Expiry Date - 29/08/2025

Development Management – Delegated Officer Report

Application Number: AWDM/0739/25 **Recommendation – REFUSE**

Site: **4 Woods Way Goring Worthing West Sussex**

Proposal: **Change of use from an industrial storage unit, to a dance and leisure studio facility.**

Date of site visit: 04.08.2025

Neighbours checked: Y

Additional neighbour notifications: N

Site and Surroundings

The application relates to a brick-built and externally clad industrial unit (approximately 420sqm) located on the north side of Woods Way, backing onto the main Brighton-Portsmouth railway line.

The industrial unit consists of a workshop with roller shutter door entrance and rear offices on the ground-floor, with storage space on the first-floor. There is a shallow concrete forecourt in front of the building and a gated car park adjoining to the east, enclosed by palisade fencing.

Planning records indicate the unit was last used as a vehicle (motorhome) repair workshop by 'SunStore Solar'.

At the time of the officer site visit, although the workshop door was closed the unit appeared to be occupied, at least in part, and the attached car park in use.

There is a larger industrial unit attached to the west side (No.3) occupied by 'SunStore Solar' with a roller shutter door entrance.

No.6 Woods Way, a part 4-storey/part 2-storey commercial/industrial building adjoins the car park to the east.

The site is with the designated Goring Industrial/Business Park.

Proposal

Full planning permission is sought to use the property as a dance and leisure studio to provide a "*much-needed, affordable, hireable space for dance classes, rehearsals and leisure activities*". The proposals involve internally sub-dividing the space into create 3 studios, changing rooms, a social area, office space and improved kitchen. The ground-floor studios will have access for disabled people.

The proposed business hours would be 07:00 to 22:00hrs daily.

Relevant Planning History:

AWDM/0209/22 Additional Metal Frame Workshop (specialising in high vehicles). Permitted 09.05.2022 – not implemented. The unit was occupied by SunStore Solar (in use for vehicle repairs to motorhomes).

AWDM/0712/12 Retrospective application for change of use from Class B2 (General Industry) to motor vehicle servicing, repairs and MOT testing (sui generis) – Permitted 14.09.2012 with conditions.

Consultations:

WSCC: The Local Highway Authority has raised no objection, commenting:

"This application seeks the change of use from an industrial storage unit to dance and leisure studio facility. The site is located on Woods Way, an unclassified road subject to a speed restriction of 30 mph.

The applicant proposes three spaces which can be hired for use by the local community for activity classes and community groups. The building will also comprise storage space and changing rooms.

No information has been submitted regarding proposed trip generation or how the site will operate. However, considering the scale of the existing and proposed use, the LHA would not anticipate that the proposals would give rise to a significant material increase in trips that would result in a severe highway safety impact. The LHA recognise the site's sustainable location that is well accessible on foot, by cycle or by public transport.

The site does benefit from existing car parking provision to the east of the building, providing four off-street car parking spaces. Any potential overspill parking on-street that may arise from the development would not be anticipated to give rise to a highway safety concern or parking capacity issue in this location.

There does appear to be ample space within the building to accommodate cycle storage, although the LPA may wish to secure more formalised cycle parking facilities to serve the site if they deem it appropriate to do so.

In summary, 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."

Southern Water: No objection.

Network Rail: No objection in principle, subject to the applicant/developer engaging with Network Rail's Asset Protection and Optimisation (ASPRO) team prior to works commencing.

WSP: No objection. Recommends 2no informatives relating to high surface water flood risk.

Adur and Worthing Councils

The **EHO** has questioned whether it is proposed to build rooms inside the warehouse, which would make sense as the spaces will be easier to keep warm in the Winter. In order to get a feel for the ability of the rooms to contain sound from the music and mindful of the complaints received from other similar types of dance studio, further information is sought on how the rooms will be constructed, for example will they have ceilings?

The adequacy of WC provision has also been queried.

Officer Comment: These matters have not been followed up as the principle of the proposed use is not supported in this location.

Policy Officer: The site is within the Goring Business Park which is a protected key employment area subject to LP Policy DM11. 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 a change of use [involving a loss of employment premises/land] be considered.

I can see nothing in this application that would justify an exception to this policy position. We continue to have a shortage of all land uses across Adur and Worthing and as such we must protect what we have where it offers good quality accommodation and for which there is a demand. We do acknowledge the value of the proposed use for our communities and local economy but would suggest a protected employment is not the appropriate location for such a use. It would be interesting to see what [alternative] sites have been looked at.

Representations: None received.

Relevant Planning Policies

Worthing Local Plan policies (WBC 2023): SP1, SP3, DM5, DM8, DM11
National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG 2024)
National Planning Practice Guidance

Planning Assessment

The key consideration is the principle of the proposed use as dance/leisure studios within Class E(d). The site is located within a protected employment area and would result in the loss of premises/land last used for employment purposes. The lawful use of the premises is ‘sui generis’ and an application for planning permission is required for the proposed change of use.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Letting Agent has confirmed that the building is largely vacant other than a small part of the GF rear which has been sub-let (by the main leaseholder) to Starr Dancewear. The main leaseholder is in difficulty and seeking to relinquish the lease. The Applicant has offered a 15-year lease on the property.

Local Plan policy DM11 states: -

a) Existing premises, sites or floor space which are used for, or last used for, employment uses, located within the following Key Employment Areas will be protected against loss to other uses.

b) Protected Key Employment Areas

i) The following key industrial estates and business parks will be protected:
- Broadwater Business Park
- Northbrook Business Park
- Northbrook Trading Estate
- Canterbury Road (including Garcia Trading Estate)
- Downlands Business Park
- East Worthing Industrial Estate
- Faraday Close
- **Goring Business Park**
- Ivy Arch Road
- Meadow Road Industrial Estate
- Yeoman Way

ii) The following key office locations will be protected:
- Liverpool Terrace/Liverpool Gardens
- Chatsworth Road
- North Street/High Street
- Railway Approach
- Crescent Road
- Farncombe Road.

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.

Only in exceptional circumstances will a change of use in involving a loss of employment use be accepted.

The Applicant has sought to demonstrate this as follows: -

(i) robust evidence setting out the importance of the use to the future of the local economy;

We are proposing to transform the site into a vibrant, multi-purpose community hub comprising three dance and multi-use studios. This facility will offer a wide range of activities including dance, fitness, arts, and wellness, catering to all ages and community groups across Worthing and the surrounding areas.

This use will support a growing local business in the health and wellbeing sector, and will create 3-5 jobs initially, with further employment expected as the centre develops. Staff roles will span:

- *Studio management and administration*
- *Instructors and freelance practitioners*
- *Front-of-house and customer service staff*

The business also plans to partner with schools, local organisations, and accessibility-focused groups to ensure inclusive programming for all parts of the community — something that the site's current use is not facilitating.

(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;

- *Our proposed use will retain and increase employment, and will significantly diversify the economic activity within the business park. The facility will contribute to the health, wellbeing, and social cohesion of the local population — an important pillar of community sustainability and economic resilience.*
- *This is not a proposal to introduce residential or low-density uses, but rather a high-activity, job-creating, community-serving enterprise that is fully aligned with the objectives of long-term economic vitality.*

(iii) evidence that the loss of the existing use would not negatively impact the local economy:

- *The site has repeatedly failed to attract industrial tenants despite reasonable marketing efforts.*
- *The current and past uses have provided minimal employment and limited economic contribution.*
- *The unit has been actively marketed twice within the last two years, and despite being in reasonable condition, no viable long-term industrial tenant has been secured. During this time, the property has only been used for storage and minimal office activity, failing to deliver the economic or employment benefits one would expect from a key employment site.*

(iv) evidence of alternative sites outside of the key employment areas have been considered and that no suitable sites are available. With regard to the search for alternative sites, the Applicant states:

"*We have been looking a suitable space for 3 years. We are aware that there are dance studios in Broadwater and by Worthing Station, so did not want to go anywhere close to those as that would not have made business sense or served the community by doubling up.*

We have wanted to go into Durrington/Goring area as there is nothing specialist in that area. The main things we have been looking for is that it has a footprint that can be converted into rectangular, decent sized studios. Lots of plots are much narrower towards the back and so that space would be redundant for our purpose. We also needed the additional space that we could have parents/carers wait safely for any students whilst still having the floorspace for studios. These premises provide that. We also need space for 3 studios for the hourly income to be enough to make the business profitable. Anything smaller and the costs outweigh the projected income. To add to this, we have been looking for a structure that does not have pillars in the middle of what would be our studios. We have discounted several options because of this. It just isn't feasible to have a concrete pillar when there are children moving in the space, particularly in dance classes where people are often turning/jumping or travelling at speed. 4 Woods Way does have pillars, but their positioning means they can form part of the internal studio wall, leaving the space hazard free.

However, the main selling point for us with this property was the ease of parking, particularly as the estate is quieter in our projected busier times. I spent many years working at a dance studio in Penfold Road and the issues with parking and upsetting the neighbours made it incredibly difficult. I wouldn't want to have that situation again.

The quieter road makes it's safer for visiting families and young people, the bus and train links are good and to be honest, the cafe across the road was also a draw! We think that this is a really positive potential relationship and service.

We have also had some initial conversations about how this site would offer privacy for higher profile actors to rehearse in.

So, to conclude, ***in our 3 year search, this is the only property we have been able to consider fully investing in as a business, due to location, footprint, and the potential to get 3 decent sized studios to make the business viable. Everywhere else we have seen was either in an already served area, not the right shape, issues with parking, or out of budget, considering the internal work we would need to do."***

In weighing up the overall planning balance, consideration can be given to the nature of the proposed use as promoting healthy lifestyles, and accessible to a broad range of people including people with disabilities.

LP Policy SP3 states that new development must be designed to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places, which enable and support healthy lifestyles and address health and well-being needs in Worthing. In order to maximise opportunities to promote healthy lifestyles, where appropriate, new development must (amongst other things) improve the quality and quantity of informal & formal recreation opportunities.

LP 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, 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.

It is not disputed that the proposal would provide the local community with a beneficial leisure and recreation resource that would support health and well-being.

However, land is an extremely scarce resource in Worthing that is subject to many competing demands and pressures. The evidence presented to support the Local Plan (the Economic Research and Employment land review Study 2016 and Update 2020) reinforced the approach taken to protecting employment land in order to plan positively for economic growth over the plan period. It found that existing employment space in Worthing is both in high demand and under threat from other uses. Furthermore, a lack of development opportunities severely limits options for future employment growth. Hence to ensure that there are long term plans to allow for the growth of businesses it is important that appropriate sites (i.e. those suitable for continued employment use) are not released in the short term.

There are some similarities between the current proposal and that previously refused (and subsequently dismissed at appeal) for a change of use of the neighbouring industrial premises at 6 Woods Way into a gymnastics club AWDM/1830/18 (then Class D2). The latter was considered under a different local policy framework – the Worthing Core Strategy (2011), albeit which adopted a similar approach to protecting the Borough's employment areas.

The Inspector noted:

"When the Core Strategy was examined, the Council's evidence bas demonstrated that there was a strong need for the retention of existing employment generating uses within the Use Classes B12, B2 and B8. The relevant evidence base was updated in 2016 and demonstrated a strong demand for industrial space remained and that there was a shortage of employment generating premises in the Borough. ……..

……Whilst I note the appellant's contention that the proposed development would provide employment and meet the objectives of the policy 11 of the CS which encourages recreation and community uses the proposed D2 use would not provide the type of 'employment use' as required by policy 4 of the CS. In addition to the above, no compelling evidence has been put forward by the appellant to suggest that the property could not be sold/let to an employment use falling within use classes B1, B2 and B8.

Consequently, I find that the proposal would result in then loss of existing industrial floorspace within a protected employment area in the which seeks to safeguard specific employment uses (as opposed to all potential employment sources) for which there is an identified need and shortage of premises in the Borough."

Since that time, changes to the national planning legislation which has allowed greater flexibility to move between uses classes (e.g. from business/commercial uses to residential uses), and also greater flexibility through the very broad range of uses now comprised with Class E, has given added importance to the use of planning policy to retain employment sites and manage change.

The Planning Policy Officer has considered the further evidence provided by the Applicant in support of the proposals.

Although the property has been marketed from time to time during the last 2 years it has not been vacant throughout that time. Moreover, no evidence has been provided as to where and how the unit was marketed. The fact that at least part of the unit remains in employment use also suggests there is no compelling evidence demonstrating it would not be attractive to another industrial or employment use.

Whilst it is understood that the generous internal dimensions and layout of this premises make it suited for the proposed use as dances studios, no details of any alternative sites that have been considered and rejected by the Applicant have been provided.

In the absence of robust evidence to justify its loss from industrial and employment use it is considered the proposal would cause unacceptable harm to the availability of suitable industrial and employment premises in the Borough contrary to LP policy DM11.

Residential Amenity

The rear of the premises is located some 45+ metres from the rear of the nearest houses in The Strand across the mainline railway to the North. The comments of the EHO are noted even though the site falls within a designated employment/business area where a degree of noise and activity associated with general industry and commerce might be expected. Nevertheless, had the principle of proposed use been supported this issue could have been dealt with as a condition of planning permission.

Parking and Highway Safety

Although the red line of the application site area includes the existing car park, it is noted that the submitted form states that only 4 car parking spaces would be available to serve the proposed use, which is likely to consist of those on the shallow forecourt area.

The LHA has not sought information on trip generation but in view of the modest scale of the premises does not anticipate it would give rise to a significant increase in the number of trips compared to the current use.

On-street parking in Woods Way and nearby Mulberry Close is heavy with vehicles typically parking up on the pavement on both sides of Woods Way. Nevertheless, the LHA is satisfied that any additional on-street parking as a result of demand not met within the site would not give rise to a serious highway safety concern.

The Applicant has pointed out that the busiest times for the dance studios (particularly for classes) is likely to be during the evenings and at weekends when other premises on the business park are closed.

No cycle parking provision nor dedicated car parking for disabled people has been made, but these matters could have been dealt with by imposing conditions if the proposed use had been supported.

Recommendation

REFUSE for the reason: -

1. In the absence of robust evidence to the contrary there is no justification for the loss of the existing premises from industrial employment use, which would cause unacceptable harm to the availability of suitable industrial employment premises in the Borough contrary to Local Plan policy DM11 and the relevant policies of the NPPF which support economic growth.

Informative

Pro-active refusal

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

Expiry Date - 29/08/2025

Case Officer:	Jo Morin	Date: 04.09.2025
Authorised by:	Peter Barnett	Date: 4 September 2025