

# DEVON VILLAGE HALLS AUDIT YEAR ONE

## *Interim Evaluation Report*

Asset Mapping Devon's Village Halls  
October 2023



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A year after the start of the Devon Village Halls Audit project, we would like to share our findings from the **290** Village Halls that we have audited to date, which form a unique new community asset map for Devon's rural communities.

Broadly speaking, Devon's 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 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.**
-  **Support to market their halls and increase bookings/revenue.**
-  **Support to work together in hubs to share best practice.**
-  **Training and support for increasing online presence and marketing.**
-  **Access to good quality and economically priced Wi-Fi.**
-  **Training in volunteer recruitment and governance.**
-  **Well positioned Village Halls can be ideal designated places of safety in an emergency.**
-  **Funding for virtual medical appointments to take place in Village Halls.**
-  **Inclusion/accessibility training and funding for necessary upgrades.**
-  **Funding for specialist advice and support to improve environmental sustainability.**

We hope that you find this report informative, and we look forward to sharing an updated version of the report in 2024.

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

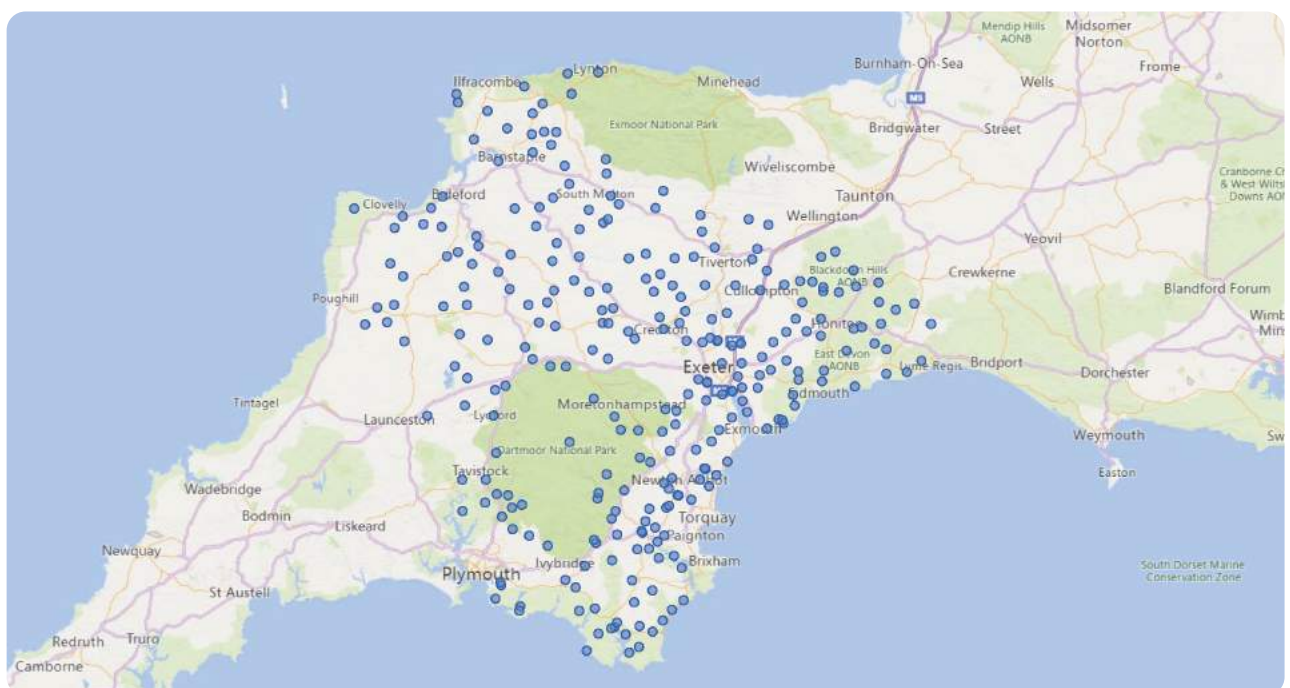
Devon Communities Together (DCT) began carrying out the first ever audit of Village Halls across Devon in September 2022. Our aim is to create a unique community asset map of Devon's rural Village Halls, vital rural community assets, to further understand the potential successes, and challenges that 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.

A year into the project, DCT has, at the time of writing, audited **290** Village Halls, all of which we have visited onsite in order to gather intelligence and insight from the community volunteers managing the halls.

**52%** of Devon Village Halls are Members of DCT enjoying the benefits of free/ discounts on training sessions, support with funding applications, model policies and newsletters including news about funding opportunities, largely funded through DCT membership fees, DEFRA and Devon County Council grant funding. DCT's Community Buildings Specialist Advice Service is on hand to support Member Village Halls with any questions or issues that might arise. Membership also gives halls a presence on the DCT Village Hall Network website page <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/community-buildings>

Only 12 Devon halls have chosen not to engage with the audit. Reasons include feeling that the audit wouldn't be beneficial as they were a small very busy hall, to a hall run by a couple who just didn't feel they had any more time to give. We still have another 150 Devon halls to visit. The halls are diverse in age and stature, but all are run by committees made up of local volunteers.

## Audited halls





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:

*“We have everything from kid’s parties to afternoon tea with the oldies.”*

*“Age ranges from young to seniors with a gap between 20-40 years. Not many business bookings.”*

*“A wide variety of groups-all ages-encompasses everyone in the community.”*

*“From age 2 to 92, but fewer youths and young adults.”*

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

- External Spaces
- Heating and ventilation
- Digital connectivity
- Purpose and 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.

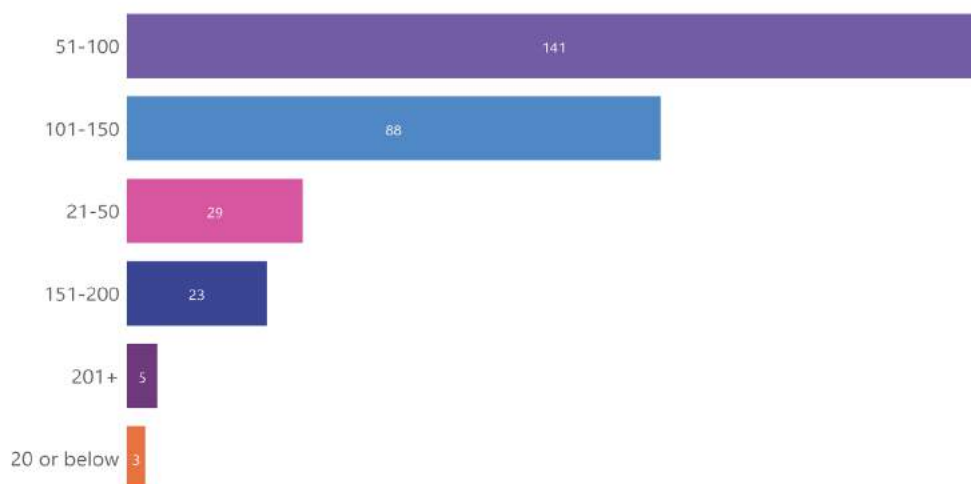
From October 2023 we are extending the scope of this project in Devon by auditing all charity run Community Buildings. This will enable us to build a comprehensive picture of all the community assets, highlight any gaps and celebrate the diversity of locations available to the people of Devon.

## 2. VILLAGE HALL CAPACITY

### KEY FINDINGS

Audit data analysed to date, shows that **49%** of Devon 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 Devon's Village Halls are as community assets. A further **30%** of halls can accommodate an impressive 101-150 people. It begs the question why these community spaces aren't used more.

#### Main hall seating capacity



### WHAT WE LEARNED

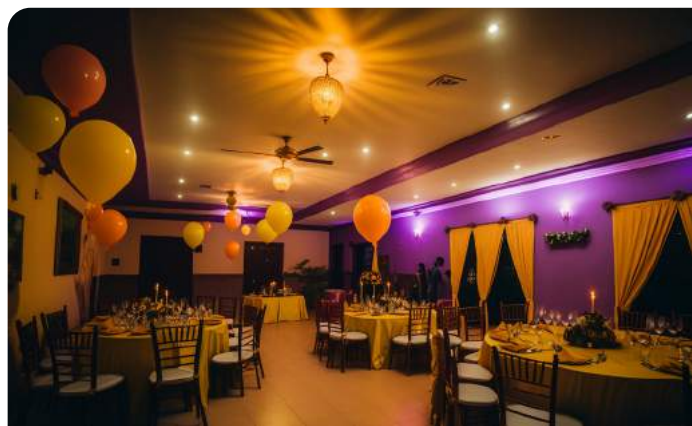
**73%** of Devon's Village Halls have comprehensive kitchen facilities, so can provide full hot meals if required, although we've found that these facilities are often underused. Local volunteers often don't have the food hygiene certification required, as they don't prepare food on this scale on a regular 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 wellbeing activities. In two halls across Devon, they own wall and ceiling drapery that's hired by hall users to "pretty up" the hall for special events.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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



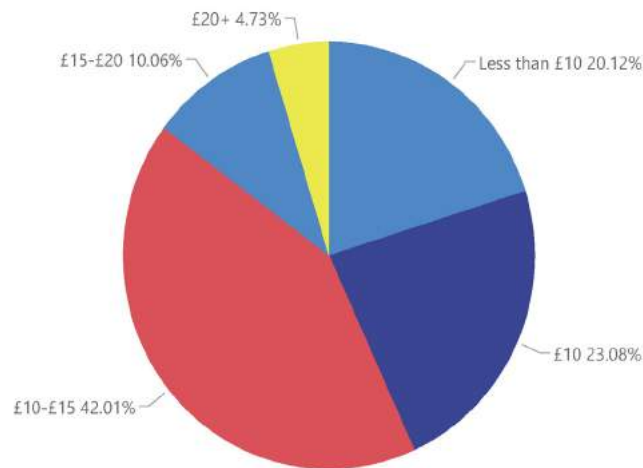
# 3. VILLAGE HALL OCCUPANCY RATES

## KEY FINDINGS

Occupancy rates vary greatly across this data set with **37%** of audited Devon Halls in use for 0-25% of the time, while **10%** are occupied for 76–100% of the time. With the highest percentage (65%) of halls being in use between just 0–50% of the time, there is obvious scope for increased usage. The amount of use that a hall has directly correlates to their income. Booking fees are the largest generator of revenue with **56%** 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, as well as for sustainability of these community assets.

Hall hire ranges from £7 per hour to £30 for non-village residents. 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.

### Charge rates per hour



## 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. Just **9%** of the Devon Halls audited have a Business Plan and **41%** said they would like help to run as a business.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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

### 'Did you know...?'

...East Devon houses one of the few two-story halls in Devon. West Hill has meeting and function rooms upstairs and provides a lunch space for the adjacent school and has a dedicated pre-school unit. A Hallmark hall (Hallmark is a free and nationally recognised quality assurance scheme) that provides a high level of service to the community and beyond.



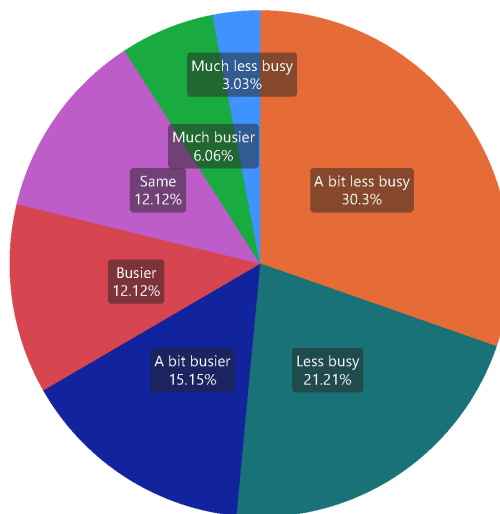
# 4. VILLAGE HALL FINANCIAL STATUS AND IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON VILLAGE HALLS

**56%** of Devon Village Halls earn 50% or more of their income from hall bookings.

Fundraising events are used to top up hall funds with **44%** of Devon Village Halls sourcing 0-25% of their revenue by fundraising. Donations again are more of a top up rather than a main source of revenue. **42%** of halls who responded, said they got 0-25% of the hall's revenue from donations, but over **56%** of audited halls suggested that donations were too irregular to put a percentage to.

**54%** of Devon Village Halls are either busier or the same as pre-Covid levels. Halls that quickly made their local residents feel safe publicising and following their Covid safe procedures bounced back quickly post pandemic as well as those providing warm hub activities during last winter.

## Occupancy compared to pre-Covid



## WHAT WE LEARNED

In some cases, behaviours changed over the Covid period, and some halls found that groups folded as the organisers 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 **82%** 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, **35%** 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 halls 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.

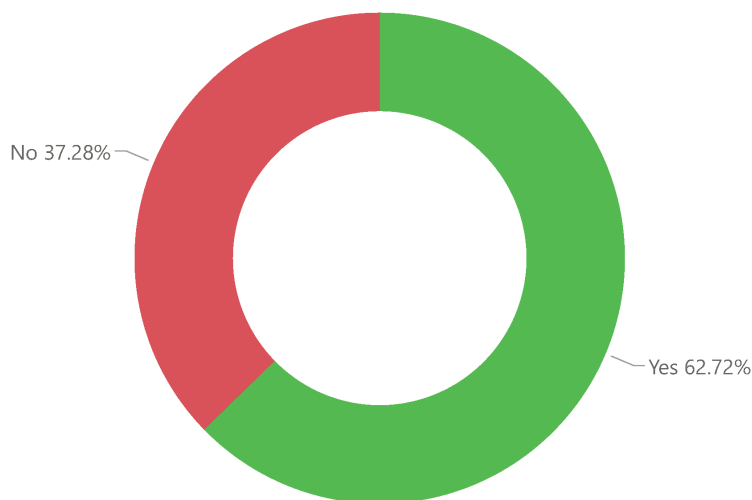


# 5. DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

## KEY FINDINGS

**63%** of Devon Village Halls are accessing Broadband, leaving **37%** of Village Halls in Devon without connectivity. **68%** of these halls assess their Broadband as working very well, with an unfortunate **2%** feeling that their Broadband is not working well.

### Does the hall have Broadband?



Digital connectivity is an important aspect in Village Halls future appeal. **34%** of Devon's Village Halls with Wi-Fi use fibre optic, **35%** have copper cable, **10%** have fixed wireless access and **3%** use Airband. With **37%** of Devon Village Halls having no broadband, there's still a long way to go on the road to good accessible digital connectivity.

**67%** of Devon's Village Halls have useable mobile phone reception and 18% have a landline.

## 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, remote services access and tele-healthcare, and digital gaming events can't be held in halls with poor 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 Halls' future sustainability.



# 5.1 SOCIAL MEDIA

## KEY FINDINGS

**65%** of Village Halls in Devon are active on social media. This suggests there is room for an increase in their online presence and another potential training need. As previously reported, halls rely heavily on income from bookings, so being accessible to all in the community is key to increasing revenue.

### Social media usage



**56%** of Village Halls in Devon have their own website and **20%** have a page on the Parish website or are in the process of developing their website. This leaves **24%** 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 digital skills, online presence and marketing would be very beneficial for Devon’s Village Halls.

Access to good quality and economically priced Wi-Fi needs to be a priority to support our Village Hall’s future growth.

# 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 Devon Village Halls have vacancies on their committees.

### Are all committee positions filled?



The halls that we visit come in a variety of sizes, so the number of active volunteers can, in part, reflect the size of building, however, audit results show that:

- **42%** of halls have 11-20 volunteers,
- **35%** have 6-10 volunteers,
- **14%** have 0-5 volunteers.

Even in a modestly sized Village Hall, 0-5 volunteers aren't many people to call on. Further support is needed to ensure these important community assets are managed correctly by suitable numbers of well-trained volunteers.

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."*

**65%** of Committee Members in Devon's Village Halls have an up-to-date copy of the governing document (a required document that sets out the basis on which the land and property is to be held and managed). According to the 2004 Charity Commission Village Halls and Community Centres Report: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/284719/rs9text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/284719/rs9text.pdf)

*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 **47%** of Devon Village Halls have a Health & Safety policy in place, **36%** have a Safeguarding policy and just **29%** 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. This lack of "new blood" is quite a frustration for many committees, noted in over 100 audit discussions to date.

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. **33%** of Devon Village Halls have monthly meetings, **28%** bi-monthly and **25%** 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, **9%** reported that no one had. Thankfully **59%** of Devon Village 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:

“ People don't seem to have the ambition to be involved and muck in. People seem more insular; they move to the area & don't want to get involved as they once did to get to know people.”

“ No one wants to be Chair, have been without a Chair for 6 years as it seems like too much commitment. Have successfully engaged 'friends of the hall' to supplement committee members.”

“ A lot of older people in the village feel they've already done their bit.”

“ We're currently managed by "interim" caretaker trustees from outside of the area. After previous chair was overwhelmed. Difficult to attract local committee members due to apathy. People become interested but then don't come to meetings.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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

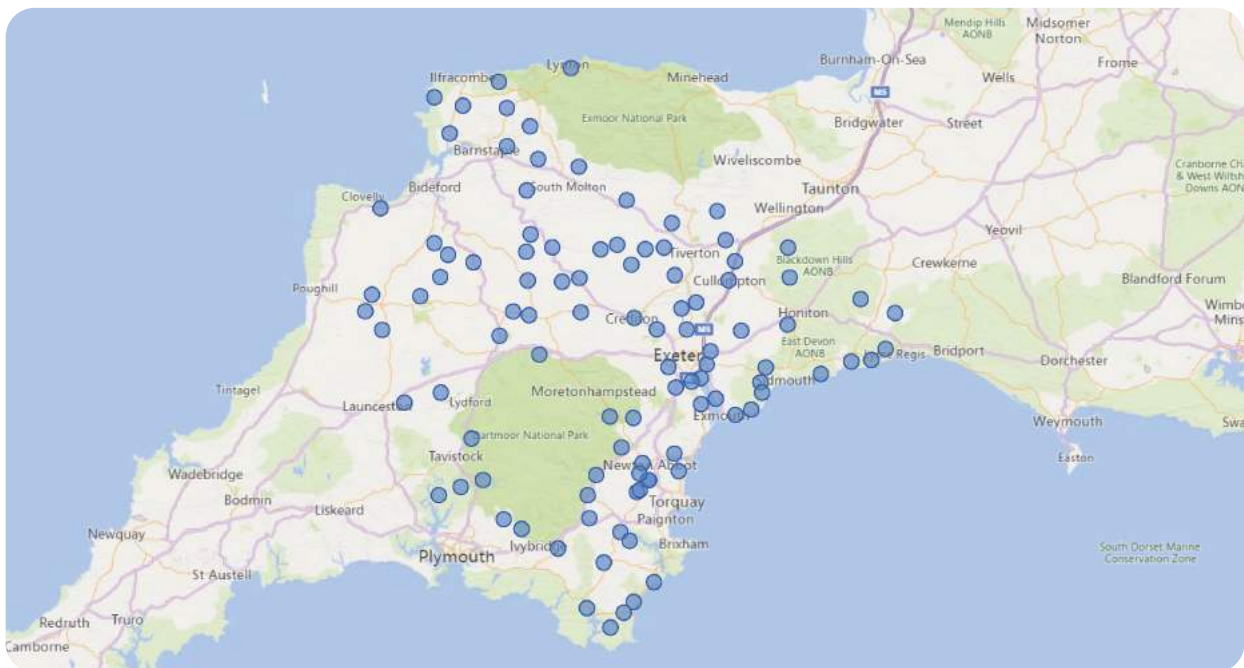


# 7. VILLAGE HALL ROLES IN COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

## KEY FINDINGS

**15%** of Devon Village Halls are in a flood risk area and **34%** are designated places of safety on the Parish Councils Emergency Plan, demonstrating another vital community resilience role that Devon's Village Halls are able to fulfil.

### Halls that are the Designated Place of Safety in their community



## WHAT WE LEARNED

**20%** of the audited Devon 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 severe weather or other local emergency incidents.





# 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 vital 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 Devon where there is a high proportion of residents living in rural areas, and **30%** of the population live in single person households. With an ageing demographic in Devon (26% 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.*



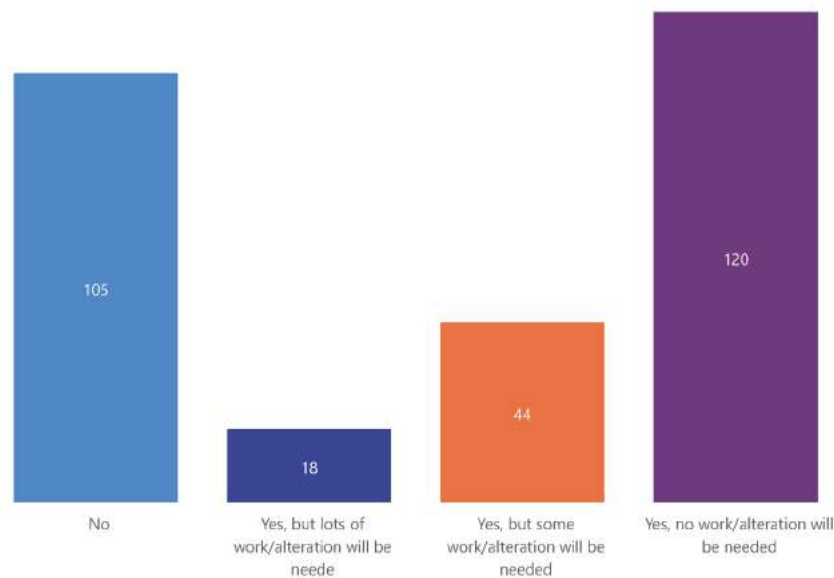
The following responses were given when asked how the Village Hall helped the physical and mental wellbeing of their communities:

- *The Hall provides a number of Physical activities: Street Dance (Teenagers), Ladies Fitness, Shotokan Karate, Ballet (youngsters), Line Dancing, Tap Dancing and a Boot camp.*
- *Mental Health/relaxation classes such as Tai Chi & Yoga are offered.*
- *Activities include a Toddler group (Wiggles & Giggles), an Art Club/Group and Dog Training.*
- *Fitness and dance classes, repair cafe, Senior lunches, art classes are all offered.*
- *With suitable modifications to the hall and the field, we could have a much more comprehensive physical health offering for the village - e.g with changing room and showers.*

**29%** of Devon Village Hall recipients said they could easily access healthcare, but **6%** responded that they felt that health care services were inaccessible to them. **58%** of those questioned, responded that healthcare was moderately accessible to them.

**41%** of Devon Village Halls have a confidential space with the potential to be used for remote/online medical appointments. **31%** of the halls with availability of a confidential space have Wi-Fi but only **6%** of halls with Wi-Fi and a confidential space also have appropriate or sufficient IT equipment/devices.

### Confidential space available



## WHAT WE LEARNED

These medical appointments could be face to face with a health care professional or online appointments where less digitally skilled members of the community could be supported by a Village Hall based digital buddy/navigator. 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 remote, online medical appointments to take place in Village Halls, funding would need to be made available for suitable IT equipment and digital upskilling of volunteers.

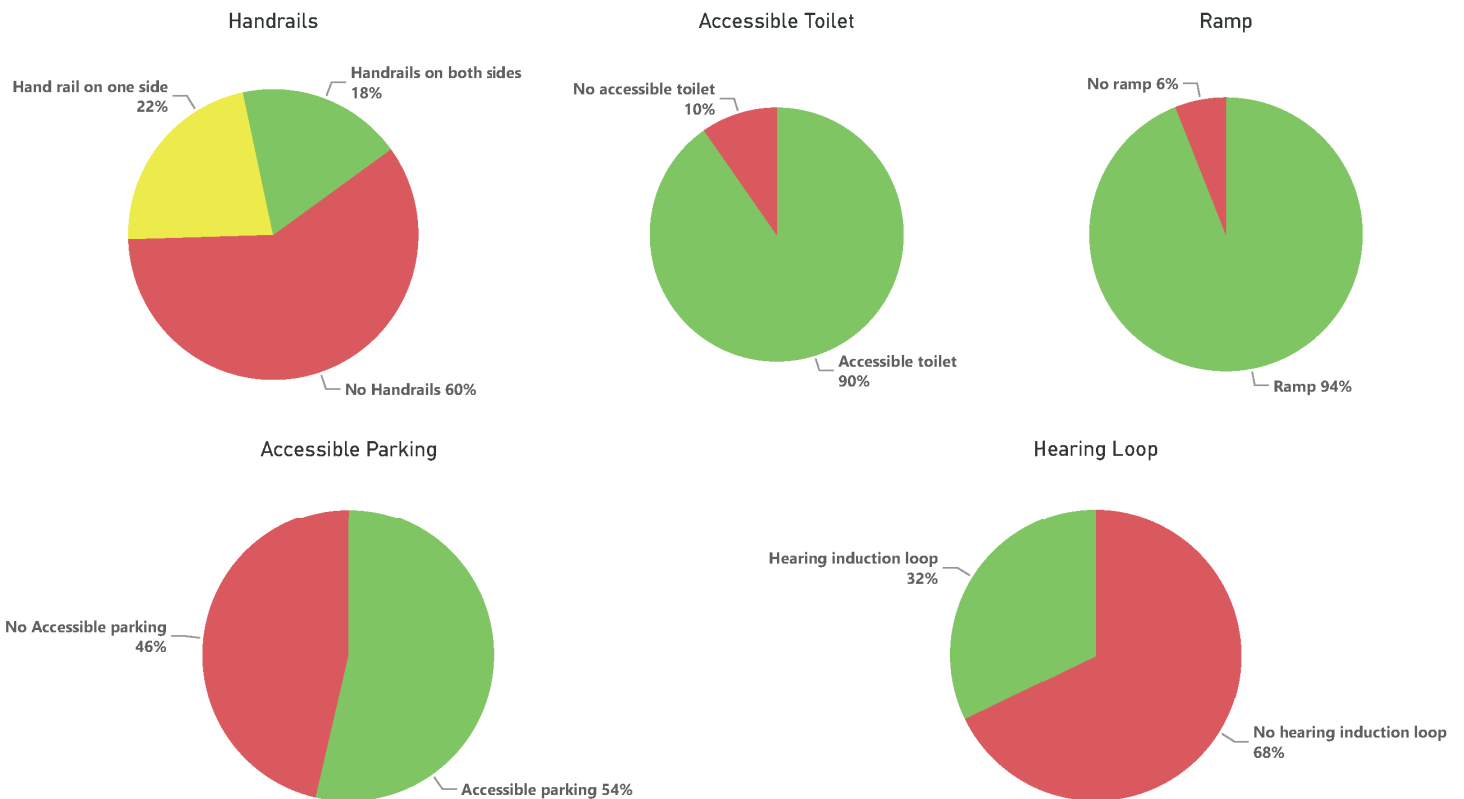


# 9. INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY OF VILLAGE HALLS

## KEY FINDINGS

Accessibility is an important part of the audit process as we all want our rural citizens to be able to use their local hall facilities. Just **14%** of Village Halls in Devon have undergone an equality audit but the majority were carried out over three years ago. We found that **10%** of Devon's Village Halls have no accessible toilet facilities, **54%** have accessible parking and **47%** offered a bench by the door of the hall so that hall users could sit down, should the need arise, before entering the hall.

### Accessibility



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Village Hall Committees would benefit from training in and support with Inclusion & Accessibility.

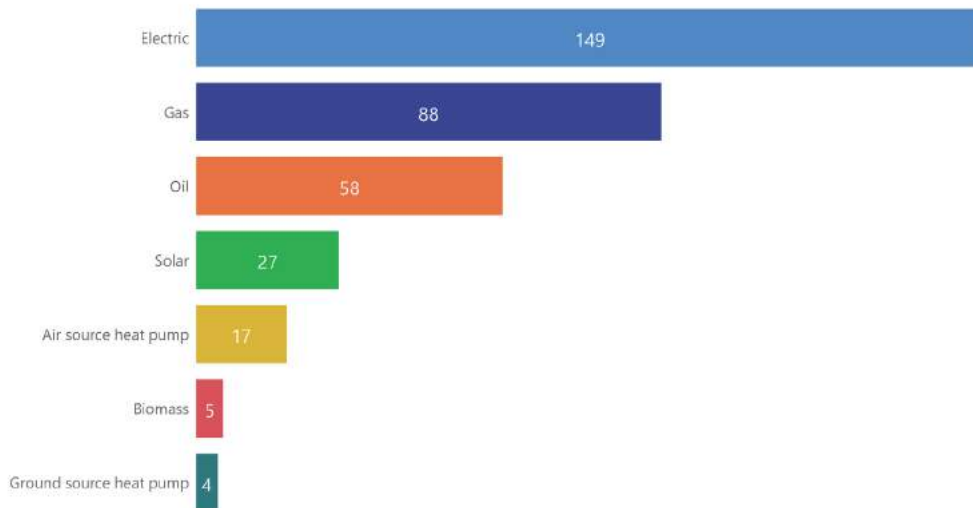
Funding will need to be identified and secured for the necessary upgrades to take place.

# 10. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

## KEY FINDINGS

**51%** of audited Devon Village Halls currently have electric heating, **30%** use gas, **16%** have oil, **8%** have solar electric and **1%** have biomass.

### Type of heating system



When asked about plans to increase environmental sustainability, Devon's Village Halls committees shared the following comments:

- *"We tried to do electric vehicle charging points, but we couldn't get the funding. We'd love to have solar panels and have applied two or three times but didn't get the funding. We have a very large south facing roof so we could even potentially provide some electricity to the village."*
- *"Investigating various options including solar panels, thermal curtains, EV charging but subject to finances and receiving grant funding."*
- *"Thinking about having solar energy, batteries, LED lighting and electric heating if we can get the panels. The hall needs to be looked at for energy efficiency."*

## WHAT WE LEARNED

The desire to improve halls' energy efficiency and environmental sustainability is there, although in some cases there is a lack of clarity and specialist guidance as to how this can be achieved.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Additional capacity/resource is required for specialist advice and support to enable environmental sustainability improvements to happen on scale.

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

When asked about their vision for the future, **33%** of Devon's Village Hall committees cited greater usage and community involvement as a priority. This community involvement often focuses on improving the health and wellbeing of their communities. For example, "activities to address loneliness in our over 60's", "offer dementia support groups", "provide a talking corner" and "offer a chair exercise group for older people". Material upgrades including "becoming more energy efficient" and "updating the building to attract new users" was stated by **36%** of committees.

Other interesting responses were having more children's activities to build on the relationships with families and keeping hire costs down so the hall is available to everyone in the community. Giving new hirers reduced rates to see if an unproven idea works within that community and hiring parking spaces to local residence who don't have parking at their homes were other innovative ideas.

At the end of the discussion **68%** of committee members said that they had actions to take away from the audit.

Feedback included:

*"We realise how proud we should be as the trustees work their socks off."*

*"Made me think about our accessibility plan and equality and diversity. Enable wheelchair users to access the building. Positional sustainability needs promoting. Proud of what we have achieved and would like to share it."*

*"It's been very useful. It has helped us to think about the future and how we sit within the community and realise that we are very important."*

*"Good to review the hall and positive to talk to someone who can highlight the efficient running of the hall and what is needed."*

*"It was a good and useful meeting, coming up with some interesting ideas."*

*"Has helped to challenge some thinking - pre visit questionnaire was a useful prompt."*

*"It's made me see that we are a major contributor to community spirit."*

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 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.

Audit responses demonstrate that there are additional 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. 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.*

*One Devon Village Hall encouraged Trustees and others to be part of EVH:*

*“We mainly did this as a community by arranging the bootcamp to be shown on a screen in the Village Hall, provided tea/coffee/lunch. This encouraged conversation and sharing of ideas as they arose. 12 trustees, committee members and new interested villagers attended and participated. It certainly made people more aware of how we must change to make the Village Hall more of a business and less of a hobby.”*

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 have 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 the Devon 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 **290** Village Halls that have been audited to date are a great example of resilience and community spirit.

There is no consistent financial support from the 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 buildings and facilities to make them more attractive as social/recreational/celebratory community spaces.**

**Halls would benefit from additional specialist 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 Devon's Village Halls.**

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

**For online remote medical appointments to take place in Village Halls, there are capacity building needs for suitable IT equipment and volunteer training.**

Charlotte Squire Project Manager  
Devon Communities Together  
October 2023