

Chapel comes into focus for camera shop

A HISTORIC Carmarthen chapel is being given a new lease of life as a camera shop — despite recommendations for the plans to be rejected.

Carmarthen Camera Centre is moving into the Zion Chapel in Mansel Street — making it one of the largest independent camera shops in the UK.

Managing director Mathew Whittal-Williams bought the building last year and steps are already under way to relocate from the current shop in Parcmaen Street.

Councillors on Carmarthenshire Council's planning committee went against the recommendation by the author-

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ity's conservation officer for the plans to be refused. Councillors discussing the application said the chapel needed to survive for future generations and the change of use would also create five more jobs — from 14 to 19.

A mezzanine level for office space is also part of the plans but the pulpit and organ will be retained. The officer, in his report to councillors, said plans to remove pews equaled "gutting" the grade two listed building.

The report read: "The applicant proposes to remove all the pews which

in conservation terms amounts to gutting the building.

"Other internal proposals such as the mezzanine floor would impact on the gallery which is meant to be a focal point of the chapel.

"Therefore, the proposed works to the interior of the chapel would not preserve Zion Chapel's architectural or historic interest and would cause significant harm which is not acceptable."

However, local councillor Jeff Thomas — who is not standing in next month's election — spoke in support of the application, stating that the chapel was being put to use.



Mathew Whittal-Williams outside Zion Chapel in Carmarthen which is being turned into the new home of Carmarthen Camera Centre.

He added: "Zion is in an area of high footfall and it will be good for Mansel Street.

"Many chapels have had pews removed across the county and even Cadw has said previously that

where a use is possible for a listed building then it should be done."

A total of 13 councillors

voted in favour of approving the plans, with three opposing approval and one abstention.