

I have been running Penelope Textiles as a business since 2010 as I did not wish to raise my daughter on state benefits and could not find any employment that was flexible enough for me to work around my daughter, for whom I have sole responsibility, nor that allowed me to afford childcare. Being self employed and working from home allowed me to earn a wage whilst still meeting my parental responsibilities.

I sell vintage and antique textiles and also Haberdashery and needlework supplies. I have two online shops and am constantly hopeful that one day I will find enough time to set up my own website.

Initially the business was run from 62 Shawburn Road whilst both my daughter and myself lived there. The situation was not ideal, The business was conducted from the bathroom and the kitchen (both acting as my laundry area), from the living room, and my bedroom, which I used as stock rooms, with the hall way being used for storage and the garden as a photography studio. It was almost impossible to move in the flat and the situation was detrimental to both mine and my daughters quality of life as there was not really room for us to live there as well as run the business from there.

My Mother moved to Selkirk from France in 2012 and was able to provide relief with childcare and seeing how we were living she purchased the old butchers shop on the corner of Back Row in 2013 which I rented from her for the business at a discounted rate. There were several problems in renting a property for the business in the town centre; the lack of sufficient natural daylight which is essential for photographing my stock for putting into my online shop. I operate in a niche market, many people simply do not understand what it is that I do for a living and would have zero interest in the items that I sell, in the two years the business operated from the shop, the takings from passing trade amounted to around £130.00. There was however a constant interruption of people coming in to look or for a chat, which was very disruptive to my work, which is internet based. The shop required building works after the ceiling fell in and after the work was completed the layout of the shop had changed to such an extent that no area was left large enough for me to carry out essential tasks which impacted greatly on the running of the business so in 2015 I took the decision to rent studio space at Riverside Mills and my Mum sold the shop.

As I already pay rent for my online shops (which works out at 20% of my annual turnover) it is very difficult to pay a second rent on top of that, but for the next two years I did just about manage it. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

By March the following year my daughter and I had moved out of the flat and into my Mum's house and I was grappling with the consequences of a possible Brexit no deal scenario for my business (Europe accounts for 30% of my market). I was quite exhausted by the events of the last 12 months and the bereavement. I was advised by my doctor to take 3 months work to get back on my feet.

During this three months I spoke to the council numerous times about the possibility of renting out the empty property at Shawburn Road as social housing, and what my responsibilities as a landlord would be. I got quotes for the new kitchen and bathroom that would be required and for the flat to be re decorated. The costs of the work required was far greater than I would recuperate and would have left me out of pocket, so I rang and spoke to the council about the possibility of moving the business to the flat and was told that I needed to let the council know that the property was being

used for business purposes once I had moved the business there, which is what I did on the day that the business moved there.

In order for me to move the business, it took one month to pack up my stock, a month of moving the stock and a month of unpacking as some of the textiles are very old and require special handling and storage and the flat is about half the size of the studio. The cost of moving the business including loss of trade and removal costs stands at about £8000, it is not a decision that I took lightly, hence my speaking to the council prior to moving the business. It is not something that I can afford to do again.

It has been suggested by Brett Taylor during our phone conversations that I move back into the flat with my daughter and continue to run the business from there, which is impossible given that there is no space for our beds or belongings. Brett has also suggested that I move the business into my current residence and run it from there, but I have 3 spare rooms, only one of them is a suitable size for my business and I can not make use of the bathroom or kitchen for laundry purposes as they are in constant use. The garage is used for storage, but would only give me a quarter of the space that I have at the flat.

With regards to the suggestion that I should rent a property in a designated area, I do not think that it has been taken into account that I already pay a very high portion of my turnover as 'rent' for my virtual selling space, to both eBay and Etsy (in the same way that 'self employed' delivery drivers pay 'rent' for their vans) that paying rent again on top of this is an almost feat impossible to meet, and sheer folly given that I own a property that can be used for this purpose.

It is unfair to refuse my application on a speculative basis that the business might grow, I have a modest business for a niche market, there are not enough hours in the day for the work that it would require to grow the business to any size that it might negatively impact an approval for change of use. I am a lone parent with sole responsibility for my daughter, there are only so many hours in the day and so much time and resources that I can devote to the business as I have other responsibilities to meet.

The number of deliveries that arrive at my business are less than deliveries that arrive at house (or at the flat when I lived there) both in terms of volume and frequency, this aspect is core to the nature of my business and will not change. In the two years that I rented at Riverside Mills, I did not have more than two customers arrive at the premises and this is unlikely to change as I am internet based and do not appreciate interruptions whilst I am at my work. I had more visitors at the flat when I lived there than I will ever have whilst operating my business from there.

Brett Taylor may have noticed when he visited the premises for inspection that next door to my flat is a childminding business that has been operating for the last 13 years. Every weekday morning there are cars that arrive for parents to drop their children off in the mornings, in the evening the same cars stop on the road for the parents to collect the children. The children play outdoors in the front garden on a daily basis and are as noisy as all children are. Although the business does not cause any actual disruption to the neighbourhood, it is tenfold more disruptive to the community than my business could ever be yet there has never been a complaint raised against them, nor any kind of enforcements. It would be unfair to refuse my application on any claim of possible disruption to the area on that basis.

At the time that the application was refused an article in the Border Telegraph noted that unemployment in the Scottish Borders was sitting at 10% (not including the job losses from Belmont Garage). I am trying very hard to support my daughter and show her that the mantra that 'Work

Pays' is true. If the change of use is refused, I stand to lose everything that I have invested in the business along with my sole income. The alternative for me would be applying for Universal Credit. I do not believe this would be in anyone's interest, not mine, my daughters not the Councils, who ultimately would be picking up the bill and possibly the financial and social repercussions.

With regards to the Covid19 situation, I earn the minimum wage and not only would I struggle to live on a furloughed wage, I would not be able to meet my ongoing unavoidable business costs. I am not able to claim any business grants as I do not have a rates exemption certificate as I have not been granted the planning permission for change of use that would provide me with the necessary certificate. I am in the group of people that should be shielding, a bout of pneumonia has left my lungs damaged. I can not afford to stop working without being able to claim a grant to help keep the business afloat.

I would be more than happy to have restrictions placed on the application being accepted, and have already suggested to Brett that this could be done. The restrictions that might be beneficial for the councils peace of mind could be;

- That the business not be allowed any more than one delivery (outwith Royal Mail's standard deliveries) per month, with no palletted goods permitted.
- That the business be forbidden from having passing trade or custom,- that any sales must take place in a virtual setting or specified circumstances (ie trade shows, exhibition halls etc)
- That the planning permission have a time limit place upon it that allows enough time for my daughter to complete her formal education and that allows me to be able to support her in this doing this.
- If there are any restrictions that the council might find beneficial for the appeal then I am open to suggestion.

All that I ask is that I continue to be able to run my business so that I can support my daughter and myself. I need to be able to use my flat for housing my business to be able to do this. Short of begging I do not know how to impress upon you just how awful the alternative can be, - I have fought long and hard to work my way out of the poverty that we endured in her early years and I do not relish returning to those days, any more that I could stand to see all my work and effort washed away.