Expiry Date - 28/10/2025

Development Management – Delegated Officer Report

Application Number: AWDM/1118/25 Recommendation – APPROVE

Site: Global House 7 Portland Square Worthing West Sussex

Proposal: Change the use of the first-floor offices at Global House from Class E (Commercial, Business & Service) to live comedy/entertainment venue (Sui Generis)

Site Visit: 07.10.25

Neighbours checked: Y

Additional neighbour notifications: N

Site and Surroundings

The application relates to the first floor above retail units on the west side of Portland Square within the town centre.

The 1990 building is rendered with a slate pitched roof and feature tower to the southern end.

There are approx. 7 units below and the entrance to the first-floor offices is on the southern side onto Chandos Road.

The first floor has previously been used for offices and is currently 'for let'.

To the north is a bar at first floor and beyond an office building. To the east are a range of shops, cafes and bars. To the south is the rear of Boots which fronts onto Montague Street. To the west is a four-storey office building.

The site is within a secondary shopping frontage and key office location

Proposal

The application proposes the change of use of the offices to Sui Generis, specifically for use as a live comedy/entertainment venue.

The operating hours would be

- Thursday–Saturday: 18:00–23:30
- Sunday (matinees/Family friendly shows): 11:00–23:00
- Monday–Wednesday: Closed to the public (private rehearsals/ hire admin only)

The plans show a large audience seating area with bar and moveable stage, an office and conference room are also shown to the southern side.

The applicant has calculated that the capacity would be 113. All public shows/events will be ticketed or bought on the door to avoid any overcrowding.

There will be approx. 6 members of staff, this includes 3 bar staff, a marketing team member, someone to manage ticket sales and ushering for the shows as well as the applicant. There will also be a number of casual staff.

There would be up to 4 comedians per night on Friday & Saturday as well as some on Sunday for family friendly/baby shows and then acts doing tour shows/previews or open mic nights on a Thursday which could be from 1 - 10 acts on the night.

In relation to policy DM11 the Applicant has advised:

- ***Employment generation:*** *The Comedy Rooms will employ approximately 6/7 regular staff (bar, marketing, ticketing/ushering, and management), with additional contracted security on peak nights, bank staff for cover and 12 - 20 contracted comedians per week. We also plan to offer work experience placements for local students, creating pathways into the events and creative industries. This represents a comparable, if not greater, level of employment than the previous office use. An office of this size would typically employ 5-10 staff; our proposal will employ the above, plus contractors.*
- ***Economic contribution:*** *The venue will attract audiences into Worthing town centre, supporting the evening economy and benefitting nearby restaurants, pubs, and transport providers. By programming family-friendly shows, touring acts, and community events, we aim to diversify the cultural offer and extend footfall beyond traditional nightlife. We will also be arranging partnerships with local businesses to aid promotion or combined meal/ticket deals which we have done in the past. We anticipate audiences of around 250 per week, generating an estimated £5750 in local spend. This is calculated on the assumption that they will spend an average of £20 on tickets/drinks at the venue and 10% of the audience spending an average of £35 in local bars/restaurants and parking in the town.*
- ***No negative impact on the employment area:*** *The proposed use is compatible with the location, with soundproofing and acoustic measures planned to minimise disturbance. As the majority of performances are spoken word, noise levels will remain low. The venue will close by 10.30pm on most nights, avoiding late-night disruption.*
- ***Consideration of alternatives:*** *I have explored other sites outside of key employment areas, but none have been suitable in terms of size, accessibility, or viability. Global House is uniquely positioned to accommodate the venue safely and sustainably. I have worked with local agents (Jacob Steel, Michael Jones, Justice & Co) to identify*

alternative sites, including making offers on several properties. However, these proved unviable due to layout and structural constraints.

- ***Landlord Clause:*** *As part of my agreement with the landlord, the property will revert to office use once my tenancy ends. This ensures the long-term supply of office space is protected, and the proposed use is strictly time-limited.*

A recent Worthing Herald post announcing the proposal received strong support from local residents and nearby business owners, which I believe demonstrates community demand.

The Comedy Rooms is a well-established entertainment brand delivering high-quality comedy nights across West Sussex. The proposed venue will enhance Worthing's cultural offering, support the evening economy, and activate a, soon to be vacant, commercial space

Relevant Planning History:

90/00939/FULL-REDEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING SHOP UNITS TO PROVIDE SEVEN SHOP UNITS PLUS OFFICE ACCOMMODATION AT FIRST FLOOR LEVEL- APPROVED

Consultations:

WSCC Highways

The site will operate shows Thursday-Saturday 18:00 – 23:00 and Sunday 11:00 – 23:00, whilst being closed to the public Monday – Wednesday. No information has been provided regarding venue capacity, although considering the scale of the floorspace proposed for the change of use, the LHA does not anticipate that the proposed use would give rise to a concern on the operation of the local highway network. Significant weight is given to the fact the site is situated in a highly sustainable location within Worthing Town Centre, that is well accessible on foot, by cycle and by public transport.

In addition, there are a number of public car parks within walking distance of the site. If vehicles were to park on the surrounding public roads, there are comprehensive parking restrictions in place that prohibit vehicles from parking in places that would be detrimental to highway safety. Considering these points made, no highway safety or capacity concerns would be anticipated.

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.

Adur and Worthing Councils

Environmental health (PH)

There are no EH objections in principle. Please can you condition hours of use. EH will deal with management of the customers through the premises licence.

Planning Policy

Key Issues / Policies

Worthing Local Plan Policy DM11 - the site is in a key office location
Worthing Local Plan Policy DM13 - the site is within Worthing town centre.

Summary

The application is for the change of use from an office to comedy club (Sui Generis).

Policy DM11 seeks to protect employment land in key areas. This development is within the Liverpool Terrace / Liverpool Gardens key office location.

Paragraph 5.15 of the Worthing Local Plan acknowledges that it is essential that there is flexibility in this protective approach to allow for new forms of economic activity and employment. It is therefore considered appropriate that, where it would not undermine the wider economic strategy objectives, change should be 'managed'. To manage this change part c) of Policy DM11 sets a clear criteria based approach.

From the information submitted we consider that sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that these tests are met.

In relation to part c) i) and iii) of the criteria, of particular relevance is that the site is located within Worthing Town Centre.

The proposed use is considered to be a town centre use that would add diversity and vitality to the town centre in accordance with policy DM13. This part of the town centre is recognised as an area with an aspiration for a commercial leisure quarter which this use would contribute to (WLP para 5.185). In addition paragraph 5.186 outlines the intention to support a vibrant evening economy.

Most town centre uses now fall under Use Class E and benefit from Permitted Development Rights for change of use. Although the proposed use in this case is Sui Generis it is a town centre use. As such we consider this change of use would also be in line with this national policy that promotes flexibility for commercial business and service uses, that includes many town centre uses.

Therefore the existing use is in a protected office location and Worthing Local Plan policy DM11 applies. This policy does seek to be flexible and that the information submitted meets the criteria in part c) of this policy. We consider that the economic benefits this change of use would bring to the vitality of the town centre means that in this instance a more flexible approach is justified in terms of the loss of employment space.

Representations:

There are two letters of objection and 7 letters of support.

Objections:

15 Chelwood Avenue, 54A Ashacre Lane Worthing edited:

- Already noise and disturbance from late night venues this will add to the noise in the area.

- Additional nuisance from antisocial behaviour.

- There is no information on what capacity the venue will hold. What will be the sound proofing measures. Will these be locked shut? Will there be air conditioning? No mention of door security or smoking area.

7 Letters of support from

11 Chatsmore Crescent, 38 Gravelly Crescent Lancing, 255 South Farm Road Offington, 136 Rowlands Road, 75 Sugden Road, Flat 12 Nautilus Marine, 54A Ashacre Lane Parade Worthing edited:

I fully support the application. The comedy club brings a positive experience to all attendees and not only is a benefit to the local town but a benefit mentally to people as a place to come for a good laugh. This would also be a unique venue to Worthing and as far as I am aware, there is no other similar type of venue around that offers such a show.

Visitors to the comedy club will go somewhere else beforehand to eat, or drink as well as needing parking or taxis to get home, bringing more income to the area.

I think a new comedy venue would be a great addition to Worthing nightlife, and Portland Road is an attractive location for this. It would hopefully bring more business to the restaurants and bars in the road as well.

The type of crowd that previous comedy events have attracted are good natured and have seen no issues when it comes to leave at the end of the night.

A dedicated space in Worthing could rival may of the comedy clubs in Brighton (and further afield) and continue to attract top talent, as well rising stars, and more often than once a month

Relevant Planning Policies

Worthing Local Plan 2020-2036: DM5, DM12, DM13, DM15, DM22, DM24
National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG 2024)

Expiry Date - 28/10/2025

National Planning Practice Guidance

Planning Assessment

Principle

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the overarching objectives in achieving sustainable development including the economic objective – *to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure.* This is interdependent with the other overarching social and environmental objectives and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (NPPF paragraph 8).

In ensuring the vitality of town centres the NPPF states that*: Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. (Paragraph 86.)*

The site is located within the town centre where retail uses are concentrated and separated into Primary Shopping and Secondary Shopping Frontage under Policy DM13 of the Worthing Local Plan. The site is identified as being Secondary Shopping Frontage. In relation to Worthing Town Centre Policy DM13 states:

Worthing Town Centre
Spatial Policy SS3 (Town Centre) sets out the overarching principles for the Town Centre and associated seafront and it is the starting point against which all proposed development in these areas will be assessed. The more detailed approach to frontages is set out below:

c) Primary Shopping Area (PSA) - a wider range of main town centre uses will be encouraged to bring people into the town and generate footfall throughout the day. In considering the most appropriate locations for proposed uses, the Council will use the identified Town Centre Character Areas as a tool to help assess whether a specific proposal would give rise to harm to the individual character or vision for each character area. The following sets out the approach to ground floor frontages within the 'Primary Shopping Area':

i) Primary Shopping Frontage (PSF) - will be the focus for retail uses within the centre The Council will seek to retain 65% of units in retail use to ensure that the centre retains its role as a sub-regional shopping centre and meets the shopping needs of the towns population. Uses such as Drinking Establishments and takeaways together with other uses that would detract from the overall shopping function of the frontage will be resisted

ii) Secondary Shopping Frontage (SSF) - a wider range of uses will be supported provided they are active uses with active shop fronts will enhance the vitality and viability and complement existing uses. However, uses such as

takeaways and uses with closed and inactive street frontages will be resisted; and

iii) Town Centre Seafront Area - proposals that help to maintain and enhance an active and vibrant seafront will be supported. Eating, drinking and shopping together with appropriate cultural and leisure uses will be retained and encouraged. However, uses such as takeaways and uses with closed and inactive street frontages will be resisted. particularly where they cause or contribute to an over-concentration of such uses.

d) Proposals that help develop and enhance the evening and night-time economy will be supported in the town centre where the operation of such activities can be controlled to address residential amenity implications and can demonstrate that such uses will add to the vitality and viability of the centre.

The site is within the South Street/Montague Street/Grafton Site Town Centre Character Area which has the following role and function identified in the local plan:

• *South Street / Montague Street / Grafton Site: Aspirational high end retailing, food and beverage, and commercial leisure quarter anchored by a leisure / entertainment 'destination'. Strong links between 'Commercial Heart' and Seafront, and located within the Primary Shopping Area.*

The principle of evening and nighttime uses in the town centre is generally supported subject to careful consideration of the impact on the character and function of the centre, on its vitality and viability, and with adequate controls to protect residential amenity.

Policy DM11 identifies this part of Portland Road/Place as a key office location that should be protected. It states that 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 that 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 change be considered.

In undertaking any assessment regard will be given 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.

The SPD ‘Sustainable Economy’ acknowledges that there may be exceptional circumstances where a site in a protected area may be considered under the principles set out in the SPD to justify the loss of employment use, but in such circumstances the criteria outlined should be ‘even more rigorously applied’ (paragraph 2.3).

In support of the application as indicated above, the applicant has highlighted the employment generation, the economic contribution and alternative venues that have been considered. The Planning Policy Officer acknowledges that it is essential that there is flexibility in the protective approach to allow for new forms of economic activity and employment. It is therefore considered appropriate that, where it would not undermine the wider economic strategy objectives, change should be ‘managed’ and from the information submitted consider that sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that these tests are met.

The proposed use is considered to be a town centre use that would add diversity and vitality to the town centre in accordance with policy DM13. This part of the town centre is recognised as an area with an aspiration for a commercial leisure quarter which this use would contribute to (WLP para 5.185). Paragraph 5.186 outlines the intention to support a vibrant evening economy.

Most town centre uses now fall under Use Class E and benefit from ‘Permitted Development Rights’ for change of use. Although the proposed use in this case is Sui Generis it is a town centre use. As such it is considered the change of use would be in line with national policy that promotes flexibility for commercial business and service uses, that includes many town centre uses.

It is considered that the economic benefits this change of use would bring to the vitality of the town centre means that in this instance a more flexible approach is justified in terms of the loss of employment space.

Visual amenity and the effect on the character and appearance of the area

Other than changes to the signage no external alterations would be carried out. There would be no significant harm to the visual amenities of the site or surrounding area which already has a number of different town centre uses.

Residential Amenity

There would be no changes to the overall floorspace. The sui generis activities is a comedy and entertainment venue with an auditorium and seating area. The use is likely to create greater activity than an office which is largely a daytime activity, this will be an evening activity. The site is above retail units and there are a number of late-night bars in the vicinity. There are also residential flats in the area above the ground-floor commercial units on the east side of Portland Road. The Environmental Health Officer has however not raised any objections to this application subject to conditions for

hours of use. The hours are only until 11:00 or 11:30 pm on a limited number of nights for customer outside these hours the premises would be used for administration and rehearsals.

The comments in the letters of representation raise concern about additional noise and disturbance, antisocial behaviour, soundproofing, security and smoking areas.

The site is however within a town centre with a number of evening and late night activities within near vicinity, although the use will create a further evening activity, the hours of use, which will be conditioned, mean that the use has no longer hours then surrounding development and should not therefore create any further detrimental noise and disturbance.

The applicant has indicated that soundproofing and acoustic partition walls are planned to be erected before opening to help dampen the sound, however the majority of the output will be spoken word with some lower-level music playing as people enter and during intervals.

Environmental Health have indicated that they will deal with management of the customers through the premises licence.

Balancing the needs and impact on local residents against the economic benefits of promoting an enhanced evening and night time economy, which is reflected in a number of the Council's strategies, and in the absence of any objection from the Council's Environmental Health Officer and where controls can be put in place which are considered sufficient to adequately protect residential amenity, the proposal is considered acceptable in this town centre location.

Transport and Highway Impacts

The site is considered to be in a sustainable location sited within the town centre with good access to public transport and local facilities. There is no car parking or cycle parking associated with the use. The Highway Authority considers that the proposals would not have a significant impact on the local highway network in this location and raises no objections.

Recommendation

Approve subject to the following conditions

1. Drawing Numbers
2. Standard Time
3. The comedy Club/Entertainment Venue hereby permitted shall not be open to customers outside the hours 17:00- 23:30 Thursday to Saturday and 10:00- 23:00 Sundays and Bank/Public Holidays.

   The premises shall be emptied of customers 30 minutes outside of these hours

At all other times and days the premises shall be used for administration and rehearsals and shall not be used beyond 23:00.

All staff activity associated with the use shall cease at the premises within one hour of the closing time

4. No deliveries to or collections from the premises shall take place other than between 08:00 and 20:00 hours Monday to Saturday and between 10:00 and 18:00 hours on Sundays and Bank/Public Holidays

5. Notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 as amended (or any Order revoking and re-enacting that Order with or without modification), except as approved under this permission no external plant or machinery shall be installed, erected or replaced on the application site.

6. No bottles shall be placed into any outside receptacles after 22:00 hours of before 08:00 hours on any day.

Informatives:

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

Case Officer: Jackie Fox Date: 18.11.25

Authorised by: Jo Morin Date: 19.11.2025