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Camera centre gives former chapel a new lease of life

AT a time when many chapels and churches close and may fall into rack and ruin, a former Carmarthen chapel has been given a new lease of life as home to Wales's largest independent camera shop.

The Zion English Presbyterian chapel, a grade two listed building in Mansel Street, has been

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sensitively renovated under the guidance of Cadw.

The Carmarthen Camera Centre, which now employs 18 people, has relocated to the chapel from its previous premises at the corner of Parcmaen

Street in the town.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was performed by Carmarthen town and county councillor Alun Lenny.

He noted that the company can trace its ancestry back, via Bill Francis at the market clocktower, to Ken and Morwena Davies who established Mayfair Studios in the 1960s.

"As more chapels and churches sadly close, this is a shining example of how to renovate a grade two listed place of worship and put it to economic use," said Mr Lenny.

"I'm aware that the owner, Matthew Whittall-Williams, had to jump through countless planning hoops to deliver the project.

"Enabling the responsible conversion and change of use of redundant places of worship and similar buildings is one issue which needs to



The Zion Chapel in Mansel Street, Carmarthen, is now home to one of the UK's largest independent camera shops, the Carmarthen Camera Centre.

be addressed as we prepare the revised council Local Development Plan. Mr Lenny added: "Speaking as a lay-

preacher who has visited countless chapels throughout West Wales, what strikes me about Zion is the feeling of

immense open space and light from its numerous Italianate windows.

"That feeling has been maintained and is surely an important feature for a shop that sells cameras, where light is such an important element."

Speaking in March as the refurbishment work neared completion, Mr Whittall-Williams said: "All along we didn't want to change the inside of the chapel so that it was unrecognisable.

"You walk in here, the shop all on the ground floor and yet it still looks like a chapel and it's an impressive space.

"I think our project here shows what can be done and it's been done sympathetically, we are celebrating its history as a chapel and not turning it into another faceless shop."



Managing director of Carmarthen Camera Centre Matthew Whittall-Williams and Carmarthen county councillor Alun Lenny cutting the ribbon.