

Retail, Office & Leisure Impact Assessment

Proposal: Change of use from Bingo Hall to Indoor Sports Complex/Gym with retention of existing bar/restaurant facilities

Site: Former Mecca Bingo, Smith Street, Rochdale, OL16 1YH

Prepared By Simon Plowman MA MRTPI
PLAN:8 TOWN PLANNING LTD
07792784924
info@plan8townplanning.co.uk

REGISTERED IN ENGLAND COMPANY NO. 06279898
M10 MAXRON HOUSE, GREEN LANE, STOCKPORT, SK6 3JQ

Proposal: Change of use from Bingo Hall to Indoor Sports Complex/Gym with retention of existing bar/restaurant facilities

Site: Former Mecca Bingo, Smith Street, Rochdale, OL16 1YH

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report has been prepared in support of an application for change of use from sui generis use as bingo hall to indoor sports complex and gym with ancillary café. The purpose of this statement is to consider whether the scheme is acceptable in town centre use policy terms. The report should be read in conjunction with the Planning Statement and Design and Access Statement.
- 2 The applicant requires the following of his intend business location:
 - At least 2800m² of internal covered space
 - Front and large door rear access
 - Close to public transport
 - Parking available
 - Cycle parking available
 - A 'blank canvas' floor space, without dozens of internal walls
 - High ceilings
 - Close to or within the town centre – preferably close to the peak land value intersection

Description of Site

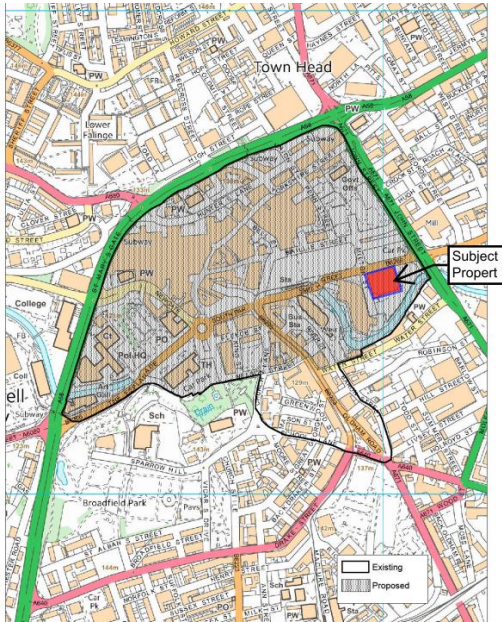
- 3 The site location is shown in red on the attached site location plan. The site on Smith Street is an existing part single storey/part two storey, former bingo hall with large central open space with ancillary space in rooms around the perimeter. The building is constructed from brown facing brick with a largely rectangular plan form with chamfered corners. There are limited windows facing onto the outside frontages. The use of the building has been a bingo hall operated by Mecca. The site is within the defined Town Centre of Rochdale.

Proposal

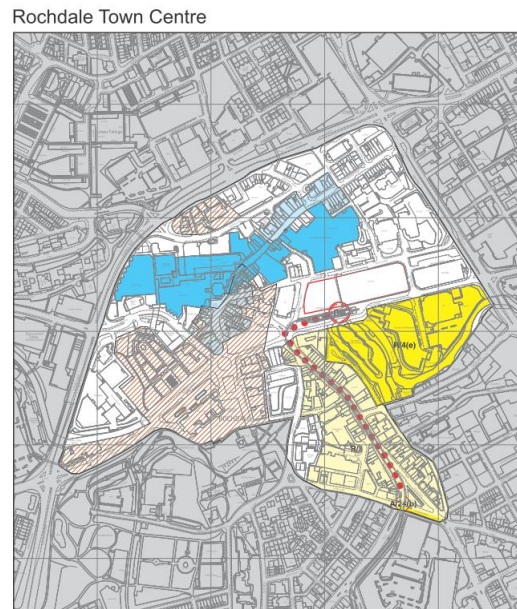
- 4 The proposed use is as an indoor sports hall with indoor football pitches, running lane and cricket lane/nets along with a gymnasium. There will be changing areas, and open aerobic and free weight sections. In addition, there will be a café serving food and drink. The café will be available for use of members and non-members alike. People that work in nearby buildings and visitors to the town centre could make use of the sports hall / gym and also the café.
- 5 Prior to the applicant taking an interest in the property the property had been marketed for lease by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. The method and length of marketing can be provided along with a commentary to explain demand for this property.

Established and Proposed Use Class

- 6 The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020 brought a change to the classification of use classes in England.
- 7 Prior to the 2020 Regulations coming into force both the existing bingo hall and indoor sports centre were within the old D2 classification; the change prior to the 2020 Regulations would not have required planning permission.
- 8 Following the 2020 Regulations coming into force the established use as a bingo hall is now not specified within a category, therefore, being sui generis. Any change of use from the established use would therefore be development requiring planning permission.
- 10 The proposed use as an indoor sports and recreation centre is a defined leisure use within use class E of the Use Classes Regulations. The proposed use is a main town centre use. Other uses also within use class E include: retail shops; café; restaurant; offices; creche; offices where members of the public visit. A significant reason for the change of use classes was to bring together uses within the same class (Class E) which are commonly found in town centre locations. As noted above the application site is within the defined Rochdale Town Centre, this is shown on the extract plans below:



Extract above from Rochdale Borough Council Draft Allocations Plan



Extract above from Rochdale UDP

Planning Policy Town Centre Uses Appraisal

- 11 The policy framework consists of the Rochdale Core Strategy 2018, saved UDP and National Planning policy Framework. Of some relevance is also the Rochdale Town centre East Area Framework SPD of 2007.
- 12 Policy SO1 of the Core Strategy has the overarching aim of delivering a more prosperous economy including as one of 6 core principles *“Establishing strong thriving attractive town centres, particularly Rochdale town centre”*. This is supported in more detail by other policies in the development plan including policy SP1 *‘Rochdale borough’s role in the city region’* which aims to: *“Promote the borough as an attractive location in terms of jobs, housing, shopping, the environment, image, tourism and quality of life”*. In addition SP2 *‘The Spatial Strategy for the borough’* confirms that the plan aims to *“focus investment, development and improvements on: Rochdale, Heywood and Middleton town centres;”*
- 13 In more detail policy SP3/R *‘The Strategy for Rochdale’* states the aims are to *“Transform Rochdale town centre”* by amongst other factors: *“Focusing growth and major retail, leisure and office developments which will maintain and reinforce the centre as the main town centre”*. In regard to this policy SP3/R links to policies E1 & P1.

- 14 Policy E1 is relevant to the Sequential Approach as it aims to strengthen the role of Rochdale town centre as well as the borough's district and local centres and direct proposals for main town centre uses towards them:

"We will focus retail, leisure, cultural, office, residential and other development to promote the viability and vitality of all the borough's town centres to maintain them as thriving and sustainable centres and the preferred shopping and leisure destinations for people living, working and visiting the borough." (Policy E1, Rochdale Core Strategy, 2016).

- 15 In part to achieve the above aims the Core Strategy confirms that Rochdale town centre is the Boroughs principal town and top of the Borough hierarchy. It is considered that planning decisions will be taken to accord with policy E1 to:

1. *"Promote a scale of retail and leisure development in the above centres which is appropriate to their size, catchment and role taking into account the most up to date retail capacity figures."* (Policy E1, Rochdale Core Strategy, 2016).
2. *"Protect and safeguard the core retail function of Primary Shopping Areas through restricting certain non A1 retail and retail uses within Primary and Secondary Shopping Frontages."* (Policy E1, Rochdale Core Strategy, 2016).
3. *"Only consider out of centre development when there are no suitable sites in, or on the edge, or well connected to, the town centre, district centres or local centres and the proposal would cause no significant overall impact on the existing centres vitality and viability;"* (Policy E1, Rochdale Core Strategy, 2016).
4. *"Support the expansion of the evening economy through a number of mixed uses such as restaurants/bars/ theatres and quality housing on appropriate sites, or through conversion of upper floors, which will enhance the vitality of the centre, making it a more vibrant, active and safer place in the afternoon and evening;"* (Policy E1, Rochdale Core Strategy, 2016).

- 16 In response to the above four criteria we comment:

1. The scale of leisure use proposed is suitable to the subject building, it makes use of an existing empty building and will a) attract visitors to the town centre as destination and encourage linked trips to other uses in the town centre and b) help to provide enhanced reasons for shoppers and workers to stay in the town centre
2. The site is not within the core retail function of the centre
3. The proposal is in centre

4. The proposal will be operational during the day and evening and thereby will enhance the evening offer of the town centre
- 17 We find that the proposal will enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre in accordance with the aims of policy E1.
- 18 Policy E1 further confirms that when considering applications for main town centre uses, which of course this proposal is, the Council will:
- “a. Require the application of the sequential approach, where the application site is not in an existing centre and not in accordance with an up to date development plan;*
- “b. Require an impact assessment for retail, leisure and office where the proposed application exceed the locational requirements floorspace thresholds set out in the reasoned justification below. This should include an assessment of the proposals within a defined catchment area and wider depending on the size of the application;*
- “c. Seek to ensure that the number of non A1 retail uses at ground floor level in Primary Shopping Frontages does not exceed 20% of its total length;*
- “d. Seek to ensure a high proportion of A1 retail uses in the Secondary Shopping Frontages whilst accommodating, where appropriate, a wider range of other retail and town centre uses;”*
- 19 In response to criteria a to d we comment:
- a) The proposal is a main town centre use within the main town centre – as such the proposal complies with the sequential approach;
- b) The RJ requires an impact assessment to be undertaken where floor area exceeds 2000sq.m. and the site is outside of a defined centre. The proposal is 2800sq.m. but is within the defined town centre, as such an impact assessment is not required;
- c) The proposal is not within the Primary Shopping Frontages and as such the proposal complies with this criteria;
- d) The proposal is within but on the edge of the town centre as such the intended leisure use is appropriate with regard to E1.
- 20 In support of our responses to criteria a to d of E1 of the Core Strategy we note that leisure uses are considered essential to attract visitors to the town centre and improve vitality and viability; the Town Centre East SPD confirms that:
- “New leisure facilities may help to attract additional retail to the centre as complementary services enhance the night-time economy and add vibrancy to the town centre. The Council will apply the sequential test to ensure that*

major new leisure facilities are located in the town centre. The type of facility that should be considered is wide ranging from arts, cultural and family entertainment facilities, such as theatres, cinemas, and concert halls to nightclubs, bingo halls and fitness clubs. Such facilities are generally more appropriately located either outside the Primary Shopping Area or above retail development but should be well integrated with other uses.” (Paragraph 4.27 Rochdale Town Centre East Area Framework – Adopted December 2007).

- 21 Further to the above in considering area based approaches to town centre uses in Rochdale town centre policy E1/R ‘Establishing Rochdale as a thriving town centre’ seeks to: *“Support a greater mix of uses and improve the public realm around the Butts and Smith Street to help create a focal point for activities, events and visitor attractions;”* (Policy E1/R, Rochdale Core Strategy, Adopted October 2016)

- 22 The proposed indoor sports complex at this location on Smith Street complies with the aims and objectives of policies E1, E1/R, SP3/R, SO1 of the Core Strategy and the Rochdale Town Centre East Area Framework.

- 23 Turning to national policy the NPPF focuses policies and strategies toward sustainable development. There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles:

-an economic role, contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;

- a social role, supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the communities needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and

- an environmental role, contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.

- 24 In the broadest sense we suggest the proposal complies with each of these three pillars by 1) helping provide a strong local economy by adding to the

offer of Rochdale Town Centre; 2) helping the wider community have increased opportunity for sporting activity and social interaction throughout the year and at all times of the day and evening; and 3) by re-using an existing building.

- 25 The NPPF also sets out how applications for main town centre uses in an existing centre should be assessed. In paragraph 86 we learn that planning decisions: *"should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation."* (Paragraph 86, NPPF, 2021). We also note that in paragraph 87 the NPPF confirms the approach in the above mentioned Rochdale policies that: *"Main town centre uses should be located in town centres"*. We consider that the proposed use of the former bingo hall as a sports complex does indeed take a positive approach to management and adaptation of the town centre by ensuring re-use of an existing building with a use that will encourage new footfall to the town centre throughout the day and the evening.

Conclusion

- 26 The above policies do not concern competition between existing uses and proposed uses rather the focus is upon concentrating town centre uses toward town centres if availability and suitability allows. In this case the subject building and site is within a town centre. The proposed use is a town centre use.
- 27 The application site is empty, available and would otherwise remain vacant. It is located in an area of very high accessibility by public transport close to other leisure, retail and office uses.
- 28 The applicant intends to create employment running the sports complex and employment would be created during the conversion of the premises. This is a significant investment in the local area and otherwise the building could remain empty. The Framework (NPPF) specifically advises that LPAs should consider favourably applications to re-use previously developed land such as the application site.
- 29 Furthermore paragraph 11 of NPPF advises: *"Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development..... For decision-taking this means: approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay;"*

- 30 The proposal as demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs complies with all the listed policies relating to town centre uses generally and in addition to policies relating specifically to the site location of Smith Street in Rochdale.
- 31 The proposed development is acceptable in principle. The mix of uses proposed would bring into use and regenerate an underused site. The proposal would have a beneficial impact on the character of the surrounding area by providing additional footfall all day long including into the evenings. The proposed development would not be detrimental to highway safety. There are no other material considerations that outweigh this finding. We trust the Council will be able to recommend the application favourably as the proposal is sustainable development that accords with the Local Plan.