



Food Grade Premise Planning Case Study

Halen Môn



Overview



Halen Môn Sea Salt is produced at Brynsiencyn on the Isle of Anglesey by the Anglesey Sea Salt Company. Halen Môn is the Welsh translation of “Anglesey Salt”. The Company was founded by Alison and David Lea-Wilson in 1997.

The Company currently produces a range of pure and flavoured sea salts, ground pure salt for manufacturing and smoked water, which is used as a food ingredient. Halen Môn is exported to more than 20 countries and is used by 20-30 manufacturers as an ingredient in their products.

Halen Môn Sea Salt is made from the clean, clear seawaters that surround the beautiful island of Anglesey in North Wales. In 2014, Halen Môn was awarded Protected Designation of Origin status by the European Commission, joining the likes of Champagne, Parma Ham and Melton Mowbray Pork Pies.

The Company opened new premises, including a visitor centre in 2015 and currently employs 23 staff.

How Did the Company Grow?

The production of Halen Môn Sea Salt started in 1997 when a saucepan of seawater was left to boil in the family kitchen and sea salt formed. In 1999 the business began when the company started supplying sea salt to a local butcher on the Isle of Anglesey. The business grew rapidly with sea salt being produced in a series of “porta cabins” extracting sea water by pumping the sea water directly into these premises where the sea salt was manufactured. As the business expanded, the company outgrew their existing premises and also saw the potential for combining salt production with a tourist attraction.



The business is based in the Anglesey Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and therefore the new premises needed to demonstrate compliance with planning policies aiming to protect the landscape of the area.

Alison and David were very keen to develop a tourist visitor attraction in conjunction with the expansion of the sea salt facility and so a coastal area frequented by tourists was preferred to an industrial park.

Plans for new premises were designed but ultimately took 11 years from initial ideas to construction due, in part, to the preferred location of the premises in an AONB. It was necessary to demonstrate that the appearance of the property was appropriate for the local area, therefore, the design of the building and its landscaping needed careful consideration. Active engagement with key stakeholders, particularly planning officers, local councillors and local MPs was crucial to finally obtaining planning permission and local buy-in.



The new Anglesey Sea Salt/Halen Môn Visitor Centre opened in February 2015, encompassing a total of 996 square metres at a cost of £1.25m and includes;

- factory
- shop
- viewing gallery
- education room
- salt tasting bar; and
- office accommodation

As both a production site and tourist attraction, costs were incurred which were specific to the tourist element of the facility namely interpretation (videos and viewing gallery into production), bilingual graphics, visitor amenity facilities, safety facilities and extra food security providing division between staff areas and visitor areas with fingerprint locks on food area doors. It is estimated that the visitor centre will attract 30,000 visitors annually by 2020.

Funding for the project came from David and Alison, the Coastal Communities fund, the Welsh Government's Economic Growth Fund and Anglesey Council.

Lessons Learnt

Advice: Don't agree to any planning conditions just because you are relieved to get planning! Always ensure that you take an architect and a quantity surveyor with you when discussing planning conditions so that they can provide an accurate idea of the cost implications of specific planning conditions.

There are three main lessons that Alison and David would like to share.

Reason: When planning was obtained it was granted with 10 planning conditions. Many conditions affected how the development was built out and work was required to discharge or amend conditions. Addressing conditions incurs costs and takes time so it is worth discussing these with the Local Authority before the Decision Notice is issued to ensure conditions are not too restrictive. David and Alison said that if they had agreed to all conditions from the outset the cost of the building would have cost nearly three times what it finally cost.

Advice: Ensure that the planning restrictions are not so restrictive that obtaining funding to finance the project becomes impossible.

Reason: Amongst the planning conditions imposed on Anglesey Sea Salt Company was Condition 2 that read:

'The premises shall only be used as a sea salt manufacturing place (with associated offices, visitors area and shop) and for no other purpose within Class B1 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 without the further express consent of the local planning authority.'

The condition was applied to allay local concerns that the development could lead to industrialisation of the area and justify industry to be located there that may not have the same local benefits demonstrated by the Anglesey Sea Salt Company. Without this condition, the Company could sell the land to another industry and no further planning consent would be required and as a result the Local Authority would have no powers to prevent it. Therefore, the condition was seen as necessary by the Local Authority. However, the condition significantly affects the value of any assets built because it would make the premises very difficult to sell. This means that borrowing money against the assets or to construct them was difficult and additional work was needed to convince financiers to fund the project.

'In our case when planning permission was finally obtained it was very specific to the manufacture of the product which then proved very difficult when investigating funding sources to help finance the project. Potential sources of funding felt that the planning condition restraints were too restrictive and therefore too much of a liability to lend against. In the end it took a further 18 months after planning was obtained to get a letter in writing from the Director of Planning stating that if the enterprise failed "the Planning Department would look favourably towards an application for change of usage". This then enabled us to access finance.'

Advice: Try to establish what the key issues are for stakeholders and then work together to think of different ways to address the problem to find a solution that works for everyone. Often there may be more cost effective solutions to problems once it is clear what the main concerns are. Work positively with stakeholders and the Local Authority wherever possible. Ensure you understand why a stakeholder, local person or the Local Authority is requesting a change to the design or a planning condition so that you can consider all alternatives for providing what they ask for and whether requests are 'necessary'.

Originally a 2.5 metre bank was to be constructed around the premises for screening purposes. However it was later agreed to reduce the height of the bank to 1 metre as it was successfully argued that the original height of the bank impeded light and affected the working conditions for employees. Landscaping of the site and careful consideration of materials helped to ensure that the development was well designed without use of the high bund.