

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Infrastructure and Regeneration

Planning Committee: 27 August 2014

DC14/149 Change of use from shop to fitness and weight management centre at 21 College Way, Dumbarton by Ms Kay Young

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1** This application relates to a development which is contrary to the development plan and is recommended for approval. Under the terms of the approved Scheme of Delegation it therefore requires to be determined by the Planning Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1** **Grant** full planning permission subject to the conditions set out in Section 9.

3. DEVELOPMENT DETAILS

- 3.1** The application relates to a vacant 2-storey retail unit within College Way in Dumbarton town centre. The unit is part of a larger modern building on the eastern side of the pedestrianised Artizan Centre, which runs northwards from the High Street. On either side of the unit there are retail units, to the front there is College Way with vacant shop units opposite, and to the rear there is a vehicular service yard area which is largely enclosed by buildings. The unit has lain vacant for at least 3 years. It is understood to have last been occupied by a clothes shop.
- 3.2** Permission is sought for a fitness and weight management centre. The business would be specifically for women and would cater for all ages and fitness levels. Its services would include exercise programmes, group classes such as boxercise and chair aerobics, and lifestyle, nutritional and fitness coaching. Opening hours would be Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm, Saturday 9am to 2pm and closed on Sundays. The business would employ 1 full time and 3 part-time staff, although the applicant hopes to increase this number as the business grows.
- 3.3** There would be no physical changes to the exterior of the unit apart from a frosted film and some vinyl graphic signs to be applied to the inside of the front window. On the ground floor there would be a reception area at the front of the unit and exercise equipment such as treadmills and exercise bikes would be arranged in groups. The space towards the rear of the ground floor would be used for group exercise such as chair aerobics. The first floor would also be used for exercise classes.

4. CONSULTATIONS

- 4.1** West Dunbartonshire Council's Roads, Environmental Health and Estates Services all have no objection to the proposal.

5. REPRESENTATIONS

- 5.1** No representations have been received.

6. ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

6.1 West Dunbartonshire Local Plan 2010

The application site is located within the defined Retail Core of Dumbarton Town Centre. Policy RET5 (Town Centre Enhancement) seeks to improve the environment of Town Centres and states that applications for non-retail uses within designated Town Centres will be favourably considered where they contribute to the vitality and viability of the town centre and do not conflict with other Local Plan policies. The proposal is considered to be consistent with this policy.

- 6.2** Policy RET6 (Protection of Retail Core) seeks to protect and enhance the retail and commercial function of Town Centres by supporting new retail uses. The policy presumes against any change of use from Class 1 within areas designated as Retail Cores. Applications for such changes of use will only be permitted where it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that such a change would reinforce and revitalise the centre and would not adversely affect the character or amenity of the area. These issues are discussed in Section 7 below, and it is concluded that whilst the proposal is contrary to the loss of retail floor space contained in Policy RET6, it would nonetheless have the potential to assist in the revitalisation of the centre and would not adversely affect the character and amenity of the area.

7. ASSESSMENT AGAINST MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 West Dunbartonshire Local Development Plan (LDP), Proposed Plan

The proposed development site is located within the core retail area of Dumbarton town centre. Policy SC2 states that proposals for the change of use of ground floor Class 1 uses will be assessed in terms of:

- Whether the proposal would significantly reduce the retail offer of the core retail area, or parts of it, or lead to the concentration of a particular use to the detriment of the town centre's vitality and viability;
- Whether the proposed use would contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre by increasing footfall;
- The availability and suitability of other locations in the town centre for the proposed use to locate; and

- Whether the unit affected has been vacant and suitably marketed for retail use.

These issues are considered below, and it is concluded that whilst the proposal would be contrary to policy SC2 in that it would result in the loss of a retail unit within the defined Retail Core, the proposed use can be justified in terms of the unit has been vacant for a number of years and that it will contribute to the vibrancy of the town centre.

7.2 Scottish Planning Policy

Scottish Planning Policy states that planning for town centres should be flexible and proactive, enabling a wide range of uses which bring people into the town centre. The planning system should encourage a mix of uses in town centres to support their vibrancy, vitality and viability throughout the day and into the evening. It is considered that the re-use of a vacant shop unit as a fitness and weight management centre within an area where there are a number of vacant units would contribute positively to the town centre and would therefore be consistent with the principles of SPP.

7.3 Loss of Retail Unit

Like many other town centres, Dumbarton town centre has suffered a decline in the quantity and variety of shops in recent years, due primarily to the loss of retail expenditure to out of centre locations. One of the effects of this is a relatively high number of vacant units, notably within the Artizan Centre. In this case the application premises have been vacant for at least 3 years, throughout which time the vacant units within the Artizan Centre have been marketed and available for let. As the unit has been empty for some time and there is a high rate of vacancies within the Artizan Centre it is considered appropriate to consider suitable alternative uses which would contribute to the vitality of the town centre. There is a tea room in the Artisan Centre and the proposal would introduce a further non-retail use. The loss of this particular unit would not prevent any new retailer from obtaining premises within the Artizan Centre, given the number of vacant units which are available.

- 7.4** There are no similar uses within the town centre therefore the development would not lead to a concentration of this type of use, and the proposal would generate increased footfall which would contribute towards the town centre's vitality and viability. Although there are other vacant units within the town centre which are outwith the Retail Core, it is considered that reducing the number of vacancies within the Artizan Centre back into use is particularly important for the regeneration of the town centre. The loss of the retail unit would therefore be outweighed by the benefits of bringing the unit back unto productive use.

7.5 Other Considerations

There would be no physical alterations made to the external appearance of the building, the application of the frosted film and vinyl graphics to the inside of the window is considered acceptable. There are no residential properties in the immediate vicinity of the site and it is not considered that

any residential properties within the wider High Street area would be adversely affected by the proposal. The Roads Service has no objections to the proposal as there are existing parking facilities nearby and the property is also centrally located for public transport.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1** Although the proposed development would result in the loss of retail floor space within the core retail area, and would therefore be contrary to policy RET5 of the adopted local plan, it would bring a property that has been vacant for some years back into use and would contribute to the vitality and viability of this part of the town centre. It is considered that these benefits outweigh the loss of a retail unit.

9. CONDITIONS

- 1. Prior to the commencement of the development full details of any graphics, film or other material to be applied to the inside of the window on the front elevation of the unit shall be submitted for the further written approval of the Planning Authority and thereafter implemented as approved.**

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Executive Director of Infrastructure and Regeneration
Date: 6 August 2014

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Appendix: None

Background Papers:

1. Application documents and plans
2. West Dunbartonshire Local Plan 2010
3. West Dunbartonshire LDP - Proposed Plan
4. consultation responses

Wards affected: Ward 3 (Dumbarton)