



PLANNING STATEMENT

PROPOSAL: EXTERNAL ALTERATIONS TO
THE PRIMARY FACADE IN ORDER TO
FACILITATE THE SUBDIVISION OF THE
GROUND FLOOR RESTAURANT AND
ANCILLARY ACCOMMODATION (CLASS
C1/A3) TO
CREATE 5 INDEPENDENT COMMERCIAL
UNITS (CLASS A1/A2 OR A3 UNITS 1, 2
AND 3 AND CLASS A1/A2 UNITS 4 AND 5)

ADDRESS: AMBASSADOR HOTEL, NEATH

1.0 Application Site

- 1.1 Full planning permission is sought for the subdivision of the existing ground floor hotel/restaurant and creation of five commercial units to either A1, A2 or A3 uses at units 1, 2 and 3 and A1/A2 for units 4 and 5. The proposal will also involve some external alterations to facilitate the creation of these new units with three new shop fronts being installed and some original features being reinstated including the 1st floor bay windows. The existing hotel has a large ground floor and basement which is currently underutilised and the proposal will introduce two commercial units to ground floor level. An open planning consent for a number of different uses would be more appealing to the market and would remove the uncertainty for prospective occupiers.
- 1.2 The application site forms part of the existing Ambassador Hotel which is a prominent building located within Neath Town Centre. The hotel was recently purchased and has undergone significant investment in order to try and create a viable business. There are a number of vacant retail stores within Neath Town Centre and the market has undergone significant change since the emergence of COVID 19 which has decimated the demand for retail units and as such a multiple number of uses are sought consent for. If Town and City Centres are to emerge from the current crisis they must seek to reinvent themselves and alternative commercial uses such as what are being proposed will be an important form of use moving forward.

Application Site

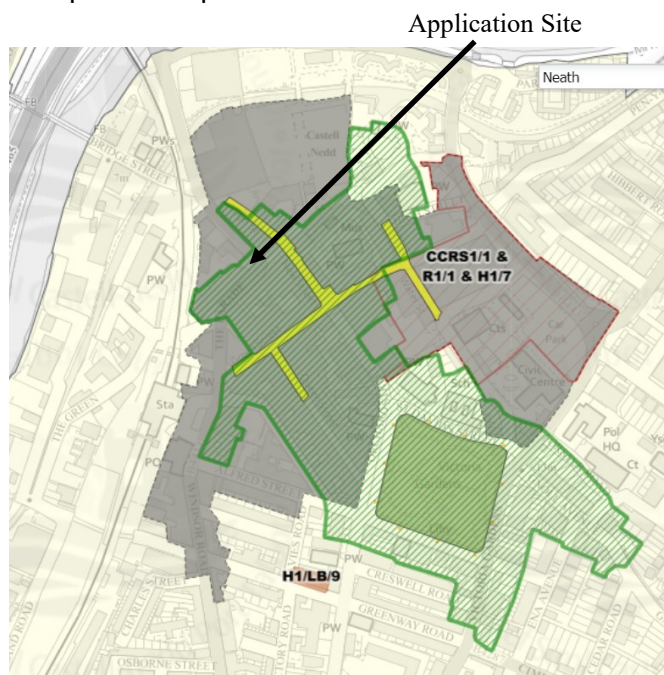


- 1.3 The site is located on a highly prominent primary frontage along the Parade within Neath Centre and forms one of a mixture of commercial properties which make up this parade of commercial uses. The site is flanked to the west by a MOT garage, the north by Morruzi Café/Restaurant, the east by the Parade road with a mixture of commercial uses and the south by other commercial uses.

- 1.4 The Parade is currently undergoing significant investment and transformation in order to create an area where people can live, work and enjoy leisure opportunities. The Castle Hotel has undergone a recent transformation which has helped raise the quality of the street-scene and significant investment has been made in order to bring residents and tourists back into the City Centre . The site is located in a dense urban area and sited on one of the main roads through the Town Centre which has multiple major bus routes which operate day and night.
- 1.5 The proposal seeks consent to subdivide the existing hotel to help bring the hotel back into beneficial use. The application seeks consent for an open permission which will give them the best chance of being occupied. The existing hotel has a large basement and ground floor which can be used by guests and the residence available is too large for its current needs.

2.0 Policy Context

- 2.1 The Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan was formally adopted in 2011 and is the relevant document when considering planning applications within the County area.
- 2.2 The site falls within the Neath Town Centre and is defined as falling within a Strategic Development Site under the provisions of the Swansea Local Development Plan Proposals Map:



The application site is located in Neath Town Centre and is located in a Conservation Area.

- 2.3 The policies from the Local Development Plan relevant to the consideration of this application are:

Policy SC1—Settlement Limits

Development within settlement limits that is proportionate in scale and form to the role and function of the settlement as set out in the Settlement Hierarchy will be acceptable in principle. Outside settlement limits, development will only be permitted under the following circumstances:

1. It constitutes a sustainable small scale employment use adjacent to a settlement limit; or
2. It constitutes live-work unit(s) immediately adjacent to a settlement limit in the Valleys Strategy Area only; or
3. It constitutes the small-scale expansion of an existing business or the suitable conversion of an existing building; or
4. It constitutes the appropriate replacement of an existing dwelling; or
5. It is an affordable housing exception site; or
6. It is an appropriate rural enterprise dwelling; or
7. It is an appropriate 'One Planet Development'; or
8. It is a sustainable tourism or farm diversification proposal that is suitable in a countryside location; or
9. It is associated with the provision of public utilities, infrastructure and waste management facilities that cannot reasonably be located elsewhere; or
10. It is associated with either agriculture, forestry, minerals or energy generation; or
11. It relates to the appropriate provision of accommodation for Gypsies / Travellers; or
12. It constitutes the provision of open space and small scale ancillary facilities adjoining the settlement limit.

Where development is permitted outside settlement limits, any new buildings must be located adjacent to existing buildings or settlements wherever possible and be of an appropriate scale and form.

Policy R 2—Proposals Within Retail Centres

1. Within the designated retail centres, uses that would enhance the vitality, viability and attractiveness of the centre, including uses in classes(16) A and D will be permitted where:
 - (a) The proposal integrates with and strengthens the layout, retail character and pedestrian flows of the centre; and
 - (b) Does not prejudice the effective use of upper floors; and
 - (c) Maintains a vibrant and attractive shopping street frontage.

2. Proposals for the redevelopment or conversion within a retail centre of retail, commercial, leisure or community premises to ground floor uses not complying with point 1 of this policy will only be permitted where:
 - (a) It is demonstrated that the existing use is no longer viable or appropriate in the location; and
 - (b) The proposal would not result in the loss of a supermarket, shop, café or public house which is important in terms of providing facilities to serve the community; Or:
 - (c) The proposal would result in the redevelopment of derelict, unsightly, underused and vacant land / premises for alternative uses which would have significant social, community or regeneration benefits.
3. Within the designated Primary Shopping Streets in Neath and Port Talbot town centres, ground floor uses other than Class A1 (Shops) will only be permitted where:
 - (a) The proposal falls within Class A2 (Financial and Professional Services) or Class A3 (Food and Drink); and
 - (b) The proposal does not result in the overdominance of any non-A1 use; and
 - (c) The proposal on its own and/or in combination with other proposals and commitments does not lead to:
 - (i) A material adverse effect on the retail function of the Primary Shopping Streets; or
 - (ii) A material reduction in the number and distribution of shop premises within the retail frontage that it will occupy and within the Primary Shopping Streets as a whole.
4. Within the district and local retail centres, proposals that would result in the over dominance of one use to the detriment of the vitality, viability and attractiveness of the retail centre will be resisted.

Policy TR 2 Design and Access of New Development

Development proposals will only be permitted where all of the following criteria, where relevant, are satisfied:

1. The development does not compromise the safe, effective and efficient use of the highway network and does not have an adverse impact on highway safety or create unacceptable levels of traffic generation;
2. Appropriate levels of parking and cycling facilities are provided and the access arrangements for the site allow for the safe manoeuvring of any service vehicles associated with the planned use;
3. The development is accessible by a range of travel means, including public transport and safe cycle and pedestrian routes;

4. Transport Assessments and Travel Plans are provided for developments that are likely to create significant traffic generation.

Policy R 2 Proposals Within Retail Centres

1. Within the designated retail centres, uses that would enhance the vitality, viability and attractiveness of the centre, including uses in classes(16) A and D will be permitted where:
 - (a) The proposal integrates with and strengthens the layout, retail character and pedestrian flows of the centre; and
 - (b) Does not prejudice the effective use of upper floors; and
 - (c) Maintains a vibrant and attractive shopping street frontage.
2. Proposals for the redevelopment or conversion within a retail centre of retail, commercial, leisure or community premises to ground floor uses not complying with point 1 of this policy will only be permitted where:
 - (a) It is demonstrated that the existing use is no longer viable or appropriate in the location; and
 - (b) The proposal would not result in the loss of a supermarket, shop, café or public house which is important in terms of providing facilities to serve the community; Or:
 - (c) The proposal would result in the redevelopment of derelict, unsightly, underused and vacant land / premises for alternative uses which would have significant social, community or regeneration benefits.
3. Within the designated Primary Shopping Streets in Neath and Port Talbot town centres, ground floor uses other than Class A1 (Shops) will only be permitted where:
 - (a) The proposal falls within Class A2 (Financial and Professional Services) or Class A3 (Food and Drink); and
 - (b) The proposal does not result in the overdominance of any non-A1 use; and
 - (c) The proposal on its own and/or in combination with other proposals and commitments does not lead to:
 - (i) A material adverse effect on the retail function of the Primary Shopping Streets; or
 - (ii) A material reduction in the number and distribution of shop premises within the retail frontage that it will occupy and within the Primary Shopping Streets as a whole.
4. Within the district and local retail centres, proposals that would result in the over dominance of one use to the detriment of the vitality, viability and attractiveness of the retail centre will be resisted.

3.0 Main Issues

3.1 The main issues for consideration during the determination of this application relates to:

- The principle of this form of development at this location.
- Impact of the development upon the visual amenity of the area and the wider character of the Conservation Area.
- Impact of the development on residential amenities of the neighbouring properties.
- Impact on highway safety.

3.2 Careful consideration needs to be given to the aforementioned policies of the recently adopted LDP and the relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance documents.

4.0 Principle of Use

4.1 The site forms part of a large hotel which is in dire need of regeneration. The current restaurant and bar on the ground floor is considered too large to serve the needs of the residents and as such planning permission is sought for the subdivision of part of the existing ground floor and creation of 5 independent commercial uses:

Unit No	Proposed Use
1	A1/A2 or A3
2	A1/A2 or A3
3	A1/A2 or A3
4	A1/A2
5	A1/A2

4.2 Given the difficulty experienced with respect finding commercial uses in Town Centres such as Neath, it is felt in order to maximise the possibility of attracting a commercial tenant an open consent is the most attractive option. The subdivision and creation of five commercial units will attract footfall into the area.

4.3 The application site is defined as falling outside the defined primary shopping street and given the extant lawful use of the building there would be no policy presumption in terms of the subdivision and creation of 5 additional commercial units.

4.4 There are a number of vacant units in Neath Town Centre and therefore granting an open use consent would provide the maximum opportunity to find occupiers for the proposed units which will help increase footfall throughout the day and evening. As such the approval of this application will hopefully result in improving the vitality and viability of the existing business by creating an additional income for the hotel which will ultimately complement the wider Town Centre and help serve the needs of the visitors to the area.

- 4.5 The function of centres has changed significantly with the emergence of low cost retailers and the significant increase in internet shopping. The approval of this application will maximise the potential of providing viable commercial uses at ground floor level and remove uncertainty for prospective occupiers by addressing the planning use. It is hoped the approval of this application would bring the ground floor of the underutilised hotel back into beneficial use would improve footfall and the vitality, viability and vibrancy of Neath Town Centre and complement both the daytime and evening economy. It will also add additional local businesses which will help boost the local economy. Notwithstanding the above, it is felt that the creation of a new vibrant viable use in this area will have a positive impact upon the vitality and viability of the Town Centre by attracting additional footfall into the area and provide important local employment opportunities for local people.
- 4.6 The emergence of out of town shopping centres and online shopping and the close proximity of other Town and City Centres and Local Centres has had an impact on the vitality and viability of small retail units such as these. The proposal will retain an active ground floor commercial frontage which will have a positive impact on the ability of the centre to attract footfall. It is envisaged that the new uses will be a mixture of both daytime and night time uses which will complement the area.
- 4.7 The function of town centres like Neath have changed significantly with the emergence of low cost retailers such as Lidl and Aldi and the significant increase in internet shopping. As such there has been a significant shift towards leisure type uses within centres such as this as they provide an important local facility. The demand for retail has been further compounded by the COVID 19 crisis with the demand for retail plummeting with one of the outcomes being an even faster shift of the wider population onto online retail and banking which has further decimated the demand for retail units on the local high street. As such the high street needs to be allowed to evolve and cater for the demand of the market and local residents which will be unknown after COVID 19. An open consent will allow the units the flexibility to attract a viable commercial use.
- 4.8 It is therefore concluded that in order to give the maximum potential to find an alternative commercial use for these proposed units the open consent will maximise the ability to find a viable use. The introduction of commercial uses will complement the area and the wider Town Centre and would bring the underutilised existing ground floor commercial frontage back into beneficial use.

5.0 Visual Amenity

- 5.1 The existing building is an important 'landmark' which is situated in Neath Town Centre. The building is in significant need of investment and the proposal seeks consent to subdivide the large ground floor to create a mixture of commercial units. In order to facilitate this work the external façade will have a significant upgrade which is being partly grant funded by NPT Council.

- 5.2 From a visual amenity perspective, the proposal will result in the creation of 5 independent commercial uses which will have new entrances and shop fronts onto the Parade. The development will be completed to a high standard and have a positive impact on the visual amenities of the area.



- 5.3 The approval of this application will increase active frontage along the Parade and simultaneously attract footfall and activity to this part of the Town Centre. The new shop frontages will utilise a high quality palette of materials including aluminium. The design of the transoms and mullions will utilise a slim profile with a vertical emphasis retained.



- 5.4 The proposed facias and signage will create a sense of uniformity and replace the existing ad-hoc facias which currently detract from the character of the building.
- 5.5 All original features of the building will be retained and where possible reinstated which will give the building a significant uplift. We feel the proposed alterations will have a positive impact upon the visual amenities of the area and wider street-scene.

6.0 Residential Amenity

- 6.1 The proposal will raise no issues relating to overbearing, overshadowing or overlooking and the premises is sited within a Town Centre Location where one would expect late night activity and a certain degree of late night activity. If A3 uses are proposed to be retained at this location and operated by new tenants then issues relating to noise and smells could be addressed via an appropriately worded planning condition.

7.0 Highway Safety and Parking

- 7.1 The site is defined as falling within Town Centre or City Centre Fringe Area—Zone 2 as defined under the provisions of the Supplementary Planning Guidance document entitled—Parking Standards. Zone 2 areas are defined as urban areas. Typically there is a wide range of public transport services, bus and rail within close proximity.
- 7.2 There is currently no designated parking for the existing commercial uses at ground floor, however there is parking to the rear of the property for the hotel and a number of public car parks within walking distance of the site. In addition to this there is public parking on surrounding streets which can accommodate future customers. It is also envisaged that customers will also visit commercial units on foot and potentially linked trips to other adjacent commercial uses or indeed guests of the hotel.
- 7.3 The proposed uses would generate a similar parking requirement to the existing C1/A3 use and in purely highway safety terms and parking generation. The proposal should have an acceptable impact on highway safety and on parking in the area in compliance with policies set out in the Neath LDP and the Supplementary Planning Guidance document entitled 'Parking Standards'.

8.0 Conclusion

- 8.1 In land use terms the subdivision of this large underutilised A3 use with 5 high quality commercial units would be a welcome addition to the Neath Town Centre and would provide local facilities and employment opportunities for both residents and visitors to the area and attract additional footfall and passing trade to the group of commercial properties by bringing the underutilised unit back into beneficial use. The open consent will maximise the ability for the owner to find viable tenants for the proposed units during this difficult time and the proposed commercial uses will complement the vitality and viability of the Local Centre.

- 8.2 From a visual amenity perspective, the proposal will result in significant investment which will improve the visual appearance of this important 'landmark building' and bring this dilapidated building back into beneficial use. The proposal will seek to retain existing features where possible and will have a positive impact on the character and appearance of the area.
- 8.3 The proposal will introduce no overlooking, overbearing or overshadowing issues and in light of the units shopping centre location and siting adjacent to a main road it is unlikely that the proposed use would raise any noise and disturbance issues which could not be addressed via an appropriately worded planning condition.
- 8.4 In terms of the highway safety, the site is situated in a sustainable location which currently has no designated official parking. Having regard for the Councils SPG the proposal would result in similar parking demand. Furthermore, the proposed uses will complement one another in a positive manner and result in linked trips and improve footfall into centre. There is sufficient parking within close proximity to the site and provide a use which would support local residents.
- 8.5 From an economic perspective, the creation of 5 new commercial units will provide a welcome boost to the local economy and provide much needed additional employment for local workers and supply chains. This development will ensure a viable long term use for the building which will help support local businesses and improve the vitality and viability of the shopping centre. Furthermore the units will provide a valuable additional income for the hotel which will enable the applicant to reinvest back into the hotel which is undergoing further investment.
- 8.6 As such this proposal is considered an acceptable form of development which complies with the provisions of the Development Plan and the relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance documents. Therefore you are respectfully requested to support this proposal.