



PLANNING BY DESIGN

FROM CONCEPT TO COMPLETION

**Change of use from class B industrial/warehouse unit
to**

Gymnastics Academy (class E (d))

at:

**Unit 15, Potters Lane Business Park, Potters Lane,
Wednesbury, WS10 0AS**

Design & Access Statement

**Written and prepared by Planning By Design on
Behalf of Sandwell Flyers Gymnastics Academy**

Date: 24 October 2023

1. Application

Planning By Design (**The agent**) has been instructed to act on behalf of Sandwell Flyers Gymnastics Academy (**the applicant**) to prepare and submit a full planning application to the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (**the Planning Authority**) for a Change of use from class B industrial unit/warehouse to Gymnastics Academy (class E) (**the proposal**) at: Unit 15, Potters Lane Business Park, Potters Lane, Wednesbury, WS10 0AS (**the site**). In support of this application, the following Design and Access Statement has been provided to demonstrate the suitability of this site for this proposal and evaluate its accordance with National and Local planning policies.

2. Current Site and Description

Sandwell Flyers Gymnastics Academy is a well-established, non-profit organisation offering inclusive gymnastics lessons for all. They strongly support community involvement in sport and promote the health and social benefits that are associated with sports participation. With this ideology underpinning the foundation of club, they also have produced a successful competitive program with gymnasts competing both nationally and internationally.

Sandwell Flyers Academy currently runs from 42 Queens Court Trading Estate, Greets Green Road, West Bromwich, B70 9EQ. They have 300 members currently with over 100 on the waiting lists.

Sandwell Flyers has been running for over 15 years, helping thousands of community members reach their goals, whether that be to enjoy the recreational benefits of sport or to join our elite pathway program and take part in competitive gymnastics. They have 20 members of staff/volunteers coaching in three main disciplines: trampolining, tumbling and DMT (double mini trampoline).

Recreational gymnastics classes consist of a structured 50-minute, coach-led gymnastics and or trampolining class for all ages ranging from 3 years through to adults. Academy coaches are trained in talent identification, whereby gymnasts can progress from this class into further pre-competitive squads. The Academy program offers a multitude of classes for a wide range of abilities, progressing up to elite squad who have the opportunity to compete regionally, nationally, and internationally. These classes are also accessible to schools in the local community, in which the academy hosts structured classes for up to 50 children on rotation during their term times. This is one of our most rewarding classes as these children are often from disadvantaged backgrounds and otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to try a sport such as trampolining. Likewise, the academy has local links with recreational school clubs that occasionally use the current facility and they host home educated and SEN classes in the daytime. However, these provisions are currently limited due to the availability of space and equipment.

Sandwell Flyers have never received any financial aids from the government, the success Sandwell Flyers has experienced has been due to sheer hard work, determination, and an everlasting passion for our sport. However, the journey has not always been plain sailing and they are only just recovering from lockdown, in which their purpose-built facility was empty for over a year.

Therefore they are hopeful that they will continue to provide for the community and be able to expand to a larger facility in the near future but the financial requirements for this are proving difficult.

3. Proposed Site Location

The application site is located in the Potters Lane Business Park which is ¼ mile south from Wednesbury Town Centre. The site is situated within Local Employment Land identified on the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD Policies Map.

Unit 15 comprises a steel portal frame warehouse consisting of a large access frontage with a roller shutter and parking to the front as well as ample yard space for articulated lorry manoeuvring. Also comprises of W/ C facilities with partial brickwork and cladded exterior. The unit benefits from having a communal palisade gated yard space upon entry. The unit is currently vacant and subject to being let, but previous use appears to be class industrial/warehouse.

The site does not appear to be associated with any planning constraints.



Figure 1: Site Location and Block Plan

4. The Proposed Development

This application seeks planning approval for a change of use of the industrial unit/warehouse to Gymnastics Academy (class E). There are no external changes proposed, only internal to accommodate the proposed gymnastics academy use.

4.1. Justification for new premises

Sandwell Flyers Academy's current venue isn't big enough to open doors to any more participants, as they simply don't have space to add more classes to accommodate those on the waiting lists. Nor is the venue suitable for academy's competitive members anymore. It's not long enough for a full length (competition standard tumble track) nor high enough to suit trampolines, the roof is 5m high at the max eaves, it is 4m in most areas and standards by are min of 6m height for a competitive standard. Due to the inappropriateness of the current facility, the academy's competitive members need to go to other clubs to use their facilities. The lease on the current unit also runs out at the end of December 23 this year.

On the competition front, this year has been one of the most successful years for Sandwell Flyers. Two gymnasts have been selected for the home nation program representing Team England and one being selected to represent Great Britain. The Academy has recently seen

one of their senior girls compete in Portugal for her first international and take away 1st place in Trampoline. Along with collecting an array of club, regional, national and British medals over the year. This is all down to the use of the facilities elsewhere, which also comes at a cost.

It would be great to have everyone in the same venue where great coaching and support can be offered to all under one roof, without the restraint of additional cost and constant travel around the country by parents and staff.

The Unit in Potters Lane is a great fit for their needs. Potters Lane is based right in the heart of the Sandwell district, with good access links to the venue via bus, metro, or car. In the new unit, they would be able to welcome members from different communities, cultures, and ethnicities. It is important for the Academy to not only provide a quality service but also a sense of belonging and personal development to every member, whether that be learning a new skill or creating a new friendship.

With application being granted for new unit 15 in Potters Lane, the Academy would be able to improve the quality of classes provided to its members. At current, they run over 25 recreational classes, facilitating the involvement of over 300 members within trampolining and gymnastics. Academy classes receive 4.5/5-star reviews (Google reviews, 2023). At current the constructive feedback they have received regarding recreational classes is that 'children are waiting a long time for a turn on the trampoline during their classes', and this is due to only having space to accommodate a small number of trampolines for these classes. Therefore, the new venue would allow them to improve the quality and capacity of the service they provide and increase the long-term retention of our club members in the sport by adding better equipment. Consequently, increasing participation at grassroot level will encourage long-term engagement in sports, allowing more members of the community to enjoy the wellbeing benefits of regular sports participation.

Furthermore, the new unit would provide a great opportunity to facilitate adult gymnastics classes, an increasingly popular activity. This is a class they currently offer once a week, but they struggle to accommodate many participants due to limited space and time on the equipment with a restricted timetable on offer. It is the Academy's goal to increase the provision of these classes and provide a safe environment within the community to allow as many members as possible to enjoy the benefits of sports participation such as increased socialisation, productivity, and improved mental health. Therefore, the move would allow to provide more adult-focused classes each week, taking 4-6 weekly adult members and doubling capacity to 25+ members.

Following on from this, the Academy currently offers one daytime class to home educated and SEN (Sensory Educational Needs) children. However, with current equipment provisions

they are only able to cater for 8-12 members with a disability on a weekly basis. With the club being the only purpose-built trampoline and gymnastic facility within Sandwell and a waiting list of over 100 members, this highlights a clear demand for increased accessibility for this demographic. With the additional equipment, they forecast to run additional SEN classes in the evenings alongside their mainstream classes to provide a sense of inclusivity, in line with the club ethos.

At the moment there are in total 18 staff employed. 15 of them are part-time and 3 full time. However, within the new facility, there will be more classes and therefore new jobs created. It is anticipated that at least 20 new jobs will be created, with admin staff, supervisors, and additional coaches to include early years staff, 2 apprentices and 2-3 cleaners.

Working hours are proposed to be Mon to Fri 4.30-9.00 pm and Sat and Sun 9.00-4.00pm

5. Planning History

A review of the council's planning database has shown no planning history for the particular unit 15 (the site).

6. Design and Access

Design

The proposal will have no external changes to the Unit, only internal. The unit's existing gross internal area is 493.5 sqm. The internal changes will include putting of trampolines, tracks and other equipment required for gymnastics and trampoline academy. This unit is ideal for a Gymnastics and trampolining club as it provides the wide-open space and headroom (min 6m) that is required for Gymnastics and Trampolining.

Access

Access to the site will remain the same. Parking provisions (approximately 25 no. spaces) are already provided in front of the unit, and these will be sufficient for the number of visitors to the site as the majority of the visitors drop off and pick up again at the beginning and end of sessions. The parents operate on a drop-and-go basis with all classes having a 10m change over time before the other starts. The majority of the sessions are held after 4.30pm on weekdays, which means that there will be little cross over with the adjoining business which all trade generally within the hours of 8.00am – 5.00pm. Sessions are also staggered to ensure that not too many visitors and vehicles are on-site at any one time. The parking provision is sufficient and there could be extra available around the site if needed.

7. Assessment

The following policy and guidance documents are recognized as primary considerations for the decision of the associated application at the site location

- National Planning Policy Framework;
- National Planning Practice Guidance;
- Black Country Core Strategy Adopted 2011
- Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document Adopted 2012

7.1. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF explains that achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):

- i) an 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;
- ii) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- iii) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment, including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

Analysis: *The proposal will promote all three primary objectives of the NPPF, firstly, the proposed development will significantly contribute to the local community by moving into a new location and better facility and enable to accommodate more members and offer frequent and more classes for all age groups. Within new facility, the Academy will be able to create more employment opportunities while retaining the existing number of jobs. From an environmental perspective, the proposed development will not result in any significant detrimental impact on the areas existing landscape character as the development will only have internal changes with changes to the external unit.*

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF describes the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Additionally, paragraph 11 specifically states that for decision-making this means (amongst other things):

- approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or:
- where there are no relevant development plan policies or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
 - ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

In line with the National Planning Policy Framework, Planning by Design kindly request a timely decision to be made on the proposal. Additionally, Planning by Design welcomes the opportunity to engage in any relevant discussion with the appointed case officer on behalf of the applicant to address any concerns or further queries.

National planning policies under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are also in place to ensure the vitality of town centres, in this case, Wednesbury Town Centre. These policies are also relevant to this application, which proposes an out-of-town leisure development.

Paragraph 87 of NPPF indicates that 'Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in the edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out-of-centre sites be considered'. With regards to the suitability and availability of other sites, paragraph 88 of the NPPF highlights that:

“Applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale’.

Analysis: *The proposed development would be a great fit and suitable for the site location context. Even though the proposal is not located within the town centre it is located on the site which is well connected to the town centre. The applicant has been searching for new facility which would be suitable for gymnastics and trampoline use and no such facility has been found in the town centre which meets specific requirement of the proposed use. The*

application site is considered as the most suitable site for the proposed use due to the high ceiling and eaves which can easily accommodate gymnastics and trampoline use. Therefore, it is considered that proposal meets the sequential test having regard to paragraphs 87 and 88 of the NPPF.

7.2. Black Country Core Strategy Adopted 2011

Relevant policies include:

- Policy EMP3: Local Quality Employment Areas
- Policy ENV6: Open Space, Sport and Recreation

Policy EMP3: Local Quality Employment Areas

Policy By 2026, we will provide 1,294 ha of local quality employment land. Local quality employment areas are characterised by a critical mass of industrial, warehousing and service activity in fit-for-purpose accommodation with good access to local markets and employees. These areas will provide for the needs of locally based investment and will be safeguarded for the following uses:

- Industry and warehousing
- Motor trade, including car showrooms, garages and vehicle repair
- Haulage and transfer depots
- Trade wholesale retailing and builders merchants
- Scrap metal, timber, construction premises and yards
- Waste collection, transfer and recycling uses

Not all areas will be suitable for all uses and Local Development Documents may provide further detail to limit the scope of uses which are acceptable.

Analysis: *Despite the fact that the proposed use does not fall under one of the above industrial warehousing uses, the proposed Gymnastics Academy is moving into this location which will bring existing employment in the area and also create 20+ new jobs which is in line with this policy. The proposed new location of the Gymnastics Academy will enable the Academy to offer more classes and to get more members which will all have a positive impact on the employment and area in general. Given the reasons above, it is considered that this is a reasonable justification for the need for this development.*

Policy ENV6: Open Space, Sport and Recreation

The aim of this policy is to support creating or enhancement of open spaces, sports or recreation facilities. Development that would reduce the overall value of the open space, sport and recreation network in the Black Country will be resisted. Development that would increase the overall value of the open space, sport and recreation network will be encouraged, especially in areas of deficiency. One of the priorities are:

- Significantly expanding community use of open space, sport and recreation facilities provided at places of education
- Increasing access to open space, sport and recreation facilities, including for people with disabilities;
- Where there is a cross boundary impact, identifying the most appropriate location to maximise community access and use of new facilities.

Analysis: *The proposed new facility in Potters Lane Business Park will increase access to sports and recreation facilities within this area and for different age groups and people with disabilities. The relocation to a new unit will enable the existing Academy to open doors for more community members, especially children to come and train and be part of a community which will have a great impact on the overall mental and physical wellbeing of the members. Therefore, this proposal is considered to be in line with policy ENV 6 of the Black Country Core Strategy.*

7.3. Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan

Relevant Planning Policy:

- Policy SAD TRAN 3 : Car Parking

Policy SAD TRAN 3: Car Parking

Certain classes of development will be subject to maximum car parking standards as defined by Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 – Transport). These standards are outlined in the table below:

Maximum Parking Standards

D2 (other than cinemas, conference facilities, and stadia) - 1 space per 22m² for developments over 1000m² gross floorspace

Analysis: *There are approximately 25 parking spaces at the front of Unit 15 but there is an option for more parking spaces around the site if necessary.*

Unit 15 has approximately 493 sqm of gross internal floor space, which comes to 22 parking spaces requirement if following the above guidelines. However, the above policy guidance is for developments over 1000m² gross floorspace which is therefore not applicable in this development. However, the number of car parking spaces is considered sufficient due to fact that the parents operate on a drop-and-go basis with all classes having a 10m change over time before the other starts. The majority of the sessions will be after 4.30 pm on weekdays, which means that there will be little cross over with the adjoining business which all trade generally within the hours of 8.00am – 5.00pm. Sessions are also staggered to ensure that not too many visitors and vehicles are on-site at any one time. The parking provision is therefore considered to be sufficient which is in line with the above policy.

8. Conclusion

In considering this application, it is hoped that the Planning Authority recognise that the proposed development has been located, designed, and scaled appropriately, in line with the site location and surrounding built context. It is considered that the proposed use of the unit specifically for the use of a Gymnastics and Trampoline Academy within use class E(d) is acceptable in principle and is an appropriate alternative use for this commercial building. The proposed use would not threaten the viability of the Wednesbury town centre and an adequate supply of other sites available for B1, B2, and B8 uses exists within the locality.

The building is considered to be appropriately and sustainably located for its proposed use, is easily accessible and it will be for wide community benefit. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with Core Strategy and Site Allocations policies and it is requested that the council view this application favorably and issue a timely decision in line with the National Planning Policy Framework. Should the Planning Authority have any queries or concerns relating to any element of this proposal, Planning By Design welcomes the opportunity to correspond to any issues prior to the release of any formal decision.