



PLANNING STATEMENT

Site: 7-10 Station Approach
Hitchin
SG4 9UW

For: RAW Performance Group

Project Ref: 25076

Date: October 2025

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Plans and Documents Accompanying the Application

Application Form
Planning Statement by Barker Parry Town Planning
Site & Location Plans, dwg ref. 001 A
Plans as Existing, dwg ref. 003 A
Plans as Proposed, dwg ref. 004 B

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of our client, RAW Performance Group, in support of an application seeking full planning permission for a change of use at 7-10 Station Approach, Hitchin, SG4 9UW.

1.2 The description of development for the proposed scheme is as follows:

Change of use from Sui Generis Car Sales to Class E(d) Indoor Sports, Recreation or Fitness (gym).

1.3 The Applicant's gym business is currently located at 12 Station Approach, and the proposals would enable them to relocate to the larger premises at 7-10 Station Approach to support their growing business.

1.4 This Statement demonstrates that the proposed scheme complies with all relevant planning policy and guidance and constitutes sustainable development which benefits from the presumption in favour.

1.5 Section 2 of this Statement outlines the Site context including relevant planning history. Section 3 provides a summary of relevant planning policy and Section 4 outlines the scheme proposal in detail. Section 5 assesses the proposals against the relevant planning policy, and the final conclusions are set out at Section 6.

2.0 **BACKGROUND AND SITE CONTEXT**

Site and Surroundings

- 2.1 The Application Site comprises an area of 0.09ha which is located in the cluster of commercial units south of Hitchin Station car park. The Site currently comprises a single storey building in *Sui Generis* car showroom use, with an internal area of c.370sqm including ancillary office space at ground and first floor and an area for car detailing (valeting) at ground floor.
- 2.2 The existing Site building is red brick on the bottom half and grey clad on the upper half. The premises is enclosed by a red brick wall and metal gates. There are 11 car spaces to the front on the Site which is predominantly used for the display for motor vehicles for sale.

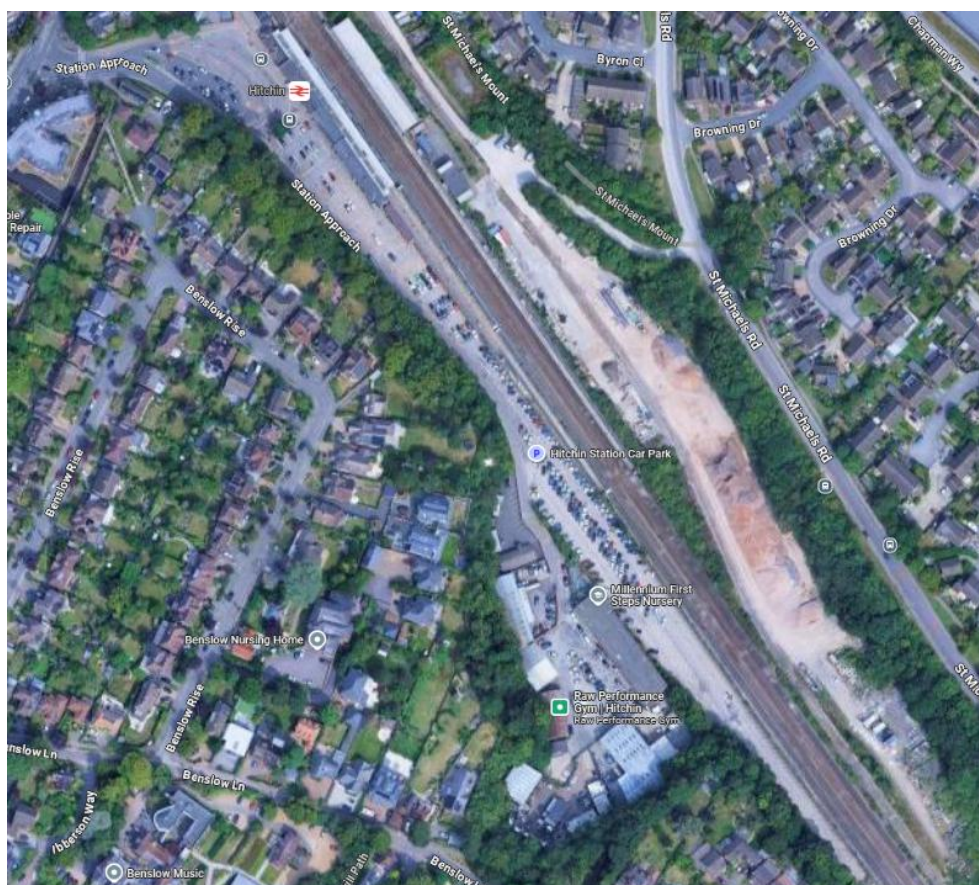


Figure 1: Google Earth Image of the Site and wider context - Site indicated in red.



Figure 2: Google Earth Image of the Application Site extent.

- 2.3 The Applicant currently occupies a unit to the south of the Site (No.12 Station Approach) and is looking to relocate to the larger premises at Nos. 7-10 Station Approach.

Planning Designations

- 2.4 The Application Site is located in a designated employment area as shown on the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 Policies Map.

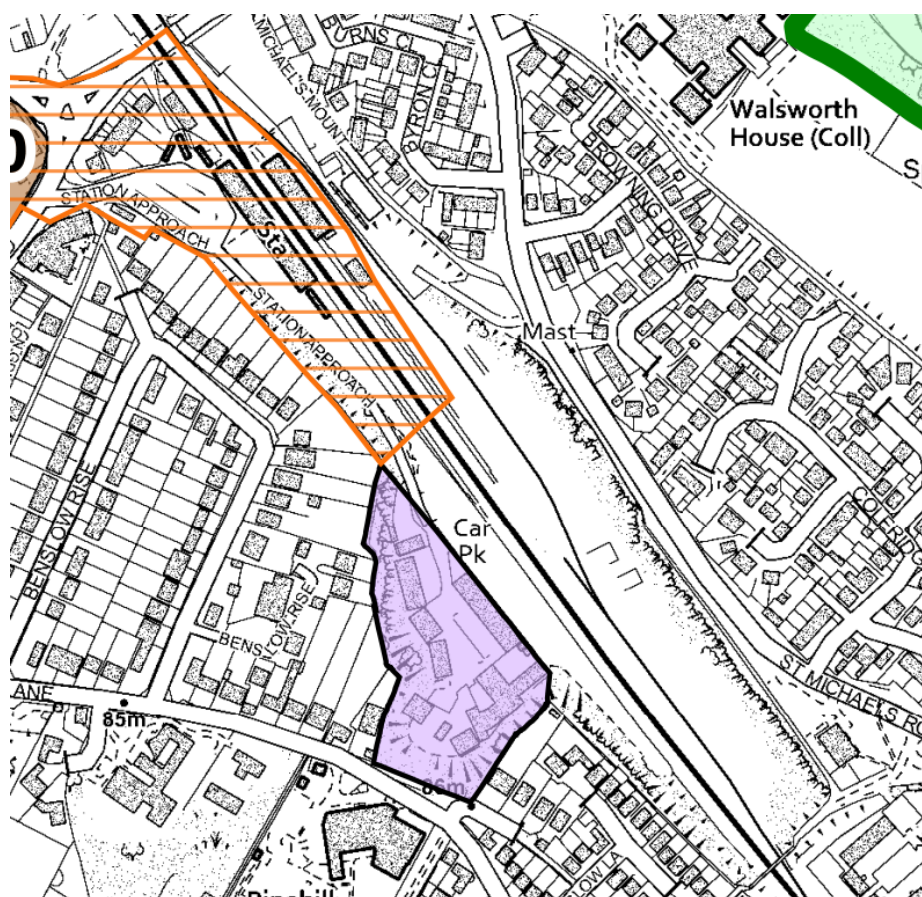


Figure 3: Extract of Local Plan Policies Map

2.5 The Site is not within a conservation area and there are no listed buildings in the vicinity of the Site. It is, however, immediately adjacent to the Hitchin Station Conservation Area.

2.6 It is within Flood Zone 1 and has a low risk of flooding from surface water.

Relevant Planning History

2.7 On 27 November 2013, planning permission was granted for Units 7 to 10 Station Approach for the change of use from a B1/B8 electric contractors to a Sui Generis sale of motor cars use (LPA Ref. 13/02485/1).

2.8 This permission was implemented and remains the current use of the Site.

3.0 **DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONSIDERATIONS**

3.1 The North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted on 8 November 2022. The Local Plan forms part of the Development Plan for the District, alongside Neighbourhood Plans for certain areas and the adopted Minerals Local Plan and Waste Local Plan.

North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031

- Policy SP1: Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire
- Policy SP2: Settlement hierarchy and Spatial Distribution
- Policy SP3: Employment
- Policy SP6: Sustainable transport
- Policy ETC1: Appropriate uses in employment areas
- Policy D1: Sustainable design
- Policy T1: Assessment of transport matters
- Policy T2: Parking
- Policy SP9: Design and sustainability
- Policy HC1: Community facilities

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024)

3.2 The NPPF is an important material consideration in the determination of planning applications, and it clearly sets out that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should take a positive approach to decision-making. Paragraph 38 states that LPAs should work proactively with applicants to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area.

- 3.3 A presumption in favour of sustainable development lies at the heart of the NPPF. Paragraph 96 sets out how planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy places which enable and support healthy lives, for example through the provision of sports facilities. It also states planning policies and decisions should plan positively for the provision of community facilities such as sports venues (Paragraph 98).

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

- 3.4 The following SPDs are considered relevant to the proposed scheme:

- Design SPD July 2011
- Vehicle Parking at new Development SPD (2011)

4.0 **THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

4.1 The proposed scheme comprises a change of use of the Site from a *Sui Generis* car showroom to a Class E indoor recreation (gym).

4.2 The key elements of the proposed scheme are as follows:

- Relocation of established business at Station Approach from current unit (Unit 12) to the Application Site, Unit 7-10 Station Approach.
- Change of use of Application Site from existing *Sui Generis* car showroom use with ancillary office space and car detailing area to a gym with ancillary office space.
- Use of 11 existing parking spaces for customer and staff parking and creation of 6 cycle parking spaces.

5.0 **PLANNING ASSESSMENT**

Principle of Development

5.1 The Application Site is located in an Employment Area as shown on the Policies Map and is therefore covered by Policy ETC1 which states that planning permission for uses that are not 'office, research and development, industrial processes, industrial and storage and distribution uses', will be granted as an exception, provided they are:

- i. Ancillary to the above uses;
- ii. Essential to the continued operation of an established premises;
- iii. Would bring comparable benefits to office, research and development, industrial processes, industrial and storage and distribution uses in the same location; or
- iv. Would make use of a Site that would otherwise be likely to become or remain vacant for an extended period of time.

5.2 In this case, the proposals would comply with criterion ii. as the Applicant is already an established business premises at Station Approach and the proposed relocation to the adjacent larger premises is essential to the continued expansion and operation of this business.

5.3 Additionally, the supporting text for Policy ETC1 states that development proposals for non-employment uses which seek to make use of the exception criteria of the policy will be considered on their merits. However, when assessing such proposals, the Council will have regard to (as applicable in each instance) the criteria set out in the table below:

Criteria	Relevance to Application Site
Employment generation on Site.	The Site has not been in an employment use for over 10 years by virtue of being in a <i>Sui Generis</i> use as a car showroom since 2013. There is no existing employment generation.
Impact on relevant town centres, including details of any sequential and / or impact testing.	The proposal does not require a sequential test as gyms are not a main town centre use only under the NPPF (i.e. is not a 'more intensive sport/recreation use') and will not impact on Hitchin Town Centre.
Where appropriate, the level and type of retail involved on the Site.	The proposal is for indoor fitness (gym) with no retail proposed on-site.
Any potential benefits to the community or surrounding businesses from the proposed use.	Proposal will have a benefit to the community by providing enabling the sustainable expansion of an established gym operator to meet local community demand.
The proportion of the Site to be used for sales and display of motor trade uses;	Currently 100% of the Site is currently used for the sales and display of motor trade uses but will become a gym instead.
Accessibility by non-car modes of transport.	The Site is extremely well located immediately adjacent to the train station and short walking distance to main part of the town centre. Site is high accessible by non-car modes of transport which make up the primary modes of transport (walking and cycling).
Any evidence clearly demonstrating that: - The land or premises is no longer required to meet future employment needs of the District; - The land or premises is inappropriate or unfeasible for employment use, based on market conditions or amenity / living condition problems; and - No other suitable sites outside designated employment areas are viable and available.	The existing Site does not contribute to employment floorspace in the district as a <i>Sui Generis</i> car showroom. The gym use is already located at Station Approach as an established business with a dedicated client base directly linked to its location by the Station and is simply seeking to relocate to another unit which better suits its business requirements. The employment generation of the gym is anticipated to be higher than the car show room due to the number of personal trainers it supports.

- 5.4 NPPF Paragraph 91 states that Local Planning Authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. The NPPF glossary defines main town centre uses as including “*more intensive sport and recreation uses*”. A gym is not a more intensive use and would not draw footfall away from Hitchin Town Centre and therefore a sequential test is not required. Further, the business already exists in this location and is predominately used in association with linked trips to the train station, i.e. people using the gym before and after work who commute from Hitchin Station.
- 5.5 In accordance with the NPPF, positive weight should also be given to the proposed use in terms of the health and community benefits which a gym generates. As such, the proposal contributes towards healthy places and people’s lives as encouraged by the NPPF.
- 5.6 Overall, the proposal is appropriate in scale for the local context, is highly accessible by a range of transport modes and would keep the established gym in the same area to meet expanding business needs. As such, the proposal should be supported as a new community sports facility in accordance with Policy HC1 and the NPPF.

Design & Heritage

- 5.7 The proposals will not result in any external alterations to the building; only internal fitout works to reflect the new use. As such there are no material design implications arising from the proposal, other than the benefit of providing Sheffield cycle stands under the existing covered canopy area to the front of the building. The proposal is therefore appropriate for the character and appearance of the area. The proposal will also have no impact on the wider setting of the nearby Conservation Area.

Access & Parking

5.8 The parking standards for gyms is out-of-date as the Vehicle Parking at New Development SPD 2011 does not reflect the Class E use. However, for fitness centres/sports clubs it does recommend a maximum standard of 1 car parking space per 15sqm of floor area and a minimum standard of 1 cycle parking space per 25sqm of floor area. In this case this would be 24 car parking spaces and 14 cycle parking spaces.

5.9 The key transport, highways and parking matters for the Site can be summarised as follows:

- The access to the Site will remain as existing.
- Public transport, walking and cycling is viable for future staff members and patrons to the Site and is the most common transport mode for existing gym users.
- 11 existing parking spaces are available on-site and will be retained to serve patrons and staff which is policy compliant. Presently the gym business at No.12 only has 6 car parking spaces, so it knows this provision is sufficient and is under the maximum standard.
- The existing covered 'smokers' shed at the Site will be converted to cycle parking for staff and patrons with 3 Sheffield stands providing 6 spaces. Additional cycle parking can be provided later based on demand. At present the existing gym business (nor the car showroom) does not have any cycle parking so this will be a significant improvement. Additionally, a significant volume of cycle parking is available at Hitchin Train Station which some patrons makes use of due to the linked nature of their trips before/after commuting.
- The Site is expected to continue being serviced as it currently is under its existing operation with no change in bin storage or collection.
- The proposals will not increase vehicle trips to and from the Site.

- 5.10 Overall, the proposed Site is in an accessible location and is expected to negligible impact on trip generation, while an appropriate level of parking is proposed based on the characteristics of the Site and local area.

Biodiversity

- 5.11 The Application Site comprises all hardstanding and built form with no existing habitat value within the red line extent. Additionally, the proposal does not include any building operations and is simply for the change of use of existing areas. As such, no habitat is affected by the proposal, and the development is therefore exempt from the requirement to provide Biodiversity Net Gain.

6.0 **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The proposed scheme seeks the relocation of an established gym business at Station Approach from Unit 12 to the larger premises at Unit 7-10 which is presently a *Sui Generis* car showroom.
- 6.2 The proposal is appropriate in scale for the local context, is accessible by a range of transport modes and would meet the need/demand for an established business in this location. As such, the proposal should be supported as a community facility in accordance with Policy HC1.
- 6.3 Overall, the presumption in favour of sustainable development should be applied as there are no policy conflicts arising from the proposal to outweigh the benefit of the delivery of a new community sports facility.