

Report to District Development Control Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Date of meeting:

Subject: Planning Application EPF/668/08 Units 1-3 Orbital Business Centre, 90 Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey.

**Officer contact for further information: Jill Shingler
Committee Secretary: S Hill Ext 4249**

Recommendation(s):

That Planning Application EPF/0688/08 for the change of use of units 1-3 Orbital Business Centre, 90 Brooker Road, Waltham Abbey, from B2 General Industrial us to D2 Children's Play Centre including A3 Café, be refused for the following reason:

- (1) The proposal results in the loss of 3 purpose built industrial units within an identified E1 employment site contrary to policies E1 and E2 of the adopted Local Plan and Local Plan Alterations.**

Report Detail

1. (Director of Planning and Economic Development) This application is before this Committee as it raises issues relating to employment policies that it is considered are of wider significance.

Description of Proposal:

2. This application is for the change of use of 3 small units within a block of 9 industrial units which are in the process of being built, to D2 use, specifically, a children's indoor play centre with ancillary party rooms facilities and A3 café use. No alterations are proposed to the external appearance of the building and parking will be provided on site for 18 cars within a gated car park.

Description of Site:

3. The site is located within the Brooker Road Industrial Estate. A site plan is attached. At the time of the case officer's site visit the units were still under construction. The 3 units are at the northern end of a new development of 9 two storey general industrial units. The proposed parking area is to the front of the site fronting on to Brooker Road, however the access from Brooker Road also serves the remaining units and their parking areas. The site is surrounded by industrial buildings, although opposite the site part of one of these buildings is used as a snooker club.

Relevant History:

4. EPF/1242/04 Demolition of existing brick workshop and redevelopment of 9 new business units and associated parking. Approved.

Policies Applied:

Local Plan and Local Plan Alterations.
E1 Employment Areas
E4B Alternative uses for employment sites
E11 Employment uses elsewhere
RST1 Recreational, Sporting and tourist facilities
ST1 Location of development
ST2 Accessibility of development
ST4 Road safety
ST6 Vehicle Parking

East of England Plan
Policy E1 Job Growth
Policy E2 Provision of Land for Employment

Issues and Considerations:

5. The main issue in the determination of this application is considered to be whether the loss of three purpose built business units within an identified employment site, to an alternative use can be justified.

Employment issues.

6. The East of England plan has identified a need for job growth and the provision of land for Employment. The policies of the Local plan and Local Plan Alterations seek to ensure that existing employment land is not lost to alternative uses.

7. Policy E1 is unequivocal it states simply: "Within existing employment areas subject to this policy (as identified on the proposals map) the Council will grant planning permission for the redevelopment or extension of existing premises for business, general industrial and warehouse uses. The redevelopment of existing sites or premises or their change of use to uses other than business, general industry or warehousing will not be permitted"

8. In this instance the proposed use is not business, general industry or warehousing and the proposal is therefore contrary to this policy and should be resisted.

9. The applicant argues that the development will provide employment (4-5 full time staff and 10-15 part time staff) and is therefore appropriate, however it is considered that to allow the loss of these new purpose built units would undermine the policy. Although it is accepted that service uses, shops, leisure facilities and such like do employ people, the intention of the E1 policy is to ensure that sites that are suitable for heavier industrial uses and warehousing are retained as there are very few such identified sites within the district. Such uses, because of the lack of suitable premises within the urban area are often displaced onto far less suitable sites within the Green Belt.

Suitability of location.

10. The site is located within the urban area of Waltham Abbey and is reasonably accessible; this is what makes it an ideal employment site. The applicant argues that it is therefore also a good location for his proposed recreational use. However, the site situated centrally within the industrial estate, not on the main Sewardstone Road frontage and people including presumably young children will therefore need to negotiate their way through the industrial estate to utilise the facility. The estate is well used and there is considerable heavy traffic parking and manoeuvring in the estate. It is not considered that it is appropriate to locate a children's play centre here.

Need for the facility.

11. Several letters in support of the application have been received, together with a petition signed by over 100 people. It is accepted that many would welcome the provision of an additional facility for children within Waltham Abbey. However this is in itself not good reason to allow the loss of a suitably location employment use at a time that both Regional guidance and Local policies are seeking to maintain and indeed extend existing employment land.

Parking and access

12. The access and parking facilities proposed are the same as those approved for the three industrial units, and are considered acceptable.

Conclusion.

13. The proposed development is directly contrary to policy E1 of the adopted Local Plan and the aims of the East of England Plan and would result in the loss of employment land. Additionally the use will attract children into a busy industrial estate, which it is considered, will lead to potential safety issues. The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

Representations Received.

TOWN COUNCIL – Applicant is a member of the Town Council therefore no observations.

PETITION IN SUPPORT Signed by 106 people.

112 BROOKER ROAD. Support. A children's play centre is greatly needed, conveniently located, easy walking distance.

1 MARHERITA PLACE – Great idea, Waltham Abbey will benefit. Within walking distance.

7 WINDMILL CLOSE- The proposal will fulfil many needs. The industrial estate already has attractions for young people, Snooker hall, fitness centre, Youth 2000. Also it is a primary route to the Town Mead Leisure Park so there is no new conflict.

24 BADBURGHAM COURT – Support Need a facility like this in Waltham Abbey, it will also provide job opportunities. A fantastic idea.

2 PRINCESFIELD ROAD – Support. Much needed facility.