

Planning Statement

**Former Margam Road Calvinistic Methodist
Chapel Margam Road, Taibach, SA13 2BN**

**Change of use of chapel and hall into residential
dwelling (Use Class C3) with associated works
including the insertion of roof lights and
alterations to access.**

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 the Change of use of chapel and hall into residential dwelling (Use Class C3) with associated works including the insertion of roof lights and alterations to access

2.0 Planning History - Planning Context

2.1. Planning History

- 2.2 P2023/0794 - Change of use of chapel and hall into residential dwelling (Use Class C3) with associated works including the insertion of roof lights and alterations to access. - REFUSED

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

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

¹ <https://www.npt.gov.uk/7328>

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

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

3.0 Application /Application site

- 3.1 The application seeks planning consent to change the use of the building from a chapel to a dwelling with the installation of roof lights and alterations to the access. The application proposes the installation of 14no roof lights within the building and door to the side elevation. Internally the proposal would create a mezzanine first floor with two bedrooms and a home office/ study.
- 3.2 The application would also include the reduction to the wall at the site, to provide a vehicular access with two parking spaces and a turning area.
- 3.3 The building is located along Margam Road, Taibach. A funeral directors is located to the south of the site with a residential street to the rear and residential properties to the north.
- 3.4 The application site is a two-storey stone church building, and identified as a Building of Local Importance.

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 effect on a building of local importance, 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.

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

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

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/>

- 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 September 2021.
(Appendix 1)
- 4.17 Following the closure of the church it was advertised for sale by Peter Morgan Estate Agents **(Appendix 2)** on the 6th September 2022. Details of the church were emailed to the Estate Agents extensive data bases in addition to advertisement on their own web site, Rightmove, On the Market, Zoopla and Social media. 7 offers were received by 3 individuals. The building was sold to the applicant on 18th August 2023. 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 **£140,000**.
- 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 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 application site it is submitted that it provides a single function namely a meeting place.
- 4.21 The local area has numerous community facilities in the vicinity as set out in **Table 1** below.

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>

Table 1

Churches	Distance	Community Halls	Distance	Pubs/Schools/School Hall)	Distance
Lady of Margam	231m	Taibach Community Centre	71m	Somerset Arms	299m
Taibach Wesley Chapel	380m	Taibach Education Centre	149m	Eastern Primary School	417m
Kingdom Hall	485m				
Gibeon Chapel	492m				

4.22 **Table 1** indicates that within 500m of the site there are 8 community facilities which provides facilities for public gatherings as such the closure of the church will not lead to the complete loss of a community facility.

4.23 In summary;

- The Church closed in 2021 following decades of decline in church attendance and finances.
- The site was marketed for **£160,000** and sold for **£140,000**.
- There are numerous facilities within 500m of the site which provide adequate meeting spaces for the community

4.24 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

4.25 Residential amenity

4.26 The scale of the building will remain unchanged as such no issues will 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. In determining the previous application the Council raised concern in relating to overlooking from the side facing first floor

4.27 In order to address the issue the first floor bedroom has been reconfigured to provide a front facing window with the side windows to obscurely glazed

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 a building of local importance

4.30 The submitted heritage impact assessment indicates that the development will not have a detrimental effect on the 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 building. As such it is considered that the development will not have a detrimental effect on the building of local importance.

4.32 Highway safety

4.33 The existing church has an area of approximately 300m². The current parking standard for places of worship **Table 1** requires 1 space per 10 seats. At 2 seats per m² the building would require parking of 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 two spaces which is in accordance with 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 An ecological survey (IG2024MargamRdChurch- May 2024) has demonstrated that 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 a building of importance

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

APPENDIX 2