

REPORT FOR DECISION

MEETING: PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE
DATE: 16 NOVEMBER 2010
SUBJECT: USE OF EMPLOYMENT PREMISES
REPORT FROM: ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING,
ENVIRONMENTAL & REGULATORY SERVICES)
CONTACT OFFICER: D MARNO – DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

TYPE OF DECISION: COUNCIL
**FREEDOM OF
INFORMATION/STATUS:** This paper is within the public domain

SUMMARY: The report identifies a recent trend in proposals to change the use of existing employment premises to leisure or recreational uses often involving children and young people and sets out the planning policy position in response to such proposals.

**OPTIONS &
RECOMMENDED OPTION** The Committee is recommended to support the planning policy approach set out in this report.

IMPLICATIONS:

Corporate Aims/Policy Framework:	Do the proposals accord with the Policy Framework? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Financial Implications and Risk Considerations:	Director of Finance and E-Government to advise regarding risk management N/A
Statement by Director of Finance and E-Government:	N/A
Equality/Diversity implications:	N/A
Considered by Monitoring Officer:	N/A
Are there any legal implications?	No. The approach set out in this report is consistent with existing planning policies.
Staffing/ICT/Property:	N/A
Wards Affected:	All
Scrutiny Interest:	N/A

1.0 Introduction

In recent months the Planning Division has seen an increasing number of approaches from individuals and organisations wishing to change the use of buildings currently in business or industrial use to other uses involving children and young people.

- 1.1 Recent examples include proposals to change the use of:
 - A unit on Taylor Street in Freetown industrial area to a children's play centre;
 - A large unit within Mountheath Industrial Estate in Sedgley Park to a children's play centre;
 - A unit within Bridge Trading Estate in Bury for a sensory play facility for disabled children operated by the Boomerang charity;
 - A unit at Woodhill Street in Bury again operated by Boomerang;
 - A unit at Lowercroft for children's indoor football; and
 - A unit at Woodhill Road in Bury to a children's play centre.
- 1.2 In all of the above examples, the buildings are in reasonably good condition and in appropriate locations for continued employment use. Indeed, the first three examples have involved buildings within established concentrations of employment (i.e. Employment Generating Areas).
- 1.3 The purpose of this note is to seek confirmation that the current planning policy context is still appropriate and that the Members are satisfied with the current approach to this issue.

2.0 Current Planning Context

- 2.1 From a planning policy perspective, the Council has operated a longstanding and continuing policy of retaining appropriate employment land and premises in order to support the local economy and to maintain opportunities for people to secure local employment in business, industrial and warehousing uses (specifically through Policies EC2/1 and EC2/2 of the Unitary Development Plan). Proposals that involve the loss of employment premises following a change of use to a facility for children and young people are clearly not consistent with this policy approach.
- 2.2 It is apparent that employment premises are being targeted as they meet the size requirements for play centres etc. Furthermore, the recent economic downturn has resulted in a temporary drop in demand from businesses seeking industrial accommodation and, consequently, there is an increased number of such premises being vacant and on the market, often for fairly lengthy periods.
- 2.3 Nevertheless, from a planning policy perspective, it is considered important to take a longer-term view on these sites rather than make a 'knee jerk' response to current economic circumstances. The current economic downturn is forecast to recover to previous levels in the next five years or so whereas emerging planning policies in the Core Strategy (including policies to retain suitable employment land and premises) are designed to control growth and development and the use of land over the long-term i.e. to 2026.
- 2.4 It is important to recognise that once an employment site is lost it is highly unlikely to ever return to employment use. Furthermore, allowing the loss of existing employment premises may set a dangerous precedent during a period

where there is presently little market activity for occupying the buildings for business and industrial purposes.

- 2.5 There is also the issue of whether introducing uses involving children and young people into what are often predominantly industrial areas represents an appropriate mixture of uses given the potential conflicts and risks that may arise as a result.
- 2.6 Furthermore, the introduction of non-employment uses into concentrated areas of business and industrial uses has the potential to lead to uncertainty amongst other existing businesses in the area in terms of the Council's aspirations for the area and whether this may affect their future ability to operate as they do at present.

3.0 Proposed Approach

- 3.1 It is acknowledged that we do need to reflect the demand for these alternative uses and the current downturn and there will be some vacant employment premises which could be considered for alternative uses particularly where they are considered to be unfit for modern employment purposes.
- 3.2 There will also be some special circumstances where an alternative use may be considered acceptable on a temporary basis as was the case with the temporary replacement of the gymnastics facilities from Goshen within a unit on Bridge Trading Estate.
- 3.3 It is recommended that there is a continued presumption that these types of proposals are unacceptable where they involve the reuse of appropriate employment sites, particularly in established employment areas or involving modern, fit for purpose premises, or where the use would adversely affect neighbouring employment uses.**
- 3.4 It is further recommended that in each case it will also be essential to establish that the alternative use would be acceptable in terms of amenity, convenience and safety for the users and neighbours.**

List of Background Papers:-

Bury Unitary Development Plan
Emerging Core Strategy for the Bury Local Development Framework

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