



Devon Rural Community Buildings' Access & Awareness Project

An Executive Summary

Compiled from the evaluation report conducted by Professor Malcolm Moseley (University of Gloucestershire) and Louise Beaton, Consultant Community Halls' Advisor



“Accessibility issues cover more territory than I realised.”

“Her [project officer] strong persuasive skills along with her community development and training skills have been very important in achieving the project outputs and outcomes.”

“It is easier for older people to get into the hall and now more people are coming to our events.”

Introduction

The Community Council of Devon's (CCD) Access & Awareness project with rural community buildings has sought to address some of the disadvantage and isolation experienced by many older people and disabled people (target beneficiaries) living in the rural parts of Devon.

With a grant of approximately £150,000 from the Big Lottery Fund (BLF), the project has focused on the county's 530 or so rural community buildings (e.g. village halls, parish halls) and in particular, on their physical suitability in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and their development of services and activities held within the building.

'Just to say thank you for all your help yesterday – not easy converting all us 'sceptics', but the session was really useful.'

Methodology

The project evaluation has been facilitated by the staff of the Community Council of Devon, and particularly the Project Officer. In addition, the halls themselves have kindly completed evaluation questionnaires and participated in telephone interviews. The Project Management Group, which included Living Options Devon, Age Concern Devon, the Devon Primary Care Trust and Devon County Council have also supported the evaluation. The research tasks included:

- Desk based research
- Desk study
- Interviews
- Questionnaire surveys
- Case studies



Offwell Village Hall: The services are in the hall

Project Design

The project commenced in September 2005 and finished in August 2008. The project outcomes include:

- Improved quality of existing services and activities (both specific and generic) for the target beneficiaries within rural communities.
- Establishment of new bespoke services and activities for target beneficiaries, within rural communities (population less than 3,000).
- Removal of barriers to participation and access to services, activities and premises for the target beneficiaries.
- Greater understanding and awareness of the needs and requirements of the target beneficiaries within rural communities, particularly amongst those responsible for delivering services and activities and managing and maintaining premises.

The project has centred on four main activities – the third and fourth were made possible by extra funding from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

- DDA access workshops
- DDA access audits
- Doing pot funding (£250)
- DACB website and project e-learning portal

The project has also successfully developed the Community Council of Devon's network with other key agencies, particularly the project partners, but also with Rural Renaissance, 5 x 30, Devon Senior Council, Devon Link Age Plus, Devon Carers' project, Villages in Action, Bailey Partnership, Devon district and parish councils and the new Devon Association of Community Buildings.

Key Findings

Training workshops

- Twenty three (23) half day workshops held during 2006 – 2007 to highlight voluntary management committee responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Two hundred and twenty six (226) representatives attended from one hundred and ninety seven (197) halls (approximately 40%).
- High level of satisfaction, indicating success in understanding the physical and attitudinal barriers to participation.
- Handbook widely used for action plans and reference.
- Non participation from halls which had recently been built or refurbished; thus considered to have no physical barriers (designed out or highlighted by planning departments/building control) – see 'Recommendations'. In addition, some halls had other significant priorities to address prior to DDA. Lack of volunteer capacity also highlighted as an issue for involvement.
- Two (2) further workshops written and delivered to cover gaps identified in the training evaluation forms: 'Sustaining Your Hall' (financial planning, generating income, marketing) and 'Involving All' (barriers to involvement, widening participation).

'One of the things we learnt was that it was not essential to do everything at once, but to show people we were working up to it; and that when we were making improvements we should bring in the DDA elements, like when we re-decorated the toilets we used contrasting paint and tiles for people with visual impairments.'

St Giles on the Heath Coronation Hall



DDA workshop in Kentisbeare

DDA access audits

- Of the one hundred and ninety seven (197) halls represented on the training workshop, one hundred (50%) opted for a 'walk and talk' access audit visit for a subsidised fee of £50.
- Access audit report used as the basis for an action plan for improvement.
- Baseline data collected indicated that seventy percent (70%) of halls considered they were

accessible (generally because they had a wheelchair accessible toilet); however provision for less visible forms of disability (e.g. hearing) was considerably poorer.

Living Options Devon, one of the project partners, is part of the exit strategy and thus, will be responsible for future access audits.

'We now have disabled issues as the number one consideration in all that we plan and the Project Officer has been inspirational in her handling of the whole project; without her it would not have been as successful.'

East Worlington Parish Hall

Doing pot (£250) grant

- Halls who had participated in the training and had an access audit were eligible to apply for a modest grant of £250 – to address physical barriers and/or to develop new services and activities.
- By March 2008, twenty four (24) halls had claimed, using the money for a variety of initiatives including an alarm for the accessible toilet, lever taps and chairs with arms. The new activities included a walking group, a drop in library, dance group, seated chair exercise group, lunch clubs, tea dance group, inter generational garden club, yoga for carers and a bridge club.
- It is estimated that at least five hundred and sixty nine (569) older and disabled people have directly benefited from this modest expenditure. This figure will rise considerably as halls secure further finance to implement their action plans.



New Washfield Lunch Club: New lunch club with 'Home' cooking and entertainment!

The Devon Association of Community Buildings' (DACB) website

- One of the project outputs related to the improved use of community buildings in Devon but it became apparent early on in the project that there was little marketing taking place and no way of finding out where the halls were or how to contact them to make a booking.
- Feasibility study undertaken, resulting in 80% of contacted halls expressing support for a generic website. The site has been developed 'by halls, for halls' with project budget under spend from Year 2 (with BLF's permission) and some additional money from DEFRA (Rural, Social & Community Programme). The site is available to DACB members, and to date, one hundred and thirty one (131) halls have entered their details.
- A second portal to the website includes associated DACB information (e.g. training, building management, quality assurance, insurance), along with relevant project information. The latter includes materials from the project (e.g. case studies from the training workshops, DDA legislation) in order to extend the life of the project and to encourage a 'do it yourself' approach by halls.

DACB is working with statutory and voluntary sector organisations to use community run halls for meetings, training and conferences, rather than the current, but significantly more costly, options of private and commercial venues.

Availability of grant funding

- The key difficulty that halls reported facing in making changes and/or implementing recommendations from their access audit report has been to do with the availability of funding; almost half of the respondents expressed this opinion. The Big Lottery Fund 'Community Buildings' programme has been particularly disappointing. Some are making progress with smaller items, whilst others are waiting for the outcome of grant applications towards more costly work – e.g. improved parking, smaller meeting rooms, wheelchair accessible toilet.
- The Project Officer has worked closely with DACB who administers a Devon County Council and district councils' capital grants scheme for community buildings and despite a reducing budget, has been an important source of funding for access improvements.

It is virtually impossible to ascertain how much grant income has been obtained by halls for refurbishment and new builds, as a result of this project. However, there are two grant funds which have provided evidence – the CCD County Grants Scheme and the DEFRA Rural Renaissance Community Buildings fund (see tables below).

County Grants Scheme: Funding for DDA works 2004-8

Year	Total Project Costs	Grants Allocated
2004-5	78,236	21,997
2005-6	283,714	60,770
2006-7	270,699	118,519
2007-8	569,461	76,239
Totals	£1,202,110	£277,525

'We need £85,000 (having already raised £35,000 from within the community) but the difficulty has been trying to get the funding in and get each party to agree at the same time – it's a bit like a jigsaw puzzle.'

Croyde Village Hall

Rural Renaissance 'Community Boost Fund' 2007-8

	Total Project Costs	Grants Allocated
A&A Project Applications		
Access to Services	1,239,874	130,895
Non A&A Project Applications		
Access to Services	106,962	44,227
Totals	£1,346,836	£175,122



East Portlemouth Village Hall: Community donations of £35,000 successful to save this view (over the estuary to Salcombe)

Recommendations

- 1 The Project Management Group remains in being for a succession period to monitor transitional arrangements and facilitate follow up work by the partners – e.g. future training and access audits, healthy living advice and activity, capital funding streams, awareness raising for building and design professionals (including planning departments and building control) and marketing project achievements.
- 2 Continue the work to further the project aims by mainstreaming within CCD funding, through resources linked to the LAA Outcome 30 'Promote health and reduce health inequalities'.
- 3 The Project Management Group, CCD and DACB raise with the Big Lottery Fund, the need for resources for DDA access improvements in order to facilitate the development of activities and services within rural communities. Insufficient capital funding is holding up implementation and this should be raised with local funders and organisations – e.g. Devon County Council, district councils, Devon PCT, DEFRA, South West Rural Development Agency.
- 4 Information about the achievements of this project be disseminated amongst Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) with a view to replication elsewhere, particularly in rural communities.
- 5 Further work, with project partners, to explore the following opportunities:
 - (a) Parish and district councils to identify barriers and provide support for potential services and activities and for volunteers who might lead, using local precepts to fund practical works.
 - (b) Develop the concept of the 'Hall is the Hub' with enhanced facilities for wifi and office/home working to ensure that statutory services are available in rural communities. Wifi enabled halls can then be used by outreach workers and home workers in order to improve accessibility and reduce carbon footprints.
 - (c) Alongside the above concept, the rural community building is in an ideal position to provide social and domiciliary support for the frail, disabled and low income households living in remote communities as these groups are most likely to feel the negative impact of rising heating and transport costs.
 - (d) The point that community buildings have a part of play in mitigating such consequences needs to be disseminated to hall management committees and local and statutory authorities.
 - (e) Capacity build within rural communities to encourage small business start ups and social enterprise activities in order to contract for statutory service provision.
 - (f) Consideration for a similar project to benefit voluntary run rural sports clubs and recreation facilities (e.g. play parks, playing fields, rugby clubs etc.).

Conclusion

This project has highlighted the need to ensure that rural community buildings are recognized and funded to support the delivery of activities and services required in rural communities throughout Devon. Rapid changes are taking place: not least, the ageing population, rising fuel costs and declining public transport. The village hall has a unique role to play in providing the 'hub' for rural community life – so that people can work together to ensure that their social, emotional and physical health needs are met. Resources can be maximized by developing the capacity of communities to be more self-sufficient and using their assets to meet their own needs.

The Devon Association of Community Buildings is managed by such volunteers and they are rising to the challenges of the 21st century, by providing a service which can lobby and influence, train and advise, quality assure and promote. They can be

contacted at the CCD office in Exeter or through the halls' website: www.devonvillagehalls.co.uk / www.dacb.org.uk. The Project Evaluation Report can be found on these sites or on the CCD website (publications page): www.devonrcc.org.uk and it should be referenced with a recent study 'Why Community Buildings Matter'.

Finally, invaluable contributions have been made by many colleagues, including the Project Management Group. However, this project would not have achieved its outcomes without the dedicated commitment from an army of volunteers who run and manage rural community buildings in Devon or without the funding from The Big Lottery and DEFRA.

Queenie Broom

Chair Devon Association of Community Buildings

Case studies

These two case studies illustrate the spectrum of the project:

St Giles on the Heath (Torrige)

The hall serves an approximate population of 700 in this rural parish.

- Two committee members attended an early DDA workshop (March 2006); Project Officer visited for access audit and arranged business planning/consultation meeting with CCD colleague resulting in grant applications.
- Big Lottery allocated £58,000 (£8,800 for a part time development worker and associated costs and £50,000 to build a small meeting room adding to the one large room existing hall).
- Own funds used to insulate existing building and CCD County Grants paid towards cost of resurfacing the car park.
- Project worker recruited in March 2008; runs a weekly drop in session and to date has developed monthly lunch club, youth club, drama group and yoga group. Working with Torrige District Council to recruit other services (e.g. Citizens' Advice Bureau, Department Work & Pensions).
- New volunteer being trained by the PCT to provide toe nail cutting service in the hall.
- Future projects include negotiations and consultation relating to post office closure and therefore the possible relocation of a private or community run shop from the hall.
- Average hours worked by voluntary management committee is approximately 3120 per year (benefiting the community by £31,200 per year).
- Average annual income from hire is £2,289 with £5,018 from fundraising (of which £2,262 comes from a community recycling venture). The average annual running costs are £3,101.



St Giles on the Heath Coronation Hall: New extension with ramp and accessible toilet

Kelly Village Hall (West Devon)

The hall serves a very small rural parish of approximately 170, although this number has increased slightly by the closure of nearby Chillaton Village Hall:

- Attended DDA workshop in October 2006 with visit and access audit arranged soon after.
- Completed audit action plan by highlighting the electricity switches, new level entrance, disabled parking bay, nosings marked around the stage; unable to address the step to rear fire exit so it is not marked as such. These improvements, along with new heating and insulation systems have been paid for with an £8,000 grant; hosting information sessions for the heating company and being used in their publicity materials.
- New members joined the management committee and hoping to recruit some of the youth living in the village.
- New activity groups include over 55's lunch club (25 – 36 people attend), badminton club, table tennis (average 24 children); exploring the possibilities of a yoga group.
- Significant increase in bookings (income up by approximately 50%, including private functions).
- Achieved Level 1 in Hallmark (quality assurance for hall management) and ready to be assessed for Level 2.
- Next phase of development includes refurbishing (including electricity) kitchen with estimated budget of £7,000, so that lunch club meals can be prepared on the premises; obtained a grant of £500 from Age Concern for new cooker (signposted by Project Officer).



Kelly Village Hall: New level and firm entrance plus accessible parking bay

Community Council of Devon

County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, EX2 4QB

T – 01392 383443

F – 01392 382062

E – info@devonrcc.org.uk

W – www.devonrcc.org.uk

This document is available
in large print and alternative
formats upon request.
Please ring 01392 383443



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE