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FOOD AND DRINK WALES



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## Food Grade Premise Planning Case Study Castell Howell



## Overview

Castell Howell is a food wholesaler which supplies and promotes Welsh produce and prides itself in creating sustainable and fair supply chains. The company provides meat, dairy, beverages and gourmet foods.

Castell Howell has grown and evolved from farming cows and chickens in Trevaughan, Carmarthenshire in the 1970s, to become a business that operates across Wales from sites in Cross Hands, Merthyr Tydfil, Avonmouth, Chirk and Blaenau Ffestiniog. The business now receives orders and deliveries 24 hours a day, 6 days a week, and has grown to a fleet of 100 delivery lorries and 500 employees.

Castell Howell has developed a new meat processing site and recently gained planning permission to expand their headquarters.

## How Did the Company Grow?

Castell Howell had previously operated out of premises in Pensarn near Carmarthen. As the business grew this was extended to include deliveries and cash and carry services to the food trade. In 1999 a second distribution depot was opened in Merthyr, and then another in Avonmouth in 2003.



Our new 60,000 square foot, state-of-the-art Hub and Head Office opened in Cross Hands, near Llanelli.

The business continued to outgrow its premises and in 2007 a new 60,000 square foot delivery hub and Head office was opened on the Cross Hands Business Park near to Llanelli, which the business is now looking to further extend. Further expansion saw distribution hubs opened in Chirk and Blaenau Ffestiniog in North Wales.

During this time their Celtic Pride brand had also been growing in popularity. It

started as a small beef butchering business, but has now grown in scale to process around 4,500 Welsh beef cattle a year and supplies many commercial customers.

A larger facility was required and so a 31,000 square foot butchery capable of handling up to 80 beef carcasses at one time was developed. The facility exclusively processes Welsh beef grown and slaughtered locally, and employs around 70 staff. The whole production facility was a major investment of around £5 million for Castell Howell.



*Local farmers inspecting the new butchery facility at Cross Hands Business Park*

### **Planning:**

The two planning applications were very different, with Castell Howell experiencing some local resident opposition for the butchery but no opposition to the expansion of the Head Office and delivery hub.

### **New Butchery Facility**

Although the Cross Hands Business Park is specifically designed to accommodate food employment businesses the butchery application met with local opposition, and took far longer to process than the Directors at Castell Howell had anticipated.

Castell Howell carried out;

- noise surveys - to demonstrate that they operated within acceptable limits;
- changes to the location and colour of the building were needed, to be as far away from the local residents as possible.

This now means the site is fully developed and further expansion will require a new location, possibly affecting the employment on site.

As the Cross Hands site is specifically zoned for use by a food business the Local Authority was supportive of the application. Relationships from previous developments allowed pre-planning to appease some of the objections made by local residents. Castell Howell is a relatively successful business and so they were able to obtain permission and carry out their developments despite the obstacles they faced. However, the Directors do suspect that similar challenges could act as a growth barrier for smaller less well-resourced businesses.

Due to specific nature of their food employment plans, the business did not engage with local residents to tell them about their plans. When objections arose Castell Howell felt that if the local planning officers had spoken with residents the delays may have been avoided.

**Advice:** The objections significantly increased the time and costs needed to reach full planning approval, as noise, environmental impact and building location studies were required by the Local Authority. Pre-planning and local consultation may be needed to identify these issues and where the employment land use is clear, it may be useful for local planning officers to help communicate with the local community.

### **Head Office expansion**

Receiving permission to expand the Head Office, (pictured page above), was described as a very easy planning application. *“The planning seemed to sail through with no objections, no complications; it was unbelievable in contrast to what we went through with the other building.”*

The business’ headquarters was built in 2007 and was always designed with an extension in mind and had some ‘future-proofing’ built in to the previous planning application and there were no objections or planning issues.

The development did require a relatively small one-off ecological fee to pay (£12,000) due to the building interfering with the flight path of a local species of butterfly.

## **Lessons Learnt**

### **Future-proof planning by considering further development**

1. When undertaking commercial development, if it is possible then future-proof the building by considering further expansion and use. This can help the development be more flexible and faster to develop if the business needs to expand.

## **Informal pre-planning access to Local Authority Planning Development Officers**

2. The language and processes of planning can be difficult for some businesses to understand. Smaller businesses that do not have resources to fund professional engineers, surveyors and architects may benefit from a very informal discussion with Local Authority Planners to understand the possible time and costs needed to obtain planning. Smaller businesses may then be willing to make more formal plans regarding expanding their business premises, and their employment sites.

## **Planning as an enabler of economic growth**

3. The planning system can be an enabler and catalyst to growth as well as a technical process to ensure lawful property development. It is useful to ensure that planning officers consider and understand both sides of the process, possibly through training or working closely with economic development teams and business associations.