

Climbing centre plans for church move a step closer

HOPES of transforming a disused Carmarthen church into a climbing centre have taken a step forward.

A planning application has been lodged with Carmarthenshire Council by Pembroke-based firm Overhang Tenby Climbing Centre to bring the ambitious project to St David's Church.

A cafe will also form part of the project along with parking for 27 cars plus two disabled spaces and bicycle storage.

A mezzanine level is also part of the plans.

The church in Picton Terrace, which is a grade two listed building, has been closed since 2003 after a storm saw its roof partially cave in and subsequent repair costs spiral for the then-owners, Church In Wales.

Plans for a climbing centre were first drawn up two years ago by Overhang Tenby and talks held with former owner Aaron Hill, a North Wales property developer who bought it from Church In Wales for just £1.

A crowdfunding bid to raise £30,000 towards the project was set up by Tenby Overhang Climbing

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Centre owners John and Helena Williams, but plans did not come to fruition and in January this year Mr Hill sold the church, walking away from his dream of turning it into a private home for himself.

The new church owner, John Trowbridge, from Burry Port, then read about the previous plans by Overhang Tenby for a climbing centre and contacted Mr and Mrs Williams to see if they were still interested in opening at the church.

Mr Trowbridge said back in January that the venture "could be one of the tallest climbing walls in Wales if it all goes ahead."

Mr and Mrs Williams have since been hard at work in recent months cleaning up the church and doing repairs.

One of the most unpleasant aspects over the summer was having to clean years worth of pigeon mess which had built up inside the church.

James Dwyer Associates acting as planning agents

for Mr and Mrs Williams state within the planning application that has been submitted: "This proposal for the conversion of this redundant listed church into a leisure facility in the form of an internal climbing wall is intended to ensure the sustainable preservation of the listed building.

"Use as a climbing wall in this instance, given the size, character and the economics of the conversion of the building appears the viable option.

"The church building is a structure of suitable configuration, size and proportion that lends to adaptation to an internal climbing venue, yet would still maintain the character of the building, ensuring that the evidence of previous use and purpose is not lost.

"This would be

achieved through keeping the primary roof structure exposed internally and maintaining an open plan arrangement where practically possible."

The plans state that the font and surrounding screen, built in seating to the west gable and pulpit would be retained, while the organ and pews would be removed.

The climbing walls would be constructed of treated plywood surface, supported on scaffolding erected and braced around the church's existing columns and walls.

In conclusion, the planning application states: "The scheme would provide a sustainable future for St David's Church, ensuring the means for the protection of the listed building, contribute to the local economy and support and enhance environmental sustainability."

The plans will be discussed soon by Carmarthenshire Council planning committee.

The project was recently awarded a Welsh Government Place for Sport grant of £35,082.

Plans have been lodged to turn St David's Church, in Carmarthen, into a climbing centre.
Picture: Robert Melen

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