



South Hams

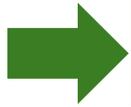
Village Halls Audit Analysis Report

June 2024



Funded by
UK Government

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



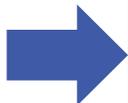
South Hams Village Halls need a system wide funding approach that includes consistent investment, including capital funds to remain sustainable in the long term.



The future sustainability of Village Halls in the South Hams 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 their halls in a digital age



A resourced county-wide network of Rural Community Connectors would provide specialist capacity building, training, and support, as well as enabling peer support networks.



Greater access to reasonably priced and reliable Broadband is needed if our Village Halls are going to remain financially sustainable.



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

CONTENTS

1) Introduction	4
2) Context	5
3) Methodology	7
4) Key Audit Findings	8
5) Key Purpose of Village Halls	9
6) Financial Sustainability	12
7) Digital Connectivity	16
8) Health and Wellbeing	22
9) Children and Young People	29
10) Place Based Collaboration	32
11) Environmental Sustainability	34
12) Future Sustainability	36
13) Is the Hall fit for purpose?	40
14) Conclusion	45

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 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

18% of the audited halls are located in the South Hams and this report draws on the data from these 61 Village Halls.

43% of South Hams Village Halls are Members of DCT enjoying the benefits of free/discounts on training sessions, support with funding applications, model policies and newsletters including 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 <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/community-buildings>



2.1 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 and 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.

During Covid, additional 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 express in their financial security, particularly those audited at the beginning of the project.

DCT supported Devon Village Halls throughout the Covid period, but it was a difficult time for hall committees.

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

- Total number of **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.

2.2 Key issues

- Concerns about covid 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.
- Further assistance needed to apply for grants and funding to offset 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.

3. METHODOLOGY

DCT has carried out **61** Village Hall Audits in the South Hams, this equates to **94%** of all of this district's halls. All have been visited onsite 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 the South Ham's Village Halls. By formulating the data into percentages, the impact or need of our Village Halls can be clearly demonstrated. By reviewing the qualitative data, we get a better understanding of Village Hall committees experiences. Between October 2023 & April 2024 we created an interim Devon 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 learned the following about the South Hams Village Halls:



7% of Village Halls in the South Hams have less than 3 months running costs in reserve



32% of South Hams Village Halls have no Broadband connection.



23% of Village Halls in the South Hams earn over half of their income from bookings



55% of Village Halls in the South Hams are empty for over half the time



65% of South Hams Village Halls would like to offer their communities access to healthcare



50% of Village Halls in the South Hams would like business training/support with grant applications

2 South Hams Village Halls chose not to engage with the audit as the committees felt so stretched that they didn't have the time or energy to engage with us. The halls that DCT has audited are diverse in age and stature, but all are run by committees made up of local volunteers.

As you read this report, please consider the following:

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 the South Hams 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 PURPOSE 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 Key Findings

- ✓ **77%** of Village Halls provide physical activities
- ✓ **70%** of halls put on regular social activities
- ✓ **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
- ✓ **37%** of halls regularly hold learning opportunities in the form of talks or workshops

How do Village Halls support their communities:

"It is a parish hall for the whole parish and want to keep it going for the community."

"We are here to support the community; we want to ensure there's enough income to provide for the community and to preserve the building for the community."

"To continue fulfilling our remit which is to facilitate an area for the village to meet their needs and to enhance the community life."

Village Halls try to be inclusive:

"We help provide for the community at a reasonable cost so it can be hired by all."

"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."

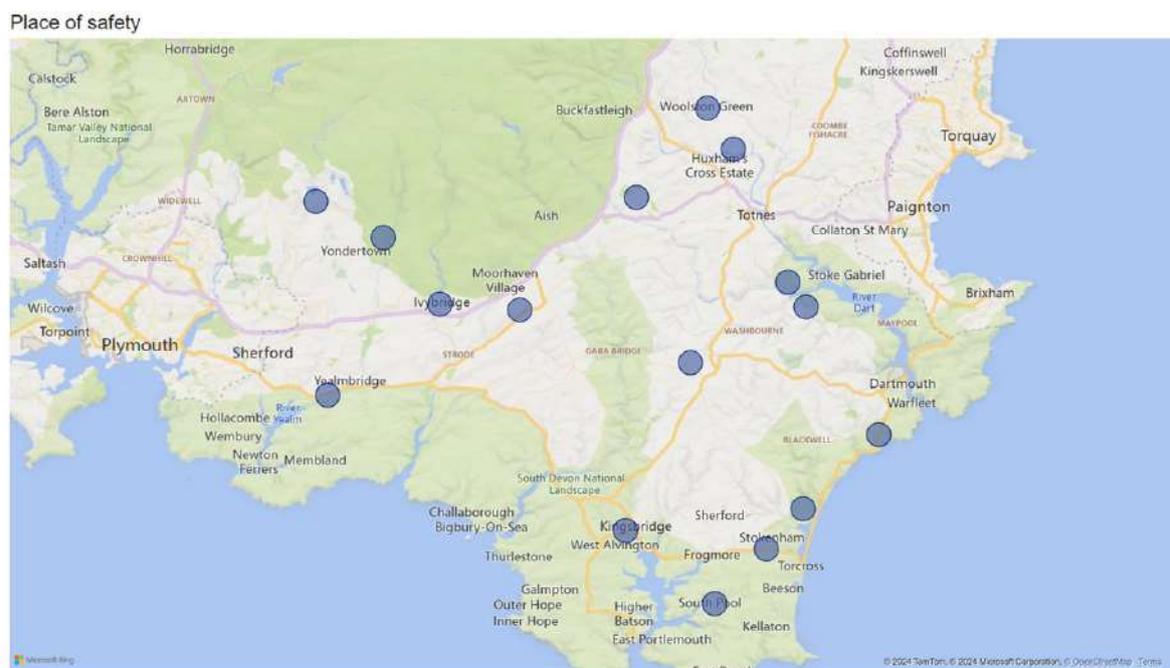
"We do an awful lot, it is an incredible supportive community. With new people in the village, we need to make sure we adapt. Will be asking one of the school children to design a welcome to your new home card to give to the new people as they move in."

Village Halls support their community's wellbeing:

"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."

Village Halls are designated places of safety in an emergency:

16% of South Ham'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 for example a flood event occurs.



5.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that South Ham's Village Halls provide their communities with physical, social 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.

5.3 So, what does this tell us?

Village Halls are the last community asset in many of the South Ham's rural locations. With the closure of village shops, post offices, pubs and withdrawal of the mobile library service, 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 can no longer survive. At a time when loneliness is rife in our society, the South Ham's Village Halls really are vital to the mental wellbeing of many in our rural communities, particularly as populations age and an increasing number of people live on their own.

5.4 Recommendations

1. Our Village Halls need training and support to continue their current offer, building and adapting for the future.
2. They need support in providing those lost services to their community.
3. Hall committees need help in engagement 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 advice sessions.

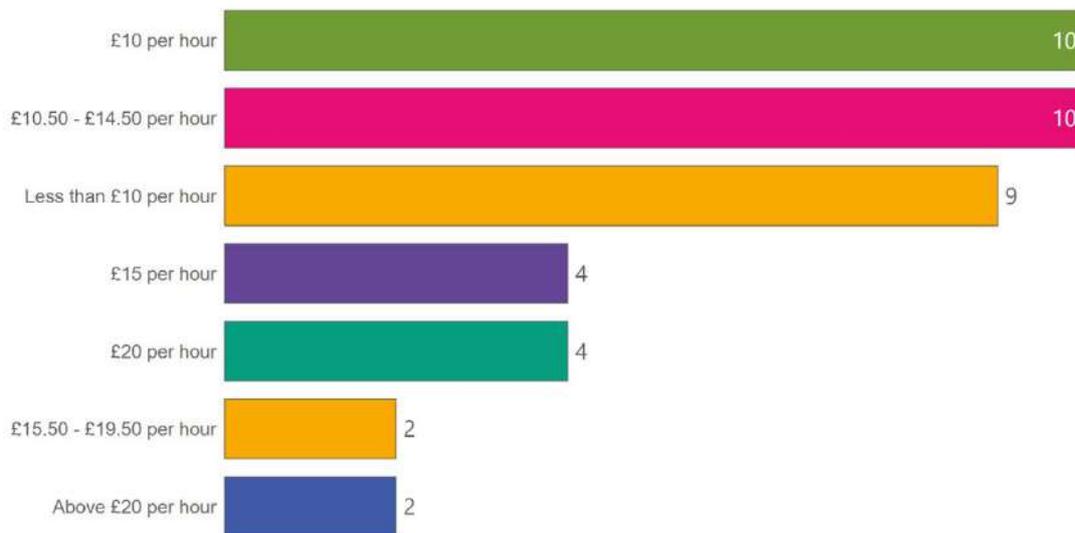
6. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

6.1 Key findings

23% of South Ham’s 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.

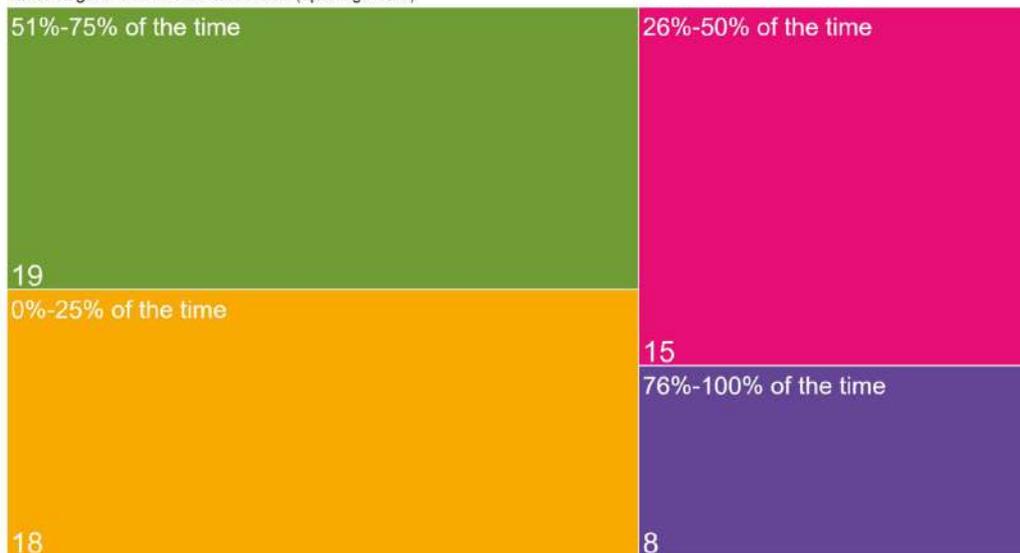
71% of Village Halls in the South Hams charge less than £15 an hour to hire their Hall.

Cost to book main hall



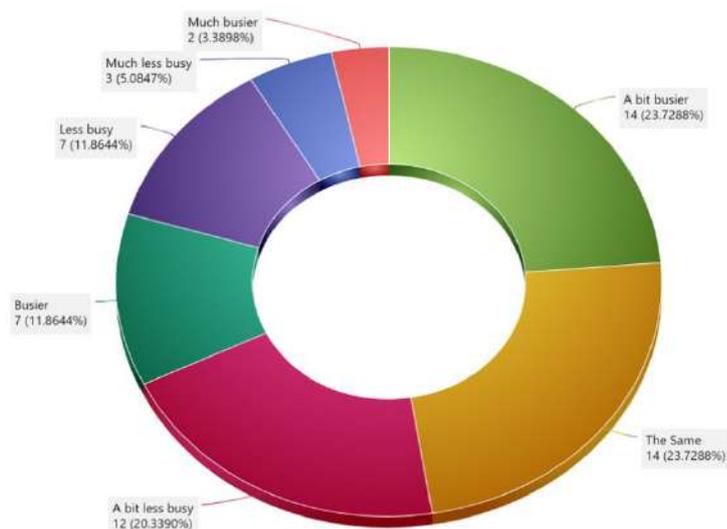
55% of Village Halls in the South Hams are booked for less than 50% of the time despite hall committees being keen to take on more bookings. This demonstrates that hall committees need help to promote their community assets, perhaps attracting bookings from outside their immediate locality.

Percentage of time is the hall booked (opening hours)



37% of South Ham’s Village Halls are less busy than pre-Covid. 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.

Hall use compared to pre-covid



15% of South Ham’s 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.

3% of Village Halls in the South Hams 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 funds criteria) but to be successful they need volunteers with the right skill set and capacity to research and correctly complete the necessary applications. Halls with an energised, well skilled committee are much more likely to apply for grant funding than a hall committee that feel like they’re struggling with the day-to-day administration of their community asset.

12% of Halls in the South Hams expressed significant concerns about their future financial sustainability.

Confidence levels re future sustainability:

32% were confident in their financial sustainability. This is partly due to covid funding providing a financial buffer, something that many halls have never experienced before.

20% were neither confident nor unconfident.

12% were worried 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 increase without a similar increase in revenue).

6.2 Evaluation of key findings

The following analysis is taken from the newly established audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that South Ham's Village Halls rely heavily on bookings for their income. 37% of South Ham's Village Halls have not returned to pre-Covid levels of activity and their confidence in financial sustainability is skewed by Covid funding (audits started in November 2022).

- Village Halls in the South Hams are currently significantly underused. These community assets need bookings to remain solvent, but most halls sit empty for the majority of the time.
- This underuse means that we have a real opportunity to shape the future use of these community assets. By enabling Village Halls to provide a space for community healthcare and other community services that our rural communities find 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.
- 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) but the financial outlay is often too high and access to funding and specialist advice and support is very restricted.

A minority of Village Halls across Devon have a diverse range of ways to generate revenue including:

- 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 for the Village Hall can take away from the pleasure of bringing people together.

50% 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 halls attending from across Devon. Attendees wanted help to 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:

“The last two years have been atypical, and we have applied for more grants. Times have changed now and with the prices rising we are thinking of other ways of fundraising to fund major expenditure in the future.”

“Most of our incomes from bookings, odds and ends from fundraising.”

“We really need to extend the parking area- we have the space available and planning permission and part of the funding (from new development offset) but we have to raise the rest.”

“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.”

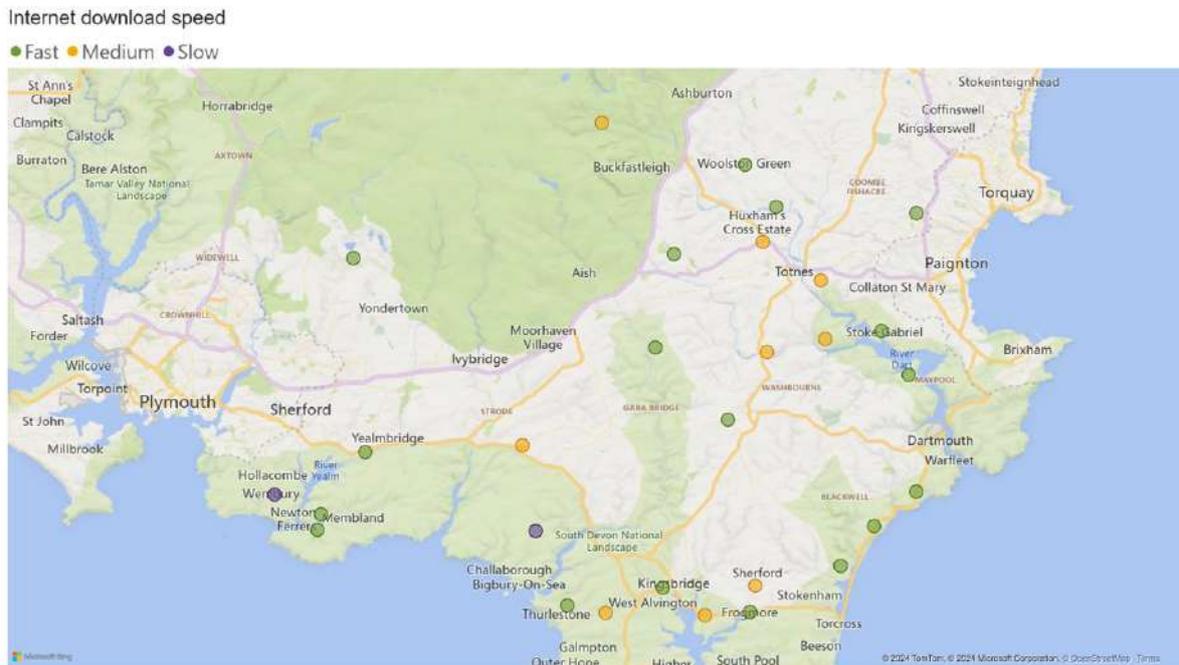
6.3 So, what does this tell us?

The Financial sustainability of South Ham’s Village Halls is a varied picture. Many are struggling to make the material changes that their buildings require and an over reliance on bookings for their income means that Halls are often only just surviving financially. Significant Covid 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.

6.4 Recommendations

- 1. South Ham’s Village Halls need a system wide funding approach that includes consistent grants including capital funds to remain sustainable in the long term.**
- 2. Village Halls in the South Hams also need a county-wide funded infrastructure support service including training in grant applications, fundraising, diversifying income streams and marketing their halls in a digital age.**

The map below shows Village Halls in the South Hams that have internet access. The red dots show where the download speed is slow. A good download speed refers to how quickly you receive information online and is needed for video calls, streaming films etc.



48% of the South Hams Village Halls access their Broadband via copper cables (ADSL) with **9%** using a fixed wireless network. A fixed wireless network is faster and more reliable than ADSL.

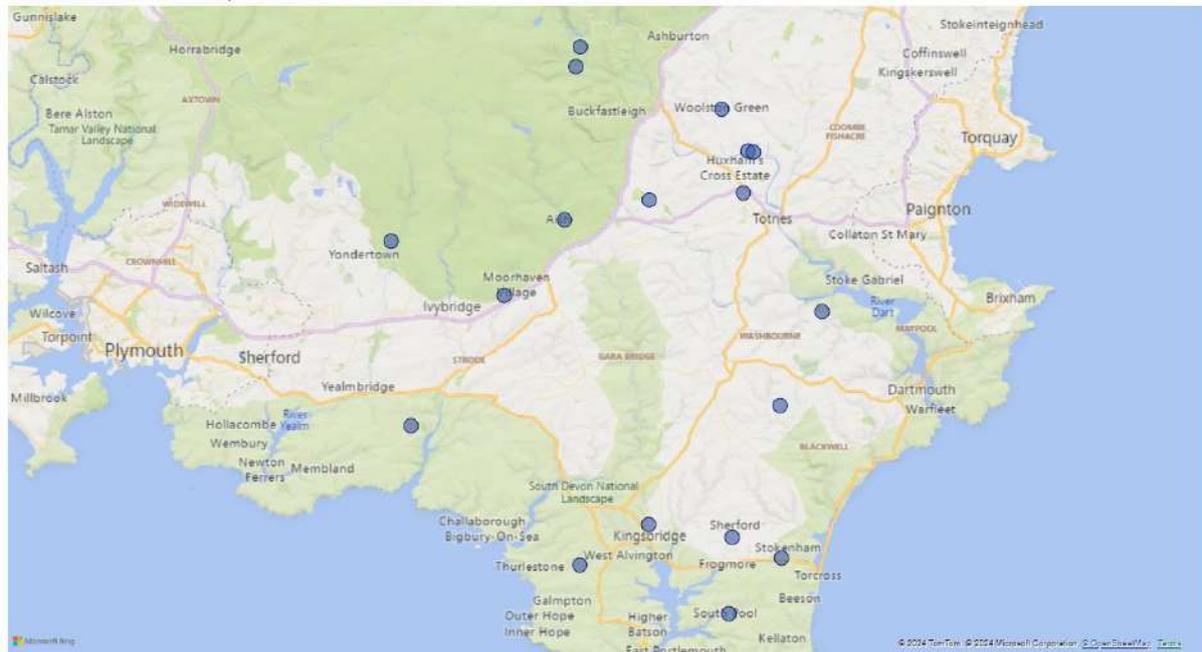
Type of Broadband



62% of Halls in the South Hams with Broadband have a fast upload speed. This refers to how quickly the broadband allows data transmission. A fast upload speed is needed for

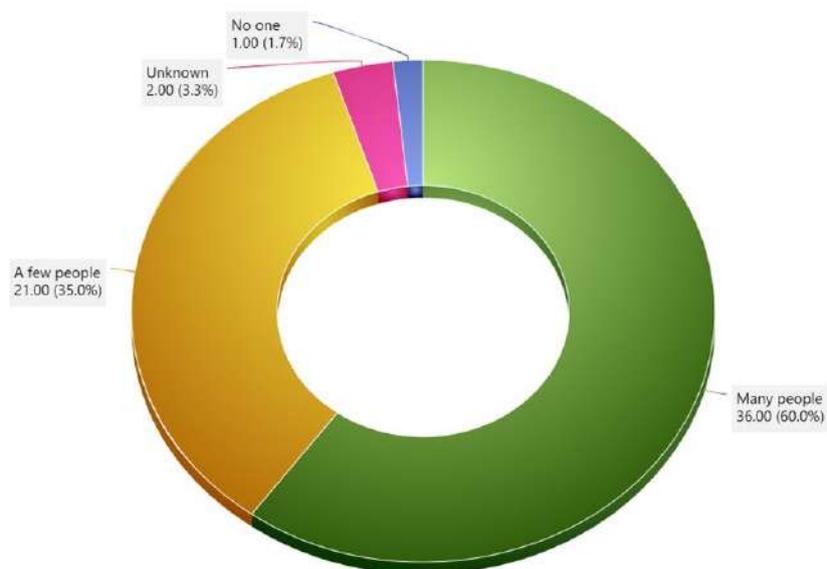
The map below shows the location of halls in the South Hams with poor mobile reception. Few halls have landlines as the halls are often unoccupied, so mobile reception is really important.

Halls whose mobile reception does not work well

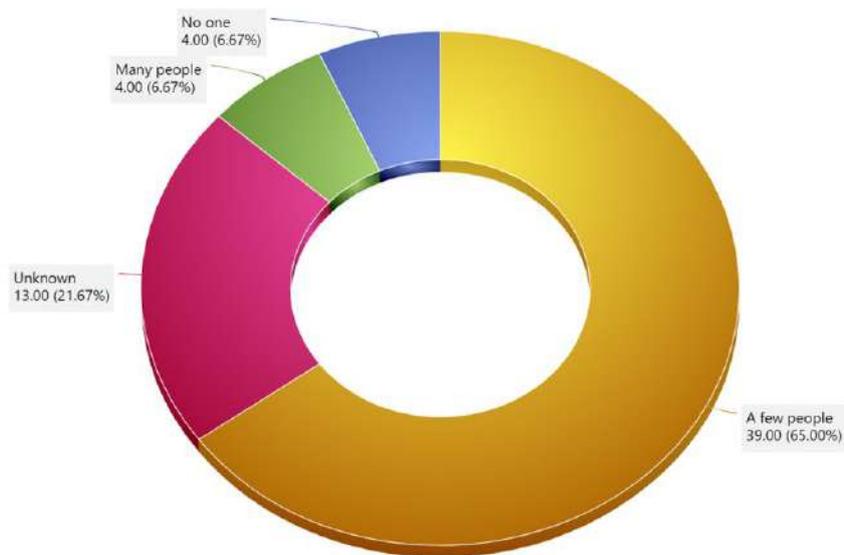


2% of South Hams Village Hall Committees struggle with digital skills. This means that a lack of basic IT skills is holding some halls back from advertising their events on social media and potentially reducing their revenue from bookings. These halls may be unable to maintain a web presence, putting them at a disadvantage in this digital age.

Adequate digital skills



Excellent digital skills



7.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that South Hams Village Halls suffer from poor connectivity and committee digital skill levels. The fact that just 8% of Village Halls in the South Hams have digital devices demonstrates that technology just hasn't been a priority. Mobile reception is also a problem for many of South Hams Village Halls, leaving them isolated and often unattractive to young people.

It's important for Village Halls to offer people digital connectivity:

"With the new Wi-Fi we aim to attract new groups eg computer /IT based groups, working from home, film clubs using the hall now we have Wi-Fi."

Digital skills and therefore digital confidence are lacking in many hall committees. Wouldn't it be great for Village Halls to offer digital upskilling to help those in our communities that are digitally excluded?

"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."

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

"Would be interested in setting up a local Village Hall group to support each other, help advertise events, help with funding and writing the policies etc."

"We need help with marketing and changing the booking system."

"We'd like help finding trustees and a new booking system."

7.3 So, what does this tell us?

Digital connectivity in South Hams Village Halls is 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. There are a lot of good ideas and intentions, but lack of good connectivity currently make some of these impossible.

7.4 Recommendations

- 1. Greater access to reasonably priced and reliable Broadband is needed if our Village Halls are going to remain financially sustainable.**
- 2. There is a training need to upskill hall committees' digital skills to enable them to market their halls online and maintain a web presence. Audiences today expect connectivity whether they're meeting socially or for business. Digitally connected Village Halls can be community hubs for a wide range of activities and services.**

8. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

8.1 Key Findings

Village Halls in the South Hams offer an incredible range of activities and opportunities for people to share time together. Sports, 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 residents what they want/need but knowing exactly what that is can be a stumbling block. Accessibility can be an issue for our halls and was welcomed as part of the audit process. Simple changes can make a big difference to people with specific needs or mobility issues.

80% of the South Hams Village Halls have not had an accessibility audit. This is probably due to the cost implications, but it does mean that vulnerable members of society may be missing out on 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 those hardest to reach in our communities.

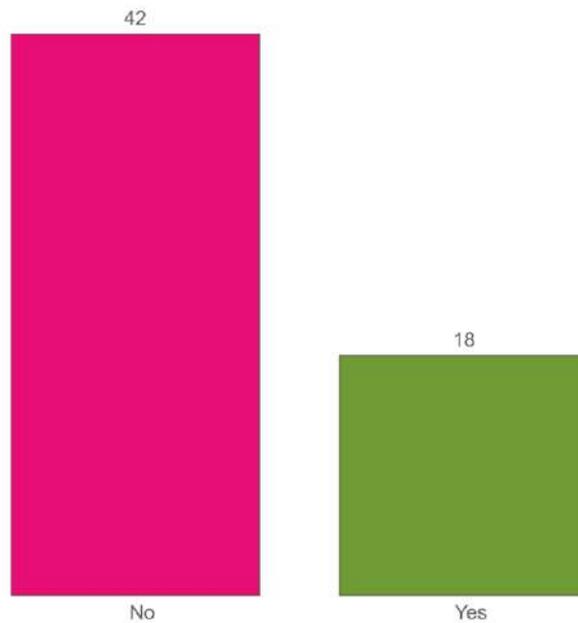
Has the hall undertaken an equality audit



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 push themselves out of the chair. As seen in the graph below, just 30% of South Hams halls could offer this, but many hadn't even considered it.

Is there a choice of furniture including chairs with arms?



Another easy 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 a variety of different activities that could benefit the health and wellbeing of their communities.

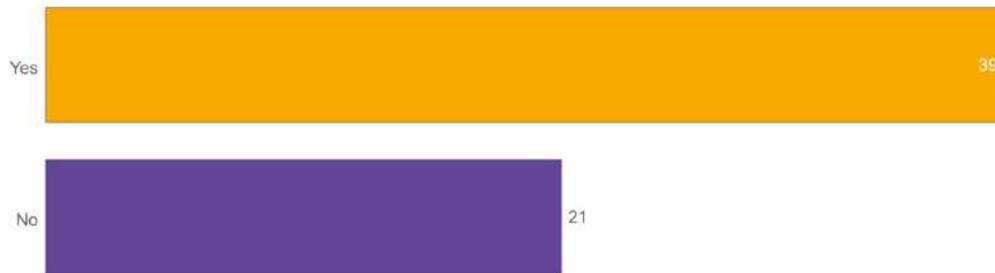
Rural isolation and loneliness contribute negatively to the health and wellbeing of many in our villages and countryside. According to WHO, loneliness carries an equivalent, or even greater, risk of early death as smoking, excessive drinking, physical inactivity, obesity, and air pollution.

The pie chart below shows interest in offering online medical appointments. 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 our community.

65% said they would be interested in offering online medical appointments, giving digitally excluded residents an alternative way to access health services.

A structured approach needs to be taken if halls are going to offer these services. Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action's ran a pilot offering video consultation appointments with primary or secondary care services where hubs provided a device, Wi-Fi and a private, COVID compliant space. This pilot recognised the importance of having regular appointment sessions, so that people knew what was available when.

Halls interested in providing online medical appointments



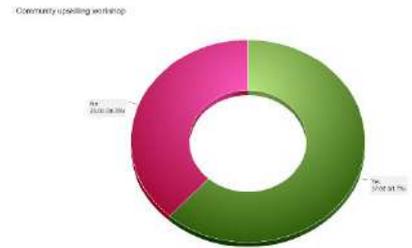
As the bar chart below demonstrates, access to healthcare varies across the South Hams with **57%** reporting that healthcare was moderately accessible. In areas where it's difficult to see community health practitioners or access primary and secondary healthcare professionals, enabling online appointments in a local Village Hall could be a real asset to both healthcare providers and local people.

What is the hall's perception of access to health care

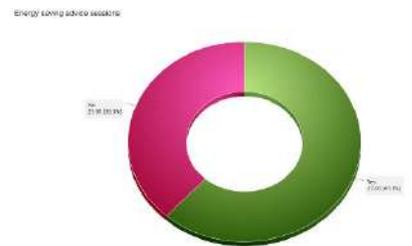


We can see the willingness of hall committees to support their communities in whatever way is needed, but further support is needed to enable this to happen:

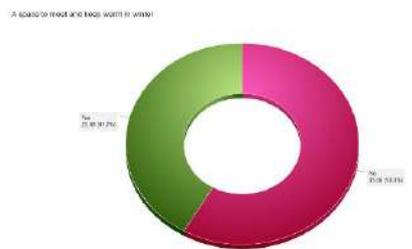
62% of halls have capacity to offer **community capacity building workshops**



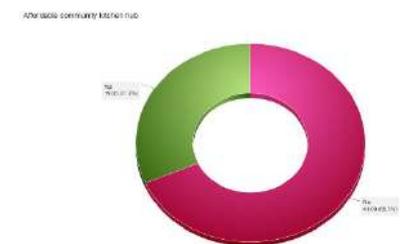
62% of halls have capacity to offer **energy saving advice sessions**



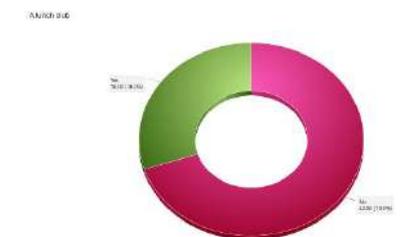
42% of halls have capacity to offer a **warm hub**



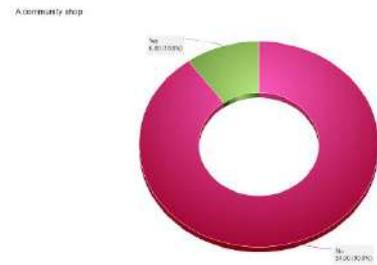
32% can offer a **community kitchen hub**



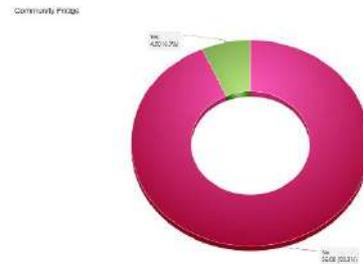
30% of halls have capacity to offer a **lunch club**



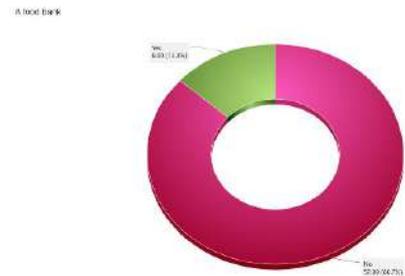
10% of halls have the capacity to offer a **community shop**



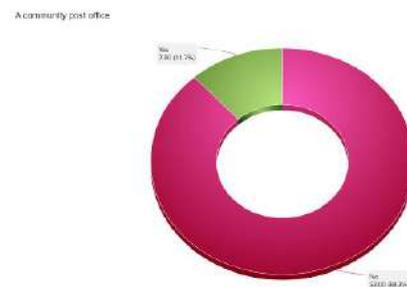
7% of halls have the capacity to offer a **community fridge**



13% of halls have the capacity to offer a **food bank**



12% 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.

47% of South Hams 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.



8.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that Village Halls in the South Hams 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, to some extent, helped society recognise the importance of local amenities and shone a light on the importance of good mental health in particular. Devon's Village Halls already offer links with social prescribers, mental health clinics, and grief support groups.

Some thoughts from audited South Hams Village Halls can be found below:

"We offer variety of regular social and wellbeing activities so there's something for everyone to get involved. IT hub to help elderly with various IT issues."

"We host our district caring and have the community fridge to support the community. Art house put a few free activities for the community."

"We provide winter warmers, funded by South Hams, people who are not mobile and people with dementia come."

8.3 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.

South Hams Village Halls have great potential to be community health hubs, offering access to community health practitioners as well as primary and secondary healthcare practitioners.

8.4 Recommendations

- 1. Halls are keen to provide a venue to support their communities, so external organisations should consider using South Hams Village Halls to offer place-based support where possible, helping hard-to-reach members of society to engage.**
- 2. Village Halls need advice and funding to make their buildings more accessible so all members of the community can engage with their Village Hall.**
- 3. Village Halls are ideally placed to become rural health hubs. Reducing rural health inequalities, supporting the health prevention agenda and providing community led place-based access to health and care services.**

9. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

9.1 Key Findings

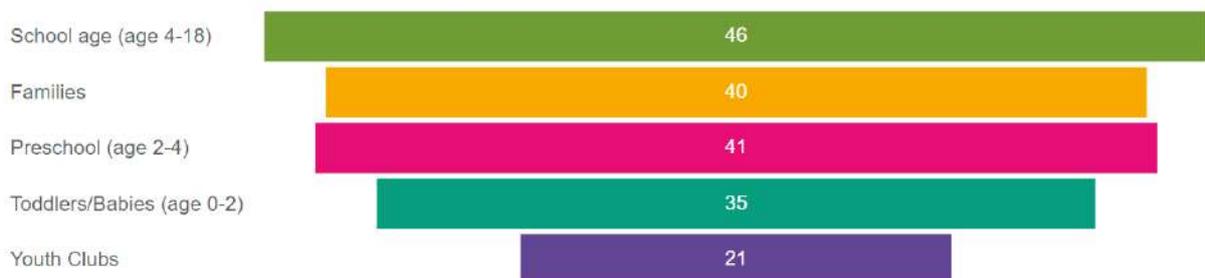
Village Halls in the South Hams provide many activities and support groups for children, young people and families. Some halls provide their preschool with a venue and others support their local school. Some halls have said they would like to attract a younger audience, but at times struggle to do so. 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.

58% of South Hams halls have provision for babies and toddlers, **68%** for preschool children and **67%** for families.

77% of halls have provision for school aged children and **35%** offer youth clubs.

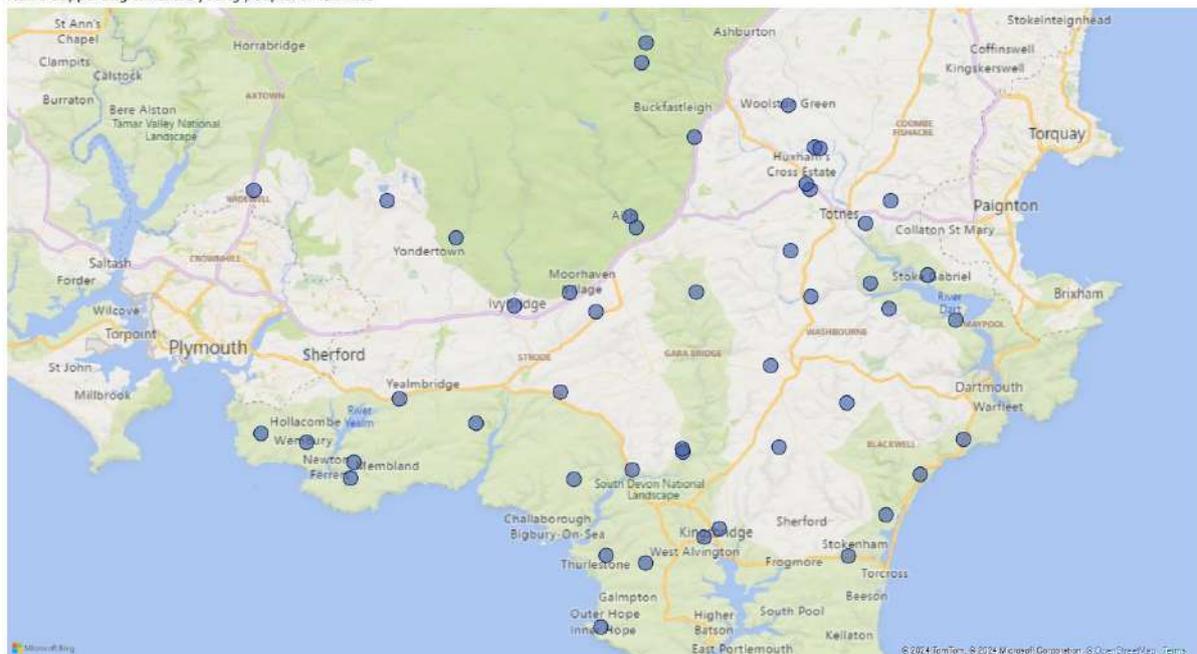
The bar charts below show the percentage of halls that offer children and young people's activities by demographic. Youth clubs are an area for potential growth and anecdotally, a section of the community that halls are keen to support.

Halls providing service to children, young people, or families



The map below shows the wide geographical spread of activities that halls across the South Hams offer children, young people or families.

Hall's supporting children, young people, or families



9.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that Village Halls in the South Hams provide a variety of activities for children and young people, but they also recognise and aspire to do more, particularly for teenagers.

South Hams Halls would like to have a younger demographic enjoying their facilities.

“Not many young people living in the village but hoping the new table tennis will be attended by them. We put in a new shower room for the local football club every Saturday afternoon but that sadly has stopped now as not enough players, although we hope it will come back at some point.”

“Would like to involve some of the younger families but can be difficult as they work during the day.”

“Trying to attract wider younger audience to the hall. For example by making it feel cosier and expanding types of activities hosted.”

A minority of South Hams Halls are used by their local preschools and schools.

“Our hall is used by preschool breakfast and after school club.”

“The hall hosts preschool, toddlers, breakfast club, after school club and preschool meetings.”

“The hall is used for school productions and school sports groups.”

“At the moment, booked up a lot of time with the Forest School.”

“The school use the playing field which belongs to the hall.”

Village Halls in the South Hams recognise that teenagers may not be well served by their halls.

“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.”

“Friday and Saturday nights are underused, would like activities for youth.”

Our Halls support parents by providing local activities and groups for children and young people to be part of.

“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.”

9.3 So, what does this tell us?

South Hams Village Halls recognise that our children and young people need to be provided for in their 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 other local volunteer support, it is achievable.

9.4 Recommendations

1. South Hams Halls would benefit from youth work support to enable them to give their local young people access to age-appropriate entertainment.
2. Hall committees could be supported in public consultation to establish what their communities want their Village Hall to offer.
3. 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 being mini link hubs or spaces for outreach. As Family Hubs don't require a referral, anyone can access the services. Family Hubs are community based and needs led, so Village Halls could provide that network of services in an easily accessible location.

10. PLACE BASED COLLABORATION

10.1 Key Findings

Collaboration, where organisations use Village Halls in the South Hams 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.

South Hams halls are currently used for district caring, Art House and leg ulcer clinics, care company training and exams, Marie Curie meetings and were of course invaluable during covid as vaccination centres.

Parish Councils, South Hams District Council, the Post Office, community shops and Library Services use Village Halls as central locations.

Village Halls in the South Hams are used for teachings sessions such as First Aid, Teaching children with learning difficulties, Teaching English to Ukrainians, Home education groups and School/Preschool.

10.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

As the above list of services demonstrates, place-based collaboration is happening in South Hams Village Halls. Unfortunately, it tends to be informal, irregular and relationship based with only **8%** of halls offering community healthcare and just **5%** offering Carers Groups/Clubs. These are only limited examples of local partnership & collaboration. It isn't currently seen as the norm for our Village Halls, which is a missed opportunity.

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that although some collaboration is taking place in South Hams halls, it's limited and could be much more effective if a more consistent approach was adopted.

10.3 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.

10.4 Recommendations

1. Access to reasonably priced and good quality Broadband will help South Hams halls to attract business bookings.
2. 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 Community Connectors, funded centrally with a focus on growing place-based collaboration 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 hard to reach in our communities.
3. As mentioned in section 9 above, Village Halls are ideal locations for Family Hubs, making place-based collaboration a smart choice for service users and providers.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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

11.1 Key Findings

24% of South Hams Village Halls interested in getting solar panels.

18% of halls openly stated that they can't improve their environmental sustainability due to lack of funding.

50% of committees already have or are currently retrofitting their halls to be more environmentally sustainable.

2% of 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."

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

Getting quotes and tradesmen can also be an issue:

"Interested in solar panels and have 2 quotes which are quite different to each other."

In a minority of halls, planning/listed building consent is difficult:

"Looking into solar and ground source heat pump but expecting challenges to solar progress due to grade I history and site."

Other challenges that South Hams Village Halls face:

"Have looked at having solar panels but roof is wrong angle."

"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."

"Thought about vehicle charging points but too complicated."

Despite some challenges, halls are planning the following environmental improvements:

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

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

11.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

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

11.3 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.

11.4 Recommendations

1. Village Hall committees in the South Hams need training/support to conduct energy audits on their halls, so that the right environmental improvements for their building can be carried out.
2. Halls need support with topics such as insurance, listed building consent and Electric Vehicle charge points from a neutral source.
3. For South Hams Village Halls to become more environmentally sustainable, they need accessible funding.

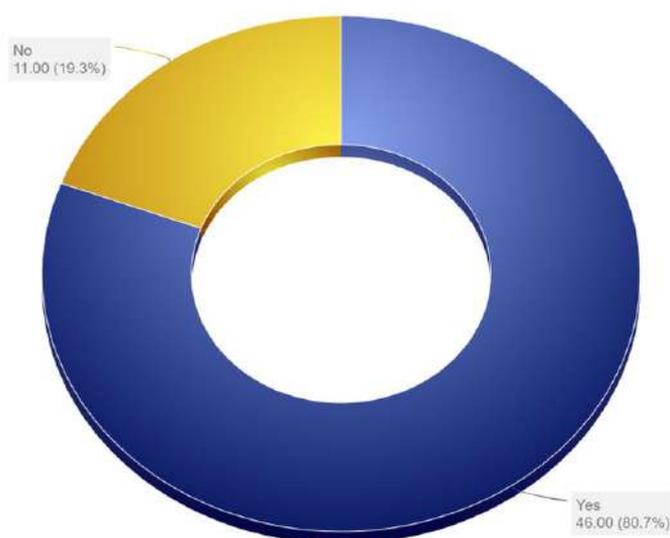
12. FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

The challenges that halls face are wide ranging but there are a number of common themes that affect many of these community assets. Many halls are still trying to find their way in the post covid era, where peoples behaviours have changed and community cohesion in certain respects seems to have lessened.

12.1 Key Findings

81% of halls have difficulties recruiting new committee members. This makes running events and even the day-to-day management of the hall hard work.

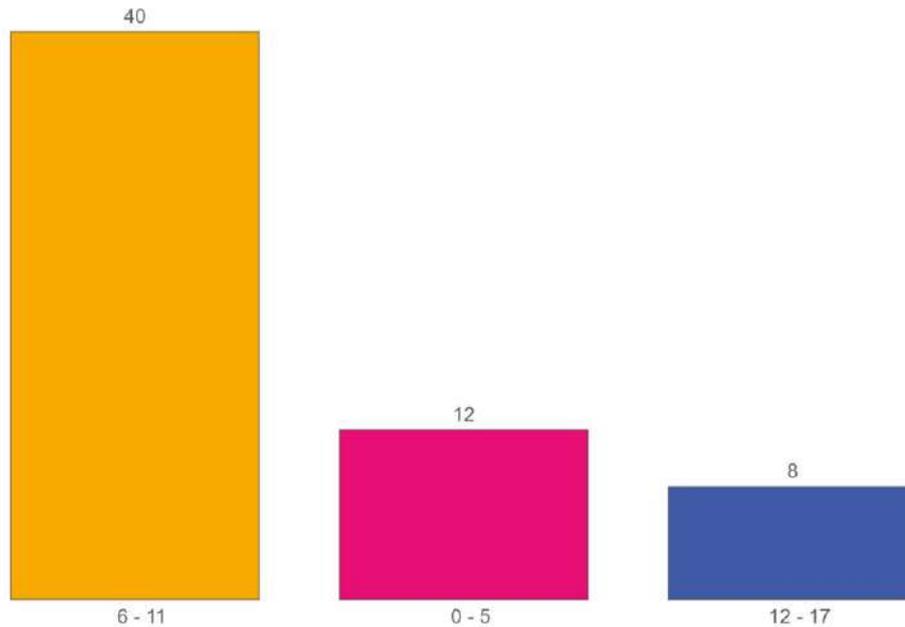
Does the hall have difficulties recruiting new committee members



20% of halls have 0-5 volunteers which is a low number even for a very small Village Hall.

The bar chart below shows the number of volunteers.

Number of committee members



Quotes referring to these difficulties can be found below:

“We are just ticking over at the moment; for more bookings and activities we need more helpers.”

“No wants to be a chair, have been without chair for 6 years, as it's seen as too much commitment.”

Some Hall Committees are finding that running their halls with so few volunteers is just too much:

“We are desperate for more volunteers two of us do most of everything and we are getting on in life.

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 main building was built in c.1960's; there are issues with the roof (holes, asbestos etc) and the building is very 'tired'.”

Rising energy costs have contributed to halls financial struggles:

“Times have changed now and with the prices rising we are thinking of other ways of fundraising to fund major expenditure in the future.”

Societal changes since covid create challenges for our halls:

“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.”

Lack of bookings is a challenge for South Hams Village Halls:

“For more bookings and activities we need more helpers.”

12.2 Evaluation of Key Findings

The following analysis is taken from the audit findings data bank. This demonstrates that most halls have difficulty recruiting trustees / volunteers / committee members. Common themes are difficulty in recruiting younger trustees as they don't have the time, no interest in becoming a trustee, concerns over responsibilities, some people volunteer for all committees in the village, trustees are getting older and want to step down.

Maintaining older buildings, particularly making them more energy efficient is problematic without funding support. Rising energy costs and less bookings than halls would like, creates a challenging financial situation.

12.3 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 (**23%** 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 is unachievable.

12.4 Recommendations

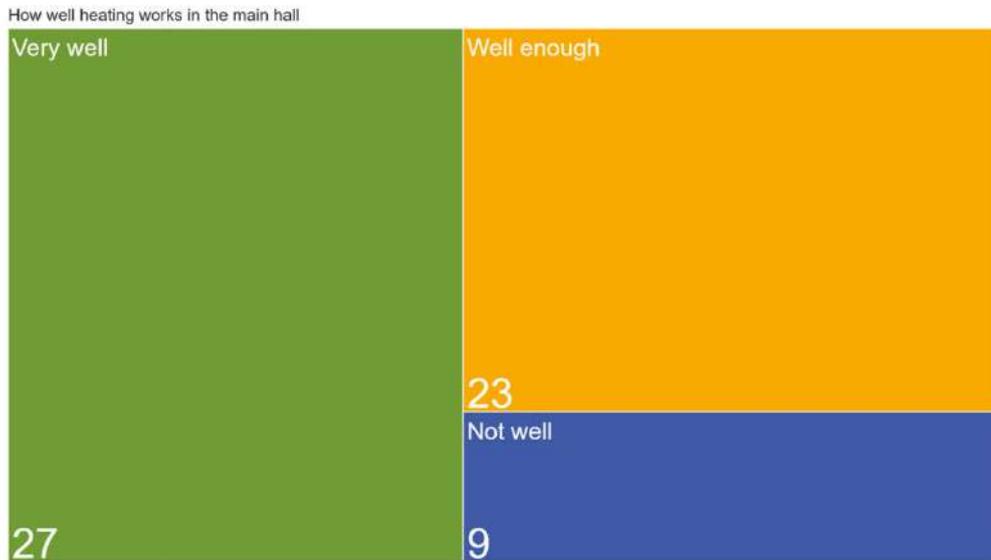
1. Village Hall Committees need to understand what their communities want from their Village Hall. The way society accesses entertainment is very different today, we can binge watch TV, game remotely with people we've never met and choose thousands of films from the comfort of our armchair. These changes mean that Village Halls need to reassess what they offer their communities, and they need support to poll local opinion.
2. Training in volunteer recruitment and succession planning would also be beneficial, but a change of Village Hall activities may bring forward new volunteers.
3. Consistent 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.
4. A resourced county-wide network of Rural Community Connectors would provide specialist capacity building, training and support.

13. IS THE HALL FIT FOR PURPOSE?

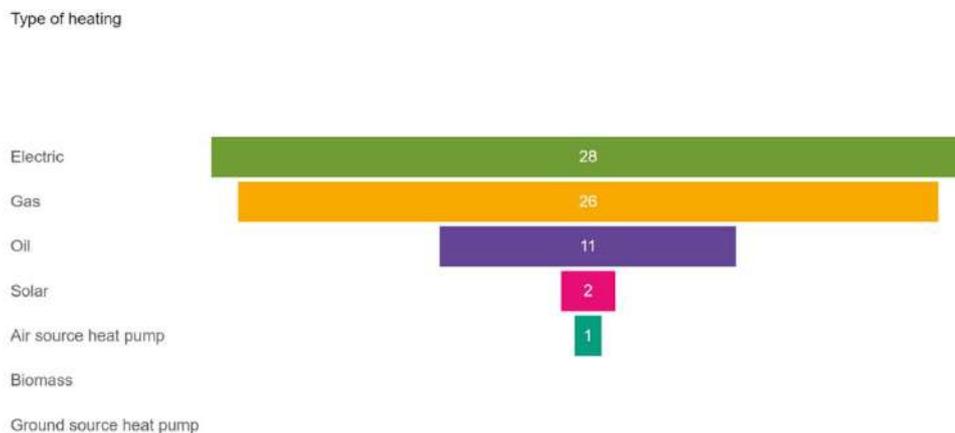
As with any building a Village Hall has a job to do. We want to ascertain if Village Halls (in general) can offer their communities what they need. This encompasses both the building (internally and externally) and its governance.

13.1 Key Findings

30% of halls plan to improve heating/insulation. These improvements help the cost of heating halls, but also help the environment.



The graph below demonstrate that, South Hams Village Halls rely quite heavily on electricity (41%), gas (38%) and oil (16%) for their heating systems. Interestingly solar (3%) and air source heat pumps (1%) 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.



6% of South Hams halls without Wi-Fi are planning to install it.

50% 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.

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

“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.”

“The loo inside is very narrow so it could be an option to convert the outside loo into an accessible one but would need some funding for that.”

“Would like information regarding funding for accessible toilets.”

“There are steps up to the toilet, also there is a flight of outdoor steps up to the upper room that needs addressing.”

A lack of volunteers (see section 12 Challenges that Halls face) 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”.

“Most people are retired and getting elderly, whilst they are keen to help, there are limits to what can be expected of them. Second homeowners do come along to events when they are in the village, but they are away the majority of the time. There not enough young people around to help, as houses are not affordable to most, and the majority of properties that could be rented to families are holiday lets.”

“Younger members of community time poor. Second home owners not present often enough. Lack of commitment to regular volunteering. Bureaucracy associated with committee membership and role of trustees more involved.”

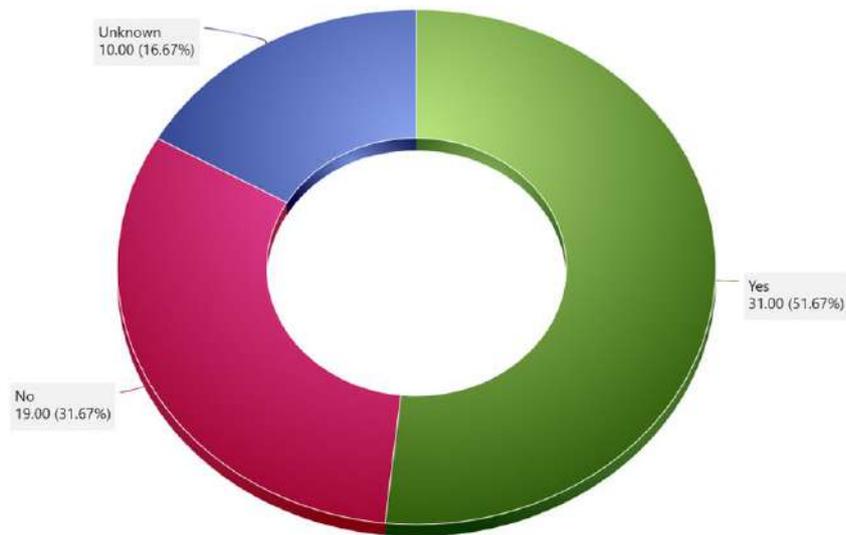
“Just had our AGM. People don't want to take it on, a battle to recruit younger committee members.”

“All the events are very well attended but we need more assistance with organising and the background running of the hall.”

“Yes. The village has changed, the old people are dying off. I don't think there is a sense of community anymore. People want everything doing for them and don't want to commit to doing anything themselves. Building is a deterrent.”

Good governance is an important aspect in halls being fit for purpose. As the bar chart below demonstrates, **52%** of South Hams Village Hall committee members have an up-to-date copy of their governing document, enabling them to understand what their roles and responsibilities are.

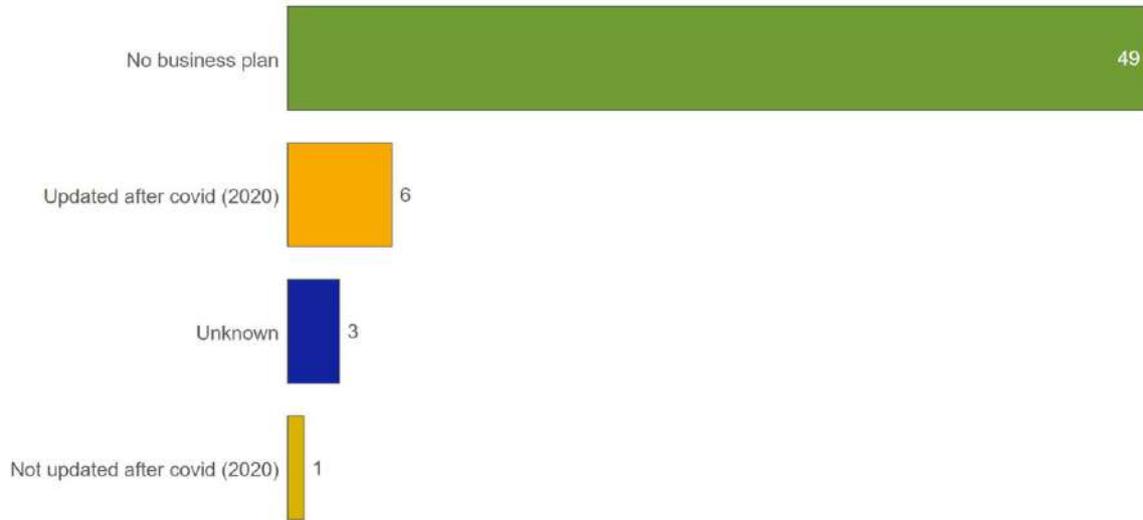
Do all committee members have an up-to-date copy of the governing document?



According to the 2004 Charity Commission Village Halls and Community Centres Report: *“The charities that thrive are those in which trustees are pro-active 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 **10%** of halls have an up-to-date business plan and **2%** have a business plan that needs to be updated. **83%** don't have a business plan, suggesting that some training/support is needed to help these committees to focus on the hall's future sustainability.

Does the hall have a business plan and has it been updated post Covid?



The bar chart below show which policies Village Halls have. Just **28%** of halls have a Safeguarding policy and **20%** have a Complaints policy.

Policies in place



13.2 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 their 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 audit findings 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.

13.3 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 your 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.

13.4 Recommendations

1. **Funding is needed for structural and environmental improvements.**
2. **Training/support would be valuable for increasing an understanding of accessibility needs.**
3. **Further training support is also needed to help committees to create/update their governance.**

14. IN CONCLUSION

This report is drawn from data collected during 61 face- to- face Village Halls Audits in the South Hams conducted by Devon Communities Together Community Buildings Team between September 2022 and March 2024.

The quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate how vital South Hams 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 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 your activity much easier. The Asset Map was created from the audit data and will be maintained initially through any changes being communicated to DCT for amendment. The Village Hall Asset Map can be seen [here](#).

Building Name	Website	Booking clerk's email	Booking clerk's phone number	Postcode
Yelverton War Memorial Recreation Field And Village Hall Trust	https://yelvertonvillagehall.co.uk/	contact@yelvertonvillagehall.co.uk		PL206AL
Yarnscombe Victory Hall,	https://www.yarnscombevillagehall.co.uk/	victoryhall.yarnscombe@gmail.com	01805 624834	EX31 3LW
Woolacombe Village Hall	https://www.woolacombevillagehall.co.uk/	info@woolacombevillagehall.co.uk		EX34 7BT
Mortehoe Village Hall	https://www.woolacombetourism.co.uk/directory/mortehoe-village-hall		01271 870007	EX34 7ED

The live link to The Village Hall Asset Map can be found here <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/projects/village-halls-community-buildings-audit>

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 clusters provides real peer support. DCT has helped to create clusters in the past, but the audit has reminded us how important that listening ear and supportive discussion can be. DCT will now be supporting new Village Hall 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 South Hams halls are to their communities and what a wide range of activities and support networks can be accessed through your doors.

Charlotte Squire

Project Manager

June 2024