

London Road, Neath | Loss of community facility statement

1. Introduction

This statement has been prepared to address the implications of the proposed loss of the former RAFA Club at London Road, Neath, in connection with its conversion to 7no. residential apartments.

It responds to the requirements of the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan (LDP) and Planning Policy Wales (PPW), which seek to protect valued community facilities unless it can be demonstrated that their loss is justified.

2. Policy Context

Policy SC1 (Settlement Limits) and Policy SC2 (Protection of Existing Community Facilities) of the LDP set out the circumstances under which the redevelopment of community facilities may be acceptable. In summary, proposals will be supported where:

- The facility is no longer required to meet the needs of the community; or
- Adequate alternative provision exists within the locality; or
- It is demonstrated that continued community use is no longer viable.

PPW Edition 12 reinforces this approach, acknowledging both the importance of retaining community infrastructure and the need to ensure the efficient re-use of land and buildings to meet housing needs.

3. Background and Current Position

The application site was formerly in use as the RAFA Club, a private members' social facility. In recent years the premises experienced a significant decline in membership and usage. As a result, the club ceased operations and the building has remained vacant.

The property is no longer in active community use, and its deteriorating condition further undermines its suitability for reoccupation. There is no realistic prospect of the facility being revived, and no evidence of unmet demand for such provision within the locality.

4. Alternative Provision

The surrounding area benefits from a wide range of existing community and social facilities that continue to meet local needs, including:

- Neath Town Hall and other civic/community venues within the town centre.
- Local public houses and working men's clubs that accommodate community events and gatherings.
- Church halls and faith buildings that provide meeting spaces.
- Sports, leisure and cultural facilities available nearby.

Given this network of provision, the loss of the RAFA Club does not create a deficiency in community facilities within Neath or the surrounding catchment.

5. Benefits of the Proposed Development

The redevelopment of the site will secure a number of planning benefits, including:

- Housing delivery: Providing new apartments that meet identified housing needs, particularly for smaller units in a sustainable town centre location.
- Efficient use of brownfield land: Reusing an underutilised building in accordance with national and local policy objectives.
- Visual and environmental enhancement: Replacing a vacant and deteriorating property with a high-quality, modern development that improves the streetscape.
- Regeneration impact: Supporting the vitality and viability of Neath through increased residential presence and investment.

6. Conclusion

The former RAFA Club has ceased to function as a viable community facility, with no realistic prospect of reinstatement. Alternative venues are readily available in the local area, ensuring no loss of community provision.

Accordingly, the redevelopment of the site for residential purposes accords with Policy SC2 of the Neath Port Talbot LDP and with national policy objectives in PPW. The loss of the RAFA Club as a community facility is therefore fully justified, and the proposed scheme will deliver clear social, economic and environmental benefits.