

**PLANNING SUPPORTING STATEMENT FOR A FULL PLANNING
APPLICATION FOR THE CHANGE OF USE OF AN EXISTING
GROUND FLOOR VACANT RETAIL AREA (WITHIN USE CLASS A1)
TO RESIDENTIAL (WITHIN USE CLASS C3) USE TO RESULT IN A
SINGLE DWELLING HOUSE TOGETHER WITH ALTERATIONS TO
IMPROVE DISABLED ACCESS.**

28, WERN ROAD, YSTALYFERA.

On behalf of Applicant Mr Terry Casey



NOVEMBER 2020

Prepared by:

KEVIN H. JONES (M.R.T.P.I.)

CHARTERED TOWN PLANNING CONSULTANT.



Office 22, Sandfields Business Centre, Purcell Avenue, Sandfields, Port Talbot, SA12 7PQ.

CONTENT.

1.0 INTRODUCTION.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION AND EXISTING PHYSICAL CONTEXT.

3.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT.

4.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT.

5.0 CONCLUSION.



ABOVE: Photograph of the existing ground floor former retailing space, currently utilised as domestic storage, home office and a hobby workshop for the applicant.

FRONT COVER: Photograph of 28, Wern Road. Premises sit behind a paved forecourt and existing dropped curb footway crossing gave previous retail customers/deliveries full access to this forecourt parking area. Although buildings are terraced and terraced blocks step-up the hill, there is a wide variety in the detail appearance of each premises.

1.0 INTRODUCTION.

1.1 This statement has been prepared to support the submission of a planning application to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. The application seeks full planning permission for the Change of Use of existing (A1) Retail floor space to Residential (C3), utilised as part of the existing first floor residential use so that the whole property is returned to a single dwelling house. As part of this application, the applicant also seeks consent to alterations to the frontage to give better access and adapt the premises, principally for the applicant's wife who suffers from Osteoarthritis and in order for the applicant and his wife to continue living in their home into the future.

1.2 The statement considers both the physical and policy context for the development and sets the design parameters to respond to this context. The statement gives consideration to the issue of amenity in terms of the character of the area, and to the potential impacts upon neighbours' amenity. As part of the formal planning application the statement can, should the Local Planning Authority wish, form the basis of planning conditions on any approval notice.

1.3 The statement has been prepared by Kevin H. Jones pgDip Town Planning, M.R.T.P.I., a Chartered Town Planner who is both qualified and experienced in Development Management and operates a private planning consultancy in line with the Royal Town Planning Institute code of conduct.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION AND EXISTING PHYSICAL CONTEXT.

2.1 The application site is on the North side of Wern Road within the village of Ystalyfera in the upper Swansea valley. The road climbs up the valley side in a North East to South Westerly direction flowing from Commercial Road in the North East. The area is of an historic linear settlement pattern of mixed residential and commercial retailing uses in fairly high-density terraced property to both sides of the road. Typically, properties open directly out onto the back edge of the footway, or are set behind short front gardens or paved forecourt areas.

2.2 Wern Road, together with Commercial Road and Gurnos Road represent the linear central road to the settlement and at times past, the thriving commercial streets of the village. A number of the properties lining both sides of the street have in the past been subject to substantial alterations to form ground floor retailing or commercial space with residential or storage space above. However, demand for such small scale commercial space has declined over many years and many such properties are now vacant or have fallen back to full residential use. This is especially so since the construction and opening of the nearby Tesco store in Ystradgynlais and Asda in Gurnos, both stores within a mile of the application site and having a marked effect upon the viability of any existing traditional commercial retailing establishments in Wern Road and Commercial Road. This is recognised by the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan designation of the district centre of Ystalyfera in very much reduced form, covering a relatively small area of Commercial Road, well to the North East of the application site.

2.3 28, Wern Road is a typical two storey traditional building of rendered walls below a tiled roof. The premises were previously subject to a mixed use of retailing with residential space above.

The upper floor elevation treatment of 3 traditional sash type window proportions (though the actual windows are now modern UPVC double glazed units) are indicative of an original double fronted residential dwelling house. However, the ground floor has been subject to the fitting of 2 large retail display type windows flanking one to each side of a central double width entrance door. The ground floor retailing area provided a relatively large (for the street) 1112sqft used as a convenience store known as Siop-Y-Pentref. The shop ceased trading in June 2013.

2.4 The property sits back off the footway behind a 3.9m deep paved forecourt area which in conjunction with a dropped kerb along the frontage used to provide for parking for up to 3 or 4 vehicles or deliveries space when the shop was in use. However, this area was fenced off with decorative metal railings after the closure of the shop unit in order to prevent parking use (and the inevitable night time disturbance) in association with the Red Cow public house opposite.



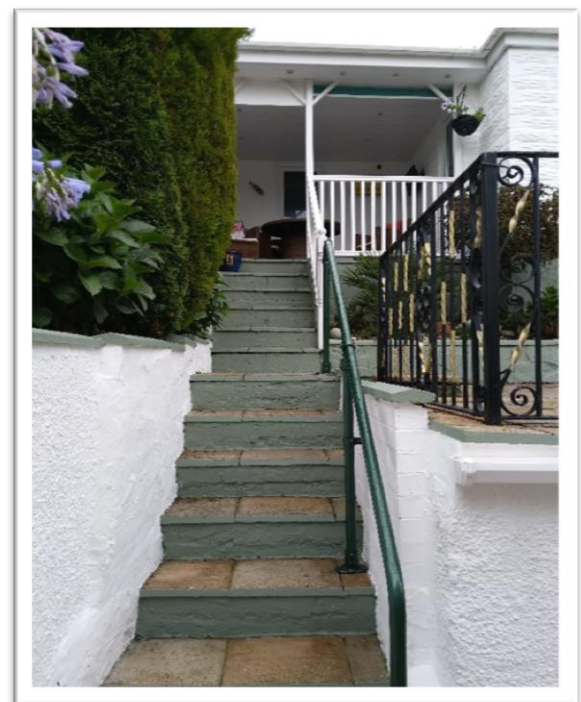
LEFT: Photograph looking out of the rear of the ground floor former retail space to the small rear passageway and steep external stone access stairs to the residential accommodation above. These stairs are steep, slippery when wet and difficult to negotiate despite the addition of the disability standard hand rail.

2.5 28, Wern Road is built almost into the hill side with the effect that the rear of the ground floor retailing premises opens up onto a small external passage, retaining wall and a steep stone staircase leading to the first floor level rear amenity courtyard for the 1st floor residential space. There is no internal linking staircase between ground floor retail area and first floor residential area. Whilst there is a narrow side passage leading from the front of the premises to the rear area, this passage is in the ownership and control of the neighbouring property and is used by the applicant only with the consent of his neighbour. From the rear amenity courtyard a further external staircase leads up to another small amenity terrace and then a further staircase up to a detached garage building which opens out onto Gough Road, running parallel to Wern Road but at substantially higher level on the valley side.

The existing residential accommodation cannot be reached from either Wern Road or Gough Road without negotiating steep flights of steps, presenting substantial difficulties for anyone with mobility difficulties.



LEFT AND BELOW: Stone steps from ground level lead up to the rear terraced amenity area courtyard and the entrance to the residential accommodation. A further two flights of steep and narrow stairs lead up to the level of the existing Garage which opens onto Gough Road. The current residential accommodation is isolated by staircases.



3.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT.

3.1 As indicated above, the retail use ceased in June 2013 and since then, the applicant and his wife have continued to reside at the premises, occupying the first floor residential accommodation and

investing significantly in the property to improve the quality of the accommodation and make it their home. By 2014, the ground floor retailing unit was fully cleared of all remaining stock and the applicant was using the space as his office and hobby workshop/store in association with the occupation of the above residential space. Without prejudice to the fact that the applicant may be able to prove sufficient and uninterrupted use over time of the retailing space as residential, he has decided to formally apply for planning permission for the change of use and alterations necessary to the building in this one application in order to enable him and his wife to continue living in their home into the future.

3.2 The applicant's wife has been diagnosed some years ago with Osteoarthritis in the lower spine. This is a degenerative condition which has worsened over time to the point where she now finds difficulty in walking and extreme difficulty in negotiating steps. Whilst the existing first floor residential accommodation is adapted for her needs, she has considerable difficulty in negotiating the numerous stairs to gain access to the accommodation. As Mrs Casey's condition is a degenerative one, the current difficulties experienced will inevitably get worse into the future and so the time has come to make necessary adaptations to the property to accommodate her needs.

3.3 In addition to formalising the change of use of the ground floor to become part of the single dwelling unit, the application will look to install a new lift from the ground to the first floor. The front elevation changes proposed, amount to the removal of one of the large retailing windows and in its place, reworking the opening to provide for a garage entrance door to a newly formed garage area from part of the former retail space. This will enable the applicant to drive into the building and help his wife in and out of the car in the dry and then to access easily the lift to the upstairs accommodation. The remainder of the ground floor area would remain as the applicant's office and hobby workshop space in association with the residential space above.

3.4 In creating the new garage door to the frontage, the proposal would be to install an electrically operated sectional type garage door which has been factory colour coated to match the existing pedestrian front entrance door. The use of a sectional door means that a vehicle can be parked right up to the door and the door still operated to open and close. Notwithstanding the remote electrical operation and the sectional type of garage door proposed, the applicant has been mindful of ensuring sufficient space will exist to pull the car onto the existing forecourt and to stop it clear of the footway and so the new garage door will be recessed as shown in the plans. This recess will also serve to make the garage door less noticeable within the street scene. In order to ensure that the recess does not provide a potential hiding place for anti-social behaviour (despite it being within the fenced curtilage), an energy efficient LED security bulkhead light with a PIR switch will be fitted in the recess ceiling. The proposed sectional garage door is also of an insulated design, likely to provide thermal efficiency improvement over the existing large former retail display window.

4.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT.

4.1 The national planning policy context comprises Planning Policy Wales (PPW) edition 10 and the relevant Welsh Government planning Technical Advice Notes (TAN). In addition, the LPA should consider its responsibilities under the Human Rights Act and the Well Being of Future Generations Act as without the alterations proposed, Mrs Casey may be put to considerable hardship as her condition worsens in future, eventually to the point where the applicant and his wife could no longer occupy the property.

4.2 The purpose of PPW is set out in the Ministerial forward as being *‘to ensure that the planning decisions taken in Wales, no matter how big, or how small, are going to improve the lives of both our current and future generations. It will support changing the way we live and work, and the buildings and environment of Wales, today, building a better environment to accommodate current and future needs’*.

4.3 Page 28 of PPW, paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6 go on to state *‘Good design is inclusive design. Development proposals should place people at the heart of the design process, acknowledge diversity and offer choice where a single design solution cannot accommodate all users, provide for flexibility in use and provide buildings and environments that are convenient and enjoyable to use for everyone. Development proposals must address the issues of inclusivity and accessibility for all. This includes making provision to meet the needs of people with sensory, memory, learning and mobility impairments, older people and people with young children’*.

4.4 PPW primary aim is sustainable place making. Paragraph 4.11.9 of PPW states that: *‘the visual appearance of proposed development, its scale and its relationship to its surroundings and context are material planning considerations. Local planning authorities should reject poor building and contextual designs. However, they should not attempt to impose a particular architectural taste or style arbitrarily and should avoid inhibiting opportunities for innovative design solutions.’*

4.5 PPW is clearly supportive of the adaptability of existing buildings to meet current and future needs, especially when those adaptations increase accessibility and as in this case, are in order to meet needs of someone with increasing mobility impairment. The existing building and large retail area at ground floor level affords the opportunity and space to be able to adapt the building to meet Mrs Casey’s needs into the future with minimal disruption and change to the external fabric and building frontage. The proposals provide for an innovative design solution to the applicant’s future needs enabling Mr and Mrs Casey to continue living at the premises and primarily living on the first floor with its direct and level access out on to the amenity area at rear. Simply converting the ground floor to provide the main accommodation is not suitable in this situation as it would deny Mrs Casey access to the external garden terrace amenity area. Dropped curbing to enable footway crossing by vehicles and a paved forecourt area already exist from accommodating vehicle parking in association with past retailing. The existing large expanse of glazing to the retail windows at ground floor already depart from the original lines and architectural style of the building and so the change of one of these windows to that of a garage door will have minimal additional impact upon the street scene.

4.6 Planning Application and Appeal decisions must be made in accordance with the adopted Development Plan and other material planning considerations. The adopted Statutory Development Plan for the area within which the application site is positioned is the Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan, adopted January 2016 (LDP). Within this LDP, the application site is shown to be within defined settlement boundaries as set in Policy SC1. The application site is not within the setting of any Listed Building or Scheduled Ancient Monument and is not within a designated Conservation Area. The site is outside of the designated Local Retail Centre as designated in Policy R1 and R2, where controls are placed upon changes of use away from retailing or commercial activity. The following planning policies have been considered of relevance in the preparation of this application and proposals;

SC 2 Protection of Existing Community Facilities *Any proposals which would result in the loss of an important existing community facility will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that:*

1. The facility is surplus to requirements; or

2. The existing use is no longer viable.

4.7 Notwithstanding the fact that the application premises are some way outside of the designated Local Centre, Paragraph 3.0.21 of the LDP clearly defines a local shop as a community facility where that facility has performed an important function in the life of that local community. As a convenience store, the application site would in the past have filled such a role but this would have been many years ago and prior to the introduction of the LDP.

4.8 As previously stated, the retail shop ceased trading in 2013. Convenience retailing space of the type offered by the application site simply cannot compete with the nearby Asda and Tesco stores. Despite the applicant's use of the vacant ground floor as his workshop/office and storage area in association with the above dwelling, attempts were made to actively market the premises in 2017 for a reasonable price comparable for the area. A copy of the marketing particulars by local estate agents Clee Tompkinson Francis is attached at the end of this statement.

RIGHT: Terraced buildings on opposite side of street tend to be situated directly on to back edge of footway. Whilst buildings to both sides of the street are terraced, these terraces display numerous heights, styles and detailing between individual premises. High incidence of vacancies in former retail units contribute to a run-down appearance.



4.9 Sale of the premises would have enabled the applicant and his wife to move to somewhere more suitable for their needs. This marketing commenced on the 31/07/2017 and ran until the 17/08/2020 but whilst there were a number of viewings, unfortunately no offers were received. The fact that the applicant has been unable to sell the premises as retailing space with accommodation above, demonstrates the lack of demand for such space within the area. It also means that the applicant must look to adapt their current building to be suitable for their needs into their retirement.

4.10 The applicant has carried out a basic Retail Vacancy survey prior to making this application. The LPA will note that at the time of making this submission, the adjacent retail/residential property at 26a, Wern Road is also on the market and provides useful price comparability. The Red Cow public

house opposite has ceased trading and has been converted to flats and within a few hundred metres of the application site, a number of vacant former commercial premises lie empty or have fallen into full residential use. This is further evidence of lack of any demand for any sustainable A1 use in this location.



ABOVE: Other former commercial units within the street have slipped back in to full residential use which is indicative of lack of any demand for retailing use. Where uses have returned back to residential the properties are generally of better maintained appearance than those retail units remaining vacant.

BE1 Design All development proposals will be expected to demonstrate high quality design which fully takes into account the natural, historic and built environmental context and contributes to the creation of attractive, sustainable places.

Proposals will only be permitted where all of the following criteria, where relevant, are satisfied:

- 1. It complements and enhances the character and appearance of the site, building or area in terms of siting, appearance, scale, height, massing and elevation treatment;*
- 2. It respects the context of the site and its place within the local landscape, including its impact on the important arterial gateways into the County Borough, its effects on townscape and the local historic and cultural heritage and it takes account of the site topography and prominent skylines or ridges;*
- 3. It utilises materials appropriate to its surroundings and incorporates hard and soft landscaping and screening where appropriate;*

4. *It would not have a significant adverse impact on highway safety, the amenity of occupiers of adjacent land or the community;*
5. *Important local features (including buildings; amenity areas, green spaces and green infrastructure, biodiversity and ecological connectivity) are retained and enhanced as far as possible;*
6. *It achieves and creates attractive, safe places and public spaces, taking account of 'Secured by Design' principles (including where appropriate natural surveillance, visibility, well-lit environments and areas of public movement);*
7. *It plays a full role in achieving and enhancing an integrated transport and communications network promoting the interests of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport and ensures linkages with the existing surrounding community;*
8. *It uses resources, including land and energy, as efficiently as possible through: (a) Making the best and most efficient use of the land available through being of appropriate density taking into account the character and appearance of the area; (b) The layout and form of the development does not preclude the reasonable use of other adjacent land; (c) Developing brownfield land in preference to greenfield land where possible; (d) Minimising building exposure while maximising solar gain.*
9. *Its drainage systems are designed to limit surface water run-off and flood risk and prevent pollution;*
10. *The layout and design of the development achieves inclusive design by ensuring barrier free environments, allowing access by all and making full provision for people with disabilities.*



LEFT: Existing long length of dropped curb footway crossing and contrasting demarcation paving line illustrates the past use of the forecourt area for retail parking in past times when the area was very much busier and demand for parking at a premium. Decorative metal fencing added in recent years to prevent disturbance from unauthorised parking.

4.11 The proposal can be seen to be in compliance with the relevant criteria of LDP Policy BE1. External alterations proposed are kept to a minimum in order to respect the existing building and the

character of the street scene. As far as possible, the installation of the new garage door and recess utilises the position and sizes of an existing former retail display window but with the opening extended to the ground through removal of the stall riser wall. Installation of the new garage door on this right side has been deliberately chosen not only to provide the best visibility for a vehicle to manoeuvre, clear of neighbouring garden walls, but also so as to complement the existing design by utilising this new large element to visually counterbalance the fact that the existing frontage is asymmetrical with a slightly larger proportion of its frontage to the left of the entrance door than to the right. Existing frontage features such as the end fascia pillars and the fascia form within the rendering above the doors and windows will remain.

4.12 The ability to utilise the forecourt area as off street parking is established with the dropped curb and the previous retail use. The reduced demand in this street to support commercial activity has led to a significant reduction in vehicle movements and congestion on Wern Road in recent years and despite the road incline, the street is considered relatively safe, straight and with good visibility, to enable reversing manoeuvres safely. Such reversing manoeuvres can already take place with respect to the application site and the application proposals will not make this situation worse than it could be under retail use. Indeed, as a single dwelling use, the site will draw substantially less traffic and parking than would the previous retail use. The proposed recess of the new garage door brings improvement in the past parking situation by ensuring the full length of a car can be accommodated clear of the footway whereas previously, vehicles would have part overhung the pavement.



LEFT: Large windows reflective of a more modern shop frontage departs from traditional older Victorian/Edwardian shop front styles seen elsewhere in the street. Adjacent premises 26a Wern Road is also a vacant retail premises with residential accommodation above. Neighbouring front door immediately adjacent to the application site access the side passageway between the two properties but is in the sole control of the neighbours.

4.13 Once inside the garage doors, the new domestic garage area will be created by new partition walls giving a generous space in which to enter and exit the vehicle in the dry and then to progress through the double doors at level to the new Stiltz Lift. These lifts are particularly suited for domestic use situations operating by way of hydraulic rams and therefore dispensing with the need for designing accommodation for overhead cabling and motor rooms. The new lift will enable access directly into the residential accommodation above and whilst this will be at the expense of a small bedroom, this loss is more than made up for by the improvements in access for the applicant and his wife. As such, the proposed alterations result in an inclusive building providing a barrier free living

environment. The remainder of the former retailing area at ground level will continue to be used by the appellant as his domestic hobby workshop, office and storage area.

5.0 CONCLUSION.

5.1 The application proposed change of use removes a redundant retail use for which there is clearly no demand within this area. The lack of demand is clearly evidenced by the applicant's attempts to market the building and by the fact that there are numerous vacant commercial type units within the street or which have already fallen back to full residential use. The formal change of use of the premises to a single dwelling will bring amenity benefits for the occupiers of the adjacent residential dwelling house.

5.2 Whilst the above proposed physical alterations are not something typically proposed in a terraced building setting, in this case the proposal can be achieved with minimal detrimental impact to the style and appearance of the building or the character of the street scene. Terraced building form apart, there is a wide variety in individual building detailing and frontage styling which will accommodate change within the street scene without harm to the character of the area. The fairly modern existing shop front at ground level and large openings in this case lend themselves to replacement with a garage door without substantial alteration to the frontage appearance. In addition, some precedent already exists within Wern Road for such installation of a garage door within a traditional terrace building, if one looks at 86, Wern Road, to the south west of the application site, and where the siting of a garage door into the building has been accomplished some time ago without harm to the building or street scene. The application site proposals have been sensitively designed and are incorporated into a building set further back within the street scene and so will be less prominent. The alterations can be further justified by the need to make improvements in accessibility to the building, to enable the applicant and his wife to continue living at the property into the future. These access improvements outweigh the untypical addition of a garage door into the terrace building elevation and as such, planning permission should be granted.

RIGHT: 86, Wern Road situated towards the upper south west of the street gives an example of how a garage door has been inserted into a traditional terraced property.

Whilst it may have been installed pre-planning, it nevertheless exists as a component part of the character within the street scene.

