

PLANNING APPLICATION FOR CHANGE OF USE FROM INDUSTRIAL TO D2 GYMNASIUM

PLANNING STATEMENT

28 PORTMAN ROAD, READING, RG30 1EA

ON BEHALF OF VIRTUE GYMNASTICS

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)
PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004**

Prepared by: Nick Kirby



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 **DESIGN**  **ENVIRONMENT**  **PLANNING**  **ECONOMICS**  **HERITAGE**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This planning statement has been prepared on behalf of Virtue Gymnastics in support of a full planning application for the change of use of an industrial unit to a gymnastics and free running/parkour (E use) at 28 Portman Road, Reading, RG30 1EA.
- 1.2 The site has been vacant for nearly 4 years and there are no signs of it being let.
- 1.3 The applicants, Virtue Gymnastics are a Reading based company which provide indoor gymnastics and free running/parkour facilities to people of all ages, abilities and disciplines. They are affiliated with British Gymnastics and Get Berkshire Active with strong links within the parkour community. Virtue Gymnastics have been operating for over four years in the Reading area and currently employ approximately 30 people which includes 15 apprentices/assistants which benefit from training and career development. A statement from the applicant is available in appendix 1.
- 1.4 Virtue Gymnastics currently rent two schools and a sports centre to host classes but are in desperate need of a permanent facility to ensure the necessary equipment can be installed rather than temporary and removable equipment which is not suitable for many required gymnastics and other activities. The properties that currently host the use result in parents/guardians having to make multiple trips to different sites for different aged children, resulting in inconvenient and unsustainable trips. Moving to the application site, will allow Virtue Gymnastics to expand their timetable and add new classes to meet the demand to provide services to disadvantaged kids and the elderly. It will also allow them to consolidate activities to one single location, allowing for more permanent equipment to be installed and a more efficient operation.
- 1.5 This statement will briefly introduce the site location, site description, planning history, the proposed development and will then consider the proposal in the context of Local and National planning policy, alongside other material

considerations, in order to assist the Officers' consideration of the application.

1.6 The application is accompanied by the following documents and plans:

- Site Location Plan
- Existing Floor Plan
- Proposed Floor Plan
- Sequential Test
- Transport Statement
- Photos of the external elevations
- Existing member testimonials (12)
- British Gymnastics letter of support
- Parkour community statement of support
- SEN statement of support (2)
- Youth worker statement of support
- Age UK statement of support
- Leadership Coach and Consultant statement of support
- Aerobic champion statement of support

- Local school Statement of support

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The application site comprises of a refurbished detached industrial/warehouse with ancillary showroom and office accommodation with a large 'L' shaped secure yard/car park to the rear. The unit has been vacant for nearly 4 years and there are no signs of it being let. It benefits from high ceilings and minimal support pillars which suit the proposed use as will be described within this statement.
- 2.2 The site is located on Portman Road, to the West of Reading Town Centre. The site lies to the North of Tesco Extra. The surrounding buildings to the East and West are in various uses such as light industrial, warehouse and retail uses but there are various leisure uses also including RedKangaroo Trampoline Park, TNT Gym, Church of God Worldwide Mission and a Dance Studio. To the South West lie residential dwellings.
- 2.3 The site is located within the designated Core Employment Area on the policies map.
- 2.4 The site is accessibly located within an existing built-up area within close proximity to a major Town Centre. The site is located approximately 1.1km from Reading West Train Station and the closest bus stop is located 630m to the South on Oxford Road. This stop is serviced by Reading-buses and Thames-travel buses 15, 15a, 16 sky blue, 17 purple and 143 with regular intervals.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 **86/TP/1:** Change of use from warehouse and part industrial use with ancillary retail and office uses to general industrial use with ancillary retail and office use. **Application Permitted**
- 3.2 **940031** – Installation of spray booths associated with existing body repair business. **Application Permitted**
- 3.3 **030462** – Change of use – Light Industrial (B1) to car showroom (likely sui generis). **Application Permitted.**
- 3.4 Whilst there are no further planning applications available for 28 Portman Road after 030462, we have been made aware by the marketing agent that the most recent use of the site has been B1c (Industrial processes). We are not able to determine at this stage the lawful use of the building and therefore whether the unit would benefit from E class already. Therefore the existing unit is being described as sui generis in the absence of other information to clearly show otherwise.

3.5 Nearby relevant applications at 24 Portman Road:

- 3.6 **03/01130/FUL** – To enable the ground and first floor of the premises (542 sqm) to continue with B1 (commercial use), but to include a new additional D1 (Place of worship) use option. **Granted**
- 3.7 **161105** - Change of use for second floor for D1 (ancillary to place of worship) in addition to existing B1 use. **Granted**

4.0 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The proposal seeks to change the use from sui generis to leisure use (E use) with no external alterations proposed. The proposed change of use will provide a gymnastics / free running parkour centre to the West of Reading to help meet the demand. The facility will operate seven days a week.
- 4.2 The proposal will result in internal alterations which will consist of the following additions on the ground floor: New reception counter, doors to be installed in various openings and stud walls to create storage/toilet. The parkour area will have various blocks/boxes fixed to the floors/walls. The additions to the first floor will consist of a new stud work wall to create a storage room, new fire door into the staff room, two new kitchenettes to be installed and a new viewing window to be installed in party room/parents waiting area. The party enterprise is only intended to be operated on Sundays.
- 4.3 The proposal will provide 14 on-site car parking spaces (including 1 disabled space) and 22 cycle spaces. The applicant has an agreement with neighbouring businesses to utilise 10 staff car parking spaces. Further off-street car parking has been agreed with Plastix Plus located at the front of the store, approximately 55m walking distance from the front entrance to the proposed site, totalling 20 car parking spaces. In addition to the above, there are 28 on-street car parking spaces within 300m of the proposed development site. The layout for this parking can be seen in the parking plan submitted and the site location plan.
- 4.4 The new site would enable Virtue Gymnastics to provide various offers to members and non-members, all of which are outlined below and set out in the statement provided in appendix 2. The length of the sessions offered will vary depending on the age and activity.
- 4.5 The applicant currently operates from multiple locations which raises challenges such as:

- Prevents the use of necessary equipment which requires installation, rather temporary and removable equipment only can be used. Not only is this unsuitable and limiting, it is very time and labour intensive to set up and remove, which limits class times.
- The limited temporary equipment that can be used reduces the offering of the facility, meaning for instance Parkour facilities lack appeal to certain ages which outgrow the current offering
- Does not provide patrons with reliable regular classes
- Makes it very challenging for parents to take multiple children to different sites for different classes and results in dispersed, inconvenient and unsustainable multiple trips.
- Limited and unreliable availability of rented premises makes it difficult for Virtue Gymnastics to fulfil the needs of its customer base, or expand to accommodate its extensive waiting list and local community needs for example additional needs class, elderly session, early years and expanded parkour facilities for teenage children.

4.6 Services will be provided to pre-school members which will consist of Baby Gym (6 weeks – walking), Preschool Bows (walking – 4 years) and Preschool Arrows (3-4 years) (invite only).

4.7 Freestyle/Parkour will be provided to FS Pre (3-4 years), FS Found (4-5 years), FS Youngster (5-6 years), FS Junior (7-8 years), FS Youth (9-10 years) and FS senior (11+ years).

4.8 Recreational Gymnastics will cater for different levels including Recreational level 0 for school starters aged 4-5, Recreational level 1 children aged 5-6 years, Recreational level 2 children agreed 7-8 years, Recreational level 3 children aged 9+ years and Recreational level 4 for children aged 11+ years. In addition to the above, they will supply advanced recreational, which will only

be open to members through coach recommendation. An opportunity will be provided for children and parents that home school to explore gymnastics with a dedicated session for home ed children. Children will also be offered the chance to compete with lessons available for Display Team, Gymnastics (Girls pre team, Boy pre team, Girl Squad and Boy squad), Aerobics and Parkour team.

- 4.9 For non-members, there will be drop in-pay as you go sessions for Adults (17+ years), Play Gym (under 5's), Junior Drop In (5-10 years), Senior Drop In (10-16 years) and gym fit. These sessions will have subsidised fees and no long-term commitment thereby improving accessibility for less economically fortunate families and a wide range of the community.
- 4.10 Alternative offers will be available which include; Adaptive Classes/Additional Needs, Elderly, Nursery and school visits, private sessions, extracurricular, school clubs, parties (Sundays only), courses and competitions.
- 4.11 All of these services that will be possible from the new facility will expand the already valuable service that Virtue Gymnastics offers to the local community.

5.0 ASSESSMENT AGAINST PLANNING POLICY AND MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 The application needs to be assessed against relevant planning policy, and a decision made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance the Development Plan consists of Reading's Local Plan (2019) and relevant supplementary planning guidance.

Sustainable Development

5.2 Policy CC1 (Presumption in favour of sustainable development) sets out that the Council will take a positive approach when considering development proposals that reflect a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

5.3 Paragraph 8 in the NPPF establishes that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. It states that each one is independent and needs to be "*pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the objections)*":

- *An economic objective – to build strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land is made available in the right locations to support economic growth, innovation and improved productivity*
- *A social objective – to support strong, vibrant and health communities, by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces to reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being*
- *An environmental objective – to contribute to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment, including minimising waste and*

pollution. This includes making effective use of land and mitigating and adapting to climate change

- 5.4 The proposal contributes to these three elements of sustainable development. The social role would be fulfilled by the expansion of an existing and successful gymnastics/free running club which would be accessible to all members of the community and contribute to improving the physical and mental health of individuals. The proposed use would also meet the current needs of the community by helping to reduce the waiting list for gymnastics club allowing it to better serve the client base. The environmental benefits would be evident through the provision of the facility in an existing building, in a good location to suit the client base. The location of the site would also make it possible for members to use sustainable modes of transport, and reduce parents having to use private cars to travel to multiple locations as they currently do. Although not an employment use, the proposal will support employment in the form of 10 full time jobs, 15 part time and 15 apprenticeships/assistants.
- 5.5 Therefore, the proposal complies with the relevant local plan policy (CC1) and the NPPF, with regards to sustainable development.

Health and well being

- 5.6 The NPPF supports health and wellbeing and paragraph 91 suggests planning decisions should aims to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which

"promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other and

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"

- 5.7 The proposals would assist in the above respect, providing opportunities to

enhance health and wellbeing and provide opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other in the community.

5.8 As for health, the Reading Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2020 was produced to "*improve and protect Reading's health and wellbeing, improving the health of the poorest fastest*". The first priority for the strategy is set to encourage an increase in physical activity in people to allow them to enjoy a healthier and more independent life. The work of the applicant, Virtue Gymnastics, contributes to this with supporting the physical and mental health of children and young people already. The introduction of a permanent facility will enable the applicant to expand the services available to support families to invest in their health thus supporting the strategy.

5.9 The new facility would ensure that children in the local area, including those from low income families, will have access to high quality coaching and facilities. In addition to this, the new facility would allow more services to be dedicated towards children and young people with additional needs with dedicated disability and additional needs classes, further contributing towards the first priority of the Health and Well Being Strategy. The impact additional services like this would have on the children has been expressed in testimonials attached to this application. The proposals therefore gain significant support from the NPPF to enhance health and wellbeing.

Town centre uses

5.10 Section 7 of the NPPF relates to "*ensuring the vitality of town centres*". Paragraph 85 sets out that planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. It further states that "*where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available for main town centre uses, allocate appropriate edge of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre*".

5.11 Policy CR4 (Leisure, Culture and Tourism in Central Reading) states that the

Central Core will be the prime focus for major leisure, cultural and tourism development.

- 5.12 Policy RL2 (Scale and Location of retail, leisure and culture development) sets out that provision will be made for up to 34,900sq m of retail and leisure facilities in Reading to 2036. The policy goes on to state *"retail and main town centre leisure and culture development, where it would mean a net gain of over 2,500 sq m, will take place in, or as an extension to, the centre of Reading, unless it is on a site allocated for such development. 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. All development will comply with the relevant tests for retail, leisure and culture development set out in national policy"*.
- 5.13 The above policies set out that the sequential test should look at potential sites within the town centre or within the edge of centre. The 'town centre' is defined as the 'central core' in policy CR1, however 'edge of centre' and 'out of centre' are not specifically defined in the Local Plan and will be considered on a case by case basis. The Council were questioned for a definition, to which it can be summarised that there is no definition.
- 5.14 In order to comply with the policies set out above, a sequential test has been completed and submitted with this application. The purpose of the test was to assess whether there were any other suitable sites to accommodate the proposed use within the town centre and edge of centre. The approach taken in this application was to extend the town centre boundary by approximately 500m for the 'edge of centre' area. A similar approach to defining these boundaries was accepted under application ref: 181860. Despite finding 8 potential sites through relevant searches, these had to be discounted as they did not meet one or more of the required parameters for the proposed use. Therefore, the sequential test concluded that there were no other suitable, available or viable sites within the defined search area to meet the needs of the proposed use and the sequential test was passed.

- 5.15 The supporting text for policy RL2 states that where retail, leisure and culture development are to be provided outside of designated centres the *"proposals will need to demonstrate that a sequential approach has been adopted to site selection, and that there will be no adverse impact on existing centres in Reading Borough or elsewhere"*. The proposed change of use seeks to relocate an existing gymnastics/parkour centre from various rented properties to a permanent location along Portman Road. As it does not involve the addition of a new gymnastics centre to Reading, it is expected to have no adverse impact on the existing centres within Reading Borough Council.

Employment function

- 5.16 Policy EM2 (Location of New Employment Development) states that *"other major employment uses, including industrial and storage and distribution will be located in the Core Employment Areas. Non-employment uses that would support the areas economic function may be located in the Core Employment Areas where they do not result in a loss of employment land"*.
- 5.17 The proposed change of use will technically result in a loss of employment land because the use of the property will be for leisure (E class). However given the E class now includes former office and light industrial uses, should the proposed application be permitted, this would not remove this site from employment function in perpetuity, as following any cessation of the Virtue Gymnastics operation, the site could still perform an employment function. Furthermore, the operation would employ a considerable number of people and provide valuable training opportunities. Nonetheless if the council remains of the opinion that the proposal represents a conflict with policy EM2, policy EM3 sets out circumstances in which the loss of employment land will be accepted.
- 5.18 Policy EM3 (Loss of employment land) states that within Core Employment Areas, the overall level of employment land should be maintained. Where, in exceptional circumstances, it can be demonstrated that a site in a Core Employment Area has no long-term (5 years or more) prospect of employment use, a related alternative commercial use or a use which complements the employment use of the area may be considered that would not result in a

significant reduction in jobs. In this instance, as stated, the proposed development would provide considerable employment and training opportunities, and would complement the existing employment function of the site, and would certainly not compromise it given the ability to retain an employment function whilst being within the E class if needed.

5.19 Even if it is considered the proposal would not complement the employment area, policy EM3 allows for loss of employment floorspace if the following circumstances are considered, as set out in *italics* and responded to in body text:

i. Is access by a choice of means of transport, including access to the strategic road network, poor and likely to remain poor?

5.20 The building has an existing access on to Loverock Road which is proposed to remain in this application. The surrounding area benefits from a range of pedestrian and cycle infrastructure with the closest bus stop being located approximately 630m South of the Site on Oxford Road. When compared to the existing operations, the application site is expected to provide better accessibility for parents and children. A table showing the differences in accessibility is available within the Transport Statement Table 3.2. The proposal will not affect the long term accessibility of the unit.

ii. Is continued use of the site for employment, including the potential for redevelopment for employment uses, viable?

5.21 Since December 2016, the application site has been the subject of two full and tested comprehensive marketing campaigns as described in the letter submitted by Sharps commercial in appendix 3. An example of the marketing activities in this time include but are not limited to:

- Production of a large full colour banner fixed to the front elevation clearly highlighting the available accommodation and good size rear car park

- A 5 x 4 double sided full colour advertising sign highlighting the tenure, size, large car park and agents company logo/contact details
- Production of a scale floor plan to assist a prospective tenants space plan
- Production of a modern 4 – page full colour marketing particulars with photography, features and location map
- Extensive internet advertising on all effective commercial property internet portals including: EG Property Link, Zoopla, MoveHut, NovaLova, CoStar, 4Prop, Industrial Agents Society, Estate Agents Clearing House and Commercial Property Register
- Featured advertising on Sharps Commercial website.
- Continuous advertising on the Industrial Agents Society, Estate Agents Clearing House, Commercial Property Register (Thames Valley)
- production of a modern 4-page full colour marketing particulars, extensive internet advertising).

5.22 Despite the extensive marketing campaign, the commercial agents have received limited interest and no offers for the application site. Alec White of Sharps Commercial suggested that this is due to there being no demand for *"high office content industrial facilities"* and rather the demand is now for *"traditional high bay warehouse space with up to a 10% office content, or separate facilities for the warehouse and officer operations"*. In order to meet this demand, the landlord undertook a comprehensive refurbishment in 2017, which included converting the ground floor office to low height storage areas and forming openings into the warehouse to reduce the high office content. Despite this investment there continued to be no offers on the property. This therefore shows that the use of the site for an employment function is not considered viable. Despite the marketing campaign being below 5 years, it has

clearly been marketed for a considerable period (4 years) with little interest. Given this was unsuccessful, it is considered extremely unlikely to generate higher interest in the current Covid environment over the next year, and to not seek alternative use where there is a clear demand would be damaging to the economy.

iii. *Is there a surplus of a similar size and type of accommodation in Reading?*

5.23 As set out in the sequential test, there are various commercial buildings fulfilling similar uses which are currently vacant in the surrounding area. Given the Covid 19 crisis, there is a clear need to reassess the availability of commercial floorspace and provide a degree of flexibility when warranted as in this case where there is very limited demand demonstrated over a considerable marketing period.

iv. *Would continued employment use of the site detrimentally affect the amenity and character of a residential area?*

5.24 The site is not and hasn't been in employment use for a considerable period. There is no suggestion it would adversely affect a residential area.

v. *Is the need for alternative uses stronger than the need for the retention of employment land?*

5.25 The application site has been vacant for nearly four years with limited to no interest in renting the property. As explained previously there is a large waiting list for children to access gymnastic facilities of over 300 children. It is therefore considered to be clear that the demand for the proposed alternative use is higher than the existing employment use.

vi. *Would the proposal result in a piecemeal loss of employment land where there is potential for a more comprehensive scheme.*

-
- 5.26 The proposal would not lead to a piecemeal loss of employment land that is suitable for a comprehensive development, and various other leisure uses are evident as noted within this statement in the immediate vicinity of the site.

Transport and Accessibility

- 5.27 Paragraph 87 states that 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.
- 5.28 Policy CC6 (Accessibility and the intensity of development) states that *"the scale and density of development will be related to its level of accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport to a range of services and facilities"*.
- 5.29 The submitted transport statement concludes that the site is accessibly located with the potential to reduce the number of vehicle trips to the site by providing opportunities for more users to walk and cycle to the site when compared to current operations. With various modes of transport available in the proposed location, the application site is considered to be located in a more accessible location than the existing operations and therefore complies with policy CC6.

Car and Cycle Parking

- 5.30 Policy TR5 relates to Car and cycle parking and electric vehicle charging. This states that development should provide car and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough. This policy goes on to state that within communal car parks for non-residential developments of at least 10 spaces, 10% of spaces should provide an active charging point.
- 5.31 Reading Borough Council Revised Parking Standards (2001) indicates that a maximum provision of 26 car parking spaces would be required for this development.
- 5.32 The proposal seeks to provide 14 car parking space within the confines of the

site, including one disabled parking space. In addition to the on-site parking spaces, Virtue Gymnastics has agreement with neighbouring businesses Plastix Plus to utilise the 10 staff car parking spaces on the northern side of Loverock Road associated with the business which are surplus to requirements. These spaces will be available for use throughout the day, seven days a week. Further off-street car parking has been agreed with Plastix Plus located at the front of the store, which totals 20 car parking spaces. These spaces will be available after 16:30 after Plastix Plus closes, which coincides with the peak periods for the proposed development, as set out in the Transport Statement.

- 5.33 In addition to the above parking spaces, there are 28 on-street car parking spaces within 300m of the proposed site.
- 5.34 The Reading Borough Council Revised Parking Standards (2011) document recommends that D2 health club and gymnasium provides a minimum of one space per six staff and one space per 40m² is provided. The cycle parking spaces will be provided in the form of 11 Sheffield Stands which will provide 22 cycle spaces.
- 5.35 Therefore, it is clear that the proposed change of use complies with the parking standards SPD.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 This statement has explained why the application site provides an excellent location for the proposed use which is in considerable demand. The proposed site is considered to be in a more accessible location when compared to existing operations. The location on a main road network and in proximity to bus stops and Reading Train station will provide parents and children with various choices of transport. The proposed development would serve the local community, widen choices for health and recreation and allow opportunities for community interaction.
- 6.2 The sequential test has provided confirmation that the application site was the most suitable site for the proposed use with a suitable floor area, internal clear height and existing car parking spaces. Therefore, the site has been found to be the most suitable, available and viable site for the proposed use. Whilst the proposal makes use of a building in an employment area, this building has been subject to a sustained marketing campaign which generated little interest in commercial use. The use proposed clearly requires a building of such a dimension that will only realistically be available in such areas. Although not a traditional employment use, the proposal will enhance job creation and training, which otherwise would not be realised if the site remained vacant.
- 6.3 It has been shown that the proposed use adheres with the principles of relevant development plan policies and gains significant support from the NPPF. It is therefore respectfully requested that Reading Borough Council approve the application, thereby granting planning permission for the proposed development.

1.0 APPENDIX 1: CLUB STATEMENT ON VIRTUE COMMUNITY



Virtue School of Gymnastics

102 Water Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 2NN

www.virtuegymnastics.co.uk Email: kara@virtuegymnastics.co.uk

Director: Kara Chance

BG affiliated - Club Number: 89255



Dear sir/madam

Our club, Virtue Gymnastics, currently runs from 3 venues as well as several satellite venues in primary schools to enable us to meet the demands of the variety of classes we currently offer.

This is not ideal.

The club is impacted by this divide as time and money is spent in setting up, packing away and travelling between venues. We are only able to operate during term time and the venues' requirements take priority often forcing us to cancel classes, often at short notice.

The coaches are impacted by this divide due to travelling, lack of team building opportunity and support as well as training and mentoring for all our staff.

The gymnasts are impacted by this divide because they are only able to train term time not all year round and the timetable is restricted to the availability of the venue.

Our resources are divided among these venues due to space which impacts the efficiency of children's progress during a session.

Parents are impacted by this divide due to constraints imposed by the venues we hire and the availability of sessions. We are unable to have a waiting room at our venues forcing parents to wait in their cars and making travel by public transport problematic particularly in winter months. Car parking spaces are limited and priority will always be for the venues.

We have been actively seeking a dedicated building for our needs for the past 4 years with no success. Many commercial landlords will not consider a change of use so this has limited our search considerably. It has been a long and difficult journey to find a venue as perfect for all our requirements as Portman Road.

There are no other units currently available in this area that will effectively meet all the needs of our club:

It is a perfect location for our current members and will enable us to reach the wider community more effectively.

It offers the space we need with large, safe, secure, private parking for our families and members. Other units do not offer this level of secure parking for young children and their families.

There are excellent public transport links in the area by both bus and train and we will encourage the use of public transport with a reward scheme to limit the impact on our environment. We will add a large secure bike housing area to encourage the physical fitness of our members included in our reward scheme. The unit has front pedestrian access from a wide safe public pathway, pedestrian crossings nearby and safe side entrance for parents and children. Other units in the area require access through industrial areas without pavements which is not ideal for children and families.

The building itself will offer scope for the variety of classes we currently run and for the new classes we would start if we were granted a change of use for this unit.

The main gym area of the proposed building has ideal ceiling height over the whole area to enable us to run our freestyle classes, tumbling classes and adult sessions with no constraints. Other units in the area have limited height at points which would put restrictions across the disciplines and age ranges as well as the type of classes we would be able to offer in the future.

It has minimal pillars which is unusual in a building of this size and in this area which is excellent for us as we can most effectively use the space without constraints.

The main gym area has the potential to add two child only toilets with access directly from the gym area. Safety of our young gymnasts is paramount and safeguarding is fundamental in the delivery of our sport, so access to a toilet facility without the necessity of leaving the gym area is essential from a welfare and safeguarding perspective and is recognised as an essential addition for new gyms by our governing body, British Gymnastics. There is a large area which would be suitable for essential storage of equipment which makes a safer environment for the children in the gym. Most other units would not be able to support these additions and therefore would be unsuitable.

There is potential for a large reception area to enable face to face contact with existing and potential members as well as offering information and answering queries. With a seating area downstairs with access to a disabled toilet facility for those who are unable to access the upstairs area including the coffee morning social for our new elderly support group.

Potential for a large parents waiting area with viewing window into the gym for safeguarding reasons which comply with requirements of our governing body, British Gymnastics. This area will include a small kitchenette to provide drinks and snacks for waiting parents and siblings. We will add educational and fun toys for siblings in this area while they wait. Parents of children with additional needs, younger children or parents that have to travel a distance to come to sessions will need this area whilst their children attend their session. This room also benefits from two toilets and hand washing areas next door. Other units in the area do not have the scope for this space.

This space will also benefit the development of our staff. We will run in-house courses to further the knowledge and understanding of our team members and build stronger working relationships. We will offer the local community a chance to participate in courses such as safeguarding and paediatric and sports first aid courses suitable for staff not only from our gym but from other gyms and sports clubs in the area and also parents, carers and other members of the wider community. We will also host vocational development courses which will be accessible to all from our field in the southern region which will be run by our governing body, British Gymnastics.

We would have a dedicated space for our staff to unwind and take breaks to assist in positive mental wellbeing which is extremely important in our industry which often lends itself to unsociable hours. We will also offer a working area for planning and coursework for our staff. An office is also a possibility with this unit which would be essential to maintain the efficient running of a community club of this size. Most other units in this area are only able to offer 1 additional office/room space which would not enable us to meet the varied demands as listed above.

Kind regards
Kara Chance
Director Virtue S.O.G

2.0 APPENDIX 2: CLUB STATEMENT ON THE PROPOSED SITE



Virtue School of Gymnastics

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Director: Kara Chance

BG affiliated - Club Number: 89255



Dear sir/madam

Virtue has now been running for 4 years and whilst we are a gymnastic club for children, we feel we offer far more than solely this to our members, their families and the staff that work at Virtue. We have actively worked to develop a family atmosphere and to achieve the most positive, nurturing and inclusive environment for everyone involved.

Community is at the heart of this for us. At each venue we currently work from, we have integrated and supported that facility with fundraising events and open days to promote well being and health within the local community.

We are very active when supporting local charities and hold fundraisers as often as possible for charities in our local area. We have raised money for a variety of charities including parenting special children and Number 5 a charity that focuses on mental health for children and young adults: a subject that is close to our hearts here at Virtue Gymnastics. More recently we have raised £600 during lockdown for Black Lives Matter.

Our classes offer a wide range of activities, reaching the broadest spectrum of community members as possible. We introduced a reduced fee, pay as you go/drop in session that enabled children from all socio-economic backgrounds to experience movement and get active without the sometimes problematic financial commitment for parents. One of these classes were specifically aimed at teenage children as we have found that at this age, children, in particular boys, disengage with clubs and sports in general. By offering them an informal, fun session where they can take ownership of their own training requirements, these young adults were able to thrive and these sessions are consistently oversubscribed. To be able to offer more sessions of this nature would be a great boost for the community. Unfortunately, we are limited with the timetable at the facilities we currently hire.

Whilst we have managed to create a positive community relationship and are able to support our members and local charities in this way, we could and would like to be able to achieve more.

With a gym of our own, we could reach out to more teenagers and offer not only additional drop in sessions, but offer a variety of classes/disciplines for them to try without financial strain on parents.

We will offer many new classes to help us to meet the needs of the local community. With our own facility we will run our timetable throughout the day and into the evening and at weekends to offer the facility for a wide range of people in the community that are not currently catered for. The classes we would like to introduce to our timetable would include: nursery/school visits, adult fitness sessions, sessions for home educated children and specific sessions for children with additional needs – a class we have wanted to introduce for a long time but have been unable to schedule effectively to meet the needs of parents and children in the area.

We would also like to start a class specifically designed for elderly people in the area to encourage gentle movement and fitness with a social coffee morning in our waiting room afterwards.

These additional classes would offer a much needed boost to the communities mental health and physical well being requirements. The only way we will be able to offer these amazing additional sessions is for us to have our own gymnastics club to extend our timetable to effectively meet the variety of needs our community has.

Kind regards
Kara Chance
Director Virtue S.O.G

3.0 APPENDIX 3: LETTER FROM SHARPS COMMERCIAL



Our ref: AIW.RBC200615

22 June 2020

Subject to Contract

Planning Officer
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

Dear Sir/Madam

**Support for Proposed Change of Use Application
28 Portman Road, Reading Berkshire RG30 1EA**

This letter is in support of the proposed change of use of 28 Portman Road, Reading to D2.

We support this change of use as Sharps Commercial, together with the previous agent, have undertaken two full and tested comprehensive marketing campaigns since December 2016, providing widespread exposure to the local, regional and national markets.

Marketing activities have included the following:

- Production of a large full colour banner fixed to the front elevation clearly highlighting the available accommodation and good size rear car park.
- A 5x4 double sided full colour advertising sign highlighting the tenure, size, large car park and agents company logo / contact details.
- Production of a scale floor plan to assist a prospective tenants space plan.
- Production of a modern 4-page full colour marketing particulars with photography, features and location map, (copy attached).
- Extensive internet advertising on all effective commercial property internet portals to include:

EG Property Link
Zoopla
MoveHut
NovaLoca
CoStar
4Prop

- Featured advertising on Sharps Commercial's website, which is compatible with smart phones and tablets, enabling interested parties to download the full marketing details.



- Continuous advertising and regular mailshots on the Industrial Agents Society (IAS) website which matches other agent's client requirements with available buildings.
- Continuous advertising and regular mailshots on the Estate Agents Clearing House (EACH) which matches other agent's client requirements with available buildings.
- Regular advertising within the Thames Valley edition of the Commercial Property Register (CPR).
- Regular electronic mailshots to registered applicants, local / regional and London commercial agents and local businesses.

Despite the above marketing campaign, we have received limited interest and no offers.

28 Portman Road is a bespoke building, designed and constructed in an era when manufacturing companies required high office content industrial facilities. These are no longer in demand with companies seeking traditional high bay warehouse space with up to a 10% office content, or separate facilities for the warehouse and office operations.

The landlord undertook a comprehensive refurbishment of the property in 2017. This included converting the ground floor office to low height storage areas and forming openings into the warehouse to reduce the high office content. This was to provide greater flexibility to an occupier and in turn appeal to a more diverse number of businesses. Despite this considerable investment, occupiers have favoured traditional warehouses with good height throughout providing greater storage capacity.

28 Portman Road benefits from a large secure private car park to the rear, as well as pedestrian access off Portman Road, with public transport (buses) within walking distance.

For the above reasons we **support** the proposed change of use application.

Yours faithfully

ALEC I WHITE
Director

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