AWDM/0964/25

CHANGE OF USE FROM LIGHT INDUSTRIAL (USE CLASS Eg(III) TO A SMALL-GROUP PERSONAL TRAINING FACILITY (USE CLASS E(D))

UNIT 5, DOMINION TRADE CENTRE, DOMINION WAY, WEST WORTHING, WEST SUSSEX BN14 8NT

STATEMENT ON COMPLIANCE WITH WORTHING LOCAL PLAN POLICY DM11

18 September 2025

CONTENTS

1.	**Introduction**	**2**
2.	**Background to the Application**	**3**
3.	**Meeting the Requirements of Policy DM11**	**5**
4.	**Conclusions**	**8**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This statement has been prepared to support a planning application for the change of use of Unit 5 on the Dominion Trade Centre, Dominion Way in West Worthing from light industrial (Use Class Egiii) to a small group personal training facility (Use Class Ed).

1.2 The site is within an area designated a Protected Key Employment Area in the Worthing Local Plan 2020 - 2036. Policy DM11 states that these premises will be protected for employment uses, and change to non-employment uses are only allowed in exceptional circumstances. The Plan defines 'employment uses' for the purposes of this policy as Storage & Distribution (B8), General Industrial (B2), Office (Class E(g)(i)), Research and Development (Class E(g)(ii)) and Light Industrial (Class E(g)(iii)). [1]

1.3 This statement explains why the proposed change of use can be considered as a justified exception to the policy that seeks to protect employment sites, when assessed against the criteria in DM11.

[1] Worthing Local Plan paragraph 5.154

2. BACKGROUND TO THE APPLICATION

2.1 The applicant, Connor Weston, started his personal training business, Function Facility Ltd., [2] on 1st July 2024. Operating out of a small premises on Victoria Road in Worthing, he and his business partner work as personal trainers (PT), and employ a further two personal trainers, all four of them working full time. They hold eight, one hour training sessions each day, for a maximum of four people (four clients to one PT). Mr Weston is already looking to employ a fifth PT to work full time in the business.

2.2 The company is now at full capacity at the Victoria Road premises, but have more potential clients who would like to join. Clearly, moving to larger premises will allow the company to expand and create more jobs and healthier clients in the process.

2.3 Mr Weston has been looking for a new premises for the past six months. His parameters for a suitable site is a building between 2,500 and 3,000 sq ft, with parking, good floor to ceiling height to allow for workouts with equipment, and solid concrete floors. During the past six months he has looked at a number of premises in Worthing, but none have been suitable.

2.4 The lease for Unit 5, Dominion Trade Centre, became available at the end of February this year. The premises was vacated at the beginning of the year by the previous tenant. It is being marketed by Justice & Co Commercial Property Specialists, Goring Road, Worthing. [3] The unit extends to 2,746 sq ft (255sqm) and is offered at a rent of £35,700 per annum. This represents a competitive rental for a unit of this size, quality and location.

2.5 The tenant in Unit 6, adjacent to Unit 5, also vacated their premises at the beginning of 2025 and the leases both units 5 and 6 are being marketed by Justice & Co., with vacant possession, at a combined rental of £70,000 per annum.

2.6 In the seven months since Unit 5 was available, the agents have only received five expressions of interest. The applicant, Connor Weston, was the first to view the premises in April. He found Unit 5 to be perfect for his business needs and is ready to sign a five year lease with the landlord. Since then there have been four other viewings, of which one did not turn up, two

[2] https://www.functionfacility.com/

[3] https://justiceandco.co.uk/property/units-5-6-dominion-trade-centre-dominion-way-west-worthing-west-sussex-bn14-8nt/

said the premises were unsuitable, and the fourth advised they were not ready to re-locate. Therefore Connor Weston is the only person that has shown any real interest in the unit in over seven months of marketing.

2.7 The agent confirms that five viewings in seven months is an extremely low level of interest in a commercial leasehold property. She also told this consultant that commercial property market in Worthing remains stubbornly sluggish. Worthing Business Park [4] is a new development of freehold and to let commercial units on Dominion Way. It is now complete, but less than half of these units have been occupied to date. Again, this slow take up reflects the weak demand for commercial lettings in the Worthing travel-to-work area.

2.8 Stiles Harold Williams' January 2024 review of rents across the region noted that take up of industrial premises was low in Worthing,

> "In Worthing, although rents moved upwards by £0.50 per sq ft to £12 per sq ft, only 5,500 sq ft was transacted in 2023. Availability is relatively high at 294,000 sq ft, mostly in a single building of 261,000 sq ft, with logged demand totalling 660,000 sq ft." [5]

2.9 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) [6] advises that when considering whether there is a realistic prospect of an allocated site being developed for its intended use, it may be relevant to take into account whether there is evidence that the site has been actively marketed for its intended use for a reasonable period, and at a realistic price; and whether there are any changes of circumstance that mean that take-up of the site for its intended use is now unlikely.

2.10 The application site has been marketed for a reasonable period at a realistic price. The very low level of interest in Unit 5 since February 2025, coupled with the good level of availability of industrial and commercial premises in Worthing and surrounding areas, indicate that the likelihood of an alternative tenant coming forward and offering to sign a five year lease is extremely low.

---

[4] https://glenmore-group.co.uk/industrial/worthing/worthing-business-park/

[5] https://www.shw.co.uk/articles/2024/rents-remain-robust-with-demand-linked-to-storage-and-distribution-across-the-south-east-industrial-market.html

[6] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/effective-use-of-land Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 66-001-20190722

3. MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF POLICY DM11

3.1 Policy DM11 of the Worthing Local Plan lists eleven key employment areas that will be protected against loss to other uses, including the Broadwater Industrial Estate, in which Dominion Way is situated. The policy states,

> "c) These key employment areas are essential in maintaining a strong and diverse supply of employment sites and premises to meet the needs of the local economy and given the significant land constraints the Council are seeking to protect them for employment uses appropriate to their location. Only in exceptional circumstances, where there is clear and robust evidence that the introduction of alternative uses is required to retain a diverse and resilient local economy, will such a change be considered. In undertaking any assessment regard will be had to the following factors:
>
> i) robust evidence setting out the importance of the use to the future of the local economy;
>
> ii) a demonstration that the introduction of the proposed use would not negatively impact on the functioning of the key employment area or the local economy as a whole;
>
> iii) evidence that the loss of the existing use would not negatively impact the local economy and;
>
> iv) evidence of alternative sites outside of the key employment areas have been considered and that no suitable sites are available."

3.2 The health and fitness industry is a strong and growing sector of the economy. Between 2023 and 2024 health and fitness revenue in the UK grew by 8.8%. In the two years from 2022 to 2024 gym membership revenue increased from £4.05bn in 2022 to £5.19bn in 2024. That's a 13.1% increase. The personal training segment is significant and growing, estimated to be worth £768.1 million, and forecast to grow to £800 million by 2025. [7] Clearly, the sector is very buoyant and projected to continue increasing in size.

3.3 The success of the applicant's own business in only one year of trading testifies to this strong demand. The type of training offered by Function Facility, where the client to trainer ratio is 4 to 1, offers an intensive, client focused service. This is particularly popular with individuals who find the standard gymnasium experience to impersonal and not geared towards their personal

[7] https://www.statista.com/topics/3411/fitness-industry-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/

fitness goals. The applicant's need for a larger premises after only one year of trading, and his ability to take on more staff, is clear evidence of the importance of the health and fitness industry to the local economy, as is required by (i) of policy DM11(c).

3.4 The use of Unit 5 as a personal training facility will not negatively impact on the functioning of the Broadwater Industrial Estate as a key employment area (see DM11(c)(ii)). The site has ample off-street parking for clients and staff, and the use itself would not detrimental to the operations carried out in adjacent premises.

3.5 As detailed in section 2, the marketing of the premises over the previous seven months, and the more general situation with regards to commercial lettings in Worthing, is evident of low demand for commercial floorspace in recent years. It is highly unlikely that a tenant falling within one of the employment classes listed in paragraph 5.154 of the Local Plan will come forward in the foreseeable future. The unit has stood empty for over seven months, during which time it has contributed nothing to the local economy. From the moment that the applicant relocates his business into Unit 5 there will be positive benefits for the local economy. He will hire a fifth, full time personal trainer, and expand the number of clients and daily training sessions.

3.6 It will also free up the current premises in Victoria Road to 'After Hours' a pilates business. Mr Weston can sub-let the premises to this new tenant, a positive economic benefit for the town.

3.7 Not only does Function Facility Fitness create economic activity through direct job creation, it also supports a number of local businesses. They have a cleaning contract with Luna Cleans worth £100 a month, a premier coffee machine hired from Coffee Roasters, and a book-keeper and accountant. And all these positive economic effects will continue for a minimum of five years, which is the length of lease the applicant is willing to sign for the premises.

3.8 The building will need refurbishing prior to their occupation, which will create work for painter decorators and other tradesmen.

3.9 There is no existing tenant in the building, so with the relocation of Function Facility Fitness into Unit 5 there will be no loss of an existing use. Whilst with the relocation of the business there will be a clear, indisputable positive impact on the local economy, not a negative impact, in accordance with DM11 =(c)(iii).

3.10 The applicant looked at a number of sites in Worthing before agreeing to rent Unit 5. None of these were suitable for his business, the parameters for which are quite exact. The premises

must be away from residential properties that could be affected by noise. It must have good floor to ceiling heights to accommodate weight lifting equipment, solid concrete floor, be between 2,500 and 3,000sq ft and have off-street car parking. None of the other premises he viewed had all of these requirements.

3.11 Moreover, the Dominion Trade Centre is in an accessible location within the built-up area of Worthing. Bus services run along Dominion Road one third of a mile to the south of the site. The personal training facility will be conveniently located to serve the local community of Worthing nearby. As the application site is located where it would be reasonable accessible to a large catchment population, including by public transport, it meets the definition of sustainable development, whereby the overall benefits of the use will outweigh the degree of harm arising from the policy conflict.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The proposed use of Unit 5 as a small group personal training facility will create employment, and provide social and health benefits to the local community. Planning decisions should aim to achieve places which enable and support healthy lives, through promoting good health (National Planning Policy Framework, para. 96). Local planning authorities should also provide the recreational facilities the community needs and plan positively for their provision (NPPF, 98). They should also help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt (NPPF, 85).

4.2 Policy DM11 of the Local Plan acknowledges that there are circumstances where uses not in Use Classes B2, B8, E(g)(i), (ii) and (iii) should be permitted in key employment areas. This is one such case. Short periods of vacancy on units is to be expected as tenants relocate, but protracted periods of vacancy are indicative of low demand, and have a negative impact on the local economy. The proposed use will allow Unit 5 to once again contribute to the economy of Worthing.

4.3 The proposed use will have a clear, beneficial economic impact, leading to direct job creation and trickle down effects to small businesses.

4.4 A condition can be imposed on the permission requiring the unit to revert to Use Classes Storage & Distribution (B8), General Industrial (B2), Office (Class E(g)(i)), Research and development (Class E(g)(ii)) and Light Industrial (Class E(g)(iii) when the applicant's business vacates the premises. This will ensure the long term retention of the unit in an employment use, in accordance with DM11.

4.5 In light of the above it is respectfully requested that planning permission is approved.