



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

The state and management of rural community buildings in England

In 2009 ACRE carried out its third national survey of almost 10,000 rural community buildings, updating data from 1988 and 1998 surveys, with information from 2,355 respondents. This is the fourth in a series of short reports providing additional information and to support the Key Findings Report¹.

This report demonstrates the responsibility that volunteer trustees undertake in managing buildings and makes suggestions that could ease the financial and legislative burden.

There can be little doubt that rural community buildings are the heart of village life today. Rural communities have traditionally owned and managed community buildings such as village and church halls, providing services and activities essential for those without access to transport. They are the glue that binds communities together, sustaining the health and wellbeing of the rural population.

Local management has a strong fit with Government policy² and is a strength which has protected halls against closure. Use has trebled in the last 20 years and other research reports³ recognise halls' unique role in rural communities. Rural community buildings provide opportunities to develop further the Big Society and to meet carbon reduction targets.

Management and upkeep presents a growing challenge. The ageing stock of buildings, lack of finance for improvements, rising heating costs and legislative burden threaten sustainability and weaken the ability to attract new volunteers. A key threat to a small proportion is the continued lack of capital grant and loan finance for the refurbishment or rebuilding of older halls, which cannot be funded from slender income. Sustainability is heavily dependent on volunteers.

Key issues from this report:

1. 10% of respondent halls need urgent repairs or replacement, a figure consistent with previous surveys and indicative of a steady demand commensurate with an ageing stock.
2. There is a strategic gap in funding for major capital projects e.g. refurbishment or rebuild in locations where income, local precept, local development and other funding streams are insufficient. Evidence shows that this gap is leaving a small proportion of communities with older buildings which are in a circle of decline and barely fit for purpose. Lack of co-ordination of short term funding streams having blighted the fundraising efforts of volunteers, in some cases holding back projects for ten years or more. Nationwide long term investment (grant and loan) is needed through a funding stream which delivers larger projects in co-ordination with locally available funding.



¹ Rural Community Buildings in England 2009 Key Findings, ACRE

² Public Service White Paper

³ Rural Insight Survey, June 2011 and Community organisations controlling assets: a better understanding, Joseph Rowntree Foundation June 2011

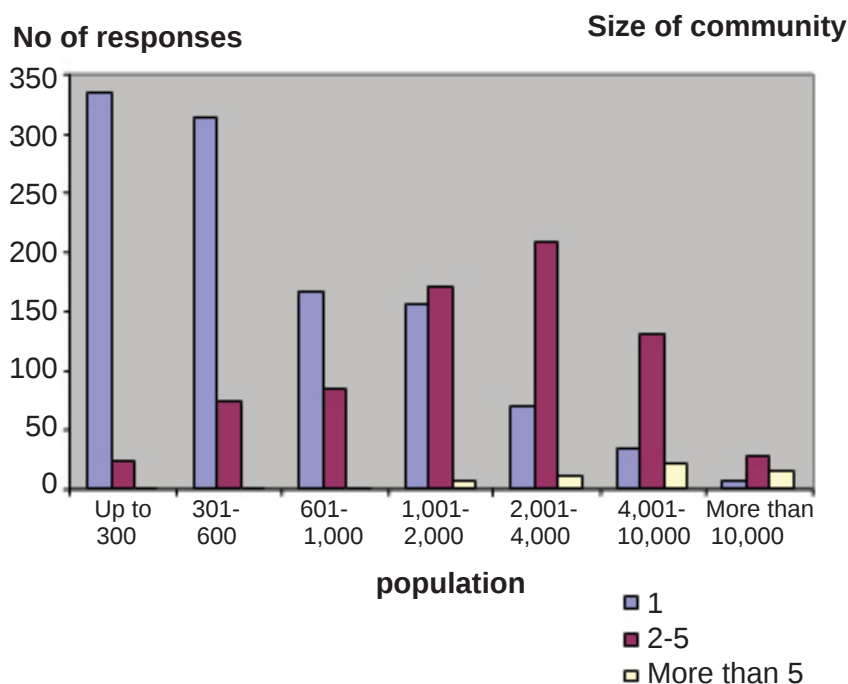
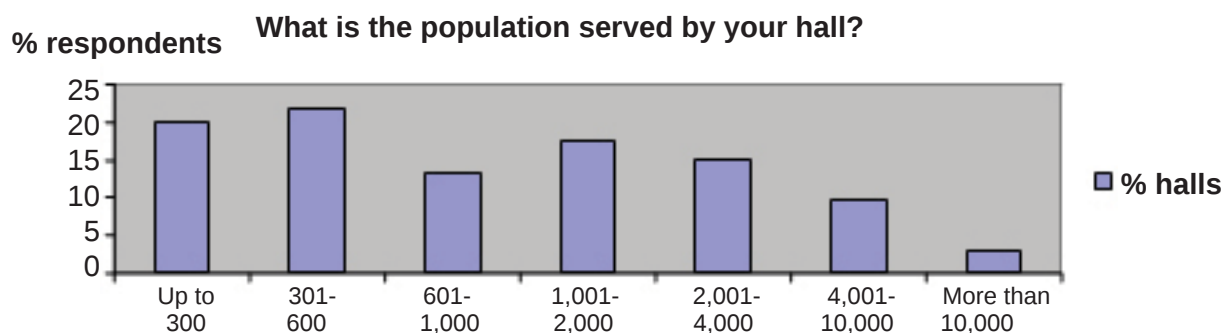
ACRE and the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) together deliver a local advisory service tailored to the needs of rural community buildings throughout England. This service aims to ensure that hall trustees have access to accurate information about regulatory requirements, training and one-to-one 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.

The Localism agenda can only be delivered by facilitating the ability of communities to acquire and develop buildings or land over a period of more than five years and by timely availability of funding when an opportunity arises.

3. ACRE supports the recommendations in the Red Tape Task Force Report⁴. In order to improve sustainability there is a need to address the effect of legislative and fiscal requirements on problems such as above inflation increases in running costs, the administrative burden on volunteers and volunteer age, recruitment and concern about liability.
4. There is need for Defra to continue taking a strong lead in ensuring that issues affecting rural community buildings are dealt with across Government, advised through the Rural Community Buildings Network.
5. Volunteer trustees run public assets in rural areas worth over £3 billion. Continued public funding for the national network of rural community building advisers is of fundamental importance to making the most of the huge voluntary commitment people make in running these buildings, 18.5 hours per week per hall on average.

The hall and its community

42% of respondent halls serve very small communities, with a population under 600. 73% have a population under 2,000. There is strong correlation between size of community and number of meeting places. 58% of respondents said they provide the only multi-purpose community meeting place and 85%, used the description village or memorial hall.



Population served	% 2009	% 1998	% 1988
Up to 300	20	20	21
301-600	22	21	22
601-1000	13	14	16
1,001-2,000	18	15	17
2,001-4,000	15	15	9
4,001-10,000	10	9	}
More than 10,000	3	2	} 9

⁴ Unshackling Good Neighbours - Report of the Cabinet Office Red Tape Taskforce 2011

Type of Hall	Response %	1998 %
Village or memorial hall	85	83
Other (scout or guide halls, sports pavilions, WI halls, reading rooms, miners welfare etc.)	8	2
Community centre	7	8
Church hall	3	3
Parish/town council hall	2	5
Joint Provision School and Community Hall	1	1

What other meeting facilities does your community have? (1900 responses)	Response %
Church	79
School hall	39
Church hall	34
Sports pavillion	32
Scout/guide hut	19
Other (eg miners welfare, pub, RBL, chapel, library, WI, reading room)	20
Village or Memorial hall	18
Community centre	9
Parish/town council hall	5

ACRE comment: Where communities have a variety of meeting places this is normally because one size is not suitable for all activities. In addition, some facilities are unsuitable for a variety of community activities; church vestries and sports pavilions, for example, are usually small, school halls lack availability during term time, pubs can be unsuitable for children and too noisy for meetings requiring quiet.

15% of respondents reported that a local community building or facility had closed in the last ten years. 16 had lost 3 or more.

14% reported that a local community facility had opened in the last ten years, and a further 2% had more than one new facility.

Facilities closed (15%)	86 gave details	Facilities opened (14%)	83 gave details
Shop and/or PO	55 (64%)	Village hall rebuilt	21 (25%)
Church/chapel/ church hall	20 (24%)	Sports pavilion/club	15 (18%)
Pub	14 (17%)	Shop (inc community and farm shops) or outreach PO	16 (19%)
Other: community hall/school hall/ youth club building	10	Other: café, pub, play area or sports field, Youth club or Pre-school	between 1-3 each

When was Your Hall Originally Built?	% 2009	% 1998	% 1988
Before 1850	7	7	7
1851 – 1914	26	24	21
1915 – 1929	14	15	18
1930 – 1939	8	7	9
1940 – 1945	1	1	1
1946 – 1959	10	10	10
1960 – 1969	7	7	7
1970 – 1979	8	10	9
1980 – 1989	7	8	8
1990 - 1999	7	7	
Since 2000	5		

56% of respondent halls are over 60 years old, 33% over 90 years old. An ageing stock creates demand for modernisation and improvement.



Managing the hall; localism at work

90% of respondent halls are registered charities and each hall benefits from, on average, 18.5 hours per week of volunteer time, a saving of £6,734 per hall p.a., at a notional £7 per hour⁵ and ⁶. Without significant volunteer effort most halls would be unsustainable.

While 5% are managed by parish/town councils, only 2% described their halls as parish/town council halls, preferring to call them village halls or community centres.

Who is the hall run by?	Response %	1998 %
A committee composed of representatives of users, elected and co-opted members, as trustees	88	74
A committee of a community association	5	6
The parish council (or a sub-committee of the council)	5	5
The parochial church council	2	2
Other e.g. elected trustees, WI, Guide Committee	6	4

Roughly how many hours per year do volunteers spend running the hall (excluding committee meetings)	Ave hours pa	Ave hrs per week
Bookings & key holding	177	3.5
Fundraising	161	3
Small repairs	158	3
Finance/treasurer	130	2.5
Secretarial/admin	103	2
Negotiations with hirers/users	96	2
Assessments (testing fire equipment, risk, etc.)	72	1.5
Supervising/liasing with staff	33	0.5
Major repairs (small no responses)	29	0.5
Total	959	18.5

Which of the following tasks are usually carried out by volunteers?	Response %
Small repairs/routine maintenance/checks	95
Risk assessments (inc fire risk assessment)	58
Most maintenance work except specialist tasks (e.g. electricity)	52
Redecorating (internal)	50
Major repairs and improvements (e.g. roofing, extensions)	2

"I think there needs to be a national campaign to explain to people how halls are managed and funded. There is a tendency amongst people using the hall to think that the Government and local authorities fund the hall and it's their automatic right to use it - the voluntary input into managing a building as responsible trustees is little known or understood."

⁵ Rural Community Buildings in England 2009 Key Findings, ACRE

⁶ The Economic Impact of Community Buildings in Rural Communities, ACRE October 2010

Managing a well used community building has become more like running a small business, owing to the growth in legislation in the last thirty years. Rural community halls are not businesses. The majority of village halls are run by a volunteer management committee.

73% own the property freehold and 20% have a lease and 7% did not know their tenure!

Only 30 respondents, 1%, are incorporated. This means that either a Custodian Trustee, or individual Holding Trustees, need to be appointed to hold the property on behalf of the charity. ACRE's recommended choice is the Official Custodian of Charities but a parish council is another good option. At least 5% of respondents confused the role of different types of trustees. For clarification see ACRE Village Hall Information Sheet 17, Trustees roles and responsibilities.

If your hall is a charity, who are the holding or custodian trustees? (1866 responses) 79%	2009 %	1998 %
Official Custodian for Charities at the Charity Commission	20	12
Parish council	25	21
Individual trustees*	50	45
A church authority (usually church halls)	4	4
Other (eg Scout Assn, Ltd. co)	1	4

How often does the committee meet?	% 2009	% 1998
Monthly	34	34
Bi-monthly	25	24
Quarterly	20	27
When required	21	12

Some respondents indicated that their committees meet formally only 2–4 times a year but that officers and sub-committees are in frequent contact by email and telephone or meet more frequently. Use of IT having enabled a move from regular formal meetings towards the constitutional minimum meetings plus as and when required.

ACRE comment: The lack of understanding about tenure and trusteeship was evident in previous surveys and underlines the need for trustee training to be available on a continuing basis, so that new managing trustees understand their legal arrangements and responsibilities. This is a role that can be performed at a local level by RCAN village hall advisers, trained by ACRE specialists and supported by ACRE Village Hall Information Sheets.

Take up of the new Charitable Incorporated Organisation structure by village halls should be monitored by the Charity Commission.

ACRE comment: It is essential that all charity trustees have opportunity for involvement in decisions about the charity's strategy and finances. While informal networking and sub-committees are often an efficient way of ensuring action is taken, the danger is that other committee members become left out of discussion, causing ill feeling or loss of interest.

As well as managing the hall and maintaining its fabric, which statements best describe your management committee? (tick all that apply)	Response %
The committee proactively markets the hall and encourages new activities/services	66
The committee actively consults and involves the community in the use of the hall	66
The committee takes a proactive role in running community events	59

Does your hall suffer problems with? (2144 responses)	Regularly %	Occasionally %	Rarely or never %	Not sure
Difficulty recruiting new committee members	39	34	20	1
Lack of support from the community	19	35	35	1
Lack of financial support	17	32	40	2
Lack of use	10	26	55	0
Competition from better equipped halls	8	24	51	7
Lack of support from the parish council	6	15	65	2
Vandalism	3	30	62	0

Managing the burden of legislation

While the table indicates the majority are complying with the rise in legislative and funders' requirements, the majority of training needs were in this area and many respondents complained about the burden of paperwork and regulatory compliance that volunteers are expected to undertake. 20% reported problems meeting legislative requirements⁷.

39% of respondents regularly have difficulty recruiting new committee members. This was the most serious problem reported with concerns about liability and lack of time often cited as reasons.

Do you have the following written documents/policies?	% 2009	% 1998
Job Description	87	30
Hiring Agreement	85	
Fire Risk Assessment	84	
Health and Safety policy	66	17
Risk Assessment	65	6
Contract of Employment	56	18
Child Protection	28	
Equal Opportunities	25	7
Environmental Policy	15	
Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults	8	

While only 19%⁸ are registered as a food business/ operator with their local authority, 55% have volunteers or staff trained in Basic Food Hygiene. Food hygiene and safety regulations are an example where differences in interpretation are not uncommon.

If you have volunteers or staff using the kitchen regularly how many have Basic Food Hygiene training?	Response Percent
Most	13
Some	42
None	14
Not sure	31

ACRE Comment: ACRE and RCAN contributed information and data to the Red Tape Task Force, a Cabinet Office initiative examining the burden of Red Tape on the voluntary sector. *Unshackling Good Neighbours*, the Task Force final report, lists 33 licences, permissions and registrations that may be required by community premises.

Multiplicity of use places community buildings in a position where legislation designed for a variety of specific purposes has unintended consequences on design, management and finances. Examples include Vetting and Barring, Licensing, Copyright and VAT. The Task Force report highlights some effects of this deluge: worry for volunteers, onerous and costly insurance requirements, differences in interpretation by local authority regulators.

To deliver the Big Society it is essential that the recommendations of *Unshackling Good Neighbours* are implemented.

⁷ and ⁸ Rural Community Buildings, Arts, Sports and Licensing Requirements, ACRE December 2010

ACRE comment: *Unshackling Good Neighbours* also serves to highlight the importance of the work done by ACRE to interpret legislation and inform volunteer managers through publication of Information Sheets and training of locally based village halls advisers throughout the country. The survey indicates that the economic value of the work of volunteers who run the 9,000 plus community buildings in rural England could amount to approx £60 million p.a⁹. The cost of the ACRE and RCAN village halls advisers is a small fraction of this and therefore represents very good value. Successful halls have developed partly thanks to long term support from their RCAN Village Halls Adviser. Piecemeal withdrawal of government and local authority funding for these services threatens long term repercussions for voluntary activity and service delivery in rural areas.

A national strategy, a point made by recent JRF research¹⁰, is needed to ensure that support services are sustainable in the long term. Combining core Defra funding, local authority matched funding and an element of private and charitable subscription income is a good partnership model that has worked previously for capital funding and funding of village hall advice services.

The Asset Transfer Unit needs to be aware of the value of the specialist nature of the RCAN village hall advisers and strive to support its continued existence.

The state of rural community buildings

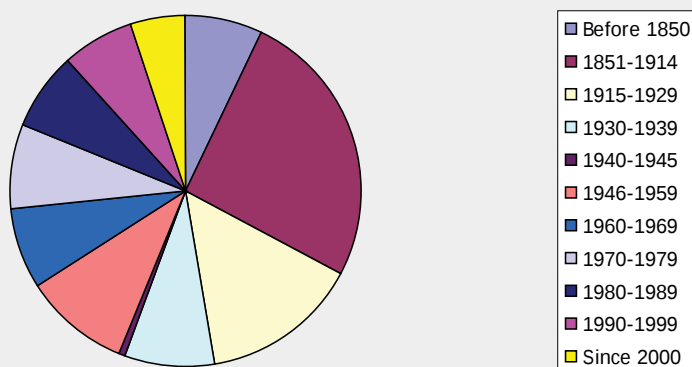
Rural community buildings have a rich cultural history¹¹. Many were originally provided as memorials to those who gave their lives in the First or Second World War or play another important role in their community's heritage - 14% are former village schools or schoolhouses. A few former army and RAF huts still serve, with loving care.

Age and construction have a significant effect on the demand for capital funding for improvement work. While overall condition has improved, previous reports¹² show that 10% of respondent halls need urgent repairs, mainly to the roof, toilets, heating and/or kitchen; a figure consistent with previous surveys and indicative of a steady demand commensurate with an ageing stock.

Halls built before 1914 are most likely to have building works planned.

What is the construction?	2009 %	1988 %
Brick	64	62
Stone/recon stone	18	17
Wood	9	13
Cement block	6	10
Corrugated iron	2	3
Pre-cast concrete panels	2	4

B10 - When was your hall originally built? (ignore previous buildings and later works)



A number of respondents described their struggle and frustration to win funding, commenting that they were throwing money away on essential repairs to buildings which badly needed replacement, that grant applications had been rejected and there was nowhere to obtain finance from. A small number of halls are clearly in priority need for replacement or major refurbishment, for example those with asbestos cement walls, roofs in poor condition, are those using temporary port-a-cabins or terrapins.

⁹ Rural Community Buildings in England 2009 Key Findings

¹⁰ Community organisations controlling assets: a better understanding, Joseph Rowntree Foundation June 2011

¹¹ Community Buildings, Arts, Sports and Licensing Requirements, ACRE December 2010

¹² Rural Community Buildings in England 2009 Key Findings

Once a building falls into disrepair, use, income and volunteer support falls, a vicious circle of decline can follow making improvement more costly, harder to finance and places a burden on public services as disadvantaged people become isolated.

Two respondent halls had been closed because funding was not available for rebuilding or major repair.

“As an experienced charity fundraiser I thought I would have no trouble finding the money for a small project like upgrading the kitchen and providing access and a toilet for wheelchair users, which my son needs to use the hall. But I didn’t realise that so few funders are interested in village halls.”

What material covers the main roof?	2009 %	1998 %	1988%
Slate	24	26	24
Tiles	56	45	42
Asbestos	5	10	16
Metal	10	10	9
Felt	7	6	12
Other e.g. artificial tiles or slates, cement sheets, 7 thatched, cedar shingles, plastic coated metal, PV tiles	6	5	3

What is the condition of the hall?	Good repair %	Need repairs in time %	Need repairs urgently %	Good repair in 1988 %
Main hall	74	20	5	
Kitchen	71	20	7	
Toilets	71	19	8	
Walls	70	21	5	68
Heating	66	22	7	
Floor	64	27	5	62
Roof/gutters	60	27	10	65
Storage space	56	17	5	
Decor	55	32	6	
Car park	48	21	6	
Committee room(s)	40	8	2	
Small hall	26	6	2	

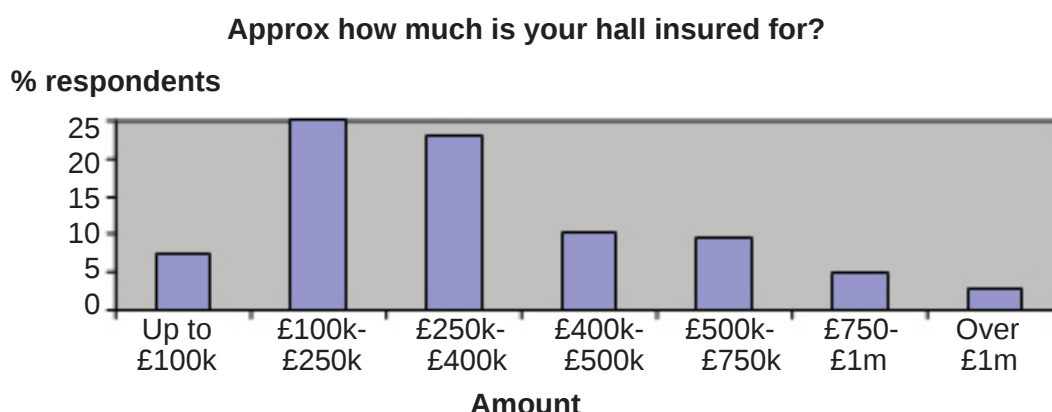
It is important that trustees consistently budget to build up a reserve for major repairs. However, it has to be recognised that the main users of rural community halls are small voluntary organisations, which limits the ability to raise income from hire charges, and building constraints affect use, so a reserve can be difficult to achieve. Those halls with good facilities can more easily generate income from weddings, parties, external service providers and touring arts. Those buildings unable to support a range of community activities are more likely to struggle financially while those which are substantially improved typically see use and income rise by 40 – 60%.

ACRE comment: We recommend a re-focussing of local authority and the Big Lottery Fund resources to give priority to assisting communities where the sole community building is seriously inadequate. Unfortunately, the BLF restricted the Reaching Communities Capital Fund 2010 – 2013 to buildings serving disadvantaged communities, owing to heavy demand for its previous 3 year fund, and these communities are not necessarily those with the most inadequate (or no) community buildings.

Managing Insurance and VAT

When was the value of the hall's insurance last checked?	% responses
Before 2000	1
2000 - 2005	4
2006 - 2007	11
2008/2009	40
Unsure/no answer	47

Insurance values provide an estimated total asset value of village halls at over £3 billion, averaging £345,000.



Is your rebuilding insurance index – linked?	Response % 2009	Response % 1998
Yes	59	75
No	10	9
Unsure	31	16

ACRE comment: An index linked policy is recommended, as this avoids the need to regularly check the insurance rebuilding costs. However, index linking reflects building cost index increases nationally, without taking into account local variations, so it is still important for trustees to check their own sum insured from time to time.

Those trustees which have not done so for five years, or are unsure, are advised to do so urgently, as it is their responsibility to ensure the insurance cover is adequate.

Is your hall registered for VAT?	Response %
Yes	4
No	91
Unsure	5

The vast majority of rural community buildings are not registered for VAT and some of those that are VAT registered are possibly run by the Parish Council. The principle consequence is the inability to reclaim VAT (now 20%) on improvement and maintenance work. In the last five years respondents had spent up to £7 million in irrecoverable VAT¹³. This represents a huge waste of voluntary fundraising, a point made in the Red Tape Task Force report¹⁴.

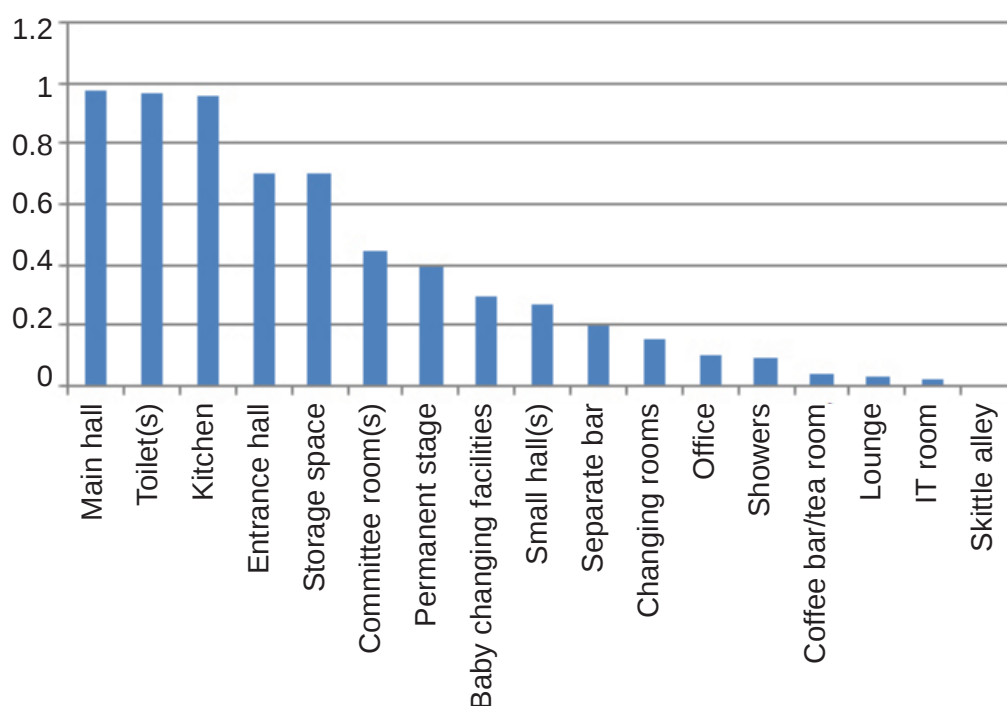
ACRE comment: The construction of new village halls is VAT zero rated. Although EC rules prevent the Government re-instating 0% VAT on improvement works, it could provide grant aid to offset the cost. Pre-election support for the case has yet to be transformed into part of the Big Society agenda to encourage and support volunteers.

¹³ Rural Community Buildings in England 2009 Key Findings

¹⁴ Unshackling Good Neighbours, Cabinet Office Red Tape Task Force, 2011

Facilities and equipment

The majority of halls are relatively small but offer a range of different types of space and equipment for a variety of performance, catering and office facilities which support a wider variety of use, such as a parish office, cultural and sports activities and/or visiting statutory services. There has been small growth in the provision of most facilities, and provision of baby changing has risen five fold from 6%.



Equipment	% 2009	% 1998	% 1988
Fridge	85	64	35
Cooker/Microwave	92	86	83
Urn/water boiler	93	77	74
Chairs	99		
Tables (small)	91		
Tables (large)	93		
Cutlery	80		
Crockery (tea)	90		
Crockery (dinner)	72		
PowerPoint projector	8		
Slide projector	6	3	2
Photocopier	10	6	
Printer	10		
Computer	11	4	
Dial up Internet	4		
Broadband	9		
Public telephone	13	22	14
Other	9	4	

The table indicates that use of technology in rural halls is growing gradually, with 13% having internet access.

The roll out of faster speed broadband provides opportunity for halls to deliver facilities and training for individuals unable to access the internet from home and to provide office support services for community groups, parish clerks, homework and homeworkers.

Halls appear to be well equipped and therefore able to accommodate a range of social and similar functions.

Access

Do you consider your hall to be accessible for all?	Response %
Fully accessible	73
Partially accessible	26
Not accessible	2

There has been a huge improvement in the accessibility of community halls. However, over a quarter are not yet fully accessible. Lack of funding was given as the principle constraint.

Accessibility	Response %	1998 %
Wheelchair accessible toilet(s)	81	41
Access for wheelchair users throughout hall	77	62
Limited access for wheelchair users	24	
Wheelchair and buggy-friendly paths to hall	74	
Disabled parking	47	13
Access audit carried out	44	
Hearing loop (fixed or portable)	32	7
Measures to assist the partially sighted	12	

Reasons for being unable to improve accessibility (581 responses, 25%)	Response %
Lack of funding	48
Not feasible (e.g. listed building, lack of space)	36
Not a priority	9
Unsure	8

How many spaces are designated for disabled parking? (1383 responses, 59%)	Response %
One	30
2-5	45
More	2

ACRE comment: Improving accessibility is an issue which needs to be addressed urgently at all levels, from trustees to Government, to avoid impacting on the cost of delivery of health and adult social services in rural areas. People are living longer. If frail, older people are to continue to lead independent lives in their own homes they need to be able to access services and activities locally. This helps avoid isolation from the stimulus of social contact leading to repercussions for mental health.

The priority is to ensure community halls are warm, comfortable and safely used by people as they become frailer. Attention should be given to adequate heating, lighting and measures to assist those with mobility and balance problems, such as rails and seats with arms. While effort should be made to accommodate wheelchair users the majority of disabled people are not confined to a wheelchair, so building constraints should not present a reason for failure to provide for a wider range of infirmities in situations where facilities for wheelchair users cannot be provided.

23% of respondents have no car park. For up to 20% the small amount of parking limits use for larger events, affecting income.

The challenge of raising income to keep the hall operating

This is the first time detailed information about the income of village halls has been gathered. 98% of rural community buildings have income from hire charges, commonly representing all or nearly all their revenue income. Less than half (46%) regularly make a surplus from hiring and rental income.

The second most common income source is fundraising (69%), which contributes 10% of total income. The principle source (53%) of other income is individual donations.

The key issues report¹⁵ highlights that 17% cover less than half their running costs from hire charges and rent, a proportion which was the same in 1998 and 1988. Up to 7% have little or no hire income because of the nature of the organisation running the building:

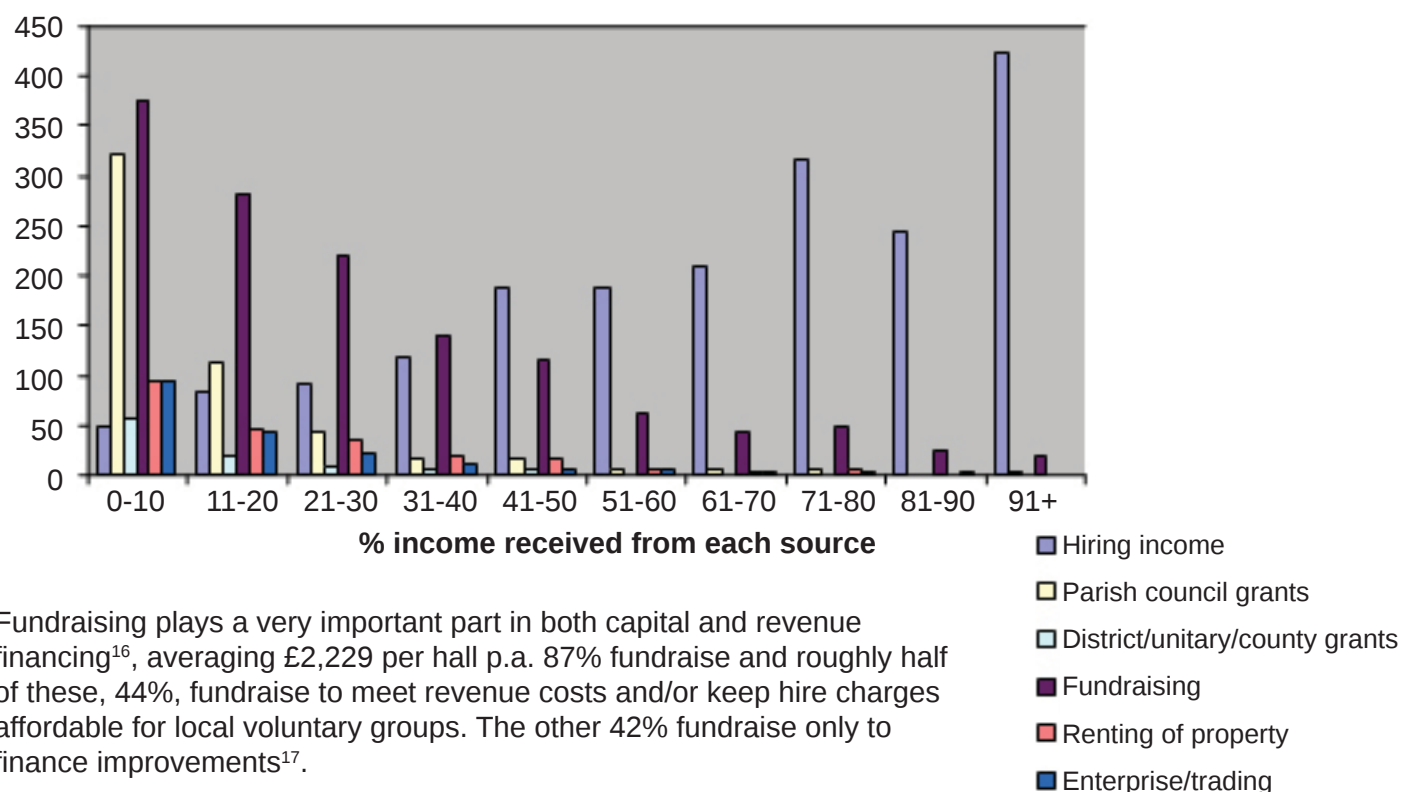
- church halls (which are more likely to rely on donations or church grants)
- parish council facilities (with precept income)
- sports clubs (with subscription and/or bar income)
- school halls (supported by the education authority).

The chart illustrates the relationship between income from hire charges and that from parish council grants and fundraising, indicating that halls with a smaller proportion of income from hire charges need to fundraise and, in some cases, need grant aid to cover expenditure.

What proportion of income typically comes from the following sources?	% having income from each source	Average proportion	Mode (the commonest proportion)
Hiring charges	98	68	100
Fundraising	69	28	10
Bank interest	48	5	1
Parish council grant aid	27	14	10
Other (donations, investments, electric meters, pitch fees, events, tax reclaim, subs, equipment hire, local charity grants, adverts etc.)	18	13.5	10
Renting out part of property	11	21	10
Enterprise/trading such as catering, bar, recycling, etc.	9	17	5
District/unitary/county grant aid	3	12	10

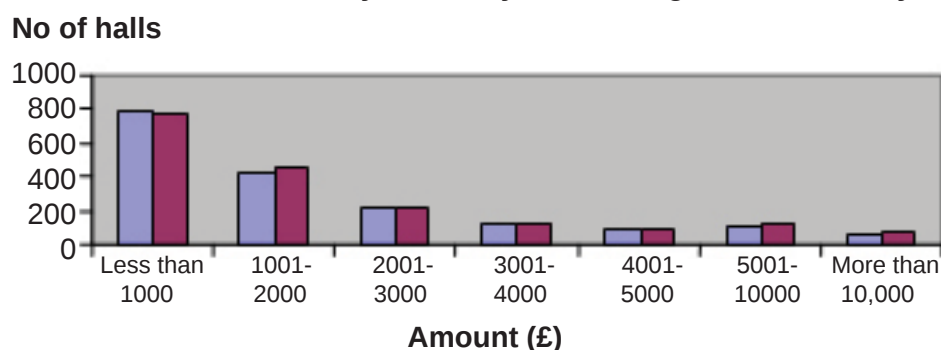
Sources of hall income

No of halls



Fundraising plays a very important part in both capital and revenue financing¹⁶, averaging £2,229 per hall p.a. 87% fundraise and roughly half of these, 44%, fundraise to meet revenue costs and/or keep hire charges affordable for local voluntary groups. The other 42% fundraise only to finance improvements¹⁷.

How much has been raised by voluntary fundraising in the last two years?



How often does the committee review hire charges?	%
Annually	66
Regularly (e.g. every 2/3 years)	32
Unsure	2
Never	0.5

Committees are advised to review hire charges annually and adjust them according to inflation in running costs by small amounts each year. Small voluntary organisations are price sensitive; they may fold or move to a cheaper venue if charges rise substantially, even if there has been no rise for a few years.

Only 3% received revenue grants from district, unitary or county councils. However, 13% had asked for and received help with costs either through discretionary rate relief or minor grants for equipment, compliance or maintenance work. 30% had asked for and received support from their parish council towards such costs. 4% had sought grant aid from parish councils and other local authorities towards revenue costs without success.

92% of halls providing information receive charitable or discretionary rate relief. This is not available to local authority run facilities. There were indications of a slight fall in the proportion receiving 100% rate relief and 4 halls were about to lose relief.

What level of rate relief does your hall receive? (1797 responses, 76%)	2009 %	1998 %
100%	72	76
80 – 100%	0.9	
80% mandatory relief (no discretionary relief)	28	18

The majority of halls receive only minimal income from use for local authority or statutory services, principally the annual hiring for elections (for which the majority charged £100 to £250) and parish council meetings. A small minority have significant income from this source, e.g. hiring for NHS meetings, school use, the maximum being £22,000 p.a. and 75% of income.

If the hall provides a venue for local authority or statutory services roughly how much income does this contribute p.a.? (1028 responses, 44%)	%
Minimal or election hire only (less than or = 3% or £300)	78
Modest (4%/£400 – 10%/£1K)	6
Medium (>10%/£1K – 25%/2.5K)	2
Significant (over 25% or £2.5K)	2

ACRE comment: A constant high level of fundraising to cover income, especially where a hall needs more significant investment, can be a drain on community finance and energy which affects trustee recruitment and other voluntary organisations. A hall in this situation is likely also to depend on regular revenue support from its parish council, particularly if it is serving a small rural community, and/or limited facilities. The mutual reliance between organisations in rural communities is explained using the concept of parish partnerships ¹⁸.

While charitable halls can offer reduced hire charges to local voluntary organisations in furtherance of their charitable objectives, local and statutory authorities should pay the standard charge, unless a condition of substantial grant financing makes such a reduction in the best interests of the charity.

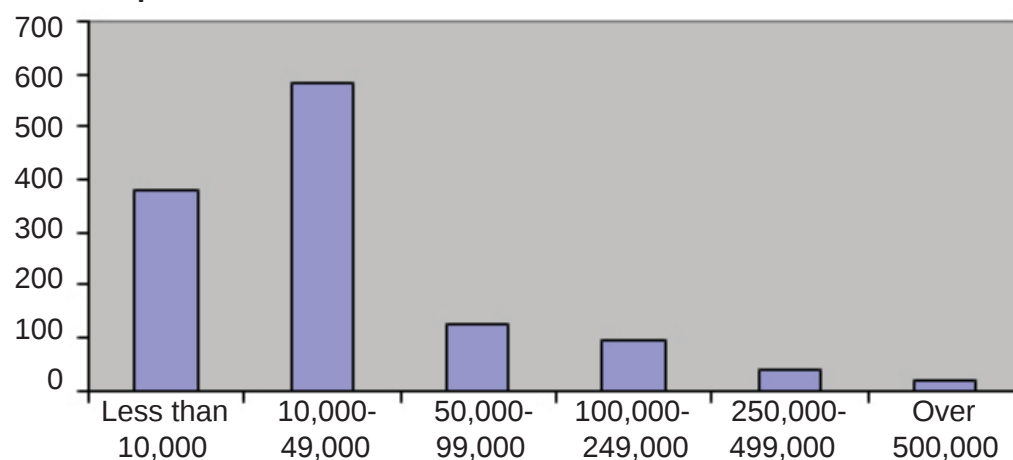
¹⁸ The economic impact of community buildings in rural communities, ACRE 2009

Financing capital build works

65% of hall committees had carried out improvement or building works in the last five years, costing £63.5 million. 78% of these were fairly small scale, costing less than £50,000 and fewer than 10% cost more than £200,000. A fifth met all the costs from their own funds.

The cost of improvement works carried out in the last five years

No of respondents



Roughly what proportion of the cost did you meet from your own funds?	Response %
None	8
Up to 25%	35
25-50%	17
50-75%	11
More than 75%	7
100%	20
Unsure	2

Local authorities remain the main grant source for capital improvement work, although the proportion of respondents receiving capital grants from either local authorities or the Big Lottery Fund fell from 1988.

Capital grants sought in the previous 5 years (1165 responses)	Number of successful applications	Successful %
District council	693	90
Parish council	667	92
County council	479	88
Landfill Trust Funds*	365	79
Defra/RES scheme **	84	82
Countryside Agency **	30	67
EU funds (e.g. LEADER+)*	25	68
DTI Low Carbon Fund **	19	73

* Only available in defined geographic areas.

** Funding from Defra, the CA and Low Carbon Buildings Fund is no longer available.

Lottery grants sought in previous 5 years (705 responses)	Number of successful applications	Successful %
Awards for All (grants under £10K)	457	79
Community Buildings Fund (BIG)	44	33
Heritage Lottery Fund*	42	39
Sports Council*	17	49
Reaching Communities Fund (BIG)	13	35
Arts Council*	12	48

Loan finance was used by 10% of these projects

Source of loan	% of those with loans
Private individuals	47
Parish council	33
ACRE/Defra Rural Community Buildings Loan Fund	32
Charity Bank	21
100%	20
Unsure	2

ACRE comment: The results show that local authority funders have supported more community hall projects than other funders, many projects having partnership support from several authorities, which indicates that public sector funding cuts could have a serious impact on community hall projects unless the Government's call to protect charity funding is respected. The Lottery has supported significantly fewer community hall projects than local authorities, with the exception of Awards for All, which assisted the largest number, but with small amounts.

For large capital projects i.e. over £200,000 the Lottery is potentially the only major source of funding to partner local fundraising and local authority grants. Although a third of the applicants responding to this survey were successful with the BIG Community Buildings Fund it was oversubscribed tenfold and a higher proportion of rural than urban applicants were successful. Comparison with the 1998 survey shows that The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) has assisted a smaller proportion of halls than its forerunner (NLCB).

The majority of awards from local authorities tend to be smaller than grants potentially available from the lottery, reflecting budgetary limits, except where S106 funds from development are available. The effect is that community buildings have usually been able to locate funding for modest improvement projects by applying to a number of smaller pots, but not in all areas. However, it has been very difficult to put together a funding package for larger refurbishment or rebuild projects, hence heavy demand on the lottery's larger capital funds. The importance of local authority funding has implications for the delivery of a continued programme of modernisation of community buildings in the current financial situation.

There is scope for small amounts of loan finance to contribute to more capital improvement projects as demonstrated by ACRE's Rural Community Buildings Loan Fund¹⁹.

¹⁹ Rural Community Buildings Loan Fund Report, September 2009

ACRE comment: Parish councils have a role to play and can borrow to grant aid work to charitable village halls, but not to lend. Repaid over a long period, so that a small amount is added to the annual precept, this is then met by future residents and hall users. Fundraising tends to fall on current residents, so a combination of fundraising and parish council borrowing has the effect of spreading the burden.

What kind of work have you carried out?	Response %	Planned in 5 years
Major renovation/improvements to basic facilities (roof, kitchen refurbishment, heating system)	67	55
Equipment/fixtures/fittings/minor works (e.g. new doors)	56	44
Facilities for disabled people	51	24
Energy efficiency/renewable energy sources	26	34
Extension to accommodate new or growing use	17	18
Replacing an old hall or building a new one	5	8

Routine building maintenance, the condition of an old hall and health and safety requirements account for around half the work undertaken²⁰.

The large majority, 87% of the respondent halls that had carried out improvement work, reported improved use, although 25% said it was difficult to ascribe it only to building improvements.

ACRE comment: There has been a mis-match between the over-riding and urgent priority for trustees of keeping a building fit for purpose so that it is suitable for use by vulnerable groups and funding streams which are either oversubscribed or highly focussed. This makes it difficult for volunteers running older community buildings most in need of updating to find funding. Assistance given by RCAN Village Hall Advisers to evidence local needs through local consultation has been essential in the face of strong competition. In the face of financial pressure, funding priority needs to be re-focussed towards community buildings most in need of basic improvements to provide a warm, safe building, providing activities for vulnerable people e.g. the young and the elderly.

Hall committees plan for future improvements

ACRE comment: The value of the proposed works to the rural economy could be substantial²¹.

60% of respondents were planning major improvements or repairs in the next five years, a slight fall from 64% in 1998. 788 halls provided their costs. 46%, almost half, are planning small works under £20,000. 85% are planning to apply for a grant.

Half the respondents were seeking grants of under £50,000. Taking the mid point as an average for each range the total sum sought was £65 million. Although very large projects brought the average up to £81,000 per hall, the mode was less than £20,000.

²⁰ Rural Community Buildings in England Key Findings, ACRE 2009

²¹ The Economic Impact of Community Buildings in Rural Communities, ACRE October 2010

The majority are planning major renovations or improvements to keep the hall fit for purpose, including facilities for disabled people and energy efficiency measures. A small proportion plan new or replacement halls and almost a fifth, 18%, plan to extend to accommodate new uses. 85% plan to apply for a grant, 65% within the next 2 years.

35% will be seeking small grants of less than £20,000 but almost 10% will be seeking large grants of more than £200,000.

Cost	count	%
Under £10K	220	28
10 – 20 K	143	18
20 – 50K	179	23
50 – 100K	88	11
100 – 200K	54	7
200K – 500K	69	9
Over 500K	35	4
Replacing an old hall or building a new one	5	8

Approx. amount of money needed	Response Percent	Response Count
Don't know yet	27	290
Less than £20,000	35	381
£20,001-50,000	15	166
£50,001-100,000	8	92
£100,001-150,000	3	37
£150,001-200,000	3	33
£200,001- 500,000	6	69
Over £500,000	2	23

When will the committee apply?	Response Percent	Response Count
Already applied	25	271
Within 2 years	66	700
More than 2 years	9	95

ACRE comments:

- A government strategy is needed to assist communities needing larger grants.
- Steady investment is vital to ensure community buildings continue to provide the services that people need. Community activities serving disadvantaged people, in particular vulnerable elderly people, need a local, accessible, safe and warm venue and are dependent on the social capital built up in a community through community activity by people of all ages. In rural areas loss of community activity contributes to isolation and health issues because of the lack of other informal meeting places. The counterpoint is that community activities generate friendships and informal support networks and provide physical and mental activity which is important to the health of older people. The danger is that reductions in capital funding for improvements to community halls could contribute to rising care costs; in the longer term investment could reduce demand on health and social services.
- While a steady pattern of investment planning is undertaken by committees unfortunately this is not matched by the public finance to support it, as evidenced by the over-subscription of applications to the Big Lottery Fund. It is hoped this information will assist key funders such as local authorities, the Big Lottery Fund and the new Social Investment Bank in designing future grant programmes for community buildings.

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 fourth.

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 buildings 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.

The changing use of rural community buildings

Research into the use of halls provides an insight into the health of rural community life and the way communities are responding to the changing nature of service delivery.

The State and Management of rural community buildings

This report demonstrates the responsibility that volunteer trustees undertake in managing buildings and makes suggestions that could ease the financial and legislative burden.



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For further information about this Report or the RCAN, contact Deborah Clarke, ACRE's Rural Community Buildings 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.