

DC/2015/01264

CHANGE OF USE FROM B1 USE (BUSINESS OFFICE) TO A3 USE (FOOD AND DRINK)

**FORMER TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE, SWAN MEADOW, MONMOUTH ROAD
ABERGAVENNY**

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE

Case Officer: Kate Bingham
Date Registered: 26/10/2015

1.0 APPLICATION DETAILS

- 1.1 This application has been submitted by Monmouthshire County Council for the change of use of the former Tourist Information Centre that is located next to the bus station into a café. The building is currently vacant and has been unoccupied for approximately 15 months. The previous occupiers were the Brecon Beacons National Park who operated the tourist information service as a B1 office use.
- 1.2 The proposed occupier is The Victorian Tea Rooms who were the successful bidder for the new lease of the building, subject to approval of a planning application. The company has been trading for approximately 2 years at a premises at 28 Frogmore Street but due to their success, are looking to move to larger premises.
- 1.3 The property is located just outside the Central Shopping Area of Abergavenny as defined under Policy RET2 of the Local Development Plan. There is no policy restriction regarding a change of use to non-retail use in principle.
- 1.4 The tea rooms propose to be open between 9am and 5pm Monday to Saturday and 10am until 4pm on Sundays and Bank Holidays and would employ the equivalent of two full time members of staff.
- 1.5 The property is located within the Abergavenny Conservation Area.

2.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

None.

3.0 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

Strategic Policies

S8 – Enterprise and Economy
S11 – Visitor Economy
S13 – Landscape, Green Infrastructure and the Natural Environment
S17 – Place Making and Design

Development Management Policies

DES1 – General Design Considerations
RET4 – New Retail Proposals
EP1 – Amenity and Environmental Protection
HE1 – Development in Conservation Areas

4.0 REPRESENTATIONS

4.1 Consultations Replies

Abergavenny Town Council – recommends approval.

Dwr Cymru – Welsh Water – no objection subject to conditions.

MCC Environmental Health – no objection in principle; would recommend that consideration is given to a condition restricting hours to prevent opening during very late night hours. This is to minimise the potential for any inconvenience to residents in the area from noise.

Abergavenny and District Civic Society – We note that this building lies just outside the central shopping area as designated in the LDP. Therefore it appears that the change of use from B1 to A3 should be assessed primarily against Policy RET4, though this policy does not refer explicitly to food and drink uses. A suitable site might well be available within the shopping area and, with over 50 coffee/tea shops and restaurants premises in the town a ‘demonstrable need’ is doubtful, but perhaps arises from the building’s proximity to the bus station and an Aldi store (also outside the shopping area).

Common sense suggests that this change of use makes very appropriate use of a vacant, hard to let, building and it should be approved. We are pleased that the building is to be leased by the Council as this will retain control in an area where redevelopment may take place in the future.

SEWBREC Search Results – Various species of bat recorded foraging/commuting within the vicinity of the site.

4.2 Neighbour Notification

One representation received from Oasis Sandwich Bar. Objects on the following grounds;

- Abergavenny has enough food and drink outlets already.

5.0 EVALUATION

5.1 Principle of Development

- 5.1.1 The site is just outside the Central Shopping Area (CSA) of the town and its boundary is at the southern end of Cross Street. The property is not therefore restricted by policies seeking to protect retail uses. Although the preferred location for new retail, commercial leisure/entertainment developments is within CSAs, sites on the edge of the CSA are the next choice where it can be demonstrated that no suitable site exists within the CSA. In this case it is considered that this site close to the public car park and bus station on the fringe of the designated shopping area is a suitable place for a café and will not cause any loss of vitality or viability of the town centre. It should also be noted that the proposed occupier of the building is moving from existing premises within a CSA which is also Primary Shopping Frontage. The vacated unit could be put to use as A1 retail which would be preferable in policy terms to its existing A3 use.

5.1.2 Policy S11 relates to the visitor economy and seeks to protect areas of tourism interest. The Tourist Information Centre itself is not considered to be an area of tourism in this sense and the service that it provided has been moved elsewhere including the One Stop Shop.

5.1.3 The number of other tea rooms and cafes within Abergavenny is not a material planning consideration and is not therefore relevant to the determination of this application.

5.2 Visual Impact

5.2.1 No external changes are proposed to the building which is located within the Conservation Area. Any signage would be subject to separate advertisement consent.

5.3 Residential Amenity

5.3.1 The building is not within close proximity to residential properties and while the comments from Environmental Health in relation to noise are noted it is considered that should a late night use be proposed then this would be subject to a licence application and it is not necessary to control opening hours through the planning system in this case.

6.0 **RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE**

Conditions:

1	This development shall be begun within 5 years from the date of this permission.
---	--