

PLANNING STATEMENT

CHANGE OF USE OF FORMER ASHFIELD CLUB TO A SINGLE DWELLING

Site: Ashfield Club, 34 Wakefield Road, Lepton, Huddersfield, HD8 0BG

Proposal: Change of use of the existing former club premises to a single residential dwelling, together with comprehensive internal refurbishment.

1. INTRODUCTION

This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of an application for the change of use of the former Ashfield Club at 34 Wakefield Road, Lepton, to form one residential dwelling.

The proposal involves the comprehensive internal refurbishment and conversion of the existing building to provide a single modern dwelling.

No extension to the building is proposed and there will be minimal alteration to the existing external window or door openings.

The proposal therefore seeks to make beneficial and sustainable use of an existing building which has ceased to operate in its previous use.

The application should be considered having regard to the adopted Kirklees Local Plan, the National Planning Policy Framework and all other material planning considerations.

2. THE SITE

The application site comprises the former Ashfield Club premises at 34 Wakefield Road, Lepton.

The building has historically operated as the Lepton Liberal Working Men's Club, subsequently known as the Ashfield Club.

The premises are located within an established settlement and are surrounded by a mixture of residential and other established uses.

The site has an existing vehicular access from Wakefield Road together with existing areas of hardstanding and parking.

The proposal will utilise the existing building, access and established site arrangements.

3. EXISTING USE AND CLOSURE

The premises operated for many years as a members' club and social facility serving the local area.

The club ceased operating in **July 2026**.

The closure occurred because the existing operation was no longer financially sustainable.

Immediately prior to closure, the club was losing money on a weekly basis and customer demand had reduced to a level at which the continued operation of the premises could not reasonably be sustained.

The closure was therefore not simply undertaken to facilitate the proposed residential use.

The existing use had ceased to provide a viable long-term operation and the building was consequently left without its former function.

The applicant does not have historic detailed trading figures available for submission. The applicant has nevertheless provided the factual circumstances surrounding the closure and will cooperate with the Council should further information be reasonably requested.

4. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposal is to convert the existing building into **one residential dwelling**.

The existing building will undergo a comprehensive internal refurbishment to provide appropriate modern residential accommodation.

The proposed accommodation will include:

- living accommodation;
- kitchen/dining accommodation;
- bedrooms;
- bathrooms/WC facilities;
- circulation and storage areas; and
- appropriate private amenity space.

No extension is proposed.

There will be a couple of alterations to the existing external window and door openings.

The proposal therefore represents the conversion and refurbishment of the existing building rather than redevelopment of the site.

5. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

The wider planning history of the site is relevant to understanding the evolution of the premises and the surrounding land.

5.1 2005 – Residential Development

In 2005, outline planning permission was granted for the development of land around and associated with the Lepton Liberals Club for **16 apartments**.

That permission was not implemented.

The history demonstrates that residential development of the wider land had previously been considered acceptable in principle.

5.2 2007 – Care Home

In 2007, planning permission **2007/62/91832/W2** was granted for the development of the wider land for a **51-bed care home**.

The land was subsequently sold to raise funds.

The Design and Access Statement accompanying the 2007 application included a section headed "**Social Context**" and explained that the sale of the land was intended to raise funds to improve the existing premises and secure the future of the club as a local community facility.

The statement is relevant historical evidence of the importance attached to the club at that time.

The available planning documentation does not, however, indicate that the refurbishment of the club was secured as a planning condition. The reference to refurbishment is therefore relied upon as historical context rather than as a planning obligation.

5.3 2019 – Former Living Accommodation

Application **2019/90930** concerned the former living accommodation associated with the club.

The application sought a change of use from **C3 dwelling to A1 shop or B1 office use**.

The application demonstrates that the former living accommodation had already been considered as a separate element of the wider site and had previously been occupied independently from the club operation.

The current application does not seek to convert that former accommodation.

The current application concerns the remaining former club premises.

6. PLANNING POLICY

The proposal is principally assessed against the adopted Kirklees Local Plan.

Relevant policies include:

- Policy LP1 – Achieving Sustainable Development;
- Policy LP2 – Place Shaping;
- Policy LP21 – Highways and Access;
- Policy LP22 – Parking;
- Policy LP24 – Design;
- Policy LP28 – Drainage;
- Policy LP30 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity;
- Policy LP48 – Community Facilities and Services;
- Policy LP52 – Protection and Improvement of Environmental Quality; and
- Policy LP53 – Contaminated and Unstable Land.

The National Planning Policy Framework is also a material consideration.

7. PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

The proposal represents the reuse and conversion of an existing building within an established settlement.

The development does not involve:

- a new greenfield development;
- an extension to the existing building;
- a new vehicular access; or
- significant external alteration.

Instead, it provides one dwelling through the conversion of an existing building.

The proposal therefore makes efficient use of an existing built asset and provides an opportunity to secure its continued occupation and maintenance.

The residential use is compatible with the established residential character of the surrounding area.

The principle of the proposal is therefore considered acceptable, subject to consideration of the loss of the former club use.

8. POLICY LP48 – COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Policy LP48 seeks to protect valued community facilities, including public houses and other facilities of value to the local community.

The policy provides a number of circumstances in which the loss of such a facility may be acceptable, including where:

- a) there is no longer a need for the facility and alternative community uses have been considered;
- b) the current use is no longer viable;
- c) adequate alternative provision exists within the locality; or
- d) an alternative facility of equivalent or better standard will be provided.

Only one of these circumstances needs to be demonstrated.

The applicant considers that the proposal satisfies, in particular, **criterion (b)** because the former use is no longer viable.

9. NON-VIABILITY OF THE FORMER CLUB USE

The Ashfield Club ceased operating in July 2026.

The circumstances immediately preceding closure were clear.

The club was **losing money on a weekly basis** and there was **insufficient customer demand** to sustain the operation.

The applicant has been unable to locate detailed historic operating accounts or a comprehensive record of membership and customer numbers.

The absence of such historic information should not, however, obscure the fundamental fact that the operation actually ceased because it was no longer financially sustainable.

The applicant is not seeking to replace a successful and viable community facility with residential development.

The proposal follows the actual cessation of an operation which had become financially unsustainable.

The Council is invited to consider the circumstances of the closure together with the planning history of the premises when assessing whether the former use remains viable.

Recent Kirklees decisions demonstrate that Policy LP48(b) can be satisfied through evidence demonstrating that the existing use is no longer viable. In the Council's consideration of The Woolpack in 2025, officers considered trading losses and other evidence relating to the operation before concluding that the public-house use was no longer viable.

Similarly, recent Kirklees planning material confirms that the policy provides alternative routes to demonstrating compliance, including non-viability and adequate alternative provision.

10. MARKETING OF THE PROPERTY

The applicant acknowledges that the property has not been marketed for sale since it was acquired in 2019.

The applicant does not seek to suggest otherwise.

The absence of marketing should be considered alongside the circumstances of the club's operation.

The club continued to operate until July 2026 but ultimately ceased operating because of continuing financial losses and insufficient customer demand.

The applicant therefore considers that the actual operating history provides relevant evidence regarding the viability of the former use.

The applicant is willing to provide any further information reasonably available concerning the former operation if requested by the Local Planning Authority.

The applicant would also be willing to discuss with the Council whether any proportionate additional evidence is considered necessary to demonstrate the lack of viability of the former use.

11. ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITY PROVISION

The applicant recognises that the former club provided social and community functions.

The loss of the premises should nevertheless be considered in the context of the wider range of community, recreational, social and licensed facilities available within Lepton and the surrounding settlements.

The application does not seek to argue that the former club was without value to individuals who used it.

Rather, the issue is whether the particular facility can continue to operate in its former form.

The evidence indicates that it cannot.

The Council is therefore invited to consider the availability of other facilities within the locality when assessing the proposal against LP48.

A schedule identifying relevant alternative facilities can be provided if required.

12. PLANNING HISTORY AND COMMUNITY ROLE

The planning history demonstrates that the club has historically had an important social role.

In particular, the 2007 Design and Access Statement described the purpose of the surrounding land sale as raising funds to improve the existing premises and secure the club's future as a local community facility.

This demonstrates that the importance of the club was recognised historically.

However, almost twenty years have now passed since that statement was prepared.

The club has subsequently experienced a significant decline in customer demand and financial viability and finally ceased operating in July 2026.

The historical importance of the club is therefore acknowledged, but it cannot reasonably be assumed that a facility which has ceased to operate and was losing money can continue indefinitely in its former use irrespective of current demand.

The proposed residential conversion provides a realistic means of securing the continued beneficial use of the existing building.

13. DESIGN AND VISUAL IMPACT

The proposal has been deliberately designed to minimise external impact.

No extension is proposed.

No alteration is proposed to the existing external window or door openings.

The principal works will take place internally and comprise the comprehensive refurbishment and conversion of the building.

The external form and appearance of the existing building will therefore be substantially retained.

The proposal is considered to respect the established character of the surrounding area and is consistent with the objectives of Policy LP24.

14. RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

The proposed dwelling will provide appropriate living accommodation with suitable levels of natural light, outlook, privacy and amenity.

The creation of a single dwelling will result in a substantially different pattern of occupation from the former club.

The former use had the potential to generate evening and weekend activity, gatherings, events, noise and associated vehicle movements.

The proposed residential use is expected to generate a substantially lower and more consistent level of activity.

The development is therefore not considered likely to result in unacceptable harm to neighbouring residential amenity.

15. HIGHWAYS AND PARKING

The existing property benefits from an established vehicular access from Wakefield Road.

The proposal is for a single dwelling and consequently the level of vehicle movements associated with the development will be modest.

Existing parking/hardstanding will be utilised.

No new vehicular access is proposed.

The proposal is therefore considered unlikely to result in a material impact upon highway safety or capacity.

16. ECOLOGY

The proposal involves the conversion of an existing building.

Consideration will be given to the potential presence of protected species, particularly bats, given the nature and age of the building.

Where required, an appropriate ecological assessment will be undertaken.

Any mitigation or enhancement measures identified will be incorporated into the development.

17. DRAINAGE

The proposal will make use of existing drainage infrastructure serving the building wherever practicable.

There is no significant increase in the developed footprint of the site.

The proposal is therefore not expected to create a significant additional surface-water drainage burden.

18. CONTAMINATION

The property has historically been used for commercial/community purposes.

Given that the proposed residential use represents a more sensitive end use, consideration will be given to any potential contamination arising from the historic use of the site.

Where required, appropriate investigation and mitigation will be undertaken.

19. SUSTAINABILITY

The proposal represents the sustainable reuse of an existing building.

It avoids the need for construction of a new standalone dwelling and makes effective use of existing land, infrastructure, access and services.

The comprehensive refurbishment also provides an opportunity to improve the thermal efficiency and energy performance of the building.

The proposal therefore accords with the broad objectives of sustainable development.

20. PLANNING BALANCE

The applicant recognises that the former Ashfield Club had historically provided a social and community function.

That history is acknowledged and has been taken into account in preparing the proposal.

However, the club ceased operating in July 2026 because the use had become financially unsustainable, with the business losing money on a weekly basis and insufficient customer demand.

The application does not seek to remove a currently functioning community facility.

It seeks to provide a viable long-term use for an existing building following the cessation of the former use.

The proposal also has a number of significant positive characteristics:

- it provides one new dwelling;
- it reuses an existing building;
- it avoids greenfield development;
- it requires no extension;
- it requires no alteration to existing external openings;
- it retains the existing access;
- it makes use of existing parking/hardstanding;
- it provides an opportunity for comprehensive refurbishment;
- it secures the continued maintenance and occupation of the building; and
- it is compatible with the established residential surroundings.

The proposal should therefore be considered a proportionate and sustainable response to the circumstances of the site.

21. CONCLUSION

The application proposes the change of use of the former Ashfield Club at 34 Wakefield Road, Lepton, to form one residential dwelling.

The proposal involves the comprehensive internal refurbishment of the existing building.

No extension is proposed and there will be minimal alteration to the existing external window or door openings.

The club ceased operating in July 2026 following a period in which it was losing money on a weekly basis and experiencing insufficient customer demand to sustain the operation.

The proposal therefore represents the reuse of an existing building following the cessation of a use which was no longer commercially sustainable.

The historical planning record demonstrates that the club has previously been recognised as an important local facility. The applicant nevertheless considers that the current circumstances are materially different from those existing when the earlier planning decisions were made.

In particular, the former use has now ceased and there is no evidence that it can realistically be revived as a viable operation.

The proposal provides an opportunity to secure the long-term beneficial use and maintenance of the building whilst providing one additional dwelling within the established settlement.

Having regard to the development plan, the circumstances surrounding the closure of the former club, the existing building and the limited external impact of the proposal, the development is considered to represent an appropriate and sustainable form of development.

Planning permission is therefore respectfully requested.