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| **Application Number:** | **AWDM/0531/25** | **Recommendation - Approve a temporary period of 5 years** |
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| **Site:** | **Unit 2 And Unit 3, Meadow Road Depot, Meadow Road Worthing** | |
| | | |
| **Proposal:** | **Change of use from industrial /storage (Class B2/B8) to industrial /storage and retail (Class B2/B8 and Class E)** | |
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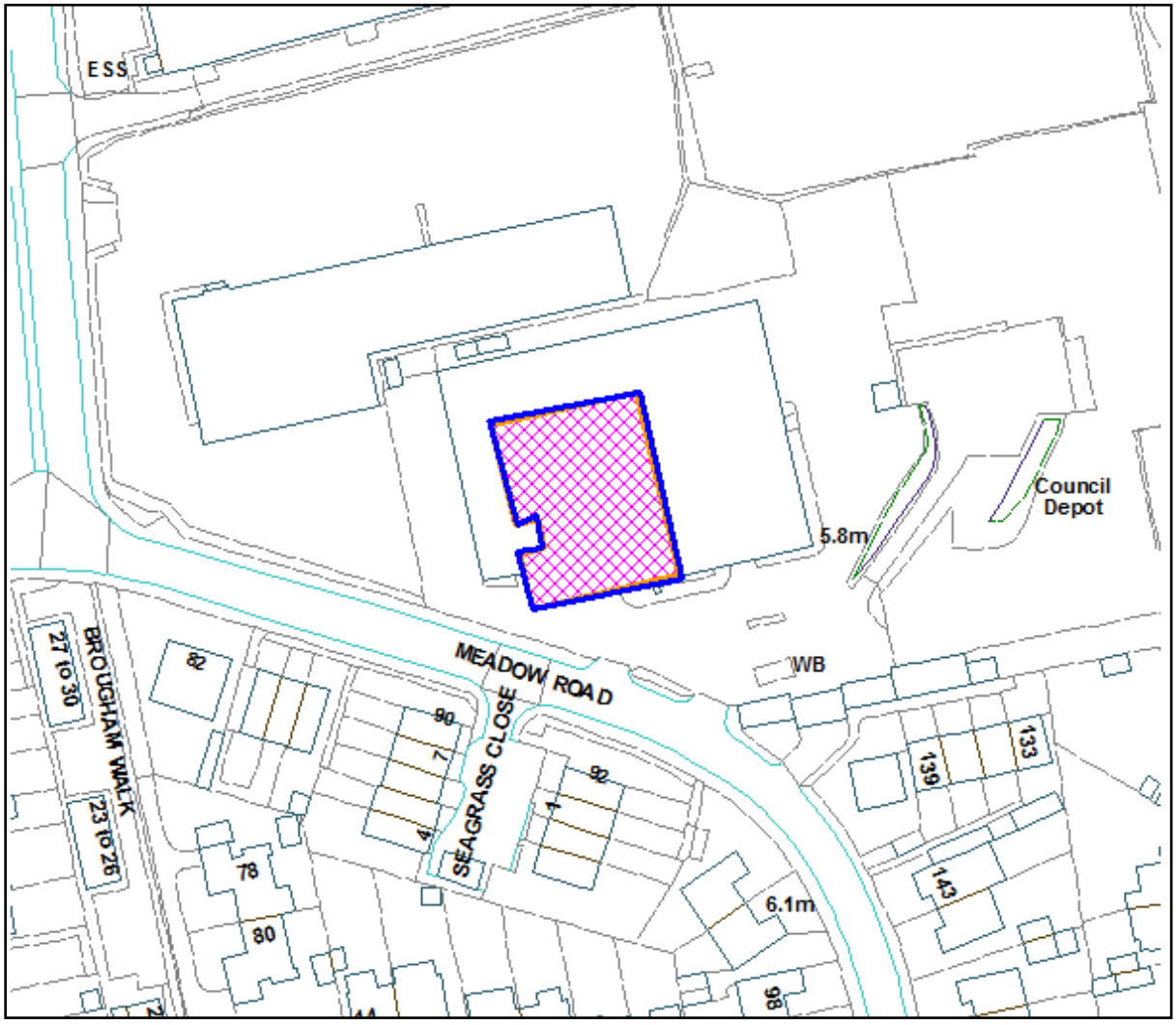
| **Applicant:** | **Guild Care** | **Ward: Selden** |
| **Agent:** | **Albion Planning** | |
| **Case Officer:** | **Gary Peck** | |




**Not to Scale**

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## Site and Surroundings

The application relates to a pair of conjoined warehouse buildings (Units 2 & 3) on the north side of Meadow Road opposite the entrance to a modern development of terraced houses in Seagrass Close. Units 1-3 are owned by the Council, formerly comprising the Council depot. Since 2004, Units 1 & 2 have been in use by Guildcare, a local charity, for storage, retail use, recycling and vehicle storage, the site has become known as 'The Greenhouse Donation Centre'. Since 2022 Unit 3 - which is shown in the plan above, has also been used for retail and storage use under a temporary permission (AWDM/0387/22), which this new application seeks to renew for a further five years, pending redevelopment of the site.

The buildings are steel-framed double height, mid C20th warehouses, which are set within a car park and loading yard, accessed via a pair of in/out gated accesses from Meadow Road. Each unit has a large roller shutter door opening on its south side and Unit 2, which is attached to the east of Unit 3, also has a loading door on its east side, where donations are received and sorted. Donations range from small household items to furniture and large electrical goods, which are checked and resold at the site, or sent to other Guildcare charity sales outlets. The site is enclosed by a combination of palisade and chain link fencing.

Meadow Road has a high proportion of housing, including houses close to the southern and eastern boundary of the site. There are also extensive business units to the west, which form the Meadow Road Trading Estate.

## Proposal

The application seeks permission for continued use of Unit 3 as retail space with some storage, as approved in 2022. The adjoining Unit 2, which has been used in a similar way for much longer.

The current application would continue to confirm that a larger proportion of Unit 2 can be used for retail, than the 300sqm limitation which applied to the 2004 permission (it is currently around 538sqm). When combined with the retail floorspace in Unit 3, (600sqm) for which this renewal of permission is sought, the total retail floorspace would continue to be 1138sqm, with 636 sqm for storage and associated work, such as testing and preparation of items, this includes a small mezzanine workshop area.

Opening hours would be 9:00am until 6:30pm Monday - Saturday and 10:00am to 5:00pm on Sundays. These hours were approved in September 2024 (AWDM/0571/24) and would otherwise expire at the end of September 2025, along with the temporary planning permission for the retail use.

The Greenhouse is described as a 'charity superstore'. It is one of several outlets currently operated by Guild Care, including 10 shops around the Worthing area. These include smaller retail shops within town, district and local shopping centre locations and another 'charity superstore' at 27 Woods Way in Goring (planning permission AWDM/1855/21)

**Relevant Planning History**

**WB/04/00806/WBR3** Change of use from Council Depot to part B1, B2, B8 together with some retail, vehicle storage, clean recycling and ancillary parking, some existing uses to be retained. **Approved 02.09.2004.**

**AWDM/0387/22** Change of Use B2 / B8 to Class E at Unit 3.
**Approved for three years (expires 30th September 2025)**.

**AWDM/0571/24** Variation of Condition 3 (Opening Hours) of previously approved AWDM/0387/22. Amendment: To open from 9:00am until 6:30pm Monday - Saturday and 10:00am to 5:00pm.
**Approved (expires 30th September 2025)**

**Consultations**

***West Sussex County Council Highway Authority:*** No Objection

Vehicle access arrangements will remain as existing, utilising the two access points on Meadow Road.

An inspection of collision data provided to WSCC by Sussex Police from a period of the last five years reveals no recorded collisions within the vicinity of the existing access points. Therefore, there is no evidence to suggest they have been operating unsafely, or that the proposals would exacerbate an existing safety concern.

In terms of trip generation, data suggests a decrease of 3 movements during the AM peak and an increase of 24 movements during the PM peak for weekdays, whilst the Saturday peak would see an increase of 55 movements. Whilst the figures are noted, the site has operated as proposed for three years as a result of the previous planning permission, so in real terms there should be no material change in movements. Considering this, the LHA is satisfied that the number of trips can be accommodated into the local highway network and is not anticipated to give rise to any adverse impacts on highway safety.

The 26 car parking spaces available is a shortfall in parking under WSCC Parking Standards. However the submitted Technical Note includes a car park accumulation forecast, which suggests a peak demand of 23 car parking spaces. I acknowledge that the site has currently been operating with a parking provision shortfall with no known highway safety concerns for a number of years.

Due to the nature of the proposed charity warehouse, a number of the vehicular trips to the site are anticipated to be “drop-in” trips, whereby they may not be parked at the site for very long. In addition, the nearby roads do benefit from unrestricted on-street parking and provide viable connections to the site by footways with street lighting. Therefore, when considering the above, the LHA does not anticipate that the proposed development would give rise to a parking capacity issue.

***Southern Water:*** No objection

***WSP, Council's Drainage Consultants***: No objection

***Environmental Health Officer***: No objection.

Recommends re-using the 2022 planning condition to control any external plant, such as extractor fans, and their acoustic specification, also to re-apply the current hours of use.

***Property & Investment Manager:*** No objection

Redevelopment for employment remains the ultimate goal, but the buildings' average condition, limited loading and parking, and shared spaces on site with Council services and open storage uses, hinders attracting long-term tenants. Guildcare's short-term lease secures and holds the site occupied until a decision to redevelop is made.

[The Guildcare use] is employment dense compared to a warehouse and is utilising a building that is otherwise compromised for some modern uses.

**Representations**

No representations have been received.

**Relevant Planning Policies and Guidance**

Worthing Local Plan 2020-2036 Policies DM5, DM15, DM11, DM13, DM17, DM20, DM22
National Planning Policy Framework, NPPF, 2024
National Planning Practice Guidance
Supplementary Planning Document 'Sustainable Economy' (WBC 2012)

**Relevant Legislation**

The Committee should consider the planning application in accordance with:

Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) provides that the application may be granted either unconditionally or subject to relevant conditions, or refused. Regard shall be given to relevant development plan policies, any relevant local finance considerations, and other material considerations

Section 38(6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that requires the decision to be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

**Planning Assessment**

***Principle***

The site is within a key employment area, as defined in the Local Plan. Policy DM11 states that these 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*.

The most recent Employment Land Review for Worthing in 2016, was updated in 2020. It identifies a continued need for storage and industrial uses. Policy DM11 attaches the following considerations for instances where other uses are proposed:

> *… 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.*

In consideration of these points, it is noted that the use has been in operation since 2004, and more recently at a larger scale with the inclusion of Unit 3 in 2022. Unlike other more recently constructed neighbouring premises, such as those occupied by Bowers and Wilkins, and Mercedes, the building comprises older stock and there is no evidence to suggest that the use at this edge of the employment area has negatively affected the wider employment estate or its economy. The site provides for financial throughput which is of wider benefit, the applicant refers to an annual figure of approximately £1m, which delivers a profit of £400,000 for the charity, providing local employment and volunteering opportunities.

The Councils Property & Investment Manager confirms that whilst redevelopment for employment remains the ultimate goal, the prospects of long term employment-use tenants is hindered by the condition of the building and its external shared spaces with Council services. In this context, the proposed use provides a good employment density and maintains a secure site pending redevelopment.

Policy DM13, Retail and Town Centre Uses, partly overlaps with the Employment policy DM11, in its requirement to consider other available sites which are in existing retail areas and outside key employment areas. This requirement relates to retail floor space of 500sqm or more, and has been introduced since the 2022 permission. Accordingly the applicant has undertaken and submitted a sequential search for another site.

Mindful of the need for drop-off, storage and sale of items including furniture, white goods and other bulky items, a suitable access and parking unloading area is needed and large internal space. The search included Worthing Town Centre, such as the former BHS/Poundland site, which did not have the requisite access and parking for donations to be dropped off. The same is the case in suburban and district retail areas,

where typically premises are also smaller than the town centre. A range of allocated sites in the local plan were also reviewed: Grafton Car Park, Teville Gate, Union Place and the Stagecoach site. These variously contain no suitable existing premises or are not yet under redevelopment.

It is considered that a reasonable sequential search has been undertaken. In light of this and the merits of the use at this site pending longer term redevelopment, it is considered that there is sufficient exceptional circumstance to enable the proposal to be supported. Whilst the timing of redevelopment is unclear, it remains the ultimate goal of the Council's Property and Investment service and therefore a further grant of temporary planning permission is reasonable. The applicant has requested five years in this case, which the Property and Investment Manager is content with.

In light of the Policy DM13 sequential approach to the location of retail space of this size, (which is a more important consideration than in 2022), it is considered that a safeguard is needed so that the retail use is particular to the Guildcare mode of operation and does not become a more general retail use if Guildcare were to vacate. Accordingly it is recommended that a planning condition should omit the sales to donated items, and exclude food sales (no food sale is intended).

Subject to these conditions, it is considered that the principle of the proposed use can be supported.

***Visual amenity***

As in 2002 no external alterations to the building are proposed, there would be no adverse impacts on visual amenity.

***Residential amenity***

Given the proximity of residential neighbours, it is considered important that hours of use continue to be limited as approved by the variation of  in September 2024 - 9:00am until 6:30pm Monday - Saturday and 10:00am to 5:00pm. The Environmental Health officer recommends this.

It is also recommended that a condition to control any external plant be re-imposed, in order to minimise risk of mechanical noise.

Traffic levels are acceptable to the highway authority and there has been no objection from local residents to the continuation of this.

***Accessibility and Parking***

As previously, the Highway Authority (HA) raises no objection. The existing in/out access arrangement appears to operate successfully as does the provision of 26 spaces. The HA accepts the submitted data which indicates that this is adequate to cater for the particular type of retail and storage use by Guildcare.  A condition to continue the 2022 requirement for a Travel Plan Statement is considered reasonable, to encourage staff and volunteers to travel to and from the site using sustainable forms of transport. Space is available for cycle parking and details can be provided under a planning condition.

***Sustainability***

The proposal continues to make use of existing buildings. As in 2022, a requirement to upgrade thermal insulation or carry out other energy-saving or carbon reduction measures would be impractical bearing in mind the short-term nature of the tenancy. However, given the interconnected nature of the use with other Guildcare outlets, and its ability to cater for the donation of domestic goods from the local area, the proposal contributes to reuse and recycling, which is considered beneficial.

**Recommendation**

**APPROVE**

**Subject to Conditions:-**

1. Approved Plans [*to be listed*]

2. Within five years of the date of this permission the use hereby permitted shall cease and return to its former lawful use

3. The building shall not be open to customers, including for the receipt and dispatch of goods, except between the hours of 09:00hrs and 18:30hrs on Monday to Saturday and between 10:00hrs and 17:00 hours on Sundays and Bank and Public Holidays.

4. The retail use hereby permitted is restricted to the sale of donated items including but not limited to, furniture, domestic goods and large electrical goods and there is to be no sale of food.

5. No external units of fixed mechanical plant are permitted unless a scheme which shall be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority for attenuating all external fixed plant. The scheme shall have regard to the principles of BS:4142:2014+A1:2019 and ensure there is no detrimental impact to the nearest residential dwellings. A test to demonstrate compliance with the scheme shall be undertaken within one month of the scheme being implemented. All plant shall be maintained in accordance with manufacturers guidance and any future plant shall also meet the specified levels within the approved scheme.

6. Agree and implement a Travel Plan, including the provision in accordance with WSCC guidance.