

BullGnG Gymnastics – Exceptional Circumstances

Planning Ref : 24/00593/FUL

Site : Units 1-3 The Sidings Merrylees Road Desford Leicestershire LE9 9FE

Change use of industrial unit (Class B2) to gymnastics club (Class E)

Planning Application description

The applicant seeks change of use Change use of industrial unit (Class B2) to gymnastics club (Class E)

There will be no external changes or alterations to the car park and the gymnastics club will occupy the entire space.

Description of the site and surrounding area

The application site lies within a designated rural employment site known as Merrylees Industrial Estate, a Category A Employment Site as defined within the most recent Employment Land and Premises Study (2013), The site is surrounded by existing commercial buildings of varying design, scales, styles and appearance.

Consultation :

LCC – Speed Survey was Carried out on Merrylees road. No Objections

All other parties – No objections

Reasons for Refusal :

Conflict with Employment Land Policies (Policy DM19)

The council aims to protect certain areas for employment purposes under specific uses (B1, B2, B8) this cause conflict with the application of change of use of industrial unit (Class B2) to gymnastics club (Class E).

The policy states that: “The Borough Council will seek to retain sites classified as Category A sites in their entirety, for B1, B2 and B8 employment uses. The development of non B class uses in Category A sites will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances. Proposals must demonstrate that they would not have a significant adverse impact on surrounding employment uses”.

I believe that our case has exceptional circumstances and they are outlined below.

1. Operating hours

2. Nature of business
3. Lack of Alternative facilities
4. Community benefits
5. Issues with the current hall we hire which are making it impossible to expand our business and provide the service we'd like to
6. Support for Special Educational Needs (SEN):
7. Economic and Employment Considerations
8. Expansion and Employment Opportunities
9. Support for Local Employment Ecosystem
10. Parallels with Approved Dance School Application 9/00176/FUL
11. Supporting letters
12. Conclusion: Exceptional Circumstances Justification

1. Operating Hours:

Our gymnastics club is scheduled to operate primarily between 4:00 PM and 9:30 PM, which significantly differs from the standard business hours of most neighbouring businesses, which typically operate from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. This evening schedule means that our activities will occur outside of the core business hours of nearby commercial establishments, reducing potential conflicts related to parking, traffic, and general noise during peak business times.

The growth our club can expect comes through us being able to open more days; a full timetable of our expanded classes can be found in BullGnG Business plan section 3.

2. Nature of Activities:

The nature of our gymnastics activities is inherently different from the operations of typical commercial businesses. Our sessions are structured to be engaging and active but are confined to the indoor space of our facility. The activities will not involve heavy machinery or high noise levels, and the noise generated will be considerably lower than that of industrial or commercial activities.

By operating during non-overlapping hours and ensuring that our activities are managed to minimize noise and traffic disruption, we aim to complement rather than conflict with the existing commercial activities in the area. This would also help improve the safety within the area and should deter crime being committed with extra security as we will occupy the site during hours that are normally empty.

We believe that these measures effectively mitigate any potential impact on surrounding businesses and contribute positively to the local community by offering valuable recreational opportunities during hours that are less disruptive.

3. Lack of Alternative Suitable Facilities

I have conducted a comprehensive search for alternative locations that could accommodate the gymnastics club within the area. I have also been in contact with Hinckley and Bosworth council over several years if there is any suitable locations. Despite these efforts, it has been determined that there are no available or suitable properties that meet the necessary requirements for the following reasons

Other properties considered recently

Stapleton Garage unit (Too far for customers, Attached to a petrol station- health and safety requirements not met)

Desford road (Poundstretcher) Taken on by another Business, Has other space available but Height restrictions make it unsuitable; also in a Cat A Industrial unit by Borough wide policies map [Site Allocations & Development Management Policies DPD | Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council \(hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk\)](https://www.hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk/siteallocationsanddevelopmentmanagement/policiesdpd/)

Building at the school (Cost is to high – business plan available to see from 2021 upon request).

Peckleton industrial park – We have been in contact with the team involved in renting out the units here but no suitable options have come available for the past 4 years.

We have also looked further afield to see if there is possibility to move our location, all viable units are too far from our customers and we would loose too many members.

Griffen park – over 2 million sqft of warehouse space is being built in Desford none of which are a suitable size for a gymnastics centre.

I have been consistently looking for suitable units to no avail, this is the first suitable site I have come across that I genuinely feel we have a chance to turn into an incredible gymnastics centre.

Already working with the council on Suitable Facilities

I have worked and been in constant contact with Graham Chilvers since before 2020; he is the Health and Recreation manager at Hinckley and Bosworth council. He has advised me on previous units and has even been out to visit me on sites I have looked into. He gives his full support on this unit in question. Enquires over the years have also been made with Hinckley and

Bosworth council on potential units for our club, none have been presented to me in my time running BullGnG.

These are just a few of my most recent searches, I have been searching for a suitable locations to move BullGnG into its own home since reopening after lockdown and has always been the main goal with the business, Units 1-3 The Sidings Merrylees Road is by far the most suitable premises I have found. I also have full support from the owner of the unit who would be glad to see the unit utilised in this proposed way.

The proposed location offers optimal accessibility for the local community. Alternative properties either lack adequate accessibility or are situated too far from Desford, which would significantly hinder the club's ability to serve its current 200+ members effectively. I have liaised with current members and they have all agreed that they would be happy to commute to this proposed venue as it is only 1.8 miles from Bosworth academy and as seen in the letters of support provided for a lot of my students this location is closer to them and they feel it would be safer too.

Size and Layout

The spaces available in the area are generally either too small or too big and therefore unaffordable or do not have the appropriate layout to support the specialized gymnastics equipment and training needs of the club. From my search this is the only unit within the local area of Desford that can become a home for my gymnastics club and allow us the space to grow. A Gymnastics floor is 12x12meters and a Asymmetric bar needs between 10 – 11.5 feet of clearance in height and specialized floor fittings for permanent fixtures. Finding such space is rare in the area of Desford or any of the surrounding areas. A gymnastics centre requires large, specialized equipment such as balance beams, uneven bars, vaults, and foam pits. These installations take up substantial floor space and often have strict safety clearance and installation requirements which mean it is impossible in a shared space. Due to the high-risk nature of gymnastics, significant space is needed around each apparatus to ensure safe landings and to prevent injuries there simply isn't the time for set up between school ending and our classes starting for us assemble these sorts of equipment. Foam pits, crash mats, and other safety equipment also require extra room and a certain standard of safety this unit offers is enough space to grow our already expanding gymnastics club

This unit not only provides us the ability to begin learning full floor routines and moving from a 2 piece gymnastics club to a 4 piece gymnastics club and a 6 pieces men's Artistic gymnastics club. This will allow us to begin competing at competitions which will also massively help with the expansion

of the gymnastics centre and hopefully lead us to being able to compete for the county – encouraging and bringing awareness to the sport, the club and to the area.

Given these constraints, the proposed location is deemed the most viable option for meeting both the operational needs of the gymnastics club and the demand within the local community. This situation underscores the necessity of approving the current proposal, as it represents the most suitable facility available.

4. Community Benefit

Establishing a gymnastics centre in an industrial unit may fulfil a significant community need, especially considering the shortage of suitable venues for such facilities. By repurposing underutilised industrial space, the centre can provide a valuable service to the local area, offering a dedicated location for gymnastics training and other physical activities that promote health and well-being.

Furthermore, I have spent the past six years traveling to various dance schools in my van to provide gymnastics instruction. Having my own space would not only centralise these activities, reducing travel time and associated costs, but also allow me to offer a consistent, high-quality environment for my students. This dedicated space would enable the continuation and expansion of these programs, benefiting the community by providing a permanent facility where children and adults alike can engage in physical fitness, dance, and gymnastics training. The centre would not only cater to the current demand but also encourage more people to participate in such activities, fostering a healthier, more active community.

Additionally, the proposal aligns with Hinckley and Bosworth's current policy objectives outlined 3.11, 3.12 in the Core Strategy Document [here](#) , which aim to make effective use of available space and meet community needs. By providing a gymnastics centre in an industrial area, we are utilizing existing infrastructure to support community activities, consistent with the council's goal of promoting sustainable development outlined in This project not only addresses a recognized gap in local amenities but also contributes positively to the local economy and community well-being, fulfilling both policy requirements and social objectives. 3.26 it would also aid crime reduction and building stronger communities as outlined later in this document. 3.33 it will allow rural communities to play and train close to where they live. 3.35 with acceptance of the change of use this will allow a high quality gymnastics centre to be available and we'd like to offer events to help build the community we have. Spatial Objective 7, this will allow us to develop healthier and stronger communities by improving access to sports, allow a new

improved facility. Desford is a key rural centre and we are keen to enhance this area. Policy 8 – ‘Deliver improvements in the quality of Sport in Desford, including the purchase of extra land to develop the facilities and outdoor pitches across Desford Parish as detailed in the Hinckley & Bosworth Cultural Facilities Audit.’

5. Issues with the current hall we hire which are making it impossible to expand our business and provide the service we’d like to

Space constraints

The limitations of the current school hall we hire are making it impossible to expand our gymnastics program and provide the comprehensive service we aim for. Currently, due to space constraints and setup time, we can only consistently teach vault and floor exercises. Setting up equipment for bars and beam is time-consuming, meaning we can only use these every three weeks, which forces us to rotate the use of other apparatus. This inconsistency disrupts our training schedule and hinders the development of our gymnasts.

Due to the hall we use being a shared public space and in light of the recent attack in Stockport, anyone could walk into our session at the school whereas with the dedicated facility we can increase the security and limit access to our members in turn providing a safer environment.

Not allowing permanent fixtures or alternations to the hall

Unfortunately with the hall being a shared space we cannot have equipment permanently set up nor can we adapt the floor to accommodate for pieces like bar. We have bars ready to be installed that unfortunately the school halls floor is not strong enough for the repetitive use it would require.

Availability

The hall’s availability is restricted by other bookings. A dance school occupies the space all day on Saturdays, making it impossible for us to conduct classes on what would be our busiest day. While we attempted to establish classes at two different locations on Saturdays, the irregular availability and frequent cancellations due to other events made these efforts financially unstable and limited our growth potential. After reopening after Covid lockdown I focused on one location in preparation for moving into its own space someday.

Shared space

Two centres we have also set up in are Countersthrope community college and Kirby Muxloe village hall. Equipment had to be moved in a van every weekend for these.

Due to staff shortages at the school in recent months we have had prebooked sessions cancelled at very short notice – including a children’s birthday party.

I can't run a viable business like this, it causes a lot of unrest and unnecessary stress trying to reorganise sessions at short notice, communicate with parents and staff and find alternative locations, it also looks unprofessional – I hate letting people down and have had to due to circumstances out of my control.

Another significant issue is cleanliness. The hall is shared with multiple other sports groups, leading to variable and often inadequate cleanliness levels, which can pose health and safety risks to our athletes. In July we made a complain to the school regarding these issues that can be seen in the document [‘Bosworth academy complaint’](#)

Problems include :

Dust / Astro turf accumulation, hygiene, Heating issues and health and safety concerns brought to the school in July 2024.

Parking

At Bosworth academy they operate on a one way in one way out system to our part of the school, the school is getting busier every week with several sports groups using the facility many of our members complain about the parking situation at the school many have included this problem in the letters of support. There is not always a safe route for children to cross the car park.

Benefits of the New Unit:

Having a dedicated industrial unit would enable us to overcome these issues and enhance our gymnastics program. We would have the space and flexibility to permanently set up all four key apparatuses—vault, floor, bars, and beam—allowing us to provide a complete and consistent training experience. This would not only improve the quality of our coaching but also allow us to prepare our young gymnasts for competitions across the country.

Additionally, having control over our own space would ensure that the facility is maintained to the highest standards of cleanliness and safety, fostering a healthier and more professional training environment. It would provide jobs which could overlap with class B, such as site officer, cleaner, maintenance, admin staff and more. This dedicated space would eliminate scheduling conflicts and enable us to operate at times that are convenient for our students and their families, supporting the growth and success of our gymnastics club, and not to have to cancel or reschedule classes at late notice.

6. Support for Special Educational Needs (SEN):

The centre would provide specialised classes for children with special educational needs (SEN), ensuring that this often underserved group has access to the physical and social benefits of gymnastics. The provision of such inclusive services

addresses a critical social need, further justifying the exceptional nature of the proposal. We already have a waiting list of 5 children with SEN that would like start gymnastics but cannot due to limited timings and having a suitable safe space. I have parents which have expressed a need for this and can pass on details / signatures of all who support this proposal and some have written supporting letters. I am also keen to reach out to local schools to offer classes to them – you can see these plans in my business proposal.

7. Economic and Employment Considerations

Job Creation and Economic Contribution

While the proposed gymnastics centre may not align with the traditional B1 (office), B2 (general industrial), or B8 (storage and distribution) employment uses, it nonetheless offers significant economic and community benefits that align with broader economic objectives. The centre will contribute positively to the local economy by creating jobs, supporting local businesses, and fostering community engagement.

Currently, our team includes Andrea Bruven, a highly qualified Level 5 Gymnastics coach, and Grace Fleeming, an ex-gymnast who is now a Level 1 gymnastics coach. We also employ three assistant coaches—Alex, Ava, and Corinna—who are passionate and dedicated but are not yet fully qualified due to our limited access to the necessary equipment and facilities. The proposed move to a dedicated industrial unit will enable us to provide these assistants with the resources they need to complete their gymnastics coaching qualifications, thereby enhancing their career prospects and increasing the overall skill level within our team.

8. Expansion and Employment Opportunities

Our long-term vision for the gymnastics centre includes further expansion, which will create additional job opportunities for extra coaches, squad coaches and admin staff. By having a dedicated space, we will be able to offer a wider range of classes including competitive squads that would compete, accommodate more students, and host local gymnastics competitions, which will not only employ more coaches and support staff but also attract visitors to the area. This increased footfall will benefit nearby businesses, such as cafes, shops, and other services, thus contributing to the local economy.

Additionally, the centre will offer positions for roles beyond coaching, including administrative staff, cleaners, and maintenance personnel, which will provide employment opportunities for local residents. By integrating a young leaders program, we can also mentor young people from the community, fostering skills in sports coaching, leadership, and event management. This aligns with

our commitment to engaging the youth and promoting active, healthy lifestyles within the community.

9. Support for Local Employment Ecosystem

The presence of a gymnastics centre can complement surrounding businesses by offering services to employees and their families, enhancing the overall appeal of the industrial estate. For example, employees of nearby companies might enrol their children in gymnastics classes, creating a symbiotic relationship between the centre and other businesses within the estate. I have throughout the planning application actively engaged with the local business' all of which that were spoke to were in support of the proposal

Preservation of Industrial Character

The change of use would not involve any structural changes to the industrial unit, allowing it to retain its potential for future industrial use if necessary. This preserves the character of the industrial estate and ensures that the site can revert to an industrial use should the demand for B1, B2, or B8 employment uses increase in the future and return back to a B1, B2 or B8 usage if I leave the premises.

10. Comments on 9/00176/FUL

Parallels with Approved Dance School Application 9/00176/FUL

The application for the gymnastics centre mirrors the circumstances under which the council previously approved the use of a dedicated space for a dance school, under planning reference 9/00176/FUL. This approval sets a precedent, underscoring the viability and appropriateness of repurposing industrial units for recreational and community uses when exceptional circumstances are present.

In the case of the dance school, the council recognised the need for a specialised environment to facilitate the safe and effective practice of dance, acknowledging that a dedicated space was crucial to meet the specific operational requirements of such an establishment. Similar to our gymnastics centre, the dance school required a facility that could accommodate specialised equipment, ensure safety standards, and provide consistent training environments free from the limitations posed by shared or unsuitable facilities.

Our situation aligns closely with that of the dance school, but it presents even greater needs for a dedicated space due to the nature of gymnastics training. Gymnastics involves a range of large and heavy equipment, including balance beams, uneven bars, and vaults, which necessitate not only substantial floor space but also specific safety features such as cushioned landings and foam pits. The presence of these permanent installations is critical to minimizing injury risks and ensuring the safety of our athletes.

Furthermore, our gymnastics centre's need for consistent and reliable access to specialised equipment and tailored layouts is even more pronounced than that of a dance school. Gymnastics equipment requires secure installation and adequate space for safe use, factors that are impractical and unsafe to manage in a shared, non-dedicated facility. Unlike dance, which can adapt more flexibly to different spaces, gymnastics training's safety and effectiveness are directly tied to the environment in which it occurs.

Given these points, the approval of the dance school sets a relevant precedent for our application. The council's acknowledgment of the importance of dedicated, specialised space for recreational activities in the earlier application directly supports our case for the gymnastics centre. Our proposal aligns with this precedent, addressing a similar need for a safe, controlled environment tailored to specific physical activities. As such, we seek similar consideration and approval to provide a valuable service to the community, promote health and well-being, and utilize existing industrial space effectively.

11. Supporting letters

Our members, coaches, parents have written supporting letters for this change of use application we have – see email attachment.

12. Conclusion & Exceptional Circumstances Justification

The proposed change of use for BullGnG Gymnastics to occupy Units 1-3 at The Sidings, Merrylees Road, Desford, presents a clear case of exceptional circumstances warranting approval. Our proposal aligns with the community's needs and provides significant benefits that cannot be achieved through adherence to current employment land policies (Policy DM19). The following key points summarize the exceptional circumstances that justify approval:

Non-Conflict with Existing Businesses: Our proposed operating hours, primarily in the evenings, do not overlap with the regular business hours of surrounding establishments, thereby minimizing potential conflicts related to traffic, parking, and noise. The nature of our activities, which are conducted indoors and do not involve heavy machinery or industrial processes, further supports this non-intrusive use of the space.

Absence of Suitable Alternatives: Extensive research into alternative locations has demonstrated a lack of suitable facilities within the local area that can accommodate the specific spatial, safety, and equipment requirements for a gymnastics centre. The proposed unit is the only viable option that meets these needs while being accessible to our existing customer base.

Community Benefit and Demand: The gymnastics centre will address a significant gap in local amenities by providing a dedicated space for physical activity, health, and well-being. This centre will serve not only the general community but also

specific groups such as children with special educational needs (SEN), promoting inclusivity and social well-being that all align with Hinckley and Bosworth council core Strategy policies.

Precedent Set by Dance School Approval (Ref: 9/00176/FUL): The council's prior approval for a dance school under similar circumstances establishes a precedent for repurposing industrial units for recreational and community use when exceptional circumstances exist. The gymnastics centre's requirements for specialised equipment and safety features exceed those of a dance school, as well as no other suitable venues in the local area make a compelling case for equivalent, if not greater, consideration.

Economic and Employment Benefits: While differing from traditional industrial employment uses, the gymnastics centre will contribute to the local economy through job creation, supporting local businesses, and increasing footfall to the area. It aligns with broader economic and social objectives, fostering community engagement and promoting active lifestyles. This change of use will not result in any employment loss from the industrial sector and still provide employment.

Long-Term Flexibility: The proposed change of use does not involve significant structural alterations, preserving the industrial character of the unit. This ensures that the site can revert to B1, B2, or B8 employment uses in the future if required, maintaining the site's long-term flexibility and potential.

Meeting criteria with other council policy

Our project and move meets the needs of the core strategies outlined by Hinckley and Bosworth council for the surrounding area of Desford.

In conclusion, the proposal to change the use of Units 1-3 at The Sidings to a gymnastics centre should be approved based on the outlined exceptional circumstances. This decision will not only serve the best interests of the local community but will also align with the council's broader objectives for sustainable development, health, and well-being. We urge the council to consider these points favourably and grant approval for the proposed change of use, recognising the significant positive impact it will have on the local area.

Thank you for your consideration.

Joshua Bull –