

Planning Statement

Planning application

Change of use from Dance Studio to Class B8 Storage

3 Bury Mead, Hitchin, SG5 1RT

DLA Ref: 24/330

July 2024

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION 1

2.0 SITE & CONTEXT ANALYSIS..... 2

3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY 3

4.0 POLICY CONTEXT 4

5.0 DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT..... 5

6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS..... 6

7.0 CONCLUSIONS 10

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1.0 Background

1.1.1 This report relates to a planning application for a change of use from Class E(d) (Dance Studio) to Class B8 (Storage and Distribution) at 3 Bury Mead, Hitchin.

1.2.0 Scope

1.2.1 This document comprises an overarching Planning Report. Sections 2 to 4 consider the physical, economic, social and historical context of the site, identifying the relevant local, regional and national planning policy framework; Section 5 sets out the details of the proposal; and Section 6 details the consultations undertaken prior to the submission of the application. The overall conclusions are set out in Section 7 and which are summarised below at paragraph 1.3.0.

1.3.0 Summary

1.3.1 The report will demonstrate that the proposal will restore a policy compliant use to an allocated Employment Area.

2.0 **SITE & CONTEXT ANALYSIS**

2.1.0 **Location**

2.1.1 The site is located on the south-western side of Bury Mead Road, close to the junction with Grove Road. It is located centrally within the town of Hitchin.

2.2.0 **Application Site**

2.2.1 No 3 is a two-storey, semi-detached property. The building has brick elevations and a tiled, pitched roof. The ground floor is occupied by Bennetts as part of their car parts and tools business. The first floor was previously ancillary offices but currently operates as a dance studio following a 2011 planning permission. The lease for the first floor expires in September 2024.

2.3.0 **Context**

2.3.1 The adjacent semi-detached property is occupied by a building company. The surrounding area is predominantly commercial in character.

2.4.0 **Proposals Map Notation**

2.4.1 The Policies Map of the North Herts Local Plan shows the site to be within a designated Employment Area.

3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

3.1.0 Application Site

3.1.1 The relevant history of the application site is summarised below.

LPA Ref	Proposal	Outcome
13/02001/1	Extension of opening hours to 09.00 to 22.00 (Monday to Friday) and 09.00 to 18.00 (Saturday & Sunday)	Approved 15.10.13
11/01395/1	Change of use of first floor from B1 (offices) to D2 (Dance School)	Approved 29.06.11
03/01766/1	Change of use from storage and offices to Class B2 and B8	Approved 12.01.04

4.0 POLICY CONTEXT

4.1.0 National Policy / Guidance

4.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023, sets out the Government's planning policies for England. The following sections are considered directly relevant:

- 2 Achieving sustainable development
- 6 Building a strong competitive economy
- 9 Promoting sustainable development
- 12 Achieving well-designed and beautiful places

4.2.0 Development Plan

4.2.1 This comprises the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031. The following policies are considered to be relevant.

Policy No.	Title
SP1	Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire
SP3	Employment
SP6	Sustainable transport
ETC1	Appropriate uses in Employment Areas
T1	Assessment of transport matters
T2	Parking
D1	Sustainable design
D3	Protecting living conditions

4.3.0 Supplementary Planning Guidance / Documents

4.3.1 Vehicle Parking at New Developments (2011)

5.0 DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT

5.1.0 Use

- 5.1.1 The proposal seeks a change of use from Class E(d) Dance Studio to Class B8 Storage and Distribution.

5.2.0 Layout, Appearance & Scale

- 5.2.1 The existing layout of the first floor would be retained. There would be no alterations to the external appearance of the building.

5.3.0 Landscaping

- 5.3.1 There would be no impact on any existing landscape features.

5.4.0 Access

- 5.4.1 The existing access and parking arrangements would be retained.

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

Based on the analysis set out in Sections 2 to 5, I consider that the application proposal raises the following issues, which I will consider in turn below:

1. Principle
2. Layout & Design
3. Highway Safety & Access

6.1.0 **Issue No 1: Principle**

6.1.1 **Policy Context**

Paragraph 85 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity.

6.1.2 Local Plan Policy SP3 advises that the Council will proactively encourage sustainable growth and support new and existing businesses. ETC1 states that within the protected employment areas permission will be granted for office, research and development, industrial processes, industrial and storage and distribution uses. It also requires B8 development to be easily accessible from the road network.

6.1.3 **Assessment**

6.1.4 **Provision of Class B8 floorspace**

The change of use of the first floor was sought at a time when Bennetts had no requirement for the use of that space. However, the company has experienced strong trade and now wishes to increase its stockholding. Using the upper floor would clearly be preferable to finding an alternative storage site in terms of both economies of scale and sustainability. It would also restore the site to a fully business related Use Class as sought by ETC1. The site is well located with regard to the surrounding road network, with easy access to Stevenage and Letchworth Garden City.

6.1.5 **Loss of Dance Studio**

The dance studio was allowed on the basis that it would bring a productive use to what was at the time a vacant floor within the building. However, a non-business related use was never policy compliant and that remains the case. The proposed Class B8 use would support the strategic land use objectives within the District and aid the economic development of a local business. These benefits would significantly outweigh any harm caused by the loss of a small recreational facility.

6.1.6 **Conclusion**

6.1.7 To conclude this issue, the proposal would restore a policy compliant use to a designated Employment Area. It would support the economic development of an existing business. The proposal would therefore comply with the provisions of the NPPF and Local Plan Policies SP3 and ETC1.

6.2.0 **Issue No 2: Layout & Design**

6.2.1 **Policy Context**

6.2.2 Paragraph 131 advises that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development. Paragraph 136 states that all development should ensure a high standard of amenity for existing and future users. Local Plan Policy D1 states that proposals should respond positively to their context and D3 seeks to protect the living conditions of existing developments.

6.2.3 **Assessment**

6.2.4 The proposal would not alter the external appearance of the building. The proposed first floor use would continue the existing use on the ground floor and so would not result in a change to the character of the site. Moreover, a Class B8 storage use is deemed to be acceptable for this location.

6.2.5 The dance studio has consent to open until 10.00 in the evening. The proposed use would operate during standard business hours and so would be less likely to impact on any nearby residential properties. The proposal would also not materially change the use of the wider site.

6.2.6 **Conclusion**

6.2.7 To conclude this issue, the proposed use would reflect the character of the Employment Area and would not detract from the residential amenity of any neighbouring occupiers. The proposal would therefore comply with the provisions of the NPPF and Local Plan Policies D1 and D3.

6.3.0 **Issue No 3: Highway Safety & Access**

6.3.1 **Policy Context**

6.3.2 Paragraph 115 of the NPPF states that development should only be prevented on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe. Local Plan Policy T1 similarly seeks to avoid issues with the surrounding highway network. T2 and the Parking SPD advise on the District's car parking standards.

6.3.3 **Assessment**

6.3.4 The proposal would support the existing use of the wider site for the sale and distribution of car parts. It would not introduce a new use and would not significantly alter how the business operates. The proposal would not have a material impact on the surrounding highway network and would likely result in a reduction in vehicular movements compared to the dance studio use.

6.3.5 The SPD Vehicle Parking at New Developments requires 1 space per 75m² for a B8 use. Leisure uses are determined on a case by case basis, but where the individual components of the use are not known it seeks 1 space per 15m². The proposal would therefore be likely to result in reduced requirements for off-street parking.

6.3.6 **Conclusion**

6.3.7 To conclude this issue, the proposal would have a neutral impact on highway safety and would not increase the demand for off-street parking. The proposal would therefore comply with the provisions of the NPPF, Local Plan Policies T1 and T2 and the Parking SPD.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

7.1.1 This report relates to a planning application for a change of use from Class E(d) (Dance Studio) to Class B8 (Storage and Distribution) at 3 Bury Mead, Hitchin. The proposal is promoted in the following circumstances:

- The proposal would restore a policy compliant use to a designated Employment Area. It would support the economic development of an existing business. The proposal would therefore comply with the provisions of the NPPF and Local Plan Policies SP3 and ETC1.
- The proposed use would reflect the character of the Employment Area and would not detract from the residential amenity of any neighbouring occupiers. The proposal would therefore comply with the provisions of the NPPF and Local Plan Policies D1 and D3.
- The proposal would have a neutral impact on highway safety and would not increase the demand for off-street parking. The proposal would therefore comply with the provisions of the NPPF, Local Plan Policies T1 and T2 and the Parking SPD.

DLA | Heritage

DLA | Strategic

DLA | Commercial

DLA | Residential

DLA | Leisure

DLA | *Solutions*