

Design, Access and Planning Statement
for
Part Change of Use, to extend
an existing Fitness Training Facility
at
Progress Boxing and Fitness Ltd
Progress Precision Engineering, Unit 8, Progress way, Mid
Suffolk Business Park, Eye.

1. The Proposal

(a) The applicant gained permission in 2013 to establish a fitness training facility using part of his premises at the above address, in order to provide an opportunity in the locality for members of the public to join classes in a variety of fitness and sports training activities.

(b) The facility provides equipment and coaching expertise in a new first floor area specially constructed within the unit where the applicant already has an established engineering business. The past 10 years of this D2 use has demonstrated the popularity of the facility. There has been a steady increase in membership, as well as casual attenders, who more often than not become members when they see the quality of the facilities, and experience the benefits of regular attendance.

(c) The current application seeks to extend the D2 use, by change of use of a section of the ground floor currently part of the existing B2 use.

(d) The proposal is put forward in response to increased demand, and to provide two additional separate rooms to cater for differing types of activity.

(f) Toilets and a lift suitable for disabled users are included, having formed part of the initial implementation of the 2013 proposal.

2. Background to the Proposal

(a) The applicant Gareth Edwards has been involved in amateur boxing for some years and has a background in promoting the sport and making it accessible to the public.

(b) Mr. Edwards began to investigate the possibility of establishing the proposed facility at his Progress Way premises in early 2011. In June 2011 he approached MSDC to discuss the scheme.

(c) During the following 12 months a number of meetings and exchanges took place between Mr. Edwards and various officers of MSDC, which included an application for grant funding, and culminated in Full Plans approval under Building regulations, ref. 12/FP/02756, and Planning Permission for insertion of windows ref. 2153/12.

(d) Unfortunately, during these discussions and applications it did not become apparent that the proposal included a change of use. Mr. Edwards was unaware of the significance of this fact, which only emerged when he enquired about funding grants for his project and made contact with Dawn Easter at MSDC. Thereafter, Mr. Philip Isbell confirmed that the proposal was for a D2 use, and that the site was designated B2, and that therefore an application for change of use was required.

(e) Mr. Edwards subsequently applied for the D2 change of Use and received permission in 2013, limited to 5 years.

(f) The purpose of the time limitation was to monitor the permitted use so as to assess its impact within the B2 designated area. The applicant believes that the use as permitted which has enjoyed enthusiastic support from its users has shown no negative impacts on the B2 zone. In addition, a further change of use to a similar D2 facility was given permission at the neighbouring Unit 2 in 2016, demonstrating MSDC's assessment of the Unit 8 D2 use since 2013 as being acceptable in terms of impact on the B2 uses.

(g) In 2019, Mr. Edwards applied for Full Permission to continue indefinitely with the thriving D2 use, and in addition proposed a further change of use on the ground floor of the existing premises. Permission was granted ref DC/19/00618 dated 2nd April 2019.

3. The Applicant's Intentions

(a) The success of the Fitness and Training facility run by the applicant brought pressure to bear on the floor area being used for this purpose whereby the first floor room specially created for the D2 use is no longer

able to accommodate the numbers wishing to attend classes. The existing room contains a full range of gym equipment as well as a full size boxing training ring. A separate space is therefore required for classes such as pilates, yoga, reflexology, and other wellbeing activities, which may be in progress at the same time as the classes using the gym equipment for boxing, circuit training, and spinning.

(b) A steel framed support structure was erected within the B2 unit to create the first floor facility, which is enclosed and separated from the B2 use. The support structure was later enclosed to extend the gym use as permission DC/19/00618. Entrance to the gym is on the ground floor under the gym, and the hallway created contains the staircase, lift and toilets, for the use of gym patrons.

Extension to the D2 Use

(c) The current application is made to extend the D2 use by a further change of use of an area of 80.5sqm on the ground floor, which is no longer required for the engineering business the applicant runs at the site, together with a further corresponding area of 80.6sqm on the first floor by insertion of new first floor construction and enclosure.

(d) There would be alterations to the exterior of the building by removing the existing external roller shutter on the South East side to be re-used on the front, South West, side in a newly created opening 4.2m wide by 4.4m high. The vacated opening on the South East side would be extended in height to 5.1m to receive a double glazed screen incorporating opening lights suitable for emergency egress purposes. The new glazing would provide natural light and ventilation to the

proposed gym extensions on ground and first floors.

(e) The existing use has proven to be popular during the 10 years it has been in operation. Fitness and wellbeing training has been identified as not being available within the area. The nearest comparable facility is at Attleborough, a 40 minute drive away.

(f) The applicant, Mr Edwards, has occupied the existing factory and run a successful engineering business for over 26 years now employing 6 members of staff and considers that with sufficient investment he is able to also provide a facility that will be of significant benefit to those who enjoy the sport of boxing as well as an opportunity for people wanting to maintain a fitness programme. The intention is to provide a high quality facility that will be a significant asset to the exercise and fitness facility of the area.

(g) Mr. Edwards is a qualified Level 2 Amateur Boxing Association of England coach, and is therefore able to fully recognise the importance and benefit such a facility has in the area.

4. The Proposal and Planning Policy

(a) It is recognised that the site is a designated Business Park where the primary uses are industrial and storage, however, it should be appreciated that the proposal is to make use of 80.5sqm floor area of the applicants' existing established engineering business, which due to a degree of ongoing economic uncertainty has become underused. The proposal will not result in a loss of employment nor will it prejudice the continued operation of the existing industrial use or other uses in the

area. The applicants own engineering business will be able to function very adequately in the remaining space, and the proposed use will not affect the economic viability of the B2 use, which has seen a downturn over the last few years due to cut backs in public spending affecting the type of contracts the engineering business has been involved with.

(b) It is also appreciated that the site is not within the town centre where it may be regarded as a more ideal place to situate such leisure uses, however the use is only practical or viable if the applicant can utilise his existing premises. He will be able to continue to manage the engineering business as well as being the qualified coach at the boxing club. Moreover, the use of the existing business is a sustainable form of development. Also, as stated, at the moment the nearest boxing gym and fitness training facility is either at Attleborough, in a far more remote location than the Business Park, or Norwich where car travel is between 40 and 50 minutes away.

NPPF

(c) The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) main principle is to encourage sustainable development and to support the need to boost the local economy, as well as improve the quality of life of local communities. Paragraph 10 states: 'plans and decisions need to take local circumstances into account, so that they respond to the different opportunities for achieving sustainable development in different areas'. Paragraph 11 goes on to remind that: 'Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise'

(d) It is maintained that the establishment of a boxing gym and fitness training facility in this situation, where the owners of the existing business unit are a qualified boxing coach and a trained therapist, recognises the problem of the lack of suitable facilities in the area. The applicant is willing to make a major investment to provide a leisure/recreational facility that will be a significant benefit to the local community. This provision is a material consideration that should be balanced against the policy criteria. The enlargement of the D2 use should therefore be regarded as desirable.

Health Benefits

(e) Concerns have been raised across the nation for the health of the population. It has been recognised and discussed widely that considerable benefit will accrue to society if we create a healthier population by the simple expedient of encouraging regular exercise. GP practices now proactively encourage, and even prescribe, regular exercise for its health benefits not only to tackle common problems such as obesity, but a range of other ailments as well. A very important beneficial effect on mental wellbeing has also been recognised as a remedy for problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress.

(f) The current application therefore fulfils the aims of the NPPF in terms of offering an improvement in the quality of life of local communities, by proposing the provision of additional facilities at these premises.

(g) It is noted that 'leisure uses' are regarded as a town centre use but this is based on the assumption that this use will enhance the vitality and

viability of the town centre. It is accepted that this may be the case with many leisure uses but a boxing gym is very specific and it is hard to imagine that attendance of the gym is going to result in a combined shopping trip, the purpose of encouraging leisure within town centres. This may be more appropriate within some of the larger, metropolitan centres that the NPPF is more aimed at.

(h) The facility has been used by many of the employees on the Business Park, and including businesses nearby. The presence of this facility on the business park is therefore seen as a positive enhancement for the benefit of neighbouring businesses whose staff can avail of the convenience of an on-site facility in much the same way as many similar business parks have children's crèches or nurseries.

Ongoing benefit of the 'Olympic Legacy'

(i) The benefits associated with boxing and fitness training gyms are fully recognised both in terms of providing a facility for healthy exercise but also providing a facility for youth. Mr Edwards is an experienced boxing coach and is fully aware of the nature and discipline necessary and the benefits that young boys, and increasingly girls, as evidenced by the ongoing 'Olympic Legacy', experience from such training. The fact that no similar facilities exist in the area without having to travel 20 miles or more is neither beneficial nor sustainable. This proposal is a classic example of the need to benefit from the 'Olympic Legacy'. The need to improve local recreational and sporting facilities is fully recognised and the opportunity of providing such premises, particularly by the private sector, should be supported.

(j) The ongoing success of the 'Olympic Legacy' has been well documented and it was an initiative of Sport England to award boxing a 26% increase in funding following its success in growing grassroots participation in the last decade.

(k) Included here is a paragraph from the previous application cited above, ref DC/19/00618:

Data for sport participation shows that the number of people participating in boxing once per week grew by 31% from 106,800 in 2008 (Active People Survey 2: Oct 2007-Oct 2008) to 140,400 in 2012 making it one of only five sports funded by Sport England to deliver an increase over the four year period. As a result one million pounds went directly to fund projects and improvements in boxing clubs specifically to help boxing at the grassroots and for projects such as this proposal. It must surely be for Local Authorities to also support this initiative if the legacy is to be seen in action. Sport England's Director of Sport, Phil Smith stated in announcing the funding, "Boxing has great potential to grow even more over the next few years and become one of the great London 2012 legacy success stories. The ABAE will use Sport England investment to exploit opportunities in health and fitness, personal challenge and fitness training for other sports, primarily amongst the 14-25 age group".

(l) The relevance of this is still pertinent today.

D2 use within B2 Business Park

(m) The proposed use is situated on the Mid Suffolk Business Park where a variety of uses take place, but it is acknowledged that the use of a boxing gym and fitness centre is a D2 use that requires the benefit of

planning permission. The policy seeks to resist alternative uses, primarily to avoid the loss of employment opportunities, or by being detrimental to the business uses of the area. The proposed use is part of an existing industrial unit, which will remain under the same management, and employment will be unaffected. The original, and later augmented, planning permissions have proven to have been justified. A planning condition to ensure continuity of the B2 use will be acceptable. The D2 use will not prejudice the existing or neighbouring uses. The scale of the proposed use is small, which will have a minimal impact on traffic movement, and adequate parking is available.

5. Design

(a) The proposal will utilise existing floorspace of 187 sqm. which was created on the first and ground floors for the gym use, and an additional 181sqm area divided equally to ground and first floors is now proposed in the D2 change of use, bringing the total for D2 use to 368sqm.

(b) The existing training gymnasium is enclosed by fire and sound resistant block partitions, and naturally lit and ventilated by a glazed 'commercial screen', comprising a continuous strip of four linked window units. Toilets are available on the ground floor, one of which is suitable for disabled users, and a lift suitable for wheelchair users is installed adjacent to an existing staircase which originally served a small storage loft over the ground floor office area. The staircase has been modified to comply with Building Regulations. These matters were the subject of a Building Control submission and have been approved.

(c) The additional ground floor room will be created by enclosing the space with the same fire and sound resistant block partitions as before to create a consistent enclosure for both ground and first floors. Natural light and ventilation will be provided via the new glazed screen inserted in place of the removed roller shutter, and by enlarging the opening in height by 900mm.

(d) Parking will be available within the site for gymnasium users. There are a total of 21 spaces on site, and a further 16 are available from 5:00

pm daily if necessary by arrangement with the owner of the adjacent unit.

(e) The past 10 years of use has shown that these parking provisions have been adequate, and will also cope with the likely increases in attendance which the additional space can encourage. Numbers attending the facility would be controlled by the available gym and other class spaces, and the available parking will meet these numbers.

(f) The insertion of new windows in an existing roller shutter opening, and the relocation of the roller shutter into a new opening are the only external changes proposed.

6. Access (a) and (b)

(a) No information is available regarding public transport to the site, but the location is close to both Eye and Diss towns. The unit is served by the access roads which circulate through the business park.

(b) The proposed facility will be fully accessible to disabled users, including parking provision, toilets, ramps, level thresholds, and a lift to the first floor. The fitness training classes and gymnasium facilities will be open to people irrespective of age, ethnicity, mobility, or social grouping.

7. Conclusion

(a) The above factors are all reasoned 'material considerations' and should be balanced against the policy criteria. The proposal offers the following:

1. A leisure/recreational use, including boxing and wellbeing classes, that is not available in the area.
2. Avoids having to travel over twenty miles to any similar facility.
3. The reduction in travel is sustainable.
4. There are no suitable alternative sites that are sequentially preferable that will be appropriate in type of space and viability.

5. It will provide a sporting facility that will be a major benefit, including to the youth of the town, as well as the business park employees.
6. The use, by its nature, will have no adverse impact on the vitality or viability of the town centre.
7. The scale is limited and only small classes are likely due to the size of the floor spaces.

(b) We trust that officers will agree the proposal merits approval and will recommend accordingly.