

How Kippen Village Hall brought a Community Asset back to life – An interview with Frances Carlaw, Chair.



The Village Hall in Kippen sits at the heart of the community, a lively hub of social events, sports and kid's clubs, and most recently bringing the community together to watch and celebrate Scotland's bout in the World Cup. But behind the busy calendar is a story of determined volunteers, careful planning and successful fundraising that helped bring a much loved community asset back to life.

SVE visited Frances Carlaw, chair of Kippen Village Hall, for a tour and interview about the hall's restoration journey, the funding lessons learned along the way and the volunteer effort behind its renewed community life.

When Frances joined the volunteer committee in 2022, Kippen Village Hall was already a well-loved community asset, but the building was no longer fully fit for purpose. It needed new flooring, lighting and paintwork; its heating and water facilities were out of date; and

accessibility improvements were required to make the hall work better for everyone who used it.

Rather than viewing the project as one enormous task, the committee broke the work into manageable phases. The plan eventually covered seven phases and sixteen separate projects, giving the committee a clear roadmap of what was needed, how much it would cost and the impact it would have. This planning helped the committee speak confidently to funders and laid the groundwork for what became a highly successful fundraising effort.

The first breakthrough came through a modest Stirling Council community award worth £800. While small in comparison to what would follow, Frances believes those early awards were invaluable because they demonstrated credibility and built confidence amongst funders. That initial success was followed by additional grants, business support and charitable funding, gradually building momentum.

Among the funding secured was support from Asda, which contributed £15,000 towards replacing the hall floor. Tillicoultry Quarries provided a £2,000 donation as part of their community policy, while larger funders backed more substantial elements of the improvement programme.

Over two years, the scale of the improvements became clear. The hall gained improved accessibility, including upgraded disabled facilities, a new floor, repairs to reduce water waste, paving improvement and a range of smaller projects that improved how the building serves the community. Funding has also been secured for audio-visual equipment, accessible parking spaces. A total of just under £250,000 raised by Frances and the Kippen Village Hall committee, making it all possible.

The result was not simply a refurbished building, but a hall that could better support the groups, events and everyday community activity that make it such an important local space.



The refurbished hall in action – pictures show (clockwise from the top left): Cancer research whist drive, Yoga group on the hall's new floor, and CPR classes for all ages.

The power of asking

Speaking to people, and trying your luck, was key to success for some projects for the hall. One project Frances spoke about was the completion of a community shed to the rear of the hall. The shed was bought flatpack and sat unbuilt due to the state of the grounds; overgrown with brambles, lacking drainage, unlevelled. While looking for potential funders, Frances put in a support application from a private construction company which they knew they did not fit the criteria for. Frances got in touch with the contractor directly and explained the situation. Although the application was not suitable for the fund, the contractor agreed to complete the job in-kind. They cleared the land, fixed the drainage issue, laid the hardstanding and even built the shed. From this effort, Frances and the committee learned the power of asking, of being bold. Businesses are not always able to say yes through traditional mechanisms, but people want to help each other. By picking up the phone and reaching the

right person, the hall was able to access support that would never have emerged through a standard funding application.

Stirling's Community Benefit Portal

The experience at Kippen Village Hall also points to a wider opportunity for third sector organisations in Stirling. In the current funding environment, it is increasingly important for the third sector to diversify its sources of support. Within Stirling, the recently launched Community Benefits Portal provides a new opportunity for charities, community groups, social enterprises and voluntary organisations to access assistance from businesses delivering contracts on behalf of Stirling Council. Under the council's Community Wealth Building approach, community benefit clauses are included as a minimum in all council contracts valued at over £50,000.

Recognising that local organisations are often best placed to identify the needs of their communities, the portal allows groups to submit specific requests for support. These requests are reviewed by the council and made available to suppliers, who can commit to delivering them as part of their tender submissions. Support may take many forms, including volunteering, materials, professional expertise, improvements to community facilities, training opportunities and other contributions in kind, rather than direct financial funding. For all third sector organisations, looking for support big or small, this is an excellent opportunity to access community benefit – [you can read more about it, and access the portal here.](#)

How to create a successful funding bid

Of the 18 funding applications submitted across the length of the project, all but two were successful. Frances puts this down to several key factors. Firstly, having a clear outline of who your organisation serves, what you want to achieve and why, and the positive impact it will have on your users. One tool she found useful was through the funder [Garfield Weston Foundation](#), who's guidelines outline the structure for a 10-page written application. The exercise of writing this application, although the fund was unrelated to their goals, was incredibly helpful in gaining a rounded understanding of the organisation and how it can be promoted to potential funders. The end result of this a catch all document which can be referred to, and tailored for future applications.

AI can also be a useful tool for drafting and refining funding applications. It can help summarise an organisation's outcomes and impact, and adapt them to a funder's priorities. However, it cannot replace a genuine understanding of how an organisation operates day to day and the difference it makes. At the recent Finance Forum held by SVE and CTSI, funders from The Robertson Trust and The National Lottery Community Fund discussed the use of AI in applications. Their view was that funders can often tell when AI has been used. While they do not discourage its use, applications that rely too heavily on AI can result in a weaker narrative.

Strong applications need clear evidence of qualitative impact, showing how the organisation works, how it supports community members and service users, what challenges it is responding to, and what funding would mean for the community. Bolstered with this information to hand, AI can be a great assistant for refining and editing applications and comparing to funding criteria.

Make your decision-making visible

Another important lesson from the project was the value of being able to show how decisions were made. When choosing contractors, the committee did not rely on price alone; they used a clear comparison process that weighed up a range of practical factors, including cost, quality, timescales, communication, aftercare and confidence in each contractor's ability to deliver the work. Each committee member scored their options across each factor, before pooling results to determine which was the preferred option. This sort of structured approach can be particularly helpful when costing for funders, because it shows that decisions have been considered carefully and made in the best interests of the project. It also helps demonstrate why the cheapest option is not always the strongest one, especially where reliability, quality and long-term value are important.

Lessons for other community groups

For other third sector organisations facing a daunting fundraising challenge, Kippen Village Hall offers an encouraging example. Significant investment is possible, even for volunteer-led groups, provided there is a clear plan, a willingness to learn and the determination to keep asking.

Now that the improvement programme is near completion, the committee is turning its attention to the future. Discussions are underway about moving towards SCIO status which means incorporation, while the committee continues to focus on long-term sustainability and ensuring the hall remains a valuable community asset for years to come.

Looking back, Frances believes the hall's success came from a combination of ambition, persistence and good planning. The committee did not rely on a single major grant to solve all its problems. Instead, they built momentum one project at a time, combining funding from multiple sources, and ensuring every improvement contributed to a larger vision.

"Retirement taught me something unexpected. I discovered that the greatest satisfaction in fundraising isn't reaching the target – it's standing back afterwards and watching a community enjoy what that generosity has made possible, simply because a group of volunteers believed in it." – Frances Carlaw, Chair of Kippen Village Hall (pictured below).



Frances Carlaw will be at the upcoming Third Sector Breakfast Club, on 25th of August at Callander Kirk to connect with other community group members, offering her insights from the past two years. She has also put together a case study detailing her process further and welcomes individuals to get in touch for an informal conversation about third sector fundraising. [You can find out more about Kippen Village Hall here.](#)