

**Change of Use of Part of Building from Class B8
Storage and Distribution to
Class D2 Leisure Use**

at

**4 Acre Road
Reading**

SUPPORTING PLANNING STATEMENT

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Change of Use of Part of Building from Class B8 Storage and Distribution to Class D2 Leisure Use at 4 Acre Road, Reading.

SUPPORTING PLANNING STATEMENT (inc. Design and Access Statement)

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This existing warehouse building is operated by its current occupier (Smiths) as a base for the distribution of newspapers and other publications. The company no longer needs as much floorspace in which to operate efficiently and effectively, and it is looking to subdivide the unit and let out part of the building to another business.
- 1.2 It is proposed that part of the building would become a separate unit and be used by the applicants, Clip n Climb, which provides a range of climbing facilities, mainly aimed at families and young people. This would involve a change of use of this part of the building from Class B8 (Storage and Distribution) to Class D2 (Assembly and Leisure).

2.0 Site and Surroundings

- 2.1 The existing building is a substantial warehouse building set within the Acre Road Industrial Estate to the south of Reading. It has a parking area to the front and the main loading and unloading area to the rear. It has two access points. The one to on the west side of the frontage is the main entrance and the other, on the eastern side, is the egress. This situation would not change as a result of this proposal. As can be seen from the aerial photograph of the site below there are a number of modest trees along the frontage to the site and along the boundaries. These will be unaffected by the proposed change of use.



Aerial view of 4 Acre Road

3.0 Proposed Development

3.1 The total floor area of the overall building is some 2,890 square metres including the two-storey ancillary offices etc. at the front of the building. It is proposed to convert some 900 square metres of this, at the western end, into a climbing centre providing a range of activities particularly aimed at families and young people. Attached as Appendix 1 to this statement are a some of images that give an indication of the internal layout of the centre.

3.2 This use falls within Use Class D2 and the main purpose of this planning application is to seek approval for a change of use of this part of the building to allow the centre to be set up. No external alterations to the building are proposed at this stage.

4.0 Relevant Planning History

4.1 In 2015 planning permission was granted for change of use of part of this building to a builders' merchants, which is a sui generis use (Application

Ref. 151635). In assessing that application the Council acknowledged the need to ensure a “flexible and responsive supply of employment land” in Reading. Although the proposed alternative use of part of the building was sui generis, and indeed had many similarities to a retail use, the Council took the view that the proposal was acceptable on the basis of, “essentially the practicalities of the use being akin to an employment use”. There are a number of similarities in this assessment to the current proposals.

5.0 Relevant Planning Policy

National Policies

- 5.1 The NPPF requires the planning system to do everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. This includes identifying and planning for new or emerging business sectors, and being flexible enough to support their needs.
- 5.2 The guidance also requires LPAs to plan positively for the provision of community facilities, including sports venues, as part of its aim to promote healthy communities.
- 5.3 Taking into account the presumption in favour of sustainable development, given the location of this previously developed site well within the built up area of the town, the opportunity to use it more efficiently and provide beneficial use for a commercial employment generating purpose should be supported.

Local Policies

- 5.4 The site falls within a Core Employment Area as defined by the Sites and Detailed Policies Document adopted in 2014. Thus, Policies CS10, CS11 and CS12 of the Council’s Core Strategy are relevant.
- 5.5 Policy CS11 requires that within the Core Employment Areas the overall level of employment land should be maintained. In particular, the policy seeks generally to guard against employment land being lost to non-employment uses, to the detriment of the local economy.

- 5.6 Recognising however, that the local economy comprises a wide range of businesses with a variety of needs, Policy CS12 identifies that a range of types and sizes of business units should be present in the Borough, and opportunities to maintain and enhance this range are encouraged. In particular the overall level of 'start-up and grow-on' space should be maintained, and where possible increased. A general need to maintain the overall level of storage and distribution uses on the area south of Basingstoke Road is identified.
- 5.7 The policy concludes by indicating that proposals for the redevelopment of older industrial units for more flexible employment premises will be acceptable.

6.0 Relevant Planning Considerations

The Principle of the Development

- 6.1 In the context of supporting the local economy and the provision of employment for the Borough, this proposal offers a number of benefits. The existing storage and distribution use on the site is to be maintained. Smiths, the existing occupier, distributes newspapers and other publications, and is going to continue to operate from the site. Its business has evolved such that less storage space is needed on a day to day basis, creating scope to allow another business to use the surplus space on the site. This will ensure that the site is used more efficiently to support the local economy. Smiths is fully supportive of this application and a letter to this effect is attached as Appendix 2 to this statement.
- 6.2 The smaller separate unit to be created will make a contribution to the range of smaller 'start-up and grow-on' units that the Council is keen to encourage.
- 6.3 There can be no doubt that the proposed use of the new unit is both a business that will contribute to the local economy, as well as a source of employment. Clip n Climb is a well-established activity, with around 300 units worldwide and 90 in this country. Climbing is a rapidly growing sport (now included in Olympics for next year) and this facility would appeal in particular to a younger age group than for example is typically

accommodated at the Reading Climbing Centre. It is a very different style and the two different types of climbing complement each other.

- 6.4 In terms of employment, and based on comparable units elsewhere, the employment structure for the centre would be as follows:

Full Time Posts

Manager

Assistant Manager

Duty Manager x 2

Catering Manager

Team Leaders / Instructors x 6

Receptionist x 2

This gives a total of approximately 13 full time employees.

Part Time Posts

This will vary but during school holidays is likely to be between 40 and 50 overall. Based on the profile at the existing Clip n Climb centre in Tonbridge the majority of part time employees are aged 16 –18 and it is often their first jobs.

- 6.5 The business will therefore create around 50-60 jobs in total, which it would be reasonable to equate to around 25-30 full-time equivalent posts. Many of these jobs are particularly suitable for young people, including those looking for their first opportunity to gain employment. The company focuses on youth employment and provides a substantial opportunity for training. This includes customer relations, points of sale systems, first aid, and health and safety. In addition, supervisory and management posts provide employment opportunities at a more senior level.
- 6.9 It is interesting to compare this level of employment with what might typically be expected from a Class B8 use of the unit. It has been accepted elsewhere that general warehousing could generate up to 1 job for every 50 square metres of floorspace. On this basis, the area this application relates to could generate up to approximately 18 jobs in total (full time and part time).
- 6.10 It can be seen, therefore, that the proposed use will provide at least as many jobs as a typical Class B8 use, and very probably more. This, taken

with the opportunity to provide jobs for young people, with the associated training that will help them to develop in the employment market, must be seen as a significant benefit of this proposal. Furthermore, given that the existing operator of the site is going to continue to operate in the remaining floorspace, with no loss of employment, the proposal represents a significant boost to the contribution this site will be able to make to the local economy and local employment provision. Similarities with the application approved in 2015 referred to above can be seen.

Additional Benefits

- 6.11 There are obvious wider community benefits deriving from the provision of this facility for the Borough. Not only will it be a further recreational and sporting opportunity for all local residents, experience at established units elsewhere has shown that the Clip n Climb arena works really well for young people with special educational need units. The centres are also very popular with a wide range of school groups as well as with other youth organisations such as the Scouts. As mentioned above, the centre will compliment the Reading Climbing Centre by providing a way into the sport for a wide range of people.

Highways Issues

- 6.12 It is clearly important that the introduction of this additional use on the site does not cause any operational difficulties for the retained B8 use, and that both business can operate successfully on the site without causing any problems on the local highway network. This includes ensuring that both uses have adequate car and cycle parking, without exceeding the maximum standards set out in the Council's guidance.
- 6.13 In practice, the busiest operating times for the Clip n Climb are unlikely to overlap to any significant degree with the storage and distribution use. This is particularly the case with the current operators of the warehouse, whose peak operating time is during the night, when deliveries of newspapers etc are organised and dispatched. Its main activities are finished by 10am each day. In general terms however, while the centre will be open and have some use during the day on weekdays outside term time, its busier periods are late afternoons/early evenings and weekends, when any

warehouse use is less likely to be unduly active. In most circumstances, these two uses will tend to compliment each other in terms of use of the site. Access to the yard at the rear of the building and room for the manoeuvring of good vehicles will not be affected.

6.14 As regards car parking, the retained warehouse use has a floor area of 1,366 square metres and has 580 square metres of supporting office floorspace. Applying the Council's maximum standards this means that the most spaces the unit should have is 22. This number of spaces is to be provided, with 7 spaces shown at the front of the site for visitors to the offices etc., and the remainder shown on surplus space within the yard at the rear for other employees.

6.15 Visitor numbers to the new unit are likely to be broadly similar to those at the existing centre in Tonbridge. A detailed breakdown of these is set out in Appendix 3 attached to this statement. The Clip n Climb in Tonbridge has 42 designated parking spaces, which has proved to be adequate to meet the demands of visitors. It is relevant to note that 30% of visits are people attending parties, therefore a large number are dropped off and picked up later. It is proposed to provide some 50 parking spaces on the site for use by the new centre, which will be wholly suitable to meet its needs.

6.16 It is also relevant to note that this part of the Borough is well served by bus services from all parts of the town. There are good opportunities for visitors to travel to and from the site without using a car.

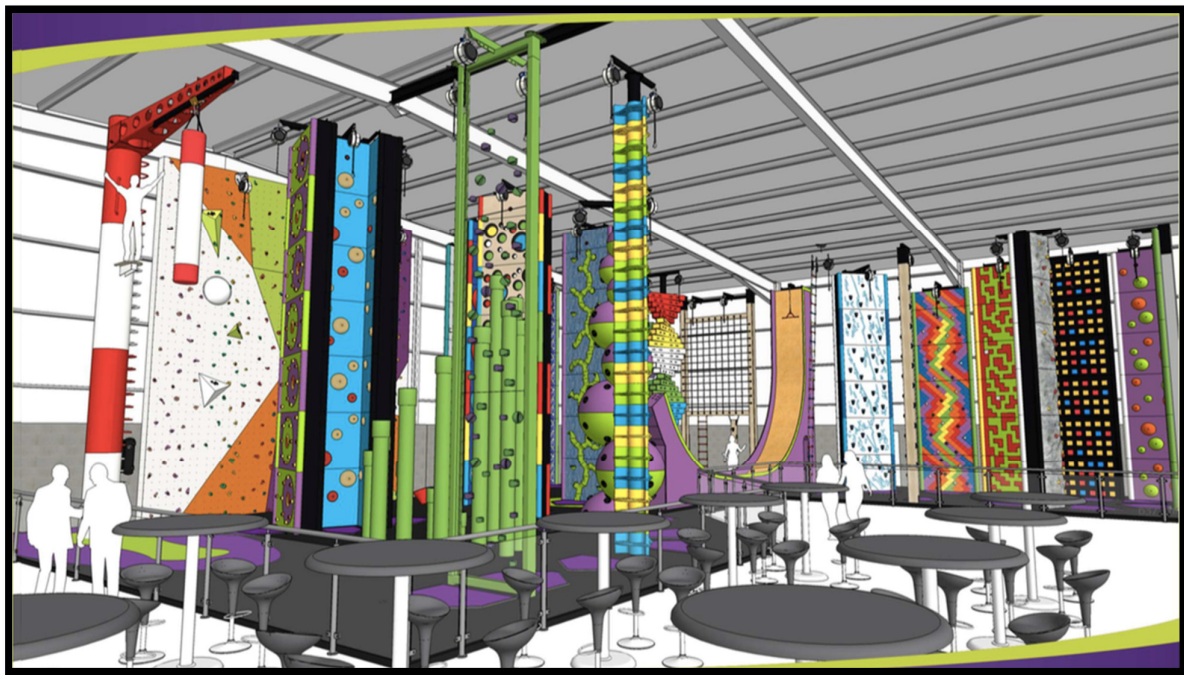
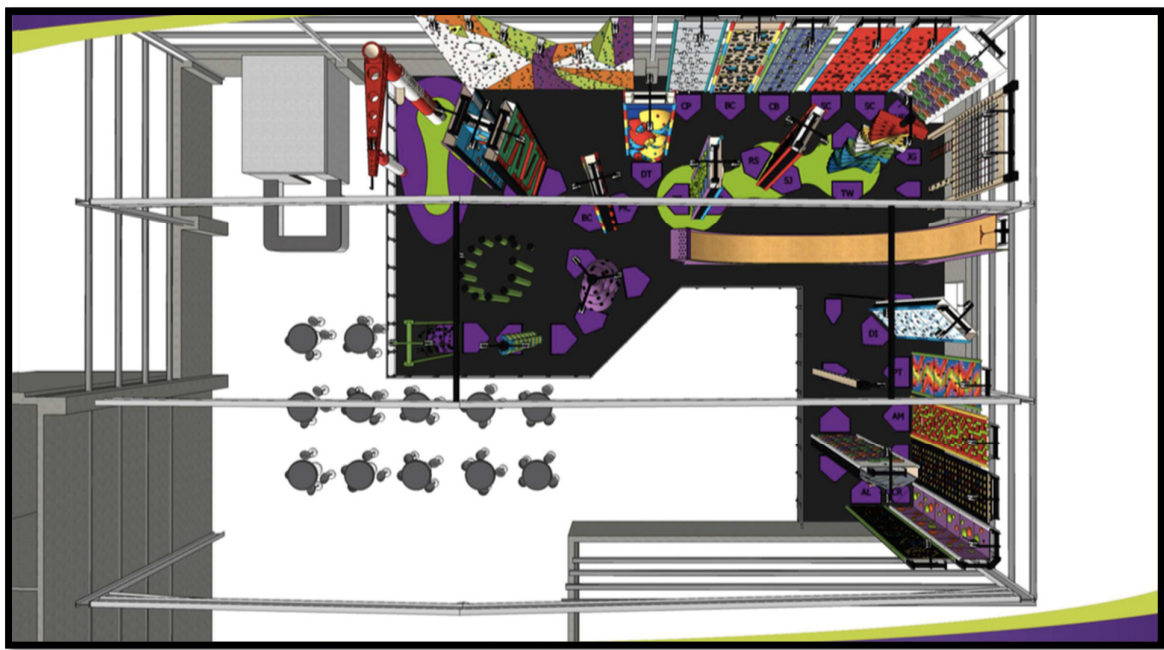
7.0 Summary and Conclusions

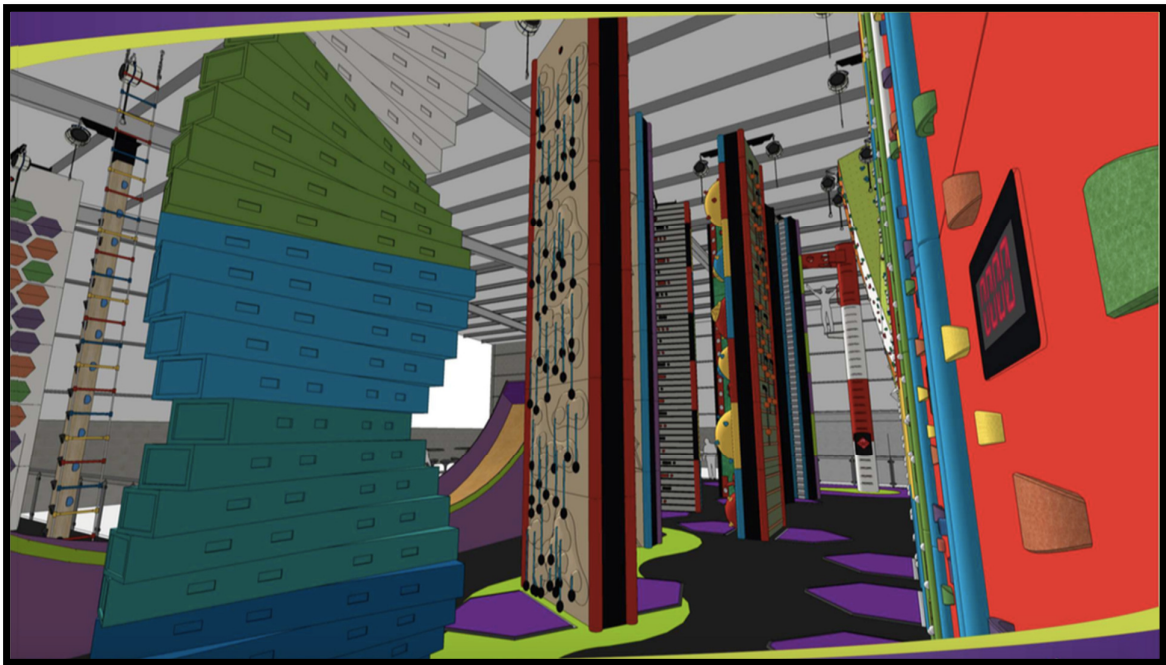
7.1 The proposed subdivision of this existing commercial building and the introduction of the proposed D2 use into the new unit will ensure that the site remains fully and efficiently used for business and employment purposes. The climbing centre will also be a valuable new facility for the residents of the Borough. There are no practical or operational difficulties with the proposed development

7.2 In these circumstances we would ask the Council to support this application.

APPENDIX 1

Images of Proposed Internal Layout of Climbing Centre.





APPENDIX 2

Letter from Smiths News.

SmithsNews

20 September 2019

Planning Department
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Reading
RG1 2LU

Dear Sir/Madam

**PLANNING APPLICATION FOR CHANGE OF USE
UNIT 8 ACRE ROAD, READING, BERKSHIRE RG2 0SU**

We are keen to communicate our support of the above planning application for change of use to D2 Leisure.

Having reviewed our operational requirements we have identified that there is clearly surplus accommodation at our Acre Road site. Our requirements to re-locate locally have been frustrated as we have been unable to identify alternative accommodation that would meet our present requirements. The alternative is to otherwise move out of area and we are keen to avoid this for obvious reasons.

We have agreed with our Landlords to extend our lease from 3 years unexpired to 10 years unexpired on the basis that the sub-letting to Clip n Climb progresses as believe we will have future proofed our operational requirements. Whilst we have downsized, the same number of employees will be retained on site.

Our main hours of operation are during 6 pm and 10 am 7 days a week and involve the distribution of newspapers and magazines 364 days of the year.

It is agreed that we would retain exclusive use of the rear yard and therefore operations would not be conflicted with the new use proposed. From an operational perspective Clip n Climb represents a unique opportunity for us to downsize and retain space that would meet all operational requirements. We have reviewed financial accounts for the management structure at Clip n Climb and are confident also that this is a viable business that we can work with longer term.

Yours faithfully



James Church
Group Property Manager

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APPENDIX 3

Breakdown of visitor numbers to Tonbridge Clip n Climb (2018/2019).

		Hols Weekday	Hols Weekend	Term Weekday	Term Weekend	Total
JAN	Days	5	2	18	6	31
	Numbers	852	727	586	2,379	4,544
	Average	170	364	33	397	147
FEB	Days	5	2	15	6	28
	Numbers	2,325	858	495	2,457	6,135
	Average	465	429	33	410	219
MARCH	Days	3	1	19	6	28
	Numbers	753	398	976	3,046	5,173
	Average	251	398	51	381	167
APRIL	Days	10	5	11	4	30
	Numbers	4,263	1,545	976	3,046	5,173
	Average	251	398	51	381	167
MAY	Days	6	2	17	6	31
	Numbers	1,590	426	490	1,871	4,377
	Average	265	213	28.82	311.83	141.19
JUNE	Days	1	2	20	7	30
	Numbers	432	319	806	1,941	3,498
	Average	432	159.50	40.3	277.29	116.6
JULY	Days	17	6	5	3	31
	Numbers	1,182	1,528	197	741	4,278
	Average	106.59	254.67	39.4	247	116.6
AUGUST	Days	23	8	0	0	31
	Numbers	5,957	1,460	0	0	7,417
	Average	259	182.5	0	0	239.26
SEPT	Days	3	2	17	8	30
	Numbers	586	481	397	3,044	4,508
	Average	195.33	240.5	23.35	380.5	210
OCT	Days	13	4	10	4	31
	Numbers	2,752	1,348	213	1,685	5,998
	Average	211.69	337	21.3	421.25	246.81
NOV	Days	2	2	20	6	30
	Numbers	262	760	668	2,551	4,241
	Average	131	380	33.4	425.17	242.39
DEC	Days	11	6	8	4	29
	Numbers	1,645	1,547	229	1,525	4,955
	Average	150.36	257.83	28.63	381.25	204.5