



Broadband and Wi-Fi in Village Halls and Community Buildings

Village halls and community buildings are increasingly looking to offer broadband and Wi-Fi access to their users to support a range of community activities and to enhance the facilities offered as a venue for hire. [Connecting Cumbria](#) have produced this short guide to support those seeking to improve digital connectivity in village halls and community buildings.

Initial Connection

Before you can get Broadband and Wi-Fi connections the building will need to have a telephone landline installed unless you can access cable or fibre to the premise (FTTP) or fixed wireless options in your area. This needs to be on a business (not residential) contract as it is for public use.

- Place an order for a new telephone line with your chosen service provider then upgrade to broadband, or
- Find out more about getting broadband without a landline [here](#).

Please note, the choice of broadband networks (the physical infrastructure that services are delivered through) has increased significantly in many parts of Cumbria over the past five years. You may find that your best choice for connectivity is a network or Internet Service Providers (ISP) that you are less familiar with. You may also find that because there is more than £300m of investment into deployment of different broadband networks across Cumbria (between 2022 and 2027) availability of services in your area may be in the process of being expanded. The Connecting Cumbria team strongly recommend shopping around to understand all your options and reviewing the advice Ofcom offer to consumers via their website at [Phones and broadband - Ofcom](#).

Some halls do not have an official post office address, which can cause problems as some ISPs may not accept an order without a formal address. If this is the case:

- Request an official address from the Post Office [here](#):
- Or find an ISP that will accept an order from an 'unserved' building.

To find out what broadband and mobile speeds are available to the hall or community building, the Ofcom mobile and broadband checker lets you:

- [view broadband availability and speeds](#) for any UK address
- [check indoor/outdoor mobile availability](#) for voice and data services from all major operators, as well as outdoor availability of 5G services.

Enter a postcode at these links to view mobile coverage by provider, or availability of broadband services.

Costs

Potential costs and issues to be aware of are:

- Installation, connection, and on-going line rental and data usage charges.
- Village halls need a business contract (not residential). Business landlines will incur VAT.
- Consider how the on-going costs will be met. Review the standard hire charges for the hall.
- Additional costs could also be required if you need to boost your Wi-Fi signal, or need work to keep your Wi-Fi router in a secure location.
- Check the ISP's Terms and Conditions to allow you to make your internet connection available to the general public before placing an order.

When shopping around for the best deals and prices, you need to balance cost with reliability and service support. Ofcom offer advice to consumers via their website at [Phones and broadband - Ofcom](#).

Security

It is strongly recommended that access to your Wi-Fi signal is managed and filtered. The risk of allowing unmanaged access is that people may use your broadband service to view, access or distribute information that is illegal, criminal, inappropriate or pirated. This could lead to a degree of liability for those providing the Wi-Fi. However, security is easy and quick to manage, and should not put you off establishing a Wi-Fi service within your community building.

To minimise the risk of inappropriate use:

- Make sure your wireless router is in a secure area, which limits physical access to authorised users only. Allowing someone to log in to the router with a direct (Ethernet) cable is a risk, as they can make unauthorised changes.
- Protect your passwords. The passwords required to manage and access your Wi-Fi connection are usually displayed somewhere on the wireless router. If you are concerned that these can be accessed by people that are not authorised consider changing the User ID and administration password. This will be explained in the user guide provided with your router.
- Change the public access Wi-Fi password on a regular basis to prevent unauthorised access. This will mean that people using your Wi-Fi connection will have to be re-issued with the password, but can limit others using your Wi-Fi without your permission.
- Make sure the parental control setting is switched on to prevent access to unsuitable websites. Use any firewall settings on the router to set the level of restriction (see router instruction manual).

End user access to Wi-Fi needs to be managed, unless the hall management committee decides to offer unmanaged and unfiltered access.

Wi-Fi Coverage

Choosing where you site your Wi-Fi router may affect coverage as the signal strength reduces further away from the router. In a large hall or building the signal may not be strong enough to cover all areas.

If the signal is not strong enough to reach all areas that you want, you could consider installing devices that extend the Wi-Fi signal to other locations within the building. Options to consider include powerline adapter(s) (using the electrical wiring and sockets), a Wi-Fi extender(s) to boost the signal strength, or using a Wi-Fi hotspot which can improve coverage in any open areas.

Good Practice guidelines

Include the use of Wi-Fi in your hiring agreement for those using the hall. A model hiring agreement is available free of charge to village halls in Cumbria on request from ACTION with Communities in Cumbria (www.cumbriaaction.org.uk)

Display a notice to make it clear to potential users that the use of the Wi-Fi service is at their own risk - users should be careful about transmitting sensitive information and ensure that their wireless device is protected with an appropriate firewall.