

Development Management – Delegated Officer Report

Application Number: AWDM/0232/26

Recommendation: – Refuse

Site: Provident House 50 Grafton Road Worthing West Sussex

Proposal: Change of use from school (Use Class F1) to commercial/business service/office (Use Class E)

Date of Site Visit: 24.03.2026

Neighbours Checked: Y

Additional Neighbours Notified: N Site notice posted 05.03.2026

Site and Surroundings

The site relates to a double gabled detached Victorian building located on the east side of Grafton Road, south of its junction with Humphry's Road. It is understood to have had a long history of civic use having been a soup kitchen many years ago with a blue plaque to commemorate its historical importance. The site is currently vacant and the application form indicates that it was last in use as a school and ceased in 2020.

There is a parking forecourt to the site frontage with parking for two vehicles. There is a small enclosed garden area at the rear.

To the immediate north is Worthing Spiritualist Church and the listed Christ Church to the north of Humphry's Road. To the rear of the site is Humphrey's Almshouses which have frontages onto Humphrey's Road and Portland Road to the east. To the south of the site is a residential development at Schools Yard.

The site is within the Chapel Road Conservation Area and is identified as a Local Interest Building. The site is outside the defined town centre boundary.

Proposal

Permission is sought for the change of use from a school (class F1) to a commercial/business/service/office use under use class E. No specific end user is indicated. Although the application description refers broadly to class E the applicant's supporting statement specifies the following uses:

4.2 The proposed range of uses is :

Use Class E – Commercial, Business and Service

c) for the provision of the following kinds of services principally to visiting members of the public —

(i) financial services,

(ii) professional services (other than health or medical services), or

(iii) any other services which it is appropriate to provide in a commercial, business or service locality,

- e) for the provision of medical or health services, principally to visiting members of the public, except the use of premises attached to the residence of the consultant or practitioner,*
- g) (i) for —an office to carry out any operational or administrative functions,*

No physical alterations to the building are proposed.

The supporting Planning and Heritage Statement includes the following description of the site:

2.1 Provident House is a single-storey brick building constructed in around 12892 as a permanent Soup Kitchen and distribution centre for coal and bread by the Worthing Provident Relief Society. It operated in this capacity until 1922 (Source: The Worthing Society).

2.2 More recently the building was used as a school and offices (pupil exclusion unit) but this use ceased in 2020 and the building has been empty ever since.

2.3 The building contains three main rooms, a kitchen area, staff room, three WCs, two parking spaces, and a private rear garden, with a net internal area of 71.8 sqm.

2.4 The site is located within the Chapel Road Conservation area and is part of a group of ecclesiastical or ecclesial adjacent buildings South of Christ Church.

A Statement of Marketing Evidence has been provided in support of the application by Spratt and Son.

Relevant Planning History:

10/1001/FULL - Retrospective application for change of use to non-residential institution (use class D1, private school)

STATUS: Application Permitted 26th January 2011.

AWDM/1029/22 - Conversion of vacant building into two houses with allied alterations

STATUS: Application Permitted 20th September 2022.

AWDM/0701/25 - Change of use from nursery school (Use Class F1a) to offices (Use Class Egi).

STATUS: Application Withdrawn 13th October 2025.

Consultations

The **Highway Authority** has commented as follows:

This proposal is for the change of use from school (Use Class F1) to commercial/business service/office (Use Class E). The site is located on Grafton Road, an unclassified road subject to a speed restriction of 30 mph. Following an inspection of the application documents, WSCC in its role as Local Highway Authority (LHA) raises no highway safety concerns for this application.

The LHA previously provided consultation advice for this site for application AWDM/0701/25, raising no highway safety concerns and this application was subsequently withdrawn.

The LHA does not anticipate that the change of use from a school to an office would give rise to a material intensification of movements to or from the site. There are no apparent visibility concerns with the existing access.

The site will retain two car parking spaces, however for the proposed office use the WSCC parking guidance would advise a parking provision of at least three spaces. Therefore, any overspill parking would have to be accommodated on-street or within nearby paid-for provision.

Comprehensive parking restrictions are in place on nearby roads, prohibiting parking in places that would be detriment to highway safety. The LHA does not anticipate that the shortfall of car parking provision would result in a highway safety concern. However, the LPA may wish to consider the potential impacts on on-street parking from an amenity point of view. Weight is given to the fact that the site is situated in a sustainable town centre location within walking/cycle distance of local services, amenities, and public transport links.

No details have been provided regarding cycle storage. Cycling is a viable option in the area, and the LHA would request secure and covered cycle parking provision being provided if there is space within the site to accommodate this.

The LHA does not consider that this proposal would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety or result in 'severe' cumulative impacts on the operation of the highway network, therefore is not contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 116), and that there are no transport grounds to resist the proposal. If the LPA are minded to approve the application, the following condition should be applied:

Cycle parking

No part of the development shall be first occupied until covered and secure cycle parking spaces have been provided in accordance with plans and details to be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To provide alternative travel options to the use of the car in accordance with current sustainable transport policies.

Southern Water has made the following comments:

Southern Water has determined that the flow rate for the above site will remain consistent, so capacity is not an issue, and no Southern Water assets will be affected. Therefore, Southern Water has no objections to this proposal.

Please note surface water should not be disposed of into a public foul sewer and must comply with the Hierarchy of H3 of the Building Regulations. For more details, refer to the Drainage and Waste Disposal: Approved Document H on the GOV.UK website.

Any new connections to the public sewerage system will require a New Sewer Connection application (also known as a Section 106) to be submitted and approved by Southern Water.

Due to legislative changes effective from 1st October 2011 regarding the ownership of sewers, it is possible that some previously private sewers, now deemed public, could be crossing the above property and may not be shown on Southern Water records. Therefore, if any additional sewers are discovered during construction, an investigation will be required to determine their condition, the number of properties served, and potential access methods before any further work can proceed on site.

*For further advice, please contact Southern Water, Southern House, Yeoman Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN13 3NX (Tel: 0330 303 0119)
Website: southernwater.co.uk or by email at:
SouthernWaterPlanning@southernwater.co.uk*

The Worthing Society - *A locally Listed heritage building. No alterations are proposed in connection with the 'change of use' and the proposed use would be acceptable, although any proposed signage would have to be looked at carefully. No objection.*

Environmental Protection, Environmental Health & Licensing - no comments confirmed

The Council's **Drainage Consultant** has commented as follows:

Thank you for your consultation on the above site. We have reviewed the application as the drainage consultant acting on behalf of the Council and wish to make the following comments.

The applicant is applying for change of use from school (Use Class F1) to commercial/business service/office (Use Class E). The application is to Worthing Borough Council.

Following a review of the submitted information, we have no objection on surface water grounds. Due to the size, site, location and type of development, we would recommend the approval of the application.

Representations

None received

Relevant Planning Policies:

Worthing Local Plan 2020-2036 (WBC 2023) Policies:

SP1 (Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development)

SP3 (Healthy Communities)

SS1 (Spatial Strategy)

DM5 (Quality of the Built Environment)

DM8 (Planning for Sustainable Communities/community facilities)

DM10 (Economic Growth and Skills)

DM11 (Protecting and Enhancing Employment Sites)
DM15 (Sustainable Transport and Active Travel)
DM20 (Flood Risk and Sustainable Drainage)
DM22 (Pollution)

National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG 2024)
National Planning Practice Guidance

Planning Assessment:

Principle of Development

Permission was granted in 2011 for the use of the site as a non-residential institution with a condition restricting it to the provision of education within the former D1 use class. The most recent permission for two dwellings (AWDM/1029/22) has not been implemented. The site appears to have been last used as a school.

Local Plan Policy DM8 recognises that communities need a range of education, health, social, community and cultural facilities and services to support their health and mental well-being, and that it is important that these are accessible to all and respond to the needs of different ages and groups, particularly those with disabilities, limited mobility and more deprived members of the community. It is recognised that locating these services close to the communities they serve, helps reduce the need to travel as well as creating strong inclusive neighbourhoods.

There is limited space within Worthing for new development and, as such, there is great pressure on all available land. It is therefore vital that, in general, existing community facilities are protected and that proposals for appropriate new or improved/expanded existing facilities are supported.

Policy DM8 states that:

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.*

Only under these specific criteria will a change of use involving a loss of a community use be acceptable.

The applicant has sought to demonstrate this against criteria (ii) in the following extracts:

Planning and Heritage Statement:

6.2 The change of use is acceptable in principle. The loss of school use is justified

through robust marketing evidence which demonstrates that there is no demand for a building of this size and configuration from a school provider.

6.3 The proposal would provide valuable small office space for SMEs in a highly sustainable town centre location

6.4 The building has now been empty for several years and its future occupancy and active use is key to ensuring the building is maintained in good condition . This is particularly important given its location in the Chapel Road Conservation Area .

7.4 The previous use of the building as a school is no longer viable and there is no demand from education providers for the building . This has been demonstrated in the Marketing Evidence which accompanies this application .

7.5 The proposed change of use will enable the building to be brought in to active use which will help to secure its long -term maintenance , upkeep and appearance within the conservation area.

The following extract is from the applicant's Statement of Marketing Evidence in support of the application:

2. Marketing Period and Strategy

The property was placed on the open market on approximately 15th February 2025. Marketing included listing on the agent's website (www.sprattandson.co.uk/), online advertising through web portals such as Rightmove Commercial (www.rightmove.co.uk/commercial-property), and a 4 x 3 V marketing board stating "To Let" erected on the property. The property remained fully visible to the market throughout the under-offer period (from May to October 2025).

The planning use for the property is 10/1001/FULL - Retrospective application for change of use to non-residential institution (use class D1, private school).

This is the standard beginning marketing strategy as interest and offers were received not extensive marketing strategies were necessary.

The property was offered on the basis of a new full repairing and insuring lease on terms to be agreed at a quoting rent of £17,000 per annum exclusive.

3. Market Response and Enquiry Summary

Initial enquiries included a solicitors' practice, which viewed and submitted an offer on 19th February 2025, and a nursery operator (Class E) which made an offer on 3rd March 2025. The landlord proceeded with the solicitors' offer, and the property was placed under offer on 6 March 2025. During this period, only minimal enquiries were received, and no parties seeking to operate a school or similar educational facility expressed interest.

While the property was under offer we received 2 enquiries neither were for a school use.

4. Analysis of Demand for Educational/Community Use

The marketing response demonstrates a clear absence of demand for school or community use. No enquiries were received from education providers, community organisations, or similar users.

5. Conclusion

Based on the marketing undertaken since February 2025 and the very limited interest from community or educational operators, it is concluded that the property is no longer viable for use as a school or community facility. In my professional opinion, the premises are redundant for such uses, and alternative uses should be considered.

The premises appear to have been marketed from February 2025 but no specific marketing material has been included in the application details with general links to the Spratt and Son and Rightmove websites. However the marketing brochure can be found online (<https://www.sprattandson.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/50-grafton-road-wothing-4.pdf> refers).

The premises have been marketed as office accommodation. The brochure describes the premises as 'Ground floor offices with parking and private rear garden'. It refers to recent refurbishment with '4 spacious offices, a kitchen area, 3 x WC's, with the benefit of 2 parking spaces and a private rear garden.' It states, 'Suitable for a variety of uses, previously traded as a nursery.' The site marketing board present on site at the time of visiting states 'To Let' with no information on the building/potential use etc.

It is not clear from the marketing statement specifically what other enquiries were received and when or why those did not proceed to an offer. Two offers were received within the first three weeks of marketing, one from a nursery operator and one from a solicitor's office. The solicitor's offer was accepted by the landlord. No information has been received as to why the nursery operator offer did not proceed. It is possible that a small crèche/nursery school could be considered as an alternative community use under policy DM8 as consideration could be given to a specific end-user as a community use but this has not been put forward here with a broad range of class E uses outlined in the application. No reason has been given for the applicant's decision not to pursue any potential alternative community use or evidence of why such a use would not be suitable.

The Marketing Statement outlines that the building layout and parking/access arrangement present challenges for a modern educational or community use, and also point to a possible presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete and asbestos material. If the site is not required or viable as a school, then appropriate marketing for alternative community uses would nevertheless be required.

It is not evident that any appropriate marketing of alternative community uses has been carried out, or any review of the effectiveness of the marketing strategy in that time. Furthermore no indication has been provided as to why an offer by a potential alternative community use has been discounted by the applicant.

It is noted that the previous application AWD/1029/22 approved the conversion to two one-bed houses and no information was provided with the previous application as to whether the site had been marketed for a community purpose and the officer's report stated that the school was closed a few years prior. However, in that case the loss of the community use was weighed against the limited size of the building and the contribution that two further dwellings, and specifically Almshouses, would make in meeting an identified housing need.

In this case the applicants supporting information states that the proposal would provide valuable small office space suitable for a small business to occupy, compatible with residential neighbours, and that the site is on the fringe of the town centre, close to the main civic and commercial areas of Worthing.

Whilst it is acknowledged the site is close to the town centre and it is not disputed that the proposals would make use of a vacant building in a sustainable location, the site is not within the town centre boundary and falls outside of any designated key office location. In weighing up the benefits of the proposal it is acknowledged that this would not follow the town centre first approach under policy DM10 or in making efficient use of existing underused employment sites.

Policy DM8 clearly provides protection for community uses and it is considered that the evidence provided by the applicant in support of the proposals is not sufficient to justify a departure from this policy position. The proposal would allow for a broad range of commercial uses under class E and, in the absence of robust evidence to justify the loss of a community use as identified in the policy, it is considered that the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the availability of suitable community premises in the Borough, contrary to policy DM8.

Visual Amenity and character of the conservation area

No external alterations are proposed and it is considered that the proposed change of use would not have any significant detrimental impact on the character of the building or wider conservation area.

Residential Amenity

Whilst the building is in a predominantly residential area, there are other community uses adjacent at the neighbouring church building to the north and the application should be considered in the context of the authorised use of the building as a school where there would be a level of noise and activity associated with those uses. The building is detached and separated from the residential properties to the south by a narrow walkway and with car parking to the Almshouses to the rear. It is considered that noise and disturbance associated with comings and goings from the site and in relation to the proposed use of the building would not be significantly more intensive than its authorised use. No objection has been raised by the Environmental Health Officer. In this context it is considered that the nature and scope of commercial uses proposed would not pose any significant impact on residential amenity subject to suitable controls. Had the principle of the proposed use been supported, the specific categories of use within class E, management of the use/operation, and hours of operation could have been dealt with by condition in the interests of protecting amenity.

Access and Highways

The site can be considered sustainable to the extent that it is within walking/cycling distance of town centre services, amenities, and public transport providing connections to the wider area.

No objection has been raised by the Highway Authority in terms of parking, highway safety or transport grounds. Car Parking for two vehicles has been indicated. Cycle parking provision would help to reduce the reliance on the private car and had the application been acceptable in other respects this could have been secured by condition if approved.

Sustainable Development

The site is not within a flood risk zone or identified as at risk of surface water flooding. In respect of drainage, no alterations are indicated and no increase in impermeable area. No objection has been raised by the Council's drainage consultant on surface water grounds.

Recommendation:

REFUSE for the reason:-

In the absence of robust evidence to the contrary, there is no justification for the loss of the existing premises as a community use, which would cause unacceptable harm to the availability of suitable community premises in the Borough contrary to Local Plan policy DM8 and the relevant policies of the NPPF.

Informative

The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by identifying matters of concern with the proposal and determining the application within a timely manner, clearly setting out the reason(s) for refusal, allowing the Applicant the opportunity to consider the harm caused and whether or not it can be remedied by a revision to the proposal. The Local Planning Authority is willing provide pre-application advice in respect of any future application for a revised development.

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

Case Officer: Rebekah Hincke Date: 20.04.2026

Authorised by: Louise Prew Date: 20/04/2026