Expiry Date - 17/12/2025
Extension of Time -

Development Management – Delegated Officer Report

Application Number: AWDM/1282/25 **Recommendation: – APPROVE**

Site: **Arts Centre Field Place The Boulevard Worthing**

Proposal: **Retrospective change of use of the Art Room from Use Class E to a Driving Test Centre (Use Class Sui Generis)**

Date of Site Visit: 04/11/25

Neighbours Checked: **Y**

Additional Neighbours Notified: **N**

Site and Surroundings

The site is located to the east of The Boulevard within a complex of buildings used for a variety of leisure, recreation and commercial purposes comprising a former manor house, large, converted barns and outbuildings. The buildings are Grade II Listed and set within landscaped gardens and grounds which include facilities such as bowling greens, sports field, tennis courts and a miniature railway and car parks.

This application relates to a room within an outbuilding which is situated approximately 14m to the north of the main manor house building. The outbuilding is a single storey building with flint façade, brick quoins and dressings, a clay tile barn end roof and white painted timber windows and rooflights. The room, within the north half of the outbuilding, is accessed from doors at its northern end. The southern half of the building is used as a pottery studio.

There is a tarmac car park directly to the west of the building which serves the various leisure and recreation activities, events and facilities on offer at Field Place. The above-mentioned barns and landscaped gardens lie to the east of the outbuilding. Additional, larger, car parks are located to the south and east of the complex adjoining the rear gardens of residential properties in Bolsover Road and Melrose Avenue.

The building sits within a larger site with various uses including indoor and outdoor leisure, recreation and sports facilities, health and wellbeing, as well as a venue for conferences, weddings/events, meeting spaces, workshops.

The room the subject of this application has been in use as an office by the DVSA for the last 12 months. Prior to that it had been used for a variety of purposes ancillary to the wider use of the planning unit as a whole comprising Field Place.

Proposal

Planning permission is sought for the continued use of the room as an office for the administration, facilitation and processing of driving tests for the DVSA (sui generis).

Driving tests start and finish on the site and consist of a health and safety compliance check before the candidates leave the site to carry out the driving tests on the local road network, returning to the site just under an hour later.

Staff consist of two managers and four driving examiners conducting the driving tests. Core hours are between 08:00 to 15:30, with testing undertaken throughout the week. Additional hours are also available between 07:00 and 08:00, and between 15:30 and 18:00. A total of 28 tests per day could be conducted within the core hours and a further 12 during the additional hours, totalling 40 tests per day.

Allocated parking for the use is located within the main car park to the south-east of the site and consists of 6 spaces. Additional overflow (non-allocated) parking is provided further east within the main car park.

There are no changes to the interior or exterior of the building. The total floorspace for this use is 46.41sqm.

The application is supported by a Transport Statement and Planning Statement.

Relevant Planning History: None relevant

Consultations

Planning Applications Highways - *WSCC has reviewed the technical note submitted by Stantec, which provides an overview of the expected net increase in trips because of the change of use from E class to sui generis.*

The net increase will be an additional 3 two-way trips in the am peak and a reduction in 5 two-way trips in the afternoon peak hour. As such WSCC do not consider the change of use will create an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, would be severe.

Therefore, no objection is raised.

Neighbour Representations: None received

Relevant Planning Policies:

Worthing Local Plan policies (WBC 2023): SP1, DM5, DM8, DM10, DM11, DM15, DM23, DM24
National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG 2024)
National Planning Practice Guidance

Planning Assessment:

There is no objection in principle to change of use within a multi-use commercial site within the built-up area. The key considerations are the effects on the listed building, the visual and residential amenities of the locality and any highways impact.

Policy Context

The site is located outside of any designated area but is part of a range of uses and facilities on site sitting under the broader umbrella of sport, leisure and recreation with additional ancillary uses also on site.

The space that is the subject of this application was previously available as a flexible space for use by the local community and therefore the loss of this community space needs to be considered in relation to policy DM8.

Worthing Local Plan Policy DM8 (Planning for Sustainable Communities/Community facilities) states that:

e) Development which would result in the loss of community facilities will normally be resisted and will only be permitted where:

> *i) an accessible replacement facility of a similar nature is provided that meets the needs of its current and intended users, as well as the local community; or*
> *ii) it can be demonstrated that the existing premises are no longer required or viable in their current use and the premises have been appropriately marketed for an alternative community use.*

The loss of a community space has been considered in relation to the above policy and can be supported, in this instance, due to the following factors:

(i) the floor space involved for this change of use, at 46.41sqm is very small (compared to the wider provision of sports/recreation facilities on this site which would be retained);
(ii) the proposed/current use meets a local need. Although this need is not identified in the Local Plan, the shortage of driving test slots and resulting long wait for learner drivers to book a test has been well-documented and reported nationally - as set out in the covering letter;
(iii) the use in question is itself sui generis meaning that when no longer needed as a driving test centre it cannot change to any other use without a planning application.

Worthing Local Plan Policy DM10 (Economic Growth and Skills) states that:

'The Local Plan will support, promote and enable the continued development of a strong, sustainable and diverse local economy by:

> *g) making more efficient use of existing, underused and accessible employment sites;'*

Worthing Local Plan Policy DM11 (Protecting and Enhancing Employment Sites) states that:

'd) Outside the identified Protected Key Employment Areas listed above, existing premises and land or floorspace which is used, or was last used, for employment uses will be protected unless it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that the site (or part of the site) or premises is genuinely redundant and is unlikely to be re-used for employment uses within the Plan period…'

The statement submitted with the application provides further justification relating to the need for the use as a driving test centre in this location, stating that:

'The DVSA and learner drivers in Great Britain are currently facing significant challenges related to booking driving tests. Several factors have contributed to the shortage in bookings, including a combination of resource constraints, geographic distribution, and the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is estimated that around one million tests were missed because of the pandemic, which has subsequently caused a backlog in driving tests due to temporary test centre closures, limited availability, and increased safety restrictions. Even though these restrictions have eased, the backlog of learners still waiting to take their tests is significant.

In addition, in 2023 (up to the end of May) the DVSA received around 800,000 new bookings for driving tests which showed a 7% increase in demand for driving tests when compared to pre-pandemic levels.

The backlog of driving tests, coupled with increased demand, has subsequently meant that there has been a continued post-pandemic surge in people seeking to complete their driving tests. However, at present there simply aren't enough test slots to meet the demand. As a result, learners are often left unable to find an available test for months in advance and are resorting to booking tests in areas of Great Britain much further from their nearest test centre in order to secure a test date.
The DVSA is therefore actively working to invest in new test centres to address the growing demand for driving tests, with a particular focus on areas of Great Britain where there is particularly high demand or where current test centres are oversubscribed.

…It should also be noted that the 'Art Room' at Field Place Manor House & Barns is already being used successfully by the DVSA as a driving test centre. This demonstrates that the change in use of the building is an effective use of the site which brings with it economic benefits and also supports the wider commercial use of the site; therefore, the change of use would not pose a detrimental loss of office space to Worthing. As such, the floor space would benefit from being regularised as a driving test centre to address an urgent need faced by both Worthing residents and a central Government Objective to provide new driving test centres.

The increased demand for driving tests coupled with the existing delays in the local area indicates that there is a need which cannot be met through existing provision in Worthing. In accordance with Policy DM10 and DM11 of the Local Plan, regard must be given to the significant challenges currently faced by the DVSA and the urgent need for a new driving test centre to serve the Worthing area. As such, the introduction of a new driving test centre in this sustainable location where employment uses are protected would help to relieve these delays and better manage the significant demand for driving tests within the area, whilst also continuing to retain the building in employment use.'

The current use as a driving test centre and associated office use has been carried out on site for the past year providing a much-needed facility serving the local community and that contributes positively to the local economy. The use is considered to be appropriate for the location and can be continued without a negative impact on neighbouring uses. Use as a driving test centre can therefore be supported by the relevant planning policies.

Impact on Listed Building and Visual Amenity

There are no changes proposed by the application to the interior or exterior of the building or the surrounding area. The use of the building as a driving test centre does not undermine the setting of the listed buildings or result in harm to any historic features.

There is no adverse impact on the listed building, its setting or the visual amenities of the locality as a result of this application.

Residential Amenity

The Arts Centre lies within the northwest corner of the extensive grounds of Field Place with the site as a whole predominantly surrounded by residential development. The rear gardens of the nearest residential properties at Selkirk Close are approximately 9.5m to the north of the building that is the subject of this application. Field Place is already a community and public facility operating a number of uses and events including weddings, conferences and other events.

The current use as a driving test centre has been in operation on site for the past 12 months and has not attracted any complaints from local residents. The current use of the building as an office in terms of noise generation is not significantly different to the range of previous flexible uses of this space, however it is the use of this as part of a driving test centre that requires further consent.

WSCC have commented, in relation to vehicle trips, that '*The net increase will be an additional 3 two-way trips in the am peak and a reduction in 5 two-way trips in the afternoon peak hour.'* There is not therefore considered to be any adverse impact on local residents, in terms of traffic generation as a result of the ongoing use as a driving test centre.

The centre acts as a starting and finishing point for the driving tests with the main duration of the tests taking place off site. Use of the building for the administrative functions in relation to conducting driving tests from site, is not considered to have any adverse impact on nearby residents or result in an increase in noise or disturbance.

There is no detrimental impact on the residential amenities of adjacent occupiers as a result of this application.

Highways Impacts

WSCC Highways have confirmed that they do not consider the change of use will create an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or that the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, would be severe and therefore no objection is raised.

The site can be accessed via bus, rail, walking and cycling or via the local highway network, and is easily accessible by a range of transport methods therefore representing a sustainable location.

Recommendation:

APPROVE subject to condition(s):-

1. Drawing Numbers

Informative

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received and subsequently determining to grant planning permission in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Is recommendation contrary to letter(s) of representation? N

Case Officer:	Amanda Haslett	Date: 12/12/25
Authorised by:	Jo Morin	Date: 15.12.2025