



Media Release

For immediate release – Thursday 18th January 2018

Action in rural Sussex join in to celebrate #VillageHallsWeek 2018

Monday 22nd January will see Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and its Network launch its first ever #VillageHallsWeek, and Action in rural Sussex (AirS) is proud to be part of this week-long celebration by highlighting the important value that Sussex village halls and community buildings have on our communities.

Sussex has over 300 village halls and community buildings and they all are crucial components in sustaining inclusive and active communities, particularly in rural areas where fewer venues and services are present. They offer communities a hub in which social interaction can occur, businesses may be supported, services may be delivered and physical activities may take place. They often act as a venue for key local services, for example libraries and post offices. Their continuing survival is due to the hard-working volunteers whose passion and dedication keep these vital buildings at the heart of many of our rural communities.

Jeremy Leggett, Chief Executive at AirS says *“This is not just a chance to celebrate all our wonderful village halls, many of which can trace their roots back 100 years to just after the First World War, but also a chance to thank all the volunteers who run them, and all the people who organise the voluntary activities that happen within them.”*

Across England, nearly a quarter of village halls were built before World War I, while an estimated 600 were built to commemorate WWI or the local residents who lost their lives during the War. Currently, more than 90,000 individuals, small businesses and professionals use Village Halls to earn their living, or part of it, during the year.*

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** Figures compiled from ACRE research 2014*

Notes to editors

- AirS is an independent charity that exists for all people living in rural areas of Sussex but especially those who are at risk of isolation and/or disadvantage, and for whom rural life brings an additional challenge and cost to their daily lives.

AirS' services include support for Children & Families (COPES), Affordable Housing, Neighbourhood & Community Planning, Community Land Trusts, Village Agents & Village Care, Community Buildings Advice & Support and Advocacy for rural communities.

Established in 1931, we are staffed by a highly experienced and dedicated team who are committed to helping people overcome the challenges caused by their rural location. Our vision is for a thriving, economically active rural Sussex full of choice and opportunities for everyone, regardless of their circumstances.

Part of the ACRE network of rural councils, our work is funded by members' subscriptions, donations and legacies. In addition, some of our services receive grant funding from trusts, foundations and the public sector.

For more information visit: www.ruralsussex.org.uk or follow us on Twitter: @ruralsussex.

- ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) is the national body for 38 charitable local development agencies that make up the ACRE Network. Their vision – to be the voice of rural communities – is supported by the wealth of evidence and intelligence on rural matters that we collect from their members.

For more information visit: <http://www.acre.org.uk/>

- **#VillageHallsWeek** is a new initiative starting in 2018. ACRE and the ACRE Network will run an annual celebration of the village halls and other community buildings, which exist at the heart of England's rural communities. The aim of the week long campaign is to champion the diverse range of buildings which make up the 10,000 strong network and promote the sheer volume of services they offer.