

## Brightening up village halls helps to tackle loneliness

By Helena Horton

THE Government is redecorating crumbling village halls across the country alongside a scheme aimed at tackling loneliness.

Halls in need of repair have already been granted £1.2 million of funding in order to turn them into centres of the community.

Grants of up to £75,000 to make improvements to halls are still available. These include repairs to roofs, refurbishments to lavatories and kitchens, and new meeting rooms. The announcement has been made to mark the beginning of Village Halls Week, which starts today.

The campaign celebrates the services that village halls provide in rural communities across England and will involve events at 650 halls across the country.

Thriving village halls help combat loneliness and become a “hub for communities to come together”, the Government said. There are more than 10,000 halls in the country, and they also provide a space for shops, cafés, pop-up pubs, nurseries and doctors.

### 10,000

*The number of village halls across the country eligible for the government refurbishment grant scheme*

Lord Gardiner, a minister for rural affairs, said: “Village halls are an essential part of rural life. I am delighted that our grant scheme is helping to refurbish our nation’s village halls.

“And each and every one will make a real difference to their communities. “There can be no doubt that village halls are more important and relevant than ever. Village Halls Week provides a perfect opportunity for people up and down the country to celebrate these wonderful places at the heart of our rural community.”

David Emerson, the chairman of Action with Communities in Rural England, said: “We are delighted to manage the Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund, and have been overwhelmed with the fantastic response from halls.

“The impact of the grants is huge and will make a great difference to rural communities.

“Village Halls Week is the perfect time to celebrate the new facilities <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub> rural communities can now enjoy.”

The announcement comes on the same day as the annual report on the Government’s Loneliness Strategy, which sets out the approach to tackling loneliness in England.

The strategy includes giving village halls across the country funding to help to increase community cohesion, and at the same time reducing isolation and loneliness.