



Planning Statement & Sequential Assessment

In respect of

CHANGE OF USE TO
CLIMBING/BOULDERING CENTRE
(USE CLASS E(d))

8A Stadium Way
Reading
RG30 6BX

On behalf of

Grip-UK Ltd

March 2022

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement and Sequential Assessment has been submitted on behalf of Grip UK Ltd for the '*change of use of vacant unit to use as an indoor climbing centre (Use Class Ed)*' at 8a Stadium Way, Reading, RG30 6BX.
- 1.2 The site currently consists of a vacant warehouse building with double height accommodation at ground floor and small first floor area to the front of the building. The unit measures a total of circa 1,350 sqm. The unit has been vacant for over 4 years, since 2017. The unit had previously been occupied from June 2005 by Plasman Laminate Products which utilised the property as a light industrial use to prepare and cut to order work surfaces and kitchen products.
- 1.3 The proposal seeks the conversion to an indoor sport, recreation and fitness use (Use Class E(d)) in order to be occupied by The Climbing Hangar, who began trading in 2010 and provides a unique leisure experience comprising a centre for climbers of all levels to practice bouldering.
- 1.4 Bouldering is different to traditional climbing, given it is a style of rock climbing without a rope or harness on artificial walls with bouldering mats to prevent any injuries from falls. Bouldering is highly accessible, with low barriers to participation due to the fact that no specialist equipment is required. As such it is becoming increasingly popular as a sport and means of exercise and fitness which is accessible to all.
- 1.5 The Climbing Hangar opened their first climbing centre at 6 Birchall Street, Liverpool, L20 8PD, in January 2011 and in recent years new operations have accelerated the expansion of their operations across the UK. A second centre opened in 2015 in Parsons Green, London. An additional climbing centre has since opened in Plymouth in March 2018, followed by a new Climbing Hangar in Swansea in April 2019. The Climbing Hangar now have further operations in Sheffield and Exeter. The company has now been operating for ten years and is looking to expand and grow further across the UK to meet growing interest and demand in bouldering, which has increased in popularity following its debut at the Tokyo Olympics last year.
- 1.6 Following the success of, and demand for, The Climbing Hangar's existing operations, the operator has identified an opportunity to open a new centre to cater for the catchment area to the west of Reading, where the sport is increasingly growing in popularity. The proposed use is aimed at catering for the surrounding local area, with the majority of users expected to originate from surrounding businesses and neighbourhoods in the area.
- 1.7 The Climbing Hangar has been attempting to identify suitable premises within the area for sometime. However, as no available or feasible premises within existing centres have been identified, alternatives in out-of-centre locations have now had to be considered. Given the long term vacancy of this unit this has led to discussions being held with the owner of the application property to bring forward this proposal to complement and provide an active use in this vacant building that will support the businesses and other uses in this commercial area and surrounding neighbourhoods.
- 1.8 The existing vacant premises are within a suitable and highly accessible location within the required catchment area, and are able to meet The Climbing Hangar's operational requirements.

- 1.9 The site is in an accessible location by walking, cycling and public transport, with bus stops within 240 metres on Oxford Road providing a number of routes to the local and wider city area, and to Tilehurst and Reading West stations. The Local Plan proposals map identifies cycle routes immediately adjacent the unit on Wigmore Lane/Portman Road, linking to the Town Centre, Reading West Train Station and Oxford Road West District Centre/ Scours Lane, connecting north; and Oxford Road, linking to the west and to Tilehurst Station.
- 1.10 This Planning Statement and Sequential Assessment undertakes a sequential assessment of available sites, sets out the key planning policies in relation to the site and assesses the proposed development against each of these policy considerations, as well as addressing flood risk, transport and amenity matters.

2 SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.1 The site currently consists of a vacant warehouse building with double height accommodation at ground floor and small first floor area to the front of the building. The unit measures a total of circa 1,350 sqm, with 1,240 sqm at ground floor and small first floor area to the front providing a further 110 sqm.
- 2.2 The unit has been vacant for over 4 years, since 2017. The unit had previously been occupied from June 2005 by Plasman Laminate Products which utilised the property as a light industrial use to prepare and cut to order work surfaces and kitchen products.
- 2.3 The wider area is characterised by a variety of uses including industrial and business uses, with the district centre of Oxford Road West 1 km metres to the east, and the city centre 2.5 kms to the east. Residential communities are located within the wider area to the north, south and east.
- 2.4 The building is in an accessible location with easy access from Scours Lane, via Oxford Road.
- 2.5 The site is in an accessible location by walking, cycling and public transport, with bus stops within 240 metres on Oxford Road providing a number of routes to the local and wider city area, and to Tilehurst and Reading West stations. The Local Plan proposals map identifies cycle routes immediately adjacent the unit on Wigmore Lane/Portman Road, linking to the Town Centre, Reading West Train Station and Oxford Road West District Central Scours Lane, connecting north; and Oxford Road, linking to the west and to Tilehurst Station.
- 2.6 The Local Plan identifies the site as being within a Core Employment Area.
- 2.7 The site is located within Flood Zone 2, with the land immediately to the south of the premises and Oxford Road and Wigmore Lane in Flood Zone 1. Further consideration of Flood Risk, resilience and mitigation measures are contained in the Flood Report provided as part of this application submission.

3 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 The proposal is for the change of use the vacant property to use as an indoor climbing centre (Use Class E(d)). The proposal will utilise 1,350 sqm of floorspace (1,240 sqm at ground floor and 110 sqm at first floor level) which will be converted to a climbing centre. No new floorspace or changes to the size of the building envelope are proposed.
- 3.2 The proposed occupier is The Climbing Hangar, which aims to bring an alternative sport and fitness activity that is affordable and accessible to all ages in the form of rock and boulder climbing. The Climbing Hangar offers a unique opportunity providing social exercise which can be enjoyed by all ages. The operator's core audience generally consists of 16 to 45-year olds, ranging from young professionals to families, however the operation is such that it also caters for and accommodates young children as it provides a safe and accessible form of climbing.
- 3.3 The Climbing Hangar has various activities on offer, and the space will comprise the following:
- *Main climbing / bouldering wall*: the climbing space will be the main focal point and will offer a range of climbing activities, primarily consisting of independent climbers, as well as classes for local schools, scout/cadet groups and charities in non-peak hours. The courses available for customers will range in level from beginners through to National Governing Body award schemes.
 - *Office*: a small ancillary management office is also proposed adjacent to the reception. The sole function of this office will be for use of staff of the climbing centre.
 - *Reception / Retail area*: the proposed retail area will serve as a small ancillary use of the climbing centre, selling specific climbing products from the customer service area, which also includes a reception. Climbing focused events for the local community will be held within the social space.
 - *Café*: the proposal also includes a café area, which will provide a community area and range of snacks locally sourced from the Reading, Berkshire and South East of England.
 - *Changing rooms and WCs*: changing facilities and WCs will be provided within the facility, including DDA compliant facilities at ground floor.
- 3.4 The proposed use will generate employment with the potential for 15 full-time members of staff and 15 part-time members of staff, which will be recruited locally where possible. Each member of staff will be given a full induction, first aid training and sales training, in addition to continued professional development support and opportunities.
- 3.5 The Climbing Hangar will be open to members of the public at the following times:

Day	Opening Hours
Monday – Friday	06:30 – 22:00
Saturday/Sunday	09:00 – 20:00

- 3.6 On weekends, The Climbing Hangar will offer a wide range of youth development classes that can take young people from their first vertical steps to internal competitions. They also work with local groups, such as scout/cadet organisations, schools and charities such as The Princes Trust.
- 3.7 The Climbing Hangar operate a number of existing premises across the UK following this successful format.
- 3.8 16 dedicated car parking spaces will be available for use by The Climbing Hangar, including a disabled parking bay adjacent to the front of the property. The provision is equivalent to that provided at their current facilities in Liverpool and Exeter. Provision of cycle parking will also be made on site with 6 cycle hoops for 12 bikes externally delivered adjacent to the entrance of the property, and a further 12 spaces internally within the unit.
- 3.9 Only minor external alterations are required to facilitate the use and entail minor amendments to entrances/exits, windows and provision of new glazed frontage in the location of the existing roller shutter. The proposals also include the provision of cycle hoops externally and internally to serve the facility.

4 PLANNING POLICY

4.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires development proposals to be considered in accordance with the statutory Development Plan and other material considerations.

4.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated in 2021, forms the national planning policy guidance document, and is supported by the National Planning Practice Guidance, which is an online resource.

The Development Plan for this location consists of the Reading New Local Plan (2019) and the adopted Policies Maps.

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

4.3 The NPPF includes a requirement on local planning authorities to plan positively for growth and states that *“It is important that needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses are met in full and are not compromised by limited site availability”*.

4.4 Annex 2 of the NPPF establishes that leisure facilities are a main town centre use. As such this location is considered to be out of centre.

4.5 The NPPF sets out two key tests that are to be applied when planning town centre uses which are not in an existing town centre and which are not in accordance with an up to date Local Plan: the sequential test and the impact test. Having regard to sequential and impact tests ensures that any proposed main town centre uses which are not in an existing town centre are in the best locations to support the vitality and vibrancy of town centres, and that no likely significant adverse impact on existing town centres arise.

4.6 Paragraph 86 states *‘Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered. Paragraph 87 states When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites which are well connected to the town centre. Applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale.’*

4.7 Paragraph 89 states *“When assessing applications for retail, leisure and office development outside of town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan, local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (if there is no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500 sq m). This should include assessment of: the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and wider retail area (as applicable to the scale and nature of the scheme)”*.

- 4.8 Paragraph 91 identifies that *“Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which: a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other; b) are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion; and c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling”*.
- 4.9 Paragraph 104 highlights that *“Planning policies should support an appropriate mix of uses across an area, and within larger scale sites, to minimise the number and length of journeys needed for employment, shopping, leisure, education and other activities”*.
- 4.10 Paragraph 109 states that *“Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.”* Paragraph 111 goes on to say that *“All developments that will generate significant amounts of movement should be required to provide a travel plan, and the application should be supported by a transport statement or transport assessment so that the likely impacts of the proposal can be assessed”*.

National Planning Practice Guidance

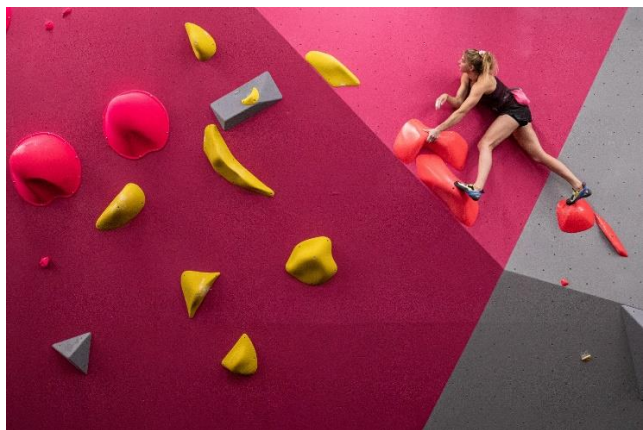
- 4.11 Under the Section ‘Ensuring the vitality of town centres’, paragraph 016 (ref: 2b-016-20140306) of the NPPG outlines that *‘the impact test only applies to proposals exceeding 2,500 sqm gross of floorspace unless a different locally appropriate threshold is set by the local planning authority’*.
- 4.12 In addition, paragraph 008 of the NPPG (ref: 2b-008-20140306) explains that *“the sequential test guides main town centre uses towards town centre locations first, then, if no town centre locations are available, to edge of centre locations, and, if neither town centre locations nor edge of centre locations are available, to out of town centre locations, with preference for accessible sites which are well connected to the town centre [...]”*.
- 4.13 Paragraph 011 (ref: 2b-011-20140306) states that the use of the sequential test should recognise that certain main town centre uses have particular market and locational requirements which mean that they may only be accommodated in specific locations.

New Local Plan

- 4.14 The UDP identifies the site as being within a Core Employment Area.
- 4.15 The key planning policies related to the development include:
- EM2 – Location of New Employment Development
 - EM3 – Loss of Employment Land
 - RL1 – Network and Hierarchy of Centres
 - RL2 – Scale and Location of retail, leisure and culture development
 - RL5 – Impact of main town centre uses

5 PARAMETERS OF THE SEQUENTIAL ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 This section sets out the site parameters required for the proposed climbing/bouldering centre use.
- 5.2 As the site is out of centre, a sequential assessment has been undertaken to address the requirements for the NPPF.
- 5.3 Ideally the use requires a floor area of between 1,100 and 1,500 sqm to operate. The assessment is based on the requirement that the proposed development requires a minimum of at least 1,000sqm of floorspace on a single floor with a minimum floor-to-ceiling height of 4.5m, whilst the remainder of the floorspace can have a reduced floor-to-ceiling height to accommodate the service facilities or be located at an adjacent upper level.
- 5.4 Whilst there is flexibility in the range of overall floorspace that the use can operate within, the requirement for a single large floorplate with a clear floor-to-ceiling height is a necessity due to the proposal's nature as a climbing centre. Climbing and bouldering uses require substantial buildings with large internal spaces with sufficient eaves heights in order to provide the equipment and facilities required for bouldering and climbing activities.
- 5.5 The floor area would ideally be located on one level; however, in some cases, it may be possible for approximately 250 sq m to be located on a mezzanine or upper storey. In any event, a large ground floor plate is required to accommodate the climbing activities, and support services, such as the support services, meeting space and changing facilities, can be located on a mezzanine or upper floor. Ground floor accommodation is required due to the weight and impact of the climbing walls and equipment, with the structure of upper floors generally unable to provide sufficient loadings to support the fit out and use.
- 5.6 The Climbing Hangar also requires a minimum of 15 car parking spaces, in addition to being located in proximity to public transport, such as local bus routes, to be appropriately accessible for members.
- 5.7 The proposed climbing centre must have its own dedicated entrance with a visible street frontage easily identifiable and accessible for visiting members of the public. This is due to the nature of the use, and sharing an access or reception area with The Climbing Hangar may not be preferable for neighbouring occupants. For instance, an office could consider that the leisure use undermines their professional environment, whilst also creating potential security issues especially due to the extended hours of the leisure use and weekend opening.
- 5.8 Images of existing Climbing Hangar operations showing the bouldering facilities are provided below for information:



- 5.9 Due to the nature of the proposal, none of the components of the proposal can be located in a separate location, such as changing rooms or support services. Therefore, there is a legitimate need to seek sites and units which can accommodate the proposed use as a whole.
- 5.10 A search for available properties was conducted using EGi (www.propertylink.estatesgazette.com), CoStar Shop Property (shopproperty.co.uk) and Right Move (www.rightmove.co.uk/commercial-property-to-let), which are well known and established property databases., which are well-known and established property databases, as well as through visits to the area and contact with local agents within the Reading area to identify available sites.
- 5.11 The Climbing Hangar has been looking for a site within Reading for a number of years to complement their growing portfolio and cater for increasing demand and interest in the area. Commercial properties in retail, employment and leisure uses were included within the search parameters.

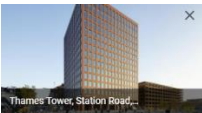
- 5.12 The sequential assessment has been undertaken on the basis of the town centre and District/Local Centres within the catchment of the site, which include: Oxford West District Centre, Tilehurst Triangle District Centre, Meadway District Centre, Coronation Square Local Centre, Wesley Road Local Centre and Dee Park Local Centre.
- 5.13 The NPPF and NPPG state that in reviewing alternative sites, careful consideration should be given to suitability, viability and availability. These are defined as follows:
- Availability – whether sites are available now or are likely to become available for development within a reasonable period of time (determined on the merits of a particular case), having regard to, amongst other matters, the applicant’s suitability criteria and timescales, in this case properties which are available now or will be ready for occupation within the next 6 months;
 - Suitability – with due regard to the requirements to demonstrate flexibility, whether sites are suitable to accommodate the proposal.
 - Viability – whether there is a reasonable prospect that development will occur on the site at a particular point in time. Again, the importance of demonstrating the viability of alternatives depends in part on the nature of the proposal and the timescale over which the applicant requires it to be delivered.
- 5.14 The next section identifies alternative sites within centre and edge of centre locations that are sequentially preferable and assesses them for the proposal against the above criteria.

6 SEQUENTIALLY PREFERRABLE SITES

6.1 Utilising the centres within the area of search the following potentially sequentially preferable properties have been identified within existing centres, within the boundary, or edge of, Reading Town Centre, Oxford West District Centre, Tilehurst Triangle District Centre, Meadway District Centre, Coronation Square Local Centre, Wesley Road Local Centre and Dee Park Local Centre. The majority of premises and floorspace which is available and meets the minimum size requirements of the use in these locations is purpose built office accommodation, however this is generally unsuitable for the use given the nature of the accommodation, the limited floor to ceiling heights, floor loadings which don't support the nature of the use and fit out and do not provide separate access for visiting members of the public.

6.2 The properties are reviewed and considered in detail below:

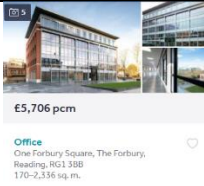
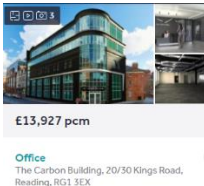
Property address	Within Town Centre	Assessment
One Vardy, RG1 1AR  TO RENT ROA SIZE 1449 - 12310.99 Sq Ft TYPE Office, Offices	Yes	The property comprises Grade A office space providing multi-let office units to a range of office occupiers. The accommodation that is currently available consists of the 2nd, 5th and 7th floors of the property. Further floorspace has now been let and therefore the total accommodation that is available on these floors only totals 782.2sq metres, with the largest single available floor only 326.8 square metres. The floors are not adjacent and capable of being cojoined to deliver the minimum required area. Therefore sufficient floorspace is not available within the property. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. Sufficient floorspace is therefore not available to meet the requirements of the use and it is not suitable for the proposed use.
33 Blagrove Street  TO RENT £28.50 Per Sq Ft SIZE 1713 - 15243 Sq Ft TYPE Office, Offices	Yes	The property comprises refurbished office space providing multi-let office units to a range of office occupiers. The accommodation provides a total of 1,413 square metres of available floorspace, however this is split across 2nd, 3rd and 4th floors. The largest floor area available on a single floor is only 420 sq metres with no accommodation available at

Property address	Within Town Centre	Assessment
		ground floor. As such the property does not provide sufficient accommodation on a single floor to cater for the proposed use. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. The property is therefore not suitable for the proposed use.
Brunel, Station Road  TO RENT £31.00 Per Sq Ft SIZE 3406 - 15194 Sq Ft TYPE Office, Offices	Yes	The property provides newly refurbished office accommodation. The property does not provide any available ground floor accommodation, with the largest available single floor area available being only 342 sq metres. As such the property does not provide sufficient accommodation on a single floor to cater for the proposed use, and no ground floor accommodation. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. The property is therefore not suitable for the proposed use.
Thames Tower, Station Road  TO RENT £38.50 Per Sq Ft SIZE 5000 - 14040 Sq Ft TYPE Office, Offices	Yes	The property provides prime office accommodation purpose built and fitted out for occupation. No accommodation is available at ground floor to provide for the use. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores

Property address	Within Town Centre	Assessment
		to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. The property is therefore not suitable for the proposed use.
One Station Hill, Station Hill  TO RENT ROA SIZE 13748 - 270159 Sq Ft TYPE Office, Offices	Yes	The scheme is under construction but not currently complete and is not due to be ready for occupation until 2024. The accommodation is therefore not available within an appropriate timescale to meet the operators requirements. Whilst a Class E(d) health club is proposed at the lower levels, this only provides 170 sqm of accommodation. Other potential retail and office floorspace is available on upper levels however the floor to ceiling heights of the building and loadings are such that the proposed use would not be capable of being accommodated within the building. The property is therefore not available, whilst it would not be suitable for the proposed use.
Sovereign House, Reading  TO RENT ROA SIZE 6582 - 13165 Sq Ft TYPE Office, Offices	Yes	This three storey office building provides multi tenanted office suites and has recently been refurbished for office use. Whilst there is accommodation available at ground floor, the total available is only 611 square metres and the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the 4.5m height required to accommodate the use. The unit does not provide a single floorplate above the minimum size required to accommodate the use and does not provide sufficient floor to ceiling heights and is therefore not suitable for the proposed use.
Quadrant House/Broad Street Mall 	Yes	There are a number of vacant units which are vacant and available to let within the overall premises. Whilst the total floorspace to let is currently circa. 1,477 sqm, the largest single unit is only 391 sqm. The units are located in different positions across the mall and therefore there is no opportunity to cojoin to form a unit large enough to meet the minimum requirements of the operation. Therefore the property is not suitable to accommodate the proposed use and there is not sufficient available floorspace in a single unit to meet the minimum requirements.
Pheonix, Station Hill  POA Office Phoenix, Station Hill, Reading, RG1 1NB 555-1,518 sq. m.	Yes	The property is an office building over ground to five stories, multi let to a number of office tenants. The accommodation available is only at 4th and part 5th floors. The property has narrow floorplates which does not enable the required layout of the use and climbing walls. No accommodation is available at ground floor to provide for the use. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of

Property address	Within Town Centre	Assessment
		accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. The property is therefore not suitable for the proposed use.
The Brick Works, Greyfriars Road  £9,794 pcm Office The Brick Works, 35-43 Greyfriars Road, Reading, RG1 1NP 312-1,100 sq. m.	Yes	The property consists of office accommodation over four floors. Whilst the property provides 1,100 sqm of available floorspace, this is distributed over ground and four upper floors. The largest floorplate available is only 312 sq metres. As such the layout is not suitable as not providing a single large footprint to accommodate the main climbing walls. Furthermore the upper floors would not have sufficient loadings to accommodate the use, and none of the floors have sufficient headroom to accommodate the minimum heights needed to install and operate the climbing walls. The property is therefore not suitable to accommodate the proposed use.
Fountain House, Queens Walk  £14,261 pcm Office Fountain House, Queens Walk, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 707-1,413 sq. m.	Yes	The property is a ten storey office building which has recently been refurbished to provide high quality office accommodation. Further accommodation has been let and therefore the only available accommodation remaining is the 5th floor, which has an area of only 706 sqm. As such the building does not provide sufficient floorspace, whilst there is no available accommodation at ground floor. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. The property is therefore not suitable to accommodate the proposed use.
Apex, Forbury Road  £4,331 pcm Office Apex, Forbury Road, Reading, RG1 1AX 138-4,122 sq. m.	Yes	The property is purpose built and fitted out office accommodation. The available space is split across a number of floors/suites across the building at ground, 3rd, 4th and 5th floors. No individual floor meets the minimum size requirements of the use, with the largest only 701 sqm, whilst the locations of the space within the building mean it is not possible to cojoin

Property address	Within Town Centre	Assessment
		suites. The available ground floor accommodation provides only 553 sqm of floorspace, whilst the upper floors not providing sufficient floor to ceiling height or structural loadings to support the use. The property is therefore not suitable for the proposed use.
2 Blagrove Street, Reading  POA Office Rv, 2 Blagrove Street, Reading, RG1 1AZ 929-2,818 sq. m.	Yes	Prime office building, multi let to a number of business tenants. Available floorspace is located across a number of suites on first, third and fourth floors. There is no available ground floor space. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. The property is not suitable for the proposed use.
No 2 Forbury Place  £29,368 pcm Office No 2 Forbury Place, Forbury Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 829-13,083 sq. m.	Yes	This purpose built office building is multi let with a variety of available accommodate on different floors. The ground floor space provides only 829 sqm of accommodation, below the minor required to provide the use. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. Furthermore the nature and layouts of the floorplates, based around a small central core with fully glazed openings around all external elevations means that there is no clear "wall" space to facilitate the erection of the required climbing walls and structures. The property is therefore not suitable to accommodate the use.
One Forbury Square	Yes	The property comprises purpose built Grade A office space. Available space is distributed across a number of floors, with no vacant ground floor accommodation. The largest single

Property address	Within Town Centre	Assessment
 Office One Forbury Square, The Forbury, Reading, RG1 3BB 170-2,356 sq. m.		floor area available is only 708sqm, which is not sufficient to accommodate the climbing wall operation. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. The property is not suitable to accommodate the proposed use.
Davidson, Forbury Square  Office Davidson, Forbury Square, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 465-1,667 sq. m.	Yes	The property is a modern purpose built office building. The property has 309 sqm of available space at basement level, which is below that required to operate the proposed use. Part of the first floor totalling 1016 sqm is also available, which is also below the required floorspace. It is not possible to cojoin the spaces as they are not provided in adjoining levels, whilst the floors do not provide sufficient floor to ceiling heights to accommodate the minimum operational requirements. The property is therefore not suitable to accommodate the use.
The Carbon Building, Kings Road  Office The Carbon Building, 20/30 Kings Road, Reading, RG1 3EX 444-2,358 sq. m.	Yes	This purpose built new office building provides available floorspace across a number of floors within the building. However, none of the floors meet the minimum requirement of the operation, with the largest floorplate providing only 481 sqm of floorspace. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. The property is therefore not suitable to accommodate the proposed use.

Property address	Within Town Centre	Assessment
The Blade, Abbey Street  POA Office The Blade, Abbey Street, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 3DE 287-3,493 sq. m.	Yes	This is a bespoke office building providing vacant floorspace that is available across various levels of the building. However none of the floors are of a sufficient size to accommodate the use, with the largest only 750sqm. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. Furthermore the nature and layouts of the floorplates, based around a small central core with fully glazed openings around all external elevations means that there is no clear “wall” space to facilitate the erection of the required climbing walls and structures. The property is therefore not suitable to accommodate the use.
No 3 Fobury Place  £9,202 pcm Office No 3 Fobury Place, Fobury Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 2GG-1,593 sq. m.	Yes	This purpose built office building provides available floorspace across different floors of the building. The largest available floor is however on the 10th floor of the building and provides only 620sqm of floorspace. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. The property is not therefore suitable for the use.
Abbey Gardens  £5,909 pcm Office Abbey Gardens Central, Kings Road, Reading, RG1 5BA 236-2,266 sq. m. Highly flexible fully refurbished Grade A office space available to let in Reading town centre.	Yes	The property comprises recently refurbished A Grade office space. The available floorspace is split across different levels of the building, however the largest available floorplate provides only 511 sqm of accommodation which is not sufficient to meet the requirements of the use. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres

Property address	Within Town Centre	Assessment
		and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. The property is therefore not suitable to accommodate the proposed use.
Abbey Wharf  POA Office Abbey Wharf, 57 Kings Road, RG1 5AB 267-2,133 sq. m.	Yes	This four storey office building provides available floorspace across different floors, however there is no vacant at ground floor. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. The property is therefore not suitable to accommodate the proposed use.
Kennet Place, Kings Road  £7,168 pcm Office Kennet Place, 121 Kings Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 262-2,877 sq. m.	Yes	This newly refurbished office building provides available suites at 3rd and 4th floors. The building does not provide any available ground floor space. The nature of the office accommodation means that the floor to ceiling heights are significantly below the minimum requirement of 4.5 metres and would not be capable of accommodating the necessary climbing walls and deliver the use. In addition, the floor loadings of upper floors in this office building are unlikely to support the fit out and operation of the equipment / climbing walls and use. There are no opportunities to provide a separate access for visiting members of the public to the proposed use, or separate cores to access the upper floors, which would be required to separate the office and public functions. The property is therefore not suitable to accommodate the proposed use.

Other properties

- 6.3 In addition to the above, the sequential assessment identified no available properties within, or on the edge of, the District or Local Centres which could suitably meet the minimum floorspace required for the proposed development. As such there are no alternative facilities that are available or suitable within the district or local centres.
- 6.4 Overall, for the reasons outlined above, there are no sequentially preferable sites in the defined catchment area, which would be suitable, available or viable for the proposed operation. As such, The Climbing Hangar has identified the application site, which is available, meets their operational requirements and will provides a viable location for their facility in an accessible location that serves the surrounding local business and residential areas.
- 6.5 The application site is in an accessible location, which is close to bus stops providing a variety of routes and links with the town centre and wider area and is accessible from the surrounding places of work and homes by good bus, pedestrian routes and cycle access. The site therefore represents an appropriate location for the proposed use given that there are no available or feasible sites within, or on the edge of, centres in the catchment area.

7 IMPACT

- 7.1 In order to assess the potential impact of the Proposed Development, it is appropriate to understand the proposed development in the context of provision for climbing and bouldering facilities in Reading.
- 7.2 Whilst National guidance identifies proposals over 2,500 m² must be accompanied by an impact assessment, Policy RL5 requires that developments for town centre uses over 1,000 m² outside of the town centre boundary carry out an impact assessment. There is no methodology for undertaking a quantitative assessment of leisure impact and therefore the assessment provides a qualitative assessment, which is appropriate and proportionate to the proposals and the requirement for the impact assessment in this instance.
- 7.3 Assessments of impact are required to be based on a direct comparison of facilities and whether there will be direct impacts which might have a detrimental effect on the centres as a whole. The operator in this case is The Climbing Hangar, a climbing and bouldering centre seeking to cater for growth in interest and demand in such facilities.
- 7.4 Impact needs to be assessed against existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres within the catchment area, and impact on vitality and viability. Overall, the key test when assessing impact, is whether the proposal will have a significant adverse impact on a centre as a whole. Individual competition between operators is not the primary consideration, albeit the effect of impact on existing units needs to be considered in terms of the wider effects it will have on the function and health of a defined centre. Accordingly, the potential impact of the bouldering centre is considered below.
- 7.5 Reading Town Centre provides multiple functions as a focus for shopping, recreation, food and drink; as well as a place of work and a residential location. The centre not only caters for the urban catchment of the town, but also the wider rural population, as well as visitors from surrounding settlements. The principle strength and health of the Town Centre is derived from its primary retail, service retail and food and beverage functions, which makes up the majority of the retail and leisure uses within the town.
- 7.6 The District and Local Centres provide for the day to day convenience shopping and service functions of the local communities in the area, with their principle strength and health based on these functions.
- 7.7 There are no existing climbing and bouldering uses within the town centre, or District and Local Centres, with only one existing facility in the area which is located in an out of centre location south of the town centre.
- 7.8 The proposed use will therefore not provide a use that is currently catered for within the centres in the area and will not therefore divert any trade from existing town, district or local centre facilities. The proposal will therefore have no impact on the core retail, service and food and beverage functions within the centres in the catchment or impact on the overall health and vitality of these centres. These centres continue their role in terms of being the principle centre for retail and service functions to the wider community. Whilst there are investment plans for the town centre and new

allocations for redevelopment, none of these are focussed or anchored by new indoor climbing facility and the proposal will not impact on potential investment in the centre.

- 7.9 In conclusion, it is evident that the proposed use will not result in a significant adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the Town Centre, or District and Local Centres in the area, and will not impact on the ability of these centres to attract future investment.
- 7.10 On this basis the scheme complies with the NPPF and the Development Plan.

8 PLANNING APPRAISAL

8.1 The proposal is for the change of use of the vacant former light industrial unit for use as an indoor climbing centre (Use Class E(d)). Minor external amendments are required to facilitate the change of use, including minor amendments to entrances/exits, windows and provision of new glazed frontage in the location of the existing roller shutter, and the provision of cycle hoops and a vertical timber screen to a dedicated refuse/recycling storage area to serve the facility.

8.2 This section provides an assessment of the development against the relevant Development Plan policies and NPPF.

Land Use Policy

8.3 The site is located in a sustainable location. The premises is located within an existing built-up area within the settlement boundary. The site is previously developed land comprising a vacant property that is not currently providing any use or benefit to the area or local community.

8.4 The use will serve the local surrounding business community and residential communities in the wider area as providing a complimentary and ancillary active recreation and fitness use that will provide opportunities to improve health and well-being. The use will appeal to employees within the area, as well as residents in the wider neighbourhoods, including youth, social and community groups which The Climbing Hangar take an active involvement in.

8.5 The building is in a highly accessible location with excellent public transport connections and good pedestrian links connecting it with the local and wider area.

8.6 The property is a vacant, previously developed site and the use will make use and improve the existing premises within this accessible location and provide a leisure use for the employees of the industrial estate and surrounding neighbourhoods, reducing the need to travel to other wider destinations and towns.

Loss of Existing Use

8.7 The application site is located within an area identified in the Local Plan as Core Employment Area. **Policy EM3** seeks to maintain the overall level of employment land but allows the loss of such land in exceptional circumstances. Where it can be demonstrated that a site in a Core Employment Area has no long-term prospect of employment use, a related alternative commercial use or use which complements the employment use of the area may be considered that would not result in a significant reduction in jobs.

8.8 Paragraph 4.3.13 recognises that there may not be any long-term prospect of re-use or redevelopment for employment, and in these cases it is preferable for a site to be used for an alternative commercial use that complements the area than for it to be vacant in the long-term. Long term vacancy in this case can be taken to mean five years or more, as shorter time periods might be the result of short-term economic conditions. If there is also no long-term prospect of redevelopment of these sites for employment, alternative commercial uses under this policy may be considered.

- 8.9 The property has been vacant for over 4 years despite the owners of the site instructing agents to market the premises to try and secure an alternative employment occupier. Marketing has been undertaken by both Sharps Commercial and TL Real Estate Limited since the landlord was informed that the tenant would be vacating. A full marketing campaign has been ongoing over this period, including internet advertisement and availability on databases, including the Commercial Property Register; publication on property websites including EGI, Property Link, CoStar, PropList, Prime Location; letting boards on the property; digital and hard copy brochures delivered and mailed to agents and prospective occupiers/tenants with known requirements.
- 8.10 The premises has been marketed for the full range of employment uses including industrial, business and warehouse use to appeal to the widest potential audience in this location. The owner has been willing to be open to discussions on subdividing the unit and the length of term of any lease providing maximum flexibility in seeking to find alternative commercial occupiers for the premises. The landlord also invested in the property and undertook a refurbishment to seek to attract interest and an occupier.
- 8.11 The marketing campaign has resulted in a number of initial enquiries through the website and via phone calls, and has led to viewings by potential occupiers. However, traditional B Class operators have discounted the site and no offers have been received with the feedback received in discounting the premises being principally related to the position of the unit on the estate and lack of available space for sufficient loading and access and space for HGVs, and issues over the relationship with the neighbouring properties. The building is positioned on a pinch point on the estate, with a far shallower frontage than other units and principal access to the side. This side entrance is accessed via a shared route which also leads directly to the main entrance of No. 7, located immediately adjacent to the application premises. Servicing of the unit by larger vehicles is therefore very limited and the relationship with surrounding properties restricts the principal access and servicing point, whilst access to the property and entrance is compromised for HGVs. The surrounding accesses to other units, car parking and relationship with the other surrounding units limits the potential to alter and amend these access arrangements. Potential tenants have dismissed the site due to a lack of any external area for vehicles to wait, load/unload and service the unit effectively and the fact the site has no provision for external loading, storage or servicing vehicles.
- 8.12 Only one offer has been received to date over the whole marketing period from a potential occupier who proposed to use the premises as a commercial kitchen to operate a wholesale division and serve their existing restaurants in the area. However, due to a change in their circumstances and concerns over the access and servicing of the unit, they identified an alternative unit with enhanced access, and they withdrew from the site.
- 8.13 There are limited opportunities to redevelop or reconfigure the site due to its position with existing commercial properties on either side and the unit forming one half of a building. Opportunities have been explored to review the access provisions and lack of external storage, but due to the proximity of surrounding properties, the access arrangements, turning requirements and servicing of the other properties within the estate it is not possible to address the deficiencies, whilst the main concerns in relation to the position of the property in the estate and the lack of forecourt and external loading/storage cannot be appropriately addressed in the limited site area. It is therefore evident that there is no long term prospect of the unit being bought back into occupation for an industrial or storage/distribution use.

- 8.14 The only other offer received to date has come from The Climbing Hangar. The lack of offers from B class occupiers, combined with the limitations raised with the premises and site, and the fact that these are not readily resolvable, have meant that alternative employment generating uses that will complement the location have had to be considered to bring it back into active and beneficial use.
- 8.15 Due to the nature and requirements of the operation The Climbing Hangar has a unique and bespoke set out requirements associated with the buildings that are capable of accommodating the use and enable the facility to operate. As such the requirements require large footprint buildings with high floor to ceilings which are generally only available within warehouse type buildings.

Economic Benefits

- 8.16 The existing building meets the parameters of The Climbing Hangar and is vacant and not delivering any current economic use or benefit. The previous use of the building as a facility storage, altering and preparing kitchen worktops/furniture generated a low level of direct employment on site, generating only 7 FTE employees.
- 8.17 The proposed use is also an employment generating use, and will generate an increased number of jobs. The proposal will generate employment providing opportunities for circa. 25 jobs, across a range of types and levels of position. As such the proposal will deliver more employment than the former use of the premises, whilst the proposal will deliver new types of employment and opportunities for those with different skills and expertise than current opportunities within the estate.
- 8.18 Paragraph 4.3.11 notes that in order for Core Employment Areas to maximise their contribution to the economy, there may be scope for inclusion of uses that are not strictly within an 'employment' classification in order to support the economic role of the area, for instance through provision of services and facilities for workers and customers.
- 8.19 The proposed The Climbing Hangar facility will provide a facility that will be complimentary to the local employment activities in the area and which is within walking distance, providing opportunities for social interaction and to improve health and wellbeing. The addition of this leisure facility to the employment area will support the continued improvement of the existing industrial area, providing another business, enhancing the area's reputation and attractiveness as a place for companies to locate.
- 8.20 The proposed leisure use would complement the existing employment uses within the wider estate, providing those employed within the area with a leisure use to utilise during break times, before and after work. Industry and business uses will continue to dominate the buildings within the Core Employment Area and the proposal would neither prejudice the existing employment opportunities nor hinder any further employment within the area in the future, but would provide enhanced amenity to current occupiers and deliver additional employment. The Climbing Hangar operate in similar locations in their facilities in Sheffield and Exeter, with these facilities being utilised by the employees of the surrounding businesses, as well as sourcing local products to service the facility.

- 8.21 The proposal will therefore result in economic benefits to the area, bring a long-term vacant building back into active use, generating new and a greater diversity of employment opportunities and supporting and serving the existing businesses and their employees in this location. The proposal will not result in harm to business and employment opportunities, but instead provides an opportunity to enhance them and to deliver economic and employment benefits in an accessible location by walking and public transport, as set out in the transport section below. As such the proposal will deliver economic benefits to this vacant site and contribute to the local economy in this location and therefore complies with **Policy EM3**.
- 8.22 The Climbing Hangar has identified a need for a facility within this location to cater for growing demand to serve the communities and neighbourhoods in this part of the City Council area. At present there is only one other such use in the town, located to the south of the town centre. The proposed unit is to be located within an existing urban area, making use of a property which is long term vacant, and will provide an affordable option for the local population and workforce to improve their health and wellbeing.
- 8.23 The proposal provides an accessible and affordable leisure and fitness use for the local area, with the use having limited equipment requirements due its nature and pay as you go use options, as well as providing local employment opportunities of different types. The proposal will provide a local facility which provides health and fitness facilities to a wider demographic and offers a flexible and affordable operation for local residents and workers. The use is aimed at those within the surrounding area and is easily accessible by walking, cycling and public transport to the surrounding employment uses, nearby communities and city centre.
- 8.24 The building allows access by people with disabilities and those with young children, as providing level thresholds and level access throughout the property and the main public areas of the use across a single level only. Disabled changing and w/c facilities are incorporated. As such the use will be fully compliant with DDA requirements.
- 8.25 Policy RL2 of the Local Plan identifies that additional provision will be made for retail and related facilities to 2036, together with new leisure facilities. The policy requires proposals for 2,500sqm or more to be located within the Town Centre and requires all proposals outside of defined centres to be subject to a sequential assessment and comply with the requirements set out in national policy.
- 8.26 Whilst indoor sports/climbing centre facilities are not directly referenced in Annex 2 of the NPPF as being main town centre uses, other leisure uses are included within the NPPF definition. We have therefore undertaken a sequential assessment as set out in sections 5 and 6 of this statement reviewing potential available sites within the town centre and District and Local Centres in the area that could be suitable and viable to accommodate the use.
- 8.27 The sequential assessment undertaken demonstrates that there are no properties within or on the edge of the town centre or district and local centres that are available and would be of a size, layout and specification that would meet the requirements of the proposed use. The proposal therefore meets the requirements of the sequential assessment and is located in an accessible urban location, benefiting from public transport links, and good walking and cycling connections to the surrounding area.

- 8.28 Policy RL5 requires proposals that include more than 1,000sqm of new or additional floorspace for main town centre uses in out of centre locations to demonstrate that there will be no significant adverse impact on existing centres.
- 8.29 The impact assessment in section 7 demonstrates that there are no existing dedicated climbing and bouldering centres within the town centre, or district and local centres in the area, which would be impacted by the proposal and the principal attractions of the centres in terms of day to day shopping needs, food and beverage, cultural and office uses will not be affected by the proposal.
- 8.30 The proposal will not result in any diversion of trade and will not impact on their operation. The proposal will therefore not result in a significant adverse impact on the health, vitality and viability of these centres overall, which are focussed on convenience and comparison retail, food and beverage uses and other day to day service uses, such as banks and beauty facilities. Furthermore, we are not aware of any committed and planned investment in the city centre or district centre that would include such a use and compete with it. As such it is concluded that the proposal will not impact on the health, vitality and viability of these existing centres and the proposed site is considered to be an appropriate and accessible location for the intended use, which will have a positive and beneficial impact.
- 8.31 The proposal is therefore in accordance with **Policy RL2** and **Policy RL5**.

Sustainable Transport & Parking

- 8.32 The site is located in a sustainable and accessible location. The premises is located within an existing built up area within the settlement boundary. The site is previously developed land comprising a vacant property that is not currently providing any use or benefit to the area or local community.
- 8.33 The building is in a highly accessible location with excellent public transport connections and good pedestrian links connecting it with the local and wider area, services and facilities.
- 8.34 The Transport Statement submitted with the application confirms:
- The proposal site meets the transport policy goals set out in the NPPF, being a sustainable development and location;
 - The site is very well connected to public transport services and lies within a comprehensive walking and cycling network in very close proximity to the site;
 - Travel by bus and rail represents a convenient option for journeys to and from the site for staff and site users.
- 8.35 The Climbing Hangar works on the basis of providing excellent facilities which are accessible and available to those living and working close by. It aims to provide a facility which can be used on a day-to-day basis for those looking for the convenience of a leisure facility either close to home or to and from work. The use will appeal to employees within the area, as well as residents in the surrounding neighbourhoods, including youth, social and community groups which The Climbing Hangar take an active involvement in.

- 8.36 Full details of the accessibility of the site and impact of the proposals on the transport network, as well as parking requirements and provision, is set out in the Transport Statement submitted with this application.
- 8.37 In terms of car parking, the proposal will deliver a total of 16 allocated vehicle bays overall for customers and staff (including disabled parking adjacent to the building entrance), with cycle parking located to the front of the property externally capable of secure parking for 12 bikes, with a further 12 spaces provided internally. Car parking is in line with Reading Borough Council standards, and other Climbing Hangar operations, and is considered to be appropriate for the operational needs of the proposed development, which the Transport Statement demonstrates will see a maximum parking demand for 15 spaces based on a TRICS car parking accumulation exercise. The cycle parking proposed will exceed the standards, and together with the changing and showering facilities will encourage cycling and walking to the premises.
- 8.38 The proposed use is not an intensive sports / leisure centre providing a high number of fitness stations, exercise classes or pool facilities. The proposed use is of a low intensity given the nature of the use and how the space is fitted out and used. The nature of the use means that there are limited numbers that can be accommodate on the wall at any one time. As such the car and cycle parking provision will adequately meet the needs of the use. The level of car parking is comparable with The Climbing Hangar's existing facilities in similar locations and as within a self-contained site the proposal will not lead to parking pressure on-street. Parking spaces will be appropriately signed and managed to deliver their appropriate use.
- 8.39 The Transport Statement confirms that the proposed car parking provision is in accordance with the maximum recommended standards while meeting the operational needs of the development, which will see demand for parking from users and members of staff. The proposed provision will ensure that there is no overspill parking onto the adjoining highway.
- 8.40 The servicing requirements of the use are low compared to traditional employment uses and will be restricted to products to serve the café, administrative requirements and waste collection. Deliveries will be undertaken twice a week in transit vans. Servicing and refuse vehicles can be accommodated off-street to serve the unit. It is considered that the proposal would not detrimentally impact upon local highways within the locality.
- 8.41 In terms of trip generation and traffic impact the Transport Statement demonstrates that the proposed change of use to an indoor climbing centre would result in a decrease of 9 vehicles in the weekday AM peak and an increase of only 8 vehicle trips during the weekday network PM peak hours, respectively. In addition, vehicle trips in the weekend peak hour are forecast to change by just 12 additional trips, which is considered to be a negligible increase that will have no discernible effect upon highway capacity. In summary, the proposed development will have no negative effect on the operation of the adjoining road network and there will be no severe traffic or highway safety impacts.
- 8.42 The proposal will therefore provide a high-quality leisure facility in an accessible location and is demonstrated to be acceptable in parking and transport terms. As such, the proposed location is considered to be acceptable, in line with the NPPF and Local Plan.

Sustainability

- 8.43 The proposal re-uses an existing vacant building in an urban location accessible by sustainable modes and of transport and in walking and cycling distance of employment and residential areas, as well as the Spital Hill District Centre and City Centre. The proposal will make beneficial use of the building providing an active use assisting to improve health, fitness and wellbeing within the area.
- 8.44 The proposed fit out is fully reversible, ensuring the future ability to reuse the building for a variety of uses and functions is maintained. No external changes, extensions or major physical works are proposed to the building or site to enable the change of use.
- 8.45 The energy demands of the proposed use are low, with the main elements related to heating, lighting and limited cooking related to the café. There is however limited electrical equipment as part of the use and operation. Lighting will be energy efficient, and activated on sensors in back of house areas to enable automatic turn off when not in use. Water fittings will be installed with anti-backflow valves to prevent water backing up pipes and low flow taps and flushes installed where appropriate.
- 8.46 Overall, it is considered that the re-use of the building will ensure the sustainable occupation of an existing building, whilst the fit out will incorporate elements to minimise energy and water use where practical and the proposal is compliant with the Development Plan and NPPF.

Flood Risk & Resilience

- 8.47 The site is located within Flood Zone 2, with the land immediately to the south of the premises and Oxford Road and Wigmore Lane in Flood Zone 1.
- 8.48 The most recent use of the site was as light industrial/storage, which is classified as a “less vulnerable use” within Table 2: Flood Risk Vulnerability Classification. The proposed use for sport and leisure would also fall within the “less vulnerable use” category of Table 2 and therefore the proposed change of use would not increase the vulnerability to flooding. Table 3: Flood Risk Vulnerability and Flood Zone Compatibility, identifies that “less vulnerable uses”, including sport and leisure, are appropriate within Flood Zone 2 and 3a.
- 8.49 The site represents an existing vacant building, does not increase impermeable areas, will not increase the vulnerability to flooding, or the risk of flooding on or off-site, and measures will be put in place, as set out below, to reduce the risk and impact of potential flooding. An Exception Test is not applicable in this case as the proposals is for a less vulnerable use, which is appropriate within Flood Zone 2 and 3a.
- 8.50 Given the flood risk of the site further consideration has been given to flood resistance and resilience measures that can be adopted as part of the fit out of the building for the proposed use and incorporated as part of its operation. This includes measures that can be incorporated to ensure flood risk is monitored, managed and that evacuation of staff and users takes place at the appropriate time and in a safe and controlled manor reducing the risk from flooding, and a Business Flood Plan will be completed prior to occupation and provides contact details of staff, service shut off-points, measures to prevent business disruption and ensure the site is safe and secure in a flood event.

- 8.51 On this basis it is considered that the re-use of the existing building is compliant with the requirements of the Development Plan in respects of flood risk.

Noise & Disturbance

- 8.52 The proposed use will not have a significant impact on the amenity of adjoining occupiers, or residents within the wider area. The site will be carefully managed and controlled by The Climbing Hangar to ensure that the amenity of occupiers and the overall environment is maintained.
- 8.53 The premises are located within a commercial area, and is not in close proximity to any residential units. The proposed opening hours of 6.30am to 10pm will ensure that the facility will not be open overnight or late at night, whilst providing appropriate access to workers and residents in the wider area during evenings.
- 8.54 The application site lies within an existing commercial setting, there are no residential properties nearby. A climbing centre is not an unduly sensitive use that would discourage other industries and businesses from locating in the area, but that it can be a positive use that can act to encourage employees and employers to the area by providing a supporting and complimentary use for workers. It is also determined that whilst the premises seek to open during the day, a climbing centre will secure the majority of its business during the evening and weekends as a leisure activity when the majority of the neighbouring industrial/commercial uses will not be operational such that it is concluded that they can co-exist without detriment to each other. The Climbing Hangar operate successfully in similar business and industrial locations across the UK, with their use seen as a positive element, complementary to the area, by other surrounding businesses and occupiers.
- 8.55 The proposed use is not inherently noisy, with limited equipment and servicing requirements, and without high levels of background noise or music within the facility. The use's main area is also set back from the entrance to the facility by a lobby area, and the changing rooms and back of house space, reducing the potential for noise breakout externally to the front of the building.
- 8.56 The wider employment area incorporates a range of commercial uses which function across a range of opening and operational hours.
- 8.57 The proposal is compliant with the Local Plan as ensuring no significant impact on residential amenity, the operation of existing operations or the local environment.

Employment & Training

- 8.58 The proposal will deliver opportunities for circa. 25 new jobs. The Climbing Hangar are an established operator which incorporates recruitment and training practices for the operation.
- 8.59 Due to the size of our business and the unique nature of our industry as an indoor climbing provider, standard recognised training qualifications i.e., BTEC/ NVQ are not applicable and the Climbing Hangar therefore provide Climbing Industry recognised qualifications for all employees, such as (BMC) Fundamentals of climbing 1 & 2, and Mountain Training - Foundation Coach training, which are co-ordinated by our Technical Advisor.
- 8.60 In addition, we deliver a variety of customer service, hospitality and site-specific training to our teams. All staff members will complete First Aid training and Level 2 Food Safety. Our kitchen

staff will undergo additional in-house Barista & Bakery Training, all of which are transferable skills which will benefit the long-term employment opportunities of our staff teams. All staff members also undertake a suite of online courses provided by Flow Training: <https://www.flowhospitalitytraining.co.uk/en/>

- 8.61 The Climbing Hangar recruitment strategy targets the local area, which for this site will be the local Reading population. The proposal will be create a range of employment opportunities in the community from unskilled positions though to senior/ operational management roles. We are endeavouring to recruit from the local area, however due to some of the unique roles and climbing industry skills/ qualifications required, it will be impossible for us to guarantee what proportion of these would be from the local area.
- 8.62 Despite the facilities being slightly over 1000m2, due to the nature of the business being a specialist use as an indoor climbing centre with relatively little redevelopment of the facility itself, the proposed employment and training measures set out above are considered to be appropriate and commensurate to the change of use proposal and will provide appropriate opportunities to recruit locally and provide necessary training in the skills required to serve the facility.

Planning Summary

- 8.63 The proposed change of use at the site to a class E(d) use will ensure this vacant unit is bought into active use whilst providing a replacement employment use and new, increased, employment opportunities and an alternative leisure use that will support the surrounding commercial estate and wider communities.
- 8.64 The property is a long term vacant building, which remains unoccupied despite active and continuous marketing. The physical attributes of the position of the property in the park, its access arrangements, external servicing and storage limitations and relationship with its neighbours means it is not attractive to commercial industrial or storage/distribution operators. As such the building remains vacant and an alternative use is required to bring it back into active operation and make sustainable use of the property.
- 8.65 The site is in a highly accessible location, accessible to bus stops, and by foot and bike from the surrounding employment uses and residential areas. As such the site is readily accessible by non-car modes from the local and wider areas.
- 8.66 The proposed use as a climbing centre provides an opportunity to secure the appropriate reuse of this unit. The use is aimed at meeting the needs of employees of local businesses, as well as residents in the surrounding communities, improving the overall health and wellbeing of those within the vicinity. The proposed use will provide an appropriate alternative use to the area and provide opportunities to improve health and wellbeing.
- 8.67 The operation has highly specific operating and buildings requirements given the nature of the use and there are no sequentially preferable sites located within or in edge of centre locations that can accommodate the proposal. Due to the nature of the use and operation there will be no impact on existing centres within the catchment, or opportunities for investment. The site is located within an accessible location with local bus routes within walking distance and good pedestrian connections. Users are anticipated to be either employees or residents of the surrounding area, utilising the facility as part of linked trips, for example to and from work.

- 8.68 The submitted Transport Statement demonstrates how the proposed use will deliver sufficient car parking to support the use and operate safely without any severe impacts, whilst the proposal will not impact on the amenity of the location or prejudice the operation of existing businesses or the floorspace to be retained in commercial use.
- 8.69 The proposed use is in accordance with the Development Plan, delivers sustainable development and will make a positive contribution to the area, improve employment opportunities, deliver new economic investment and provide health and wellbeing benefits.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The proposal is for the change of use of the former light industrial use as an indoor climbing centre (Use Class E(d)). The site currently comprises a single-storey vacant building which was last in use over 4 years ago.
- 9.2 The proposal will comprise the re-use of a vacant building, which has been actively and continuously marketed since the former tenant advised it would be vacating the premises. The premises has been marketed to commercial and industrial occupiers through a variety of methods, including site board, circulation of particulars, website and property database distribution, targeted communication with potential tenants. Despite the active marketing no offers have been received from industrial or warehouse operators and the unit has remained vacant. The owner has therefore had to consider alternative occupiers and uses to bring the premises back into active use, secure employment and to deliver a positive impact from the site. The Climbing Hangar has been seeking a premises for their use in this location for some time and the building's floor to ceiling height and its layout also provide the ideal opportunity for its use as The Climbing Hangar, whilst the site is in an accessible location by walking, cycling and public transport, and accessible to the surrounding employment and residential areas.
- 9.3 The site is not located within any designated centre. On the basis of the NPPF, a sequential assessment has therefore been undertaken and potentially sequentially preferable sites have been identified and reviewed. These sites, however, have been demonstrated to not provide sufficient available floorspace or to be unsuitable for the purposes of the proposed climbing centre. The proposal therefore meets the requirements of the sequential test.
- 9.4 The Impact Test has demonstrated that as the proposal is for a specialist use which is not present within any designated centre there will be no harmful impact on the vitality and viability of the City Centre or District and Local Centres, whilst there are opportunities for linked trips and increased footfall. The proposal is situated within a highly accessible location, with a number of bus links adjacent to the site, providing regular and direct access to the wider locality, train stations and town centres, as well as good quality walking and cycling routes linking the site to the surrounding communities. The site can also be accessed from the local employment uses and residential areas by walking and cycling. As such the site is readily accessible by non-car modes from the local and wider areas.
- 9.5 The site is in Flood Zone 2, however the proposal does not propose any external changes to the building or site which will impact on the flood risk of the site or surroundings, and the proposed use is a 'less vulnerable' use identified as being appropriate in this zone. A Flood Evacuation Plan and Framework Flood Business Plan are provided as part of the Flood Risk Assessment which identifies measures for monitoring flood warnings and safe evacuation routes in the event of a warning being received, and resilience and mitigation measures to reduce the risk and impact of flooding on staff, business and premises.
- 9.6 The proposal will provide a use which generates employment and will also enhance the area within which it is located as providing additional and varied employment opportunities, to those currently within the location, with the proposal reusing a vacant unit to provide a complementary leisure use which will improve opportunities for fitness and overall activity within the area for neighbouring businesses. The proposal will also assist in supporting and attracting new businesses and employees

to existing occupiers by providing an additional and complementary facility in close proximity. The proposal will not harmfully impact upon the amenity of neighbouring residents and businesses and is compatible with the existing uses in the area.

- 9.7 Overall, it is considered that the proposals will have a positive impact on the wider area, and provide a clean, safe and accessible facility which fits within the nature of this location and will support the current business uses. The proposals are in line with local planning policies and will provide improved opportunities for health, fitness and social interaction for employees and residents in this area, as well as generating employment and new economic investment. The proposal is therefore compliant with the Local Plan. We therefore respectfully request that the Council grant planning permission for the proposed subdivision, change of use and minor associated works.