

# Case Study

October 2020



**ACTion**  
with communities  
in cumbria

## Stainton Village Hall



### Virtual Village Hall Project

**Stainton is located 3 miles west of Penrith, south of the A66 and just outside the Lake District National Park. The largest village in Dacre parish, with around 400 homes, it is made up of a mixed demographic with some younger families and a high proportion of older, often one-person, households. Stainton has a primary school, church, Post Office, pub, hotel, small number of business and an hourly bus service to Penrith and Keswick. The Village Hall is on the site of the old village pond, opposite the pub and Post Office, so is often regarded as the centre of the village.**

### Background

Stainton village has had a community hall for 100 years. Funding from the Big Lottery, local businesses and community groups helped fund a rebuild and the brand new hall opened in March 2019. Activities and bookings were successfully building up and everything was looking good until the Covid-19 pandemic struck in March 2020.

The local community and businesses rallied round to help vulnerable people in Stainton. The Village Hall committee met to discuss how to manage the close down of the hall and continue the work of providing a community hub, without the use of the building. Some of the committee members were experienced at working online and communicating through video conferencing and suggested that purchasing a Zoom video communications license, that could be offered to regular users, would enable some activities to continue and assist the hall committee to stay connected.

In addition, they were particularly disappointed to be forced to shelve plans to celebrate the hall's centenary. The focus had been to celebrate the people, culture and heritage of Stainton, including talks from local people and cross-community events, and they wondered if some of these could still be achieved using Zoom.

### The Project

The committee decided to create a Virtual Village Hall through the purchase of a Zoom license. The idea was to make the virtual village hall available via Zoom to hall users through their existing Hallmaster online booking system and to continue with the centenary talks and activities to help keep the village community connected through lockdown.

### What has been achieved?

The first online activity was held on 1st May with a talk by Keith Scobie-Young on the Cumbria Clock Company. This was quickly followed by a VE Day celebration event on 8th May, with live music and a specially written short comedy sketch. The social sub group then set out to continue delivering a virtual service to the community, instigating a weekly online catch up and community café.



An example  
'What's On' poster

One user successfully continued to deliver her Karate classes via the Virtual Village Hall throughout the Lockdown period. Others found their own ways to contact their members online, while a number of regular groups simply halted their activity during that period.

In addition to the VE day celebration event, the social sub group established a number of other virtual events including a series of monthly talks, quizzes, book club, virtual garden visits, a 'Who Done It' event and a virtual pet show. These online activities were held every Friday evening and were popular with a regular following plus occasional users depending on the event. Attendance at events ranged from 10 to 40 individuals with an average of around 25.

The virtual Community Cafe on Tuesday afternoons attracted a small number of regular users and it succeeded in bringing together villagers who were unable to live in their village homes due to caring responsibilities elsewhere.

The Farmer's Market was also able to operate after the main lockdown period and this was held outside the hall, using the internal space to support the traders.

All events were promoted via posters, flyers, Facebook, Twitter and the hall's website. People could obtain the Zoom links to join activities by emailing or messaging the hall's Facebook page.

## The Learning

The Virtual Village Hall succeeded in making the community hub aspect of the hall a reality, while the building was out of use. However the online offer didn't manage to support all those who had previously used the physical hall since many were unfamiliar with or unwilling to use Zoom. Some residents also didn't have the required technology in their homes. Encouragingly, the number of people using Zoom did increase as time went on.

The Village Hall building reopened in between lockdowns, but the committee plan to continue with the Virtual Village Hall regardless as even when not in lockdown activities permitted at the hall are still limited due to Covid-19 restrictions.

In many ways the Virtual Village Hall has allowed them to connect not just within the village, but between villagers and their families and friends around the country and even across the world. For example, the monthly virtual quiz uses break-out rooms where a team can meet and this has allowed village folk to form a team with their families elsewhere. Some talks have been given by and attended by people beyond the village. In future they might have talks hosted inside the Hall while also broadcast over Zoom for people who can't or prefer not to attend in person.

The Village Hall has become much more than a building. Operating within the Covid-19 restrictions, the hall committee are proud of their efforts to support the community in these difficult times.



## Virtual Village Hall

Bringing the community together on **Zoom** every Friday evening

Friday, 12 <sup>th</sup> June 8.00pm	<b>Plants and gardens from around the World</b> <i>A photographic presentation</i>
Friday, 19 <sup>th</sup> June 8.00pm	<b>Virtual Book Club</b> <i>"A Man called Ove" by Fredrik Backman</i>
Friday, 26 <sup>th</sup> June 8.00pm	<b>Quiz Night – play with friends &amp; family via Zoom</b> <i>Register your team by Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> June</i>
Friday, 3 <sup>rd</sup> July 8.00pm	<b>Centenary Talk</b> <i>'Back to the Future' - Heritage lost, Opportunities found. Some anecdotes from the Ullswater archives. By Gordon Lightburn – Friends of the Ullswater Way</i>
Friday, 10 <sup>th</sup> July 8.00pm	<b>MacMillan Cancer Support - Whodunnit Evening</b> <i>Join us on board RMS Whodunnit: to help solve the mystery of who killed Dr McDogood</i>
Friday, 17 <sup>th</sup> July 8.00pm	<b>Virtual Book Club</b> <i>Check out our website for July's book</i>
Friday, 24 <sup>th</sup> July 8.00pm	<b>Quiz Night – play with friends &amp; family via Zoom</b> <i>Register your team by Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> July</i>
Friday, 31 <sup>st</sup> July 8.00pm	<b>Garden Designs and Makeovers</b> <i>Inspiration and tips from local gardeners</i>

Check out our website and facebook page for further information  
Email: [enquiries@staintonvh.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@staintonvh.org.uk)  
or message us on facebook for the **Zoom** link

[www.staintonvh.org.uk](http://www.staintonvh.org.uk) / [@staintonvhall](https://www.facebook.com/staintonvhall)

## Want to know more?

For more info on Stainton's  
Virtual Village Hall email:  
[enquiries@staintonvh.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@staintonvh.org.uk)