



## Food Grade Premise Planning Case Study Welsh Hills Bakery



## Overview



Welsh Hills Bakery is a third generation family business specialising in Gluten Free, Wheat free and Dairy Free products. The company based in Hirwaun South Wales currently employs over 60 staff and supplies in excess of 80 product lines which are available online and are distributed widely in Europe, Scandinavia, Australia and the USA.

In 2001 the company started producing quality 'Free From' products specialising in gluten free recipes. Their main customer portfolio at that time was to supply major UK supermarkets with supermarket branded gluten free products. In 2008 the company developed its own brand of gluten free products named "Lovemore Free From Foods" which produces a range of both gluten and dairy free bakery items.



## How Did the Company Grow?

Welsh Hills Bakery has been an established bakery since 1956 and operated from locations in both Aberavon and Aberdare before moving to its current location in 1986. The current premises are privately owned and were built by converting premises which were previously being used as a car garage. In 1986, suitable food grade premises in the area were not available, hence the conversion. In 2002 the premises were extended to provide a warehouse and plans are proposed to extend the premises further (subject to obtaining planning permission) in 2016.

As the business has grown, the company have considered moving but each time the decision has been made to expand the premises on the existing site for the following main reasons:

- 1) Existing premises meets food standards and utility supplies are in situ. There are no suitable food grade premises in the locality, so any move would still incur significant costs to meet requirements.

- 2) The site is now a dedicated Gluten and Wheat Free production facility with all products produced at the site being Gluten and Wheat free. As a food enterprise specialising in gluten/wheat and dairy free products, it would be difficult for the business to share premises with other types of food businesses. Being in a separate, detached unit away from other food premises makes it far easier to avoid contamination and is therefore advantageous.
- 3) Many of the residents in the locality are employed at the company. The business is an important source of employment in the area.
- 4) In the past, planning permission to extend has not been refused and the Local Authority has been very helpful and supportive.

The site in 1986 was surrounded by farmland, however during the last 10 years residential development has occurred in the vicinity. The design of the proposed extension has had to take this into consideration. As a result the proposed extension is located on the aspect where no residential housing exists and there may be restrictions as to the overall height of the extension. Engaging with Local Authority, councillors and residents from the onset and throughout planning is of vital importance.

As a gluten/wheat and dairy free site the company has to comply with strict standards set by the industry and to operate to the most stringent controls. Every batch of relevant ingredients and all batches of finished goods are tested in an “in-house laboratory”, on a positive release basis of < 20ppm gluten (most results being < 10ppm), and < 2.5ppm total milk. Products, procedures and machinery are constantly monitored to ensure they meet and exceed high standards of quality control. Welsh Hills Bakery is BRC Accredited Grade “A”. Facilities at the premises include the following areas:

- Goods in store
- Weighing area
- Mixing
- Production
- Baking
- Cooling
- De-panning
- Cutting/finishing
- Packing
- Finished goods store
- Despatch

The above means that a bespoke premises is necessary and suggests that for these type of businesses, the main aim could be to ensure businesses have access to land in the right locations or support obtaining consent on their existing holdings, rather than access to ready built food grade premises.

Overall, the company strategy has been to develop bespoke premises and expand on their existing site as far as possible. Positive engagement with the local community has helped this process.



## Lessons Learnt

A lot of the processes for this development have gone relatively well, although there is one main lesson from this study.

**Advice: Engage with the local community stakeholders from the onset.**

Where possible develop and maintain a good relationships with stakeholders and local people in your area as this will help to ensure expansion opportunities are locally supported.

This case study provides an example of a case where a business has continually grown and expanded, with a supportive relationship with the Local Planning Authority. Where expansion has been required, obtaining planning permission has been relatively straight-forward. This is partly due to the fact that the business employs local people and the economic benefits to the local area are very clear. Where local people and organisations are supportive of your business, you are much less likely to find objections to planning applications, making the process quicker and easier. The supportive approach of the Local Authority is also to be commended in supporting the local business.

**Advice: Be clear about employment benefits.**

Where there are or may be employment benefits for local people, make this clear to local stakeholders and residents at pre-planning and consultation stages so that the social value of the development is understood.

Whilst planning permission has not been granted yet for the additional extension, the chances of consent will be heightened by the company's proactive approach to engagement and care taken to respect the surroundings and minimise impacts wherever possible.