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PLANNING STATEMENT

Proposed Change of Use of Existing Industrial Unit (Class B2) to Gymnasium, Health, Fitness and Community Facility

Site: 3a / 3b Stockton Street, Littleborough, Rochdale

Applicant: Life Without Limits / LWL Gym

Local Planning Authority: Rochdale Borough Council

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of an application for the change of use of an existing industrial unit on Stockton Street, Littleborough, from its existing Class B2 general industrial use to provide a gymnasium and wider health, fitness, sport and recreation facility operated by Life Without Limits, trading as LWL Gym with operational hours of:

- Monday – Friday 6:00 – 22:00
- Saturday – Sunday 8:00 – 20:00

The proposal relates principally to the change of use of an existing building use class. No external extensions, new openings or structural alterations are proposed. The existing building, access arrangements to the site and associated parking provision will therefore remain substantially unchanged.

The premises already contain toilet, changing and office facilities suitable for the proposed occupation. The application consequently represents the re-use and adaptation of an existing commercial building rather than the development of a new building or the redevelopment of the site.

A total of 36 on-site parking spaces are available, comprising approximately 5 staff spaces and 28 membership/customer spaces.

The proposed use would provide an expanded facility for LWL Gym, an established independent fitness business operating within the Rochdale Borough. The business currently provides gym and fitness facilities alongside group exercise, personal training, children's fitness, physiotherapy, rehabilitation, Pilates, recovery and wellbeing services. The applicant's supporting information confirms that the business currently involves approximately 12 staff and associated health and fitness professionals and is seeking larger premises to facilitate continued growth.

The proposal therefore represents the expansion of an established local business rather than the introduction of an untested commercial operation.

The principal planning considerations are:

1. The principle of changing an existing industrial/employment use to a leisure use;
2. The impact upon the supply of employment land and local employment;
3. The suitability of the site for a gym and indoor recreation facility;
4. The accessibility and sustainability of the location;
5. The sequential approach applicable to main town centre uses;
6. Highway safety, parking and access;

7. The relationship with neighbouring commercial and industrial uses;
8. The health, wellbeing and community benefits of the proposal; and
9. The economic benefits arising from the continued growth of LWL Gym.

It is considered that, when assessed as a whole, the proposal represents an appropriate and sustainable use of an existing commercial building which would provide substantial local economic, health and community benefits without requiring physical redevelopment of the site.

2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

The application site is located off Stockton Street within the established Littleborough Industrial Estate.

Stockton Street forms part of an established commercial and industrial area close to Littleborough town centre. The surrounding area is characterised principally by industrial, warehouse, trade and other commercial premises.

The location is particularly well connected in the context of Littleborough. The industrial estate is accessed from the A58 and is approximately 0.5 miles from Littleborough town centre. Littleborough railway station is approximately 0.5 miles from the industrial estate, providing direct rail connections towards Rochdale and Manchester.

The site is consequently not an isolated employment location remote from the settlement. It is a highly accessible urban commercial location immediately adjoining the built-up area of Littleborough and within a short distance of the town centre and railway station.

The existing premises are already capable of accommodating employment-generating commercial activity and have previously been occupied by a trade counter operation employing approximately six people.

3.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The application seeks permission for the change of use of the existing industrial premises to a gymnasium and indoor sport, recreation and fitness facility.

The proposal does not involve any extension of the existing building or the introduction of any new openings. All existing structure is to remain in place and all external parking facilities and access arrangements are to remain as existing.

The principal purpose of the application is therefore to establish the planning use of the premises for operation as a gym and associated indoor health, fitness and recreation facility.

The facility would provide a broader range of services than a conventional unsupervised gym, including:

- General gym and fitness provision;
- Strength and conditioning;
- Personal training;
- Group exercise;
- Children's fitness and sports coaching;
- Pilates and Reformer Pilates;
- Physiotherapy and rehabilitation;
- recovery and wellbeing services;
- Nutritional and online coaching; and
- Education, training and work experience opportunities.

The applicant intends to operate the premises as a professionally managed and supervised facility, providing structured activities alongside conventional gym membership.

4.0 BACKGROUND TO LWL GYM

LWL Gym is an established independent fitness business operating within the Rochdale Borough.

The business has developed significantly since its establishment and currently employs and works alongside approximately 12 staff members and health and fitness professionals providing a wide range of services and facilities.

The proposed premises would allow the business to consolidate and expand these activities within a larger facility.

Importantly, the application is not therefore speculative in nature. The proposal is being brought forward in response to the established growth of an existing local business and its requirement for premises capable of supporting its next stage of development.

The applicant anticipates that the expanded operation could at least double the existing workforce and professional team as the business develops.

The proposed use would therefore continue and increase the employment function of the premises while simply changing the nature of the employment generated.

5.0 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

5.1 Development Plan

The statutory development plan for Rochdale currently comprises the adopted Places for Everyone plan together with the Rochdale Core Strategy and other adopted development plan documents.

Places for Everyone became part of the statutory development plan on 21 March 2024.

Rochdale Borough Council is also progressing a new Local Plan. The Publication Local Plan was published in August 2026 and is currently subject to consultation, with representations invited until 25 September 2026. It is therefore an emerging plan rather than an adopted part of the development plan.

The current application should therefore principally be assessed against the adopted development plan, the August 2026 National Planning Policy Framework and other material considerations. The emerging Local Plan is nevertheless a relevant material consideration, with the weight to be afforded to its policies determined in accordance with the NPPF.

The NPPF confirms that weight may be given to emerging policies having regard to the stage of preparation, the extent of unresolved objections and the degree of consistency with national policy.

6.0 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The current NPPF was published in August 2026 and replaced the previous December 2024 Framework.

The Framework identifies three overarching objectives for sustainable development: an economic objective, a social objective and an environmental objective.

The economic objective seeks to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity.

The social objective seeks to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, including through accessible community facilities and infrastructure which support health, social and cultural wellbeing.

Both objectives are directly relevant to the current proposal.

6.1 Economic Development

NPPF Policy E1 seeks to create the conditions for long-term economic growth and specifically recognises the need to support the expansion or modernisation of businesses of local, regional or national importance, including leisure and tourism businesses. The proposal directly supports this objective.

LWL Gym is an established local business seeking to expand its operation within the Rochdale Borough. The development would retain an employment-generating use on the site and is expected to result in a significant increase in the number of employment and self-employment opportunities associated with the premises.

The proposal should therefore not be regarded simply as the loss of an industrial unit. It represents a change from one employment-generating commercial activity to another, with the potential for a higher level and broader range of employment.

6.2 Healthy Communities

The health benefits of the proposal are particularly relevant to NPPF Chapter 16.

Policy HC4 states that substantial weight should be given to proposals which make a demonstrable contribution towards promoting good health, preventing ill-health, reducing health inequalities or supporting social interaction, including through new recreation facilities. The proposed facility would directly contribute to these objectives by providing facilities and amenities for regular physical activity and training including strength and cardiovascular fitness, children's exercise and sports coaching, Pilates and group exercise / classes. Outside general exercise facilities, the proposal also includes facilities for rehabilitation, physiotherapy, supervised exercise, structured fitness programmes and broader health and wellbeing activities.

The facility would cater for a broad range of users, including beginners, older people, individuals returning to exercise and people undertaking rehabilitation, rather than being limited to experienced gym users.

The proposal therefore has a clear and direct relationship with national policy objectives concerning health and wellbeing.

7.0 PRINCIPLE OF THE LOSS OF B2 EMPLOYMENT USE

The principal policy concern associated with the proposal is the change from an industrial use to a leisure use within an established employment area. This issue is acknowledged and has been carefully considered.

The proposal does not involve the conversion of employment land to residential development or another use which would remove the site from economic activity. Instead, it would retain an active commercial and employment-generating use.

The premises were previously occupied by a trade counter employing approximately six people. By contrast, LWL Gym currently operates with approximately 12 staff and associated professionals and anticipates further expansion at the proposed premises.

The applicant anticipates that the workforce and professional team could at least double as the expanded operation develops. Consequently, the proposal has the potential to increase rather than diminish local employment which is an important material consideration when assessing the effect of the proposal upon the employment function of the area.

The adopted Rochdale Core Strategy Policy E2 seeks to ensure a sufficient supply of suitable employment land and premises while also recognising the importance of other employment-generating uses. Policy E2 provides for other uses where it can be demonstrated that they are more appropriate, subject to the relevant criteria.

The emerging Local Plan takes a similarly flexible approach. Draft Policy PR9 seeks to protect employment zones and employment sites but allows alternative uses in defined circumstances, including where a site is no longer suited to employment use, where regeneration objectives are supported, or where redevelopment enables reinvestment which will provide jobs in the borough.

The proposal is particularly consistent with the latter objective because the alternative use would facilitate significant reinvestment in the premises and support additional employment.

There is therefore no basis to conclude that the proposal would undermine the economic function of the area simply because the particular employment activity would change.

The proposal should instead be viewed as supporting the continued employment function of an established commercial location while allowing the premises to respond to changing economic requirements.

8.0 LOCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

The location of the proposal is a significant positive consideration. Littleborough is a substantial established settlement with a significant residential population and a range of existing services and facilities. The application site sits within the urban area and immediately adjacent to a densely developed residential catchment.

The proposed gym is intended principally to serve residents of Littleborough and the surrounding area.

This local catchment is important because the provision of an accessible fitness facility within Littleborough reduces the need for residents to travel elsewhere for equivalent services. Without accessible local provision, residents may instead need to travel to larger facilities elsewhere within Rochdale or beyond, including facilities such as JD Gyms in Rochdale.

The proposed location therefore has the potential to intercept trips which would otherwise involve travel outside Littleborough. This is consistent with the objectives of sustainable transport policy, which seek to minimise the number and length of journeys required to access leisure and other services.

The site is approximately 0.5 miles from Littleborough town centre and railway station.

The proposal therefore represents a sustainable re-use of an existing urban commercial building.

9.0 MAIN TOWN CENTRE USE AND SEQUENTIAL TEST

A gymnasium/health and fitness centre is a main town centre use for the purposes of national planning policy.

The August 2026 NPPF Policy TC3 states that a sequential test should be applied to main town centre uses requiring planning permission where they are neither in an existing centre nor allocated for that purpose in an up-to-date development plan. The sequential hierarchy is town centre locations first, followed by edge-of-centre locations and then out-of-centre locations. The Framework also requires flexibility concerning format and scale.

The proposal is therefore appropriately considered against the sequential approach.

The applicant has selected Stockton Street because the premises provide the particular characteristics required by the proposed operation, including:

- large existing floorplate capable of accommodating gym equipment and exercise areas;
- Existing changing and welfare facilities;
- Existing commercial access;
- Extensive existing on-site parking;
- An established commercial/industrial environment;
- Suitable building height and configuration;
- Separation from sensitive residential accommodation; and
- A location immediately adjoining the residential catchment the facility is intended to serve.

A conventional town centre unit is unlikely to provide an equivalent combination of floor area, configuration, parking and operational characteristics.

The emerging Rochdale Local Plan is also instructive. Draft Policy PR5 confirms that health and fitness/leisure uses should follow the sequential approach but identifies a 500 sq m gross floorspace threshold for Littleborough and District/Local Centres above which an impact assessment is required. The policy expressly applies the threshold to changes of use; as such a separate sequential test report has been provided to support this application.

The Stockton Street premises provide a combination of characteristics which are particularly suited to this type of facility and which are unlikely to be readily replicated within conventional town centre premises.

Furthermore, the site is itself closely related to Littleborough town centre and railway station and is not a remote or isolated out-of-centre location.

10.0 RELEVANT LOCAL POLICY: COMMUNITY, SPORT AND LEISURE

Rochdale Core Strategy Policy C8 relates to improving community, sport, leisure and cultural facilities.

The policy supports the provision of built facilities in appropriate locations and recognises that sports and active leisure facilities, including health and fitness centres, are increasingly important in improving health and wellbeing.

The Council's supporting evidence identifies the importance of sport and physical activity in improving health and wellbeing and recognises the need for accessible facilities.

The policy's underlying objective is therefore strongly supportive of the type of facility proposed, subject to ensuring that the location is appropriate and accessible.

The current proposal provides a particularly strong response to this objective because it would place a substantial health and fitness facility directly within the Littleborough urban area, allowing local residents to access the facility without having to travel to larger settlements. The proposal is therefore consistent with the wider objective of providing community, sport and leisure facilities in accessible locations which serve local needs.

11.0 ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

The employment benefits of the proposal are substantial and should be given significant weight. The previous trade counter use provided employment for approximately six people.

LWL Gym currently employs and works alongside approximately 12 staff and health and fitness professionals and anticipates that the proposed expansion could at least double its workforce and professional team.

The proposal would also support self-employed professionals operating within the health and fitness sector.

The applicant therefore anticipates a substantial increase in employment associated with the premises.

Wider economic benefits include increased membership base and workforce which would generate expenditure within Littleborough and the wider Rochdale Borough. The operation would require professional services, maintenance, cleaning, equipment, supplies and other goods and services consequently contributing to the diversification of the local economy while retaining investment within the borough.

12.0 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

A particularly important element of the proposal is the expansion of children's fitness and sports coaching.

The applicant's existing business already provides children's fitness activities and intends to substantially increase this provision within the larger premises. The facility would allow structured sessions addressing:

- Movement and coordination;
- Cardiovascular fitness;
- Strength and conditioning;
- Teamwork, confidence and discipline;
- Fundamental sporting skills; and
- Longer-term healthy lifestyle habits.

This represents a significant community benefit beyond the provision of conventional gym membership.

The facility would provide a structured environment in which children can participate in physical activity under suitable supervision and could assist young people in developing an early and positive relationship with exercise. The applicant also intends to explore opportunities for students and young people to obtain practical experience within the health and fitness sector through work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.

13.0 PARTNERSHIP WITH HOPWOOD HALL COLLEGE, LOCAL SKILLS AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

LWL is has on going links and growth with Hopwood Hall College with the aim of providing opportunities for local college students to gain practical work experience and placements within the fitness industry. This developing relationship provides an opportunity for students from the local area to gain valuable exposure to a professional working environment, develop practical skills and gain an understanding of the range of employment opportunities available within the health, fitness and wellbeing sector.

As the business continues to grow, LWL's longer-term ambition is to increase the number of opportunities available to young people within the fitness industry, providing a pathway between education and employment for students who are interested in pursuing careers within fitness, personal training, coaching and related areas. The proposed larger

premises at Stockton Street would provide LWL with the additional space and facilities necessary to support the continued development of these initiatives alongside the expansion of its wider operations.

This represents a further community benefit arising from the proposal, helping to retain and develop employment opportunities locally while supporting young people in gaining relevant skills, experience and potential routes into employment. The proposal would therefore not only facilitate the growth of an established local business, but would also provide a platform from which LWL can expand its contribution to local skills development, youth employment and career opportunities within the fitness sector.

14.0 EDUCATION, TRAINING AND LOCAL CAREERS

The applicant is currently in liaison with Hopwood Hall College regarding potential opportunities to work with students studying sports, fitness and related subjects. The proposed facility would provide a practical environment in which students could obtain work experience and industry placements, gain coaching experience and be mentored by senior team members through practical experience and observation. This creates clear pathways for students and young people into employment and apprenticeships.

The proposed development therefore has the potential to create a link between local education, training and employment. This is a further benefit which would not arise from continued use of the premises solely for conventional industrial purposes.

15.0 HIGHWAYS, PARKING AND ACCESS

The proposal would utilise the existing site access and parking arrangements, currently the parking provision is offered via an open tarmacked area to the front of the site; the proposal would look to adopt a structured parking plan suitable for the site. No new access or significant external highway works are proposed.

A total of 36 parking spaces are available within the site, comprising approximately 5 staff spaces and 28 membership/customer spaces.

The availability of 28 dedicated membership spaces is particularly important given the nature of the proposed use. The proposal therefore does not seek to rely upon unrestricted on-street parking within the surrounding industrial estate.

The current NPPF requires development proposals to provide suitable parking having regard to the location, nature and connectivity of the development and local parking standards. It also requires development generating significant movement to be appropriately located and for unacceptable highway impacts to be avoided.

In this instance, the existing commercial nature of the site, its established highway access and the provision of 36 on-site spaces provide a strong basis for concluding that the proposal can be accommodated without unacceptable highway or parking impacts.

The site's proximity to Littleborough town centre and railway station also provides opportunities for members and staff to travel by means other than the private car.

16.0 RELATIONSHIP WITH SURROUNDING INDUSTRIAL USES

The proposed use is considered compatible with the existing character of the area. The premises are located within an established commercial and industrial environment. The use would remain entirely within the existing building and would not introduce a residentially sensitive use.

A gym is also compatible with a commercial location of this nature, subject to appropriate management of matters such as noise, servicing, opening hours and parking.

The proposed use is principally internal and therefore would have no material visual effect upon the appearance of the industrial estate with no new windows or openings are proposed and no physical changes to the external appearance of the building are required.

The proposal would therefore not prevent surrounding businesses from continuing to operate.

This is consistent with the approach of both adopted and emerging Rochdale employment policy, which seeks to ensure that alternative uses do not adversely affect the operation of existing businesses.

17.0 DESIGN AND VISUAL IMPACT

The proposal involves no material external alteration to the existing building.

There would consequently be no significant change to scale of the existing building, external appearance, its relationship with neighbouring buildings or the site layout.

The development represents the sustainable re-use of an existing building and therefore makes effective use of previously developed land without requiring additional land take.

The absence of external alterations also means that the proposal would have negligible visual impact.

18.0 PRECEDENT FOR GYMS WITHIN INDUSTRIAL LOCATIONS

The use of industrial premises for gyms and indoor fitness facilities is well established in the planning system. There are numerous examples of industrial buildings being successfully adapted for gymnasium and indoor sports uses.

A particularly relevant example is Unit 5A, Denaby Main Industrial Estate, Coalpit Road, Old Denaby, Doncaster, where planning permission was granted for the change of use of an industrial unit/workshop falling within Classes B1/B2/B8 to a gymnasium (formerly Class D2), application reference [18/02838/COU](#). The application was approved in January 2019.

More recently, 3B Nine Trees Trading Estate, Morthen Road, Thurcroft, received conditional planning permission in August 2026 for the change of use of an industrial unit to a gymnasium.

A further recent example is Unit 5, Hanley Workshops, Hanley Swan, where planning permission was approved in August 2026 for the change of use of a light industrial unit to a gymnasium (Class E(d)).

These examples demonstrate that the principle of locating gyms within existing industrial/commercial buildings is not unusual in planning terms.

Importantly, the relevance of these examples is not that they establish a binding precedent. Each planning application must be determined on its individual merits. Rather, they demonstrate that the reuse of industrial buildings for health and fitness purposes can be an appropriate planning response where issues such as employment, accessibility, parking, highway safety and compatibility with neighbouring uses can be satisfactorily addressed.

The current proposal benefits from a particularly strong combination of these factors.

19.0 BENEFITS TO LITTLEBOROUGH

The proposal would provide a number of specific benefits to Littleborough.

Local access to health and fitness

The facility would provide a significant health and fitness service directly within Littleborough, serving residents of the town and its surrounding communities.

This is particularly beneficial given the substantial residential catchment surrounding the site.

Reduced need to travel

Providing a local facility would reduce the need for residents to travel to Rochdale or other settlements to access comparable gym facilities.

This is consistent with the principle of locating services close to the communities they serve.

Employment

The proposal has the potential to significantly increase employment associated with the premises, compared with the previous trade counter operation.

Children's activity

The proposal would substantially expand opportunities for children's fitness and sports coaching.

Health and wellbeing

The combination of gym facilities, coached exercise, physiotherapy, rehabilitation, Pilates and recovery services would provide a broad health and wellbeing offer.

Education and training

The proposed links with Hopwood Hall College would provide potential opportunities for students and young people to gain practical experience within the health and fitness sector.

Investment in an existing building

The proposal would facilitate continued investment in established commercial premises without requiring demolition, extension or redevelopment.

Support for the local economy

The expanded business would retain investment, expenditure and employment within Littleborough and the wider Rochdale Borough.

20.0 BALANCING THE PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The proposal must be considered in the context of the competing planning objectives associated with the retention of employment land and the provision of accessible leisure and health facilities.

The applicant acknowledges that the premises are currently used for employment purposes and that the retention of a suitable supply of employment land is an important planning objective.

However, the proposal would not result in the loss of an employment-generating function.

Instead, it would retain the building a commercial employment use while facilitating expansion of an established local business with potential increase employment and self-employment. The proposal would also introduce a significant local health and fitness facility catered to all age groups while making effective sustainable use of an existing building.

The proposal also avoids many of the impacts commonly associated with redevelopment proposals because no new building, extension, access or significant external works are proposed.

The planning balance therefore weighs strongly in favour of the application.

21.0 CONCLUSION

The proposed development represents the appropriate re-use of an existing industrial building within Littleborough for an established and expanding local business.

The proposal would change the use of the premises from Class B2 general industrial use to a gymnasium and indoor sport, recreation and fitness facility. No external extensions, new openings or structural alterations are proposed, while the existing toilet, changing, access and parking arrangements would be retained.

The proposal is supported by a number of significant planning benefits.

First, it would facilitate the continued growth of an established Rochdale-based independent business and has the potential to substantially increase employment associated with the premises. The applicant currently employs and works alongside approximately 12 staff and professionals and anticipates that the workforce could at least double as the business expands.

Second, the proposal would provide a substantial new or expanded health and fitness resource for Littleborough. The facility would offer not only conventional gym provision but also children's fitness, coached exercise, personal training, physiotherapy, rehabilitation, Pilates and recovery services.

Third, the location is highly accessible to the local population. Stockton Street is immediately adjoining the built-up area of Littleborough and is located close to both Littleborough town centre and railway station. The facility would therefore serve a substantial local residential catchment and reduce the need for residents to travel outside Littleborough to access comparable facilities.

Fourth, the proposal would make effective use of an existing commercial building and would not require additional land take or physical redevelopment.

Fifth, the proposed 36-space on-site car park provides a significant level of dedicated parking for staff and members, reducing the potential for parking displacement onto surrounding streets.

Sixth, the proposed use is compatible with the commercial and industrial character of the surrounding area and would not prevent neighbouring businesses from continuing to operate.

The current National Planning Policy Framework places significant emphasis upon economic growth, healthy communities, sustainable transport and the effective use of existing buildings. The proposal responds positively to each of these objectives.

The principle of locating gyms and indoor fitness facilities within existing industrial premises is also well established, with planning permissions having been granted elsewhere for comparable changes of use from industrial buildings to gymnasium uses.

While the proposal is a main town centre use and must therefore be considered against the sequential approach, the Stockton Street premises provide a combination of size, layout, parking, accessibility and operational characteristics that make the building particularly suitable for the proposed use. The site is also closely related to Littleborough town centre and benefits from good sustainable transport connections.

In respect of employment land, the proposal should not be considered as the simple loss of a B2 employment site. It represents the continued commercial use of the premises by an established local employer, with the potential for a significant increase in employment and economic activity.

On balance, the proposal would deliver a sustainable, economically productive and socially beneficial use of an existing building within the urban area of Littleborough.

For these reasons, it is respectfully considered that the proposed change of use accords with the relevant provisions of the development plan, national planning policy and other material considerations, and that planning permission should therefore be granted.