

PLANNING, DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

**5 PONTMORLAIS,
HIGH STREET,
MERTHYR TYDFIL,
CF47 8UB**

Mr Chris Clifford

November 2021

Carter Jonas

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CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION	4
2.0 THE PROPOSAL	4
3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY	4
4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	5

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 5 Pontmorlais is a 3-storey property on the High Street in Merthyr town centre, currently in use as a ground floor office A2, with a residential maisonette above.
- 1.2 The former A2 occupiers, a firm of solicitors, moved out earlier this year and the property has remained vacant since. The solicitors firm cited the ongoing pandemic and their new found ability to work from home offices as their reason for quitting the premises.
- 1.3 The applicant has since tried marketing the property over the last 6 months to re-let the property to other A2 professional users, along with potential A1 users too, but with almost no enquiries and of those few which have shown any interest at all, they have not been proceedable. It is clear that the market for this use has now fallen away through Covid and the widespread change of working practices in this field to home/remote based working, and the applicant has been advised by local agents that this market is unlikely to return to its previous extent going forwards.
- 1.4 The property was in fact extensively renovated in 2015 as part of the Pontmorlais Townscape Heritage Initiative, but in spite of that, it has since then only achieved at most a 50% occupancy, with lengthy periods of vacancy. A viable long-term use of the commercial space is therefore sought.
- 1.5 Hence now the consideration of this application to find an alternative use for the ground floor offices.

2.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The proposal now seeks a change of use of the ground floor office space from A2 to B1, to act as a co-working space in effect where a potential number of small B1 users might come to occupy the space under the one roof as it were.
- 2.2 The proposal does not involve any external changes to the existing property and the shopfront appearance of the premises to the street would remain as is.
- 2.3 Indeed, there are no changes to the property proposed at all, internally either..
- 2.4 The proposed change of use from A2 offices to B1 offices is a closely similar use and with no external changes proposed to the appearance of the building from existing use to proposed use, it is considered that to all outwards intents and purposes, the change of use would present a most discrete and unassuming change. But at the same time it would make the property a more attractive and lettable commercial proposition it is considered.

3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

- 3.1 The Merthyr Tydfil Replacement Local Development Plan 2016-2031 provides the local planning policy framework for the area.
- 3.2 There are certain relevant policies in that plan that between them work together in support of this proposal.
- 3.3 Policy ECW2 'Protecting Employment Sites' is aimed at protecting the employment function of the Borough's business and employment sites. It is a permissive policy in terms of its positive support for B1 Class uses. The proposal at hand would of course retain the main employment use of the existing ground floor premises, and if anything, in going to a more flexible B1 use, would likely expand the

opportunity for a more intensive use of the employment space at the site. This is also just as the thrust and emphasis of Policy ECW2 directs.

- 3.4 Policy ECW5 'Town and Local Centre Development' requires that any new development should enhance the vitality and viability of the Borough's town and local centres. In this case, an existing A2 use at the premises has left a vacant unit and with no local, market demand prospect of finding another ongoing use. A B1 use is herein proposed, which is a closely complementary use and a use which has a wider commercial appeal in these ongoing pandemic times. To all intents and purposes, certainly so to outward sight, in going from the A2 use to the B1 use proposed, with no external changes involved and the existing shopfront appearance of the unit retained, then it is considered that this proposal would come to enhance the vitality and the viability of this part of the sMerthyr town centre, precisely as Policy ECW5 requires.

4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The ground floor A2 unit at 5 Pontmorlais, High Street, Merthyr Tydfil is vacant, with no reasonable prospect of securing a further A2 user in the current market conditions.
- 4.2 An alternative B1 use of the ground floor of the premises would allow for a more flexible use of the unit, whilst at the same time ensuring the commercial and employment use of the premises continues.
- 4.3 No external changes are proposed to the premises in connection with this proposal and the shopfront appearance of the property in the streetscene would entirely remain unchanged.
- 4.4 This proposal provides an excellent opportunity to see a vacant commercial unit brought back into a complementary use and which would positively assist the general vibrancy and vitality of the town centre in so doing.

