



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Torrige Village Halls Community Asset Map

## *Audit Evaluation Report*

January 2024



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A year after the start of the Devon Village Halls Audit project, we'd like to share our findings from the **36 Torridge Village Halls** that we've audited to date, which form a unique new community asset map for Devon's rural communities.

Broadly speaking, Torridge Village Halls are the hubs of their rural communities. They provide a wide range of activities for entertainment, socialisation, health and wellbeing. Some have also stepped in to provide rural services that their community has lost, demonstrating flexibility and a deep understanding of community need.

The report looks at Hall Capacity, Occupancy, Financial Status (inc. Covid-19 impact), Digital Connectivity, Governance, Community Resilience, Health and Wellbeing hub potential, Accessibility and Environmental sustainability.

The findings provide an insight into the great work that Village Hall committees do, but also highlight areas of training need and financial support such as:



**Funding to upgrade their facilities.**

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**Support to market their halls and increase bookings/revenue.**

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**Support to work together in hubs to share best practice.**

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**Training and support for increasing online presence and marketing.**

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**Access to good quality and economically priced Wi-Fi.**

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**Training in volunteer recruitment and governance.**

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**Well positioned Village Halls can be ideal designated places of safety in an emergency.**

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**Funding for virtual medical appointments to take place in Village Halls.**

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We hope that you find this report informative, and we look forward to sharing the Devon wide Village Hall Audit report later in 2024.

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Devon Communities Together (DCT) began carrying out the first ever audit of Village Halls across Devon in September 2022. Our aim is to create a unique community asset map of Devon rural Village Halls, vital rural community assets, to further understand the potential, successes, and challenges that they face. The data we collect in our final report will 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 these Village Halls.

DCT has, at the time of this data collection, audited **307 Village Halls**, all of which we have visited onsite in order to gather intelligence and insight from the community volunteers managing the halls. There are **44 Village Halls** located in Torrridge, **36 Village Halls** of which have been successfully surveyed to date.

**14** Torrridge Village Halls are Members of DCT enjoying the benefits of free/discounted training sessions, support with funding applications, model policies and newsletters including funding opportunities. **2** Torrridge halls have chosen not to engage with the audit, one hall felt that they didn't have enough time. The second hall said they weren't suitably interested in the audit findings to be involved. We still have another **6** Torrridge halls to visit. The halls are diverse in age and stature, but all are run by committees made up of local volunteers.

## MAP OF TORRIDGE VILLAGE HALLS AUDITED TO DATE:



As you read this report, please consider the following:

***What would the impact be on rural communities if Village Halls were allowed to decline and permanently close?***

We have been amazed by the variety of activities that Torridge Village Halls offer their communities. The following word cloud shows the most frequently offered activities across Torridge:



Some of the other activities offered by Mid Devon's Village Halls include:

- Dementia Club
- Art Club
- Mediation
- Youth club
- Good companions
- Choirs
- Pickle ball
- History club
- Working wheels meetings
- Village bar
- Friends together lunch
- Post office
- Kick boxing
- Horticultural society
- Ladies circle
- Anti-natal classes

Due to the wide range of activities on offer, we found that hall users generally represent quite a balanced demographic. In the words of hall committee members:

“Across the board, under 2’s through to 100! Higher number are over 50’s.”

“Retirees mainly, birthdays are younger & 40’s+ for tea and cake.”

“Mixed ages for some things but mainly older, a lot of ladies’ groups.”

“Wide variety of age groups from Young Farmers Clubs, children’s parties to older people at the coffee afternoon.”

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

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

The on-site audit surveys are conducted by a specialist DCT Community Development Team. The discussions that take place as part of the audit process help us to form a picture of what the physical building can offer; what tools the committee can access to optimise and publicise their community asset; what activities their communities currently enjoy; whether the whole community is able to access these activities and how secure the committee is in their governance and financial status.

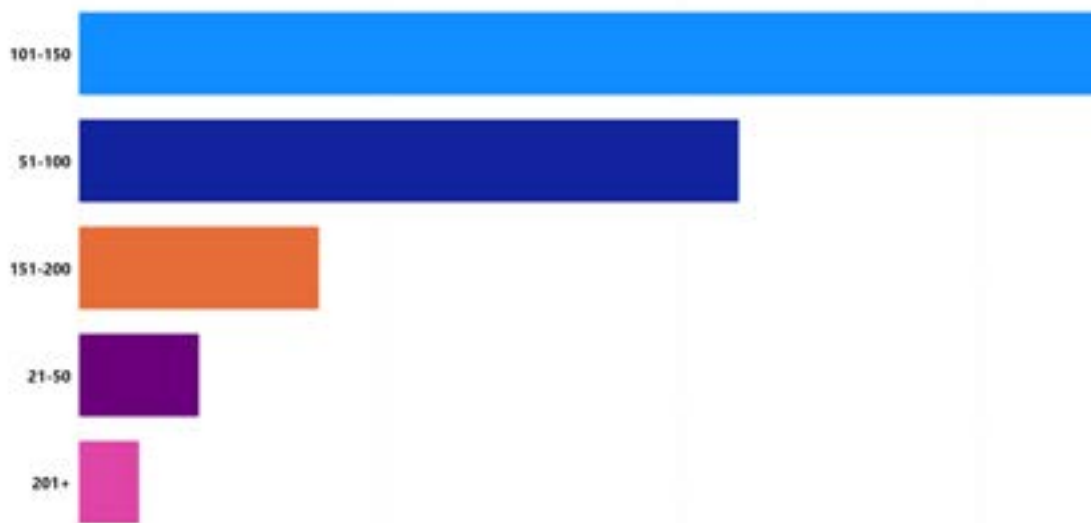
From October 2023 we’ve extended the scope of this project in East Devon by auditing all charity run Community Buildings. This will enable us to build an even more comprehensive picture of the area’s community assets, highlight any gaps and celebrate the diversity of locations available to the people of East Devon.

## 2. VILLAGE HALL CAPACITY

### KEY FINDINGS

Audit data analysed to date, shows that **31%** of Torridge Village Halls can accommodate between 51 and 100 people when the hall is set up for a sit-down meal. 51-100 is a lot of people, demonstrating how versatile Torridge Village Halls are as community assets. A further **50%** of halls can accommodate an impressive 101-150 people. It begs the question why these community spaces aren't used more.

Seating capacity (main hall)

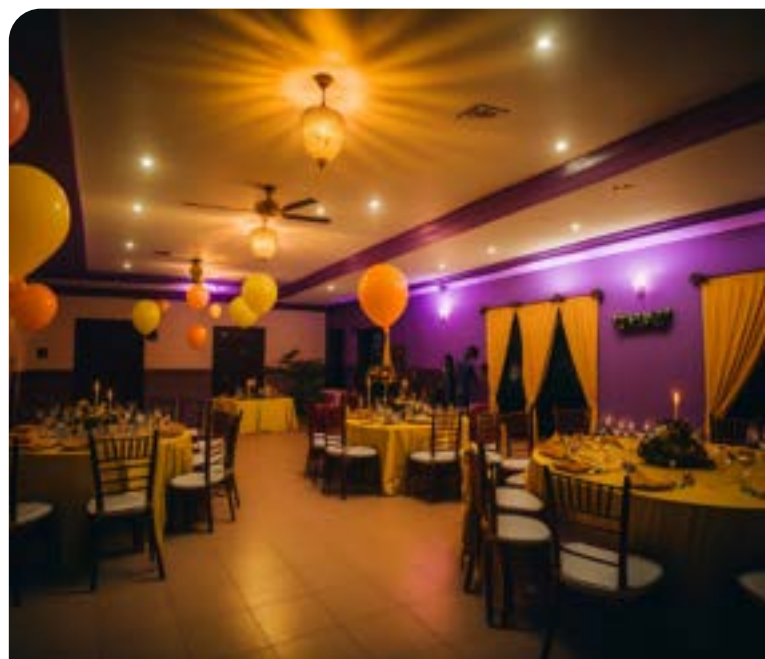


### WHAT WE LEARNED

**75%** of these Village Halls have comprehensive kitchen facilities, so can provide full hot meals if required, although we've found that these facilities are often underused. Local people don't have the food hygiene certification required as they don't prepare food on this scale on a regular basis. Most halls also have car parking, predominantly owned by the hall, but occasionally a Parish Council asset, making accessing the facility quite straightforward for most people including those with mobility problems. This data demonstrates how easily Village Halls could become the hub for local accessible rural service provisions and activities.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

*Halls would benefit from funding to upgrade their facilities and décor to make them more attractive as celebratory spaces.*



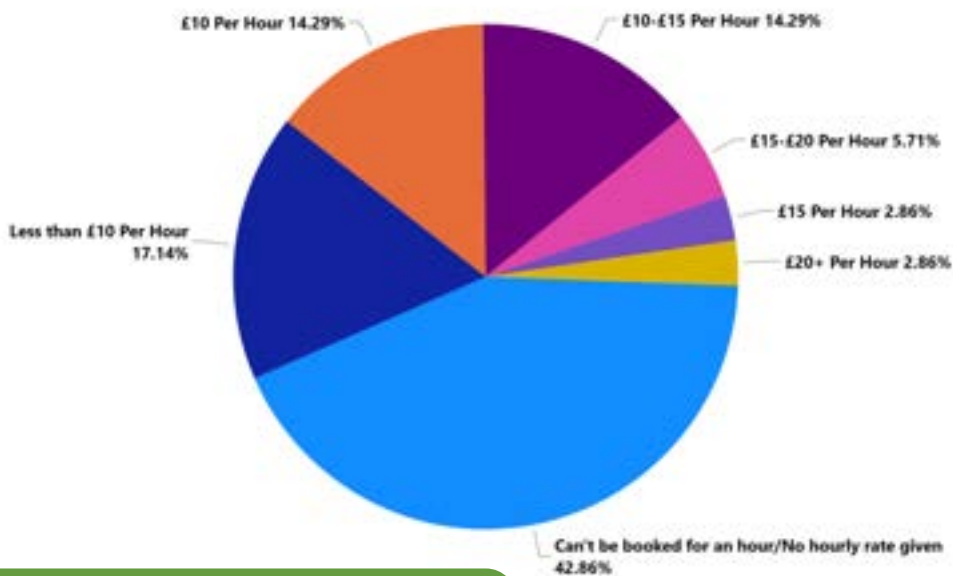
# 3. VILLAGE HALL OCCUPANCY RATES

## KEY FINDINGS

Occupancy rates vary greatly across this data set with **44%** of audited Torridge halls in use for 0-25% of the time, while only **3%** are occupied for 76-100% of the time. The amount of use that a hall has directly correlates to their income. Booking fees are the largest generator of income with **69%** of halls deriving over half of their income from bookings so increasing hall usage is beneficial both for the halls revenue and for the community enjoying hall activities.

Hall hire ranges from £5 an hour to £20+ for commercial users. Halls vary in their charging rates as some charge per session (half a day), some include use of the kitchen and others have reduced rates for regular bookings. Having said this, when compared with commercial premises, Village Halls are always the more economical option.

**Cost per hour (main hall)**  
Charge Rate



## WHAT WE LEARNED

Although bookings provide the largest amount of revenue, it's important that Village Halls are accessible to all. Halls may benefit from business support to ensure that they remain economically viable, with sufficient funds for necessary repairs and material upgrades. **17%** of the Torridge Village Halls audited have a Business Plan and **53%** said they would like help to run as a business.

### *'Did you know.....'*

One Village Hall in Torridge hires the hall out to enable a young person on the autism spectrum to enjoy their roller-skating hobby in a safe environment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Halls would benefit from support to market their halls and increase bookings/revenue.



# 4. VILLAGE HALL FINANCIAL STATUS AND IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON VILLAGE HALLS

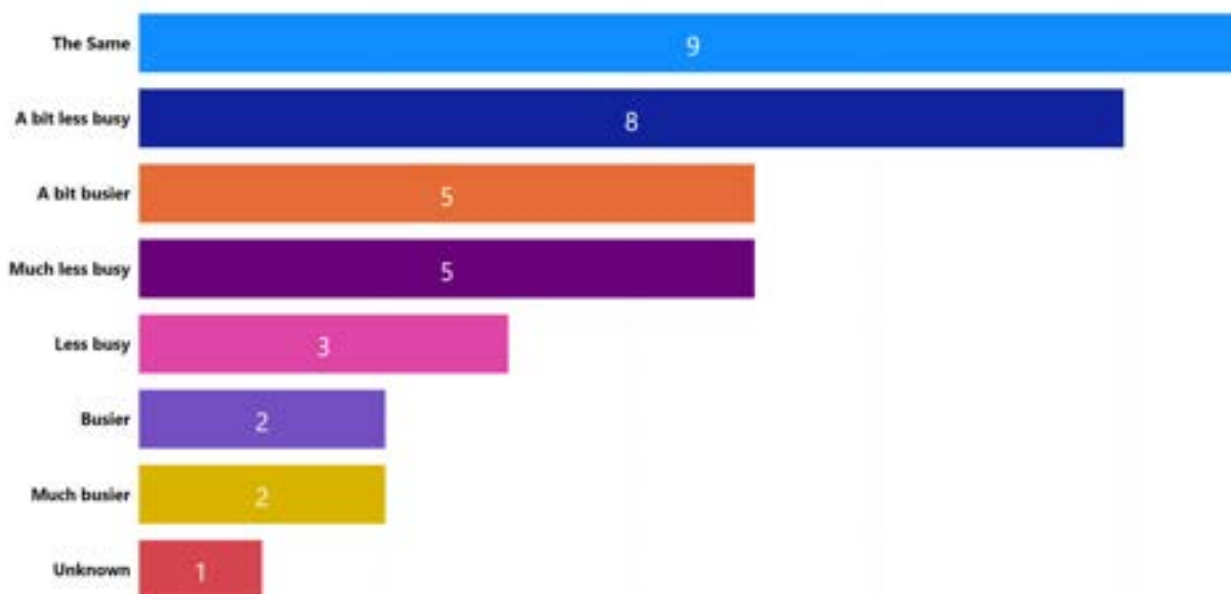
## KEY FINDINGS

Torrige Village Halls generally reflect a similar picture to the rest of Devon when we analyse their revenue sources. **28%** rely on income from bookings for 76-100% of their revenue.

Fundraising events are used to top up hall funds with **58%** of Torrige Halls sourcing 0-25% of their revenue by fundraising. Donations again are more of a top up rather than a main source of revenue. **50%** of Torrige halls that responded, said they got 0-25% of the hall's revenue from donations, a higher percentage than the Devon average of **41%**.

Halls across Torrige have generally fared well since Covid with **50%** either busier or the same as pre-Covid levels, this figure is higher than the Devon average of **39%**. Halls that quickly made their audiences feel safe, publicising and following their Covid safe procedures bounced back quickly post pandemic.

*Hall occupancy (Compared to pre Covid-19)*



## WHAT WE LEARNED

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. Children's parties in Village Halls seem to have made quite a comeback in the post Covid era with two halls mentioning that this was a growth area for them.

Levels of financial security are generally good (although this may still be skewed by Covid grant funding) as **86%** of halls have over 12 months running costs available to them. Possibly linked to this, when asked about their level of confidence in future financial security and support from the community, **30%** responded as very confident. This suggests that the communities want their Village Halls to provide activities for them to enjoy. The challenge is keeping the hall fit for purpose so that activities and events can continue.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Halls may benefit from working together in hubs to learn best practice and lessons learned from each other.*



# 5. DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

## KEY FINDINGS

64% of Torridge halls are accessing Broadband with the Devon wide percentage sitting at 63%. This leaves 36% of Village Halls in Torridge without broadband. 36% of Torridge Village Halls have useable mobile reception, which is well below the Devon wide the figure of 68%.

### Torridge halls with Broadband



Digital connectivity is an important aspect in village halls future appeal. 8% of Torridge halls with Wi-Fi use fibre optic, 17% have copper cable with the others using either Fixed Wireless Access or Satellite. All halls bar one report that the Wi-Fi works well or well enough. That said, with 36% of Torridge Village Halls having no broadband, there's still a long way to go on the road to good accessible connectivity.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Many halls want to attract new and younger audiences who will have an expectation that good quality Wi-Fi is available. Youth clubs and gaming events can't be held in halls with poor or no Wi-Fi, nor can office space be rented out or online medical appointments be made available to the local community. Connectivity is an important part of village hall's future sustainability.

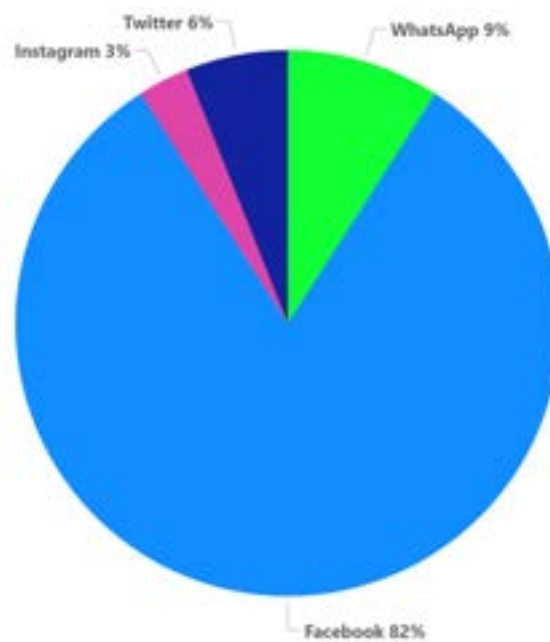


## 5.1 SOCIAL MEDIA

### KEY FINDINGS

82% of audited halls in Torridge are active on social media, predominantly Facebook. This suggests there is room for an increase in their online presence and another potential training need to broaden the platforms used. As previously reported, halls rely heavily on income from bookings, so being accessible to all in the community is key to increasing revenue.

#### *Halls use of social media*



When asked if halls had a website or were part of the Parish website **53%** responded positively. This leaves **47%** of halls with no website presence.

### WHAT WE LEARNED

Venue research for most people starts online, putting halls without a website at a distinct disadvantage. With bookings often relied on for hall running costs, being visible to potential customers is vital.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

*Training and support for increasing online presence and marketing would be very beneficial for Torridge Village Halls.*

*Access to good quality and economically priced Wi-Fi needs to be a priority to support future growth in Torridge Village Halls.*

## 6. VILLAGE HALL GOVERNANCE

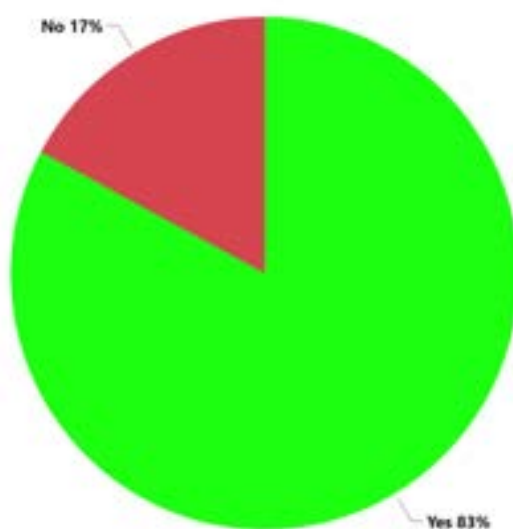
### KEY FINDINGS

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.

In our discussions with Village Hall Committee Members, it became clear that committee positions can be difficult to fill. **19%** of Torridge Village Halls have vacancies on their committees, the same figure as the Devon wide Village Hall average. Further support is needed to ensure these important community assets are managed correctly by suitably well-trained volunteers.

#### *Are all committee positions filled?*



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.”

**69%** of Committee Members in Torridge Village Halls 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.*

Devon Communities Together's audit data shows that **19%** of Torridge Village Halls have a Health & Safety policy in place, **11%** have a Safeguarding policy and **31%** have a Data Protection policy.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Attracting young people to join hall committees is a particular issue, with some committee members staying on longer than they'd like to, as there's no succession planning. The majority of Torridge Village Hall committee members are retired people, old enough to have time to give to their community and at the start of their tenure, well enough to be able to participate.

Micro volunteering has been suggested by three halls across Devon as one way to attract a younger audience to engage with helping at Village Hall events. The idea of joining a committee isn't always popular with young people but being responsible for advertising an event on social media, for example, seems to be more achievable.

Clear communication about the role of a Village Hall committee member may also help potential new recruits to understand the sort of commitment they'd be asked to make if they did join the hall committee. **25%** of Torridge Village Halls have bi-monthly meetings, with **28%** having quarterly meetings, so the actual committee element isn't a huge time commitment.



Attracting younger people to help with their village hall would also benefit IT skill levels. When asked how many of the hall committee had excellent IT skills, **15%** reported that no one had. Thankfully **47%** of Torridge Hall committees felt they had enough people with an adequate IT skill level.

When asked if halls have trouble recruiting volunteers, the following thoughts were shared:

“

*Pre covid our committee members were from the retired community. Post covid we are all working people. Older people decided they didn't want to come out, lost confidence and capability. It took 3 months to get a new treasurer.”*

“

*Yes, small community, ages very different. Young people busy, elderly may not be well enough to commit.”*

“

*Yes, apathy, people say that they are interested but then not. Perhaps we are not good enough at explaining the required commitments.”*

“

*Yes, society today is very non-committal. Trying to get people to commit and increasing age is a great concern.”*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Training in volunteer recruitment and governance is another training need to help the sustainability of our Village Halls.**



# 7. VILLAGE HALL ROLES IN COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

## KEY FINDINGS

3% of Torridge village halls are in a flood risk area. 28% are designated places of safety on the Parish Councils Emergency Plan, demonstrating another vital role that Torridge’s Village Halls are able to fulfil.

*Torridge halls that are designated places of safety*



## WHAT WE LEARNED

11% of audited Torridge village halls are in a Devon Resilience Innovation Project (DRIP) or Devon Community Resilience Forum (DCRF) priority place. This means that their local area is being supported in natural flood management measures and/or offered targeted support with their Emergency Plan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Devon’s steep sided river catchments make some areas of the county liable to flash flooding. Well positioned Village Halls can be ideal Designated Places of Safety in an Emergency.*





# 8. VILLAGE HALLS CAPACITY AS COMMUNITY “HEALTH AND WELLBEING HUBS”

## KEY FINDINGS

As the opening word cloud and list of activities demonstrates, village halls are hubs for community health and wellbeing. Providing activities on your doorstep with people that you're already familiar with can make participation much easier. It can be daunting to join clubs or activities on your own. This is particularly relevant in Torridge where **31%** of the population live in 1 person households. With an ageing demographic in Torridge (**29%** of the population is 65 or older), rural isolation and loneliness are real risks to the health and wellbeing of our village communities.

According to the Campaign to End Loneliness:

*Prolonged and/or intense experiences of loneliness can have negative impacts on our lives. It can affect our health and wellbeing: Loneliness can increase the risk of early mortality by 26%. Loneliness can put people at greater risk of poorer mental health, including depression.*

The following responses were given when asked how the Village Hall helped the physical and mental wellbeing of their communities:

*“The dementia club offers a safe space for various categories, e.g. loneliness, dementia sufferers and bereaved. Coffee mornings bring people together.”*

*“Sporting, social & physio, osteopath, & reiki healing.”*

*“Getting people together, we have a community coffee shop, all people come together and have a natter.”*

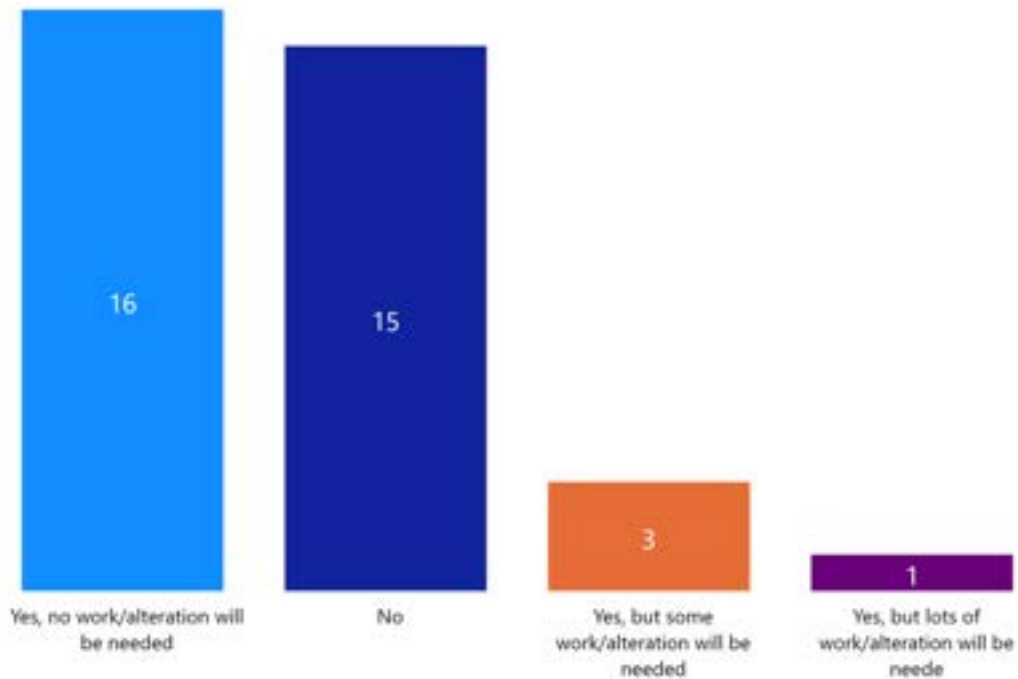
*“The feedback we get from our community shows us that we do this e.g. big breakfast. Farming is a lonely occupation, and this is a good community hub and good for wellbeing generally.”*



The perception of access to health care in Torrridge seems to be slightly more positive than for Devon as a whole. **14%** of Torrridge recipients said they could easily access healthcare with **3%** responding with health care being inaccessible (the Devon average is **6%**). **33%** responded with an answer of access to healthcare being moderately accessible.

**53%** of Torrridge Village Halls have a confidential space with the potential to be used for medical appointments. **68%** of the halls with availability of a confidential space have Wi-Fi but only **5%** of these halls also have appropriate or sufficient IT equipment/devices.

### Available confidential spaces



## WHAT WE LEARNED

These medical appointments could be face to face with a health care professional or online appointments where less IT literate members of the community could be supported by a digital buddy. Both types of appointment could help to address health inequalities experienced by residents of rural environments and/or those who are digitally excluded.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

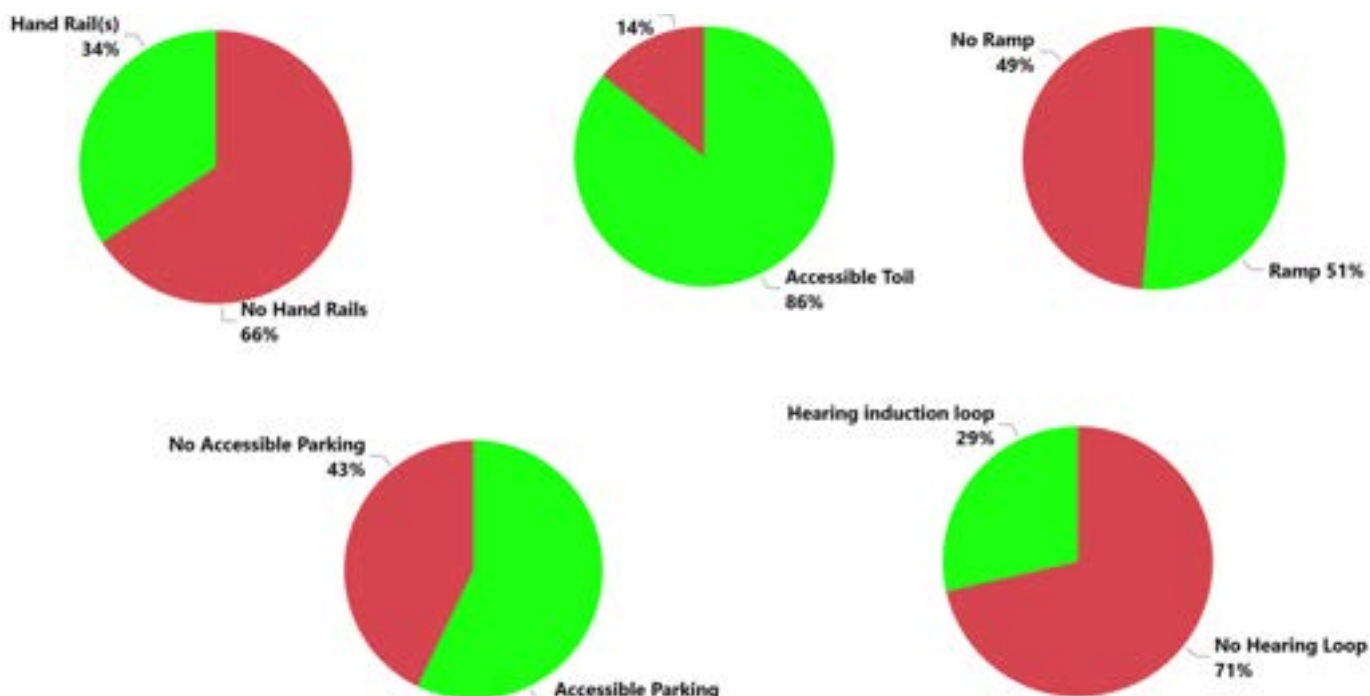
*For virtual medical appointments to take place in Village Halls, funding would need to be made available for suitable IT equipment.*



# 9. INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY OF VILLAGE HALLS

## KEY FINDINGS

Accessibility is an important part of the audit process as we all want our rural citizens to be able to use their halls facilities. **17%** of Village Halls in Torridge had undergone an equality audit, but none very recently. We found that **14%** of Torridge Village Halls had no accessible toilet facilities, **30%** could offer chairs with arms (to help those less mobile to push themselves out of the chair) and **33%** offered a bench by the door of the hall so that hall users could sit down, should the need arise, before entering the hall.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Village Hall Committees would benefit from training in Inclusion & Accessibility.*

*Funding needs to be made available for the necessary upgrades to take place.*

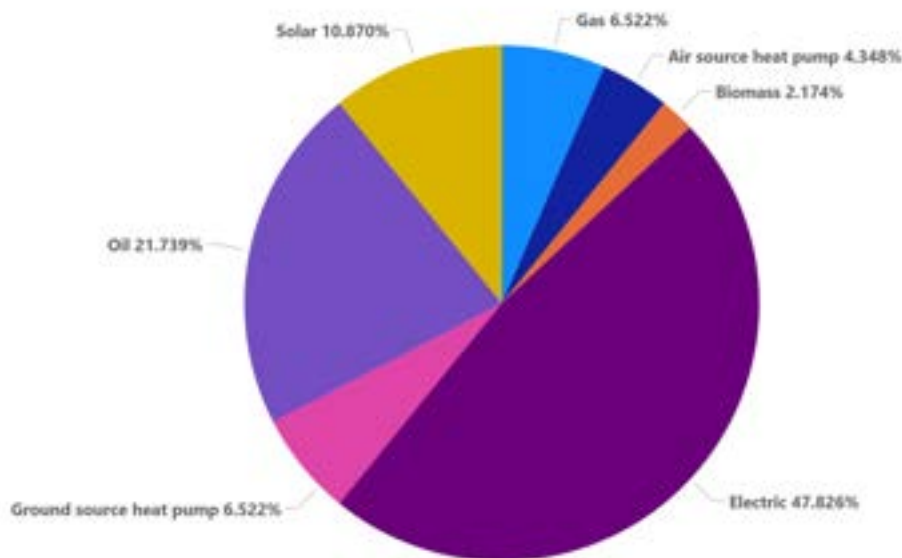


# 10. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

## KEY FINDINGS

47% of audited Torridge Village Halls currently have electric heating, 6% use gas, 23% have oil, 11% have solar electric and 6% have a ground source heat pump.

*Types of heating system*



When asked about plans to increase environmental sustainability, Torridge Village Halls responded as follows:

- 22% either have or are considering solar panels/battery storage (although this may be funding dependent),
- 14% have or are planning to change to LED's.
- 3% were considering an Electric Vehicle charge point.
- 17% were interested in heat pumps if suitable funding was made available.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

The desire to improve halls environmental credentials is there, although in some cases there is a lack of understanding as to how this can be achieved.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Funding is needed for specialist advice and support services to enable these improvements to happen.*

# 11. IN CONCLUSION: TORRIDGE'S VILLAGE HALLS – VISION FOR THE FUTURE

When asked about their vision for the future, **42%** of Torrridge Hall committees cited greater usage as a priority. More community involvement also comes high up on the list with **8%** of committees and **25%** want to further support their community's physical and mental health.

## Other thoughts include:

"There is a renovation project in hand which will allow flexible use, is energy saving, as well as future proofing the hall for our community."

"Would like to get more kids after school sessions, dance classes, music sessions etc."

"Would like to use the skittle alley for more social events and build a proper lock up bar. This is the only amenity in the village. Continue to improve, introduce new social events to enable the hall to continue and grow. Planning solar panels to keep the hire charge at a reasonable level so locals don't have any extra costs."

"To make sure that we provide what people want. A lot of people really suffered during Covid and suffered by being on their own. We have built up the community again and made sure that people feel safe."

At the end of the discussion **82%** of Committee members said that they had actions to take away from the audit. Feedback included:

"A lot of things that we haven't considered. Eg the equality and environmental things."

"Training would be helpful. I think it does need to look like you are running a business. We do need to make money."

"Will look at more ideas for attracting young people to the hall."

"This has concentrated my thinking on other uses for the hall and getting policies up to date. Need a more formal business plan."

At the start of the report, we asked you to consider the following question.

***What would the impact be on rural communities if Village Halls were allowed to decline and permanently close?***

We hope you've had the opportunity to give this some thought.

Based on the audit data, it's clear that Village Halls in Torridge offer their 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.

Audit responses demonstrate that there are training, and support needs around:



**Recruiting volunteers**



**Increasing online presence**



**Business planning**



**Environmental sustainability**



**Marketing**

### ***Did you know....***

That in response to the audit findings, DCT recently ran an Enterprising Village Halls (EVH) programme with 31 halls attending, 6 of which were from Torridge. Trustees 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. Feedback included:

*“Well-resourced and informed. Good encouragement. Plenty of opportunity for reflection and interaction.”*

*“A great way to meet others in a similar situation and talk through ideas and problems.”*

*“I am recommending that other Trustees from our organisation attend the next programme.”*

Alongside financial support for training, funding is needed for:



**Creating local hall hubs so best practice and pitfalls can be shared**



**Designing and updating hall interiors to attract community/celebratory events**



**Increasing accessibility for the community, irrespective of their state of health**

We've found Hall Committees are keen to give local people what they need and want, but sometimes understanding what that is can be challenging. Providing something for everyone, so that the community at large is represented and supported is the aim of hall committees. A busy hall tends to be a thriving hall.








Data gathered from Torridge Village Hall audits shows that we have a lot to thank our local rural volunteer committee members for. They provide a local venue that's open to the changing needs of its community.

The overall picture is one of hall committees working hard to give their communities what they want and need, but with little or no financial support. The **36** Torridge Village Halls that have been audited to date are a great example of resilience and community spirit.

There is no consistent financial support from government. Although Defra funding schemes, such as the Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Grant Fund are extremely welcome, they need expertise to apply, and competition is fierce. Grant funding for core costs would be a welcome addition to Village Halls.

The data and intelligence gathered through this audit process highlights the benefits, in this age of localism, of essential community assets like rural Village Halls should be supported by the system and have access to local funding from statutory services and other community anchor institutions.

## 12. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

-  **Halls would benefit from funding to upgrade their facilities and décor to make them more attractive as social/celebratory spaces.**
-  **Halls would benefit from support to market their halls and increase bookings/revenue.**
-  **Halls may benefit from working together in hubs to learn best practice and lessons learned from each other.**
-  **Access to good quality and economically priced Wi-Fi needs to be a priority to support our Village Halls' future growth and sustainability.**
-  **Training and support for increasing online presence and marketing would be very beneficial for Mid Devon's Village Halls.**
-  **Training in volunteer recruitment and governance is another training need to help the sustainability of our Village Halls.**
-  **For virtual medical appointments to take place in Village Halls, funding would need to be made available for suitable IT equipment.**