

Planning Application Response of Planning Policy

Application No:	APP/15/00240
Site Address:	Unit C, Wren Centre, Westbourne Road, Emsworth
Development:	Change of use from Current B1/B8 to D1/D2 Fitness and rehabilitation facility (D2) and Chiropractic and health care clinic (D1).
Case Officer:	Mrs T Pickup
Comments by:	Gavin Stonham
Date of Comments:	8 th April 2015

Policy Status:

The Local Plan is now comprised of the Core Strategy (2011) and the recently adopted Allocations Plan (2014). It should be noted that Saved Policies are no longer relevant.

Comments:

This application is for change of use of an existing B1/B8 unit within the Wren Centre to a D1/D2 health and leisure use (fitness centre and chiropractic/healthcare clinic).

Hours of operation and noise:

The hours of operation of the proposed fitness centre would significantly extend the hours of operation of the Wren Centre. The businesses on this site are at present generally open from around 8am to 6pm on weekdays and 8am until 1pm/4pm on Saturdays. The hours of operation of the proposed facility would be from 6am until 9pm on weekdays, 6am until 4pm on Saturdays and 8am until midday on Sundays. The implication of these extended hours would be a longer period where there would be traffic movements to and from the site and a longer period where noise may be a cause of disturbance for nearby local residents, particularly of Bourne Bridge House, and other businesses on the site itself. This conflicts with Havant Borough Local Plan (Core Strategy) policies CS16 (1), DM11 and DM12. No evidence has been submitted with the application to prove the applicant's assertion that the proposal would not have adverse impacts on local amenity and quality of life and the Council's Environmental Health department has already raised an objection to the application on the ground of potential noise disturbance. The planning statement submitted with the application states that 'we will not be using any form of amplified music outside of normal working hours', however the facility would be open outside of normal working hours and this would appear likely to generate at least some degree of disturbance. The precedent that such a change of hours would set for future development at this site, or on other similar sites, is a further consideration.

Loss of an employment use:

In my view the applicant should have first considered other locations for the gym before a site in previous B1/B8 use. The proposed new business would generate additional employment of three members of staff according to the applicant's planning statement, although it would be a different category of employment to that previously on the site. Policy CS2 of the Local Plan (Core Strategy) seeks to accommodate 162,000 sq m of B1/B2/B8 employment floor space between 2006 and 2026. The change of use from B1/B8 to a D1/D2 use would reduce the amount of available floor space on this site that could contribute towards this total.

The change of use from a B-use class which may be fit for purpose to another use class would also conflict with policy DM3. If the site were to be deemed to be not fit for purpose, then under this policy the applicant would still need to provide evidence of 12 months' worth of marketing covering points i) to v) as a minimum. This evidence is unlikely to be available at present, as the existing unit has only recently become vacant due to the previous occupier, Lewis Marquees (Westbourne) Ltd, having reduced its floor space.

Traffic impacts:

The site is rural, with many of the buildings on the industrial estate being previously converted farm buildings. The proposed gym facility is likely to generate considerable additional traffic movements to and from the site and this could cause highway safety issues as well as the above-mentioned issue of noise disturbance. The road to which the site adjoins is a narrow country road with limited views, although the entrance to the Wren Centre is reasonably wide with good vision splays.

The applicant has the aim of incentivising travel to and from the site by healthier modes of travel to the car, i.e. walking and cycling. The rural location could in theory encourage uptake of this mode of travel although public transport to the site is not realistic due to its infrequency and the narrow road is not particularly safe and has a footpath only on one side – the side furthest away from the Wren Centre. The likelihood is that most trips to the site would be by car.

A health and fitness centre is a main town centre use under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the NPPF recommends a sequential test to planning applications for this type of development be undertaken to ensure that they are located in the most accessible locations. This site is out of centre and on the edge of the urban area.

Flood risk:

The Local Plan proposals map indicates that a small area of the site that is to be developed falls within Flood Zone 2, with the remainder in Flood Zone 3. The National Planning Policy Guidance categorises leisure facilities as a 'less vulnerable' use for flood risk in Flood Zone 2. The site would therefore not be inappropriate in this respect.

Parking:

The applicant has stated that he envisages that the business would receive 200 visitors each month. This equates to approximately only six visitors per day which seems a very low estimate for a gym; the size of the facility would suggest that many more than this could be accommodated. The applicant has not indicated the total number of parking spaces that the facility would need, nor how many additional parking spaces would be created for the exclusive use of visitors to the facility and how many existing spaces would be used. A clearer parking plan showing this information would have been helpful. The likelihood is that if many existing spaces are taken by users of the new facility then this will at times cause a shortage of spaces for existing businesses, leading to possible conflicts and to dangerous and/or illegal parking in non-allocated areas. The main road outside the site is not appropriate for parking, so it is important that sufficient parking is available on site for the new facility. Policy DM11 seeks to reduce informal parking in areas surrounding new developments where this would impact on the highway network.

Even if the applicant were unable to find another more suitable site in or closer to Emsworth district centre, the lack of realistic alternative modes of travel to access this site apart from by car would make the need for sufficient on-site parking spaces essential to make this scheme work and not result in competition for existing parking spaces and possibly also

dangerous and/or illegal parking on the B2147 Westbourne Road or in Rivermead Court. The applicant's planning statement indicates his intention to expand the gym further still if it is successful, which could exacerbate the parking problem still further.

Health:

Policy CS1 (Health and Wellbeing) is encouraging as the proposal would provide an indoor sport and leisure facility to contribute towards strategic and local provision.

Principle of development:

This type of leisure development on an industrial estate can work successfully on sites where there is more space and no residential properties nearby, which is unfortunately not the case at this site.

This proposal would be in conflict with a number of Havant Borough Local Plan policies as described above, and lead to several adverse impacts due to the site's location and other nearby uses. I therefore recommend that it be refused.