

NEWS

AGAINST THE RULES

Northcote neighbours would like to see their local park used again. But, Valerie Schuler reports, they're not keen on footie players from across the ditch

Residents are fuming. Tenants departed long ago and clubrooms at the northern end of Onepoto Domain have stood empty since, gathering dust. After years of discussions, Birkenhead-Northcote Community Board voted in July last year to have the building removed.

The board has since re-entered negotiations with an Australian Rules football group that wants to lease it.

Shane Brannigan, whose Sylvan Ave home overlooks the reserve, says: "The community board has done a complete U-turn and it's just not on. We want the building gone."

The building is owned by Glenfield Rovers, a soccer club which moved to new premises about three years ago and the North Shore City Council has been unable to find suitable tenants.

Mr Brannigan and other members of the Onepoto Domain Residents Association are worried that the Auckland Australian Football League will apply for a liquor licence once it gets its hands on the building.

"The people don't want alcohol consumed on their lovely park. It should be there for families to enjoy," he says.

Other concerns include the park's gates being left open late at night to allow club members to come and go.

Aussie Rules president Robert Greenwood says the league has submitted refurbishment plans to the council and is waiting for a decision. "It's really quite staggering," he says.

"One thing that strikes me is that these clubrooms are further away from residents than any others in Auckland.

'One thing that strikes me is that these clubrooms are further away from residents than any others in Auckland. The nearest house is about 500m away'

ROBERT GREENWOOD, AUSSIE RULES PRESIDENT

"The nearest house is about 500m away."

The council says the football league's proposal has changed since it first applied to lease the premises.

"They may apply only for a liquor licence for special events and their current proposal includes making the building available to community groups for use.

"There are, therefore, a number of things that have changed to cause a new direction in thinking," says parks officer Bob Wallace.

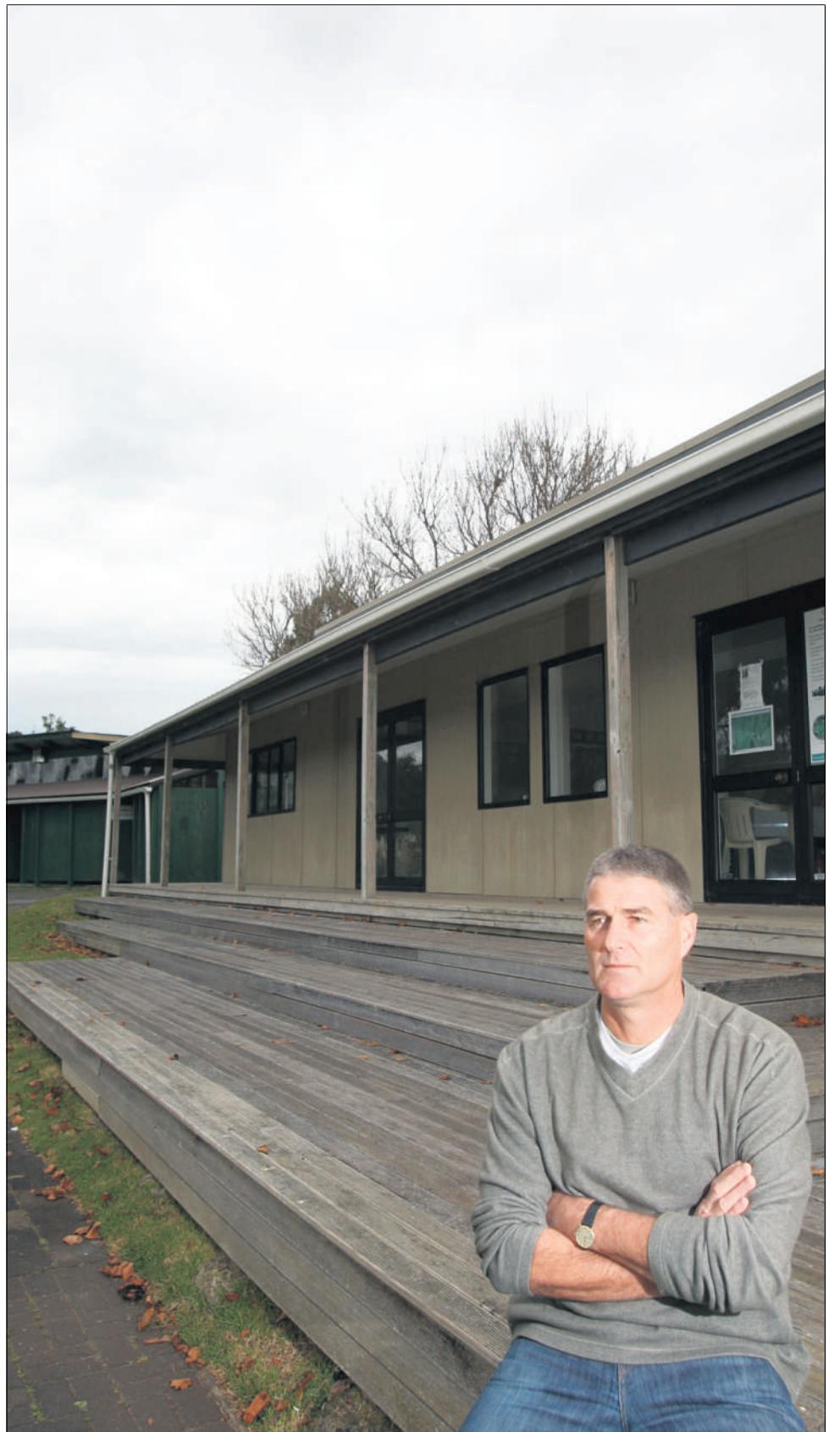
Mr Brannigan is not convinced. He says it's only a matter of time before the Aussie Rules group applies for a full licence once it has a foot in the door.

"They say they need changing rooms, but new changing rooms and toilets are being built later this year."

The existing toilet block, next to the clubrooms, will be removed.

"What more do they need?" says Mr Brannigan. "I've played rugby all my life and know what clubrooms are used for. Why can't they go to the pub to drink?"

Community board chairwoman Jennifer York says nothing is set in concrete. "There's a shortage of community buildings in the Northcote area and it would be a shame to demolish it."



NORTHCOTE LOCAL SHANE BRANNIGAN AT THE DISUSED CLUBROOMS

KELLIE BLIZARD

She says removing the building will be a last resort if the board can't reach a satisfactory agreement with the Rules players.

Mr Brannigan says the residents' association

will put up a fight. "We will take this thing to court if we have to."

■ valerie.schuler@theaucklander.co.nz



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