Steven Abbott Associates LLP
Chartered Town Planners

PLANNING AND
BUILDING CONTROL
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PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Ms Jennifer Hale and Mr Alex Whittaker (House of Bounce)

Planning Application for Change of Use of Industrial Unit to Children's Soft Play Area (Resubmission)

Unit 4, Froxmer Street, Gorton, Manchester

April 2014

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Steven Abbott Associates LLP (SAA) are instructed by Ms Jennifer Hale and Mr Alex Whittaker (the clients) to provide professional planning advice in relation to the submission of a planning application to Manchester City Council (the LPA) for the change of use of an industrial unit on Froxmer Street, Gorton to a children's soft play facility.

1.2. Both our clients are local to the East Manchester area and have been searching for suitable premises for their proposed business for a lengthy period of time. The unit subject to this application is ideal for them as it is an area that they have identified as having a lack of such facilities, is the required size and is available at an affordable rent to them (an issue very important given the fact that this will be a new business and finances need to be carefully spent).

1.3. This is a resubmitted application which now includes a Transport Statement which addresses the highway issues which the Council had concerns with. The Applicant's noise consultant has met the Council's highway engineer on site and it is through these positive discussions that the proposals now include parking on an adjacent public house car park and amended access details.

1.4. For ease of reference, the following sections are:

Section 2 Site and Surrounding Area

Section 3 Relevant Planning History

Section 4 Description of Proposals

Section 5 Planning Policy Context

Section 6 Analysis of Proposals

Section 7 Conclusions

1.5. It is our professional view that the application should be supported by the LPA as it allows a struggling industrial unit to be occupied by a new local business which will serve the East Manchester area and fulfil all the roles of sustainable development set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This case will be expanded on throughout this document.

2. SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

2.1. The application site is located within a predominantly industrial area with the closest residential dwellings sited approximately 38 metres south west of the site on Briercliffe Close and approximately 75 metres east of the site on Goring Avenue.

2.2. The industrial site on which the subject unit is located contains a variety of uses including B1, B2 and B8. There are other commercial activities carried out on sites in close proximity to the unit including a vehicles repair business on the junction of Froxmer Street and Bondmark Road which is accessed from Bondmark Road to the north west of the application site. However, not all the uses along Froxmer Street are industrial and there is a go-karting centre located in a unit to the north of the site.

2.3. Vehicular and pedestrian access is from Froxmer Street and there is parking available to the front and on the adjacent Vulcan public house car park.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

3.1. Here follows the details of the relevant planning applications dealt with by the Council on the application site:

LPA Ref: 085857/FU/2008/N2

Description: Change of use of industrial unit from parking and storing coaches to Class B1/B8

Decision: Approved on 28th April 2008

LPA Ref: 082979/FO/2007/N2

Description: Change of use to allow the parking and storing and coaches

Decision: Approved on 26th July 2007

LPA Ref: F12139

Description: Use as a storage and distribution site

Decision: Approved on 8th July 1980

3.2. The relevance of the above will be addressed in Section 6 of this document.

4. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSALS

4.1. The application is to change the use of Unit 4, Froxmer Street, Gorton to a children's inflatable play centre for children up to the age of 11 years old. It is proposed that the centre will be called House of Bounce and it is my clients aim to provide children with a fun and safe environment for children to play with a variety of facilities suited for a variety of age groups. The centre will contain the following:

- Sensory room;
- Electronic kiddie carts;
- Two party rooms;
- A cafe;
- Variety of inflatables, including a large bouncy castle, an inflatable assault course, an inflatable fun house and much more.

4.2. The play centre will help children to grow physically, emotionally and mentally through interactive play with their parents, peers and the facilities within the centre. All equipment will be tested and approved for health and safety purposes.

4.3. Parents will have special seating areas where they can sit in comfort whilst watching their children play and the ancillary cafe will always be open to serve simple snacks and drinks to ensure the parents do not have to leave the centre at any point.

4.4. Both Jennifer and Alex will be responsible for the daily operations at House of Bounce and will form two full-time members of a hard working, customer focused team of six in total. There is a possibility that more staff will be required to cover busy periods and this will be addressed whenever the need arises.

4.5. House of Bounce will be open Monday to Saturday (inclusive) 0900 – 1800 hours and 1000 – 1800 on Sundays but will be closed on Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Years Day and Easter Sunday.

4.6. Parking is proposed to be at the front of the unit and on the adjacent public house car park. This will be clearly signposted and customers will also be made aware of it via the House of Bounce website and other promotional literature handed out to potential customers.

5. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

5.1. The Development Plan consists of the following:

- Core Strategy (Adopted July 2012);
- Saved Policies of the Unitary Development Plan (Adopted July 1995)

5.2. The following are the most relevant local policies to this application:

Core Strategy

- **Policy EC1** – Employment and Economic Growth in Manchester;
- **Policy EC2** – Existing Employment Space.

Saved UDP Policies

- **Policy DC26** – Development and Noise

5.3. On a national level the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides policy guidance for Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) and is a material consideration in determining planning applications. The following are the most relevant sections in the NPPF:

- **NPPF Section 1** – Building a Strong, Competitive Economy; and
- **NPPF Section 8** – Promoting Healthy Communities.

5.4. All of the above will be addressed in the context of the proposals in Section 6 of this document.

6. ANALYSIS OF PROPOSALS

6.1. Jennifer and Alex have provided a statement about their plans and the reasons for choosing the site they have and this is reproduced for information below.

"We believe we have found our ideal location and property at Unit 4, Froxmer Street, Gorton, Manchester. There are two schools, St James C of E primary school and Abbey Hey primary school which are both a short stroll away. The unit is easily accessible for people walking, driving or using public transport as it is situated just off Gorton Lane which has a busy bus route, and is easily accessible for people travelling on foot, by car, by bus or by train.

We believe the Gorton area will benefit hugely from having a children's play centre in this location as it will attract customers from the surrounding areas of Droylsden, Audenshaw, Openshaw, Clayton, Beswick and not forgetting Gorton itself. House Of Bounce will become their closest play centre, on par with Kiddly Beanz in Failsworth (the opposite direction and currently difficult to access if you don't drive a vehicle as there is not one straight bus route from any of these areas).

It is our aim to have a sensory room for newborns and for children with sensory impairment and special needs. This is a special room designed to develop people's senses usually through lighting, music and objects. It can be used as a therapy for children with limited communication skills. Sensory equipment can help develop key life skills including vocalisation, colour recognition and gross motor skills. Sensory rooms in play centres are few and far between but we recognise that some families are torn when it comes to planning a day out, especially if they have a child who displays sensory impairment or has special needs because usually there is nothing at play centres for these children - so families are torn in their decisions if they have to consider the needs of more than one of their children. House of Bounce recognises this as a problem and aims to fulfil this need.

We also aim to have the electronic kiddie carts that will operate around a little track which only a few play centres have, therefore, giving House Of Bounce the advantage once again and yet another reason for us to be the number one choice of play centre over other play centres within the North West.

We are confident and passionate about this idea and believe we have the relevant skills, determination and devotion to drive the company to success. Having a child of our own, we have recognised the popularity for such play centres and actually having observed numbers and figures, realised the potential for this type of business.

We have found a gap in the market within an excellent catchment area, and believe with our experience, skills, knowledge and passion along with the relevant professional support and advice we can not only pursue our dream but establish a thriving business for life."

6.2. As the above proves, our clients have a very clear business plan and support and, through thorough research and financial planning, are convinced that they have a model which will be a long-term success. Given the fact that they will be both be resigning from their current jobs to pursue this it should be no surprise that they have left no stone unturned with the preparation for this long-term project and it is to their great relief that they have finally found a suitable site after a long time searching for one unsuccessfully. It is also relevant that the landowner has offered our clients a favourable lease agreement which takes into account the fact this is a new enterprise thus assisting them greatly.

6.3. The Transport Statement which accompanies the application sets out all highway issues as does the noise survey – before are considered to prove that the proposals will not create any highways problems or impact on residential amenity by virtue of unacceptable noise levels.

6.4. There was concern shown from a neighbouring occupier of an industrial unit that the traffic movements on –site would be a hazard for children. However, this is not seen as an issue as the ages of the children attending means that they will always be accompanied by an adult and the vehicular movement will pose no greater threat than it does at present for adults on the site.

6.5. Notwithstanding this, we are aware that the application has to comply with planning policy if it is to be approved by the Council and it is our professional view that it does comply with both local and national policy for the reasons below.

Core Strategy Policy EC1 – Employment and Economic growth in Manchester

6.6. This policy sets out the aim of the Council to stimulate the development of at least 200 ha of employment land between 2010 and 2027. It is acknowledged that the proposed use is not B1, B2, or B8 in nature and the loss of a unit which has originally been erected for these uses has to be addressed if the application is to be approved.

6.7. However, the unit is far from modern and the landowner (Rammon Group Properties Ltd) has had great difficulty over recent years trying to find a long-term tenant for it. The one potential long-term tenant was a coach company (Haytons) who had to vacate the site when the Council put restrictions on the hours of operation which meant that they could no longer fulfil their contractual obligations. This was in 2007.

6.8. After this tenant was lost an application was approved to allow B1/B2/B8 uses in the unit but it has proved very difficult to find a long-term tenant and this situation will only be exacerbated by the development of 200 ha of employment land in the near future (of which 65 ha are earmarked for the nearby Eastlands site).

6.9. In short, the unit is losing its value and purpose as an industrial unit especially when there are much more modern premises available at reasonable prices in the locality. For that reason alone the LPA is urged to consider the unit favourably for the use proposed.

Core Strategy Policy EC2 – Existing Employment Space

6.10. A section of the above policy reads as follows:

"The Council will seek to retain and enhance existing employment space and sites. Alternative uses will only be supported on sites allocated accordingly, or if it can be demonstrated that:

- *The existing use is un-viable in terms of business operations, building age and format."*

6.11. Whilst the application is not within an allocated employment site the above policy provides a good for base for the unit's 'loss' to be addressed and justified.

6.12. The application can be supported through the above criterion due to the following matters of fact;

- There have only been occasional short-term occupiers (3 – 6 months) since 2007 when Haytons vacated the site;
- This is the first opportunity the landowner has had to secure a long-term tenant since 2007;
- There are several units in close proximity to the application site that have been vacant for a lengthy period;
- The unit's age means it is rapidly losing its value and purpose as an industrial unit.

6.13. In terms of vacant units in the locality - there is a 12,400 sq ft unit at Griffin Trading Estate on Froxmer Street which has been vacant for a long time and there is a 27,000 sq ft modern unit on Delta Industrial Estate, Preston Street, Gorton that has been empty for many years and is currently being marketed by Savills and Atlas One.

6.14. In addition to the above, Roger Hannah & Co have, for the last 18 months, been marketing a crica 15,000 sq ft unit on Bennett Street, Ardwick and Colliers' Manchester office have been marketing a 75,000 sq ft unit on Ashton Old Road (close to junction of Pottery Lane) for around two years. Finally, and perhaps most relevant, is the fact that DTZ's Manchester office have commenced marketing industrial units on Pottery Lane on a design and build basis, thus ensuring businesses can have units constructed exactly suited to their requirements.

6.15. Manchester City Council are understandably concerned about losing any units which would be suitable for employment use but in this case we have a potential long-term tenant who will be occupying a unit which is currently only managing to sustain short-term tenants who are mostly poor employment generators given the B8 nature of uses.

6.16. The vacancies in the area show that if the application is approved, B1/B2/B8 uses will still have somewhere to go in the locality. Furthermore, the vacant units are often much more modern and suitable for these uses than the application site.

Saved UDP Policy DC26 – Development and Noise

6.17. This policy states that developments likely to result in unacceptable high levels of noise will not be permitted in residential areas. If necessary, the Council will control levels by insisting on noise barriers where this is appropriate.

6.18. There is a Noise Impact Assessment produced by Acoustic and Engineering Consultants Limited (AEC) which accompanies this application. It is not considered necessary to repeat the content of the assessment in this document but the results suggest that the proposals can be approved without any impact on the amenity of nearby residents by virtue of increased noise levels.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

6.19. The common thread which goes through the NPPF relates to the presumption in favour of sustainable development and the Government's desire to see such development

facilitated rather than hindered. The NPPF sets out three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.

6.20. The proposals satisfy these three dimensions by ensuring that a unit is occupied by a long-term tenant who happen to also be a young local couple who are starting up their own business (economic); by providing a children's play facility which is not currently available in the area (social); and by removing an industrial use from an area where residential dwellings are located (environmental).

6.21. More specifically, sections 1 (Building a Strong, Competitive Economy) and 8 (Promoting Healthy Communities) lend support to the scheme for the following reasons:

- The proposals will lead to long-term job creation;
- The use of the unit by a long-term tenant represents sustainable economic growth;
- Paragraph 20/Section 1 requires LPAs to be proactive in assisting the needs of modern businesses;
- Paragraph 22 urges LPAs not to protect sites which are unlikely to be used in the long term for their original use – "Where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for its 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";
- Section 8 urges LPAs to plan positively for recreational facilities (we would consider the proposed use to fir into this bracket) to assist with the creation of healthy communities.

6.22. Given the NPPF's content set out above, it is considered supportive of the proposals and should be given the appropriate weight in the decision making process.

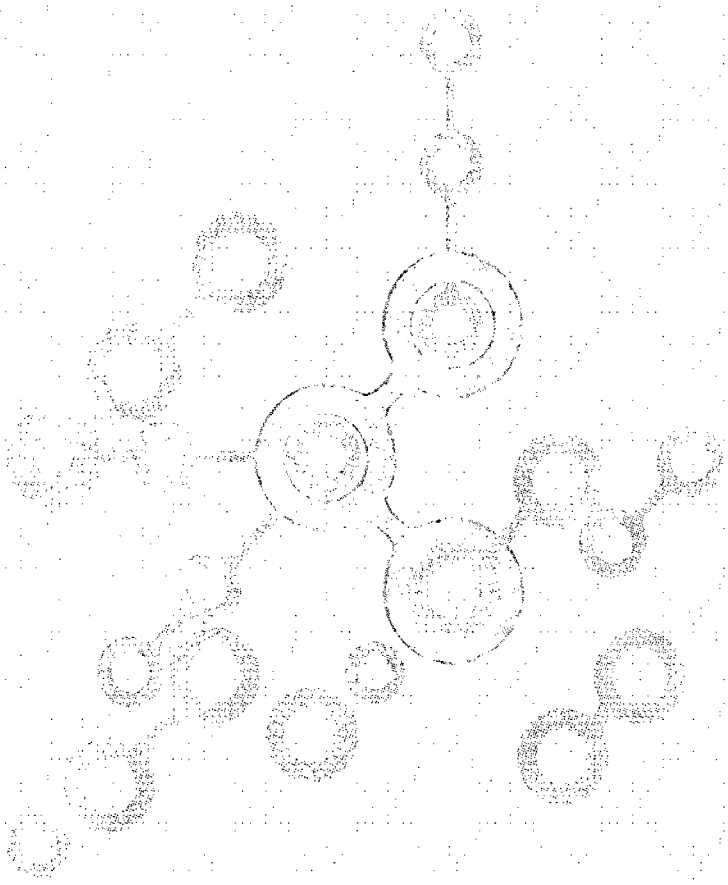
7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Before pulling together all the policy issues that are set out throughout this document for the justification of the approval of the application, it is considered beneficial to summarise the general issues which, when looked at from a 'common sense' approach, point to the approval of the application by the LPA. In these tough economic times we have a young local couple who are prepared to take the plunge and set up a business which has been a goal of theirs' for some time. As it is their first business financial constraints are tight but they have been luckily enough, after a long time searching, to find premises that meet their budget restraints whilst also meeting their need to provide a high quality facility in the correct location.

7.2. Notwithstanding the above, it is hoped that the content of this document makes it clear that the proposals are fully compliant on both a local and national level taking all material planning matters into consideration. For example:

- There is no long term demand for the unit from B1/B2/B8 users;
- The unit is dated and lacking the attraction of more modern units;
- There are modern industrial units available in the locality and others soon to come to the market;
- The proposed use will not impact on the amenity of nearby residents;
- The proposed use fulfils the three dimensions/roles of sustainable development set out in the NPPF;
- There is a clear demand for the proposed facility in the East Manchester area;
- The proposed use will not impact detrimentally on existing and future commercial occupiers on the industrial estate.

7.3. It is for these reasons and those set out throughout this document that it is respectfully suggested that the application should be approved and planning permission granted.



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