

DELEGATED REPORT

Application No:	P/25/0208
Site Address:	14A Wheatsheaf Lane (Tourist Information Board) Merthyr Tydfil CF47 8AY
Development:	Change of use of ground floor from St John's Ambulance office into a laundrette (sui generis) to include the installation of solar panels.
Case Officer:	Marlene Ferreira
Site Visit:	30th July 2025
Application Expiry Date:	19th September 2025
Consultation reply date expired:	18th August 2025

APPLICATION SITE

The application site relates to a two-storey premises located off Wheatsheaf Lane in the town centre. The property lies within the Town Centre Conservation Area and is located at the end of a row of commercial properties which front the green open space formerly occupied by the bus station. The property has been vacant for some time and was previously used as offices, in association with St. Johns Ambulance Service.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

This application seeks planning permission to install solar panels to the roof of the premises and change the use of the ground floor of the premises from offices to a laundrette (sui generis).

The laundrette area would occupy over half of the internal ground floor area, whilst the rear section of the premises would serve as tea/waiting area for the users of the laundrette and comprise a stair access to the first floor. It would open daily from 6am until 9pm and operate as a self-service business with access gained via a key coded system. As such, no staff would be present at the premises. Visits to the laundrette would be made online and a code would be provided following confirmation of the booking.

The first floor of the premises would continue to be used as offices in association with a development business (Highfield Property Group - HPG). The business (HPG) is also owned by the applicant, but would operate separately to the laundrette. Given the continued use of the first floor as offices, a change of use at first floor would not be required. Whilst internal changes would be carried out to accommodate an amended

layout, these internal alterations could be carried out without planning permission. Thus, this part of the proposal would not be considered in the assessment of this application.

The proposed solar panels would be installed on the southeastern and northwestern roof slope of the premises. Specifically, an array of solar panels would be positioned along almost the full width of the northwestern roof elevation, occupying an area of approximately 12.9m², and along almost the full width of southeastern roof elevation, also occupying an area of approximately 12.9m².

The Vertex S N-type i-TOPCon panels, manufactured by Trinasolar, would each measure 1.76m by 1.13m and 0.3m deep and would be black in colour. These would be installed and set into the roof of the premises and would project a total of 0.015 metres above the existing roof tiles.

Other external alterations include the re-rendering to the front and side elevations.

PLANNING HISTORY

The following planning history is relevant to this site:

P/17/0336 – Installation of roller shutter – Approved: 2nd January 2018

P/08/0390 – Refurbishment of building to include new shopfront window/door and rendering of external walls – Approved: 24th November 2008

CONSULTATION

The following consultations were undertaken:

Head of Highways and Engineering	No objection.
Town Planning's Policy Officer	No objection.
Town Planning's Ecologist	No objection, subject to conditions.
Environmental Health	No objection, subject to conditions.
Natural Resources Wales (NRW)	No objection.
Welsh Water	No objection.

PUBLICITY

In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012, adjoining properties were consulted and a site notice was

displayed within the vicinity of the site. No letters of representation were received following this publicity exercise.

POLICY CONTEXT

National Development Framework

- Future Wales: the National Plan 2040 (February 2021)

Policy 1 – Where Wales Will Grow

Policy 2 – Shaping Urban Growth and Regeneration – Strategic Placemaking

Policy 4 – Supporting Rural Communities

Policy 9 – Resilient Ecological Networks and Green Infrastructure

Policy 33 – National Growth Area – Cardiff, Newport and the Valleys

National Planning Policies

- Planning Policy Wales - Edition 12 (February 2024)

Paragraph 3.3 refers to good design and states that *‘...design is not just about the architecture of a building but the relationship between all elements of the natural and built environment and between people and places. To achieve sustainable development, design must go beyond aesthetics and include the social, economic, environmental, cultural aspects of the development, including how space is used, how buildings and the public realm support this use, as well as its construction, operation, management, and its relationship with the surroundings area...’*

Paragraph 3.9 refers to character and states that *‘...the special characteristics of an area should be central to the design of a development. The layout, form, scale and visual appearance of a proposed development and its relationship to its surroundings are important planning considerations. A clear rationale behind the design decisions made, based on site and context analysis, a strong vision, performance requirements and design principles, should be sought throughout the development process and expressed, when appropriate, in a design and access statement...’*

Paragraph 3.14 refers to context appraisal and states that these *‘...should be used to determine the appropriateness of a development proposal in responding to its surroundings. This process will ensure that a development is well integrated into the fabric of the existing built environment...’*

Paragraph 4.3.30 – 4.3.34 discusses commercial development and states that *‘...Although retailing (A1) uses should underpin retail and commercial centres, it is only one of the factors which contribute towards their vibrancy. Primary areas are typically characterised by a high proportion of A1 retail uses, and their designation requires an understanding of the existing distribution of uses in a centre together with careful consideration of a centre’s role and how it relates to the retail strategy for the area. Secondary areas typically contain mixed uses, for example shops, cafes and restaurants, financial establishments and other services and community facilities. Policies should encourage a diversity of uses in centres. Planning authorities should identify which retail and commercial centres in their development plans have primary and secondary shopping areas, and show these on the proposals map. Vibrant and viable centres are distinguished by a diversity of activity and*

uses which should contribute towards a centre's well-being and success, whilst also reducing the need to travel.

Paragraph 4.3.36 refers to vacant premises and explains that '*...Where economic decline is impacting on a retail and commercial centre, emphasis on retaining A1 uses in premises either in primary or secondary areas, which have been vacant for a period of time, may undermine a centre's viability and vitality. In such circumstances planning authorities should consider how non-A1 uses may play a greater role to increasing diversity and reducing vacancy levels...*'

Paragraph 6.16, 6.17 and 6.19 discusses the Welsh Government's objectives for the historic environment and states that these seek to '*...protect the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Sites; conserve archaeological remains, both for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and the economy; safeguard the character of historic buildings and manage change so that their special architectural and historic interest is preserved; preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas, whilst the same time helping them remain vibrant and prosperous... It is important that the planning system looks to protect, conserve and enhance the significance of historic assets. This will include consideration of the setting of an historic asset which might extend beyond its curtilage. Any change that impacts on an historic asset or its setting should be managed in a sensitive and sustainable way... Any decisions made through the planning system must fully consider the impact on the historic environment and on the significance and heritage values of individual historic assets and their contribution to the character of place...*'

Paragraph 6.4.3 discusses biodiversity and states that '*...the planning system has a key role to play in helping to reverse the decline in biodiversity and increasing the resilience of ecosystems, at various scales, by ensuring appropriate mechanisms are in place to both protect against loss and to secure enhancement...*'

Paragraph 6.6.22 advises on flooding and explains that '*... the climate emergency is likely to increase the risk of flooding as a result of sea-level rises, increased storminess and more intense rainfall. Flooding as a hazard involves the consideration of the potential consequences of flooding, as well as the likelihood of an event occurring. Planning authorities should adopt a precautionary approach of positive avoidance of development in areas of flooding from the sea or from rivers. Surface water flooding will affect choice of location and the layout and design of schemes and these factors should be considered at an early stage in formulating development proposals...*'

- TAN's (Technical Advice Notes)

TAN 4: Retail and Commercial Development (2016)

This TAN discusses the variety of uses in the centre and section 2.3 states that '*...a wide range of uses are located in retail and commercial centres including retail, office, residential, leisure, tourism and community functions...This diversity of uses, whilst benefiting the wider economy, will need to be carefully planned and managed to ensure that no conflicts arise, particularly with regards to amenity...*'

TAN 5 – Nature and Conservation Planning (2009)

This TAN provides advice on development affecting designated sites and habitats, in addition to protected or priority habitats and species. Section 6.2.2 states that *'...It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision. It is considered best practice that such a survey is carried out before planning application is submitted. Planning permission should not be granted subject to a condition that protected species surveys are carried out and, in the event that protected species are found to be present, mitigation measures are submitted for approval. However, bearing in mind the delay and cost that may be involved, developers should not be required to undertake surveys for protected species unless there is a reasonable likelihood of them being present...'*

TAN 12 – Design (2016)

This TAN advises that the Welsh Government is strongly committed to achieving the delivery of good design in the built and natural environment, which is fit for purpose and delivers environmental sustainability, economic development, and social inclusion at every scale throughout Wales. Section 2.6 of TAN12 states that *'...Design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to grasp opportunities to enhance the character, quality or function of an area, should not be accepted, as these have detrimental effects on existing communities...'* Section 4.3 of TAN12 points out *'...Understanding the site and its immediate and wider context is the basis for a meaningful and sustainable design response, and is the responsibility of all those involved in the design process...'*

TAN 15 – Development, Flooding and Coastal Erosion (2021)

This TAN provides guidance that supplements those set out in PPW policies in respect of flooding. It provides a framework within which the flood risks arising from rivers, the sea and surface water, as well as the risk of coastal erosion can be assessed. It goes on to advise on the consequences of the risks and adapting to and living with flood risk.

TAN 24 – The Historic Environment (2017)

This TAN refers to conservation principles and *'... recognises that the whole of the historic environment is a finite and shared resource. Every place has its own history, which has shaped its character and leaves tangible traces in its present form and fabric. This historic character makes each place unique and gives it a distinctive identity. Historic character should be taken into account in the management of change in order to sustain local distinctiveness and a sense of place. The use of an objective, structured approach to identify the elements of historic character and creating an evidence base is vital...'*

Local Planning Policies

- The Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) 2016-2031

Policy SW4 – Settlement Boundaries

Policy SW11 – Sustainable Design and Placemaking

Policy CW1 – Historic Environment

Policy EnW1 – Nature Conservation and Ecosystem Resilience

Policy EnW4 – Environmental Protection

Policy EcW3 – Retail Hierarchy- Supporting Retail Provision
Policy EcW5 – Town and Local Centre Development
Policy EcW8 – Renewable Energy

- Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG):

SPG4 – Sustainable Design, July 2013

SPG5 – Nature and Development, May 2015

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The issues to consider when assessing this application relate to whether the proposed development is acceptable in principle in this location, and whether it would be an appropriate proposal in respect of its impact upon the character and appearance of the area, residential amenity, ecology, parking provision and highway safety.

Principle of Development

The premises lies in the settlement boundary – Primary Growth Area. Development in this location is supported by LDP Policy SW4 provided it complies with all relevant LDP policies and other material considerations.

The premises also lies within the town centre boundary, as such LDP Policies EcW3 and EcW5 are therefore relevant policy considerations. LDP Policy EcW3 advises that *‘Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre is the favoured location for retail, leisure, and other complementary development, being situated at the head of a retail hierarchy....Proposals for new and enhanced retail, leisure and other complementary provision in this location will be permitted where they improve the vitality and viability of the centre...’* LDP Policy EcW5 advises that *‘Development enhancing the vitality and viability of the town and local centres will be supported...’*

The existing building, as previously noted, was formerly used as offices and is currently a vacant premises. It's proposed use as laundrette, classified as a sui generis use, would amount to a complementary use in the Town Centre, which would therefore be acceptable in this location. Indeed, the proposal would bring the vacant building back into use and serve to enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre. The proposed use in this location would therefore be welcomed and accord with LDP Policies EcW3 and EcW5.

The application site also lies within a flood zone. The Flood Map for Planning (FMfP) identifies the application site to be at risk of flooding, given its siting within Flood Zone 2 (Rivers). NRW were therefore consulted on this proposal. In this instance however, the proposal involves a change of use to a laundrette, and therefore a less vulnerable development/use. As such, NRW have not raised any objections and consider that the proposal could be acceptable subject to the developer being made aware of the potential flood risks and consequences. A copy of NRW's response has therefore been forwarded to the agent for consideration. Thus, the proposal would accord with LDP Policy EnW4.

Given the nature of development, which includes the addition of solar panels, LDP Policy EcW8 is also a relevant policy consideration. This policy states that the use of renewable energy will be supported as a means of reducing local carbon footprint. Thus, the proposal would also accord with LDP Policy EcW8.

Character and Appearance

The proposed development primarily relates to a change of use and internal alterations. However, as described above, the proposal also seeks to introduce solar panels to the side roof slopes of the premises and re-rendering of elevations.

In respect of the solar panels, these are required to reduce energy use at the site. These solar panels would be located, as previously noted, to the northwestern and southeastern roof slopes and would therefore be clearly visible within the surrounding area. It should be noted however that the solar panels would be black in colour and therefore very similar in colour to the existing roof tiles. Furthermore, these would only project above the roof slope by approximately 0.015 metres. Their projection would therefore be minimal. This combined with its colour, which would be very similar to that of the existing roof tiles, would appear almost unnoticeable when viewed from the street scene by passersby. Indeed, it would be similar to other solar panel developments which have been accepted at other premises within the town centre conservation area. It is therefore considered that the proposed solar panels would therefore result in an acceptable form of development which would not be considered to significantly harm the appearance of the premises, nor would it adversely affect the character of the existing street scene or wider conservation area. As such, in this instance, it would accord with LDP Policies SW11 and CW1.

With regards to the application of render to elevations, this is required to upgrade the building, since the existing render is cracked and in need of maintenance. The re-rendering of the building would therefore be welcomed. It is noted that the render would be applied to the elevations in their entirety and the stone clad stallriser would be lost as a result. Given the appearance of the building within this setting, the loss of the stallriser, which is of no historic or special interest, would not be a concern. Whilst details of the type of render to be applied have not been included with the application, a suitably worded condition could be attached to any permission granted to secure such details. The proposed re-rendering of the building would therefore be acceptable and accord with LDP Policy SW11 and CW1.

It is noted that an advert has been included in the proposed plan showing the front elevation. This part of the development may require advertisement consent and as such an informative will be added to any planning permission granted.

Residential Amenity

Given the nature of the proposed use, its hours of operation, and its siting away from residential properties/occupiers, the proposal, although likely to result in an increase in noise (due to the operation of washing machines, etc) when compared to its current use as an office, this would not be considered significant and as such would not result in any substantial disturbance or nuisance to nearby residents or occupiers. Indeed, its positioning in the town centre, adjoining other commercial businesses, is ideally located to accommodate the proposed development. It should also be noted that no concern or objections have been raised by the Environmental Health Manager in this respect. The proposal would therefore accord with LDP Policies SW11 and EnW4.

Ecology

Given the nature of the proposed works, the Council's Ecologist requested that a Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) be submitted in support of the application. An acceptable bat survey report (which included a Green Infrastructure Statement) was received on 10th September 2025.

This document concluded that there was no evidence retrieved to suggest that bats were using the building and that bats and roosts are likely to be absent. However, three bat species were found to be commuting and foraging near the application site, including pipistrelle which are known to hibernate within buildings. Furthermore, no evidence of nests were found. No further survey work was therefore requested.

The report however recommended mitigation/enhancement works, such as work being undertaken outside the winter months (October to April) (or in line with a site-specific method statement) and the implementation of enhancements features for net gain biodiversity. The enhancements for bats and birds specifically include the installation of one artificial roost, as high as possible on the south-western gable, near the apex, and one nesting box to be installed on the north-eastern gable of the building, near the apex.

The Council's Ecologist reviewed the report and did not raise any concerns with the conclusions reached or recommendations set out, provided that the development be carried out in accordance with the relevant documents. As such, a suitably worded condition could be added to any planning permission granted. The proposed development would therefore be considered to accord with LDP Policy EnW1.

Parking Provision and Highway safety

The proposed laundrette, like the existing offices, would not be served by any on-site parking provision. It should be noted however that the business lies within the town centre and is therefore located in a sustainable location, served by a reliable bus service and train station. Furthermore, there are on-street parking spaces and a public car park located in very close proximity to the site and therefore within very short walking distance. The Head of Engineering and Highways has considered the proposed use in this location and has not raised any concerns or objections. The proposal is therefore considered acceptable and would accord with LDP Policy SW11.

CONCLUSION

The proposed development for the reasons discussed above is therefore considered acceptable and would comply with the relevant LDP policies.

Finally, the duty to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, under section 3 of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ("the WBFG Act") has been taken into consideration when determining this application. In reaching the following recommendation, the ways of working set out at section 5 of the WBFG Act have been considered and thus the proposal is in accordance with the sustainable development principle through its contribution towards one or more of the Welsh Ministers well-being objectives set out as required by section 8 of the WBFG Act.

Accordingly, the following recommendation is made:

RECOMMENDATION: BE APPROVED subject to the following **CONDITIONS:**

1. The development shall begin not later than five years from the date of this decision.

Reason - To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

- 1141.04 Proposed Elevations, received: 9th October 2025;
- 1141.05 Proposed Elevations, received: 9th October 2025;
- 1141.06 Proposed Section and Plans, received: 12th September 2025;
- Bat Survey Report (version 3), by Little Wing Ecology, received: 12th September 2025.

Reason -To ensure compliance with the approved plans and clearly define the scope of the permission.

3. **Prior to the commencement of development** samples/details of the proposed render (to include manufacturer, name and colour) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To ensure that the external appearance of the proposed development will be in keeping with the character of the conservation area in the interest of visual amenity and to accord with Policies SW11 and CW1 of The Merthyr Tydfil Replacement Local Development Plan.

4. Prior to the beneficial use of the laundrette hereby approved, the enhancement measures proposed, as stipulated in the recommendations set out in the Bat Survey Report (received: 12th September 2025), shall be implemented and retained thereafter in perpetuity.

Reason - To protect the natural environment and important habitat in accordance with Policy EnW1 of the Merthyr Tydfil Replacement Local Development Plan.

5. Demolition or construction works shall not take place outside the hours of 08:00 to 18:00 Mondays to Fridays and 09:00 to 14.00 on Saturdays and at no time on Sundays or Public Holidays.

Reason - To ensure that the noise emitted/activities are not a source of nuisance to occupants of nearby properties in accordance with Policies SW11 and EnW4 of the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan.

INFORMATIVES

1. This planning permission does not provide consent to undertake works that require a European Protected Species (EPS) licence.

All bats and their roosts are protected under UK and European legislation. It is an offence to deliberately kill, injure, capture or disturb a bat or to recklessly damage or destroy their breeding sites or resting places.

If works are planned on a building/tree in which bats are found to be roosting, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) must be contacted. on 0300 065 3000 or at <https://naturalresources.wales/permits-and-permissions/species-licensing/apply-for-a-protected-species-licence/bat-licences/?lang=en>.

If work has already commenced and bats are found, or if any evidence that bats are using the site as a roost is found, work should cease and NRW should be contacted immediately.

Under these circumstances, an EPS licence is likely to be required to undertake the works within the law.

2. All birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) while they are breeding.

If works to any trees, hedgerows and/or other nesting bird habitat (including buildings with suitable features) are to be undertaken, they will take place outside of the bird nesting season. If the works must be undertaken during the nesting season (generally from 1st March until 31st August, although birds are known to nest outside of these dates in suitable conditions), a breeding bird survey will be required and must be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist. Any active nests identified will be protected until the young have fledged.

Where a Schedule 1 species (as defined in the Wildlife and Countryside Act - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/schedule/1> is involved, compensation for impacts, e.g., loss of nesting sites, will be devised and implemented.

3. No advertisement material apart from that permitted by the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisement 1985) shall be placed on the building without the prior written consent of the Local Planning Authority.

RECOMMENDATION ENDORSED



Director of Neighbourhood Services

DATE: 14.10.2025