

Planning Statement

**Former St Catherine's Church and Hall Old Road
Neath, Port Talbot, SA11 2BT**

**Change the use of Church hall (Class D1) to a 2-
bedroom Dwelling (Class C3)**

Content

1. Introduction
2. Planning History – Planning Context
3. Application/Application Site
4. Appraisal
5. Summary
6. Appendix

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for Change the use of Church hall (Class D1) to a 2-bedroom Dwelling (Class C3).
- 1.2 There will be no external changes to the Church Hall and the Church will remain as a community facility within Class D1

2.0 Planning History - Planning Context

2.1. Planning History

- 2.2 N1979/0434 - Hall for social functions and Sunday school, approved 18th November 1979.

N1976/0013 - Hall for social functions and Sunday school, approved 23rd March 1976.

Q2023/0129 -Change the use of the 1980's prefabricated hall from a D1 to C3 property with 4 bedrooms. The structure of the building is to remain the same. The Church will remain class D1 for community use

2.3 Planning Context

- 2.4 The development plan for the site is the Neath Port Talbot Local Development. The Council adopted the plan on 27th January 2016¹

¹ <https://www.npt.gov.uk/7328>

2.5 LDP Policy

SC1 Settlement limits
SC2 Protection of Existing Community Facilities
EN6 Important Biodiversity and Geodiversity Sites
EN7 Important Natural Features
TR2 Design and Access to New Developments
BE1 Design

SPG Guidance

SPG Design (July 2017) ²

SPG Parking Standards October 2016 (Parking Standards SPG) ³

Planning Policy Wales PPW (Edition 12 Feb 24) ⁴

3.3 - Good design is fundamental to creating sustainable places where people want to live, work and socialise. Design is not just about the architecture of a building but the relationship between all elements of the natural and built environment and between people and places.

3.4 - Meeting the objectives of good design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process and should be applied to all development proposals at all scales.

4.3.40 Local and village shops, and public houses provide an important role in the local community and their loss can have a detrimental impact, particularly in rural locations.

4.3.41 The economic and social function of local shops, village shops and public houses should be taken into account when considering

² https://www.npt.gov.uk/media/7237/spg_design_july17.pdf

³ https://www.npt.gov.uk/PDF/spg_parking_standards_oct16.pdf

⁴ https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-02/planning-policy-wales-edition-12_1.pdf

applications for a change of use into residential or other uses.

3.0 Application /Application site

- 3.1 This application seeks consent for the change of use of the building from a hall used for social functions and Sunday school (Class: D1) to a dwellinghouse (Class: C3), together with internal and external alterations. The property is Listed Grade II* Building and as such the proposed development would require both planning permission and Listed Building Consent.
- 3.2 The application site consists of a large detached church and a single storey 1980's prefabricated structure used as a church hall.

4.0 Appraisal

- 4.1 The main issues in the determination of this application are the principle of the development, the loss of the community facility, the effect of the proposal on residential amenity, the setting of a listed building, highway safety and ecology.
- 4.2 **The principle of the development**
- 4.3 The application site is located within settlement limits, as defined in Policy SC1 of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan. As such it is considered that the use of the site for residential purposes is in principle acceptable subject to other detailed planning considerations.
- 4.4 **The loss of the community facility**
- 4.5 Policy SC2 recognises the importance of community facilities and their contribution to local residents
- 4.6 Community facilities are a vital part of the life of a community and can help create cohesive communities where people are able to

meet and participate in a range of activities, making a fundamental contribution to ensuring the sustainability of communities. The importance of meeting places is vital for health and well-being and helps create communities where residents feel included rather than isolated. Any proposals which would result in the loss of an important existing community facility will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that:

- The facility is surplus to requirements; or
- The existing use is no longer viable.

4.7 Where a facility performs (or has performed) an important or central function in the life of the local community, any change to a non-community use will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that the facility is no longer viable or needed by the community and that there is no potential that the building can be used for an alternative or shared community use. The type of evidence required will vary depending on the type of facility under consideration, but may include details of why the building is no longer in use, what alternative provision there is locally, what other community options have been considered for the building and evidence to show that reasonable efforts have been made to market the facility for sale or lease for its existing use

4.8 **Background**

4.9 In 2021 the Office of National Statistics (ONS) reported that Wales had a greater decrease in people reporting their religion as “Christian” (14.0 percentage point decrease, from 57.6% in 2011 to 43.6% in 2021) and increase in “No religion” (14.5 percentage point increase, from 32.1% in 2011 to 46.5% in 2021) compared with England and Wales overall.⁵

4.10 Unsurprisingly, this reduction has had a direct effect on church attendance.

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>

- 4.11 In June 2024 a survey was conducted by Brierley Consultancy, they found that UK church membership had declined from 10.6 million in 1930 (30% of population) to 5,400,000 in 2013(10.3%) and predict that Church attendance would be 8.4% of the population by 2025.⁶
- 4.12 In September 2023 Professor M Hughes of The Church of Wales reported that a decline in church attendance had resulted in a £1 million reduction in annual income.⁷
- 4.13 In 2000 The Church of Wales indicated that between 1996 and 2016 the number of signed-up Church in Wales members dropped from 91,247 to 45,759 or 1.5% out of a total population of 3,113,150 The number of Church in Wales members on the "Electoral Roll" dropped further to 42,441 by 2018 or 1.4% out of the total Welsh population of 3,187,203
- 4.14 It is predicted that if current level of decline continues within the Church of Wales then it will cease to exist by 2038.⁸
- 4.15 In January 2024 The Church Times reported that since 2014 over 25% of churches and chapels in Wales had closed.⁹
- 4.16 Against a background of national declining church attendance and church closure the application site close in 2017.
- 4.17 Following the closure of the church it was advertised for sale by Chartered Surveyors (**Appendix 1**) on the 26th August 2022. Details of the church were emailed to the Estate Agents extensive data bases in addition to advertisement on their own web site, Zoopla and Co Star (Loop Net). Six offers were received within the first 2 months of marketing. As the church was owned by a charity in order to achieve the best market price full and final sealed offers were required by the end of October 2022. Six offers were received and the property

⁶ <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html>

⁷ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2023/15-september/news/uk/church-in-wales-governing-body-income-drops-by-1-million-as-attendance-declines>

⁸ <https://churchmodel.org.uk/church-growth-models/limited-enthusiasm/demographics-2/church-in-wales-2000-2019/>

⁹ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/26-january/news/uk/national-churches-trust-draws-up-blueprint-to-show-how-to-save-churches-from-closure>

was sold for £80,000. Policy SC2 does not set our criteria for the type or duration of marketing in order to satisfy the test as to whether a property is surplus to requirement or no longer viable. However, in this case the property has been comprehensively marketed and the property sold for £80,000.

- 4.18 The statistical evidence from Government and numerous independent surveys, as set out above, clearly identifies a picture of a declining faith community, church attendance and church finances which invariably leads to the closure of churches
- 4.19 The evidence clearly demonstrates that churches and the community facilities that they provide are both surplus to requirement and no longer viable both in relation to finance and footfall.
- 4.20 In this case, whilst the church and hall have been closed since 2017 the applicant proposed to reopen the church to provide community based activities. To that end the applicant has conducted a neighbourhood survey to assess the types of activities that the community.
- 4.21 Whilst it is regrettable that the church has closed it is submitted that a measure in assessing the importance of a facility is whether its closure will result in the complete loss of some sort of community service. In the case of the appeal site it is submitted that it provides a single function namely a meeting place.
- 4.22 The local area has numerous community facilities in the vicinity as set out in **Table 1** below.

Table 1

Churches	Distance	Community Halls	Distance	Schools/School Hall)	Distance
Ebenezer Church	286m	Melyn Cryddan Community Centre	281m	Melin Junior School	94m
Bethel Elim Church	455m			Melin Infants School	253m

4.23 **Table 1** indicates that within 500m of the site there are 5 community facilities which provides facilities for public gatherings as such the closure of the church hall will not lead to the complete loss of a community facility.

4.24 In summary;

- The Church closed in 2017 following decades of decline in church attendance and finances.
- The site was marketed and sold for £80,000
- There are numerous facilities within 500 m of the site which provide adequate meeting spaces for the community
- The development will result in the re-opening of the church as a community facility.

4.25 It is therefore submitted that the proposal will not result in the loss of an important community facility and therefore accordance with policy SC2 of the LDP

4.26 Residential amenity

4.27 The scale of the building will remain on changed as such no issues with arise in relation to overbearing and overshadowing. However, detailed consideration needs to be given in relation to the size and

location of windows so as to avoid loss of privacy. This appears to be common ground with the LPA

“By virtue of the fact that the overall scale and massing of the application building will remain as existing, it is not considered that any detrimental overbearing or overshadowing issues would arise, above and beyond that of the existing situation. The main issue to consider in regards to the potential impact upon the neighbouring properties relates instead to privacy. It is noted that along the north-western elevation, the majority of the existing high-level windows are sought to be utilised to serve the mix of bedrooms and bathrooms, albeit with the exception of the windows adjacent to the proposed kitchen, which would be widened to form a singular, elongated window. Provided that sill of the windows are not less than 1.7m above the floor of the room in which they are installed, it is not considered that any overlooking issues would occur.”

- 4.28 The location and design of windows within the development will not result in the loss of privacy to neighbouring properties and as such it is considered that the development will not have a detrimental effect on residential amenity.

4.29 The effect on the listed building

- 4.30 The submitted heritage impact assessment indicates that the development will not have a detrimental effect on the listed building.
- 4.31 Whilst there will be some minor internal and external changes to the hall these changes must be balanced against the fact that the proposal will ensure the long-term use and preservation of the listed building. As such it is considered that the development will not have a detrimental effect on the listed building.

4.32 Highway safety

- 4.33 The existing church hall has an area of approximately 200m². The current parking standard for places of worship **Table 1** requires 1 space per 10 seats. At 2-3 seats per m² the hall would require parking

for over 20 parking spaces assuming that only 100m² of floor area is used for public worship.

- 4.34 The proposed development is for a two-bedroom dwelling which necessitates two car parking spaces. The submitted plans show provision for three spaces which is above the adopted guidance. Moreover, it is submitted that the development will result in the significant reduction in vehicle movements to the overall benefit in highway and pedestrian safety

Table 1

Type of Development	Operational	Non-Operational
Hospitals (See Note 1)	Essential vehicles as required	2.5 spaces per bed
Health Centres & Surgeries (See Note 2)	1 space per practitioner	1 space per 3 ancillary staff (1 space per 2 in Zones 5 & 6) & 3 spaces per practitioner
Churches & Places of Worship (See Note 3)	1 commercial vehicle space	1 space per 10 seats or 1 space per 8m ² of praying floorspace
Chapels of Rest	3 commercial vehicle spaces	As per Churches etc.
Funeral Homes	3 commercial vehicle spaces	1 space per 2 members of staff
Public Leisure Centres	1 commercial vehicle space	1 space per 2 facility users & 1 space per 3 spectators
Fitness Clubs, Leisure Clubs & Sports Clubs (See Note 6)	1 commercial vehicle space	1 space per 10m ²
Marinas	1 car and trailer space	1 space per berth
Golf Course (See Note 6)	1 commercial vehicle space	4 spaces per hole
Libraries	1 commercial vehicle space	1 space per 45m ²
Sports Fields (without Club House) (See Note 6)	1 coach space	12 spaces per pitch

4.35 Ecology

- 4.36 There are no significant ecological features within the site and the submitted green infrastructure assessment demonstrates a net

ecological gain.

4.37 The proposed development will result in a net ecological gain.

5.0 Summary

- 5.1 The proposal will not result in the loss of an important community facility
- 5.2 The development will not have a detrimental effect on residential amenity
- 5.3 It is considered that the development will not have a detrimental effect on the listed building
- 5.4 The proposal will result in an overall reduction in vehicle movements to the benefit of highway and pedestrian safety
- 5.5 The proposed development will result in a net ecological gain.
- 5.6 It is therefore submitted that the proposal accords with PPW, Policies SC1, SC2, EN6, EN7, TR2, BE1 of the Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Local Development Plan and the Councils SPGs
- 5.7 You are therefore respectively requested to grant planning permission.

APPENDIX 1