

Chapel to reopen as camera shop

A CARMARTHEN chapel will reopen to the public within weeks as one of the largest independent camera shops in the UK.

Two years ago, planning permission was granted for Carmarthen Camera Centre to relocate from the town's Parcmaen Street into the former Zion Chapel in Mansel Street.

Councillors on

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Carmarthenshire Council's planning committee went against the recommendation by the authority's conservation officer for the plans to be refused.

That meant the decision by the council had to be looked at by Cadw as the

building is grade two listed but there were no concerns raised by the heritage body.

Now the final touches are being made at the chapel by managing director of Carmarthen Camera Centre Matthew Whittall-Williams and his team.

It is expected to open at the end of the month.

It has been a labour of

love with parts of the chapel restored to its original form, despite of course the pews having to be taken out - but even these have been recycled and are now shutters on the windows.

Matthew said: "We've spent around £200,000 on it and it's a fantastic space."

"We have the organ intact and that will sit behind the main serving desk and the rest of the ground floor will be display areas for cameras and equipment."

"We have also put in a mezzanine level that will be used as our office space for online and telephone orders."

He added: "We have replaced original lamps with new electric ones that look like the originals and doorways have been recreated as they used to be, so we want to keep the history and heritage. We also have the clock that was part of the chapel."

The project has meant the chapel, which had a dwindling congregation of just a dozen people before it closed, will now still play a part in town life, albeit under quite a different guise.

Matthew, who bought the chapel three years ago,



Carmarthen's Zion chapel in Mansel Street will reopen to the public within weeks as one of the largest independent camera shops in the UK. Carmarthen Camera Centre is relocating to the grade two listed chapel from its current shop in Parcmaen Street.

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."

With plans also afoot for Carmarthen's St David's Church in Picton Terrace to be turned into a climbing centre, Carmarthen is seeing innovative modern uses for its places of worship which are no longer in use.

The alternative, as Matthew said, would be see-

ing these grand buildings falling into ruin.

"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."

The repurposing of chapels and churches has been an issue over recent years with plans springing up across the county for different uses and even as homes for some people.

Three years ago, Carmarthenshire Council was urged by councillors to call on the Welsh Gov-

ernment to deliver a strategy to deal with empty properties.

In a motion before a meeting of the full council in October 2016, it was argued that the need for old buildings, churches and halls be brought back into use along with other urban buildings.

BBC news anchor, presenter and journalist Huw Edwards has also spoken out during recent years over the future of a number of churches and chapels and places of worship in Carmarthen, Llanelli and Wales in general.