

North Devon

Village Halls Audit Analysis Report

November 2024



Funded by
UK Government

CONTENTS

Key Recommendations	3
Introduction	4
Context	4
Methodology	7
Key Audit Findings	8
Key Functions of Village Halls	9
Financial Sustainability	12
Digital Connectivity	17
Health and Wellbeing	20
Children and Young People	24
Place Based Collaboration	27
Environmental Sustainability	29
Future Sustainability	31
Is the Hall fit for purpose?	35
Conclusion	40

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

North 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 North 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

Through our research, we identified **52** Village Halls in North Devon; **43** North Devon Village Halls participated in the audit.

13% of the audited halls are located in North Devon and this report draws on the data from the 43 Village Halls audited.

63% of the 43 audited North Devon Village Halls are members of DCT enjoying the many benefits, including: free/discounts on training sessions, support with funding applications, model policies and regular newsletters, including up to date information and funding opportunities. This is 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>



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:

3) METHODOLOGY

Between September 2022 and March 2024 DCT carried out **43** Village Hall Audits in North Devon, this equates to **82%** of all of North Devon's Village 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

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 were fully closed.

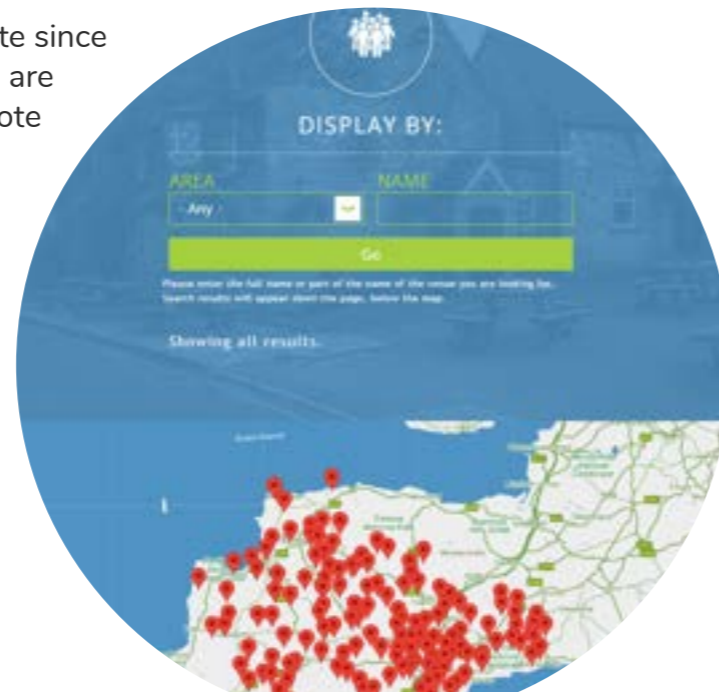
A total number of 40 out of 87 respondents had applied for funding, 33 had been successful/awarded grants from diverse sources.

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



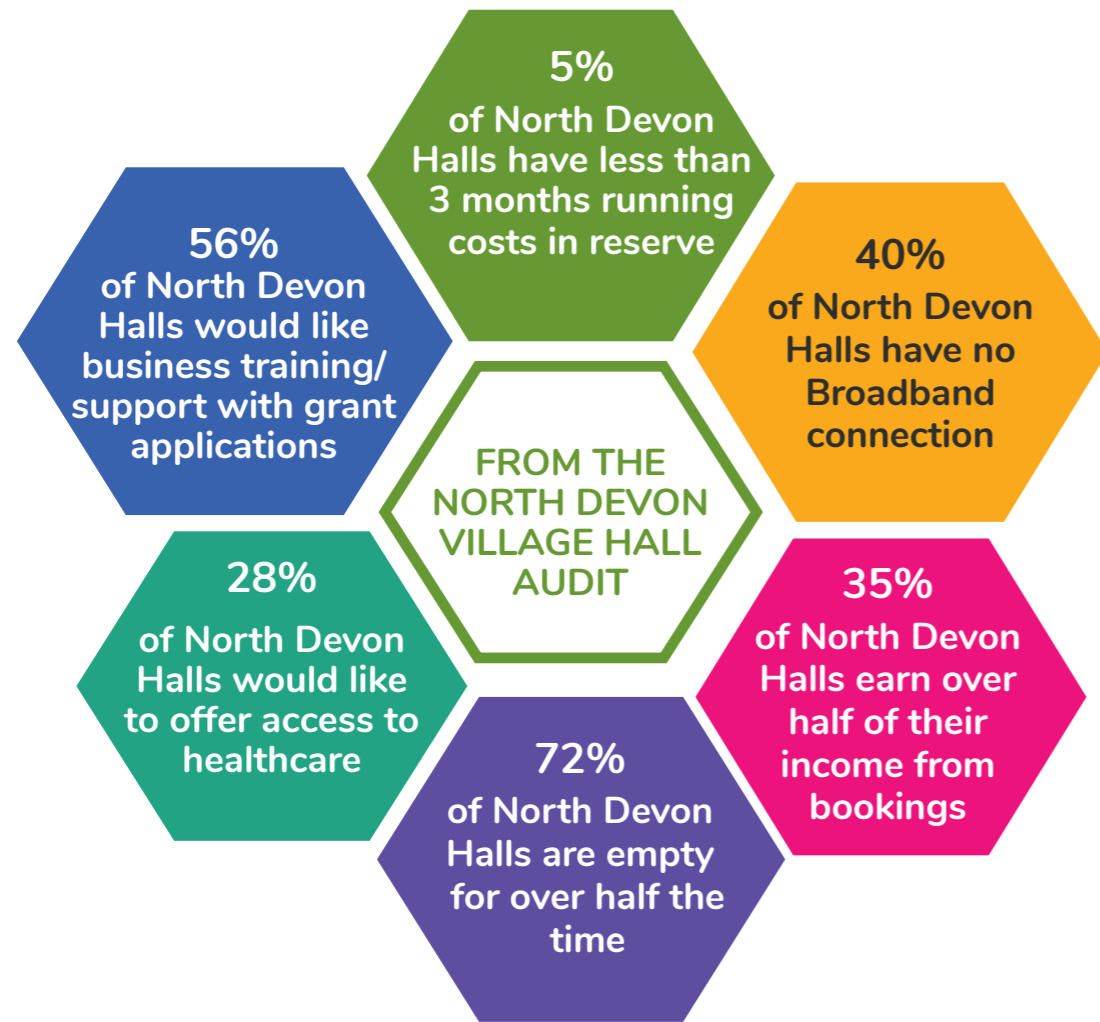
The audit was co-designed with a wide range of stakeholders and was promoted via the DCT website, social media channels, local press, radio and television. The data gathered is both qualitative and quantitative, providing a clear picture of the status of North Devon's Village Halls.

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 obtain 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



9 North Devon Village Halls chose not to engage with the audit. Reasons given included 'having a difficult time and unable to commit' or 'the trustees decided they weren't interested' and others declined without providing a reason. 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 North 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 They need support in providing those lost services to their community.
- 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

- 56% of North Devon Village Halls provide physical activities
- 49% of halls put on regular social activities
- 21% of halls regularly hold learning opportunities in the form of talks or workshops
- 4% of Village Halls told us they provide a post office or library service
- 9% have a community shop, market, community fridge or food bank



How North Devon Village Halls support their communities and aim for inclusivity and accessibility :

“Venue for community get togethers.”

“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. We keep the prices of the coffee morning and the film night quite low because we don't want to price anyone out of coming. There are some people that come to the film night who don't come to anything else because they probably can't afford to go anywhere else.”

North Devon Village Halls support their community's health and wellbeing:

“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.”

Village Halls are designated places of safety in an emergency:

37% of North 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 the newly created Devon Village Hall central data bank. The data demonstrates that North 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 North Devon's 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 can no longer reach rural areas or are no longer accessible. At a time when loneliness is rife in our society, North 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

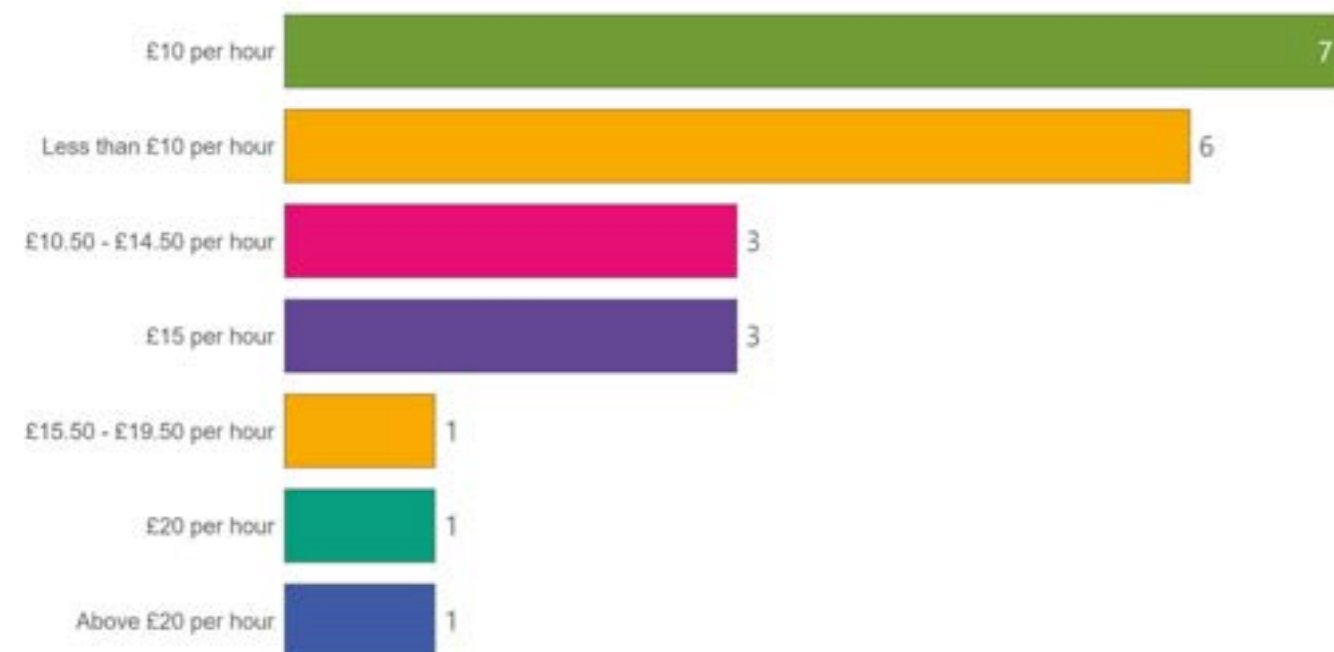
6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5 North Devon's Village Halls require a system wide funding approach that includes consistent grants/investment including capital funds to remain sustainable in the long term.
- 6 Halls in North Devon also require additional capacity in a 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

35% of North Devon'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.

73% of Village Halls in North Devon charge less than £15 an hour to hire their Hall.

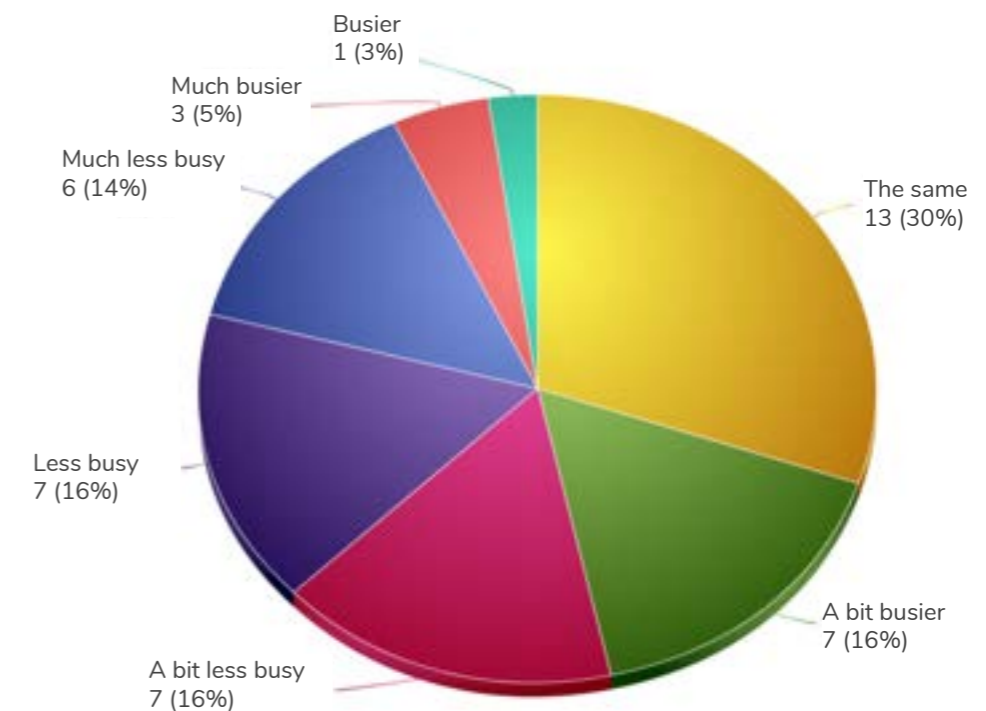


72% of Village Halls in North Devon are booked for less than 50% of the time despite hall committees being keen to take on more bookings. This demonstrates that hall committees need help to promote their offer more widely as the halls have significant potential to host place-based services in rural communities, perhaps attracting bookings from outside their immediate locality. You can see booking levels in the chart below:



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

47% of North Devon's Village Halls are less busy than they were pre-Covid (see chart below). In some cases, behaviours changed over the Covid-19 period, and some halls found that groups folded as the organiser decided they didn't want to carry on. There have 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)

19% of North Devon'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.

47% of North Devon's Village Halls rely on grants for over half of their income. 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:

72% of Halls were confident in their financial sustainability. This is partly due to Covid-19 funding providing a temporary financial buffer, something that many halls have never experienced before and which has now expired.

21% of Halls were neither confident nor unconfident.

5% Halls were worried about their future financial sustainability (they have less than 6 months running costs and no reserves).

(Without Covid-19 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 North 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 funding (audits started in November 2022).

North 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 underuse means that we have a real opportunity to develop the scope and future use of these community assets, by enabling Village Halls to provide a space for remote/telehealth care, local family hubs and community healthcare that our rural residents find more difficult to access.

"The hall's committee members see [the hall] as a great community asset and would like to increase its usage by local residents and beyond, with increased commercial use. Making the hall more attractive is instrumental in achieving this, e.g. by installing Wifi, getting a water filtration system and by making the hall physically more accessible with a ramp and accessible toilets."

"Seeking to gain more weekend bookings; restoring pre-covid fitness type activities; more usage for weddings."

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, North Devon's 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 the financial outlay is often too high and access to funding and specialist advice and support is still very restricted.

"Want the hall to be used and evolve."

"Difficult to find funding. At the moment, there's no roof insulation and we want to up-grade the heating system."

A minority of Village Halls have developed diverse methods of generating 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

56% 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:



“Want a hall that is fit for purpose for the next 50 years. Want to be able to look after all groups. Improve the disabled facilities and have things for the youth. We need funding to be able to do this.”

“Parish council have to fund the balance of running costs.”

“We did the Enterprising Halls workshops. It was really helpful doing this.”

6.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

The financial sustainability of North Devon’s Village Halls is a varied picture. Many are struggling to make the material changes that their buildings require for further sustainability and an over reliance on bookings which means 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.



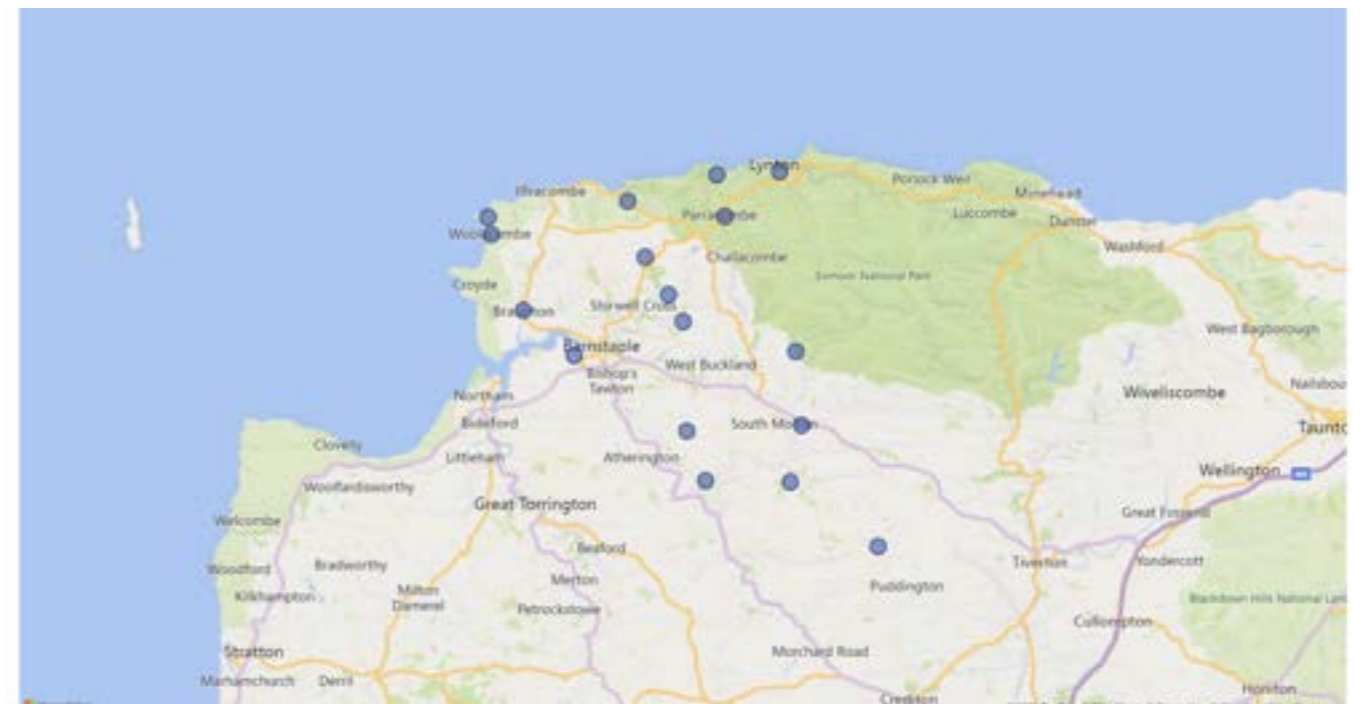
7) DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7 Greater access to reasonably priced and reliable Broadband is needed if 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 and maintain a web presence and to support digital remote outreach services. Audiences today expect connectivity whether they’re meeting socially or for business. Digitally connected Village Halls have huge potential to be community hubs for a wide range of activities and services.

7.2 KEY FINDINGS

40% of Village Halls in North Devon do not have Broadband connectivity (see map below of halls without broadband).



5% of North Devon Village Halls have their own onsite digital devices. This figure shows that technology hasn't been seen as a priority. It may also be due to poor connectivity.

42% of North Devon Village Halls have a sound system, which allows those with hearing disability to enjoy Village Hall events.

33% of Village Halls in North Devon have a projector. This is vital technology for a variety of activities such as meetings, virtual exercise classes and film shows.

2% experience unreliable Broadband signal so they can't rely on connectivity for events or bookings.

5% of North Devon Village Halls access their Broadband via copper cables (ADSL) with **14%** using a fixed wireless network (see full breakdown in the chart below).



35% of North Devon Village Halls have poor mobile phone reception. Few halls have landlines as the halls are often unoccupied, so mobile reception is really important (full results about how well mobile phone reception works is below).



16% of North 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 **5%** of North 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 Village Halls in North Devon, leaving them isolated and often unattractive to young people.

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?

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.

7.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

Digital connectivity in North Devon's 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 and also to better provide remote access to services within their local community. There are a lot of good ideas and intentions, but lack of good connectivity currently make some of these impossible.



8) HEALTH AND WELLBEING

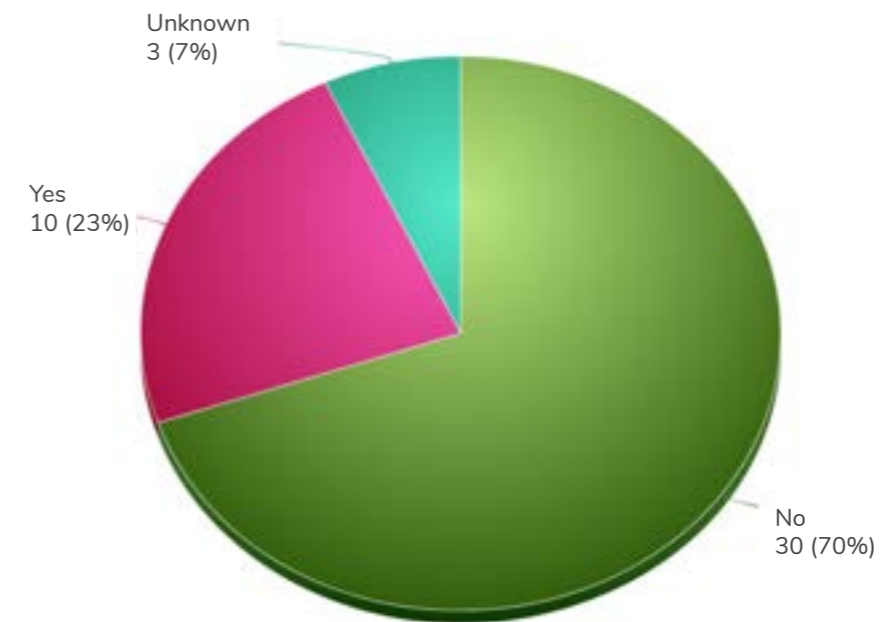
8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9 Halls are keen to provide a venue to support their communities, so external organisations and public sector organisations should consider using North Devon Village Halls to offer place-based support where possible, helping seldom heard members of society to engage and benefit.
- 10 North Devon 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 North Devon 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

North Devon's Village Halls offer an incredible range of activities and opportunities for people to socially interact and engage with their communities. Sports, exercise classes, parent and baby classes, WI meetings, coffee mornings, film clubs, big breakfasts, and young farmers meetings 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.

70% of North Devon's Village Halls have not had a full equality audit (full results in the chart opposite). This is probably 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. **21%** of halls in North Devon 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 Health Organisation, loneliness carries an equivalent, or even greater, risk of early death as smoking, excessive drinking, physical inactivity, obesity, and air pollution.

28% of North 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 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.

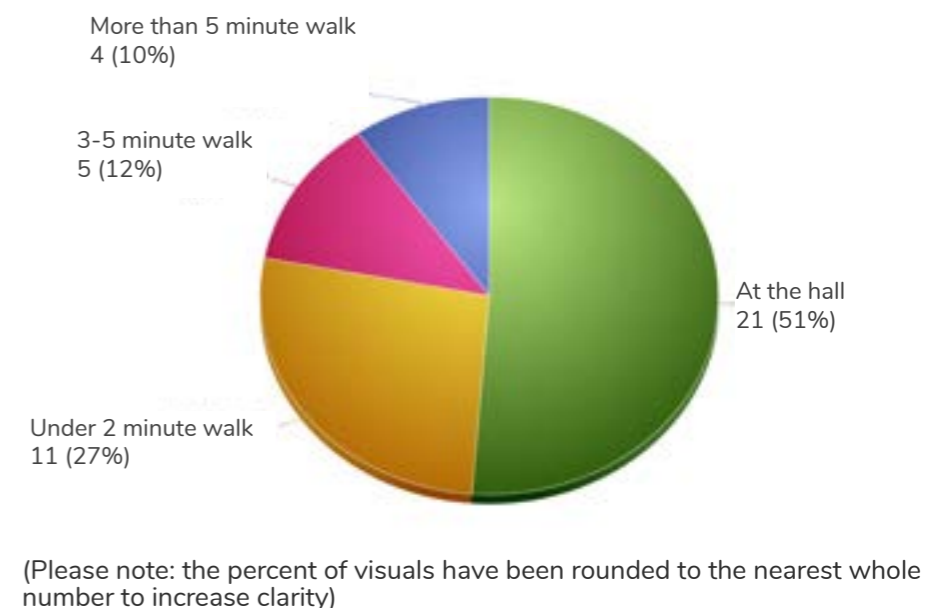
As the chart below demonstrates, access to healthcare varies across the district with **82%** of Halls reporting that healthcare was moderately accessible locally. In areas across Devon where it’s difficult to see community health practitioners or access primary and secondary healthcare professionals, enabling online appointments in a local Village Hall could be a real asset to both healthcare providers and local people.



We can see below the willingness of hall committees to support their communities in whatever way is needed, but further support is needed to enable this to happen. The last few category figures are lower as these services are often available in a nearby location already:

- 35%** of halls have capacity to offer **community upskilling workshops**
- 33%** of halls have capacity to offer **energy saving advice sessions**
- 30%** of halls have capacity to offer a **warm hub**
- 19%** of halls can offer an **affordable community kitchen hub**
- 26%** of halls have capacity to offer a **lunch club**
- 14%** of halls have the capacity to offer a **community fridge**
- 14%** of halls have the capacity to offer a **community post office**
- 9%** of halls have the capacity to offer a **food bank**
- 12%** of halls have the capacity to offer a **community shop**

51% of North 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.



8.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

The following analysis is taken from the Devon Village Hall central data bank. This demonstrates that North 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.

8.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

Village Halls in North Devon, 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.

North 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 North 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

Village Halls in North Devon already provide many activities and support groups for children, young people and families who live in rural and remote communities. Some halls provide their preschool with a venue and others offer their facilities to support their local school. Many North Devon Village Halls have said they would like to attract a younger audience, but at times struggle to do so. This may be 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.

44% of North Devon Village Halls have provision for children during school hours including primary school bookings, preschool, parent baby and toddler groups and holiday clubs.

37% of Village Halls in North Devon have provision for children out of school hours including youth clubs, young farmers, scouts, guides and brownies.

The chart below 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 as a number of halls are used by out of school groups for young people such as Guides and Scouts, Young Farmers, and youth groups.



This map shows the wide geographical spread of activities that halls across North Devon 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 North Devon's Village Halls already provide a variety of activities for children and young people, but there is some recognition of local unmet need and a genuine aspiration to do more for young people and families.

North Devon Village Halls would like to have an increased younger demographic enjoying their facilities. A minority of North Devon Halls are used by their local preschools and schools. Village Halls in North Devon recognise that teenagers may not currently be well served by their halls. Some feedback from what halls would like to offer the younger community can be seen below:

“Would like a children’s club or mothers and babies group.”

“We’d like to attract younger people with appropriate activities.”

“School do PE and are hoping to use it [the hall] more.”

“School art club.”

“School gym and theatre.”

“Would like to attract younger people with appropriate activities.”

“Would like a youth group here, but when the hall closed for months while we were having the hall done, the youth club we had didn’t re-open.”

9.4 SO, WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

North 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 North Devon's Village Halls to attract business bookings.
- 16 Increased training in how to promote Village Halls in North Devon, 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 Village Halls in North Devon 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.

Parish Councils and District Councils use our Village Halls. The Post Office and community shops use North Devon Halls as central locations.

Devon's Village Halls are used by the Commoners Association, Villages in Action, for school meetings as well as a wide and diverse range of community groups and organisations.

One North Devon Village Hall “previously hosted a district nurse/midwife; used to host Compass advice service and used to have a police room upstairs”. Increased collaboration could bring services such as these to local rural areas.

10.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

As the above list of services demonstrates, place-based collaboration is happening in North Devon's Village Halls. Unfortunately, it tends to be informal, irregular and relationship based. These are only limited examples of local partnership & collaboration. 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 North 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 North Devon 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 North 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 North Devon 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 in North Devon 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 North Devon's Village Halls to become more environmentally sustainable, there is a need for strategic and readily accessible funding sources.

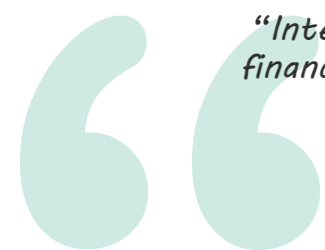
11.2 KEY FINDINGS

33% of North Devon Village Halls are interested in getting solar panels.

58% of North Devon Village Hall committees have already or are planning to retrofit their halls to be more environmentally sustainable. For example, increasing insulation, fitting secondary or double glazing etc.



Unfortunately, finances/funding is often a stumbling block, as well as other eco challenges:



“Interest in insulation but finances make it impractical at present.”

“Hall has looked into an electric car charging station but it is impractical for the location.”

“Interested in solar panels but isn’t possible at the moment due to finance and possible fire risk.”

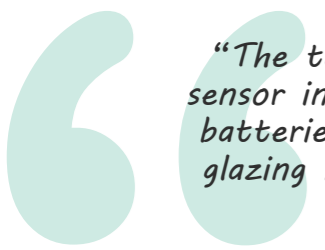
“Looked into solar panels, but would need battery storage as hall mostly used at night.”

“Very draughty building, with an asbestos roof. Has some insulation, but could be further developed.”

“Would love solar panels but haven’t got the funding.”

“Yes...would like to but difficult to find funding.”

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



“The toilets will be replaced with modern efficient sanitary ware, sensor in urinals, low flush loos, water saving taps etc. Solar panels, batteries and air source heat pump planned. Insulation and double glazing has been done...Installing improvements [will] get hire costs down.”

“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. Improving the insulation, lining with sheep wool, use local materials and reuse some of the things we have eg tiles and floor.”

11.3 EVALUATION OF KEY FINDINGS

The following analysis is taken from the Devon Village Hall central data bank. This demonstrates that although most Village Halls in North Devon are keen to improve their environmental credentials, there are often roadblocks that make these improvements difficult. 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 North 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 North Devon 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 Training in volunteer recruitment and succession planning would also be beneficial, but a change of Village Hall activities may bring forward new volunteers.
- 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

67% of North Devon 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.

19% of North Devon 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:



North Devon Halls have voiced their challenges in the examples below. Some Hall Committees are finding that running their halls with so few volunteers is unsustainable:

“It’s getting people to say that they will come on board. It’s time, can’t be bothered, apathy. Because of what we’ve got, if we had an all singing and dancing facility it would be different. People have become more insular since covid. One end of the village doesn’t know what the other end is doing.”

“People say they haven’t got time, they don’t want to commit but are happy to help.”

“Ageing population. And younger busy people working multiple jobs, time poor.”

But there is some positivity from some North Devon Village Halls regarding committee members:

“We just have a good open, non-confrontational group of people and we have good proper discussions, rather than ‘dictatorial or single decision makers’. Not cliques but amenable”.

“I think they did [have challenges], but we have overcome that now. The committee now is more like minded and there wouldn’t be that now. We will have succession planning”.

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 small existing committee does not have resources/energy to advertise [for volunteers]. Plus Hall is in need of renovation before activities like recruiting take place”.

Lack of regular bookings and hall revenue, as well as societal changes since Covid-19, means that some halls in North Devon are struggling financially:

“Feels harder now as the village is not wealthy and are struggling with the cost of living crisis”.

“People have become more selfish and don’t realise what there is to gain from volunteering”.

“If the hall were used more we would consider solar but not at the moment”.

“A lot of local houses are rented and there is no real interest in what is going on”.



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 in North Devon 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 (35% 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?

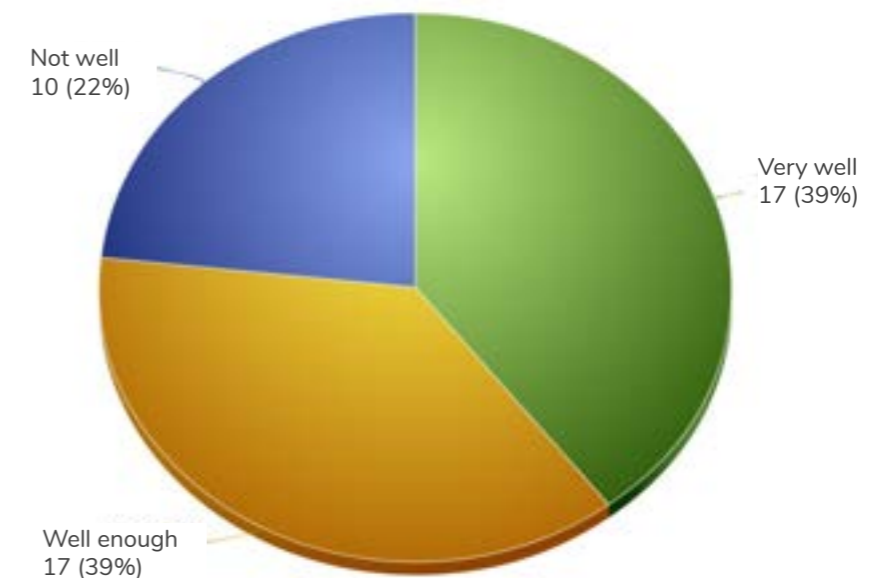
As with any building a Village Hall has a job to do. We want to ascertain if Village Halls (in general) can offer their communities what they need. This encompasses both the building (internally and externally) and its governance.

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

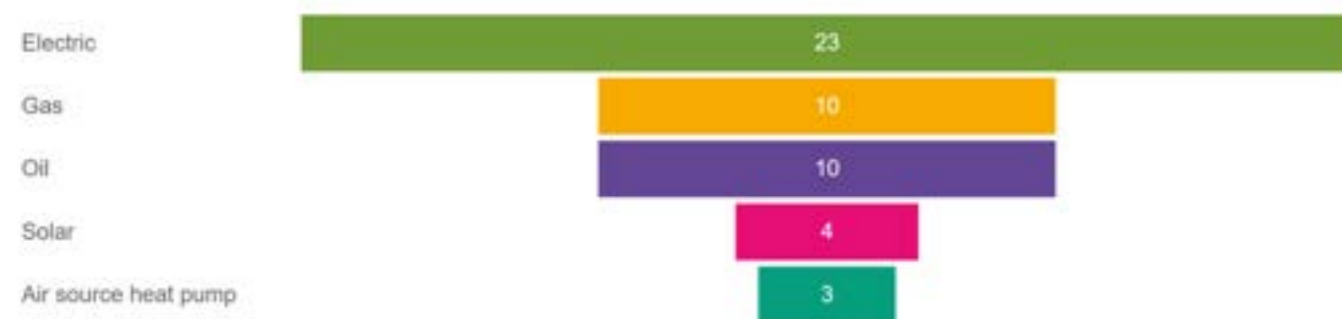
28% of halls plan to improve heating/insulation. These improvements help the cost of heating halls, but also help the environment. The chart below shows how well the heating currently works in the main hall:



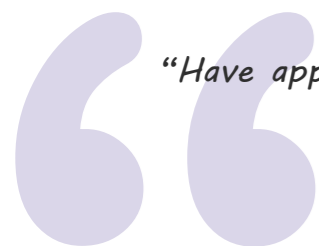
(Please note: the percent of visuals have been rounded to the nearest whole number to increase clarity)



As you can see from the chart below, North Devon's Village Halls rely quite heavily on electricity (53%), with gas (23%) and oil (23%) popular for their heating systems too. Interestingly solar (9%) and air source heat pumps (7%) are growth areas too 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:

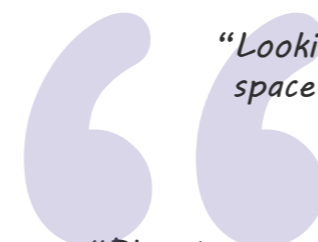


"Have applied for a warm space grant."

"Hold a lunch club on Wednesdays and Sundays."

"Thursday cafe acts like a keep warm space; host a pop-up pub, and a village market once a month."

18% of North Devon halls without Wi-Fi are planning to get it, hoping that this will make their halls more attractive to a variety of audiences. **56%** 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:



"Looking to develop a smaller, more intimate space so they can attract different users."

"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."

"Electric vehicle charging point is in progress. Also planning to invest in batteries to store the energy generated by the solar panels."

"Would like to improve the hall and making it a more attractive space, to make it more attractive for bookings and commercial usage (drinking water, toilet facilities and wifi need to be improved)."

"Electric vehicle charging point is in progress. Also planning to invest in batteries to store the energy generated by the solar panels."

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. 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."

Good governance is an important aspect in halls being fit for purpose. **65%** of North 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 bar chart below shows that only **16%** of halls have an up-to-date business plan, which has been updated since Covid-19. **79%** don't have a business plan, suggesting that continued and expanding training/support is needed to help these committees to focus on the hall's future sustainability.



The bar chart below shows which policies North Devon Village Halls have. Just **49%** of halls have a Safeguarding policy and **35%** 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. North Devon 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 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 in North Devon 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 peoplepower 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 **43** face-to-face Village Halls Audits in North Devon, conducted by Devon Communities Together Community Buildings Team between September 2022 and March 2024.

The quantitative and qualitative data demonstrates how vital North 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 North Devon 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.

Devon Communities Together



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
Yarncombe Victory Hall	https://www.yarnscombevillagehall.co.uk/	victoryhall.yarnscombe@gmail.com	01805 624834	EX31 3LW
Woolcombe Village Hall	https://www.woolacombevillagehall.co.uk/	info@woolacombevillagehall.co.uk		EX34 7BT
Mortehoe Village Hall	https://www.woolacombe tourism.co.uk/tourism/mortehoe-village-hall		01271 870007	EX34 7ED

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



Devon Communities Together

helping communities help themselves

www.devoncommunities.org.uk

01392 248919

info@devoncommunities.org.uk