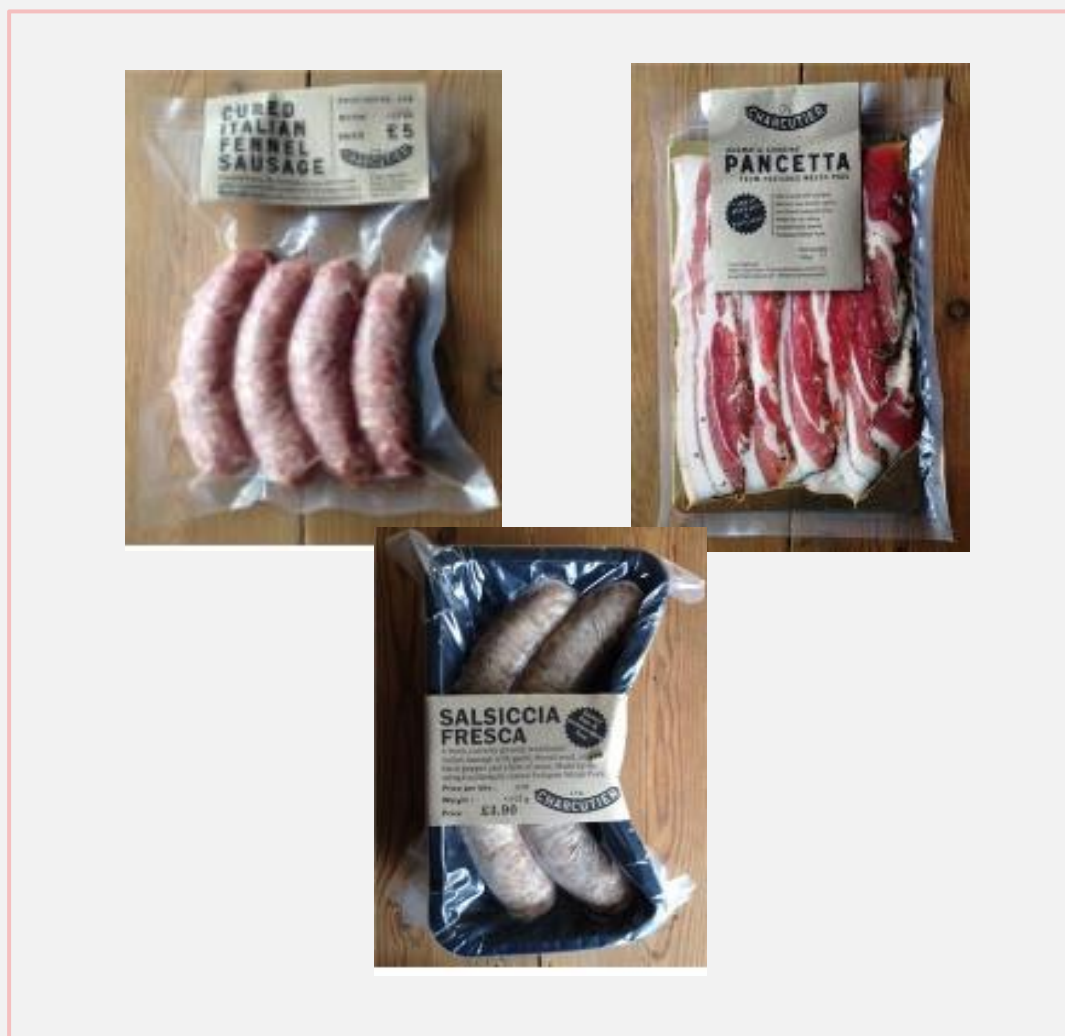




## Food Grade Premise Planning Case Study

### Charcutier Ltd



## Overview

*Charcutier Ltd* is an artisan charcuterie company which brings together British, South European and North American methods of curing. The company currently sell a range of hand salted bacons and gluten-free and preservative-free sausages across South Wales through direct deliveries and produce/farmers markets. The company have been developing a range of air dried products since 2014 and opened a large on-farm production facility in 2015.



## How did the Company Grow?



The company was co-founded by Illtud Llyr Dunsford and Liesel Taylor in 2010 when the first batch of bacon and sausages for retail were made in the farmhouse kitchen. In early 2011 the facilities at the Food Centre Horeb were used to develop a product range and in 2012 Charcutier leased one of the incubator units at the Food Centre to start production.

The Food Centre at Horeb is located in Ceredigion and Charcutier is a Carmarthenshire based company. The company were unable to find any food grade premises in Carmarthenshire that were suitable for a start-up food business. There were no suitable units available at the Cross Hands Food Park, with any units available being far too large. The impression received was that there were food grade premises available for larger businesses wishing to expand but not for start-up food businesses. The location at Horeb meant that the founding staff had to travel over 50 miles (round trip) to produce their product, due to the lack of facilities locally. The facilities at Horeb were adequate for a business starting to grow and the waiting time to lease a unit was less than a year. However at Horeb, the company was fitting production into an existing unit as opposed to bespoke facilities.

Therefore, as the business expanded, they looked to develop their own premises in Llanelli in Carmarthenshire at a former milking parlour. Charcutier first submitted a planning application in August 2011 and although the initial application had to be withdrawn and re-submitted, they gained planning consent in December 2011. The bespoke food processing facilities were finally built in 2014 and opened in 2015.

The former milking parlour is now a state of the art purpose built factory with meat lab facilities, a well equipped butchery, Italian drying room, German smokehouse and comprehensive recipe development centre.

It is envisaged that further expansion might be required at some time in the future, not necessarily due to market growth but more to provide facilities for different types of production, so this is a company that is looking to continue to evolve and develop.

## Lessons Learnt

There are three main lessons emerging from this study for businesses or supporting bodies looking to gain planning permission for new food grade premises.

**Advice:** Consult key stakeholders and the Local Planning Authority so that you can incorporate comments into your planning application

In August 2011 the company applied for planning permission for bespoke facilities at the farm by converting a redundant old milking parlour. The company was very thorough in consulting and engaging with all parties before and during the planning process. This meant that the process was relatively streamlined. Food Centre Wales and Environmental Health were extremely helpful and provided advice on the design of the building.

Charcutier also obtained advice from the Environment Agency (now Natural Resource Wales) on drainage which they incorporated into their planning application which was submitted in June 2011. Unfortunately the application received an objection from the Environment Agency on drainage and so was withdrawn in August 2011. Charcutier was surprised at this given the previous advice they had received and so would advise other businesses to ensure they keep records of consultation in writing to avoid similar issues.

**Advice:** Obtain advice from statutory consultees in writing wherever possible and retain records.

Charcutier worked with the Environment Agency to develop a drainage scheme and a revised application was submitted in November 2011 and approved under delegated powers<sup>1</sup> in December 2011. Given that, following planning permission, separate consent is required for drainage, the combination of the planning delay and the delay obtaining separate consent led to an estimated project delay of 12 months.

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<sup>1</sup> Delegated powers means that a planning application is approved by a Planning Officer without the need to be discussed by the Planning Committee. Planning applications are often determined this way where applications are small and/ or relatively uncontentious.

Therefore, agreeing some further details of drainage earlier in the process could have led to building earlier. It is noted that many businesses either cannot provide details on drainage at an early stage or would not want to invest in doing so until planning consent is obtained. However, a full understanding of all consents required at an early stage can help businesses make decisions on when to carry out work to obtain different consents and early consultation can help do this.

The case study also highlighted recommendations for the support of food businesses more generally.

**Advice:** Ensure agencies are sufficiently staffed to assist food businesses through consent processes

The experience of Charcutier was generally that key stakeholders and agencies were supportive of their development. However, it was felt that both Trading Standards and Environmental Health were extremely over stretched and underfunded and in some cases their extent of knowledge is too broad to provide advice to specific food businesses. It was felt that there is a need to provide more specialist advice to industries whose issues vary significantly depending on their product.

Similarly there were instances where Charcutier felt that Building Control were treating the premises as if it was required for residential usage rather than specialist food production. Therefore, again, it would be useful to ensure that staff dealing with Building Regulation applications fully understand the needs of food businesses and regulations for Food Grade premises. Guidance may be useful to assist this.

**Advice:** Ensure there is a sufficient supply of food grade premises for start-up businesses and more premises in general in Carmarthenshire

Charcutier were looking for premises five years ago so it is possible that shortages the company experienced no longer exist. However, if the problems endure, it may be that the Welsh Government, Local Authorities and supporting agencies need to consider how to increase the supply of food grade premises for these types/ location of businesses. This may be particularly the case for start-up businesses, as businesses that are not located near existing food centres may not be able to locate start-up space.