

The Role of Village Halls in Repopulating Rural & Island Scotland



To celebrate Village Halls Week 2025, we looked at the multitude of ways our community spaces are contributing to repopulation through underpinning the culture, economy and wellbeing of local communities.



Background

Village and community halls in Scotland are recognised by the Scottish Government as pivotal in addressing rural and island depopulation. These community-run spaces serve as multifunctional hubs, offering venues for social, cultural, and educational activities. In areas where access to services is limited, village halls provide essential facilities such as health outreach programs, clubs, and support groups. They are core elements in community resilience plans and underpin local democracy by hosting elections and public consultations. They also underpin local economic activity through offering resources to support remote working and space for micro businesses, as well as for large scale events including fairs and weddings.

In 2022, Scottish Rural Action's (SRA) small scale but timely collaborative research project in rural Clackmannanshire reinvigorated a national partnership of organisations including the Scottish Community Alliance, Social Enterprise Scotland, Scottish Rural Network, InspirAlba, the TSI Network and Community Enterprise, all committed to working together to improve recognition and support for village halls. An important strand of this activity is a Village & Community Halls Handbook led by SCVO and the Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS). The annual Village Halls Week celebration is another important strand of this activity.



**celebrating,
encouraging
& supporting
volunteers**
17-23 March 2025



Village Halls Week is a partnership between the organisations above and Action with Communities in Rural England. It is an annual showcase of village halls with a jam packed programme of events and campaigns. The theme for 2025 was Celebrating, Encouraging & Supporting Volunteers.

[VILLAGE HALLS WEEK 2025](#)



Thriving Village Halls

An event of the Village & Community Halls Practitioner Network

On Thursday 20th March as part of Village Halls Week 2025, SRA hosted an online 'Thriving Village Halls' event, in partnership with Social Enterprise Scotland (SES). The event, which attracted 100 people from all over Scotland, featured presentations from three inspiring speakers, all closely involved in the running of their village halls - Emma Galloway, Chair of **Balerno Village Trust**, Ros McKenna, Chair of **Colintraive Village Hall**, and Moira Small, Secretary of **Brodick Community Hall**.

A key aim of the event was to share insights, experiences and stories, and ultimately inspire future ideas and create connections. A second aim was to **launch a new practitioners' network**, which will run events periodically through year, following this format, and exist to provide support for people working behind the scenes in village halls and community spaces both in rural and urban Scotland.

The event presentations provided insights into the diverse ways that village halls strive for sustainability, engage local people, and ultimately retain and attract people to live in these communities. In the following pages, from the voices of our speakers, we will learn about some of the unique challenges that exist within these three communities, and of the activities and initiatives taking place to address them. We will explore how village hall committees are creating social, practical, and cultural community hubs, and how they nurture a sense of belonging for the people who use them.

Get in touch

For any questions about the event or to join the Practitioner Network, please contact:

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Community Spotlight 1: Colintraive Village Hall

A vital local hub within a remote community

The small hamlet of Colintraive is on Argyll's Cowal Peninsula. It is a tiny village of 109 houses, with 123 permanent residents, stretched across a 15 mile coastal road. There is an ageing population, and the village hall is critical for residents, as there is little else besides a hotel and a post office. The Village Hall committee is responsible for the hall, and its surrounding assets - a community garden, a village bowling green, and a heritage centre. All are located in one central spot, forming a hub for this small, isolated community. The hall is seen as a safe, welcoming space, which was particularly highlighted after covid, when people lost the ability to come together.

Community Initiatives

The village hall is used by outside groups, but Committee is also active in developing a busy winter programme, featuring pop up restaurants, quizzes, bingo, beetle drives, soup & sandwiches, and afternoon teas. Creative Scotland recently funded cinema equipment, which has enabled the showing of films every 4-6 weeks, and people come far and wide for this. There is a Christmas Fayre, a carol concert and annual Christmas meal for the community. The local windfarm helps fund these events, which are not run to raise money, but to create a hub for local people. The main fundraiser is the annual village fete, which features gardening produce, home baking, stalls, and games such as a duck race and running race. The Committee has perfected the format of this event, and it raises significant funds to support the hall.

The Committee avoids reinventing the wheel - they know what works to keep the community invested. They have built a name for supplying delicious home baking and championing local produce. Supporting local groups and businesses in turn fosters local support for the hall. They offer support to young people within the community helping, for example, with a recent fundraiser to send a group on a trip to Tanzania. These activities are, in the context of tackling depopulation, a critical approach to strengthening cross-generational ties.



Community Spotlight 2: Balerno Village Trust *Creating a “thriving, resilient, sustainable community”*

Known as the ‘Gateway to the Pentlands’, Balerno is described by Visit Scotland as a ‘well heeled’ village, seven miles south-west of Edinburgh. Historically, it is a village based on paper mills - the main industry in the 19th Century. Balerno is technically urban but it can also be considered as rural, given its surrounding farmlands and proximity to the Pentland Hills. It is often thought of as a commuter village or ‘dormitory town’, with a high proportion of elderly residents. As an urban village, there is an ongoing struggle to attract external funding, since there are no markers of deprivation. There is a recognised local need, therefore, to offer village events and activities that will boost the local economy and encourage people to spend time there.

Community Initiatives

The Balerno Village Trust manages the local community centre, which is well used by local groups, engaging in activities such as regular dance classes; it also includes a post office. The centre was recently used for a film set, where it was turned into a visitor centre for two weeks, resulting in an economic benefit of around £10k to the local economy. Future plans include creating smaller meeting rooms, and an after school club to address the lack of local childcare.

A recent CARES project enabled significant renovations to the community centre, including loft insulation, LED lighting, solar panels, full building rewire, and air source heating. This has reduced energy consumption by 50%. Outside the community centre, there is a locally-run monthly farmers market, which supports the local economy and attracts around 1000 visitors per market. The Trust also manages a hydro-electric scheme which supports local projects within Balerno and its surrounding communities. There are plans afoot to buy the local police station, with a Scottish Land Fund application currently in progress.



Community Spotlight 3: Brodick Community Hall

Supporting year-round community events

Brodick is the main village on the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde. It serves as the island's primary ferry port, connecting it to the mainland via Ardrossan. Because of this, Brodick is often the first stop for visitors and plays a central role in the island's tourism, commerce, and transportation. While small (a few hundred residents), the community is vibrant and active year-round, with a mix of locals and seasonal workers. Brodick Community Hall, which opened in 1895, is a large, impressive building, and is regarded as the heart of the community. Owned by North Ayrshire Council, it's run by a Committee who oversee bookings and overall management with the help of a part time hall keeper.

Community Initiatives

Two years ago, when Brodick nursery, based in Brodick Community Hall for 50 years, moved to the primary school, this left a huge gap in bookings and jeopardised the Hall's financial sustainability and future. The loss, however, also presented opportunities to engage with more diverse groups of all ages, as well as with different businesses, and the space was quickly filled by regular classes and activities, helping to keep hall busy. There is now a full, year-round calendar of community events taking place within the hall, with many outside groups using the space a venue.

Regular events and group meet-ups include a Baptist church service on a Sunday (attended by 60 people), drumming, choir and band practices, keep fit and art classes. There are numerous conferences, and meetings involving MSPs, and the hall is used as a polling station. The hall is also used to support and facilitate large-scale annual community events which generate local wealth and promote social cohesion such as the horticultural show, the folk festival, the Highland Games, and Arran Pride. It is quieter during the winter months, though there are various festive events over the Christmas period, with Brodick's village party for the children finishing off the year!