

PLANNING STATEMENT

Introduction

This Statement has been prepared on behalf of London & Cambridge Properties Limited in support of a planning application for the change of use from children's play facility to a gymnastics gym at Unit 7 Sterling Way, Norcot Industrial Estate, Reading.

Site & Surroundings

The application site is situated within a small industrial estate comprising 7 industrial units (all owned by the applicant). Unit 7 comprises a steel portal frame with brick and part clad elevations under a fully insulated pitched roof. The Unit has been in use for approximately 15 years as a soft play centre (Krazy Kids). However, due to the pandemic it has been forced to close. There is parking for approximately 30 cars.



The Proposals

The proposal is to use the premises as a gymnastics club for Virtue Gymnastics, a long established gymnastics club in Reading, who offer a wide variety of classes for children aged 1-17 years. A link to their website: -

<https://virtuegymnastics.co.uk/>



They offer an extensive programme which includes gymnastics pre-school, freestyle, aerobic and competitive squad sessions. In addition they operate drop in classes and extra curriculum PE.

The club is affiliated with British Gymnastics along with Great Berkshire Active. At present they are operating their classes from 3 separate venues on weekdays and 2 venues on Saturdays. All of their current lettings are for 39 weeks a year due to current venue term time only conditions. With these new facilities, they would ideally be open 50 weeks a year from 9:00am – 10:30pm seven days per week to cater for an extensive waiting list and to be able to expand the class timetable into a more community based club.

The number of staff on site per hour would be between 6-8 and the numbers of members per hour would be 48 (between 4-8pm) and about 24 for the remainder of the time.

Planning History

On 6th May 2005, planning permission was granted for the change of use from industrial use to a children's play facility (Application

No. 05/00007/FUL). A copy of the planning permission has been submitted with the planning application. Condition 11 restricted the use to a children's play facility only within Class D2 and no other use.

Planning Policy Context

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2003 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material consideration indicates otherwise. For the purposes of this application the statutory development plan comprises the Reading Local Plan (adopted November 2019). Relevant Policies include: -

Policy CC1 Principle in Favour of Suitable Development

Policy CC8 Safeguarding Amenity

Policy EM3 Loss of Employment Land

Policy TR3 Access Traffic and Highway Related Matters

Policy TR5 Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Charging Points



Justification for the Proposals

The premises have been in use as a children's soft play facility for over 15 years and not in industrial use. Unfortunately the use has had to close due to the pandemic.

The proposed use also seeks to provide a facility for children to train in gymnastics etc. It would also enable the Virtue Club to consolidate its activities in one permanent building. Thus allowing them to provide additional facilities. Accordingly, there will be no loss of industrial floorspace as the premises has not been in industrial use for over 15 years. Accordingly the proposals are not contrary to Policy E3 of the adopted Local Plan.

Appearance and Character of the Area

There are no external alterations proposed to the building and so the change of use would not be detrimental to the appearance of the existing building and the character of the area.

Residential Amenity

The property is situated in a predominantly industrial area and whilst the operating times are slightly longer than the children's soft play use it is considered that issues regarding potential noise and disturbance with such a community use would not arise.

Sequential Assessment

Paragraphs 86 and 87 of the NPPF states that: -

“Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date 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.

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, so that opportunities to utilise suitable town centre or edge of centre sites are fully explored.”

The application site comprises a unit of 1,340sqm with 30 car parking spaces. The sequential assessment has sought to identify sites which are capable of accommodating the proposed development as a whole as opposed to disaggregating the use (which is not feasible or productive). Furthermore, the Framework, appeal decisions and the Courts have made it clear that it is not necessary to disaggregate the uses proposed.

The gymnastics club requires the level of accommodation to carry out all of their activities. They also require a sprung floor to undertake gymnastics. This is a considerable investment and requires a long term solution as it would be prohibitively expensive to relay the floor etc.

At the moment the club operates from a number of different sites and the building offers the opportunity to provide all of the classes

under one roof. There are no available premises of this size either within or on the edge of any nearby centre.

Accordingly, it is considered that the applicants have met the requirements of the sequential assessment.

Transport

The site is situated on Norcot Road in close proximity to Oxford Road. Norcot Road and Oxford Road lie in a Quality Bus Corridor with excellent public transport facilities and a good frequency of services. A pedestrian access is available from Norcot Way to the application premises which avoids the vehicular entrance to the site and the car parking area. A zebra crossing exists close to the entrance which assists any pedestrians walking to the west of Norcot Road.

Parking is available within the site and there are some 30 parking spaces. In addition, cycle parking is also available at the premises.

It is considered that the proposals are situated in a suitable location which is attractive by non car modes. Accordingly, there should be no highway objections to the proposals.



Conclusions

The proposals would provide an opportunity for a local gymnastics club to occupy the building and continue to provide a local community use. There is no loss of industrial floorspace as the property has not been in industrial use for over 15 years.

It is understood that there would be no transport or other detrimental impact on the surrounding area.

It is therefore requested that planning permission be granted.