

Statement by Claire and Richard Allen

App. No. 20/00203/FUL - Unit F6, Briarsford Industrial Estate, Perry Road, Witham

We are operating a Small Group Training Studio in Witham - in a medium to large sized unit (E2) on Briarsford Industrial Estate. This is close to the town centre (5minutes walk) with ample parking. With the agreement of our landlord, we wanted to move to a smaller unit (F6) on the same estate and owned by the same landlord. This requires change of use from B1(c) to D2 (there are 4 units vacant on the site of that size: so this makes it 40% empty). Given the current economic climate this is incredibly important for the survival of our business that we move.

However, it seems that the planning officer has some reservations: with regards the change of use, as this would reduce the stock of B1(c) Units and not be sustainable in terms of the future demand for office space. In fact, we would be freeing up a larger unit if we moved which would increase the stock of B1(c) space if this were turned back. Our landlord and ourselves in fact would see no objection to unit E2 being returned to B1(c) use. The planning officer states there is no legal mechanism to do this. On approval of the change of use for F6, we would be happy to pay for an application of change of use for the larger E2 unit to go back to B1(c) if this helps our current application. In terms of the demand for office space, we would like to point out that the smaller units are currently 40% vacant on this site.

According to the planning officer the location for a leisure use would be better in town centre, except if there are no suitable facilities available there. As the type of training we provide includes elements of gymnastics and we therefore need a high building for rope climbs and use of rings, there are therefore no suitable buildings within the town centre. The planning officer claims that she has shared information of similar businesses which could share our current unit with us: this would not be practical in terms of prime time for classes and the different layout of equipment needed for the other businesses.

We are an existing business with an existing client base and all we are asking to do is to move to a smaller unit which is located less than 50 metres away from our current unit. As pointed out by the planning officer, health and fitness businesses bring many benefits to the community and particularly in our role in helping to prevent diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity... all of which are not only a risk factor in the current climate, but are also a growing national problem.

We hope that the committee will agree to help support our local business in these difficult times.

Many thanks in anticipation for your support!