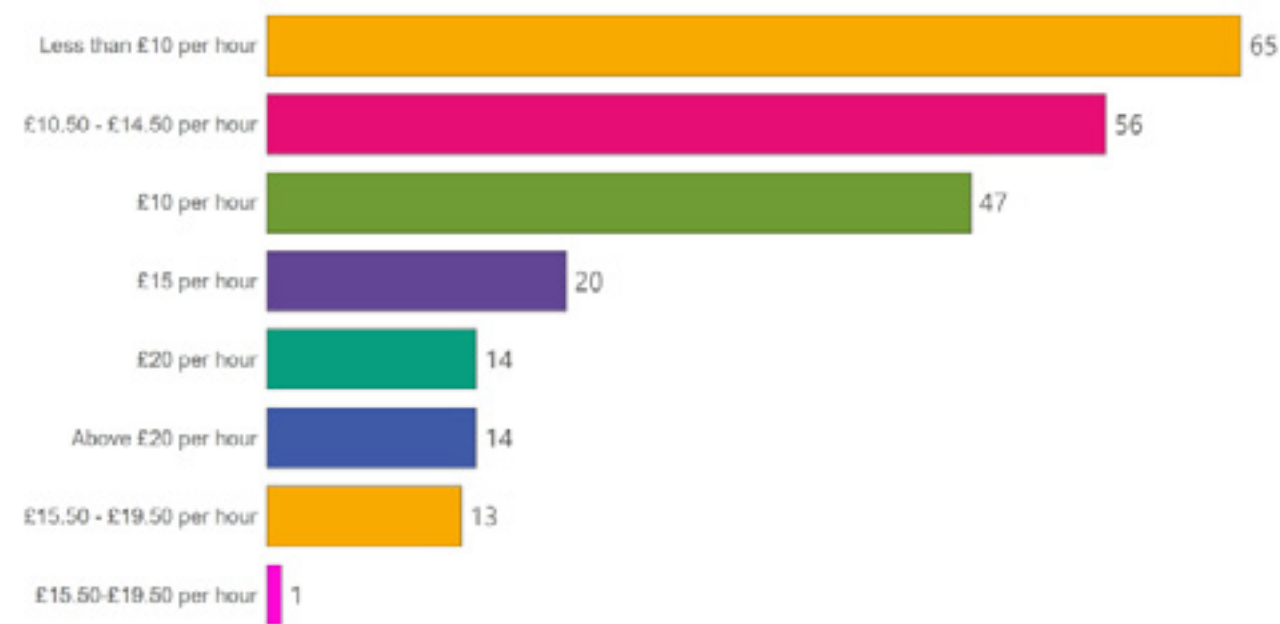
6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5
- Devon’s Village Halls require a system-wide funding approach that includes consistent grant funding/investment including capital funds to remain sustainable in the long term.
- 6
- Devon’s Village Halls also require additional capacity in the county-wide funded infrastructure support service, as current capacity within DCT is unable to meet the demand for training in grant applications, fundraising, diversifying income streams and marketing their halls in a digital age.

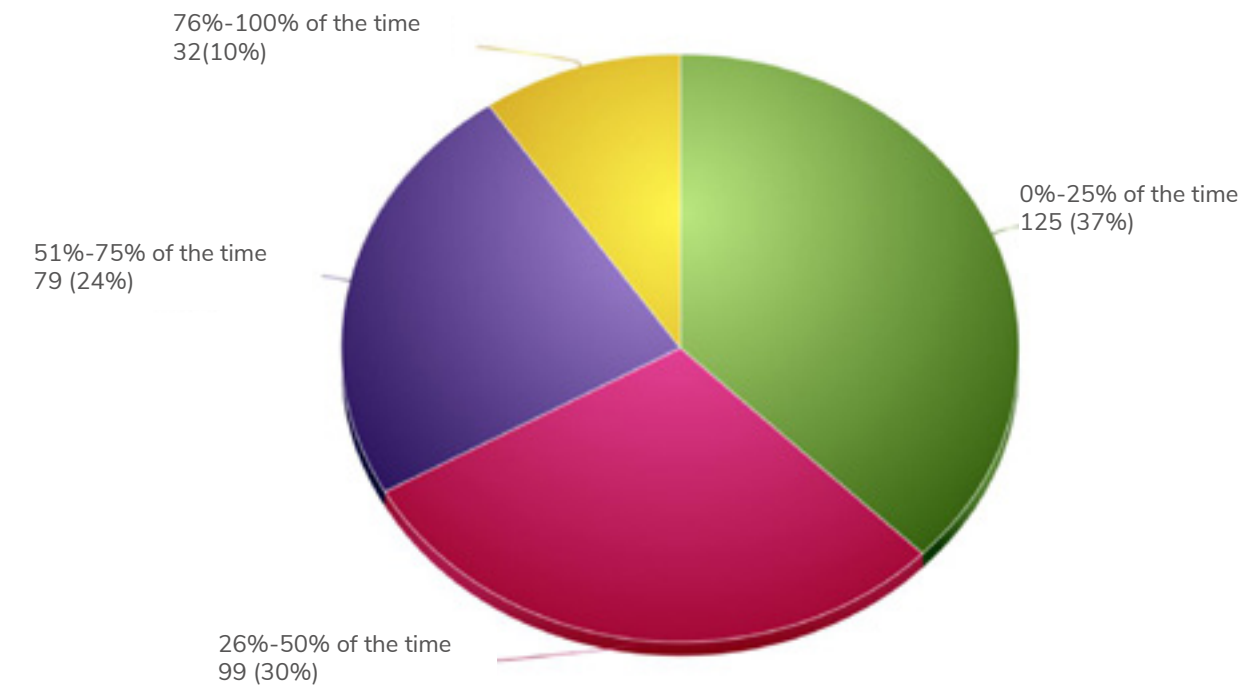
6.2 KEY FINDINGS

58% of Devon Village Halls earn more than half of their income from hall bookings. Other income sources include fundraising events, donations, grants, and in some cases solar feed in tariffs.

50% of Devon Village Halls charge less than £15 an hour to hire their Hall (see below).

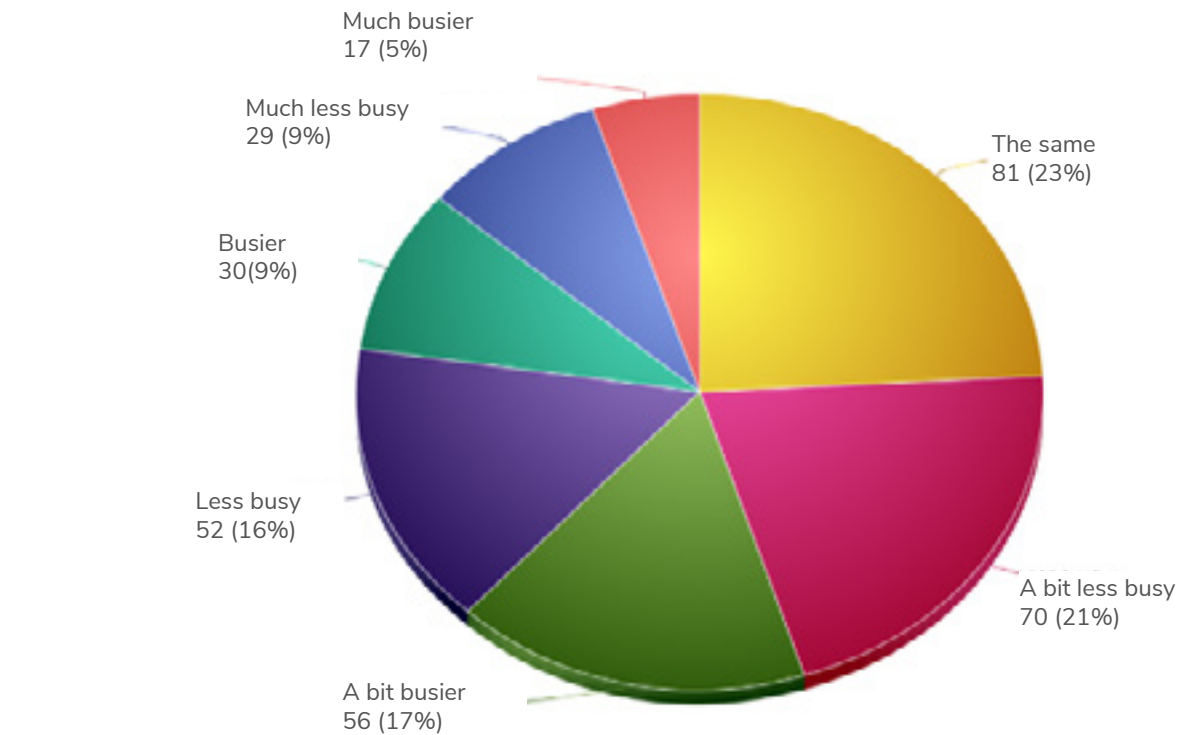


67% of Devon Village Halls are booked for less than 50% of the time despite hall committees being keen to take on more bookings. This demonstrates that hall committees need help to promote their offer more widely and the halls have significant potential to host place based services in rural communities perhaps attracting bookings from outside their immediate locality.



(Please note: the percent of visuals have been rounded to the nearest whole number to increase clarity)

44% of Devon Village Halls are less busy than they were pre-Covid (combined results from chart below). In some cases, behaviours changed over the Covid period, and some halls found that groups folded as the organiser decided they didn’t want to carry on or sometimes groups restarted, but the local enthusiasm had waned during the period of inactivity. There has also been problems with recruitment and retention of volunteers.



(Please note: the percent of visuals have been rounded to the nearest whole number to increase clarity)

11% of halls rely on local community fundraising events for more than half of their income. This shows real community support for their halls both in running these events but also in attending them to support their halls financial health.

1% of Devon's Village Halls rely on grants for over half of their income. This figure is low because there is no consistent Government funding. Halls may successfully apply for funding (if they fit the funder's criteria) but to be successful they need volunteers with the right skill set and capacity to research and correctly complete the necessary applications. Halls in areas with increased social capital, with an energised, skilled committee, are much more likely to apply for grant funding than a hall committee that is struggling simply to manage the day-to-day administration of their community asset.

Confidence levels around future sustainability

35% of Halls were confident in their financial sustainability. This is partly due to covid funding providing a temporary financial buffer, something that many halls have never experienced before and which has now expired.

25% of Halls were neither confident nor unconfident.

6% of Halls expressed significant and urgent concerns about their future financial sustainability (they have less than 6 months running costs and no reserves). (Without covid funding, these figures would look much less positive as day-to-day running costs continue to increase without a similar increase in revenue).

6.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

The following analysis is taken from the newly established Devon Village Hall central data bank. The data demonstrates that Devon's Village Halls rely heavily on bookings for their income. Almost half of Devons Village Halls have not returned to pre-Covid levels of activity and their confidence in financial sustainability is skewed by Covid-19 funding (audits began in November 2022).

Devon's Village Halls are currently significantly underused. These community assets need bookings to remain solvent, but most halls sit empty for the majority of the time.

This level of underuse means that we have a real opportunity to shape the future scope and use of these community assets, by enabling Village Halls to provide a space for community-based remote/telehealthcare, local family hubs and other community services that our rural residents currently find more difficult to access.

With no regular consistent funding for Village Halls, Hall Committees can feel rather isolated and undervalued as they try to navigate the post Covid era with all the behavioural change that encompasses.

"Secured grants through covid. So have good running costs, but without this would have been in a very bad situation."
(Teignbridge)

"Staying open is the concern of everyone on the committee, how we are going to keep it going. If it doesn't stack up financially then there is no other option. We are fundraising all the time just to keep the hall running, the bookings don't cover breakages and repairs."
(Torrige)

"Looking at solar if there are grants available. More usage to bring in more income to address fuel price increases."

"There are many things we'd like to do to improve the hall to ensure it serves all community members; currently this is prohibited by availability of volunteer time and lack of funding." (South Hams)

"Investigating various options including solar panels, thermal curtains, EV charging but subject to finances and receiving grant funding."
(South Hams)

With many costs increasing, Village Halls that could previously survive with just local bookings are finding that a different more entrepreneurial approach is needed. There is clear evidence of need for investment in additional capacity building and business planning support services aimed at Village Hall committees.

There is appetite for environmental improvements (in part to reduce hall running costs, through retro heating and solar panels but also to provide community eco services such as EV charging points and wind turbines) but the financial outlay is often too high and access to funding and specialist advice and support is still very restrictive.

A minority of Village Halls have developed diverse methods of generating revenue including:

- **58%** from hall booking revenue
- **9%** from long term rental income (flats, workshops, school/pre-school, sheds, car park spaces)
- **6%** of halls receive income from 100 clubs/membership fees
- **4%** from dividends on shares
- **3%** of halls receive income from hire of equipment (tables, crockery, marquee, stage)
- **2%** from car park donations

Fundraising events take time and energy to organise. Although well attended Village Hall events are great for community cohesion, the pressure of needing to raise core funds from community members for the Village Hall can take away from the pleasure of bringing people together.

24% of Halls said they needed business support training or help with capacity and capability building and grant funding applications and fundraising.

In January, February and March 2024 DCT held "Enterprising Halls" training sessions with 65 Village Halls from across Devon attending. Attendees were supported to adopt an entrepreneurial approach to further develop the use of their halls and had the opportunity to attend some "deep dive" sessions of their choice on areas such as governance, sustainable energy use, funding bids and creating a business plan.

The following quotes show how necessary grant funding is to sustain the future of our Village Halls:

"We are looking at a 3-year plan so rather than having to run fund raising events we want the bookings to sustain the hall. Then the events will be the extras and then that money can be reinvested in the hall." (North Devon)

"Fundraising feels harder now, the village isn't wealthy and are struggling with the cost of living crisis." (North Devon)

Sometimes hall committees can feel overwhelmed with the financial challenge of managing a Village Hall:

“We are in desperate need of someone who knows about the funding network or how to approach funding.” (Mid Devon)

“Staying open. Concern of everyone on the committee, how we are going to keep it going. If it doesn’t stack up financially then there is no other option.” (Torridge)

6.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

The financial sustainability of Devon’s Village Halls is a varied picture. Many are struggling to make the material changes that their buildings require for future sustainability and there is an over reliance on bookings for their income, which mean that Halls are often only just surviving financially. Significant Covid-19 funding has skewed the financial picture, but in the long term, halls financial sustainability needs to come from a range of areas. These vital community assets could offer their communities so much more if they were given the right support to do so.



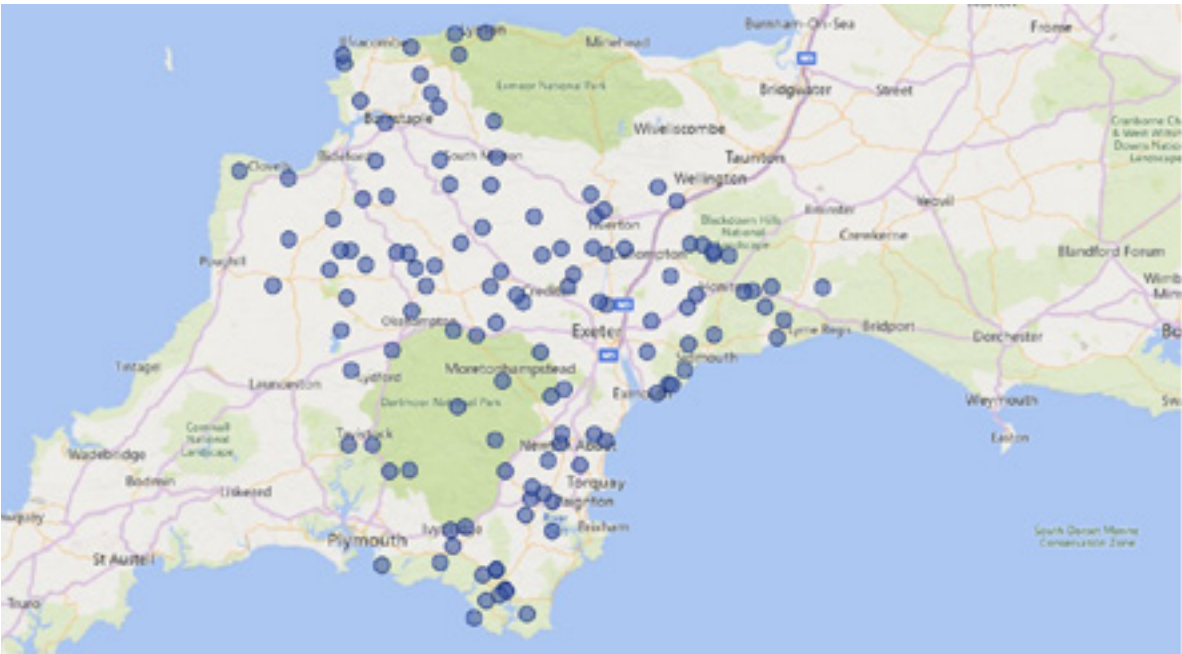
7) DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7 Greater access to reasonably priced and reliable broadband is needed if our Village Halls are going to remain financially sustainable.
- 8 There is a training need to upskill hall committees’ digital skills to enable them to market their halls online, maintain a web presence and to support digital outreach remote services. Audiences today expect connectivity whether they’re meeting socially or for business. Digitally connected Village Halls have huge potential to be rural community hubs for a wide range of activities and services.

7.2 KEY FINDINGS

36% of Village Halls in Devon do not have broadband connectivity:

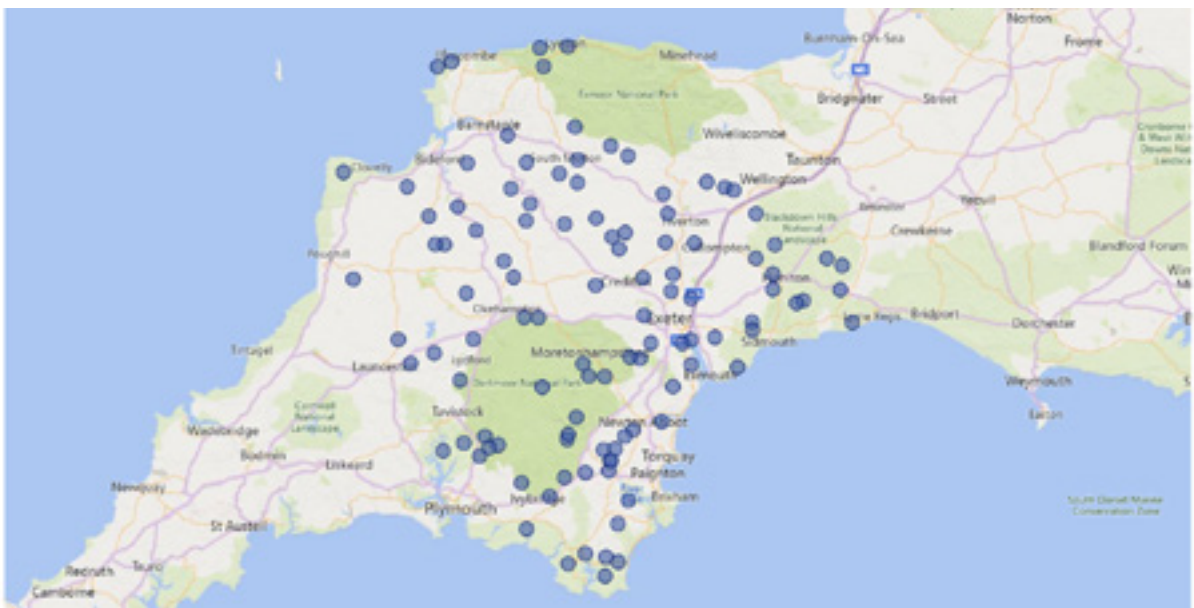


Of the halls that have broadband connectivity, 47% have slow to medium internet speed.

59% of Devon Village Halls access their internet via copper cables (ADSL) with **55%** using fibre optic or wireless connectivity.

43% of halls with internet access have a fast upload speed. This refers to how quickly the broadband allows data transmission. A fast upload speed is needed for posting content online, video calls, sending emails and sharing large files over Cloud based services such as WeTransfer, Dropbox or Google Drive.

32% of Devon Village Halls have poor mobile phone reception (see below). Few halls have landlines as they are often unoccupied, so mobile reception is really important to maintain contact with potential bookings and other income streams.



12% of Devon Village Hall Committees struggle with digital skills. This means that a lack of basic IT skills is holding some halls back from advertising their events on social media and potentially reducing their revenue from bookings. These halls may be unable to maintain a web presence, putting them at a disadvantage in this digital age.

7.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

The following analysis is taken from the Devon Village Hall central data bank. This demonstrates that a significant proportion of Devon's Village Halls suffer from poor digital connectivity and committee digital skill levels. The fact that just **15%** of Devon's Village Halls have digital devices demonstrates that technology just hasn't been a priority. Mobile reception is also a problem for many of Devon's Village Halls, leaving them isolated and often unattractive to young people.

The value of Village Halls being supported to offer people digital support and services:

"Looking into trialling Wi-Fi, people having parties want to be able to stream music and Libra school would find it beneficial." (North Devon)

"We aim to attract new groups e.g. computer/IT based groups, working from home, film clubs using the hall now we have Wi-Fi." (South Hams)

"Would like to have broadband so that it can control the heating system." (Teignbridge)

"Homework club would be good to have here as there is no internet at some of the farms." (East Devon)

"No Wi-Fi at the hall at the moment so limits other options." (West Devon)

Digital skills and therefore digital confidence are lacking in many hall committees. With further investment and training, Devon's network of Village Halls are extremely well placed to offer digital upskilling to help those in our communities that are digitally excluded and to host rural community connectors providing digital navigation support:

"Would like to have broadband. Would like to offer IT classes." (Teignbridge)

"Already have some workshops and considering having some techy advice sessions." (East Devon)

"We are also keen to create digital hubs and have drop-in IT sessions for the elderly; would be keen to investigate being used as a Health Hub, and also as work space for home workers." (South Hams)

As bookings provide the majority of revenue for Village Halls, it's important that potential audiences can find halls with appropriate facilities when looking for a venue:

"We need to start using Facebook and get a website. Currently only advertise in Parish magazine and on posters." (West)

"We need to get a bit more modern, maybe get a website." (West)

"Would like to set up village buddies Facebook page so people can help each other with things like taking people to appointments and have the hall as a hub for this." (West)

7.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

Digital connectivity in Devon's Village Halls is geographically varied and inconsistent. Generally, there is a recognition from hall committees that they need to get online to increase their visibility and be more attractive as bookable spaces and also to better provide remote access to services within their local community. There are a lot of good ideas and innovation, but lack of good connectivity currently make some of these impossible.



8) HEALTH AND WELLBEING

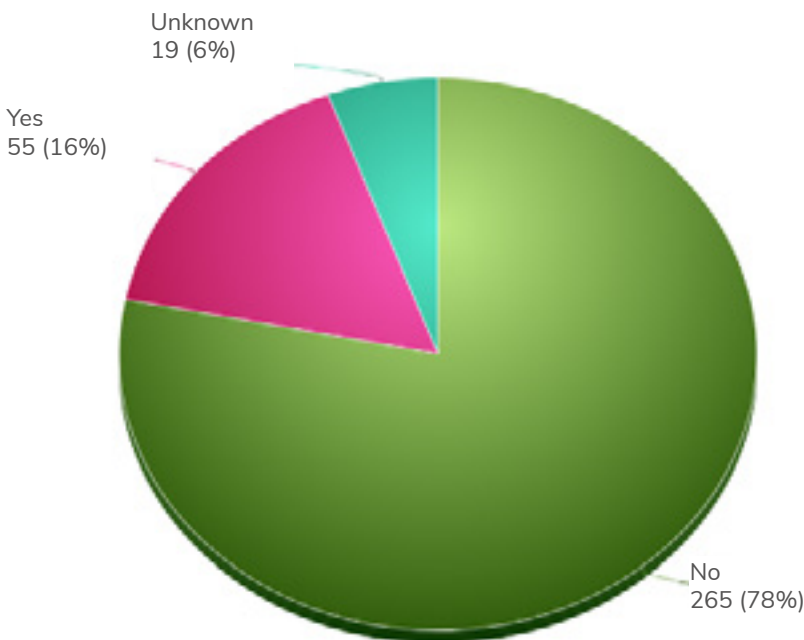
8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Village Halls are keen to provide a venue to support their communities, so external organisations and public sector services would benefit from using Village Halls to offer place-based support where possible, helping seldom-heard members of society to engage and benefit.
- 10
- Village Halls require additional specialist advice and funding to make their buildings more accessible so all members of the community can engage with their Village Hall.
- 11
- Village Halls are ideally placed to become rural community health hubs, reducing rural health inequalities, supporting the health prevention agenda and providing community led place-based access to health and care services.

8.2 KEY FINDINGS

Devon’s Village Halls offer an incredible range of activities and opportunities for people to socially interact and engage with their own local communities – sports facilities, exercise classes, parent and baby classes, health visitors’ clinics, dance classes, U3A, coffee mornings, support groups to name just a few. These local activities are generally reasonably priced and can be a lifeline particularly to people who may not have their own transport or access to public transport. Hall committees are happy to try and offer local residents what they want/ need but knowing exactly what that is can be a challenge. Accessibility can be an issue for our halls and an accessibility audit, conducted during onsite visits was welcomed as part of the audit process. In many cases, simple achievable changes were identified which can significantly improve accessibility for people with specific needs or mobility issues.

78% of Devon’s Village Halls have not had a full equality audit. This is largely due to the cost implications, but it does mean that vulnerable members of society may be missing out on being able to access health and wellbeing activities on their doorstep. If people feel that getting into the building or using its facilities will be too difficult, their approach will be not to engage. Supporting hall committees to increase accessibility can benefit more vulnerable people and people with additional needs in our rural communities.



(Please note: the percent of visuals have been rounded to the nearest whole number to increase clarity)

The Village Hall audit accessibility questions looked at wheelchair access, lighting, signage, hearing loops and contrasting colours between walls and door frames.

An example of an accessibility quick win is having some chairs with arms so that people with less mobility can use to push themselves out of the chair. Just **27%** of halls could offer this, but many hadn’t even considered it.

Another popular way to make a hall more accessible is to put a bench near the door of the hall. If someone with mobility issues has walked from the carpark, they may need a place to stop and rest before navigating the hall entrance. A bench enables this to happen and can be used by passers-by as well.

As part of the audit, we asked if halls would be interested in offering an increased range of different activities that could benefit the health and wellbeing of their communities.

Rural isolation and loneliness contribute negatively to the health and wellbeing of many in our villages and countryside. According to the World Helath Organisation, loneliness carries an equivalent, or even greater, risk of early death as smoking, excessive drinking, physical inactivity, obesity, and air pollution.

41% of Devon Village Halls said they would be interested in offering online medical appointments, giving digitally excluded residents an alternative way to access health services. This would involve a confidential space being set up with suitable IT equipment, broadband and a trained digital buddy to help those less digitally able members of the community.

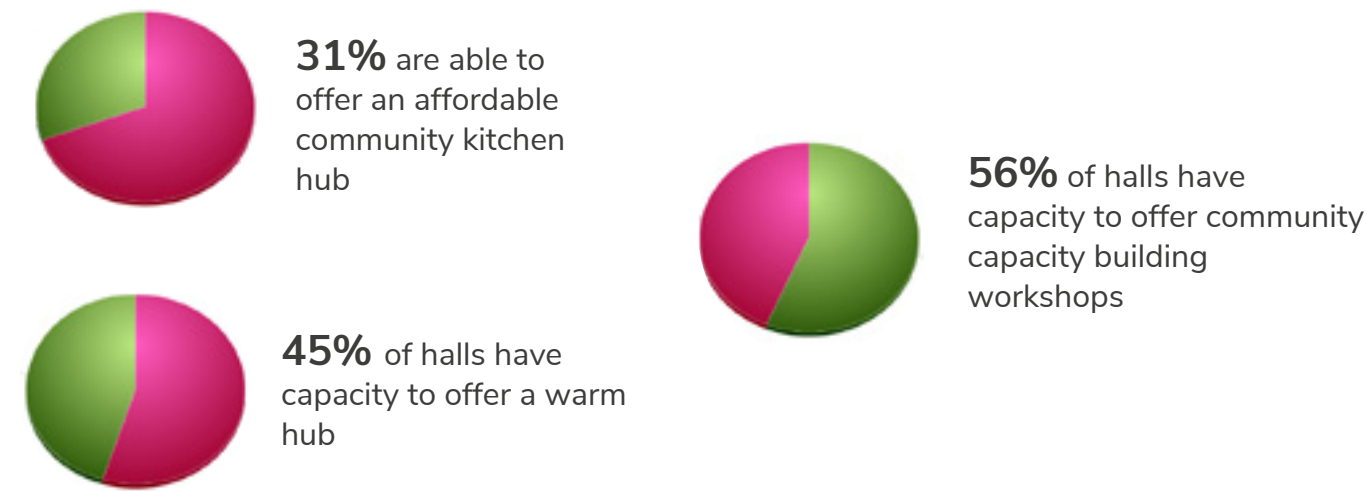
One west Devon Village Hall offered online medical appointments during the Covid-19 period as the hall had better Wi-Fi than the rest of the village, but this wasn’t continued post pandemic, due to a lack of support/resources.

A structured development approach needs to be taken if halls are going to offer these services. One successful example of this approach is Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action’s pilot offering video consultation appointments with primary or secondary care services where hubs provided a device, Wi-Fi and a private, Covid-19 compliant space (Near Me Public Engagement: Public & Clinician views on video consultation 2020). This pilot recognised the importance of having regular appointment sessions, and onsite support, so that people knew what was available when.

As the chart below demonstrates, access to healthcare varies across the county with **63%** of halls reporting that healthcare services were only moderately accessible locally. In areas where it’s difficult to see community health practitioners or access primary and secondary healthcare professionals, enabling online appointments in a local Village Hall could be a real asset to both healthcare providers and local people.



Many halls have the capacity to offer a variety of community services and facilities, often as the ones in the village have had to close or there is increased demand:



- 56%** of halls have capacity to offer energy saving advice sessions
 - 31%** of halls have capacity to offer a lunch club
 - 14%** of halls have the capacity to offer a community shop
 - 13%** of halls have the capacity to offer a community fridge
 - 12%** of halls have the capacity to offer a food bank
 - 11%** of halls have the capacity to offer a community post office
- The last few category figures are lower as these services are often available in a nearby location already.

56% of Devon Village Halls have a defibrillator on site, helping to support the health and wellbeing of their communities. This is a great example of how an education campaign, backed up by funding can support real behaviour change, build community resilience and potentially save lives.



(Please note: the percent of visuals have been rounded to the nearest whole number to increase clarity)

8.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

The following analysis is taken from the Devon Village Hall central data bank. This demonstrates that Devon’s Village Halls provide a wide range of health and wellbeing services to their communities. Until recently many Village Halls hadn’t really considered their role in the health and wellbeing of their communities, they just provided activities that people wanted and enjoyed the fact that they were well received.

Covid-19, to some extent, helped society recognise the importance of local amenities and shone a light on the importance of supporting health prevention activities and good mental health in particular. Many of Devon’s Village Halls already offer links with social prescribers, mental health clinics, and grief support groups in nearby market and coastal towns.

“This (health & wellbeing) is the existing main focus of the hall, they are linked to the wider league of friends charity, and so have relationships with clients and carers.”

“It is a community centre, a social hub. The cinema club brings people together. They have an interval and on an evening they have wine and on an afternoon, they have a cream tea. They talk about the film, it gives people a focus to talk about.”

8.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

Village Halls, where able, are stepping in to provide services that are being lost in rural communities. Without this, our villages risk losing all facilities and places to meet and socialise.

Accessibility is an area that halls could improve on, particularly if training and funding support were offered. The audit demonstrated the huge range of activities, classes and support groups that Village Halls accommodate, but in some cases, these aren’t accessible to everyone due to the limitation of the building.

Devon’s Village Halls have great potential to be rural community health hubs, offering access to community health practitioners as well as primary and secondary healthcare practitioners. In addition, there are a range of other digital access services that Village Halls are uniquely well placed to host and support, with the right level of investment and capacity building.



9) CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

9.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12
- Devon’s Village Halls would benefit from specialist family and youth work support services to enable them to give their local young people access to age-appropriate entertainment.
- 13
- Village Hall committees require increased levels of community engagement and consultation support, in order to improve their understanding of what their communities want their Village Hall to offer.
- 14
- As the Devon Children’s Services Family Hub Strategy is being developed to create a network of local place-based Family Hubs across Devon to support families of children and young people aged up to 19 or up to 25 for young people with special needs or disability, Village Halls are ideally suited to host rural link hubs or spaces for outreach, using a hub and spoke model. As Family Hubs will not be restricted to referral pathways, everyone can feel comfortable accessing the services from a trusted and micro-local community facility. Family Hubs are community-based and needs-led, so Village Halls could provide that network of services in an easily accessible location.

9.2 KEY FINDINGS

Devon’s Village Halls already provide many activities and support groups for children, young people and families living in rural and remote rural communities. Some halls provide their preschool with a venue and others offer their facilities to support their local school. Many Devon Village Halls have said they would like to attract a younger audience, but at times struggle to do so. This is due to a number of factors such as a lack of suitable volunteers, not knowing what to offer and lack of suitable equipment/Wi-Fi to entertain a young audience.

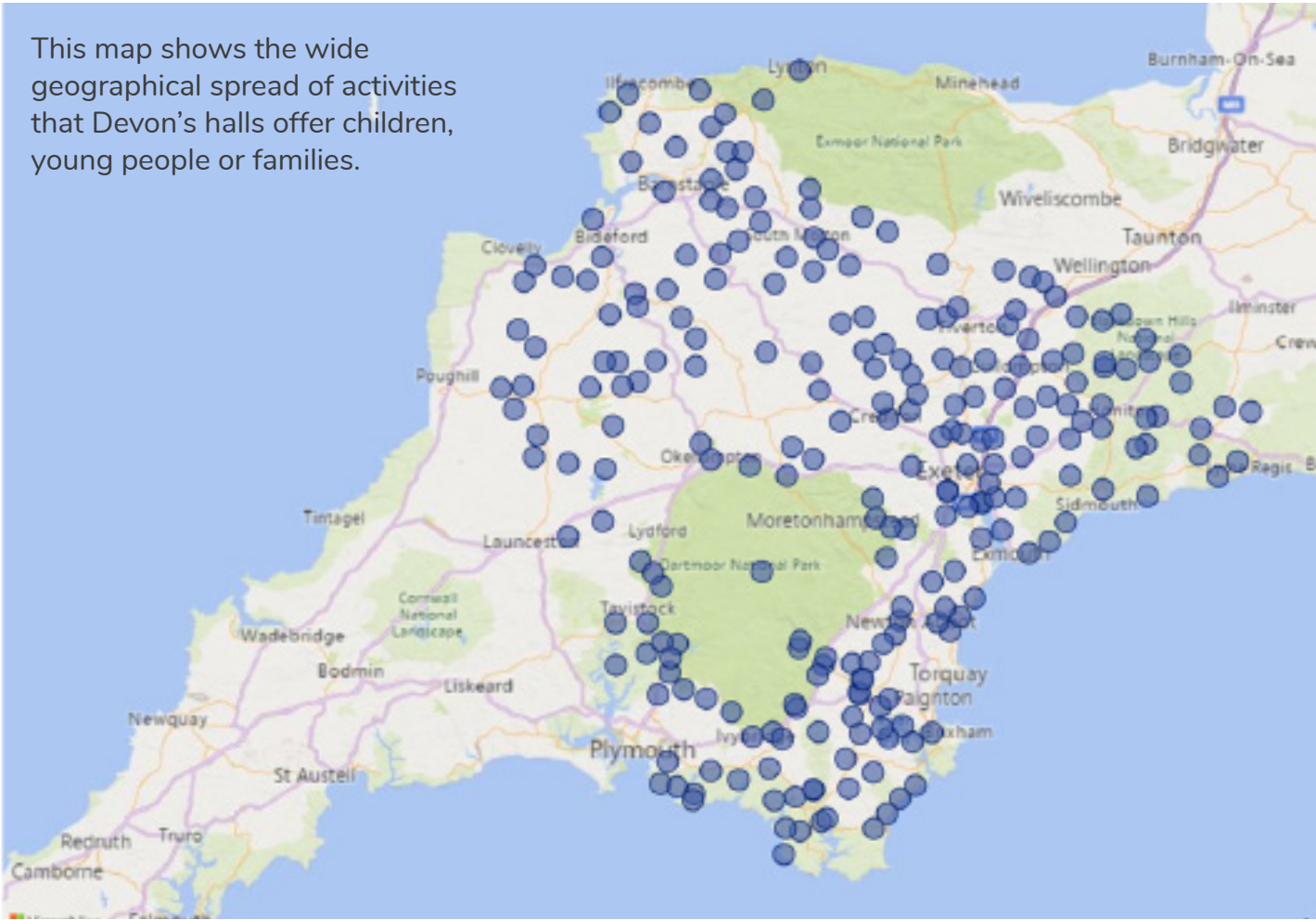
25% of Village Halls offer provision for children during school hours including primary school bookings, preschool, parent baby and toddler groups and holiday clubs.

18% of Village Halls have provision for children out of school hours including youth clubs, young farmers, scouts, guides and brownies.

The bar chart shows the number of halls that offer children and young people’s activities by demographic. Youth clubs are an area for potential growth and anecdotally, a section of the community that halls are keen to support.



This map shows the wide geographical spread of activities that Devon’s halls offer children, young people or families.



9.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

The following analysis is taken from the Devon Village Hall central data bank. This demonstrates that Devon’s Village Halls already provide a variety of activities for children and young people, but there is widespread recognition of local unmet need and a genuine aspiration to do more, particularly for teenagers.

A minority of Village Halls in Devon (12%) are used by their local preschools and schools:

“School bookings provide a regular income which supports the hall.”

“The school frequently hire the hall.”

“Booked up a lot of the time with Forest school.”

“The primary school uses it daily in term time, taking up majority of daytime booking availability. Also, a breakfast club before. Pre-school also uses it four days a week.”

Devon Village Halls would like to have an increased younger demographic enjoying their facilities:

“Would like to see the hall used more, would like to attract activities for younger people as there is nothing here in the village for them.”

“Youth project will provide young people with better wellbeing. The hall plans to support parents and children as there is a gap in services for preschool age children and primary age children. It also plans to increase capacity for parenting support delivered through the school.”

“High number of children in area and would like to do subsidised things for them, make more of the outside area.”

Devon Village Halls recognise that teenagers may not currently be well served by their halls:

“A lot of the current hall users are pre-school, school age or physically active adults. Would like to attract teenagers – Youth Club.”

“Would like to start up a youth club…… There is a small block of social housing in the village and we don't see them apart from the children at the bus stop in the morning. It would be great to involve families more.”

Other Village Halls are managing to support their local teenagers more effectively:

“The Hall runs the Youth Club. It is considered important as providing social interactivity amongst the children who go to a wide variety of schools and would not mix if not for the Club.” (East)

Village Halls support parents by providing local activities and groups for children and young people to be part of and to enable parent peer support opportunities:

“The Hall owns two senior and one junior football pitch, an all weather cricket pitch, two tennis courts, a skateboard park, and a small wood which used Forest School. Also have a children’s playground and an adult exercise area.” (South Hams)

“The Village Hall have started a family fun day on Saturday morning. They offer the hall for free and parents can come and set up activities with their families. It is being promoted by a young person who makes the posters to advertise the event. It started at the beginning of this year with just a few families but is growing month on month.” (East Devon)

“The community sees the hall as having a key role in maintaining community cohesion and independence in the village. The hall would like to build on this and is considering the idea of purchasing a piece of land in the village, which could be used for recreational community purposes, e.g. with playing equipment for children.” (Mid Devon)

“We are trying to bring in parents, encouraging them to use the hall. Currently looking at doing children’s event every quarter with children’s art exhibition and do teas and coffees for parents.”

9.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

Devon’s Village Halls recognise that our children and young people need to be provided for in their immediate locality, just like any other demographic. With play areas often no longer under local authority jurisdiction, Village Halls with the outdoor space to do so, are stepping up to fill the gap in service provision. As hall committees tend to be older people, finding the right activities to offer can be a challenge but with strategic support as well as local volunteer support, it is achievable.



10) PLACE BASED COLLABORATION

10.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15 Access to reasonably priced and good quality broadband will help Devon's Village Halls to attract business bookings.
- 16 Increased training in how to promote Village Halls, particularly online, will help halls to be more visible to potential audiences. This opportunity to benefit rural communities, many of which have lost their rural services could be supported by establishing a network of Rural Community Connectors, funded centrally with a focus on growing place-based collaboration, accessibility, eco improvements and digital skills. Accessing services can be difficult for people in rural locations particularly if they don't have their own transport. By using a local, trusted venue, bringing services closer to their homes, rural isolation and health inequalities can be reduced, particularly for those who are harder to reach in our rural and remote communities.
- 17 Village Halls are ideal locations for Family Hubs, making place-based collaboration a smart choice for service users and providers.

10.2 KEY FINDINGS

Collaboration, where organisations use Devon Village Halls to provide local services to local people is of real benefit to rurally isolated areas. Collaboration happens in our halls but could be used so much more and with great effect for both the service provider and service user.

Devon halls are currently used for blood donation, health clinics, local meetings, adoption meetings and they were, of course, invaluable during Covid-19 as vaccination centres. Health services such as antenatal clinics, leg ulcer clinics, Bowen therapy and chiropodist services currently frequently use Devon Village Halls as appointment locations.

Parish Councils, District Councils, Devon County Council, the Children/Adolescent Mental Health Service and Adoption Southwest, as well as a wide and diverse range of community groups and organisations, regularly use Village Hall facilities. The Post Office, Community Shops and Library Services also use Village Halls as central locations.

Devon's Village Halls are currently also used for educational activities such as First Aid, teaching children with learning difficulties, teaching English to Ukrainians, home education groups, school/preschool, HGV theory training and marriage preparation.

10.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

As the above list of services demonstrates, there is already a well-established tradition of place-based collaboration happening in Devon's Village Halls. Unfortunately, it tends to be informal, irregular and relationship based with only **3%** of halls offering regular community healthcare services and just **3%** offering food and nutrition related learning. The potential for expanding these opportunities for local partnership & collaboration is huge and failing to do so would be a missed opportunity.

The following analysis is taken from the Devon Village Hall central data bank. This demonstrates that although some collaboration is taking place in Devon's Village Halls, it's limited and could be much more effective if a more consistent and inclusive strategic approach were to be adopted.

10.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

The rates charged by Village Halls tend to be considerably lower than their commercial counterparts, so it makes good business sense for private and public organisations to use Village Hall space. As already stated, Village Halls want to increase their bookings, particularly during the day. Greater collaboration between Village Halls and local organisations would be beneficial for all parties; Local authorities/businesses get economical space to hire, local people receive accessible support/health care and Village Hall space is used more regularly, increasing revenue.





11) ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Many Devon Village Hall committees are keen to improve the green credentials of their halls. With a large number of halls built just after World War One, their construction doesn't naturally lend itself to environmental sustainability, however retrofitting is beginning to happen, improving insulation, heating efficiency and energy creation.

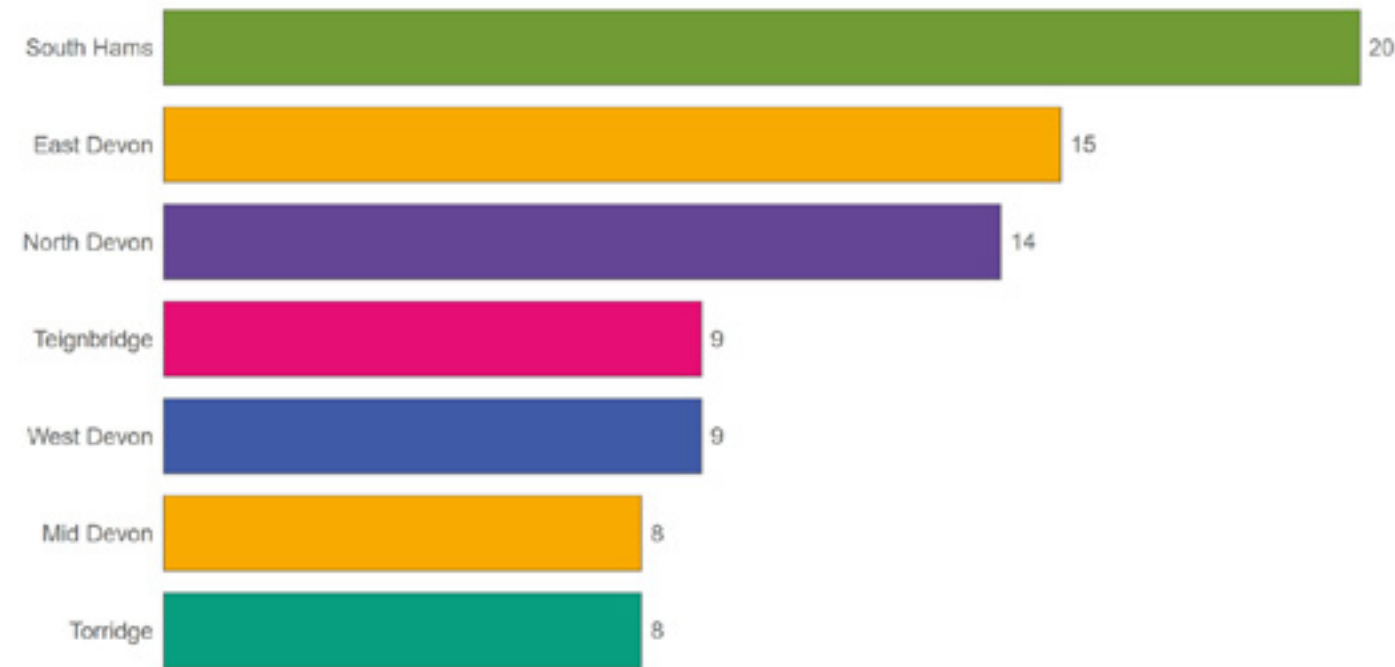
11.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 18 Village Hall committees require additional training/specialist support to conduct energy audits on their halls, so that the right environmental improvements for their building can be identified, planned for and resourced.
- 19 Village Halls need access to specialist support with topics such as insurance, listed building consent and Electric Vehicle (EV) charge points from a neutral source.
- 20 For Devon's Village Halls to become more environmentally sustainable, there is a need for strategic and readily accessible funding sources.



11.2 KEY FINDINGS

24% of Devon Village Halls are interested in getting solar panels. These break down by district as follows:



10% of Village Halls openly state that they are unable to improve their environmental sustainability due to lack of funding.

7% of Village Hall committees are currently in the process of retrofitting their halls to be more environmentally sustainable.

2% of Village Halls have made changes to reduce their water usage.

Unfortunately, finances/funding is often a stumbling block:

- "We'd love to have solar panels and have applied two or three times but didn't get the funding. We have a very large south facing roof so we could even potentially provide some electricity to the village. Would be interested to apply again for funding." (South Hams)
- "Interested in solar panels if there was a grant." (Mid Devon)
- "Would like air source heat pump, if we can get a grant would like solar and battery." (Torridge)
- "Have reviewed heat pumps and solar - at this stage too expensive." (Teignbridge)
- "Investigating various options including solar panels, thermal curtains, EV charging but subject to finances and receiving grant funding." (South Hams)

Getting quotes and specialist trade suppliers can also be a challenge in rural communities:

“Really difficult at the moment getting trades to give quotes.” (Teign)

“Interested in solar panels and have 2 quotes which are quite different to each other.” (South Hams)

“Plans for potential wind turbine on the roof; plans to expand their existing solar panel array. Plans are on hold due to long waiting list for tradesmen (18+ months).” (Exeter)

For a minority of halls, who are listed buildings planning consent is difficult to achieve:

“Looking into solar and ground source heat pump but expecting challenges to solar progress due to grade I history and site.” (South Hams)

“Being listed we probably can't put solar panels on the roof. We are inhibited by the building.” (Mid)

Other eco challenges that Devon Village Halls reported facing, include:

“We tried to do electric vehicle charging points, but we couldn't get the funding because the village doesn't have enough electric charge to do it.” (South Hams)

“Difficult to update insulation in ceiling because of asbestos roof. Thin double skin walls etc.” (East)

“Have looked at solar panels and due to the capitals costs and the return it is not viable.” (Torridge)

Despite some challenges, there is general enthusiasm and commitment and some halls are planning the following environmental improvements:

“Planning to replace all the lighting with LED; Looking to do insulation if can get funding - as no insulation on walls, and minimal in the loft. Expecting to do the kitchen, with new more efficient equipment.” (North)

“We want to turn the building into a zero carbon footprint. Want to put solar on the roof, batteries, putting in a link to the grid so that additional power will provide an income, 20 or 30 panels. Improving the insulation, lining with sheep wool, use local materials and reuse some of the things we have e.g. tiles and floor.”

(North)

“Water and room heaters are now on timers to cut down on wasted energy and the hall has switched to a green energy provider.” (East)

“Strongly considering electric charging points - as have surplus energy from solar panels.” (South Hams)

“We have replaced the curtains with insulating and acoustic ones.” (Mid)

“We have just installed our own water butt to water our own flowers. We have a green space by the car park which we wild plant and allow planting projects to take place eg crocus planting and maintaining hedgerows.” (South Hams)

11.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

The following analysis is taken from the Devon Village Hall central data bank. This demonstrates that although most halls are keen to improve their environmental credentials, there are often roadblocks that make these improvements difficult or impossible currently. Improving environmental sustainability is important to Village Hall Committees and for their communities.

11.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

The key motivation for halls addressing climate change and sustainability is to reduce energy costs, which can be the main expenditure for buildings. The main barriers for halls in reducing their energy costs is funding the work and the fabric of the building (older buildings). Halls that said they wanted to make improvements said that they were looking at funding options to pay for major capital works such as fitting solar and batteries, fitting EV points and updating heating systems.





12) FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

The challenges faced by Devon Village Halls are wide ranging but there are a number of common themes that affect many of these vital rural community assets. Many halls are still trying to find their way in the post Covid-19 era, where people's behaviours and needs within their communities have changed and community cohesion in certain respects seems to have lessened.

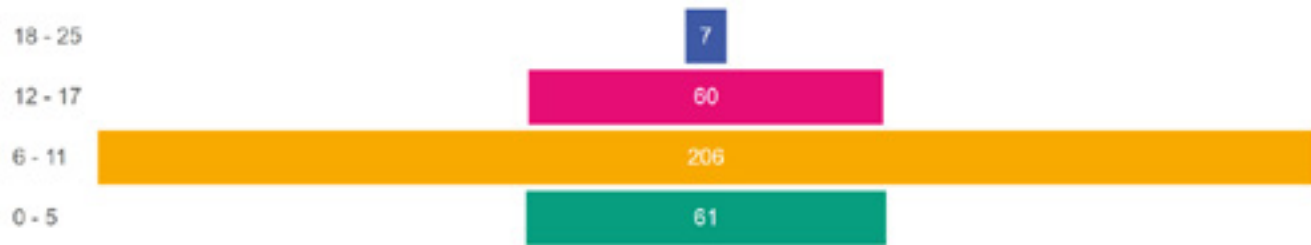
12.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 21 Village Hall Committees need additional support to understand changing needs and what their communities want from their Village Hall. The way society accesses entertainment is very different today, we can binge watch TV, game remotely with people we've never met and choose thousands of films from the comfort of our armchair. These changes mean that Village Halls need to reassess what they offer their communities, and they need support to poll local opinion.
- 22 Increased training opportunities in volunteer recruitment and succession planning would also be beneficial for many Village Halls.
- 23 Consistent strategic funding needs to be made available for the capital costs of running these buildings and the scope of activities need to broaden both to support rural communities but also to increase booking revenue to provide financial sustainability for these vital community assets.
- 24 A resourced county-wide network of Rural Community Connectors would provide specialist capacity building, training and support.

12.2 KEY FINDINGS

72% of Village Halls have difficulties recruiting new committee members and retaining existing ones. This makes running events and even the day-to-day management of the hall hard work, and leaves minimal or no capacity for business development activities.

18% of Village Halls have less than 5 regular volunteers, which is a low number even for a very small Village Hall. The bar chart below shows the number of committee member volunteers:



Halls have voiced their challenges in the examples below:



"We are desperate for more volunteers two of us do most of everything and we are getting on in life." (South Hams)

"Difficulty in recruiting younger trustees. Appears to be a general apathy. Don't know why. 20- to 40-year-olds who are working can't be bothered to go out when they get home from work." (Teignbridge)

"No wants to be a chair, have been without chair for 6 years, as it's seen as too much commitment." (South Hams)

"People are busy, don't want the responsibility. Lives are different now." (West)

"Treasurer wants to leave. Nobody wants the responsibility these days. They think everything can come back to bite you personally. The safeguarding etc is intimidating for people. Having to dot the i's and cross the t's with risk assessments etc." (Teignbridge)



4% of Village Hall Committees openly state that running their halls with so few volunteers is unsustainable:

“Currently managed by ‘interim’ caretaker trustees from outside of the area. After previous chair was overwhelmed.” (East)

“Sense of desperation and deep sadness at everything that needs doing.” (Torridge)

Village Hall buildings can be a challenge. Many hall committees find it difficult to maintain an older building with issues such as damp, poor insulation, planning restrictions etc:

“The whole hall needs significant refurbishment to repair significant issues related to damp and disrepair.” (North)

“The issue is that the hall is not well insulated, roof needs doing, toilets need updating, there is no wheel chair access to the loos. We can’t get grants as the lease runs out in 2027.” (Teignbridge)

“Currently no heating at the hall and no electric.” (North)

“The main building was built in c.1960’s; there are issues with the roof (holes, asbestos etc) and the building is very ‘tired’.” (South Hams)



Lack of hall revenue means that 6% of Village Halls are currently failing financially:

“Fundraising feels harder now, as the village is not wealthy and are struggling with the cost of living crisis.” (North)

“Staying open is the concern of everyone on the committee, how we are going to keep it going. If it doesn’t stack up financially then there is no other option.” (Torridge)

Rapidly rising energy costs have significantly contributed to Hall’s financial struggles in recent years:

“The cost of energy and resources limits the ability to provide more community services.” (Mid)

“(Would like) More usage to bring in more income to address fuel price increases.” (West)

Societal changes since Covid-19 continue to create challenges for our Village Halls:

“Older people decided they didn’t want to come out, lost confidence and capability.” (Torridge)

“Covid was very hectic and damaging. We are still recovering from this in terms of bookings.” (Teignbridge)

“The hall is less busy after Covid as the lunch club didn’t return. This had been very popular and the hall would like to start it up again but it is difficult to find volunteer drivers to collect people due to insurance issues.” (South Hams)

“Pre-Covid, there were film evenings, badminton and wedding bookings these have not recovered post-pandemic.” (East)

Lack of bookings is a challenge for 67% of Devon’s Village Halls:

“The committee organise their own events but need to get more bookings to pay for the bills for the year.” (Mid)

“For more bookings and activities we need more helpers.” (South Hams)

“Challenge for the hall is that it has limited appeal due to lack of parking.” (Teignbridge)

“We could offer more if we could employ a person to assist with bookings and administration.” (Mid)

“Pre School have dedicated area but due to security remainder of Hall cannot be let when they are in resi-dence (every day during term time).” (East)

12.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

The following analysis is taken from the Devon Village Hall central data bank. This demonstrates that most halls have difficulty in recruiting/retaining custodian trustees/volunteers/committee members. Common themes are difficulty in recruiting younger trustees as they don’t have the time, low levels of interest in becoming a trustee, concerns over legal liabilities and responsibilities, small numbers of people volunteering for all committees in the village, trustees are getting older and want to step down, but replacement trustees being difficult to recruit.

Maintaining older buildings, particularly making them more energy efficient is problematic without accessible specialist advice and funding support services. Rising energy costs and less bookings than halls would like, has created an ex-tremely challenging financial situation.

12.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

Village hall committees are struggling, and this is exacerbated by a lack of volunteers, particularly younger people. As the buildings get older, maintenance demands increase. With high energy costs and in many cases poorly insulated buildings, day to day running costs can spiral out of control. Without sufficient bookings (58% of halls rely on revenue from bookings for over half of their income) the cost of hall upkeep can feel unachievable and with no consistent funding, in some cases it may be unachievable.



13) IS THE HALL FIT FOR PURPOSE?

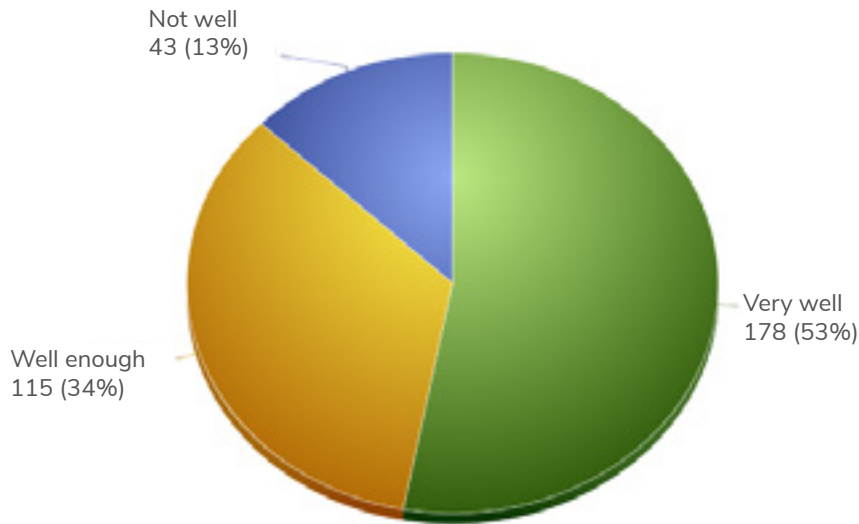
As with any building a Village Hall has a job to do. We want to ascertain if Village Halls (in general) can offer their communities what they need. This encompasses both the building (internally and externally) and its governance.

13.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 25 Additional funding/specialist support is required for structural and environmental improvements.
- 26 Additional training/support/resources would be valuable for increasing an understanding of accessibility needs.
- 27 A county-wide resourced business development training programme is necessary to help committees to create/update their governance and operate on a more entrepreneurial basis.

13.2 KEY FINDINGS

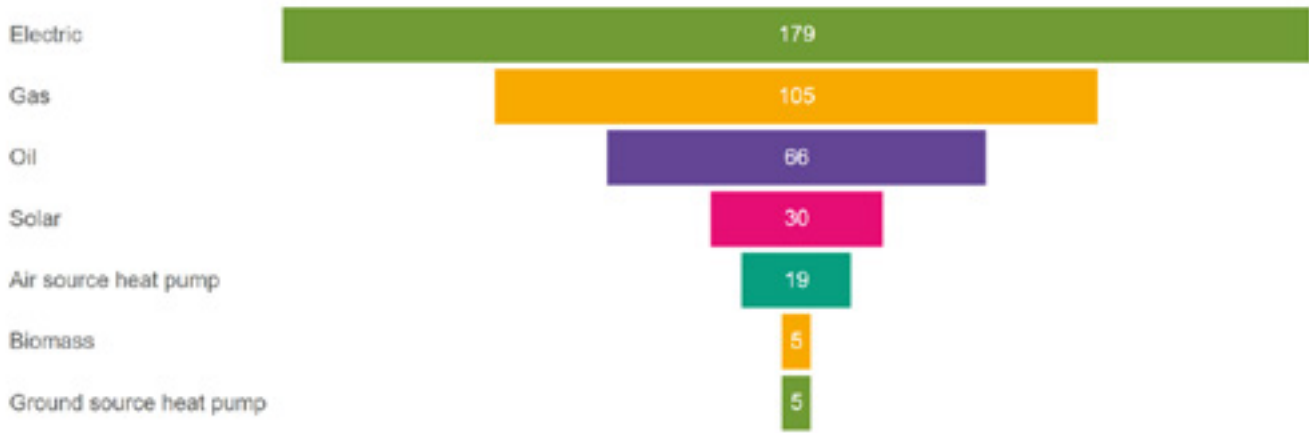
26% of halls plan to improve heating/insulation. These improvements help the cost of heating halls, but also help the environment. The graph below shows how well the heating currently works in the main hall.



(Please note: the percent of visuals have been rounded to the nearest whole number to increase clarity)



As you can see from the chart below, Devon's Village Halls rely quite heavily on electricity (53%), gas (31%) and oil (19%) for their heating systems. Interestingly solar (9%) and air source heat pumps (6%) are growth areas and would be even more so if funding support was made available. Please note that halls often have more than one heating method.



Being a warm and welcoming space is an important attribute for a Village Hall:

- "The hall is key for holding together the social network of the village, including for older residents who come to the coffee morning. Problematic at present due to being a cold space in the winter, which can affect attendance."
- "Looking to do insulation if can get funding - as no insulation on walls, and minimal in the loft."
- "We need extensive refurb throughout to incorporate improved insulation and heating."

13% of halls without Wi-Fi are planning to get it, a breakdown by district can be seen below. Wi-Fi will make their halls more attractive to a variety of audiences.

- ✓ **3** West Devon
- ✓ **2** Torridge
- ✓ **4** South Hams
- ✓ **2** Teignbridge
- ✓ **2** North Devon
- ✓ **2** East Devon
- ✓ **1** Mid Devon

“With the new wifi we aim to attract new groups eg computer /IT based groups, working from home, film clubs.” (South Hams)

31% of halls are planning to make improvements to the buildings such as extensions, toilet renovations, kitchen upgrades, increased insulation, improved accessibility, new roof or floor:

“There are many things we'd like to do to improve the hall to ensure it serves all community members, currently this is prohibited by availability of volunteer time and lack of funding.” (South Hams)

“The committee is engaged in a major improvement project to improve access to hall, accessible toilet, new kitchen, additional heating and insulation to main hall.” (North)

“We have a leaking roof, so we are replacing the roof so one of the quotes we have is for an insulated roof. We would like to fit solar panels and batteries. We need to sort out the penetrating damp and rising damp. We need to insulate the walls, but we are concentrating on the roof.” (West)

Welcoming everybody to Village Hall events is really important, so accessibility and equality and diversity need to be considered. Section 8 Health and Wellbeing has some data referring to accessibility, the following quotes give a flavour of what hall committees are trying to achieve:

“Have publicly accessible disabled toilets open 24hours.” (North)

“People feel that it is a safe space e.g. we have a lot of same sex couples and they know they can come here and not feel judged.” (Teignbridge)

“It's paramount that we have a Village Hall, it is social so that people can meet. We have a diverse range of people, a mix of housing including council housing, affluent people and working farms.” (Teignbridge)

A lack of volunteers negatively impacts halls ability to be fit for purpose. As Deborah Clarke from ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) said in The Village Hall Survival guide “You can have a building, but without local people to run and manage it, then it's just an empty shell”.

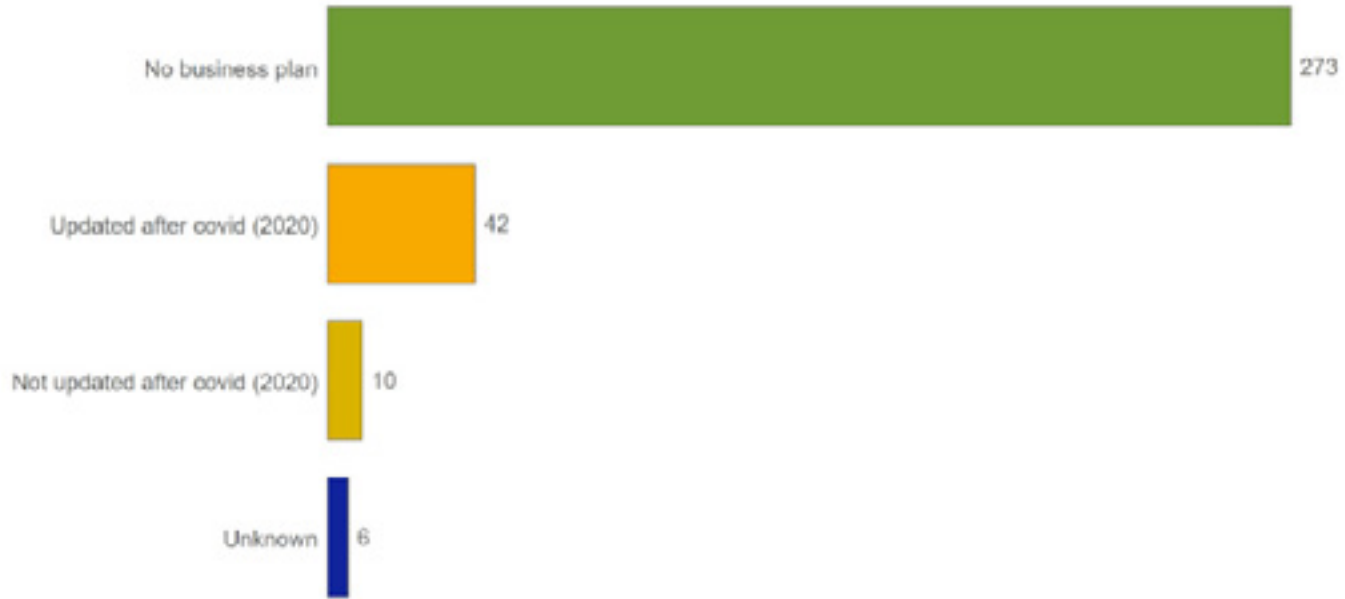
“Young people do not know how or even want to volunteer. They have work and no time for volunteering. People want paying for doing something. No-one coming in to replace those that have got to an age when they want to step down. (West)”

Good governance is an important aspect in halls being fit for purpose. **63%** of Devon's Village Hall committee members have an up-to-date copy of their governing document, enabling them to understand what their roles and responsibilities are.

According to the 2004 Charity Commission Village Halls and Community Centres Report:
The charities that thrive are those in which trustees are proactive in understanding their responsibilities and in ensuring that their charity provides activities that meet local needs.

The report also states:
Active vibrant governance and an active vibrant Village Hall go hand in hand. Our research revealed a clear identifiable link between the ability to attract users, their ability to attract trustees and other volunteers, and their ability to generate funding.

The chart below shows that only **13%** of halls have an up-to-date business plan and **3%** of those have a business plan that needs to be updated. **82%** of Village Halls do not currently have a business plan, suggesting that continued and expanded training/support is needed to help these committees to focus on the hall's future sustainability.



The next chart shows which policies Village Halls have in place. **60%** have a fire safety policy, however just **20%** of halls have an Equality and Diversity policy and **20%** have a complaints policy.



13.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

Hall committees are trying hard to fund capital improvements, both structural and environmental, to their Village Halls. These improvements help to provide a suitable, inviting space with economical/sustainable heating. Village Halls should be open to all, so accessibility for those with mobility issues or visual/auditory impairment needs to be considered. Hall committees often don't know how to support these individuals but do there utmost to make everyone as welcome as they can. As stated above; **Active vibrant governance and an active vibrant village hall go hand in hand.** Having an up-to-date governing document that the hall committee buy into, has an important function.

The following analysis is taken from the Devon Village Hall central data bank. This demonstrates that halls can struggle to keep their buildings fit for purpose due to financial pressures, lack of volunteers, accessibility constraints and governance challenges.

13.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

Our Village Hall committees work extremely hard to provide for their communities. With ageing buildings, it can be challenging to keep halls structurally and materially fit for purpose, particularly when energy prices increase, and the hall is poorly insulated. Old buildings can be retrofitted to improve their carbon footprint and reduce heating bills, but all these improvements have a cost attached. Lack of manpower also adds to committee pressures as it's often the same people doing all the volunteer roles in a community.

14) IN CONCLUSION

This report is drawn from data collected during **339** face-to-face Village Halls Audits conducted by Devon Communities Together Community Buildings Team between September 2022 and March 2024.

The quantitative and qualitative data demonstrates how vital Devon's Village Halls are to the communities that they serve. Halls step up, where possible, to fill the void when village post offices, pubs and shops disappear. They provide a safe space for members of our society who are rurally isolated and sometimes lonely. This social isolation, exacerbated by Covid-19 and lack of public transport is an issue that negatively impacts people's health and wellbeing, decreasing life expectancy and increasing the likelihood of stroke, heart attack and depression.

These community assets, survive because of the tenacity of volunteers. We rely on their goodwill and community spirit to maintain and improve our Village Halls. Their efforts often unrecognised and unappreciated, despite the vital role they play in our rural communities.

As the way society enjoys its recreational time changes, so the Village Hall offer needs to change. Halls need to be able to offer themselves as health hubs, family hubs, digital hubs, youth hubs. For this to happen, there needs to be capital investment for structural improvements and environmental upgrades. Funding needs to be made available for training in digital skills, marketing, accessibility, and governance. By employing Community Connectors, place-based collaboration can be structured rather than ad hoc and digital skills training can be facilitated to support members of our rural communities who are digitally excluded.

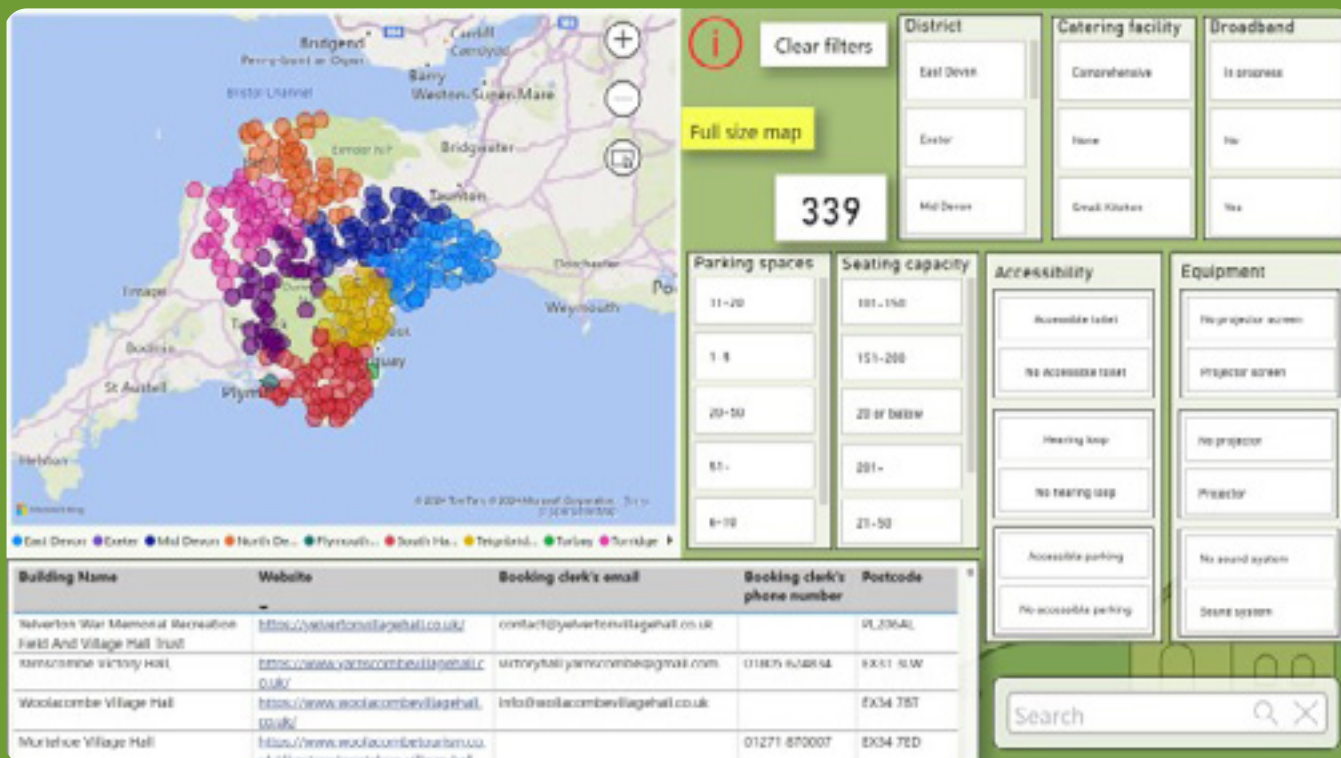
DCT has learned that by creating a Village Hall Asset Map, halls can be found by searching certain criteria, making sourcing the right hall for rural services and activity planning much easier. The Asset Map was created from the audit data and will be maintained by Devon Communities Together, with Village Halls updating initially through DCT, but in future through online self-updating by Village Hall committees. A screenshot of the newly launched online Village Hall Community Asset Map can be seen overleaf.

We've also learned that our community buildings support service is an invaluable resource to many Devon Village Halls. By listening to hall committee members, we recognise that enabling Village Halls to form peer support network clusters provides valuable support. DCT has helped to create clusters in the past, but the audit has reminded us how important that a listening ear and supportive discussions can be. DCT plans to actively support new Village Hall geo-clusters to form, encouraging lessons learned to be shared and collaborative thinking to be encouraged.

DCT would like to thank all the Village Halls that took part in this audit. The findings show what an invaluable resource Devon's halls are to their communities and what a wide range of activities and support networks can be accessed through your doors.

We hope that sharing this data and insight with strategic partners and public services, will enable Village Halls to continue to take their rightful place and to form part of the solution to many of the challenges faced by both public service providers and our rural communities across Devon.





[CLICK HERE to access the Village Hall Asset Map online](#), or scan the QR code



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