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PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Beast Rampz

Proposed Indoor Skate Park

Unit 2, Montague House, Matthews Street, Ardwick

June 2012

PLANNING AND
BUILDING CONTROL
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. I am instructed by Beast Rampz, to provide professional planning advice in connection with a planning application for the change of use at the currently vacant 27,535 sq feet Unit 2 at Montague House, Matthews Street, Ardwick. M12 5BB

1.2. The Directors of Beast Rampz, Mark Newbould and Tim Bottomley, have been searching for a suitable large location for their new business for some time and the Matthews Street unit is ideal given its size, the surroundings, the demographics of the area, the availability of large off road car parking provision, its close proximity to Manchester Climbing Centre and the ease of access from the M60 ring road.

1.3. For the avoidance of doubt, Manchester Climbing Centre is a converted church on Bennett Street at the top of Matthews Street which was approved by the Council (Planning Application Ref: 070150/FO/2003/N2) and has since become a very successful and well respected climbing facility. This is seen as highly beneficial to the skatepark and even more so to the Ardwick area which has relatively little to offer the youth in the way of recreational facilities.

1.4. We have undertaken detailed pre-application work to ensure that the submission documents are as comprehensive as possible. During this pre-application work it was heartening to hear lots of positive feedback from the regeneration specialists at the Council, the planning officers and the Greater Manchester Police (GMP). Some of this information is included in the Appendices.

1.5. However, the pre-application responses from the Council have taken disproportionally longer than I would normally expect and this has seriously impacted on my clients' business plan. It was their intention to open for the summer holidays so that the business could 'hit the ground running' after a campaign of advertising and a presence on social networking sites. Therefore, it would be greatly appreciated if this application could be dealt with as expeditiously as possible and determined soon after the

consultation period ends. This process began way back in the middle of March and it is only very recently we have received some feedback of note.

2. SITE & SURROUNDINGS

2.1. The application site is a commercial unit which benefits from off road parking areas to the front and rear. The property is located on Matthews Street, Ardwick.

2.2. There is both established industrial and residential development within the immediate area and open land approximately 85 metres to the west of the application site. At the end of Matthews Street to the south is the former St Benedict's Church where Manchester Climbing Centre is now located.

2.3. The main road that serves the estate is Bennett Street which runs from east to west.

2.4. There are a number of vacant industrial properties both on and immediately off Bennett Street including the now derelict Fujitsu administration building.

3. DETAILS OF THE PROPOSALS

3.1. The application is purely for the change of use of a commercial unit with no operational development.

3.2. The Directors of Beast Rampz, Mark Newbould and Tim Bottomley, objective is to create a destination skatepark in the northwest of England and ultimately one of the best in the UK. Skaters will travel the length and breadth of the country to experience top facilities so this is not only an asset to Ardwick and surrounding areas – it is intended to be an additional leisure destination which Manchester City Council can be proud of on a national scale.

3.3. Mark and Tim have produced the following statement which is an enlightening read:

"**Subject:** Beast Rampz Skatepark

Objective: To open the finest skatepark in the northwest of England and one of the top three in the UK.

Research: Following an exhaustive research exercise involving numerous existing skateparks, studying how they are run and the requirements of children and parents alike, our findings came as quite a surprise. Travelling over most of England during the last 12 months we were amazed that some of the 'parks' we visited were so badly organised, dangerous and poorly managed (although there were a couple of exceptions). Mount Hawk in Cornwall (http://www.mounthawke.com/) would be the type of facility we would be basing our model on and we are convinced it would benefit the young people in our area.

Plan: To provide a safe, well monitored and fully staffed environment that the youngsters could come and enjoy themselves in. It would not only have brand new modern ramps, jumps etc. but we would want to include a small 'tuck shop' with seating where they and/or their parents could go to relax and meet other enthusiasts whilst

taking on refreshments. We seek to provide a separate section in the park with mini ramps and jumps etc for children under the age of 6 as this is something that no other local facility offers (to the best of our knowledge). We also intend to offer the use of the skatepark to local schools, community groups and disabled people. Finally, we intend to construct a viewing area for parents/visitors whilst enjoying a coffee/snack.

Security: Besides proactive facility management there is a specific insurance requirement that the skatepark be covered by a comprehensive CCTV system both inside and out that assists as a deterrent. We shall be offering membership incentive policy to all our customers with a database record of all members who visit the park and should any issues occur with any member their membership will be permanently revoked. We have worked closely with the Police and Fire Service, both have visited the proposed site and we shall be fully implementing the advice given to us.

Health and Safety: We and our staff will be undertaking all the necessary courses on first aid, hygiene, food standards.

Finally: We intend to provide a first class safe and secure facility for a diverse range of able and disabled people that both benefits the immediate area but also compliments the much needed regeneration work within the area.

3.4. The refreshment area and shop will be ancillary to the main use.

3.5. The reasons why such a facility is suited for the site and the wider area are set out in Section 5.

4. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

4.1. The adopted development plan for Manchester is the Manchester Unitary Development Plan (UDP). However, given the fact that the UDP was adopted in 1995 and the Core Strategy has not yet been adopted, the recently published National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is of great significance to this application.

4.2. The parts of the NPPF which are particularly relevant will be set out in the following section.

4.3. The RSS (still part of the Development Plan) is not considered to be directly applicable to this scheme.

5. APPLICANT'S CASE

5.1. It is the Applicant's case that the proposed skatepark will create the following:

- A focus for local youths who may otherwise be on the streets;
- Local employment (proposed that approximately 10 staff will be employed on a full-time/part time basis);
- An additional high quality youth facility in close proximity that emulates the success of the Manchester Climbing Centre;
- Sustainable development;
- A landmark recreational facility for Manchester, Ardwick and the wider national area;
- A relationship with local schools and youth groups;
- Return to productive use of large currently vacant unit;

5.2. There is no escaping the fact that the unit subject to this application is ideal for the purpose of a skatepark. It is a large open unit of 27,535 sq ft.

5.3. There are no restrictions currently on the hours Unit 2 can operate as a storage and distribution warehouse.

5.4. The proposed use within Unit 2 will have opening hours of Monday to Thursday (1430-2100), Friday (1300-2100), Saturday and Sunday (1000-2100).

5.5. My clients and I have been careful from the outset to involve the Council as much as possible during the pre-application stage to ensure that the proposals are not in conflict with the Council's vision for the area. This thorough consultation exercise resulted in us receiving the following feedback from the Regeneration and New East Manchester team:

"I have sent comments on behalf of the regen teams and New East Manchester directly to Carl Glennon. To summarise, there are long term plans for housing nearby (on land between Mathews St and Wigley Street)and we would want to ensure what management arrangements and noise controls will be in place as we don't want to facilitate a problem with future or existing neighbours. However a well managed centre providing leisure opportunities for young people that is adjacent to the climbing centre would be a welcome. Further to this, I think we would also need to be assured that the use would not conflict with existing industrial uses in the neighbouring units, therefore we would need to be satisfied that access, parking and servicing arrangements are all fully considered as part of an application."

5.6. This was viewed as a positive response because the issues that were raised – impact on future and existing residents, management, noise issues, conflict with industrial uses, access parking and servicing arrangements – are all matters that we had already discussed and can be dealt with relatively easily.

5.7. We have had other responses from Council officers which have raised concerns with the proposed use's impact on a relatively small existing outdoor skate park with limited facilities which is located under the Mancunian Way. Whilst this is not considered to be a material planning consideration, my clients and I are willing to address this matter comprehensively.

5.8. The proposed facility is not a 'threat' to the existing one for the following reasons:

- The proposed park is entirely indoor;
- It will be one of the biggest indoor skate facilities in the country;
- It is not being set up to attract people from solely the Ardwick and Manchester areas but nationally too);
- It is to cater for disabled as well as able bodied people/schools;

- It is not solely for skateboarders (see below).

5.9. The above means that, due to the more diverse nature of activities, there is absolutely no reason why the existing (Mancunian Way) outdoor park cannot continue to be successful. Much in the same way that the Pitz outdoor 5 a side facility in Ardwick can operate and be in demand while at the same time various indoor 5 a side facilities in the area can also be successful. It is a matter of fact that people can (and will) carry out the same recreational activity at different locations over time without ever 'deserting' a particular one.

5.10. It is also considered to be a relevant point that the location of the existing skate park, underneath the Mancunian Way and near a very busy road, may not be ideal for younger children to visit without their parents. This is not intended to be a slight on the existing park as it is clearly an excellently run operation – this is just a comment on parents' potential attitude in regard to where they are most comfortable leaving younger children for a few hours recreation on their own.

5.11. The additional facilities provided will not only be for skateboarders but also for:

- BMX cyclists;
- Inline skaters;
- Scooters; and
- Wheelchair users.

5.12. Coaching courses will be provided for all the above and local schools will be offered full use of the facility. Throughout the year, and particular in school holidays.

5.13. It is also proposed that there will be areas inside the unit which will allow graffiti artists to work under strict supervision. The benefits of this are obvious as young artists can

express themselves without breaking the law and share creative ideas with other like-minded people.

5.14. It is proposed that the facility within Unit 2, Montague House, Matthews Street, Ardwick is open Monday to Thursday 14.30 – 2100 hours, Friday 1300 – 2100 hours and Saturday and Sunday 1000 – 2100 hours. My clients are willing to accept a planning condition restricting the hours of use in Unit 2 – a detail that should be appealing to the Council given the long-term plan for housing on the land directly opposite the unit.

5.15. Included in Appendix 1 are the Terms of Conduct and Conditions of Participation that the Directors of Beast Rampz have drawn up for prospective members. These will be strictly enforced and the following terms are highly relevant:

8. Should any member of staff decide at any time and for any reason that a member is not behaving in a suitable manner, they may remove the member immediately from the park and a note will be placed on the member's file. In this instance no refund will be given.

14. Any abusive, dangerous or discourteous or anti-social behaviour will not be tolerated and may lead to the member(s) being removed from the park. In this instance no refund will be given.

23. All skatepark users need to vacate the park as quietly as possible in a manner respectful of our neighbours. Anybody that does not comply to this will have their membership revoked.

5.16. The above is just part of the robust evidence of how the skatepark is intended to be run. The aim is for it to be the finest skatepark in the northwest of England one of the top 3 in the UK. For this to be achieved a reputation has to be earned and excellent management of the park is the only way that this will be achieved.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

5.17. The recently published NPPF should be given substantial weight given Manchester's current position with a UDP which was adopted pre-2004 and a Core Strategy which has yet to be adopted. The NPPF lends support to the application in the following manner.

5.18. One of the Core Planning Principles (Para 17) reads as follows:

"Support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change, and encourage the reuse of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encourage the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy)"

5.19. For the facility to be a success, it needs to be indoor and have a relatively large floorspace for obvious reasons. The only premises that really meet this criteria are industrial buildings – more specifically, B8 industrial buildings. The landowners, Rammon Group properties Ltd (with the advice of Savills and Jones Lang Laselle) have informed me that there is currently very weak demand for units of this size and if this application is not approved the likelihood is it will remain vacant for the foreseeable future due to a disproportional high number of empty industrial buildings within the immediate area.

5.20. The only other option for my clients, if they are not allowed to occupy an industrial building, is to build their own unit. However, this is clearly in stark conflict to the NPPF Core Planning Principle above when there is a suitable unit already available.

5.21. The issue of the potential 'loss' of employment sites is also dealt with in Paragraph 22 of the NPPF which reads as follows:

"Planning policies should avoid the long term protection of sites allocated for employment use where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose. Land allocations should be regularly reviewed. Where there is no reasonable

prospect of a site being used for the allocated employment use, applications for alternative uses of land or buildings should be treated on their merits having regard to market signals and the relative need for different land uses to support sustainable local communities."

5.22. The proposals to occupy a currently vacant commercial unit are fully in line with the above.

6. SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

6.1. It is my professional opinion that this application presents the Council with a wonderful opportunity to provide the Ardwick area with a facility that will assist with the regeneration of an area which has seriously deteriorated over the years and suffered from social and economic blight. Manchester City Council has identified Ardwick as a Regeneration Area and such a high quality youth facility in a blighted area should be encouraged by the Council to assist with the regeneration.

6.2. The proposed scheme will provide the area with jobs, ensure that a currently vacant unit is occupied and also provide a fresh focus for the youth of the area. Additionally, Unit 2 is able to be occupied at present for 24 hour B8 (Warehouse and Distribution) use and my clients are willing to accept a planning condition which limits the hours of operation. This will mean that any impact on the residential amenity of nearby residents is protected in the future.

6.3. During pre-application discussions it has been noted that certain officers (non-planning) have raised concerns regarding an existing outdoor skatepark under the Mancunian Way and the effect the proposed facility may have on it. This has been addressed in the section above and it is hoped that the Council can appreciate that, far from being a threat to the existing park, Beast Rampz will compliment the existing facility and potentially increase the number of people in the area who are likely to use it.

6.4. The recently published NPPF is very supportive of the scheme in principle as it means that a currently vacant unit in a regeneration area is occupied thus ensuring that the area is revitalised with the introduction of an exciting and progressive use. This issue is dealt with in the section above but the following section of NPPF under 'Decision-taking' is also of great relevance:

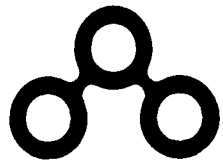
(Para 187) "Local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable

development where possible. Local planning authorities should work proactively with applicants to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area."

6.5. The proposals tick all the boxes in the above respect because:

- It will bring jobs to the area thus improving the economic and social conditions;
- It will mean a vacant unit in an identified Regeneration Area becomes occupied for the long-term (economic/social);
- It provides a focus for the youth of the area and it is intended that relationships will be built with local schools and youth groups (social);
- It is an existing/sustainable commercial site;
- It removes the potential for a 24 hour operation in a location which could see additional housing in the future (social/environmental).

6.6. It is for these reasons and all those set out throughout this report that I respectfully suggest that the Council approve this planning application and grant planning permission for the new skatepark.



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APPENDIX 1

BEAST RAMPZ: TERMS of CONDUCT and CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

1. Prior to using any ramps, equipment or structure in the park you should check it for your safety and suitability for your purpose and skill level. If you find any temporary defect in the equipment you should immediately inform a member of staff who will rectify the fault.

2. The risk of injury from the activities involved in this facility is significant, including the potential for permanent disability or death, and while particular rules, equipment and self-discipline may reduce the risk, the risk of injury does exist.

3. All members knowingly and freely assume such risks, both known and unknown, and assume full responsibility for their participation and for using appropriate safety equipment.

4. We do not accept any responsibility for member's failure to comply with these rules other than due to negligence.

5. We do not accept any responsibility for loss, theft or damage to any personal property.

6. Any accident must be reported to a member of staff immediately.

7. Members willingly agree to comply with the stated customary terms and conditions for participation. If a member observes any unusual significant concern in readiness for participation they should remove themselves from participation and bring it to the attention of the nearest member of staff immediately.

8. Should any member of staff decide at any time and for any reason that a member is not behaving in a suitable manner, they may remove the member immediately from the park and a note will be placed on the members file. In this instance no refund will be given.

9. We reserve the right to refuse admission.

10. No graffiti will be tolerated anywhere in the park except in the designated areas. Any member wishing to carry out proper graffiti art should register their interest with the manager.

11. No food or drink is to be brought into the premises (unless in the allocated areas).

12. Smoking is not permitted anywhere within the building.

13. No alcohol or drugs will be allowed on the premises. Any evidence of use or trade in either will result in an immediate removal from the park, a lifetime ban and the authorities will be advised.

14. Any abusive, dangerous, discourteous or anti social behaviour will not be tolerated and may lead the member(s) being removed from the park. In this instance no refund will be given.

15. Anyone under 16 years wishing to use the park must have parental consent. Separate parental consent may be required if wishing to use the park during school hours.

16. All BMX riders and Roller Bladers, and scooter riders have to wear helmets at all times no matter what age or ability. Skate boarders under the age of 16 years of age must wear helmets at all times, however any skate boarders over the age of 16 are encouraged to wear helmets. All helmets must

be properly fastened at all times, all participants are encouraged to wear wrist, knee and elbow guards to minimise the risk of injury.

17. Children under the age of 10 must not be left unattended by a parent or the responsible adult who brought them at any time.

18. BMX bikes must have fully functional brakes to allow all options to be available in the event of a possible collision.

19. Members should allow other users free and easy access to all ramps.

20. Do not attempt any manoeuvres you feel is beyond your skill level. If you require help please ask a member of staff.

21. Make clear your intentions to other members before starting a manoeuvre if it is likely to obstruct them.

22. Avoid cutting across, in front of or behind other riders, boarders or bladers.

23. All skatepark users need to vacate the park as quietly as possible as not to upset our neighbours. Anybody that does not comply to this will have their membership revoked.

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