



Supporting vibrant and sustainable rural communities
through the Rural Community Action Network

Rural Community Buildings, Arts, Sports and Licensing Requirements

In 2009 ACRE carried out its third national survey of almost 10,000 rural community buildings, updating data from the 1988 and 1998 surveys, with information from 2,355 respondents. This is the third in a series of short reports providing additional information and to support the key findings.

The surveys show that in today's society rural community buildings have a multi-purpose role, serving as a social centre, arts centre, sports centre and, in some cases, providing education, health or retail services. As a result they deliver a wide range of government targets, but are also affected by a wide variety of government legislation. Licensing changes, in particular, can impact significantly on the running of community buildings and local community activity.

This report demonstrates the cultural significance of rural community buildings in England on several levels. 90% are charities run by local volunteer trustees, an aspect of British culture which is unique within Europe. They deliver a wide and growing range of local arts and cultural activities and many embody elements of local history. They contribute to Government's vision for the Big Society, but need support to do so:

1. Government departments need a thorough understanding of the use, management and financing of community buildings in rural areas in order to frame appropriate legislation and enable halls to contribute towards rural Big Society.
2. Temporary Event Notices need to remain a light touch regime for community buildings. For example, notice requirements should not be raised, limits relaxed for community buildings and the consent of the committee should be required in order to allow applications to be controlled given the tight annual limits.
3. The Intellectual Property Office should act to ensure that the abolition of the exemption for charities from copyright fees to Phonographic Performance Ltd does not result in disproportionate copyright fees for community buildings or their charitable users.
4. The Better Regulation Executive needs to reduce the cumulative impact of legislation, particularly in relation to health and safety, risk assessment and fire safety, and address the liability concerns which deter volunteers from stepping forward as trustees.
5. It is essential to maintain the small grant schemes which have been instrumental in enabling arts, sports and cultural activities to be delivered more widely, generating wider participation and preserving the cultural heritage.



ACRE and the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) together deliver a local advisory service tailored to the needs of rural community buildings throughout England. This service aims to ensure that hall trustees have access to accurate information about regulatory requirements, training and one-to-one advice and support with business planning. All RCAN advisers are networked by ACRE, undertake an OCN accredited course and are provided with resources to support their work. The national Hallmark quality standards programme encourages hall trustees to adopt best practice through a peer visitor programme. However, demand from halls for support often exceeds supply and demonstrates the need for a proactive, local service that can support all halls to achieve their aspirations and potential.

Rural community buildings have a rich cultural history

Halls in rural communities strive to meet local need in an ever changing society. Each hall therefore reflects the history and tradition of the community it serves, whether new or old.

Many have been adapted from existing buildings. A fourteenth century monastery and a sewerage works have previously been recorded, this survey includes a lifeboat house and a Victorian railway workshop. Whilst falling rolls led to the closure of many small schools in the last century, for some villages this was the opportunity to provide a village hall: 14% of village halls are former village schools or schoolhouses¹.

Elsewhere in Europe community buildings are provided either by local or regional government or the church², so Britain's network of charitable halls is a unique part of our culture. The main impetus to village hall building came after the First World War, when the rate of provision in the 1920s was at least twice that of any subsequent period. Many were originally provided as memorials to those who gave their lives, and the availability of former Army and RAF huts, and a national drive to develop social and educational provision in rural areas, also contributed to this impetus. Some of these old army huts are still in use as halls today.



Millington Village Hall

7% are listed buildings, 37% are situated in a conservation area and 14% listed special architectural features, several containing murals.



The Victory Hall, Balcombe

The Victory Hall, Balcombe was erected in 1923 as a memorial to Balcombe men who had fought and died in the 1st World War, funded by public subscription and the generosity of Lady Denman. The main hall is decorated with frescoes on the theme of War and Peace painted by the artist Neville Lytton, inspired by his experience as a war correspondent. The hall featured in the TV programme and book "Forgotten Heroes", presented by Ian Hislop. (Photo reproduced courtesy of the Victory Hall Management Committee).

¹ Village Halls in England 1998, ACRE

² Village Halls in Europe, ACRE 1989

The use of halls for sports and exercise

73% of respondents provided information about use of the hall for sports and exercise, showing that community buildings are a significant resource for the health and wellbeing of people living in rural communities. Most sports use has grown in the last twenty years, with substantial growth in activities such as pilates, yoga and martial arts, which are suitable for smaller, as well as larger halls. Whilst some activities may not appear more widespread some halls now support a variety of different classes.

A wide variety of other sports are supported e.g. archery, boxing, cycling groups, junior sports training, fencing, fun runs, gymnastics, circuit training, croquet, chair based exercise, curling, squash, shooting, uni-hockey, volleyball, walking groups, village sports days and Wii sports.



East Hoathly Village Hall

Sports (mainly weekly)	% 2009	% 1998	% 1988
Fitness classes such as aerobics, keep fit, pilates, tai chi	51	53	43
Carpet or short mat bowls	33	30	13
Yoga	31	11	9
Martial arts such as karate and judo	22	18	11
Badminton	19	19	23
Table tennis	18	15	16
Soft play for toddlers	13	-	-
Darts/billiards/snooker/pool	9	6	4
Football training	7	6	-
Skittles (Occasional)	5	-	-
Short tennis	3	3	3



31% of respondents have facilities attached and 12% have changing rooms.

Other facilities indicated in the survey as being available were rugby pitches, squash courts, conservation areas, basketball courts, toddlers' playgrounds, Multi-use games areas, teenage shelters, boules, a swimming pool and an Aunt Sally pitch. 1% indicated that they shared their site with local allotments.

Facilities attached or sharing site	% 2009	% 1998	% 1988
Playing field or village green	25	18	-
Play equipment	20	12	14
Football pitch	14	13	13
Tennis court	8	6	6
Cricket pitch	7	7	9
Sports pavillion(s)	6	-	-
Public park/garden	6	-	-
Picnic site	5	-	-
Bowling green	5	4	-
Netball court	2	2	-
Skate park	2	-	-
Allotments	1	-	-

Arts activity in rural community buildings

80% of the halls responding to the survey provided information about use for arts activities. Participation in arts activities in rural areas has grown in 3 areas since ACRE conducted its first survey in 1988:

- regular weekly arts activity - children's dance, band practices and art clubs
- in variety - different types of dance classes
- occasional performance activities

Arts Activity (Weekly, Monthly, Occasional = usual frequency)	% 2009	% 1998	% 1988
Amateur dramatics/pantomime O	38	34	22
Concerts O	43	40	40
Dance classes/clubs (eg ballroom, line, tap, scottish, folk, belly and morris) W	35	35*	25*
Art/craft exhibitions O	34	30	<4*
Art classes/Art club W	30	28	7*
Band practices W/O	29	18	<4*
Visiting professional theatre/music O	29	-	-
Children's dance classes W	25	15	16
Sewing classes/Upholstery/craft classes W	20	23*	<8*
Film shows M/O	18	10	20
Flower arranging classes/club M/O	14	15	<4*
Choral society W	10	6	5
Folk/jazz/other music club O	9	5*	3*
Photography M/O	6	-	-
Music lessons W	5	3	3*

* Figures not directly comparable owing to changes in questions e.g. some halls now have more than one type of dance, craft or music club.

25 other arts activities were recorded, including acting classes for children, writer's clubs and book clubs, recording, music for toddlers, orchestral rehearsals, bell ringing, spinners, weavers, and wood turners. Crafts range from sugar craft and egg painting to lace making and beading. They reflect the local historical, cultural and geographical context, as well as the talents present within specific local communities today. Other cultural activities include a literary festival and well-dressing.



Arts facilities in rural community buildings

Roughly 40% of halls are equipped with permanent stage facilities, lighting and curtains, with a trend to increasing flexibility through use of portable staging. 72% are considered fully accessible to disabled people, 26% partially accessible. While around a quarter are equipped with black out facilities and screens. There has been resurgence in the showing of films and some own projection or other visual equipment.

25 halls, 1%, had applied for funding from the Arts Council for facilities or equipment, and almost half had been successful. We assume that these received funding from the lottery small grants scheme, Awards for All, as it is difficult for community buildings to qualify for larger Arts Council Awards.

Facility	% 2009	% 1998	% 1988
Piano	44	57	-
Stage curtain(s)	43	42	-
Permanent stage	40	47	52
Stage lighting	37	30	-
PA/sound system	32	24*	20
Screen	27	14	-
Portable stage	25	20	20
Black-out facilities	24	22	27
PowerPoint projector	8	-	-
DVD/Video player	8	-	-
Slide projector	6	3	2
Television	6	4	-
Film projector	5	1	1

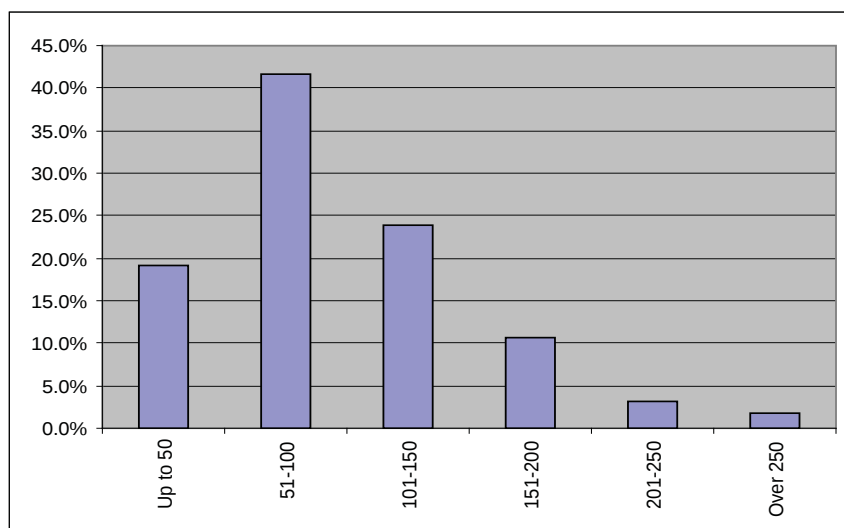
The majority of halls are quite small venues; 61% have a dancing capacity under 100.



Tempsford Stuart Memorial Village Hall

Seating Capacity (theatre style)	Main Hall %	Second Hall %
Up to 50	7	18
51-100	39	6
101-150	28	1
151-200	12	0.1
201-250	5	0.1
Over 250	2	0
Response Count	2172	598

Approx. size of the main hall	Response %
Up to 100m sq	30
101-200m sq	41
201-300m sq	14
301-400m sq	6
More than 400m sq	4
Unsure	5



Trends in hall use

89% of respondents provided information about community, social and recreational use. Comparison with previous survey results show that bingo is less widespread, whereas coffee mornings, concerts and charity auctions are more popular.

Of the halls that responded to the survey:

- 85% are used for services; as a polling station, for parish council meetings and luncheon clubs
- 61% for educational activities; pre-school or nursery, cubs or brownies and local history groups
- 32% for occasional commercial activities; company meetings, one day sales and antique fairs.



Other occasional social events	% 2009	% 1998	%1988
Private parties	95	93	90
One-off fundraising events not listed elsewhere (e.g. video horse racing)	72	-	-
Wedding receptions	69	69	74
Fairs/fetes	63	62	-
Dances	62	64	64
Coffee mornings	55	54	44
Harvest supper	52	57	-
Discos	50	59	55
Church/PCC events	48	52	*
Produce show	33	35	-
Charity auctions	31	18	23
Bingo (also held weekly or monthly)	25	30	32

While 60% reported new activities had opened, 30% reported activities that had moved or closed, usually as numbers dwindled and leaders left. Some of these are important community activities which serve people disadvantaged by lack of private transport, including WIs, youth clubs, senior citizens clubs, pre-schools and baby clinics.

34% provided information about activities which were excluded and these fell into five categories:

- A third exclude teenage/21st birthday parties and 9% discos, dances and band practices owing to damage, under age drinking, noise and concern for neighbours
- 19% exclude certain sports or dancing, principally because of damage e.g. from hard balls or stilettos or because facilities are inappropriate e.g. too low for badminton, too short for bowls, floor unsuitable
- 11% exclude dog training and other activities involving animals because of health and safety concerns, principally because the hall is also used by young children
- Small percentages exclude activities which are not compatible with their charitable objects or for which the hall is not licensed, e.g. commercial sales, religious or political activities, adult entertainment and sale of alcohol
- A small percentage cannot be used by certain groups, such as under fives, frail or disabled people or for larger events, having inadequate heating, toilets and/or kitchen, lacking storage or parking. 20% said their hall was inadequate for current users and 10% that it needed urgent repair.

Licensing and regulation of community buildings

“Me, chairman of the committee? I volunteered - I must be mad!”

There are two principal licensing requirements which affect rural community buildings:

- A Premises Licence is needed from the District or Unitary Council Licensing Department in order to hold regulated activities, such as public performance of music, singing, dancing and similar entertainments, plays, films and sale of alcohol. In social clubs a Club Premises Certificate is needed for the supply of alcohol. When or where licensable activities are to be held which are not covered by a Premises Licence, a Temporary Events Notice (TEN) can be given, subject to certain limits
- The public performance of copyright music or film requires a licence from an organisation administering the copyright.

Depending on the use of the hall, a committee may need to comply with a range of other requirements:

- Licensing for holding raffles or lotteries from the district council
- Registration of the hall as a Food Business with the District Environmental Health Department
- Up to 18 Health and Safety requirements e.g. risk assessment, provision of an accident report book etc.
- Fire safety risk assessment
- Criminal Record Bureau checks (now Vetting and Barring) for unsupervised contact with children.

Roles performed by staff or volunteers	% Vols	% Part Time or	% Full Time
Cleaner	71	66	2
Caretaker	70	26	3
Grounds maintenance	63	25	1
Booking secretary	32	20	2
Secretary/admin	20	12	2
Finance/treasurer	20	11	2
Bar staff	18	5	0.5
Hall/centre manager	11	5	2

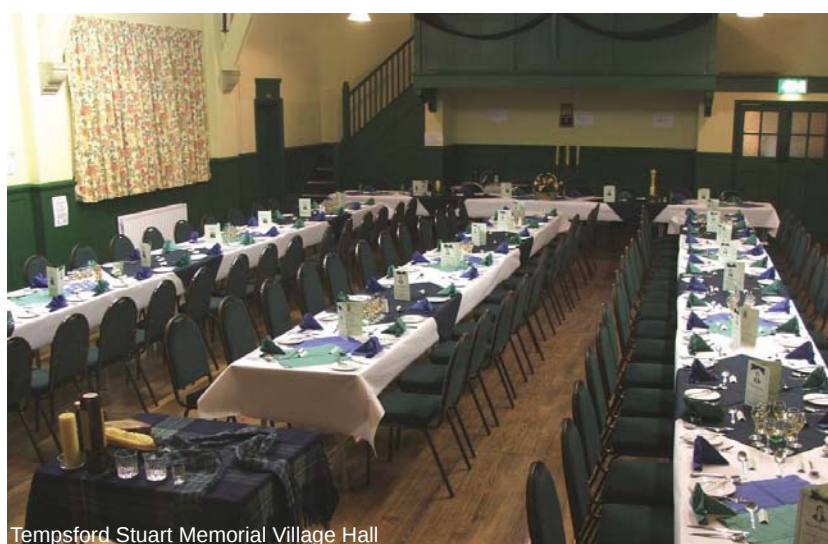
It is therefore important to bear in mind that the majority of community buildings are run by volunteers and that licensing requirements are just one of many, which collectively give rise to complaints about “red tape” and excessive bureaucracy.

How often is your kitchen used for food preparation other than tea and biscuits?

Often	17%
Occasionally	67%
Never	16%

Is the hall registered as a “food premises” or a “food business/ food business operator” with the Environmental Health Department?

Yes	19%
No	69%
Unsure	12%



Tempsford Stuart Memorial Village Hall

Premises Licences

75% of respondent halls hold a Premises Licence, which is the key licence needed by most community buildings as it permits a variety of entertainment to be held in public. The licensing system was simplified in 2005, so that only one licence is now needed from licensing authorities to hold a variety of entertainments. The basic licence is free of charge for community buildings. The same licence can authorise sale of alcohol or late-night refreshments, for a fee. Halls were asked to tick which activities they are covered for, in the same way as they do when applying for a licence.

69% of survey respondents answered this question.

Licensable activity	% of responses to Q (1,642)	% of all survey responses
Performance of live music	92	64
Playing of recorded music	89	62
Performance of dance	85	59
Stage plays	76	52
Provision of entertainment facilities for making music/dance and similar	75	51
Entertainment similar to that above	71	49
Film shows	63	43
Indoor sporting events	47	33
Sale of alcohol	36	25
Sale of late-night refreshments	20	14

The top two activities listed as taking place in halls under the Premises Licence were performance of live music and playing of recorded music, which is good news for the music industry. Village halls are often the starting point for fledgling bands as practice venues. They also support a wide range of musical performances through touring arts organisations.

ACRE recently responded positively to the Department for Culture Media and Sport consultation to exempt the need for a licence for live music in small venues, but suggested that the capacity proposed should be increased from 100 to 200. This would be in line with the average capacity for rural halls (see arts facilities section). It would also enable halls that do not have a Premises Licence including live music (36% of those responding to the survey question) or the 25% having no Premises Licence to trial or organise small occasional events without the need to give a Temporary Event Notice.



Crowcombe Village Hall



Although at the time of the survey over a third of those with a Premises Licence were licensed for alcohol sale, as a proportion of all respondent halls this figure was just a quarter. When the Licensing Act 2003 came into force one of the key problems for charitable community buildings was finding someone qualified to sell alcohol who was willing to take on the responsibility of becoming the hall's Designated Premises Supervisor (DPS), responsible for supervision of alcohol sales. 22% responded to the question asking who had taken on the DPS role and 75% were volunteers. Some were already qualified for this role, e.g. local publican, shopkeepers or restaurant owners (or retired from such roles), but for those which have had to undertake training it has required additional expense. There were concerns among volunteers about the liabilities they were taking on, particularly as infringement can lead to criminal prosecution and they could not personally supervise all events.

If the premises licence includes the sale of alcohol, who is the designated premises supervisor (DPS)? (492 responses)

A volunteer management committee member	70%
A local publican or restaurant owner	28%
An employee (e.g. parish clerk, caretaker, manager, steward)	7%
A volunteer not on the committee	5%
A local shopkeeper	4%
A caterer or mobile bar contractor	2%



Since the survey the need for a qualified DPS to supervise alcohol sales in community buildings has been waived and a management committee may take the responsibility. The Department for Culture Media and Sports National Statistics Bulletin, September 2010, shows that 244 community buildings (urban and rural) applied for this facility in the first year to March 2010.

ACRE and RCAN members have made substantial efforts over the years to ensure the licensing regime is appropriate to the needs of rural community buildings. Up to 2% appear to have had difficulty answering, owing either to a lack of understanding about licensing or difficulties with the on-line form.

6% of respondents have a Social Club on the premises supplying alcohol and a small number have arrangements with the Social Club for provision of bars for events.



Down Ampney Village Hall

Temporary Event Notices

Where premises are not licensed for a particular activity a Temporary Event Notice (TEN) can be given. This is intended to be a "light touch" regime designed for occasional events. Only ten working days notice needs to be given to the licensing authority and police. A maximum of 12 can be given for any premises per annum, and 5 per individual who is not a Personal Licence Holder.

Approximately how many Temporary Events Notices (TENs) were approved for the hall in 2008?

None	43%
Less than 5	29%
5-12	25%
12-24	2%
More than 24	1%

Where a building has a number of meeting rooms each room can have its own limit of 12 TENs, providing communal areas have been excluded from each TEN, and 3% had used this approach to deal with the limits. Over half the respondent halls, 56%, used TENs in the previous year.



Licensing Act 2003 problem areas

Only 110 halls, 5% of those answering the question, reported problems with holding activities under the Licensing Act 2003. 55 halls reported problems with the limits on and/or costs of TENs. 17 recorded that they had lost bookings as a result of the TENs limits, 18 that the cost was too high in relation to small, low income events, 8 complained about the difficulty of controlling who gives a TEN.

Besides problems with TENs, 17 halls referred to the control of noise and disturbance, usually at the end of an event. Complaints had in some cases given rise to restrictions on events which were affecting hire income. Some halls complained that neighbours were overly difficult in relation to occasional events.

There were a small number of complaints relating to licensing administration e.g. 'hostile' licensing officers, confusing regulations or the bureaucracy of form filling.

Copyright Licensing

The public performance of copyright music or film requires a licence from an organisation administering the copyright. In the case of music the Performing Right Society (PRS) administers the rights of composers and Phonographic Performance Ltd (PPL) the rights of record companies. Fees are payable and although single permits can be obtained for occasional events, where music is played regularly it is generally cheaper for a hall to hold a licence and pass the cost on through hire fees.

An exemption from payment of PPL fees for charitable performances has recently been overturned by European legislation, to which the Government is now obliged to give effect. ACRE is working with other charities and the Intellectual Property Office to seek an agreement from PRS and PPL to a low cost joint licence to avoid an overall rise in costs and administration for the voluntary sector.



Does your hall have the following licences?

Performing Right Society (PRS)	49%
A Phonographic Performance (PPL)	7%
To hold wedding ceremonies	0.6%

Given that only 7% of respondent halls hold a PPL, this indicates that costs could increase substantially.

Financial implications

Less than half the respondent halls, 46%, regularly make a surplus from hire charges for reserves and there is heavy reliance on fundraising and parish council grants to cover costs. Extensive volunteer management and fundraising towards upkeep enables hire charges to be kept at an affordable level for community use. This heavy dependence on volunteer support means that it is essential that cost rises, such as new copyright fees and VAT, are avoided and that grant streams are available when needed to help with urgent repairs and to improve hall facilities so that they better serve community needs.

This report shows that there are cultural benefits in supporting these facilities, which also help improve the health and wellbeing of people living in rural areas. However, community based arts, sports and cultural activities also generate important economic benefits to rural areas by providing local training and employment opportunities.

Use of halls has trebled over the last 20 years, thanks to investment by local authorities, the lottery and other funders, in partnership with local fundraising. Increased use has enabled many halls to become financially self-sufficient and build up reserves, reducing the need for public funding in the longer term.

In the context of short term economic restraint priority needs to be given to investing public and lottery funding in those halls that need urgent repair and improvement of basic facilities to bring them into better use and improve financial sustainability.

Information Sheets are available from ACRE and the Rural Community Action Network about licensing and other issues mentioned in this Report.

The National Village Hall Survey 2009 collected information from 2,355 village halls and other similar rural community buildings. ACRE released the Key Findings Report in November 2009 followed by a series of reports of which this is the third.

Key Findings

This provides summary of data collected and makes 10 recommendations

Economic Impact of Community Buildings in Rural Communities

Demonstrates that investment in rural community building has a multiplier effect. Building works create local employment, new halls activate community activity and development of services, which have important social benefits and creates further employment.

Rural Community Buildings and Environmental Sustainability

Community buildings have an important part to play in improving environmental sustainability in rural areas with potential to demonstrate energy efficiency, renewable energy and sustainable buildings in action.

Rural Community Buildings, Arts, Sports and Licencing Requirements

The survey shows that in today's society rural community buildings have a multi-purpose role, serving as a social centre, arts centre, sports centre and, in some cases, providing education, health or retail services. Licensing changes, in particular, can impact significantly on the running of community buildings and local community activity.

State, Management and Use of Rural Community Buildings

Available soon



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For further information about this Report or the RCAN, contact Deborah Clarke, ACRE's Village Hall Information Officer (d.clarke@acre.org.uk)

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About ACRE

Action with Communities in Rural England is the national umbrella body of the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN), which operates at national, regional and local level in support of rural communities across the country. We aim to promote a healthy, vibrant and sustainable rural community sector that is well connected to policy and decision-makers who play a part in delivering this aim. ACRE is nationally recognised for its expertise in ensuring rural community-led solutions are central to public policy debate.