

Planning Statement to Support an Application for Retrospective Planning Permission for the Change of Use of the Crynant Service Station to Office, Storage and Laundering for a Cleaning and Property Maintenance Business

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared by CDN Planning (Wales) Ltd on behalf of Mr Rob Thomas and Miss Caryl Thomas, the owners of Sparkles Solutions, the occupiers of the property. The company has occupied and traded from the property for a period in excess of 5 years having previously been advised in 2017 via a telephone call to the planning department that a change of use planning permission was not required. At the same time the applicants were visited by the rural development fund who were keen to assist with the conversion. There was thus no reason at that time to believe that a formal grant of permission was needed for the new use.
- 1.2 In 2019 the applicants were visited by an enforcement officer who advised that change of use permission was actually required. This was queried with the department as the storage use of the building seemed to Mr Thomas to be very similar to the previous use, but they would not discuss the issue further without a formal pre-app submission.
- 1.3 In 2019, therefore, Mr and Miss Thomas submitted an application for change of use Permission. They were advised, however, that the application was unacceptable and they were forced to withdraw it. A revised application supported by a statement was then submitted in 2020 but the applicants were again told that it was unacceptable and had to be withdrawn.
- 1.4 Some two years later, in June of this year, Mr and Miss Thomas were contacted once again by the planning department to request submission of a retrospective application. The 2020 application documents were submitted once again, and once again they were found to be inadequate, but this did result in a new willingness on the part of the planning case officer to help and advise. As a result, Mr and Miss Thomas have now sought professional help. This application is now submitted seeking a retrospective change of use permission from car sales with associated maintenance and repair to the base for a cleaning and property maintenance business.

2. THE SITE AND CONTEXT



Aerial view of the application site

- 2.1 The property is on the northern outskirts of Crynant and fronting directly onto the Main A 4109 road which links Neath with Seven Sisters, Onllwyn and beyond. It is part of a Group of properties that front Main Road but have rear access via a service road that runs close to the River Dulais further to the west. All other properties in the immediate vicinity are residential.
- 2.2 The application site consists of a substantial former garage building located at the southern end of the site. It is single-storey with a pitched roof and has a floor area of some 242 sq. m. It is set back from the road allowing vehicles to enter via a splayed access and traverse across the site to an exit at the northern end. To the north of the building is an open yard and parking area, whilst at the rear is a screened open storage area for building materials and two waste skips.



Exterior view of the site looking north

3. **PLANNING HISTORY**

- 3.1 No records are available of the original planning permission relating to the creation of the former service station. It is understood, however, that it was originally a petrol filling station and car repair garage that ceased to trade in the 1970's. It was then occupied as a car sales area with ancillary repair and servicing, and it is understood that this is the accepted authorised use for the property.

4. **THE CURRENT USE**

- 4.1 The premises are now used by Sparkles Solutions as their operating centre. The Company conducts commercial and domestic cleaning services and a variety of commercial and domestic property maintenance services. The premises are the primary location which the business operates from. The business also retains an office premises in Newton Road, Mumbles and a storage facility in Llansamlet. The business primarily operates in the Neath, Port Talbot and Swansea areas but they do cover work between Pembroke and Newport.

- 4.2 The garage building is used for office and storage purposes. It also incorporates a number of washing machines for cleaning linen, towels etc. The office areas are the same as those previously used for car sales, whilst the storage consists of equipment, materials and tools related to property maintenance and cleaning and linen for serviced accommodation. (See photographs below)





- 4.3 The land around the building is used for access, parking and open storage of various building materials as well as three skips for waste. As part of this application it is proposed to better organise these activities as shown on the submitted layout plan, with the open storage moved to the back of the site and screened by new fencing.
- 4.4 An estimated 11 vehicles will enter and exit the site each day. These will consist of 6 employees' cars and 2 vehicles which may be cars or light vans used for deliveries or occasional business meetings. Three of the staff members leave their personal vehicles on site for the day after collecting company vehicles which are light commercial vans. These vans exit the site at the beginning of the day and return at the end. Deliveries to the site may consist of skip collection and replacement as well as suppliers of office equipment, uniforms etc. The premises are not open to members of the public.
- 4.5 In terms of vehicle access it is proposed that the two existing access points shall be used as entry and exit points as recommended by the Council highway section. This is shown on the submitted plan.

- 4.6 Operating hours are 7am – 7pm Monday to Sunday. On the weekends it is just a skeleton Staff. The premises are open on all Bank Holidays with the exception of Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day.
- 4.7 It is known that the premises are located in identified flood zones. All relevant Precautions are taken, therefore, to safeguard the property and its users in the event of a flood. It is also known that the site is within a high risk coal mining area as defined by the Coal Authority containing potential hazards arising from former coal mining activity including mineee entries, shallow coal workings, geological features, mine gas and previous surfac mining sites. However this is a change of use application only and no penetrative ground ground works are proposed. It is considered, therefore, that the property and its occupiers are not endangered by coal mining legacy issues.

5. **PLANNING POLICY**

- 5.1 The Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan seeks to preserve and encourage employment opportunities in the valley communities which have mainly become commuter settlements for the growth areas along the south Wales coast. Paragraph 2.5.54 of the Strategy section of the LDP states as follows :-

2.5.54 Existing employment areas are safeguarded reflecting the important function they have within the valley communities, including employment sites not contained within the growth areas, namely within the Afan, Dulais and Amman Valleys. The reuse of vacant premises and the development of land within the estates will also be encouraged in principle. In line with national policy, home working, rural enterprises and farm diversification will also be supported.

- 5.2 The application site has been a long-standing employment feature in Crynant which had, unfortunately, become vacant with the demise of the car sales business. What Mr Thomas has done over the last 5 years is to return the site once more to a thriving local business that is probably now the biggest employer in the valley. Many of the employees live locally. The new use would clearly, therefore, be fully supported by the aims and intentions of the LDP.

- 5.3 Crynant is defined in the plan as a 'large local centre' that is a suitable location for new employment uses. Local policy SP6 then repeats the aim of the plan to encourage development in the valleys area stating that :-

"The local economy and communities will be enhanced and reinvigorated and the distinctive environment will be protected through the following area-specific measures

3. Safe guarding employment sites and uses"

- 5.4 Policy SP11 is entitled 'Employment Growth' and states as follows :-

Policy SP 11

Employment Growth

Existing employment uses will be supported and safeguarded and new and expanding employment developments will be encouraged through the following measures:

1. 96 hectares of land for employment and business purposes will be allocated for development within the Plan period in the Coastal Corridor Strategy Area to meet economic development and employment needs;
2. Additional employment provision will be made within the Strategic Regeneration Areas as part of mixed use, sustainable development in these locations;
3. Existing employment areas will be safeguarded for employment uses;
4. Premises in existing appropriate lawful employment use will be safeguarded for employment purposes;
5. Employment uses will be encouraged in principle within settlement limits;
6. In the Valleys Strategy Area, a flexible approach will be taken to employment proposals and 'live-work' units within or immediately adjacent to settlement limits.

LDP Objectives: OB 2, OB 11 and OB 12

It is clearly the intention of the LDP to protect and retain existing employment areas and as such it would seem to fully support the retention of this local business.

6. **CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 It is always unfortunate when a change of use takes place without a prior planning permission being in place. Mr Thomas was wrongly advised, however, in this case and proceeded to set up and establish his business believing that the previous commercial use allowed him to do so. On being recently challenged he has wasted no time in organising the submission of a retrospective application.
- 6.2 It is, of course, significant that the use in question has successfully traded from these premises for over 5 years without any concerns being raised either by neighbours or by the planning authority. What this tells us, of course, is that the business has been able to develop and prosper without causing any issues for those living nearby. This is because all traffic arrives and leaves via the main road and the activities within the building do not produce any issues regarding noise or smell.
- 6.3 Mr Thomas lives in 'Alba' the property immediately adjoining the site, and as with many businesses located in smaller settlements they have tried to support the local community. They sponsor the local rugby team and several charity events. They also launder the rugby kits for local clubs within the Dulais Valley.
- 6.3 The retention and encouragement of this business is clearly supported by the adopted policies of the Local Development Plan and it is respectfully requested, therefore, that a retrospective permission be granted.

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