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Rural Business and Community Hub Fund

Case study - Ringsfield and Weston Recreation Ground and Village Hall

Ringsfield and Weston Recreation Ground and Village Hall is a charity that runs a community building in a rural area of East Suffolk. It provides recreational and leisure space to a variety of local community groups and private hirers, although the number of users has been relatively low since the Covid-19 pandemic. To fix this, the charity trustees decided to consult with the community to find out what would make the hall more attractive for use. One of the things they discovered was that most people found the hall to be too cold, which didn't come as a surprise. The old oil-fired heaters were too slow to bring the room temperature to a comfortable level – apart from being far from the most environmentally friendly option! It was clear that the hall had to be made fit for 21st century use.

While looking at funding options, one of the trustees came across the **Rural Business and Community Hub Fund*** from East Suffolk Council. Replacing their outdated heating system with a greener option seemed the perfect example of net-zero upgrade, which is one of the priorities for the fund, and they also had other ideas that could potentially meet at least one of the other two priorities. They quickly decided to get in touch with Community Action Suffolk (CAS) to check that they were eligible and discuss their ideas further.

The conversation with the CAS team helped the trustees come up with an action plan to create a strong application for the fund. They were encouraged to take a holistic approach and consider all the different options to make their village hall **a multi-purpose community hub with a sustainable future**. After consulting with their community through canvassing and a questionnaire delivered to all households, they came up with a project that involved replacing the oil-fired heaters with a greener infrared system, installing a dividing curtain to create a new space for business and community hire, and updating the floor appearance to make it suitable for indoor sports.

After gathering evidence of need and costing the project, the trustees were finally ready to start drafting their application. They continued to use feedback and resources from the CAS team to build a clear and compelling case for their project, then after a few adjustments here and there, they finally submitted their application.

A couple of months later, when they received a positive response, the trustees and the rest of their community were absolutely elated! The hard work of gathering evidence and putting an application together seemed very daunting at the start, but it had definitely paid off. More importantly, it had also brought their community together and encouraged local interest in the hall.

* Part of the Rural England Prosperity Fund, which is a top-up to and complementary to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.