# Port Talbot Gas Welfare Club celebrates relaunch after overcoming financial challenges



The Port Talbot Gas Welfare Club has recently marked a significant turning point in its history with a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating its relaunch. Founded in 1949 for the workers of the Wales Gas Board, this establishment, affectionately known as the "Gas Club," serves as a key community hub in Port Talbot. The ceremony was attended by local dignitaries, including Cllr Matthew Crowley, the Mayor of Port Talbot, and Stephen Kinnock, MP for Aberafan, who acknowledged the collective efforts that have gone into preserving this longstanding institution.

The club had been struggling to remain viable due to soaring energy costs, which peaked at between £700 and £900 a month. Peter Johnson, the club's secretary for the past eight years, described the heartbreaking situation faced by the club and its patrons. "We were struggling and on the verge of closing because of massive energy costs. It felt like every penny we made was going right out the door on bills," he noted, expressing the emotional toll of the club's potential closure on regular visitors, particularly the elderly members who attended bingo nights.

In an effort to navigate this financial crisis, changes were made to the pricing of drinks, which had long been a point of pride for Johnson. “I was in loggerheads about keeping the beer at the price of £3.10,” he explained, highlighting the previous commitment to providing affordable social options in a community increasingly affected by financial pressures. After discussions with his bar manageress, Julie, he agreed to modest price increases, noting that even with the changes, their lager price remains competitive against other local establishments.

To combat rising expenses, the Gas Club has embraced sustainability measures, installing solar panels with funding from the Welsh Government and the National Lottery amounting to £20,000. This initiative aims to reduce future energy costs through credits received for energy fed back into the National Grid. With these developments, Johnson remarked, "This has been a lifeline, allowing the club to secure its future and avoid the fate that many other local clubs are facing."

Despite the challenges, the club remains a vibrant hub for various activities, including hosting 14 youth football teams and a variety of social events, contributing to an inclusive community atmosphere. Over the past 45 years, the Gas Club estimates it has donated between £90,000 and £100,000 to local charities, further demonstrating its commitment to the region. Johnson expressed his determination to keep the community engaged, stating, "There's always something going on here. It's a must."

Additionally, the club hosts tribute acts, such as the highly regarded Elvis impersonator Ciaran Houlihan, who has been performing at the Gas Club for 15 years. Johnson takes pride in the entertainment quality provided, ensuring that patrons have access to enjoyable experiences, which he believes is essential for fostering a sense of belonging and social interaction in Port Talbot.

The Gas Welfare Club's recent resurgence highlights not just the challenges faced by traditional social venues, but also the resilience and determination of its community. Johnson's ambition is that the Gas Club will continue to thrive for another 75 years, rooted firmly in the heart of Port Talbot's social fabric. As the club moves forward, it embodies a character of perseverance and adaptability, ensuring its legacy endures into the future.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/documents/g11756/Public+reports+pack+12th-Dec-2024+14.00+Social+Services+Housing+and+Community+Safety+Scrutiny+Com.pdf> - This document from Neath Port Talbot's council discusses community and social services issues in the area, which can be relevant to the community role of the Gas Club.
* <https://www.britishgas.co.uk/energy-efficiency/energy-tips/how-to-save-money-on-your-energy-bills> - This webpage provides tips on reducing energy costs, similar to the efforts made by the Gas Club to manage its energy expenses through solar panels.
* <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/lifestyle/arts-culture/how-wales-discovered-love-live-music-18552451> - This article discusses the importance of live music and community venues in Wales, which aligns with the Gas Club's hosting of tribute acts.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cnv57v8z74lt/wales-energy-bills> - This BBC news topic page covers rising energy costs in Wales, a challenge faced by the Gas Club.
* <https://national-lottery.co.uk/> - The National Lottery funds various community projects, including those like the solar panel installation at the Gas Club.