

# Go-ahead on £1m Guildhall plan

PLANS to turn an iconic listed building in Carmarthen into a modern restaurant and cafe bar have been given the go-ahead.

The Guildhall, which was a courthouse up until 2016, will be transformed into a town centre bar and cafe after planners at Carmarthenshire Council gave the £1 million project the green light on Tuesday.

Swansea-based developer Nextcolour Ltd will now press ahead with its plans to modify the grade one listed, 18th Century building before it opens as part of the Lounges chain, which operates branches all over the UK including Zinco Lounge in Swansea and Croeso Lounge in Mumbles.

Planning permission was granted, subject to approval from the Welsh Government's historical organisation Cadw, despite some concern being aired by local groups such as the Civic Society and the Georgian Group.

These concerns were

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echoed by some councillors, who fear the heart of the building will be ripped out when it opens as a bar.

Councillor Ken Lloyd said: "I have real concerns about it. We're going to be losing one of the finest buildings in West Wales. We're going to be losing the fabric of it and the heart of it."

Alun Lenny, chairman of the planning committee at Carmarthenshire Council, admitted: "We would all like to see something different there," before adding there was a "need to be pragmatic".

This has resulted in permission being granted to reinvigorate part of the first floor of the building. The historic former crown court on the second floor will not be altered, and the developers behind the plans have been keen to stress that the building will retain its character and charm.

Speaking before planning was granted, James Morse, director of Nextcolour Ltd, said: "The frontage will remain, 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 staircase at the end of the hallway, along with the side staircase."

Councillors took part in a site visit on Tuesday morning at the Guildhall, where they were told in detail about the plans to knock down walls in the hallway on the ground floor, which will create one large space that could facilitate a restaurant area.

The bar, meanwhile, will be located to the left as people enter the building. Upstairs, the room which was formerly used by jurors for deliberation will be transformed into customer toilets.

Across the hall, mem-



Plans for a cafe bar and restaurant at Carmarthen's Guildhall have been approved.

bers of the public will be able to peer into the crown court chamber - which was used as a key location in the filming of hit BBC drama *Keeping Faith* -

through glass panels that will be erected to protect the courtroom's interior, which will remain untouched.

It's understood that the

new venue, which has not yet been named, will create up to 35 jobs in the heart of Carmarthen and will open later this year.

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