



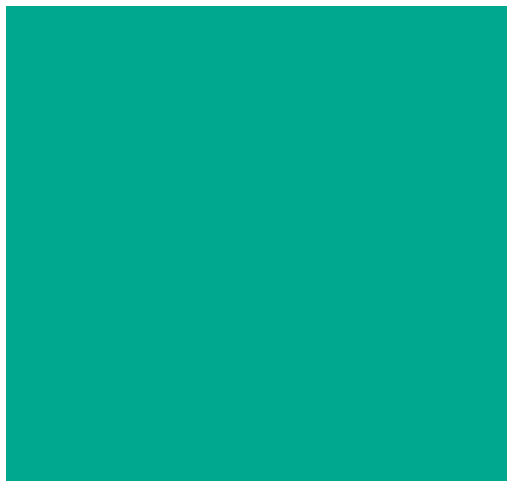
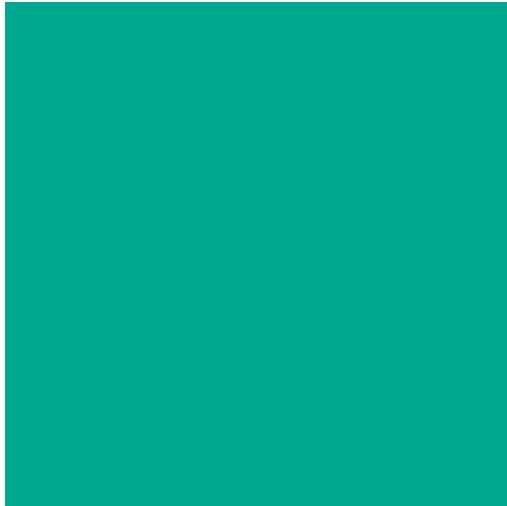
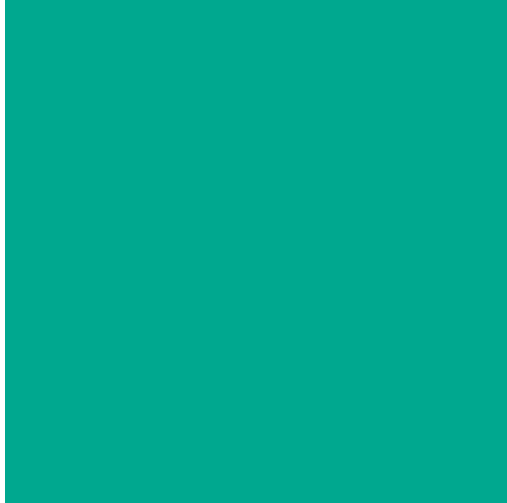
PLANNING STATEMENT

Site: 5 Hunting Gate, Hitchin, SG4 0TJ

For: Padel Zone Ltd

Project Ref: 25010

Date: 31 March 2025



Prepared by:

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Plans and Documents Accompanying the Application

APPLICATION FORM
PLANNING STATEMENT BY BARKER PARRY TOWN PLANNING
1003 LOCATION PLAN
1004 BLOCK PLAN EXISTING
1005 BLOCK PLAN AS PROPOSED
1001 EXISTING GROUND FLOOR LAYOUT
1002 PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR LAYOUT
1006 EXISTING AND PROPOSED FIRST FLOOR PLAN
1007 EXISTING AND PROPOSED SECOND FLOOR PLAN
TRANSPORT STATEMENT, PREPARED BY EAS

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of our client, Padel Zone Ltd, in support of an application for full planning permission for a change of use at 5 Hunting Gate, Hitchin, SG4 0TJ.

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

Change of use from Sui Generis Waste Centre to Class E(d) Indoor Sports Venue for Padel.

1.3 Padel is the fastest growing sport in the UK and Europe. Presently there are no dedicated Padel centres in North Herts, with aspiring players contending with many other sports for court time at local leisure centres. The growth of Padel should be supported as a grassroots sport as it can be played with minimal, inexpensive equipment and in all weathers as an indoor and outdoor sport. Comprising a blend of tennis and squash, Padel is considered as a more relaxed and social sport than other racket sports and is suitable for players of all ages and skill levels. Additionally, three padel courts can fit in the same size as one tennis court making it very suitable as an indoor sporting activity.

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 0.3ha which sits along Hunting Gate off Wilbury Way. The site currently comprises a large warehouse of *Sui Generis* use, with a total gross internal area of 2,162.5sqm.
- 2.2 The site has a large, gated/fenced yard at the rear which is accessed down the left side of the warehouse building. There is also on-street parking at the front. Figure 1 below shows the approximate extent of the site outlined in red.



Figure 1 - Google Earth Image of the Site from June 2023 - Site indicated in red.

- 2.3 The existing site comprises 1,557sqm of ground floor warehousing space, plus 605.5sqm of ancillary office space in the front part of the building which is 3 storeys (see Figure 2 below).



Figure 2 - Google Image of the Site from March 2019 showing front office area.



Figure 3 - Photo of yard area (looking towards 5 Hunting Gate building) which is fenced and gated at the rear with access primarily from Hunting Gate.

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.
- 2.5 The site is not within a conservation area and there are no listed buildings in the vicinity of the site. It is within Flood Zone 1 and has very low risk of flooding from surface water and rivers and the sea.

Relevant Planning History

- 2.6 On 14 January 2011, an application was approved by Hertfordshire County Council for the proposed change of use of the existing building from storage and distribution (Class B8) to a waste recycling facility (*Sui Generis*) (LPA Ref. 10/02713/1CM, HCC Ref. PL/0316/10). The site was used from 2011 by Winters Haulage as a waste recycling facility with ancillary offices at the front serving as the occupier's head office and administration centre.

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 ETC3: New retail, leisure and other main town centre development
- 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* waste processing centre to a Class E indoor padel sports venue.

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

- Reception area created with access to male and female changing/shower area with toilets and disabled toilet/shower.
- Provision of 4 double padel courts (20mx 10m) and a single padel court (20m x 6m).
- Ancillary juice bar to serve players only.
- 29 car parking spaces and dedicated cycle parking in rear yard area accessed from Hunting Gate.
- Use of first and second floor office space for business administration and meeting rooms for sponsors and businesses interested in corporate events.

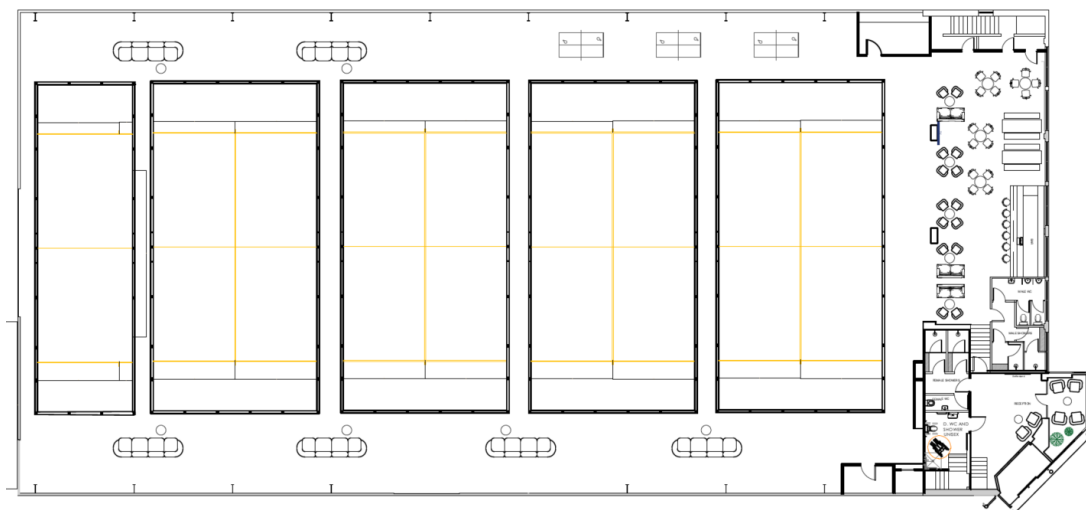


Figure 4 – Extract of Proposed Site Layout (Ground Floor)

5.0 **PLANNING ASSESSMENT**

Principle of Development

5.1 The application site is located in a safeguarded employment area and is therefore covered by Policy ETC1 which states that planning permission for other (non-employment) 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 The supporting text states that development proposals for uses in employment areas that are not for office, research and development, industrial processes, industrial and storage and distribution uses which seek to make use of the exception criteria of this policy will be considered on their merits. 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 waste management site, except the ancillary offices areas which are to be for office functions.
Impact on relevant town centres, including details of any sequential and / or impact testing	See below – the proposal does not require a sequential test and will not impact on Hitchin Town Centre.
Where appropriate, the level and type of retail involved on the site	Proposal is for indoor sport with ancillary café area. The ancillary café will not be licensed to serve alcohol and will not be

	advertised as a standalone venue. Café users will be padel court players already using the facility.
Any potential benefits to the community or surrounding businesses from the proposed use.	Proposal will have a substantial benefit to the community by providing a Padel centre to meet demand of UK fastest growing sport where there are currently no dedicated in North Herts.
The proportion of the site to be used for sales and display of motor trade uses;	N/A in this case.
Accessibility by non-car modes of transport.	The Site is 150m from bus stops on Wilbury Way providing connections into the centre of Hitchin and also to surrounding villages of Pirton and Henlow Camp/Lower Stondon. It is also a 5-10 minute cycle from Hitchin Town Centre and Railway Station.
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. The former waste site is no longer required by HCC for waste purposes. The size of site required for the Padel centre does not exist within Hitchin Town Centre and is generally found in industrial areas. Padel requires a minimum ceiling height of 6-metres and ideally 8-metres which means no suitable sites could be found outside the employment area for the proposal.

5.3 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”. Whilst a Class E(d) Indoor sport use, it is not considered that a Padel Centre is a more intensive sport use and is most similar to a local sport centres that would provide squash, badminton, tennis court etc which would not require a town centre sequential test. It is more of

a local community use than a town centre use. It is not a use which would draw footfall away from Hitchin Town Centre as it is a community indoor sport use which would be used in isolation and not as a linked activity with other town centre uses such as retail shopping, regardless of where it may be located. Further, there are no comparable buildings of this size or nature within Hitchin Town Centre boundary as the centre is historic and comprised of predominantly smaller retail units. As such the proposed use could not be accommodated within the town centre.

5.4 In accordance with the NPPF, positive weight should also be given to the proposed use in terms of the health and community benefits. Padel is the fastest growing sport in the UK and Europe. Presently there are no dedicated Padel centres in North Herts, with aspiring local players contending with many other sports for court time at local leisure centres. The growth of Padel should be supported as a grass roots sport as it can be played with minimal, inexpensive equipment and in all weathers as an indoor and outdoor sport (in this case, indoors). As a sport formed from a blend of tennis and squash, Padel is considered as a more relaxed and social sport than other racket sports and is suitable for players of all ages and skill levels. Additionally, three padel courts can fit in the same size as one tennis court making it very suitable as an indoor sporting activity. As such, the proposal contributes towards healthy places and lives as encouraged by the NPPF.

5.5 The proposal will provide a centre of Padel that will serve the community and meet local demand for the sport and will also be sufficient to host tournaments and matches that will enable the development of players and the sport as a whole. In this regard, the location lends itself to the proposed use by providing adequate on-site parking and good accessibility by bicycle and walking from surrounding housing developments, the town centre or the train station. The Applicant already has an expression of interest from over 400 local padel players.

- 5.6 As such, 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 Padel in the local area. As such, the proposal should be supported as a new community sports facility in accordance with Policy HC1 and the NPPF.

Design & Sustainability

- 5.7 The proposals will not result in any external alterations to the building. As such there are no material design implications arising from the proposal. The proposal is therefore appropriate for the character and appearance of the area.
- 5.8 The change of use will require some internal works at ground floor level to reflect the new use. Internally, five padel courts will be erected. Each padel court is individually enclosed by a glass and weld mesh rebound wall and fence panels which are 3 to 4 metres in height.

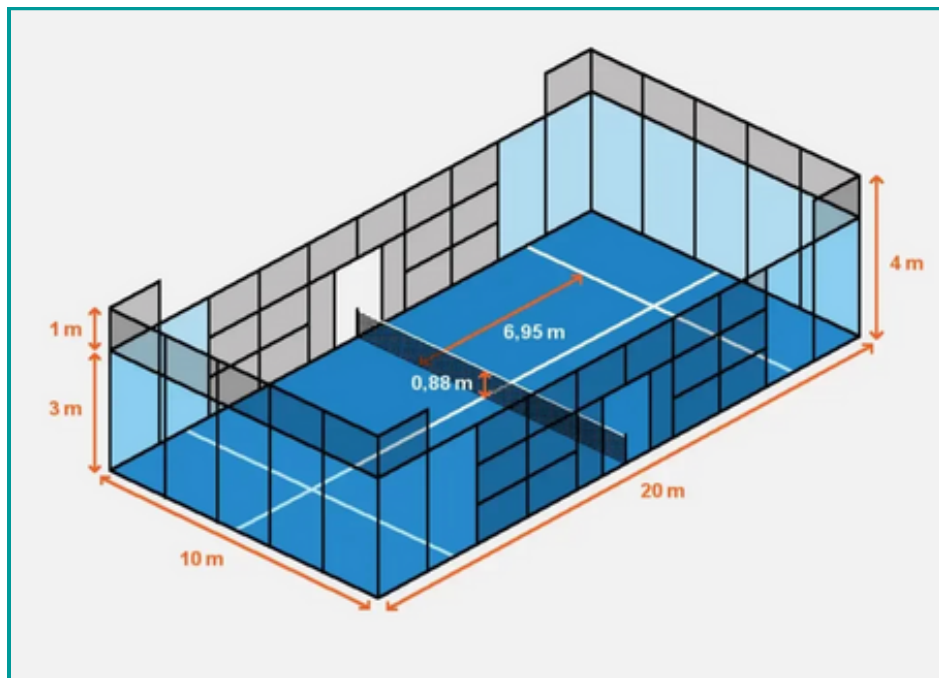


Figure 5 – Example of standard Padel court

- 5.9 The site will also be fit out at ground floor with a new reception area at the front entrance plus visitor showers and toilets. An ancillary juice bar area is also to be created beyond the reception area for use by customers only. Seating areas are to be provided around the courts for spectators taking a break from play.
- 5.10 The rear yard area will be reconfigured with white lines to create visitor parking and provision made for cycle parking. This area is not visible from Hunting Gate.
- 5.11 As such, the proposed scheme is considered to be acceptable in design and appearance terms.

Access & Parking

- 5.12 The application is supported by a Transport Statement prepared by EAS Transport Planning which confirms the following:
- Public transport is viable for many future staff members and patrons to the site.
 - 29 parking spaces are provided on-site to serve patrons and staff which is policy compliant.
 - In accordance with policy requirements, the proposals will provide 2 long-term cycle parking spaces for staff as well as 20 short-term cycle parking spaces for patrons. Additional cycle parking can be provided later based on demand.
 - The site is expected to continue being serviced as it currently is under its existing operation. There is a bin store located to the rear of the building within the car park where refuse will be collected from directly. There is ample space for a refuse vehicle to enter the site in forward gear, turn and exit in forward gear.

- The proposals are likely to engender a decrease of 11 and 6 vehicle trips in each of the AM and PM peak hours, as well as a decrease in 15 vehicular trips throughout the course of a day. Providing an improvement to the highway in terms of capacity and safety.

5.13 Overall, the assessment concludes that the proposed site is in an accessible location and is expected to result in a reduction in vehicular trip generation, while an appropriate level of parking is proposed based on the characteristics of the site and local area.

Hours of Operation

5.14 The Applicant intends to operate Padel from the preises between 6:00 to 00:00 Monday to Sunday to enable people to play before and after work and sometimes hold full day tournaments at weekends. However, given the location of the site and no potential for residential amenity impacts, there is no reason to restrict the hours of operation.

Biodiversity

5.15 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 re-use of a vacant and redundant non-employment (*Sui generis*) building within an Employment Area for an alternative use as a new community facility for Padel with ancillary office space.
- 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 Padel in the local area. As such, the proposal should be supported as a new community facility in accordance with Policy HC1.
- 6.3 The proposed scheme is supported by a Transport Statement which demonstrates that the change of use should be supported on transport and highways grounds.
- 6.4 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.