

## **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **Report by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development**

**Planning Committee: 14 August 2013**

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**DC13/145: Proposed Change of Use from Vacant Retail Unit to Children's Soft Play Area and Ancillary Café at 16 Carinthia Way, Clydebank.**

#### **1. REASON FOR REPORT**

- 1.1** The proposal relates to a property in which the Council has a partial ownership interest. Under the terms of the approved Scheme of Delegation it requires to be determined by the Planning Committee.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1** **Grant** full planning permission unconditionally.

#### **3. DEVELOPMENT DETAILS**

- 3.1** The application site comprises a large first floor unit within the Clyde Shopping Centre, located on the north side of Carinthia Way close to the north eastern entrance of the shopping centre. The unit has a floor area of approximately 1350m<sup>2</sup> and has been vacant since November 2012 when the previous retail operator (JJB Sports) closed down. The unit is accessed from within the Clyde Shopping Centre by way of stairs, escalators and a lift from ground floor level in the south western corner of the unit. The site is bordered to the north and east by car parks, and to the south and west by other retail/commercial units within the shopping centre.
- 3.2** Planning permission is sought to change the use from a shop (Use Class 1) into a large indoor children's soft play area with ancillary café (Use Class 11). There would be no external alterations, and alterations within the shopping centre would be limited to signage over the entrance stairs. Within the unit, it is proposed to provide a large climbing frame incorporating various slides, ball pools etc. There would also be a toddler's play area, a mini playcourt for ball sports and an indoor battery operated car track. A large ancillary café area with 172 seats would be provided for the use of parents/guardians whilst their children are playing, and there would be two smaller private rooms which could be hired for parties. It is understood that the premises would be operated by a local company, Sutherlands, which already operates a restaurant within the Clyde Shopping Centre, and that it would employ 10 full time and 5 part time staff. The soft play area is expected to operate from 9am to 6pm Monday to Saturday and 11am to 5pm Sunday. As all access is from within the shopping centre it would not operate in the evenings when the centre is closed.

#### **4. CONSULTATIONS**

- 4.1** West Dunbartonshire Council Estates and Roads Services each have no objection to the proposal.

#### **5. REPRESENTATIONS**

- 5.1** None.

#### **6. ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

**6.1** West Dunbartonshire Council Local Plan 2010.

The site lies within the town centre, which Policies RET1 and RET2 indicates to be the preferred location for retail and commercial leisure activities. Policy RET1 indicates that new retail, commercial leisure, cultural and public service developments and other key town centre uses should adopt a sequential approach to site selection. The first preference should be for town centre sites where sites or buildings suitable for conversion are available. The proposed conversion of a vacant shop unit within the town centre to provide a commercial leisure facility would fully comply with this policy. Policy RET2 has regard to assessment of retail and leisure developments within town centres and indicates that the considerations for this would include the effect on the vitality and viability of town centres. The proposal is therefore consistent with policies RET1 and RET2.

- 6.2** Policy RET5 seeks to improve the environment of Clydebank town centre. Applications for non-retail uses, particularly those involving the re-use of vacant upper floors, 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. This proposal involves re-use of a large vacant unit on an upper floor for a purpose which will attract people to the shopping centre and thus help to improve the vitality and viability of the town centre in general. The proposal is therefore in compliance with Policy RET5.

#### **7. ASSESSMENT AGAINST MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

National Planning Policy

- 7.1** The Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) supports the provision of a mixture of uses and activities within town centres. It recognises that shopping patterns are changing and town centres should support a diverse range of community and commercial activities. Planning Advice Note 59 (Improving Town Centres) emphasises the importance of providing a range of facilities within town centres in order to ensure the attractiveness of the centre. Together these policies support the provision of mixed commercial activities within town centres, and the proposal is consistent with these national policies.

Principle of Non-Retail Use

- 7.2** The application site is at the northern edge of the Clyde Shopping Centre and is outwith the area covered by the core retail frontage policy (RET6). There is

therefore no policy presumption against the loss of retail floorspace. The applicant has submitted a supporting planning statement indicating that they have actively marketed the site for Class 1 retail use but that there has been little interest. The applicant has indicated that the unit is relatively large, and in the current economic climate there are relatively few retailers with requirements for units of such size. Furthermore the retail floorspace is entirely on the upper floor level with minimal frontage, which makes it less attractive to retailers than ground floor units with a wide frontage onto the pedestrian mall. At present there are 6 vacant ground floor units within the Shopping Centre, which indicates the difficulties of finding new occupants in the present market conditions. The vacant units are all smaller than the application premises, however some of these could be combined with vacant first floor accommodation to provide a unit of similar size to the application premises. The loss of the application unit to retail purposes would therefore not prevent a retailer requiring a unit of this size from locating within the shopping centre. Overall, it is accepted that there is limited demand for the unit for retail purposes and that its re-use for appropriate alternative purposes is therefore desirable and in line with all relevant policies.

#### Soft Play Use

- 7.3** Soft play areas are a type of commercial leisure use for which town centres are the preferred locations. The proposed facility is intended to appeal to families who are visiting the town centre for shopping purposes, by providing an opportunity for both children and adults to have a break. It is common for modern shopping centres to include soft play areas, and it should be noted that the St Enoch Centre, Buchanan Galleries, Braehead and Glasgow Fort all have soft play centres. Provision of a soft play area within the shopping centre would therefore broaden the range of facilities available to visitors and would help to attract more people to the town centre, thus increasing footfall and contributing to the overall vitality and viability. The proposed use would therefore be beneficial to the town centre, and it is supported by Policy RET5.
- 7.4** The internal alterations to the shopping centre are of a minor nature and are not subject to planning control. Whilst there would be new signage installed for the entrance, there would be no alteration to the frontage of the unit. Having an active entrance would be preferable to the present shuttered unit, especially as the unit is close to one of the main entrances into the shopping centre.

### **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1** The proposal involves the provision of a new privately operated soft play area within the Clyde Shopping Centre. The proposal is consistent with all relevant policies, and there is no policy objection to the use of a first floor unit outwith the Retail Core area for non-retail purposes. The proposal would contribute to the vitality and viability of Clydebank Town Centre by bringing this unit back into use and by broadening the range of facilities available to visitors.

### **9. CONDITIONS**

None.

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**and Economic Development**  
**Date: 18 July 2013**

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**Appendix:** None.

**Background Papers:**

1. Planning application and plans
2. Consultation responses
3. West Dunbartonshire Local Plan 2010

**Wards affected:** Ward 6 (Clydebank Waterfront)