



Mapping and Connecting Community Spaces in Rural Clackmannanshire



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SC048086

Introduction

Scottish Rural Action is a registered charity (SC048086) that supports the rural movement in Scotland. We work with our members and partners at national, regional and community levels to:

- Build a grassroots-led rural movement in Scotland that connects rural communities with each other and with politicians and decision-makers;
- Collaborate with seldom-heard groups to create platforms that better enable their participation in the rural movement;
- Collectively develop a cross-sectoral, locally-informed understanding of rural Scotland's economy, society and culture that shapes local practice and national policy;
- Deliver the biennial Scottish Rural Parliament and a Rural and Island Manifesto for Scotland.

“Our vision is for vibrant and connected rural and island communities which have control over their future, and which contribute to building a society that is inclusive, just and sustainable”

Part of making this vision a reality is forming connections between Scottish Rural Action and rural communities and finding out where we can work together to gain the best understanding of rural areas in Scotland. Scottish Rural Action has funded this short-term project in rural Clackmannanshire as a first step to understanding the unique characteristics, logistics and drive that go into running the village halls that provide so much to our rural communities.

Aims

We want to understand how the halls self-identify, is the term village hall accurate? We want to gain a deep understanding of what these halls feel their role in the community is and how this is reflected in the services they provide.

Village halls tend to be at the heart of their community and rely on various types of support, we would like to understand what kinds of support are available to these groups and what ones they utilise. We are interested to know how these groups network with one another and other organisations such as their local third sector interface.

Covid-19 has had a widespread impact across the globe, this project will look at how village halls, their support and their communities have been affected.

We want to explore what kind of support would increase these organisations' resilience and sustainability and enable them to learn from one another and share that learning with others. Would a national network of village halls similar perhaps to what they have in England be useful or something else entirely?

Participants

A total of five organisations took part in this research project, four of which completed the study fully. Each of these organisations participated voluntarily and gave permission for all data collected to be published in this report. As a thank you gesture for participation, each of the five groups received various supermarket vouchers to help support their efforts within the community. Each of

the groups who consented to sharing their data have been allocated a group number to keep their identity anonymised and these numbers will be used to reference them throughout the report.

Group overview.

A summary of the group's objectives, ethos and achievements within their community.

Group 1

- Group 1's main priority is to improve their community for the people living in it and provide a safe welcoming environment for everyone. The group's key focus is to tackle social isolation and ensure that finance is not a barrier to inclusion. The group is at the heart of their community and provides activities, events, and support services while also taking an active role in the upgrading of their local area. The group has grown from 7 members to now hundreds of people benefitting from their activities on a monthly basis.

Group 2

- This organisation caters to all ages from babies to OAP. The groups operated in the hall are largely their own. The main aim of the group is that each of these activities are inclusive and open. One of the proudest achievements of the group is their food larder. This is a membership organisation that is not a food bank. They receive donations, sell them as low as possible or in some circumstances give them as a donation. The group acts as a step after crisis whereby members come from all over Clackmannanshire to be a part of it and get back on their feet. The impact of this is evident in the support they receive back.

Group 3

- The group was originally formed by local businessmen over a half-century ago – who felt there was a need for leisure, recreation and relaxation for the older generation. The group still strives to maintain this ethos. They run a large hall that has one big hall with disabled access and a bar/reception area, kitchen and meeting room.

Group 4

- This hall is a great example of community and church coming together to make the most of a village hall. The building itself has one large hall with a stage, storage and a fully fitted kitchen. The hall operates to host activities, events and private functions. The hall is home to fitness classes, church groups and community events.

Group Identity.

How each group identifies themselves. For example Resource Centre, Village Hall, Community Hub etc.

Group 1

- This organisation identifies as a community centre.
- "We identify as a community centre rather than a hub or hall because the building is quite literally at the centre of the community. It is used for providing activities and community support and much more than just a hall."

Group 2

- Group 2 identifies a community centre.
- “We identify as a community centre because we believe we are at the centre of our community, in terms of heart and building. It’s a place for all the community to come together.”

Group 3

- This group identifies as a community hall.
- The group was identified as a hub in its original constitution however the current committee feel it identifies closer to a community hall.

Group 4

- Group 4 identify as a village hall.
- The group highlighted that they identify as a hall because within their small village it’s a perfect hall to host activities, events and private functions.

The groups made an interesting distinction between a village hall and a community centre. The descriptions provided suggest groups identify as a community centre when they refer to the types of services, they provide whereas when a premises is referred to as a hall it suggests they are referring to the premises. For example, the groups who identify as a centre run their own community-based activities whereas the group that identifies as a hall primarily hire out their hall to the community.

Group Services.

An overview of the services and activities a group offers within their local communities.

First Aid Training	Music for Dementia	Gardening Group	Choir	Fun Days
Adult Arts & Crafts	Public Meetings	Coffee Mornings	Bingo Teas	Soup & Sandwich Lunches
Christmas Concerts	Film Clubs	Youth Clubs	Pensioner Clubs	Dementia Support Groups
Food Larders	Fitness Classes	Educational Lectures	History Walks & Talks	Festivals
Museum Groups	Sports for Dementia	Dance Classes	Kids Arts & Crafts	Football Clubs
Gaming Clubs	Cafes	Advice & Support Groups	Toddler & Baby Groups	Community Shops
Women’s Support Services	Financial Advice Services	Mental Health Groups	Conferences	Befriending Services
Food Delivery Services	Educational Support	Christmas Appeals	Litter picks	Community Regeneration Projects

Role Within the Community.

The way in which each group views their main role within their community and the impact this has.

Group 1

- The main role within group 1 is to provide support, advice and help to their community. The group take leadership to provide smaller tailored groups and work with other organisations like the churches to build the community further.
- Their main role in the community is to “try to eradicate the consequences of poverty” and to “ensure finance is not a barrier to inclusion”. The group also recognise the levels of loneliness in their area: “we work hard to tackle loneliness and isolation, the services we provide are open to everyone to ensure there is always a place for someone to go.”

Group 2

- The group acts as a step after crisis whereby members come from all over Clackmannanshire to be a part of it and get back on their feet. They have a wide range of support services from dementia support to financial support. The group is described as a “real community feeling” their main role is to continue to create this feeling for their community and continue to expand on the events they do to make sure as many people can be a part of this as possible.

Group 3

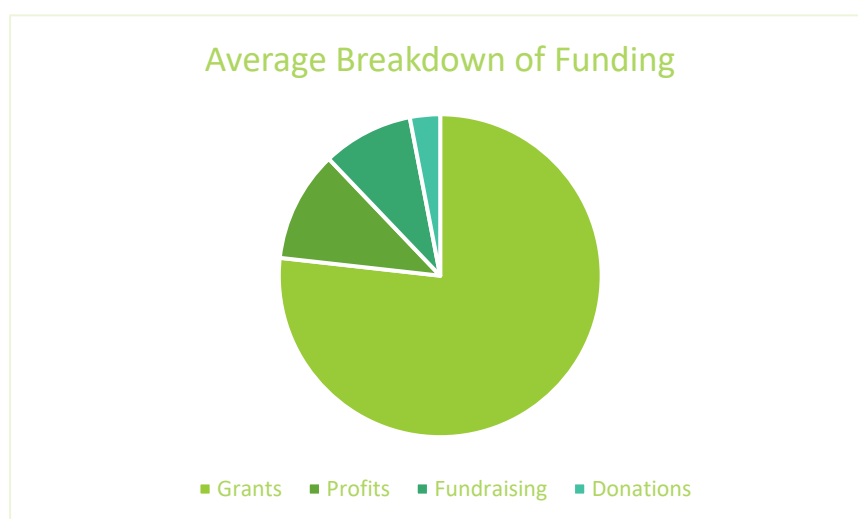
- The hall acts as a social point within the community, especially for OAPs who have a space created for them where their needs are met in terms friendship accessibility and enjoyment.
- “As custodians: to maintain premises on behalf of senior citizens”

Group 4

- This group’s main role is to provide a safe place for the community to come together. Group 4 host events and activities but also allow the community to hire the hall. This creates more opportunities for local people such as sports or music events whilst also supporting local businesses. One of the main roles is to create partnerships between the community and church.

Income Breakdown.

What sources make up the financial aspects of the group: Funding, Donations etc.



Grants

- 3 out of the 4 groups used grant funding to secure funds. These grants paid for upgrades to buildings, staffing costs, transport and running costs.
- Group 1 stated that “[they] Largely rely on funding for staffing, running the building, bills and continuing to keep the activities up-to-date.” The group also highlighted that the amount of funding received each year varies which means their income breakdown fluctuates between years. Similarly, Group 2 stated, "External funding allows support to the business element of the hall."

Profits

- Each of the group's profits from their activities and events goes back into the organisation.
- All of the groups state that they take private hires within their hall that contribute to their profits.

Fundraising

- Along with the regular activities, each of the groups holds specific fundraisers. For example, group 1 has a concert each year to raise funds for their building enhancements and group 2 has its groups within their umbrella fundraising to keep the organisation going.

Donations

- Each of the groups receives donations from their members and other community organisations.
- Groups work together to raise funds for each other in different ways. One example given was choir singing outside supermarkets for specific causes.

Businesses

- Local businesses and supermarkets also make donations both cash and needed items such as food which contribute to keeping the income-expenditure down for these groups.
- Each of the groups raised this as a vital part of the running of their organisations. The relationships between these groups and local businesses were described as strong and it created mutual benefits for both parties.
- One of the examples was a local wood crafting business who choose a local charity every 3 months and their profits from a specific set of items go towards that charity.

Main Challenges

The key challenges faced by the group and their aims to overcome them.

Rising Cost of Living

- The cost of living is going up which is directly affecting village halls and the work they do. The findings suggest that while individuals' household bills are rising so will the village halls which is a direct threat to the level of support they can give.
- It was highlighted by multiple groups that the funding they receive tends to be ringfenced for specific projects and the rest can only cover parts of these rising bills.
- Some of the groups have their own transport, one group uses this for transporting people to and from events as well as transporting equipment etc. Another group uses their transport as a delivery service where they can transport food packages to their members. However, the groups highlighted this is a substantial initial cost and the upkeep is beginning to rise

with the cost of fuel rising. It is a challenge for the groups who rely heavily on their transport to be faced with more additional costs that were perhaps not budgeted for.

Ageing Population

- Interestingly, groups 1, 3 and 4 all raised the need to bring in younger volunteers and trustees. It seems that the group's attendees, membership and volunteer pool are largely made up of those classed as old age pensioners. While each of the groups strives to include everyone in their activities, they noted a real threat to their organisations being the lack of younger generations taking an active role in the organisation of the group.
- One of the groups drew the comparison that 20/30 years ago there would be people retiring at around 60 which would allow a new wave of volunteers to join the group whereas now people are retiring in their late 60s and 70s which means there is no longer a guaranteed/steady flow of volunteers.

Funding

- A main challenge faced by village halls appears to be funding. In particular, the problem of short-term funding that the third sector receives.
- The groups portrayed a real worry when it came to this type of funding. They highlighted this is mostly what is available to village halls. It was suggested that funded staff had to be on temporary and short term contracts which is a worry for them and also the organisation.
- The funding allowed activities to be set up and be successful however as the end of the funding approaches it means uncertainty for the future of these activities.
- The groups are then constantly having to keep up with funding applications and bids.
- The groups also raised the competitiveness to obtain funding.

Bridging the Age Gap

- Earlier we discussed the ageing population of the group's members being a threat to the organisations. Another point raised in relation to age was the struggle to bridge the age gap between their youngest members and their oldest. It was interesting to reflect on the activities produced by these groups as each one is organised and operated differently however the commonality seems to be the activities being attended by families, particularly baby groups, and older generations.
- It is apparent that getting people in between these generations is the biggest struggle, however several factors play into this such as full-time work commitments and family life.

Building Repairs

- One of the main concerns raised was the upkeep of the buildings. Despite each of the halls differing in sizes, each of the groups mentioned the costs of repairing or updating their premises.
- One example was that a hall needed a new kitchen as the old one was beginning to become unsafe, and this was a costly task. Luckily the group secured funding however these types of big repairs and upgrades are a worry financially for village halls.

Table of Challenges

- Listed below are some of the challenges the groups felt are faced by village halls.

Rising Cost of Living	Crime	Keeping up with Modern Times (e.g. going online)
Ageing Population	Funding	Staffing
Legislation	Recognition of Third Sector	Community Engagement
Bridging the Age Gap	Building Repairs	Covid & Restrictions

Networking

The ways in which the group interacts with people and organisations within the community.

- The ways in which each of the groups networked varied. Some highlighted strong positive relationships with their local third sector interfaces, and this was a key source of networking for them.
- It was great to see that the groups take the initiative to hire other halls where appropriate and take opportunities to work together. One of the groups suggested by doing this they “are helping each other stay open and to provide as many services to the community as possible.”
- Facebook and the use of social media seemed to be key factors in networking with other groups. Social media provided the groups with a way to stay up to date with each other’s activities and share local group's activities with their own followers.
- Various groups suggested that they have made strong connections with local businesses and organisations however they do not have an active plan or target for networking.

Proposal on Village Hall Network

Would a national network of village halls in Scotland – similar to ACRE – be beneficial to the group?

There was a mixture of responses to the proposal of a village hall network in Scotland. Below some of the key points are explored.

- The main feedback from the sessions was that if the network was relevant to the group it was something they would take advantage of.
- One of the groups who had previously not branched out to these sorts of things and is only starting to look into ways to promote themselves and take on a bigger role within their community welcomed the proposal.
- A range of positives were highlighted:
 - Sharing ideas
 - Sharing equipment
 - Point of information
 - Good for start-ups
 - Good way of communicating between similar groups.
- One of the groups suggested another forum can mean just another meeting, and the groups wanted to stay away from this. Therefore it would be important for the network to stay relevant and up to date with what was important to village halls.
- One of the negative takeaways from this proposal was that it could take a lot of time and effort for not a lot of return and there is perhaps a different more suitable way to provide support.

Proposal for Facebook Page

Would a Facebook Group, aimed at Scottish village halls, benefit the group in terms of providing a support network and promotional resources.

One of the groups partaking proposed a Facebook group could be just as beneficial as a national village hall network but perhaps more easily and informally. They suggested that it would be a chance to ask questions directly to other groups rather than one point of contact who would then have to go and find the information. It would also be an opportunity to boost each of their Facebook pages. This proposal was then proposed to each of the following groups as a question.

- The overall consensus was that it was a positive and welcomed idea. The groups suggested it would be a way of gaining the benefits from a national network with fewer commitments.
- Facebook and social media were portrayed as a way forward in modern times and suggested groups are more likely to join something like this as opposed to another forum.
- one of the groups partaking proposed that this would help them directly as they are trying to grow their social media and they would welcome any opportunity to do this and learn tips from other groups.
- Another of the groups did suggest that this would not be beneficial to them as they do not use Facebook so anyone in the same situation would be at a disadvantage.

Proposal of Support

What support would be most beneficial to the group to increase sustainability and resilience while maximising the impact within the community.

It was clear from the interviews with each of the groups that village halls feel they could benefit from more levels of support. These types of support varied from support from the government, funding bodies, specific organisations, other groups etc. Below is a table of the types of support suggested by the groups.

Help to Promote	Increase Volunteers	Bridge the Age Gap	Younger Membership
Larger Building Space	Long Term Funding	Increased Council Support	More Recognition for Village Halls
Links Between Third Sector & NHS	Funding Application Support	Financial Support	Net Zero Sustainability

Help to Promote

- Some of the groups felt it would be beneficial to have advice and support to teach them to grow their groups, promote their halls and reach wider audiences.

Recognition for Village Halls

- It was highlighted that for some village halls it can feel like they do get the level of recognition for the work they do. One group suggested development trusts can feel hierarchical whereas the impacts of a small village hall with a small committee can be just as powerful.
- The group summed this up as “In areas across Scotland we see and hear a lot about development trusts, sometimes people assume these are the main organisations within their community however in some cases it’s that they get more funding and more recognition.

Small community organisations are able to match the work development trusts do and, in some cases, go further. It's not a hierarchy of organisations we are all working toward improving our community and it's the drive of the organisation that determines it's place and impact"

Net Zero Sustainability

- The groups felt it was important to be sustainable and incorporate more sustainable practices into the running of their groups & building. The groups welcomed education and support on how to go about this.
- One of the groups stated, "We might be the Wee County in Scotland, but we should all be aiming for positive climate action, we are willing to do our part and we would appreciate support on how to do this within our organisation."
- The groups also raised openness to tips on how to change their transport from a petrol/diesel to an electric car. Transport and the rising cost of fuel was raised as a challenge for the groups, this would perhaps be a positive step towards more eco-friendly and sustainable practices along with reducing costs in the long term.

Links Between Third Sector & NHS

- Multiple groups highlighted that the work they do falls into the categories of social care and mental health care. The groups work hard to ensure they have the correct training and are providing informed and helpful activities for people facing medical challenges.
- The groups raised their concern that this work is overlooked when they should be entitled to similar funding, recognition and partnerships with the NHS and government.

The consensus from these organisations is that more support for village halls is necessary to allow them to continue to make positive impacts in their community. It was heartening to see that the organisations already felt supported in a lot of ways. Particularly through support from local businesses and supermarkets. Each of the groups have benefited from the supermarket community champions who give donations of food and raffle prizes. The groups have also received support from local police, councillors, schools and universities.

Covid Impact

How the covid-19 pandemic has affected the group.

Covid-19's impact was widespread across the world, from the discussion with these groups it was clear village halls had been impacted severely. In the space of a day these organisations went from operating 5 days a week to 0, this was quite evidently serious for both the groups and their community. The impact was surprisingly not all negative, as for some of the group's positive elements came from it. The main findings are discussed below.

Positives

- A wider variety of funding became available to these groups which allowed them to extend their help further.
 - For some groups, this meant being able to provide financial support and packages such as food parcels and arts & crafts packages to help people get through the pandemic.

- One of the groups became an anchor organisation for covid funding. This allowed them to distribute significant amounts of funding to other local organisations where it was desperately needed.
- Time was a common theme in the impact of covid. It was apparent that each of these village halls are filled with activities 5-7 days a week. The groups commented on how the pandemic allowed time for upgrades, repairs and to think of new ideas.
- Due to events being moved online for most groups it allowed them to grow their online presence which has now benefitted them when the groups reopened. It also allowed them to branch into these new types of online activities.
- Restrictions meant groups had to utilise their outdoor areas and create outdoor spaces and activities.
 - One group has a community garden which they have said to be vital in maintaining people's mental health, it was particularly utilised on their daily walks.
 - Another group was able to install an outdoor gym for the community to use.

Negatives

- The lockdown caused major isolation for the attendees of these groups. It was clear throughout all organisations that the impact of attending daily events to then having no social contact was very hard, for both the volunteers and attendees.
 - One of the main points that can be drawn from these conversations was the concern for their most vulnerable members who relied on social contact. There was a significant impact on these members' mental health. The groups pointed out that whilst they went online to continue support some people weren't able to access online.
- An issue that the groups are still working through is attendance. When the groups opened back up, while it was phased returns in line with government guidance, the attendance was significantly lower than pre-pandemic for most of their activities.
 - A lot of members were scared to return to activities, this was apparent when each new wave or lockdown occurred as more fears were generated, particularly in the older generations.
 - The groups also suggested that some members had become accustomed to less social life and no longer feel they want to come out to events.
- Across the groups, there was a consensus that the government guidance throughout covid for village halls was unclear which made operating during these times unnecessarily difficult.
 - One of the examples given was that the rules differed from activity to activity. One activity could return and have full attendance, another one could return but only to a certain extent then another activity couldn't return at all. This was confusing and frustrating for the groups.