

28 PORTMAN ROAD, READING, RG

SEQUENTIAL TEST

ON BEHALF OF VIRTUE GYMNASTICS

Prepared by: Mykena Mortimer - Davies



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Sequential Test is submitted in support of an application, made on behalf of Virtue Gymnastics. The application seeks to gain permission for a change of use from light industrial (B2) to gymnastics/ free running parkour use (E use). The existing unit is being described as B2 use due to the absence of other information to clearly show otherwise. Further information on this has been set out in the planning statement.
- 1.2 Reading Local Plan Policy RL2 relates to the scale and location of retail, leisure and culture development. This policy states that "*where a need for additional development has been identified, and no sites are available in or adjoining the centre of Reading, or other defined centres, a sequential approach should be adopted to identifying alternative sites*". The purpose of this Sequential Test is to sequentially assess whether there are suitable alternative sites to accommodate the proposed use within the town centre and edge of centre sites. Where sites which meet a defined criterion of potential suitability are identified, their appropriateness for the proposed use are assessed in greater detail within this test.
- 1.3 The remaining sections of this statement will set out the parameters that were used for conducting this Sequential Test, before turning to the results and analysis of sites that were identified from the area wide search.
- 1.4 For clarification, during the course of completing this Sequential test the Use classes Order was amended to include certain B use classes within the E use class. As the test has considered a wide range of B and D use classes, the wider E use class does not provide additional opportunities to identify viable alternative premises that have not already been assessed.

2.0 SEQUENTIAL TEST PARAMETERS

- 2.1 Policy RL2 of the Reading Local Plan (2019) states that *"where a need for additional development has been identified, and no sites are available in or adjoining the centre of Reading, or other defined centres, a sequential approach should be adopted to identifying alternative sites"*.
- 2.2 The 'town centre' is defined as the 'central core' in policy CR1 and Policy RL2. However, 'edge of centre' and 'out of centre' are not specifically defined in the Local Plan and these locations would be considered on a case by case basis. We questioned the Council for a definition, to which the answer is provided in appendix 1. To summarise there is no definition.
- 2.3 For this application, the 'edge of centre' area has been extended by approximately 500m from the 'town centre' to reflect the distance of the proposed site from the 'town centre' area. The depth of this buffer has been continued around the Reading Central Area, to ensure all those sites as close to, or closer than, the application site to the town centre are considered. A map showing the area of search for this Sequential Test is available in Appendix 2. The boundary lines for the 'town centre' and the 'edge of centre' areas are marked in blue and red respectively. A similar approach to defining these boundaries was accepted under application ref: 181860.
- 2.4 In order to identify and assess alternative sites, it is important to understand the site characteristics of the proposed gymnastics use. The application site is 782.40 sq m, and fronts directly on to Portman Road, which directly feeds on to Oxford Road, a major link between Reading West and Reading Town Centre.
- 2.5 Consequently, in order to provide a degree of flexibility, an alternative site would need to accommodate a single storey unit between 578 sq m and 978 sq m, with a clear internal height of 5.5m, apex height of 5.9m and parking spaces. The internal height is fundamental to the operation of the proposed use due to the equipment height including safety provisions aswell as the activities that will be undertaken which require aerial manoeuvres. Sites have

been selected in the catchment area that have a building up to 25% more and 25% less than the application site (792.40 sqm), i.e. between 587 sqm to 978 sqm.

2.6 In summary alternative sites have been identified that are within the following search parameters:

- Within the defined search area
- Floor area between 587-978 sqm
- Existing D1 and D2/B use with potential for acceptable change of use if needed
- Existing parking/access
- Clear internal height of at least 5.5m (clear of obstructions)
- Clear apex height of 5.9m
- Suitable, Available and Viable for rent

2.7 The sites in the search area were identified by a variety of means. An initial web-based search was conducted on various websites including Estates Gazette, Zoopla and Prime Location to identify suitable sites. Once sites were identified, this resulted in letters being sent to several local leading commercial letting agents (Haslams, Sharps Commercial and Hicks Baker) on the 9th September 2020. The letters asked the agents whether they were aware of any other suitable sites that adhere with the parameters, beyond those already identified in the web based assessment undertaken.

2.8 Email responses were received from Haslams (10th September) stating that the site 'Reading Central Club' is available and could be suitable. A response

was received from Hicks Baker (9th September) stating that there were no suitable sites available. A response was received from Sharps Commercial (12th September) stating that they were not aware of any suitable sites, however, did provide comments on the potential sites identified through the web based research. Evidence of the correspondence with the commercial agents is available in Appendices 3-8.

- 2.9 Additionally, a survey on the ground (by foot and car) was also carried out within the search area on 13 July 2020. Consequently, it was considered that sites that are 'suitable', 'available' and 'viable' were robustly identified within the defined search area (see map in appendix 2).

3.0 ASSESSMENT OF SUITABLE ALTERNATIVE SITES

3.1 Table 1 below contains the sites that were identified from the area wide searches. Comments have been made against the suitability of each site in the following section.

Site Name	Source	Floor area (sq.m)
1. 199-213 Cardiff Road	Prime Location	910.45
2. Unit 2, Meadow Road	Prime Location	551.18
3. 8 Richfield Avenue	Estates Gazette	920.55
4. 14b Richfield Avenue	Estates Gazette	873.26
5. 16b Richfield Avenue	Estates Gazette	906.61
6. 2-4 Cremyll Road	Prime Location	541.21-1082.47
7. Unit 2-4 Portman Trade	Estates Gazette	215.99-655.97
8. Reading Central Club	Haslams	550

Site 1: 199-213 Cardiff Road

3.2 This site is suitable in that it has sufficient parking with 22 spaces and an apex height of 8.25m. However, the eaves height is 5m and therefore lower than the required 5.5m which would not be viable for the proposed use. The agent at Sharps Commercial also stated that the landlord only wished for the building to be let to a B8 Warehouse occupier and would not be willing to allow contractual terms for obtaining a change in planning use. Therefore, the site is not suitable or available for the proposed E use.

Site 2: Unit 2, Meadow Road

- 3.3 Site 2 is suitable in that there are 22 parking spaces on site. However, the building has a floor area of 551.18 sq.m which is lower than the required 587sq.m. The eaves height is also below the required 5.5m. The commercial agent also stated that the site has recently been let and therefore the site is not suitable or available.

Site 3: 8 Richfield Avenue

- 3.4 Site 3 has a floor area of 920.55sq.m which is within the parameters for the proposed use. However, the internal images available for the site show that there are 8 internal steel pillars which is too many to create a safe layout for the proposed use which requires a wider open expanse. There is also a steel roof supporting structure which reduces the internal height and makes it too low for the proposed use. The agent at Sharps Commercial also stated that the site is currently under offer. Therefore, the site is not suitable or available for the proposed use.

Site 4: 14b Richfield Avenue

- 3.5 Site 4 is currently in general industrial/retail use and has a suitable floor area of 873.26sq.m. The front of the unit is split over two floors whereas the rear of the site is single storey height. The brochure states that the eaves height is 6.8m however due to the unit being of two differing heights, neither the single storey rear section or the two storey front section would provide sufficient clear internal height. It was confirmed by the agent at Sharps Commercial that the clear eaves and apex height was too low for the proposed use. There is also no secure car parking on site. Therefore, the site is not suitable for the proposed use.

Site 5: 16b Richfield Avenue

- 3.6 This site has a suitable floor area of 906.61sq.m. However, the clear apex

height for this site is 3.85m which is lower than the required threshold. There is also no secure parking available. Therefore, the site is not suitable for the proposed use.

Site 6: 2-4 Cremyll Road

- 3.7 Site 6 consists of two separate buildings with floor areas of 541sq.m which is lower than the required threshold. The agent at Sharps Commercial also informed us that 4 Cremyll Road has recently been let. Therefore, the units are not suitable or available for the proposed use.

Site 7: Unit 2-4 Portman Trade

- 3.8 Site 7 consists of three separate units which have varying floor areas between 216-220sq.m which is much lower than the required 587sq.m. The clear height of the properties is not suitable and there is no adequate or secure car parking available. Therefore, the site is not suitable or viable for the proposed use.

Site 8: Reading Central Club

- 3.9 Site 8 was generated through the letters sent to commercial agents (Haslams). The site has a floor area of 550 sq.m and the internal height is lower than the required threshold. This property is under offer and terms have been revised with the buyer, subject to planning permission. Therefore, the site is not suitable or available for the proposed use.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 This Sequential Test has assessed potential alternative sites that are between 587-978 sqm in floor area, are located within the defined search area (appendix 2), with suitable internal heights of at least 5.5m and apex height of 5.9m and have secure parking. The sites in the search area were identified by a variety of means, this included conducting various web-based searches, undertaking a foot and vehicle survey and writing to local commercial agents.
- 4.2 Overall, it is concluded from the assessment that there are no alternative sites in sequentially preferable locations which are suitable, available and capable of viable occupation. As a result, the proposed use of the application site for a gymnastics/free running passes the sequential test.

1.0 APPENDIX 1: COUNCIL RESPONSE "EDGE OF CENTRE"

RE: Reading Local Plan



Worringham, Mark <Mark.Worringham@reading.gov.uk>

To  Mykena Mortimer-Davies

OFFICIAL

Mykena

We do not specifically define edge-of-centre and out-of-centre – we would consider it on a case by case basis, using the definitions in the NPPF glossary.

Hope that helps

Mark

Mark Worringham

Planning Policy Team Leader

Planning Section | Directorate of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

Reading Borough Council

Civic Offices

Bridge Street

Reading

RG1 2LU

2.0 APPENDIX 2: SEARCH AREA

3.0 APPENDIX 3: LETTER TO HASLAMs

4.0 APPENDIX 4: EMAIL TO HASLAMs

RE: Query re Potential Gymnasium site/premises on the market, either in or close to Reading Town Centre.



Steve Smith <stevensmith@haslams.co.uk>

To: Nick Kirby

Cc: Mykena Mortimer-Davies

[Click here to download pictures.](#) To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of some pictures in this message.



Hi Nick

I will circulate to others for a response and reply as soon as possible.

I am acting on the attached property that could suit....?

With regards

Steven Smith

From: Nick Kirby <nick.kirby@pegasusgroup.co.uk>

Sent: 09 September 2020 17:17

To: Steve Smith <stevensmith@haslams.co.uk>

Cc: Mykena Mortimer-Davies <Mykena.Mortimer-Davies@pegasusgroup.co.uk>

Subject: Query re Potential Gymnasium site/premises on the market, either in or close to Reading Town Centre.

Dear Steve,

Please see attached letter, I would appreciate any response by 18/09/20.

I look forward to hearing from you

Kind Regards

Nick Kirby

Director

Pegasus Group

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5.0 APPENDIX 5: LETTER TO SHARPS COMMERCIAL

6.0 APPENDIX 6: EMAIL TO SHARPS COMMERCIAL

RE: Query re Potential Gymnasium site/premises on the market, either in or close to Reading Town Centre.

 Alec White <awhite@sharpscommercial.co.uk>
To:  Nick Kirby
Cc:  Mykena Mortimer-Davies

 You replied to this message on 15/09/2020 15:35.

[Click here to download pictures.](#) To help protect your privacy, Outlook prevented automatic download of some pictures in this message.

 Reply  Reply All  Forward 

Sat 12/09/2020 10:45

Hi Nick

Hope all is well.

Thank you for your email. All of the properties listed in your letter were offered and considered by Virtue Gymnastics, however for the reasons set out below each found to be unsuitable.

- **199-213 Cardiff Road, Reading** – The clear eaves height is too low. It should also be noted the landlord wishes to let his building to a clean B8 warehouse occupier as opposed to an E or D2 use occupier.
- **Unit 2 Meadow Road, Reading** – Too small (551 sqm) and not sufficient car parking. Now let.
- **8 Richfield Avenue, Reading** – Both the clear eaves and apex heights are too low and the building does not have secure car parking. The building also has 8 columns which was too many to create a safe layout for a gymnastics club. Now under offer.
- **14b Richfield Avenue, Reading** – Both the clear eaves and apex heights are too low and the building does not have secure car parking.
- **16b Richfield Avenue, Reading** – Both the clear eaves and apex heights are too low and the building does not have secure car parking.
- **2-4 Cremyll Road, Reading** – Two separate buildings of 541 sqm so too small and both the clear eaves and apex heights are too low. 4 Cremyll Road has since been let.
- **Units 2-4 Portman Road, 64 Portman Road, Reading** – Three separate units between 216 – 220 sqm so too small. Combining the units would be costly and even then the clear height would be too low and the units do not have adequate or secure car parking.

Kind regards

Alec

Alec White
Director
Sharps Commercial
DDI: 0118 467 6981
Mob: 07775 595174
Email: awhite@sharpscommercial.co.uk

7.0 APPENDIX 7: LETTER TO HICKS BAKER

8.0 APPENDIX 8: EMAIL TO HICKS BAKER

From: Fiona Brownfoot MRICS <f.brownfoot@hicksbaker.co.uk>

Sent: 09 September 2020 18:27

To: Nick Kirby <nick.kirby@pegasusgroup.co.uk>

Subject: RE: Query re Potential Gymnasium site/premises on the market, either in or close to Reading Town Centre.

Nick

I am not aware of any units which meet your criteria.

Regards

fiona

Fiona Brownfoot MRICS

Director (Retail / Restaurant / Leisure)

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