



**Why Village Halls Matter to Rural  
Health and Wellbeing  
A Discussion Paper  
by  
Cantley Village Hall  
Small Charity Week 2026<sup>1</sup>**



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## **Executive Summary**

Health is created in communities long before people enter hospitals, GP surgeries or care homes. As the NHS increasingly focuses on prevention, neighbourhood health and reducing health inequalities, attention is turning towards the role of community assets in supporting healthier, more connected populations. In rural areas, village halls are among the most important of these assets.

Cantley Village Hall Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO Reg No:1209574) believes that village halls should be recognised not simply as venues for social activities but as critical infrastructure for community health, wellbeing, resilience and prevention.

This paper sets out the case for greater collaboration between the NHS, local government, voluntary organisations and community-owned facilities to improve health outcomes in rural communities.

## **The Rural Challenge**

Rural communities are often perceived as healthier and more affluent than urban areas. While this is true in some respects, it masks significant challenges. Many rural communities experience:

- Limited access to healthcare services
- Poor public transport
- An ageing population
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Digital exclusion
- Rising levels of long-term health conditions
- Reduced access to preventative support

Residents frequently travel considerable distances to access healthcare, wellbeing services and community support. For older residents, carers and those without access to transport, these barriers can become significant determinants of health.

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<sup>1</sup> Small Charity Week is a campaign to empower the UK's small charities to have an even greater impact on society, and to address the challenges they face. When small charities are stronger, the communities they support are stronger too.

## **Village Halls Matter to Rural Health and Wellbeing**

The challenge facing public services is not simply how to treat illness, but how to maintain health and independence for as long as possible.

### **Prevention Starts in Communities**

The NHS has increasingly recognised that prevention offers the greatest opportunity to improve population health and reduce long-term demand on services. Many of the factors that influence health are social rather than medical.

These include:

- Social connections
- Physical activity
- Access to advice and support
- Volunteering opportunities
- Community participation
- Mental wellbeing
- Access to information and services

Village halls already support many of these activities. Across England, thousands of village halls host:

- Exercise classes
- Dementia support groups
- Lunch clubs
- Community transport initiatives
- Health awareness events
- Carer support networks
- Social prescribing activities
- Youth programmes
- Advice and outreach services

They provide trusted, familiar and accessible spaces at the heart of communities.

### **Village Halls as Community Health Infrastructure**

Community buildings are often overlooked within health planning despite offering significant opportunities. Village halls possess several advantages:

#### **Trust**

Residents know and use their local hall. They are often viewed as neutral and welcoming spaces.

## Village Halls Matter to Rural Health and Wellbeing

### Accessibility

Many are located within walking distance of residents and are familiar to people who may be reluctant to engage with statutory services.

### Flexibility

Village halls can host a wide range of services without the need for expensive new infrastructure.

### Value for Money

Community facilities are typically operated by volunteers and charitable organisations, delivering significant social value at comparatively low cost.

### Sustainability

Investment in community assets creates benefits that extend beyond individual programmes and funding cycles.

## The Neighbourhood Health Opportunity

National policy increasingly emphasises neighbourhood-based models of care. Emerging concepts such as:

- Neighbourhood Health Centres
- Integrated Care Partnerships
- Social Prescribing
- Community Outreach Services
- Prevention and Early Intervention

These all require accessible local locations where services can engage with communities. Not every village requires a dedicated health centre. However, many communities could support a hub-and-spoke model where local facilities provide outreach, prevention and wellbeing functions linked to larger neighbourhood hubs.

This approach could help extend services into rural communities without the need for significant new capital investment.

## The Cantley Example

Cantley Village Hall CIO is exploring the redevelopment of its existing village hall into a modern community and wellbeing hub. The vision includes:

- Flexible community space
- Meeting and consultation rooms
- Facilities suitable for health and wellbeing activities
- Space capable of supporting visiting health professionals and community services
- Enhanced accessibility and energy efficiency

## Village Halls Matter to Rural Health and Wellbeing

The objective is not to replicate a GP surgery or hospital. Rather, it is to create a community asset capable of supporting the wider health and wellbeing ecosystem while strengthening community resilience.

The proposal reflects growing recognition that health outcomes are influenced by the strength and connectivity of local communities.

### Recommendations

Cantley Village Hall CIO believes that government, the NHS and local authorities should:

#### 1. Recognise Village Halls as Health Assets

Community buildings should be considered as part of local health and wellbeing infrastructure.

#### 2. Include Community Assets in Health Planning

Integrated Care Systems and local authorities should actively engage village halls when developing neighbourhood health strategies.

#### 3. Support Community-Led Solutions

Funding programmes should encourage locally designed approaches that reflect the needs of individual communities.

#### 4. Invest in Prevention Infrastructure

Capital investment in community facilities should be viewed as an investment in long-term population health.

#### 5. Strengthen Partnerships

Closer collaboration is needed between health services, local government, charities and community organisations.

### Conclusion

The future sustainability of health and care services will depend not only on hospitals and clinical services, but on the strength of communities themselves. Village halls have served communities for generations.

With appropriate support and recognition, they can play an even greater role in tackling isolation, supporting prevention, improving wellbeing and helping people live healthier, more connected lives.

The question is no longer whether community assets contribute to health and wellbeing. The question is whether we are making full use of them.

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#### Cantley Village Hall CIO

Building a Community and Wellbeing Hub for the Future

[www.cantleyvillagehall.org.uk](http://www.cantleyvillagehall.org.uk) Further details available from [sp.heard@talktalk.net](mailto:sp.heard@talktalk.net)