

- Competitive impact on existing businesses
- Create a 'one stop shop'

Support

- Revitalisation of an empty building and creation of jobs;
- Boost Newtown's tourism;
- Base for activities and benefit the town;
- Encourage physical activity and wellbeing
- Positive change
- Positive health and economic benefit
- Develop Mid-Wales as an outdoor hub
- Encourage investment
- Increase footfall
- Develop Newtown as a destination
- Boost to Newtown

Neil Hamilton AM

I write strongly to support the objections you will have received to the grant of planning consent for the current proposal relating to the Radio Hafren site in Newtown. Whilst there appears to be universal support for a development on this site, many business owners in the town are concerned about potential adverse effects on the town of consent for a cafe/bar as part of the application.

The potential adverse impact on the main shopping thoroughfares of Newtown of any grant of planning consent is clearly a legitimate planning issue. I understand that the original proposal was for drinks to be available for site-users from a vending machine and this proposal would enjoy support from existing business owners. The current proposal, however, is for a cafe with 25 internal seats and, potentially, 100 external seats.

I recently met with many business owners in Newtown and their main concern is the competitive impact on existing businesses of a development, partly or largely paid for by public funds, which enjoys business rate relief denied to its competitors.

The High Street (colloquial usage) is under severe pressure throughout Wales because of internet shopping and the high costs of Business Rates. These threaten the survival of existing businesses and raise the bar for the establishment of new ones.

Mid-Wales is a relatively poor area and running a successful retail/cafe/bar business is problematic at the best of times. Many of the businesses which are likely to be affected if consent for the current application is granted have had profits ploughed back into the business by their owners over many years. They look with envy on an applicant which enjoys the luxury of £950,000 of uncommercial finance compulsorily extracted from taxpayers viz. the Targeted Regeneration Fund.

No economic impact assessment has been undertaken in relation to this application and I believe it would be irresponsible to grant consent until the potential effects on the town generally are fully investigated.

The application has already been reduced from over 100 internal covers to 25 but even this reduced number is larger than many competitors in the town. I am told that the plans also provide for 100 seats and tables outside the proposed new building.

I also understand that no revised business plan has been provided for the reduced-seating proposal. This is clearly necessary as the viability of a proposal for any site, especially one owned by a public authority, must be germane to any decision.

It is, in my opinion, crucially important that any development proposal should complement the existing pattern of business in Newtown and not undermine it. It should add to the footfall in the town and not threaten or reduce it. That is why it is vital to assess professionally the likely effects of the cafe aspect of the application.

I understand that the canoeing/bike riding part of the proposal amounts to no more than 5% of the building and 'tourist information' amounts to only another 7%, with the remaining 88% competing with existing businesses in the town.

Traders worry that what is proposed would create a 'one-stop-shop,' giving users no incentive to go into the town centre.

As Powys County Council has been described by the applicants as the 'project lead' on this development, PCC should be especially sensitive to the needs of those who fear an adverse impact on their businesses, given the important role the Council itself is taking in the development application and process. The dangers of a perception of conflict of interest should be reduced by maximum transparency and background justification for viability as well as the impact of the project.

It is also a legitimate concern that, if the project proves ill-conceived, the responsibility for administering the development will fall on the Town Council, (the leaseholder for a 99 year lease) and, ultimately, the residents of Newtown who would face a compulsory impost for any costs flowing from the failure.

In all the circumstances, it seems to me that the Planning Committee does not possess adequate information and is, therefore, unable to take a considered decision pending those inadequacies being remedied.

Officer Appraisal

Impact on an existing tourist facilities, Newtown retail centre and amenity

Officers would like to highlight an error in terminology used within the above section of the Committee Report. Reference has been made to the proposed site falling within

Newtown's Town Centre, however the site is within the Area Retail Centre of Newtown. This specifically relates to LDP policy R1. A revised paragraph is provide below correcting the error;

Powys Local Development Plan Policies R1 and R4 seeks to ensure that retail development is located within defined retail centres with Newtown being classified as an Area Retail Centre. The proposed development is not considered to undermine the retail hierarchy of Newtown and would not be considered to have an unacceptable adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the retail centre.

Members are also advised that in addition to the café element an area for retail is also proposed as an ancillary function to the tourist information area (which amount to approximately 35 square metres).

It is noted that a number of comments relate to the need for an impact assessment to be undertaken on the proposal. Technical Advice Note 4: Retail and Commercial Development (2016) states that retail applications of 2,500 square metres or more gross floorspace that are proposed on the edge or outside retail and commercial centres should be supported by a retail impact assessment. The application proposed approximately 137 square metres of retail space, falling far below the threshold identified within the TAN, and the site is located within Newtown, which is defined as an Area Retail Centre.

With regards to Area Retail Centres the LDP stated that these areas not only serve the resident population, but also a wide catchment area due to the nature of retail facilities and services offered. Para 4.7.5 of the LDP states that settlements categorised as Area Retail Centres are therefore considered strategically important in terms of their retail and service provision and best suited to accommodate large new retail developments.

As such in considering policy R1 and the statements made within the LDP it is considered that the provision of a small area of retail space, amounting to some 137 square metres, support the retail hierarchy identified within the policy. Furthermore, it is considered that the scale of the development, its sensitive design and location within the Area Retail Centre of Newtown ensures that the proposal is compliant with the retail hierarchy as defined by policy R1 of the LDP.

In light of the above it is considered that the proposed development is in accordance with the relevant local and national planning policies.

Additional Third Party Representations

The comments received from third parties since the publication of the original Committee Report are noted however offer no new issues above those which have already been covered in the original report.

Recommendation

Based upon further public representations received, Officers are satisfied that the proposal accords with planning policy and the recommendation being one of approval subject to the conditions outline within the original committee report.

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