

10th July 2025

Planning Services
Knowsley Council
Municipal Buildings
Huyton
Liverpool
L36 9UX

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: PLANNING APPLICATION FOR GYM (CLASS E USE) – TESCO EXTRA, CABLES RETAIL PARK, PRESCOT

Please find enclosed an application for full planning permission for the use of part of the existing mezzanine floor within the Tesco Extra store at Cables Retail Park as a gym (Class E). This application is submitted on behalf of Pure Gym Limited.

Background

Cables Retail Park is located to the south of the town centre at Prescott with access from Steley Way. The retail park is anchored by Tesco Extra with other units occupied by retailers including Boots, M&S Foodhall, Next, The Range and TK Maxx. There are also freestanding restaurant units occupied by McDonald's and Subway. The existing Tesco foodstore is arranged over ground and mezzanine levels but contains floorspace that is now surplus to Tesco's requirements. The store has previously been subdivided to provide a Mothercare concession, until that retailer fell into administration. It is now proposed to subdivide the floorspace to provide a gym on the existing mezzanine level with a separate ground floor entrance from the Sewell Street elevation.

We understand that the Tesco store at Cables Retail Park was originally developed following a grant of planning permission in 1999 (ref. 99/00010/APP). This permission has been varied in 2002 and 2015 to increase the permitted delivery hours. Planning permission was granted in 2007 (ref. 07/00339/FUL) to extend the foodstore, including the provision of a mezzanine floor, alterations to servicing arrangements and re-organisation of the car park. This permission was varied in 2011 to alter the site layout, external elevations and internal floor layout (ref. 10/00175/FUL). A further planning permission was granted in 2014 (ref. 14/00473/COU) for the change of use of the retail unit to a mixed use of retail and children's play area (Class A1 and Class D2) together with external alterations to the west elevation.

Whilst planning permission ref. 07/00339/FUL did not restrict the permitted retail use, the amended planning permission granted in 2011 (ref. 10/00175/FUL) was subject to condition no. 10 which stated that the '*mezzanine floor retail sales areashall be used for the sale of non-food comparison goods only*'. This was superseded by planning permission 14/00473/COU which did not restrict the permitted retail use but required the mezzanine area identified for use as a children's play area to only be used for such purposes. That area falls outside the mezzanine area that is now proposed to be used as a gym.

The permitted retail use will now fall within Class E ('Commercial, Business and Service'). Class E includes previous Class A1 retail as well as a number of other commercial uses. This includes gymnasiums which previously fell within Class D2. As such, the existing and proposed uses of the application site both fall within the same use class. Section 55(2)(f) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 states that the use of buildings or land for any other purpose within the same use class does not involve development for the purposes of the Act and planning permission would not ordinarily be required for the introduction of the new use now proposed.

The applicant has previously submitted an application for a lawful development certificate (ref. 25/00320/CLD) to confirm that the alternative Class E use would not require planning permission. However, it is the Council's view that condition no. 10 of the 2011 permission excludes the normal operation of the Use Classes Order even when no retail floorspace is provided at mezzanine level. We have also been advised that the mixed use permitted by the 2014 permission would now constitute a sui generis use rather than a Class E use. Consequently, this application seeks full planning permission for the alternative Class E use of part of the Tesco Extra store as a gym.

Proposed Use

The applicant, Pure Gym Limited ('PureGym'), is the prospective tenant for the new gym space. It is the largest gym group in the UK with over 400 locations, providing flexible and accessible health and fitness facilities on a low-cost, no-contract basis. The nearest existing PureGym facilities are at Kirkby and Liverpool Shopping Park. As noted above, the proposed gym will occupy ground and mezzanine floorspace to the western end of the existing foodstore. This part of the store has been surplus to Tesco's requirements for some time. An existing doorway on the Sewell Street elevation will be re-purposed to provide independent access to the gym and external plant to ventilate the gym will be located within the rear service area. A separate planning application (ref. 25/00325/FUL) has been submitted for these external works.

Principle of the Proposed Use

As noted above, the proposed use is an alternative use within Class E for which planning permission would not ordinarily be required. Paragraph 012b of Planning Practice Guidance ('When is permission required?') emphasises that where existing conditions limit changes within any expanded classes of use, local planning authorities should have regard to the new regulations. The increased flexibility intended to be provided by Class E is now a material consideration that should be afforded significant weight.

Policy CS2 ('Development Principles') of the Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy (2016) sets out development principles including 'Principle 1' which seeks to promote sustainable economic development and tackle the causes of deprivation and disadvantage. Amongst other things, Policy CS2 states this will be achieved by '*providing opportunities for positive lifestyle choices and health improvement for people of all ages*' and reducing health and other inequalities between Knowsley and other parts of the UK. The proposed gym will support these principles by providing a high-quality and accessible health and fitness facility that provides low-cost membership on flexible terms to all members of the community. The proposed development will therefore help to promote positive lifestyle choices whilst supporting a reduction in health inequalities and reducing the need to travel to access equivalent fitness facilities.

Policies CS4 ('Economy and Employment') and CS6 ('Town Centres and Retail Strategy') of the Core Strategy require a sequential approach to proposals for main town centre uses, with preference given to available and suitable sites within existing centres and then edge of centre locations, before out-of-centre sites can be considered. This is consistent with the provisions of paragraphs 91 and 92 of the NPPF. The application site is an established retail park destination on the edges of the town centre at Prescott. It is both accessible and well connected to the town centre, with Policy CS14 ('Principal Regeneration Area – Prescott Town Centre') of the Core Strategy seeking to extend the town centre boundary towards Cables Retail Park to reflect the combined functions of the two destinations. Given this relationship, the consideration of sequentially preferable site is focussed on alternative sites within Prescott Town Centre, as defined by the existing town centre boundary shown on the Local Plan Policies Map. The town centre is focussed on Eccleston Street and the Prescott Shopping Centre which is immediately to the south.

In considering sequentially preferable sites, the NPPF states that applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale. Case law confirms that

matters of suitability should be directed to the requirements of the proposed development and not other, hypothetical proposals. In this case, the applicant seeks permission for a gym of 1,220 sq. m to provide an all-purpose fitness facility that will meet the needs of the widest possible cross-section of the community, regardless of gender, age, level of fitness etc. As an affordable operator, it does not include ancillary leisure facilities such as swimming pools and customer cafes. With this in mind, suitable alternative sites should provide between 1,100 and 1,350 sq. m (i.e. $\pm 10\%$ of the proposed floorspace). Such sites must have large floorplates to accommodate necessary equipment and facilities, and appropriate ceiling heights. Alternative sites should be available within 12 months to deliver the applicant's proposed investment and its associated benefits.

Our search for sequentially preferable sites has considered all sites that are currently being marketed on commercial property websites such as Estate Gazette's Propertylink, LoopNet and Rightmove Commercial. The largest available premises that we have identified is Unit SU3 of Prescott Shopping Centre which provides floorspace of 185 sq. m. It may be feasible to amalgamate this unit with Unit SU02 that is also available and provides floorspace of 156 sq. m, providing scope for up to 340 sq. m. However, the total floorspace would be very significantly below that required as part of the application scheme and would necessitate significant changes to the proposed development which would render this site unsuitable.

Outside of the shopping centre, the largest available premises are at 4 High Street (139 sq. m) and 13-15 Atherton Street (86 sq. m). These properties would clearly be unsuitable for the proposed development based on their size, as well as their layout, comprising first floor offices at High Street and a three-storey former watchmaker's cottage on Atherton Street that is Grade II listed. The application site is therefore the most sequentially preferable location for the proposed use in accordance with Policies CS4 and CS6 of the Core Strategy. It is in an edge-of-centre position that is well connected to the town centre and will activate underutilised commercial floorspace on the Sewell Street frontage which Policy CS14 of the Core Strategy recognises is key to extending the success of the retail park to the town centre and supporting its wider regeneration.

Other Matters

In common with many similar facilities, the proposed gym will operate on a 24/7 basis. This is part of the applicant's flexible model and will increase the accessibility of the proposed health and fitness facility by providing access for those who work shifts or wish to use the gym at less busy times of the day. Existing planning permissions do not restrict operating hours at the application site and it would therefore be possible for the existing retail use to operate on a 24-hour basis (the existing Tesco store already opens between 6am and midnight for most of the week). Gym classes will not be held at night and only background music will be played within the gym. Between the hours of midnight and 6am, we would expect an average of 5-10 visitors to the gym per hour on weekdays and less than 5 per hour at weekends. PureGym installs extensive security measures at all sites including comprehensive CCTV systems that are remotely monitored at all times, individual PIN and QR entry systems designed to prevent tailgating and similar secure entry arrangements for changing facilities. The proposed use will therefore accord with the relevant requirements of part 2) of Policy CS19 ('Design Quality and Accessibility in New Development') of the Core Strategy.

Existing access and parking facilities at the site are well established and we are not aware of any significant issues with their operation. Cables Retail Park provides parking for approximately 870 vehicles and the proposed gym use would not be expected to generate greater parking demand than the previous retail use. The application site is sustainably located with good pedestrian access from surrounding residential areas. There are bus stops immediately adjacent to the proposed entrance on Sewell Street providing access to services 61, 89, 99, 239, 248, 289, 297 and C50. These services run at regular intervals and connect the site to Huyton, Kirby, Liverpool, Liverpool John Lennon Airport, St Helens, Whiston and intervening destinations. The town centre bus interchange at Church Street is also within 150 metres of the application site and Prescott railway station is located approximately 300 metres to the south-east. The proposal therefore accords with the relevant requirements of Policy CS7 ('Transport Networks') of the Core Strategy.

Summary

This application seeks planning permission for the use of part of the existing Tesco Extra foodstore at Cables Retail Park as a gym within Class E. It is intended to enable the occupation of the application site by PureGym and the operation of a high-quality, affordable fitness facility. The proposed use would not ordinarily require planning permission, falling within the same Use Class as the existing retail use.

It has been demonstrated that the application site is the most sequentially preferable location for the proposed use, being well-related to Prescott Town Centre. The proposed gym will expand the provision of health and fitness facilities within this part of Knowsley, will promote healthier lifestyles and create up to 15 new job opportunities. In doing so, the proposed use will not have any unacceptable impacts on the amenities of neighbouring properties and will not have any significant impacts on the highway network or highway safety.

If you have any queries or require any further information, then please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

JONATHAN WADCOCK
Director