Managing and Sustaining Community Buildings in County Leitrim

Survey Findings

South Leitrim Community Network

December 2015

Contents

South Leitrim Community Network

The South Leitrim Community Network is an information sharing network for local community groups established in 2002. The South Leitrim Community Network provides a forum for community groups in South Leitrim to come together to share information and to lobby on issues. The Network meets four times per year and has 40 member groups, which are mostly area based community groups and community centre committees. The Network meetings are convened with assistance from Leitrim Development Company which provides funding for meetings, administration and travel support for members.

Since its inception, the South Leitrim Community Network has carried out significant work to support community groups in this geographical area. This has included lobbying on changes to community employment schemes in conjunction with North Leitrim Community Network, highlighting the need for improved road signage within the county, encouraging the employment of people on the live register at polling stations on election and referendum days and lobbying for a reduction to waste charges for unemployed and older people in Leitrim.

The South Leitrim Community Network participated on a number of training events including planning and review days, media training and a review of the implementation of the Public Participation Network structures in Leitrim. The Network also produced newsletters providing information on funding, projects and training. In 2012, the Network had their first major fundraising event, producing a calendar showcasing community work within Leitrim.

The community building survey is the first research project undertaken by the South Leitrim Community and has been completed in conjunction with the North Leitrim Community Network and Leitrim Development Company.

SECTION 1

Introduction

In 2013, the South Leitrim Community Network held a joint planning event with the North Leitrim Community Network. This event highlighted a range of issues affecting community buildings committees in rural Leitrim and their struggle to sustain activities in these buildings in the midst of rising running costs and reductions in public funding. A proposal was put forward to carry out research into the needs of community groups managing community buildings in the county. The findings presented in this document are the result of a survey completed of community buildings committees in Leitrim

'Community Centres /village halls provide civic space where different groups can meet, community celebrations held and significant events marked. In smaller communities without shops, schools or other significant communal buildings, they may be the only place that communities can come together' (Muintir na Tire, Submission on the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020)

The aim of this research is to explore how community groups are managing their centres/buildings in the context of cutbacks in the community sector and to establish how they can be supported.

Community buildings, for the purpose of this research, are defined as buildings managed or owned by a local community group providing facilities for either social, recreational, sporting, education or training needs in their local areas.   These buildings are open for use to the local community and are not for profit. These include community centres, sports centres, enterprise centres, social economy/ community services centres, and family support centres.

This research presents the findings of the community buildings survey exploring in particular how community buildings are managed, maintained and how they are funded. It explores the level of use of community buildings and it highlights the challenges currently facing community building committees. It also highlights the level of support needed to upgrade and develop community buildings in rural Leitrim. The final section makes a number of recommendations on how community building committees could be supported in the future.

Methodology

In 2013, the South Leitrim Community Network commenced the process of carrying out research into the needs of community buildings committees in Leitrim.

In early 2014, the South Leitrim Community Network mapped the number of community buildings within Leitrim. A sub-committee was established to oversee this process consisting of representatives of both the North Leitrim and South Leitrim Community Networks. An audit of community facilities had been developed by the Leitrim Community Forum in 2008 which listed all community buildings in Leitrim.   This list was updated by the sub-committee. In total, the updated list consisted of 72 community buildings in Leitrim.

A questionnaire was designed by representatives of the North Leitrim and South Leitrim Community Networks and presented for review to the Networks at their meetings. In January 2015, the questionnaire was distributed in hard copy and soft copy format to 72 community building committees throughout the county. A number of follow up and reminder emails were sent and the return date was extended to allow a good response rate. Leitrim Development Company also sent reminders to groups to return their questionnaires.

In May 2015, a total of 51 questionnaires were returned. The responses to the survey have been collated and are presented and analysed in this document.

Section 2
Community Buildings Survey Findings

Response to Survey

A total of 72 questionnaires were distributed to committees of community buildings throughout Leitrim and 51 responded, giving a response rate of 71%. The questionnaires were distributed in soft and hard copy format to ensure that groups could reply in the format which suited them. The high response rate was due to follow up support from community network member groups and Leitrim Development Company staff who encouraged groups to return their questionnaires.

Table 1: Response rate

Questionnaires distributed	Questionnaires Returned	Response rate
72	51	71%

**2.1 Ownership and Management of Community Building**

Just under half of respondents (25) indicated that the community building was owned by the community. Eighteen (18) responded that their facility was owned by the Church or Parish. The remainder (8) stated that the centre was owned by other organisations. Other organisations included the following: Leitrim Development Company, Leitrim Co Council, GAA, Private companies or landlord and Church of Ireland.

Table 2: Who owns the community building?

Ownership of Building	Number	Percentage
Church/Parish	18	35%
Community	25	49%
Other	8	16%

When asked if their group leases the community premises and the length remaining on the lease, a total of 18 respondents indicated that they had a lease on the building. The length of time remaining on their lease ranged from 2 years to over 990 years. However, the majority had 10-30 years remaining on their lease.

Ownership & Management
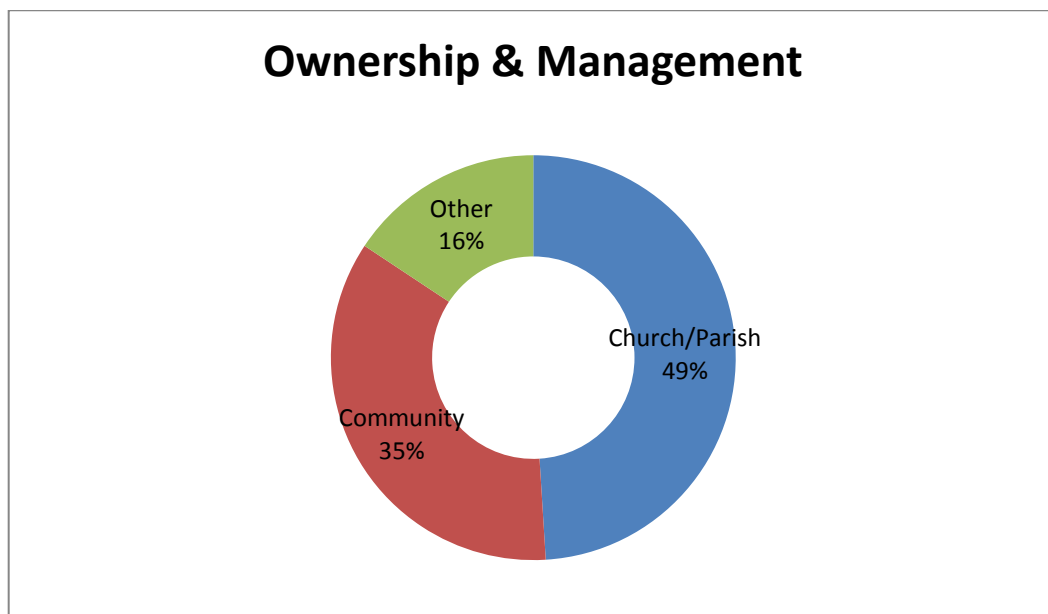
When asked to indicate the management structure, the majority of respondents indicated that they are registered as companies limited by guarantee (31), a total of 10 indicated that they are a community group or association and the remainder are either parish Council or Committees(6) or Trustees

Table 3: Management Structure

Management Structure	Number	Percentage
Company Limited by Guarantee	31	60%
Parish Council or Committee	6	12%
Community group/Association	10	20%
Trustees	4	8%

2.2 Insurance on Community Building

All respondents indicated that their community building is insured, with a total of 44 providing the name of their insurance company. Fifteen (15) respondents stated that their premises is insured with BHP, 12 are insured with Allianz. The remainder were insured by JLT(7), Ecclesiastical(3), FBD(3), Zurich(1), GAA(1) Aviva(1) and Wills Insurance(1)

Insurance Company

Allianz 28%
JLT 16%
Ecclesiastical 7%
Zurich 2%
BHP 34%
FBD 7%
Aviva 2%
GAA 2%
Wills 2%
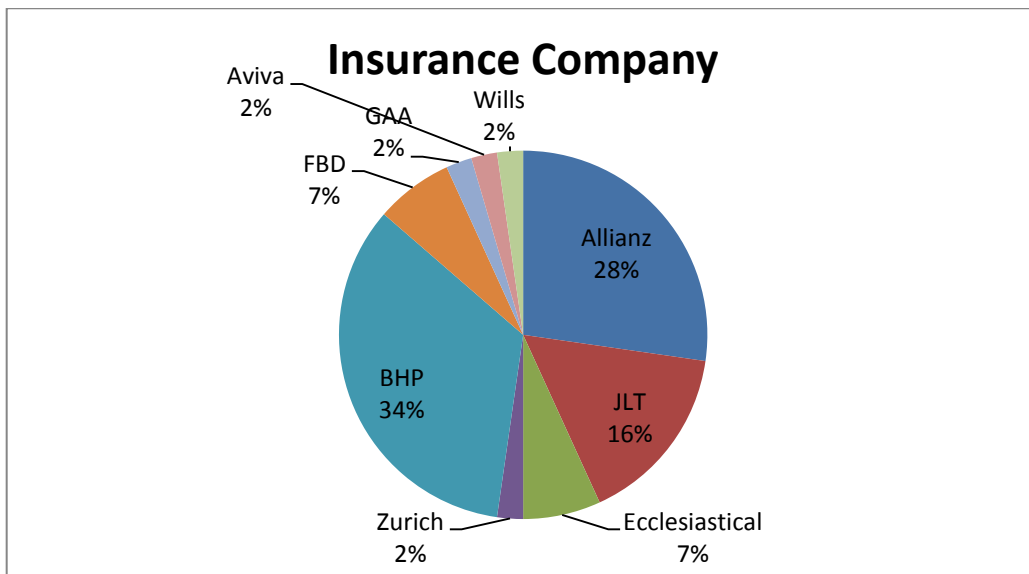
When asked to specify the type of insurance cover, the majority (37) stated that they had public liability and contents insurance only on the premises, while 4 respondents had public liability insurance only. One had public liability and employer's liability and 7 had public liability, contents and another form of insurance. Examples of other forms of insurance included director's liability, all risks and industrial site insurance.

Table 4 Insurance Cover

Type of Insurance cover	Number	Percentage
Public Liability Only	4	8%
Public liability and other	1	2%
Public liability and contents only	37	72%
Public liability, contents and other	7	14%
No answer	2	4%

A total of 41 respondents provided details of their annual insurance premium. For community buildings with public liability insurance only, annual premiums ranged from €300 to €700. For public liability and contents only, premiums for community buildings only ranged from €400 to €2300. For public liability and contents for community buildings with a business focus including childcare, day care, organic centre, education or arts centre, premiums ranged from €1000 to €7000. One group with industrial site insurance, plus public liability and contents had an annual premium of €14000.

2.3 Activities in the Community Building

Respondents were asked to indicate which, if any, community based groups use the community building. The table illustrates the wide range of use of community buildings amongst local community groups throughout the county. Active Age groups, exercise groups, youth groups, sports groups and education group classes showed the highest level of use of community buildings throughout the county.

Table 5: Groups/Activities in the community building

Groups	No using building	Groups	No using building
Active age groups	26	Residents associations	12
Festival committees	19	Men's groups	8
Exercise groups	29	Sports groups	25
Youth groups	27	Tidy Towns	18
Women's groups	19	Education classes	31
Farmers groups	15		

Other uses of the community facilities included cards/whist, drama/art /music/dance groups, order of Malta, apostolic groups, GEAI, parish groups, show committees, bingo, playgroups, parents groups, family support groups, water schemes, disability groups, schools, private parties, heritage groups, enterprise and funeral/church functions

Fifteen (29%) respondents indicated they have long term tenants using the community building. Long term tenants ranged from agencies such as Leitrim Development Company, private businesses, GEAI, Leitrim Co Council, HSE, and Community Services Projects.

When asked about the level of use amongst agencies of their premises, only 14% stated that these agencies use their premises on a regular basis. Fifty nine per cent (59%) indicated that agencies e.g. LDC, HSE, Co Council use their community buildings occasionally, while 27% stated that agencies never use their facilities.

How often do agencies use your community building?

■ Never ■ Occasionally ■ Regularly

14%

27%

59%
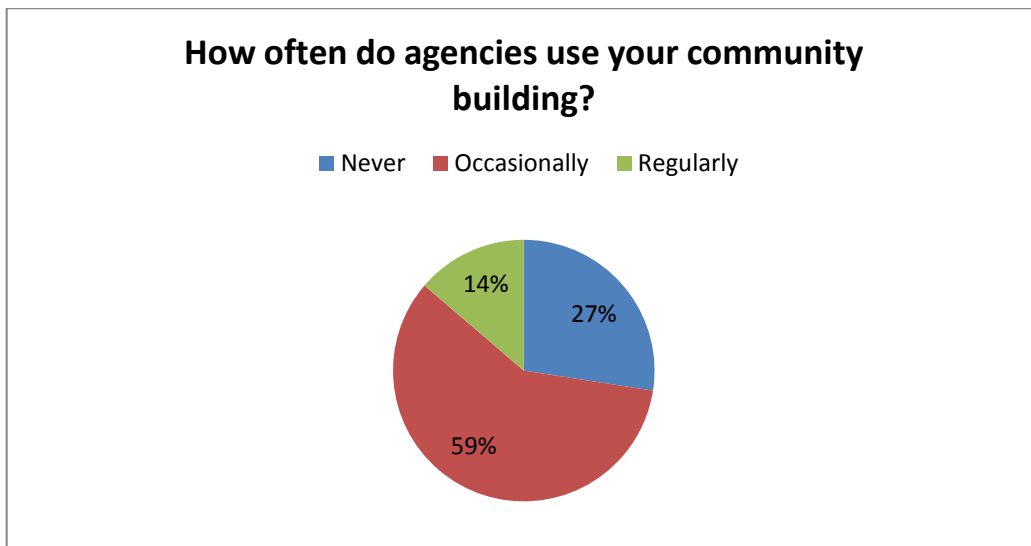
2.4 Staffing and Caretaking of Community Building

Community building committees were asked to indicate if their community buildings were maintained by staff under social employment schemes, other programmes or their own income.   Forty three out of 51 respondents had a paid worker maintaining the building; the majority of these workers were employed through social employment schemes. Some community buildings had more than one worker and these came from various schemes. In total, there were 25 people employed through the Rural Social Scheme, 19 people employed through Tús, 11 employed under community employment schemes, 3 under the Job Initiative scheme and 7 under the Community Services Programme. Fourteen employed from other schemes, funds or income generation. Other included Enterprise Ireland, Pobal, HSE, Tusla, ETB Solas, DCYA and Arts Council and own funds

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Table 6: Numbers employed in Community Building

RSS	TÚS	CE	JI	CSP	Other
25	19	11	3	7	14

The majority (20) of those who had maintenance staff employed through social employment had one worker, while 16 had two workers and 4 had three workers or more.

2.5 Facilities in Community Building

Community building committees were asked to outline the facilities in their building. Forty six had meeting rooms and kitchen, 47 had accessible toilets, 29 had a community hall, 23 had computers and only 22 had Wi-Fi in their centres. Other facilities in the community buildings outlined by respondents included youth cafés, restaurant and secretarial services, stage, projector and audio system, shop, sports facility, play area, self-catering apartments and incubator units

Table 7: Facilities in the community building

Facility	Number	Facility	Number
Hall	29	Accessible toilets	47
Meeting rooms	46	Computers	23
Kitchen	46	Wi-Fi	22

2.6 Condition of Community Building

When groups were asked to outline the current condition of their community building, the majority (67%) categorised their building as being 'in good condition', 29% stated that it was 'Okay but needs upgrading and improvement' and only 4% felt that their building was 'in poor condition'.

When asked if their building had ever been renovated or upgraded, a total of 44 indicated that they had carried out renovation work on their buildings while 7 indicated that they had not carried out any renovation works.

Current Condition of Community Building

- 4%
- 29%
- 67%

■ In Good Condition
■ Okay but needs improvement
■ In Poor Condition
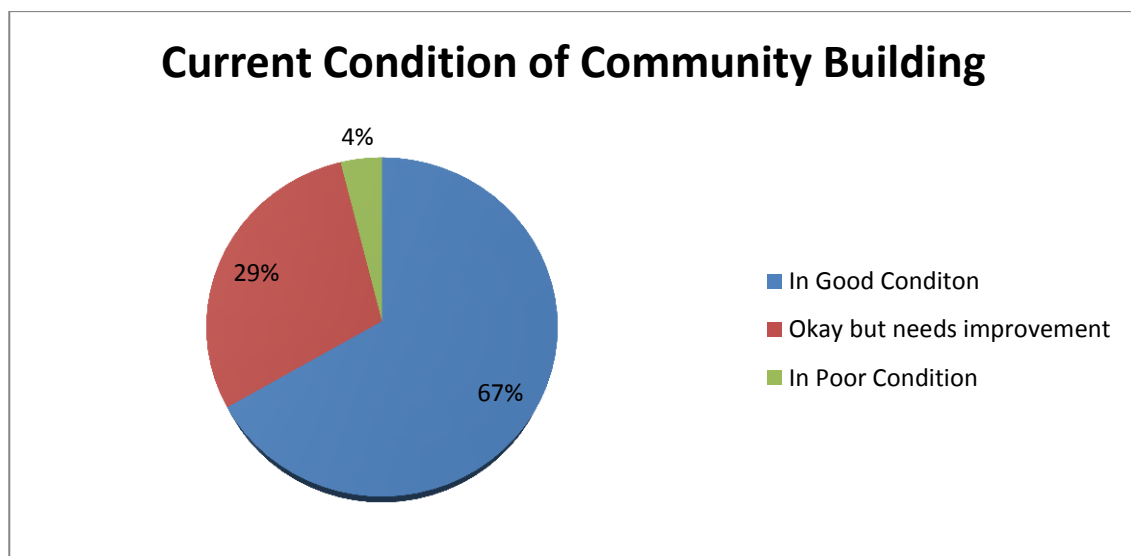
Of those community buildings where they was renovations or upgrading carried out the majority(50%) had this work carried out in the last five years, 13% had carried out this work between 6-10 years ago, while the remainder 37% had not renovated or upgrading their centre for over 10 years.

When asked to indicate where they received funding for renovation or upgrading works, the majority had accessed funding from more than one funding agency. Most of the groups (22) had received funding from Leitrim Development Company, twelve had funding from local fundraising/parish, three received funding from IFI, and three from Cross Border and PEACE funding, two from Department of Sport and Lottery funds, seven received funding from other sources including Pobal, People in Need, County Enterprise Fund, Family Support Agency and Irish Youth Foundation.

2.7 Running Costs

Respondents were asked how they meet the operational costs of running the building. Most respondents had more than one means of meeting their running costs. The majority (47%) stated that tenants/ groups were their main source of income, 40% indicated that they fundraise while only 12% used grant aid.

How Group Meet Operational Costs

Other 1%
Grant aid 12%
Tenants/Groups 47%
Fundraising 40%
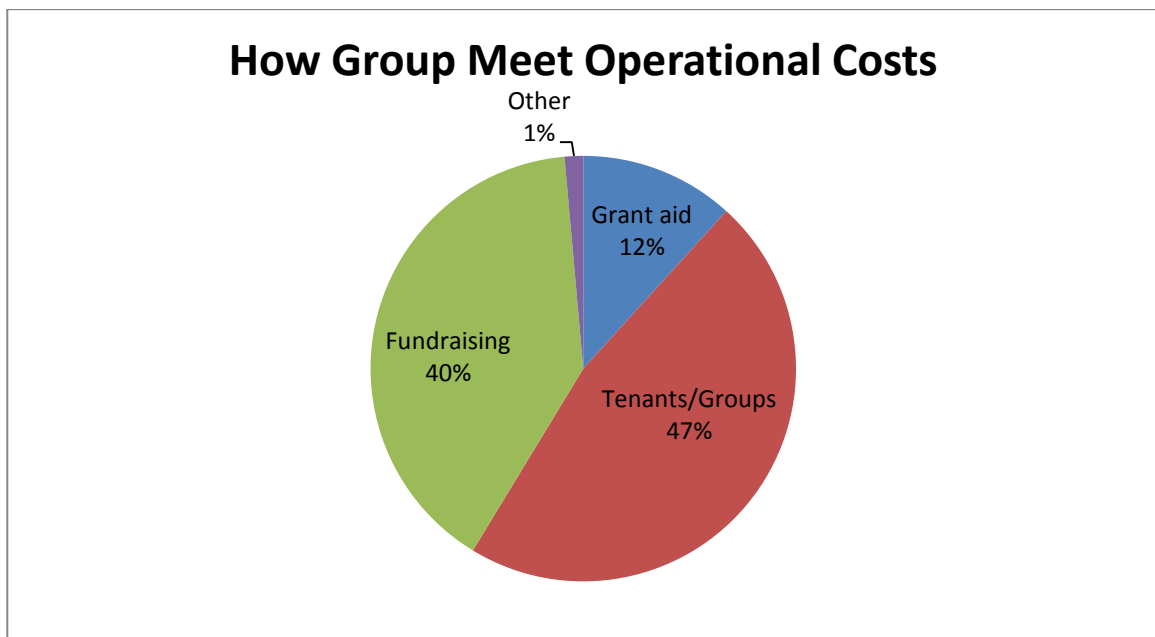
2.8 Plans for Renovation or Expansion

Groups were asked to indicate if they have plans to renovate, enhance or expand their community building over the next three years. The majority, 71% stated yes and 29% stated no.

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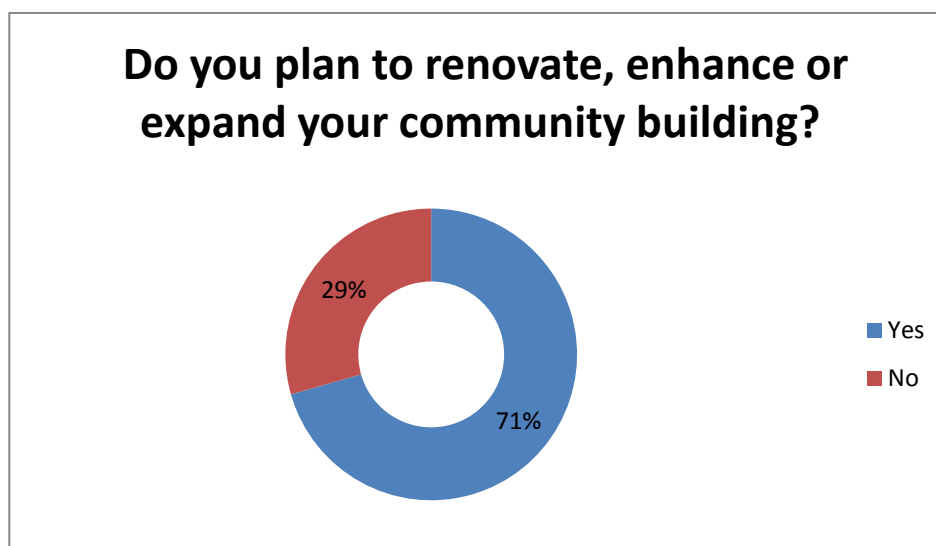
When groups were asked to provide details of work that they would like to carry out on the community building over the next three years, most respondents indicated that they need to carry out repair and renovations, 6 indicated that their community centre would need an extension, 4 expressed the need for equipment including IT and others included energy upgrading, carpark space and signage.

Table 8: Details of Renovation/ Enhance or Expansion

Type of Expansion or Renovation	Numbers
Extension	6
Equipment/IT	4
Repair/Renovations	14
Energy Upgrade	1
Other	5

2.9 Challenges to Running a Community Building

Community building committees were asked what they think are the main challenges to running a community centre at present. The vast majority (68%) indicated that funding for running and repair costs was the most significant challenge, while 20% indicated that there is a need to increase use and ensure the sustainability of their facility while 12% stated that there is a need for more volunteers.

Challenges to Running a Community Building
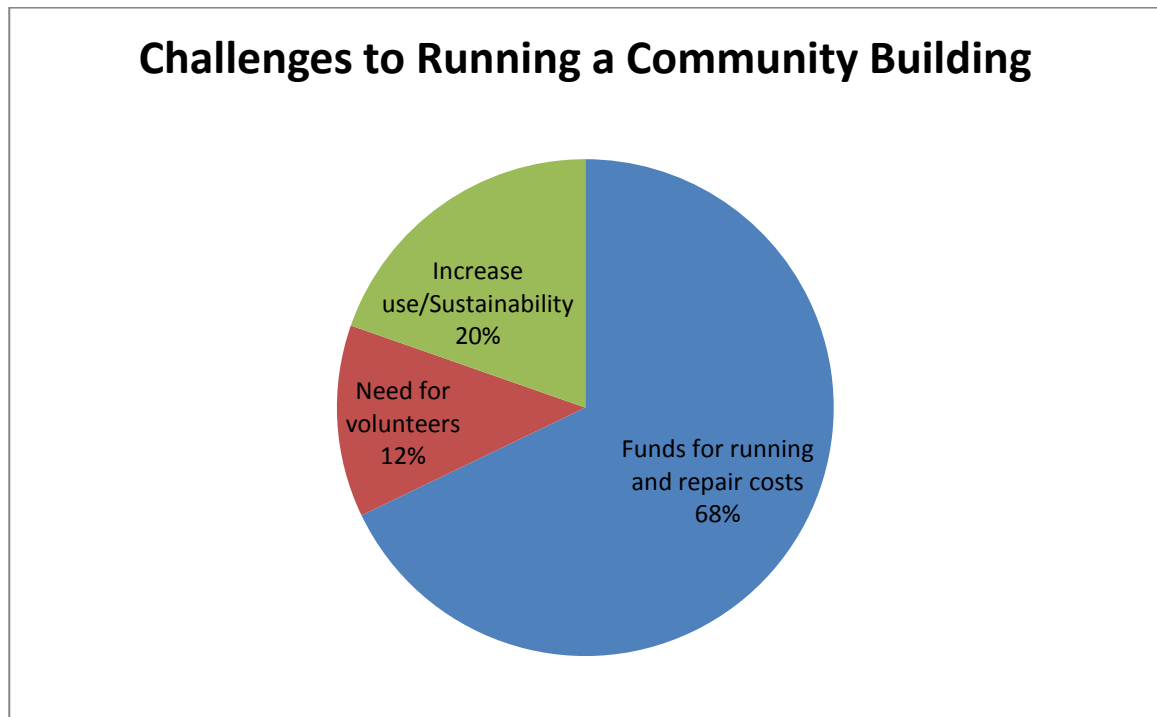
The challenges to meetings the costs of running and repairs were evident in the following responses:

'The cost of ongoing maintenance and repairs is the biggest cost. Once you have a good tenant, most of the other issues are minor'

'Upkeep of building, heating, water rates, Esb bills'

'Running costs-the lack of money in the community-you feel embarrassed to be asking people for money when you know there is none out there'

'It is difficult to get funds to maintain the centre'

'It can be quite hard to stay on top of overheads-heat, light, oil, insurances, repairs and maintenance all add up. Even cleaning and decorating can be tough to say on top off. We lost our contribution from CSP Pobal several years ago and have struggled since'

Those who indicated that their main challenge was the need to increase use and sustainability, highlighted the challenges that they face in sustaining current activities in their buildings

'Maintaining the financial viability of the project'

'Ensuring we maintain the current level of income and to encourage more use of this building by the community and external groups to raise our income so we can cover all maintenance costs and improve on the current services that we provide'

'Sustainability-expenses exceed income'

'Fundraising opportunities to meet funders matching fund requirements are limited in small communities and banks are unwilling to lend to voluntary groups'

'If we had not a good tenant group who respect the place, it would be difficult to operate a small centre'

Those who indicated that their main challenge was the need for volunteers, referred to the time commitment that being a volunteer demands and the shortage of other volunteers coming forward as illustrated in the following responses:

'Provide volunteer management and supervision'

'Getting more people involved in various activities which helps financially'

'Getting people to volunteer'

'Demands on voluntary time'

'An acute shortage of volunteers for community projects'

Section 3

Conclusions

The purpose of the community building survey was to explore how community groups are managing their centres/buildings in the face of rising running costs and to establish their support needs. It is clear that there is a vast amount of voluntary commitment throughout the county to keep community buildings open and operational for the benefit of those living in these communities. As highlighted at the start, 72 buildings were identified and a significant number of committees took the time to complete the survey to highlight issues affecting them in maintaining and managing a community building.

It is significant that nearly three quarters of respondents stated that they wish to renovate, enhance or expand their community building, with the majority seeking to renovate or repair rather than expand. Although the majority of respondents (67%), felt that their building was in good condition, one third stated that their centres were either in okay or poor condition.

The main challenge highlighted from the research for community building committees at present is funding for running and repair costs with nearly 70% highlighting this as the single most significant issue for them. The majority of these committees rely on income from tenants/ groups as their main source of funding for running costs with only 12% accessing support from grant aid. Reliance on tenants/community groups renting these buildings may not be sustainable in the future as they may also experience funding cutbacks. A significant issue here is also the low number of agencies using community buildings on a regular basis. It is worth noting that only 14% indicated that agencies use their premises on a regular basis and a total of 27% stated that they never use their building.

The research highlighted the variety and extent of the use of community buildings throughout the county with groups ranging from active age to tidy towns to youth groups using their local community building for their activities. This demonstrates that these community buildings are still viewed as the local centre for a vast array of social, recreational, educational and sporting activities in local communities and provide a base for these groups to meet and these activities to take place.

The range of facilities available in these centres is also significant with the majority having meeting rooms, kitchen and accessible toilets. Only 29 respondents indicated that there was a community hall with less indicating that there were computers available. Less than half of those community buildings surveyed had wi-fi access.

In terms of ownership of the community building, 35% were parish or church owned and this may have implications for these groups if they are seeking funding from grant bodies for renovations or enhancement to these buildings. Sixty per cent were incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee with the remainder either parish council or committee, community groups or Trustees.

The survey results highlighted above have informed a number of recommendations and these are presented in the next section.

Section 4
Recommendations

The findings of the research were presented to the North Leitrim and South Leitrim Community Networks and they proposed the following recommendations. All recommendation presented below have a timeline and a lead person/agency or group.

(1) A list of all potential funding programmes for community buildings that cover work including renovations, extensions or refurbishment should be compiled and distributed to community building committees
To be completed by: June 2016
Lead person/agency/Group: Leitrim Development Company

(2) A meeting of all community building committees will be organised to enable sharing of information on insurance, grant support, fundraising, social employment schemes etc.   This Network should meet at a minimum of once a year
To be completed by: April 2016
Lead person/agency/Group: Leitrim Development Company and Community Networks

(3) Information workshops should be provided for those groups who are considering leasing a community building from the parish or another body.   This should include information on legal implications, tax, costs and the potential of using a lease as matching funding
To be completed by: April 2016
Lead person/Agency/Group: Community Networks and Leitrim Development Company

(4) A list of the most commonly used insurance companies with contact details should be provided to these committees. A group insurance scheme similar to that implemented by Leitrim Residents Network could be explored as a way of bringing down insurance premium costs for groups
To be completed by: April 2016
Lead person/agency/Group: Leitrim Development Company and Community Networks

(5) Many groups are struggling to pay back loans as well as meet running costs and it was suggested that there should be some support for these groups. Some groups, as highlighted in the research, will not be in a position to apply for Leader and other grants where a percentage of matching funding is required, as they do not have access to other funds. It was suggested that Leitrim Co Council should be approached to provide matching funding for

these groups. The recent funding announced by the Government to revitalise rural areas, which is to be administered by the local LCDC, should be explored as a means of matching funding for community buildings.

To be completed by: February 2016

Lead person/agency/Group: Leitrim Co Council and Community Networks/PPN

(6) There needs to be a system to enable the application process to be as straightforward as possible for community groups as there is too much red tape involved in applying for funding. Training workshops should be set up to assist groups to fill applications that require a lot of detail.

To be completed by: February 2016

Lead person/agency/Group: Leitrim Development Company and other funding bodies

(7) Training on fundraising strategies that have worked for other centres/communities should be organised for groups who are wishing to make applications to funding agencies that require matching funding.

To be completed by: December 2016

Lead organisation: Leitrim Development Company and Community networks

(8) Potential funding opportunities for computer and wi-fi access in community buildings in rural areas in rural areas will be explored

To be completed by: September 2016

Lead organisation: Community Networks

(9) Agencies operating in Leitrim should make efforts to use community buildings when holding meetings in local areas. A list of all community buildings and contact numbers should be available to agencies and others who may want to book the building for use.

To be completed by: June 2016

Lead person/agency/Group: Leitrim Development Company

(10) The new volunteering website for Leitrim www.volunteerinleitrim.ie could be used to recruit new volunteers in local areas with specific skills which the group require e.g. fundraising, maintenance work, accounts. Information workshops on using the website as a means of recruitment will be organised

To be completed by: September 2016

Lead organisation: Leitrim Development Company

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Appendices

<u>Questionnaire</u>

We would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to fill in the questionnaire below to assist us to identify the needs of community building committees in Leitrim.

1. Contact Details

Title & Address of Community Building/Centre:

_____

Main Contact person for Community Building

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel/Mobile: _____

Email: _____

2. Ownership and Management

(a) Who owns the community building?

Church/Parish ☐

Community ☐

GAA ☐

Other (please specify) _____

(b) If your group leases the premises, how much longer will the lease run for?

_____

(c) Please outline the Management Structure:

Company Limited by Guarantee ☐

Parish Council or Committee ☐

Community Group or Association ☐

Trustees ☐

Other (please specify) _____

(d) Is your community building insured? Yes ☐   No ☐

Insurance company name _____

If yes, please specify type of insurance
Public liability   ☐
Public liability and contents   ☐
Other(please specify)_____

Please indicate the amount of the annual premium_____
(For comparison purposes only)

3. Activities in the community building?

Please indicate which of the following groups, if any, use your community building

Active Age group	☐	Youth Group	☐
Residents Association	☐	Tidy Towns	☐
Festival Committee	☐	Women's Group	☐
Men's Group	☐	Classes/Education	☐
Exercise Group	☐	Farmer's group	☐
Sports based group	☐		

Other (please specify)_____

(b) Does your building have any long term tenants e.g. childcare services, afterschool services, social enterprise or day care centre? If yes, please specify

_____

_____

© Do any agencies use the building e.g. HSE, Co Council, Leitrim Development Company etc

Never   ☐
Occasionally   ☐
Regularly   ☐

4. Staffing and Caretaking of Community Building?

Please indicate if you Community Building is maintained by workers on any of the following schemes:
Rural Social Scheme   ☐
Tús   ☐
Community Employment   ☐
Jobs Initiative   ☐
Community Services Programme   ☐
Other(please specify)_____

If your Community Building Committee employs other staff, please outline their roles and how they are funded

_____
_____
_____

5. Facilities in the Community Building

Please indicate which of the following facilities are available in your building:
Community or Sports Hall   ☐
Meeting or training Rooms   ☐
Kitchen   ☐
Accessible Toilets   ☐
Computer facilities   ☐
Wi-Fi   ☐
Other (please specify) _____

6. Please describe the current condition of the Community Building:

In good condition   ☐

Okay, but needs upgrading and improvement   ☐

In poor condition   ☐

Please give reasons for your answer_____

_____

_____

7. Sources of Funding for Maintenance/Development

Has your Community building ever been renovated or upgraded?

Yes   ☐   No   ☐

If yes please give details of work carried out, when it was done and how it was funded?

_____

_____

_____

8. Running costs of building

How does your Group/Committee meet the operational costs of running the Building?

Grant Aid   ☐

Income from groups or tenants using the centre   ☐

Fundraising   ☐

Other (please specify)

_____

9. Does your group have any plans to renovate, enhance or expand the community building over the next three years?

_____

_____

_____

10. What do you think are the main challenges, if any, to running a Community building at present?

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
Please return via email or post to
Leitrim Development Company
Credit Union Building
Mohill
Co Leitrim
jocreegan14@gmail.com

Appendix 2: Community Buildings in Leitrim

1. Annaduff Community Centre
2. Askill Community Centre
3. Aughavas Community Centre
4. Aughawillan Community Centre
5. Aughnasheelin Community Centre
6. Ballinaglera Community Hall
7. Ballinamore Community Centre
8. Ballinamore Sports Hall, & Community/Scout Facility
9. Bee Park Centre
10. Bornacoola Community Centre
11. Breffni Family Resource Centre
12. Bredagh Old School
13. Cornmill Theatre
14. Cloone Community Centre
15. Clogher Old school
16. Dartry Centre
17. The Depot
18. Drumreilly/Drumlea Community Centre
19. The Mayflower
20. Drumsna Community Resource Centre
21. Eslin Community Centre
22. Fenagh Community Centre
23. Fenagh Visitor Centre
24. Glencar Community Resource Centre
25. Ahanlish old School -Glenade Resource Centre
26. Rainbow Ballroom of Romance
27. Gortletteragh Community Centre
28. Gorvagh Community Centre
29. Irish Wheelchair Association/Resource Centre
30. Jamestown Community Centre
31. Keshcarrigan Community Facility
32. Kilargue Community Centre
33. Kiltoghert Community Centre
34. Liscarbin Community Centre (Old School)
35. Kinlough Community Centre
36. Kiltyclogher Community Centre & Kiltyclogher Holiday Centre
37. LAPWD Ability Centre
38. Leitrim Education & training Centre Drumshanbo
39. Leitrim Gaels Community Facility
40. Lough Allen Education Centre
41. Leitrim Sculpture Centre
42. St Joseph's Community Centre
43. Newtownmanor Hall
44. The Glens Centre (Arts Centre)
45. The Ballagh Centre
46. The Kabin Rossinver Youth and community project LTD
47. The Organic Centre
48. Rowantree House Drumkeerin
49. Drumkeerin Community Centre
50. Drumkeerin Youth café, NCYS
51. Drumshanbo Youth Café
52. NYP
53. St. Mary's Hall
54. St. Bridgets Church of Ireland
55. Tullaghan Community Centre
56. Newbridge School House
57. Newtowngore Community Hall
58. Mohill Enterprise Centre
59. Drumshanbo Enterprise Centre
60. The Food Hub
61. Ballinamore Enterprise Centre
62. St. Georges Heritage centre
63. St John's Church
64. Church of Ireland Schoolhouse, Drumshanbo

65. "The Barracks"
66. Carrigallen Community Centre Hall
67. Canon Donohoe Hall, Mohill
68. McDermott Terrace Community House
69. Teach Duchais, Drumeela
70. La Nua Centre
71. Trathnona Centre, Ballinamore
72. Hyde Terrace Community House