

EMPLOYMENT LAND JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT

1. Introduction

This Employment Land Justification Statement is prepared in support of a planning application for the change of use of an existing industrial unit at 11 Sherbourne Street, Cheetham Hill, Manchester. The proposal seeks to allow the building to operate as an indoor sport and wellness facility within Use Class E(d), together with an ancillary café.

The principal planning issue is whether the introduction of Class E(d) use results in the loss of employment land or undermines the function of the employment area. On a proper and policy-led assessment, it does neither. The proposal retains the employment designation, preserves the industrial fallback, and introduces a more active and labour-intensive commercial use within the existing building.

The proposal must be assessed against the National Planning Policy Framework, the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, the Draft Manchester Local Plan 2025, and relevant local evidence including the Cheetham Hill District Centre Framework and the Great Ducie Street Strategic Regeneration Framework. When assessed against those frameworks, the development is fully compliant and strongly supported.

2. Site Context and Existing Position

The application site comprises an existing industrial unit located within the Sherbourne Street / Great Ducie Street / Strangeways fringe area, immediately adjacent to Manchester City Centre. The site sits within an established commercial and industrial context characterised by a mix of light industrial, warehousing and evolving commercial uses.

No external alterations or extensions are proposed. The building envelope, servicing arrangements and industrial characteristics are retained in full. The proposal is therefore a reuse and intensification of an existing employment building rather than a release of land for alternative development.

The Draft Manchester Local Plan identifies Strangeways as a key Inner Area growth location where significant regeneration, investment and job creation is anticipated. The plan confirms that the area will accommodate a mix of uses and that employment space will be improved through intensification, renewal and modernisation. The proposed development sits squarely within that strategic direction.

3. Principle of Development and Employment Land Protection

The proposal does not result in the unacceptable loss of employment land, nor does it undermine the strategic employment function of the wider area. The site remains in active and productive commercial use and continues to contribute directly to the economic role of the Strangeways and Cheetham Hill corridor. The proposed indoor sport and wellness facility is a commercially operated, fee-generating business use which creates employment, supports local expenditure, attracts private investment and increases economic activity within the site. It is

not a non-commercial or sui generis community use divorced from economic output, nor does it represent the introduction of residential accommodation or other sensitive uses that could prejudice the continued operation of surrounding commercial and industrial premises.

Importantly, the assessment of employment land impact must move beyond an overly simplistic classification-based approach. The correct policy question is not whether the building remains within a traditional industrial use class, but whether the site continues to function as economically productive employment land consistent with the strategic objectives of the development plan. On that basis, the proposal performs strongly. The development introduces a significantly more active and labour-intensive commercial use than many conventional storage and distribution operations occupying comparable premises. The proposal therefore represents the diversification, intensification and modernisation of economic activity within an existing employment building rather than the loss of employment land.

The building itself remains an established commercial premises within a wider urban employment environment. No residential encroachment occurs. No operational conflict is created with surrounding businesses. The proposal does not sterilise neighbouring industrial activity, restrict servicing operations or undermine the commercial integrity of the wider area. Instead, it reflects the evolving economic character of the Strangeways fringe, where broader commercial, leisure and service-based employment uses are increasingly forming part of the urban employment mix consistent with the wider regeneration objectives of Manchester City Centre expansion and the Great Ducie Street corridor.

The proposal aligns directly with the National Planning Policy Framework. Paragraph 85 requires significant weight to be placed on supporting economic growth and productivity. The development does precisely that through the active reuse of an existing employment building as a viable, investment-led commercial leisure facility generating ongoing employment and economic activity. Paragraph 87 requires planning decisions to recognise and respond positively to the specific locational requirements of different sectors. Indoor sport and wellness facilities require large uninterrupted floorplates, substantial internal clear heights, robust building structures and operational flexibility which are rarely available within conventional district centre environments. Existing industrial buildings are uniquely suited to accommodating such uses and therefore represent entirely appropriate locations for this form of development. Paragraph 124 further supports the effective use of previously developed land, particularly within sustainable urban locations. The proposal directly accords with this objective through the comprehensive reuse and optimisation of an existing commercial building within an accessible city fringe location immediately adjacent to Manchester City Centre.

Accordingly, the proposal cannot reasonably be characterised as the harmful loss of employment land. The site remains economically active, employment-generating and commercially productive. The development instead represents a clear example of sustainable urban regeneration through the modernisation and

diversification of employment activity fully aligned with national, strategic and emerging local planning policy.

4. Employment Intensity and Economic Benefits

The proposal materially enhances the economic productivity, employment intensity and operational activity of the site when compared to both a vacant baseline and many conventional industrial or storage and distribution uses typically occupying premises of this nature.

While traditional B2 and B8 uses remain important components of the urban economy, it is widely recognised that modern warehousing, storage and distribution operations frequently operate at relatively low employment densities, particularly where activities are heavily reliant upon logistics efficiency, automation, palletised storage and limited staffing structures. Large floorplate industrial buildings can therefore generate comparatively modest levels of direct employment relative to the scale of floorspace occupied.

By contrast, the proposed indoor sport and wellness facility is inherently labour-intensive and operationally active throughout extended periods of the day and evening. The development requires a permanent and visible on-site workforce across multiple operational functions including management, reception, coaching, administration, customer service, maintenance, cleaning and café operation. Unlike many industrial operations concentrated around daytime trading hours, the proposal generates sustained activity across weekdays, evenings and weekends, materially increasing temporal activation and economic utilisation of the site.

The development will also support significant indirect economic activity through construction expenditure, specialist sports installation contractors, equipment suppliers, servicing providers, maintenance contractors, food and beverage suppliers, utilities, digital systems, marketing expenditure and wider operational supply chains. In addition, the facility will generate linked expenditure within the local economy through increased visitor activity and associated spending patterns within the surrounding area.

Importantly, the proposal does not simply maintain the economic role of the site; it materially improves it. The development introduces a more active, employment-intensive and service-led commercial use into an existing urban building, thereby increasing both the qualitative and quantitative economic contribution of the site. This is a significant material consideration in the planning balance and directly supports the core objectives of national and strategic planning policy relating to economic growth, productivity and urban regeneration.

The proposal therefore represents a clear uplift over a typical low-density storage or distribution scenario and an even more substantial improvement over any underutilised, intermittently occupied or vacant baseline condition. The development secures ongoing commercial activity, sustained employment generation and long-term productive use of an existing urban employment building within a highly sustainable city fringe location.

This approach aligns directly with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework, which places significant weight on supporting economic growth and productivity, as well as recognising the importance of responding flexibly to the changing needs of different sectors within the economy. The proposal also aligns fully with the strategic objectives of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, which seeks to support employment growth, urban intensification, regeneration and the effective use of previously developed land within accessible urban locations.

At a local level, the proposal strongly accords with the Draft Manchester Local Plan strategy for Strangeways and the Inner Areas, which supports commercial diversification, regeneration, investment and employment-generating development within the city centre fringe. The proposal therefore represents precisely the type of economically productive, regeneration-supportive and employment-generating urban reuse anticipated by the emerging policy framework.

5. Policy Compliance – Draft Manchester Local Plan 2025

The proposal aligns strongly and comprehensively with the strategic direction, spatial objectives and thematic policies of the Draft Manchester Local Plan 2025. While the emerging plan is currently progressing through the preparation process, it nonetheless represents the clearest and most up-to-date articulation of the Council's strategic vision for the future growth, regeneration and diversification of Manchester's urban areas, including Strangeways and the wider city centre fringe.

At the heart of the Draft Local Plan is a clear recognition that Manchester's Inner Areas, particularly locations immediately adjoining the city centre, are expected to evolve through intensification, regeneration and the introduction of a broader range of economically productive commercial uses. The proposal directly reflects and supports that strategic transition.

Policy SP1 establishes the overarching spatial strategy for sustainable economic growth, regeneration, social inclusion and environmental improvement across the city. The policy seeks to support development which increases economic productivity, creates employment opportunities, promotes health and wellbeing and makes effective use of previously developed urban land. The proposal directly advances each of these objectives through the productive reuse of an existing commercial building as a significant indoor sport and wellness facility within a highly accessible city fringe location.

Policy SP2 further supports the creation of healthy neighbourhoods and sustainable communities through improved access to sport, recreation, services and active lifestyles. The proposed development makes a direct and measurable contribution to these objectives by introducing substantial new indoor sporting infrastructure into an area currently deficient in comparable health and wellness provision. The proposal therefore delivers not only economic benefits, but wider social and public health benefits fully aligned with the strategic objectives of the emerging plan.

Policy SGL1 identifies Strangeways and the surrounding Inner Areas as key locations for growth, regeneration, investment and economic diversification. The policy recognises that these areas are undergoing substantial transition and are expected to accommodate a broader and more diverse mix of commercial, employment-generating and city centre fringe uses over the plan period. The proposal aligns directly with this vision. It introduces an active and commercially productive leisure use into an existing urban employment building, increases employment intensity and contributes positively to the evolving mixed-use economic character of the area.

Importantly, the proposal reflects the wider regeneration trajectory of Strangeways and Great Ducie Street rather than conflicting with it. The development does not undermine the strategic function of the area. Instead, it supports its transition towards a more diverse, active and economically resilient urban environment.

Policy EC3 is particularly significant in the context of this application. The policy supports the renewal, upgrading, modernisation and diversification of employment premises and recognises that alternative commercial uses may be acceptable where they continue to support economic activity, do not prejudice surrounding employment uses and deliver wider regeneration, economic or social benefits.

The proposal satisfies each element of this policy test in full.

Firstly, the development remains fundamentally employment-generating and commercially active in nature. It is not a residential use, nor a low-intensity or passive land use. The proposal creates direct and indirect employment, attracts investment and materially increases economic activity within the site.

Secondly, the proposal does not prejudice surrounding commercial or industrial operations. No sensitive residential receptors are introduced and no land use conflict arises. The surrounding area remains fully capable of accommodating ongoing commercial and industrial activity without restriction.

Thirdly, the proposal delivers substantial wider benefits extending beyond the site itself, including health and wellbeing benefits, urban regeneration benefits, increased footfall and activity, improved perceptions of safety and the activation of an existing commercial building within the wider city centre fringe.

The proposal therefore represents precisely the type of economically productive diversification anticipated and supported by Policy EC3.

Policy C4 and Policy C9 provide further support for the development. These policies support leisure, recreation and service uses within sustainable and accessible locations, particularly where proposals broaden local provision, contribute positively to communities and enhance the vitality of surrounding areas.

The proposal directly aligns with these objectives. The site occupies a highly accessible urban location immediately adjacent to Manchester City Centre and well connected by sustainable transport infrastructure. The development

introduces a form of indoor sport and wellness provision currently underrepresented within the local area and complements rather than competes with existing district centre uses.

Importantly, the proposal does not undermine the vitality or viability of Cheetham Hill District Centre or any surrounding centre hierarchy. It does not divert core retail expenditure or displace primary retail functions. Instead, it introduces a complementary leisure and wellness use which broadens the local offer and contributes positively to the wider commercial ecosystem of the area.

When assessed holistically, the proposal demonstrates exceptionally strong alignment with the Draft Manchester Local Plan 2025. The development supports economic growth, employment generation, regeneration, health and wellbeing, urban intensification and the productive reuse of previously developed land, all while remaining fully compatible with the surrounding commercial environment. There is therefore no conflict with the strategic direction or policy objectives of the emerging local plan.

6. Compliance with Places for Everyone

Places for Everyone forms part of the adopted statutory development plan and therefore carries full development plan weight in the determination of the application. The proposal aligns strongly and comprehensively with the strategic objectives, spatial strategy and economic growth ambitions embedded throughout the framework.

At its core, Places for Everyone seeks to support sustainable economic growth, maximise the productive use of urban land, encourage regeneration within highly accessible locations and promote healthier, more inclusive communities across Greater Manchester. The proposal directly advances each of these strategic objectives.

The application site occupies a highly sustainable city fringe location immediately adjoining Manchester City Centre and falling within the wider Core Growth Area identified through the strategic spatial strategy. Places for Everyone recognises that these Inner Area and city centre fringe locations are expected to accommodate substantial investment, regeneration, employment growth and diversification over the plan period. The proposal aligns directly with this approach through the active reuse and intensification of an existing urban commercial building within one of Greater Manchester's most strategically significant growth corridors.

Importantly, the proposal represents a highly efficient use of previously developed urban land. The development does not require greenfield release, urban expansion or the redevelopment of open land. Instead, it optimises the use of an existing commercial building and existing infrastructure within a highly accessible location already served by established highway, transport and utility networks. This is entirely consistent with the fundamental sustainability principles underpinning Places for Everyone.

The proposal also strongly supports the economic objectives of the development plan. Places for Everyone does not seek to preserve employment areas in a rigid or overly simplistic manner based solely on historic industrial classifications. Rather, the framework seeks to ensure that urban land remains economically productive, employment-generating and capable of supporting modern patterns of economic activity. The proposal achieves precisely that outcome.

The development introduces a commercially active, employment-generating and labour-intensive use into an existing building, materially increasing the productive economic utilisation of the site. The proposal supports direct employment across management, coaching, administration, customer service, maintenance and café operation functions, whilst also generating wider indirect economic benefits through servicing, suppliers, contractors and operational expenditure.

Crucially, the proposal does not remove the site from active economic use, nor does it undermine the wider commercial function of the area. The site remains entirely commercial in character and fully compatible with the surrounding employment environment. No residential encroachment or sensitive land use conflict is introduced. The proposal therefore enhances the performance and economic contribution of the site rather than diminishing it.

The proposal also aligns strongly with the wider social and health objectives embedded throughout Places for Everyone. The framework places significant emphasis on improving health outcomes, increasing access to sport and recreation facilities, encouraging active lifestyles and creating healthier urban communities. The proposed indoor sport and wellness facility directly contributes to these objectives through the provision of year-round indoor sporting infrastructure within an accessible urban location currently lacking comparable facilities.

In regeneration terms, the proposal further supports the wider strategic transition occurring across Strangeways, Great Ducie Street and the northern city centre fringe, where traditional industrial areas are evolving towards more diverse, mixed and service-led commercial environments. The proposal therefore reflects the type of commercially productive urban diversification anticipated and encouraged by the development plan.

When assessed holistically against the objectives of Places for Everyone, the proposal demonstrates exceptionally strong policy alignment. It supports economic growth, employment generation, urban regeneration, sustainable land use, health and wellbeing objectives and the efficient reuse of existing urban infrastructure, all while maintaining the commercial integrity and functionality of the wider area. There is therefore no conflict with the adopted strategic development plan.

7. Cheetham Hill District Centre and Sequential Test

The proposal satisfies the sequential approach to town centre uses and fully accords with the wider strategic objectives relating to the vitality, viability and diversification of Cheetham Hill District Centre.

The starting point is the Council's own evidence base, which confirms that Cheetham Hill District Centre currently exhibits a clear deficiency in health, fitness and indoor leisure provision. Existing leisure activity within the centre is heavily dominated by food and beverage uses, small-scale retail and service functions, with no significant indoor health and fitness operator or comparable large-format recreational facility present within the centre. This is a highly material consideration and demonstrates that the proposal would not duplicate or undermine existing provision, but instead addresses an identified gap in the local leisure and wellness offer.

Equally important is the physical and operational reality of the district centre itself. The Council's evidence confirms that the centre is predominantly characterised by small-format units and fragmented frontages with very limited opportunities for substantial large-scale leisure accommodation. The overwhelming majority of units within the centre are fundamentally unsuitable for a development of this nature due to constraints relating to floorplate dimensions, internal height, structural capability, servicing arrangements, accessibility and operational functionality.

The operational requirements of an indoor sport and wellness facility of this scale are highly specific and materially different from conventional retail or small-scale leisure uses. Indoor padel and comparable indoor sporting facilities require large uninterrupted floorplates, substantial internal clear heights, significant structural spans, robust acoustic containment and operational flexibility. These requirements cannot realistically be accommodated within the existing stock of small and fragmented district centre premises.

Accordingly, the proposal has appropriately applied flexibility in accordance with national planning policy, but there are no suitable or available sequentially preferable sites capable of accommodating the operational requirements of the development within the defined district centre. The application site therefore represents an entirely logical and appropriate location for the proposed use given its existing building typology, urban accessibility and compatibility with the surrounding commercial context.

Importantly, the proposal does not undermine the vitality or viability of Cheetham Hill District Centre and does not give rise to any harmful retail displacement impacts. The development is not retail-led in nature and does not compete with primary shopping functions or core convenience retail expenditure. Nor does the ancillary café element operate as a standalone destination capable of diverting trade from existing centre uses. The café remains modest in scale and clearly ancillary to the primary sporting function of the building.

Instead, the proposal complements and strengthens the wider leisure and commercial offer of the area by introducing a form of indoor sporting and

wellness provision currently absent from the district centre and wider locality. The development broadens consumer choice, supports healthier lifestyles and contributes positively to the diversification of the wider area's commercial and recreational offer.

The proposal also aligns with the broader strategic direction of both the Draft Manchester Local Plan and the wider regeneration objectives for Strangeways and the city centre fringe, which support the diversification and intensification of accessible urban commercial locations through the introduction of complementary leisure, service and employment-generating uses.

When assessed properly against the requirements of the sequential test and the wider objectives of town centre policy, there is no evidential or policy basis to resist the proposal. The development satisfies the sequential approach, addresses an identified deficiency in local leisure infrastructure and complements rather than harms the vitality and viability of Cheetham Hill District Centre.

8. Great Ducie Street SRF and Regeneration Context

The Great Ducie Street Strategic Regeneration Framework promotes the creation of a mixed-use neighbourhood with a strong sense of place and community. The Draft Manchester Local Plan reinforces this by supporting mixed-use development and the expansion of the city centre into the Strangeways area.

The proposal is entirely consistent with this vision. It introduces an active commercial leisure use within an existing building, supports footfall and activity, and contributes to the evolving mixed-use character of the area.

It does not undermine the employment function of the area. Instead, it reflects the ongoing diversification and modernisation of employment uses within an urban regeneration context.

9. Amenity and Compatibility

The proposed development is entirely compatible with the surrounding commercial and industrial environment and will not give rise to unacceptable impacts upon neighbouring occupiers, the wider employment area or local amenity.

The site is located within an established urban commercial context characterised by industrial, warehousing, storage, servicing and city fringe commercial activity. The surrounding area is not residential in character and already accommodates the operational characteristics typically associated with employment-generating urban uses, including vehicle movements, servicing activity and general commercial operations. The proposed indoor sport and wellness facility comfortably integrates within that context.

Importantly, all primary operational activity associated with the development takes place entirely within the existing building envelope. No external courts are proposed. No external recreation areas, amplified music systems or outdoor sporting activity are introduced. The proposal therefore remains fully internalised and contained within the existing commercial structure.

The operational characteristics of the proposed use are controlled, predictable and materially less intensive than many traditional industrial or storage and distribution uses capable of occupying the premises. Unlike unrestricted B2 or B8 operations, the proposal does not involve manufacturing processes, external industrial activity, palletised storage operations, large-scale servicing yards or regular heavy goods vehicle movements associated with logistics and distribution uses.

The lawful fallback position for the site is a critical material consideration in assessing amenity impacts. Existing lawful industrial and storage uses are capable of generating substantially greater levels of servicing activity, loading operations, commercial vehicle movements and associated industrial noise than the proposed development. The surrounding area is already planned and intended to accommodate those forms of activity as part of its established employment function.

By comparison, the proposed use introduces a significantly more managed and lower-impact operational profile. Vehicle activity associated with the development is predominantly customer-based, dispersed throughout the day and evening and controlled through a structured booking model. There is no requirement for routine heavy goods servicing or industrial-scale loading activity as part of the core operation.

The accompanying Transport Statement confirms that the development operates within the capacity of the existing highway network and generates a lighter servicing profile than many conventional industrial uses. The proposed development also provides appropriate on-site parking, cycle infrastructure and waste management arrangements fully integrated within the existing commercial site layout.

Similarly, the accompanying Noise Impact Assessment confirms that the use will not give rise to unacceptable acoustic impacts and that operational noise associated with indoor sporting activity remains appropriately contained within the building envelope. The absence of external courts or external sporting activity is particularly important in this regard and materially distinguishes the proposal from outdoor recreational uses.

The proposal also delivers wider environmental and placemaking benefits through the activation of an existing commercial building which would otherwise contribute relatively limited activity outside conventional industrial operating hours. The introduction of a managed and occupied indoor leisure use increases passive surveillance, improves perceptions of safety and contributes positively to the wider urban environment without creating land use conflict.

Importantly, the development does not introduce sensitive residential receptors into the employment area and therefore does not create the risk of future constraints being imposed upon surrounding commercial occupiers. The proposal fully preserves the operational integrity and long-term functionality of the wider employment area.

Accordingly, there is no evidential basis to conclude that the proposal would give rise to unacceptable amenity impacts or incompatibility with surrounding uses. On the contrary, the development represents a highly compatible, lower-impact and operationally sustainable form of commercial activity entirely appropriate for this urban city fringe employment context.

10. Health, Wellbeing and Social Benefits

The proposal delivers substantial and compelling public benefits in health, wellbeing, recreation and social infrastructure terms, all of which attract significant weight within the overall planning balance.

The National Planning Policy Framework places considerable emphasis on the role of planning in creating healthy, inclusive and active communities. Paragraph 96 states that planning decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which enable and support healthy lifestyles, particularly through the provision of accessible sport and recreation facilities. Paragraph 102 further requires planning policies and decisions to positively plan for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities and sports venues to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments. The proposal directly and unequivocally responds to these objectives.

The development introduces substantial new indoor sport and wellness infrastructure within a highly accessible urban location immediately adjacent to Manchester City Centre and the densely populated surrounding residential communities of Cheetham Hill, Salford and the northern city centre fringe. The proposal therefore provides a meaningful expansion of accessible recreational infrastructure within an area where high-quality indoor sporting provision remains comparatively limited.

Importantly, the proposal addresses a clear deficiency in local indoor health and fitness provision identified within the Council's own evidence base. Existing leisure provision within Cheetham Hill District Centre is heavily dominated by food and beverage uses, with no comparable large-format indoor wellness or padel facility currently serving the area. The proposal therefore broadens the range and quality of recreational opportunities available to local residents and workers rather than duplicating existing provision.

The public health benefits arising from the proposal are substantial. The development promotes increased participation in physical activity, exercise and recreational sport through the provision of accessible year-round indoor facilities capable of operating irrespective of weather conditions. This is particularly important in the context of indoor padel, which has experienced substantial growth nationally due to its accessibility, inclusivity and broad demographic appeal across different age groups and ability levels.

Unlike many traditional sporting activities which may present barriers to entry, indoor padel is widely recognised as a socially accessible and beginner-friendly sport encouraging participation amongst individuals who may not ordinarily engage in structured physical exercise. The proposal therefore supports not only

formal sporting participation, but also wider public health objectives relating to active lifestyles, social wellbeing and preventative health outcomes.

The development also delivers wider social and community benefits extending beyond physical health alone. Sport and wellness facilities perform an important social function by encouraging interaction, community engagement and social cohesion. The proposal creates a managed and active communal environment where recreational participation, social interaction and wellbeing activity occur within a safe and accessible urban setting.

The ancillary café further supports this role as a secondary social and welfare component directly associated with the primary sporting use, encouraging longer dwell times, informal interaction and broader community engagement within the facility.

The Draft Manchester Local Plan similarly places significant emphasis on improving health outcomes, promoting active lifestyles and increasing access to sport and recreation infrastructure across the city. The proposal aligns directly with these strategic objectives and contributes positively to the creation of healthier urban communities within the Inner Areas and city centre fringe.

The proposal also supports broader sustainability objectives by locating significant indoor sporting infrastructure within a highly accessible urban environment capable of being reached by walking, cycling and public transport. This improves accessibility to recreation and wellness opportunities for a broad catchment population without requiring reliance upon isolated out-of-centre leisure destinations.

Importantly, the health and wellbeing benefits arising from the proposal are not abstract or incidental. They are direct, measurable and substantial planning benefits arising from the delivery of a significant new indoor sporting facility within an accessible urban location currently lacking comparable provision.

When assessed holistically, the proposal delivers major public benefits in health, wellbeing, recreation and community infrastructure terms. These benefits attract significant weight within the planning balance and strongly support the grant of planning permission.

11. Impact on Employment Land Supply

The proposal does not give rise to any harmful impact on the quantitative or qualitative supply of employment land within Manchester and there is no evidential basis to conclude that the development would undermine the strategic employment function of the wider area.

Importantly, the site remains in active commercial and employment-generating use. The proposal does not involve the redevelopment of the site for residential accommodation, student housing, hotel use or other non-employment generating forms of development commonly associated with the permanent erosion of employment land supply. Nor does the proposal remove the site from the wider commercial economy or sterilise surrounding industrial and commercial operations through the introduction of sensitive land uses.

This distinction is critically important and goes to the heart of the correct policy assessment.

The proposal must be properly distinguished from cases where employment land is permanently lost to wholly incompatible or non-commercial forms of development. This is not such a proposal. The development retains the site in productive economic use as a commercially operated indoor sport and wellness facility which directly generates employment, investment, expenditure and ongoing economic activity.

The building itself also remains fundamentally commercial in character. No substantial structural alterations are proposed which would compromise the building's commercial utility or its compatibility with the surrounding employment area. The proposal therefore represents the continued productive use of an existing employment building rather than its removal from the commercial land portfolio.

The assessment of employment land impact must also move beyond an overly simplistic reliance upon historic use classifications alone. The strategic purpose of employment land policy is not merely to preserve industrial labels in perpetuity irrespective of economic performance or wider regeneration objectives. Rather, the purpose of policy is to ensure that urban land continues to support productive economic activity, employment generation and sustainable growth.

On that basis, the proposal performs strongly.

The development materially enhances the economic productivity and utilisation of the site by introducing a more active, labour-intensive and commercially dynamic use than many traditional storage and distribution operations typically occupying comparable premises. The proposal therefore contributes positively to the economic performance of the wider area and supports the ongoing diversification and modernisation of employment activity within the Strangeways and city centre fringe corridor.

Importantly, the proposal does not undermine the operation or viability of surrounding commercial occupiers. No residential encroachment is introduced and no land use incompatibility arises. The wider employment area therefore remains fully capable of accommodating ongoing industrial, warehousing and commercial activity without restriction.

The proposal is also entirely consistent with the wider strategic direction of both Places for Everyone and the Draft Manchester Local Plan, which recognise that city fringe employment areas are evolving towards broader mixed commercial environments incorporating a range of employment-generating service, leisure and commercial uses alongside more traditional industrial activity.

The application site occupies a highly accessible urban location immediately adjoining Manchester City Centre where policy increasingly supports commercial diversification, regeneration and intensification. In this context, the proposal represents a logical and sustainable evolution of economic activity fully aligned with the changing role and function of the wider area.

Furthermore, the proposal brings an existing commercial building into more intensive and productive use without requiring greenfield land release, outward urban expansion or the loss of undeveloped land. The proposal therefore supports the efficient use of existing urban commercial infrastructure and contributes positively to wider sustainability objectives relating to urban intensification and regeneration.

When assessed holistically, the proposal does not result in the harmful loss of employment land either quantitatively or qualitatively. Instead, it enhances the economic productivity, operational activity and employment-generating function of the site while preserving the wider commercial integrity of the surrounding area.

There is therefore no policy conflict arising in employment land terms and no justification for refusal on the basis of impact upon employment land supply.

12. Planning Balance and Conclusion

12. Planning Balance and Conclusion The proposal represents sustainable development and should be granted planning permission without delay. There is no policy conflict. The development does not result in the loss of employment land, does not undermine the employment function of the area and does not prejudice future industrial use. It retains flexibility within Class E and preserves the B2/B8 fallback. The proposal delivers clear and substantial benefits. It increases employment intensity, supports economic growth, enhances health and wellbeing provision, addresses an identified deficiency in local leisure infrastructure and contributes to the regeneration of the Strangeways and Great Ducie Street area. Any perceived harm is either negligible or based on a misinterpretation of policy. There is no evidence to support refusal on employment land grounds. The Council would be overstating and misapplying policy if it sought to resist a proposal which demonstrably enhances the productive use of employment land while retaining its industrial function. In the overall planning balance, the proposal accords with the development plan when read as a whole. The economic, social and regeneration benefits are significant and compelling. There are no adverse impacts that would outweigh those benefits. Planning permission should therefore be granted.

12. Planning Balance and Conclusion

The proposed development represents sustainable development in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan and the emerging Draft Manchester Local Plan 2025, and planning permission should therefore be granted without delay.

When assessed properly against the development plan as a whole, there is no substantive policy conflict arising from the proposal. The development does not result in the harmful loss of employment land, does not undermine the strategic employment function of the area and does not prejudice the continued operation of surrounding commercial and industrial uses. The site remains in active and productive commercial use and continues to contribute directly to employment generation, economic activity and urban regeneration objectives.

The proposal must be considered within the correct strategic and spatial context. The application site occupies a highly accessible city fringe location within the evolving Strangeways and Great Ducie Street corridor, an area specifically identified for regeneration, diversification, investment and economic intensification. The proposal aligns directly with that strategic direction through the reuse and optimisation of an existing urban commercial building as a viable and employment-generating indoor sport and wellness facility.

The development delivers substantial and compelling economic benefits. It materially increases the productive utilisation of the site, enhances employment intensity and introduces a more active and labour-intensive commercial use than many conventional industrial or storage and distribution operations typically occupying comparable premises. The proposal also generates indirect economic benefits through construction expenditure, servicing, suppliers, operational supply chains and increased local expenditure associated with customer activity.

The proposal further delivers major social and public health benefits. It introduces significant indoor sporting infrastructure into an accessible urban location currently lacking comparable provision and directly supports increased participation in physical activity, healthier lifestyles and wider community wellbeing objectives. These benefits attract substantial weight within the planning balance and align strongly with both national and local policy objectives relating to health, recreation and active communities.

The proposal also contributes positively to wider regeneration and placemaking objectives. The development activates an existing commercial building, increases footfall and activity throughout the day and evening and improves passive surveillance and perceptions of safety within the surrounding area. Importantly, this occurs without introducing sensitive residential uses or creating operational conflict with surrounding commercial occupiers.

Any perceived harm arising from the proposal is either negligible, unsupported by evidence or based upon an overly rigid and outdated interpretation of employment land policy divorced from the wider strategic objectives of regeneration, economic productivity and sustainable urban growth. The proposal does not sterilise employment land, does not fragment the commercial area and does not compromise the wider operation of surrounding industrial and commercial premises.

To resist the proposal on employment land grounds would therefore represent a clear misapplication of planning policy and a failure to properly assess the development against the broader economic, regeneration and sustainability objectives of the development plan. The proposal demonstrably enhances the productive use of the site, increases employment activity and contributes positively to the ongoing evolution of the Strangeways and city centre fringe economy.

The development aligns strongly with the National Planning Policy Framework through supporting economic growth, productive urban land use, healthy communities and sustainable development. It accords with Places for Everyone

through promoting urban intensification, regeneration, economic diversification and the efficient reuse of previously developed land. It similarly aligns with the Draft Manchester Local Plan 2025 through supporting employment-generating development, commercial diversification, health and wellbeing infrastructure and the regeneration objectives for Strangeways and the wider Inner Areas.

When the proposal is assessed holistically and the development plan is read as a whole, the planning balance falls decisively in favour of approval. The economic, social, health, regeneration and placemaking benefits arising from the proposal are substantial, direct and compelling. There are no adverse impacts which would significantly or demonstrably outweigh those benefits.

Accordingly, the proposal constitutes sustainable development and planning permission should be granted.