

Plans for Guildhall

will mix the old with the new

AN entrepreneur behind plans to turn Carmarthen's historic Guildhall building into a restaurant and cafe bar has unveiled details of the £1 million project.

The former courthouse, a listed building in the heart of the town, has been snapped up as part of the Lounges group which already has eateries Zinco Lounge in Swansea and Croeso Lounge in Mumbles.

"A six-month project of work is about to get under way and it will be open to the public in the summer," said James Morse, director of Nextcolour Ltd which is carrying out the work and which was behind the hugely successful launch of Oyster Wharf in Mumbles.

The cafe bar restaurant remains as yet unnamed but will occupy the ground floor and the impressive crown court above will remain untouched yet visible for customers to soak in its glory.

The venture will create up to 35 jobs.

A deal to lease the building from Carmarthenshire Council has been agreed and talks have already taken place with Cadw over the ambitious plans which seek to redevelop but retain much of the buildings character and original features, together with returning some which have been hidden due to development work over the decades.

Speaking about the acquisition of arguably one of Carmarthen's most iconic building, Mr Morse,

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who oversaw the development of the Swansea branches and has a background in renovating listed buildings, said it was an exciting project for Carmarthen.

"One thing that I want to stress is that the frontage will remain. Also, the main entrance will stay the same, the main doors and those in the entrance hall will stay the same.

"The gates will be opened back and the black and white tiling inside will remain, along with the steps and stair case at the end of the hallway, along with the side staircase.

"The side entrance will be the disabled access too.

"The current walls creating the hallway and former court room will be knocked down to open the ground floor up into one space.

"The walls are not original features and we plan on recreating more limestone columns to open up the space for them to be standing on an open plan room for dining, along with the bar."

Mr Morse added: "One side of the ground floor, the old cells area, was redeveloped after 1974 and original windows on the Hall Street side have not been seen since then, they were blocked off.

"We will be bringing those windows back into use, allowing a lot of natural light into the ground floor.

"It will be a grand entrance, but a nice light open space."

Indeed, even the cells will be used for cool storage of beverages.

Turning to the Crown Court, Mr Morse explained: "We knew how important this was and is.

"It's an incredible court room that we simply will not touch, all dining will be on the ground floor.

"We are putting toilets across the landing from the court room upstairs but as for the court, it will remain as it is but we want people to be able to see it and enjoy it.

"We will be placing waist-height glass panels at the entrance doors to the court upstairs so people can look into the court."

Coupled to that, the court will be open to charitable groups and schools for educational purposes, free of charge.

While TV and film crews will continue to have access to the crown court for a fee as they do now.

Looking at the wider impact of the regenerating of the Guildhall, Mr Morse said: "It sits in an important part of the town and ties it together.

"The aim is to create a family-friendly space whether for breakfast, lunch or dinner that then has the potential to send people off up into King Street and the newer part of town (St Catherine's Walk).

"It's such an important square and a building that means a lot to the town with its history.



James Morse, Director of Nextcolour Ltd who are developing the Guildhall, with Carmarthenshire Council leader Emlyn Dole.

"When we bought it as a council, the alternative of letting the building go was pretty grim.

"We took that risk and that risk has turned out

well because of the offer here, as far as the regeneration of this square and this is the Guildhall the county seat, it emphasizes all that.

"The ambition is to be commended on behalf of the developers because what they are doing is bold.

"It is a unique project but also keeping the historical aspect upstairs in the court room which is absolutely dripping with history and that's going to be kept and enhanced because there will be more people who can see it and appreciate all that has happened there in the context of the history of this county.

"So it works in all ways, along with the regeneration that we are continuing in Carmarthen town, and joining King Street and the lower part of the town, which again will be reflected when we think about Jackson's Lane and that project.

"We are excited about the Guildhall project and all that is on offer in the town over the next year."



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