

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
READING BOROUGH COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 7th September 2022

Ward: Kentwood

App No: 220463/FUL

Address: Unit 8 Stadium Way, Reading, RG30 6BX

Proposal: Change of use of vacant unit to use as an indoor climbing/ bouldering centre (Use Class E(d)), minor amendments to building elevations/entrances, provision of cycle/bin storage and associated works

Applicant: Grip-UK Ltd

Extended Target Date: 12/09/22

RECOMMENDATION

GRANT permission subject to the following conditions and informatives

Conditions to include:

1. Standard Time Limit
2. Approved Plans
3. Materials as specified
4. Hours of operation as specified
5. Only to be used as an indoor climbing/ bouldering centre (use class E(d))
6. Retail area (shop and café) remain ancillary to the climbing centre
7. Bin storage as specified
8. Vehicle parking as specified
9. Cycle parking as specified
10. Sustainability measures as specified
11. Flood Risk measures as specified

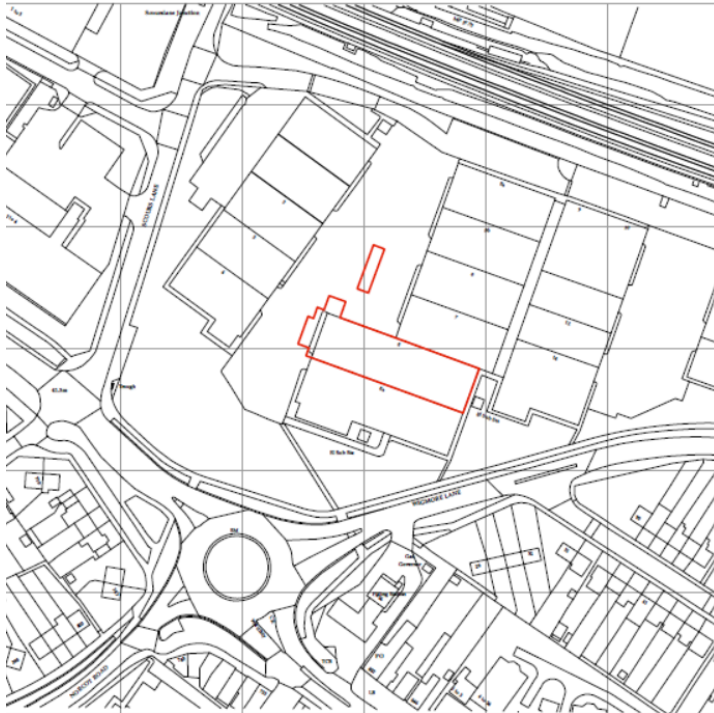
Informatives

1. Terms
2. Building Regulations approval may be required
3. Complaints about construction
4. Separate advertisement consent is required for any new signage
5. The site lies on contaminated land
6. Positive and Proactive

1. INTRODUCTION:

- 1.1 The site currently consists of a vacant warehouse building with double height accommodation at ground floor and small first floor area to the front of the building. The unit measures a total of circa 1,350 sqm, with 1,240 sqm at ground floor and small mezzanine office level area to the front providing a further 110 sqm.
- 2.2 The unit has been vacant for over 4 years, since 2017. The unit had previously been occupied from June 2005 by Plasman Laminate Products which utilised the property as a light industrial use to prepare and cut to order work surfaces and kitchen products.

- 2.3 The wider area is characterised by a variety of uses including industrial and business uses, with the district centre of Oxford Road West 1 km metres to the east, and the city centre 2.5 kms to the east. Residential communities are located within the wider area to the north, south and east.
- 2.4 The Local Plan identifies the site as being within a Core Employment Area (EM2h: Portman Road) and the site is located within Flood Zone 2.



Site Location Plan



Image of the site

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The application is for the change of use the vacant property to use as an indoor climbing/ bouldering centre (Use Class E(d)). No new floorspace or changes to the size of the building envelope are proposed.
- 2.2 The proposed occupier is The Climbing Hangar, which aims to bring an alternative sport and fitness activity that is affordable and accessible to all ages in the form of rock and boulder climbing.

2.3 The Climbing Hangar has various activities on offer, and the space will comprise the following:

- *Main climbing / bouldering wall*: the climbing space will be the main focal point and will offer a range of climbing activities
- *Office*: a small ancillary management office is also proposed adjacent to the reception. The function of this office will be for use of staff of the climbing centre.
- *Reception / Retail area*: the proposed retail area will serve as a small ancillary use of the climbing centre, selling specific climbing products from the customer service area, which also includes a reception.
- *Café*: the proposal also includes an ancillary café area
- *Changing rooms and WCs*: changing facilities and WCs will be provided within the facility

2.4 The proposed use will generate employment with the potential for 15 full-time members of staff and 15 part-time members of staff.

2.5 The Climbing Hangar will be open to members of the public at the following times:

Day	Opening Hours
Monday - Friday	06:30 - 22:00
Saturday/Sunday	09:00 - 20:00

2.6 Minor external alterations are required to facilitate the use and entail minor amendments to entrances/exits, windows and provision of new glazed frontage in the location of the existing roller shutter. An air source heat pump is proposed on the side elevation.

2.7 The proposal includes 16 car parking spaces and 24 cycle parking spaces (12 external spaces and 12 internal spaces).

2.8 This application is being presented to the Planning Applications Committee as it is a major application owing to the fact the change of use relates to more than 1000 sqm of floorspace.

3. PLANS/ DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED:

- 5.900_Rev* - Detail - Cycle St Plan
- 5.901_Rev* - Detail - Cycle St Elevations
- 2.200_Rev G - Proposed Elevations

Received 23rd August 2022

The Climbing Hangar Sustainability

Received 22nd August 2022

Vectos Response to Reading Borough Council (RBC) Transport Development Control dated July 2022

Received 26th July 2022

0.000_Rev B - OS Location Plan
0.001_Rev G - Existing Site Plan
0.200_Rev F - Existing Elevations
2.001_Rev I - Proposed Site Plan
2.200_Rev F - Proposed Elevations

Received 11th May 2022

0.100_Rev E - Existing Ground Floor Plan
0.101_Rev E - Existing First Floor Plan
0.102_Rev B - Existing Roof Plan
2.100_Rev G - Proposed Ground Floor Plan
2.101_Rev F - Proposed First Floor Plan
2.102_Rev B - Proposed Roof Plan
Application Form
Planning Statement & Sequential Assessment
Flood Risk Assessment
Supporting Letter ref.MB1116
Transport Statement VN222202 dated March 2022 prepared by Vectos

Received 29th March 2022

4. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 None relevant to this site, but application 220637/FUL at Scours Lane (*Proposed development a Drive-Through restaurant (Use Class E (a,b) and Sui Generis Hot Food Take Away, Car Parking, enhanced landscaping and Access Arrangements*) is also being presented to this committee on 7th September 2022 and is located 32m to the south-west of this site at Stadium Way.

5. CONSULTATIONS:

5.1 Internal Consultees

Transport: No objection, subject to condition

Planning Policy Manager: No objection

Environmental Protection: No objection

5.2 External consultation:

Environment Agency: Did not wish to be consulted

- 5.3 A site notice was displayed. In addition, the following addresses were formally consulted via letter on 11/04/22:

Units 1-12 Stadium Way

- 5.4 One representation was received querying the address of the site, as it had been submitted as 'Unit 8a' Stadium Way

Officer Comment: Originally, the application was submitted under the address 'Unit 8a' Stadium Way. Upon further investigation, the agent confirmed that the site is 'Unit 8' Stadium Way and the application amended accordingly.

LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework, among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. The application has been assessed against the following policies:

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC2: Sustainable Construction and Design
CC3: Adaption to Climate Change
CC4: Decentralised Energy Source
CC5: Waste Minimisation and Storage
CC7: Design and the Public Realm
CC8: Safeguarding Amenity
EM2: Location of New Employment Development
EM3: Loss of Employment Land
EM4: Maintaining a Variety of Premises
TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters
TR5: Car and Cycle Parking and Electric Vehicle Parking
EN16: Pollution and Water Resources
EN18: Flooding and Drainage

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

- Revised Parking Standards and Design (2011)

6. APPRAISAL

6.1 The main issues for consideration are:

- a) Principle of Development
- b) Transport considerations
- c) Design and impact on the character of the area
- d) Impact on neighbouring amenity
- e) Sustainability
- f) Flooding
- g) Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

Appraisal

- a) Principle of Development

- 6.2 The application site is located within Core Employment Area EM2h: Portman Road. Policy EM2 defines the boundaries of Core Employment Areas to be the main location for industrial and warehouse uses and there is a general presumption against loss of employment land in these areas. It is noted, however, that the related policies should ensure a flexible and responsive supply of employment land in Reading.
- 6.3 In terms of the principle of loss of employment land within a Core Employment Area, the measures undertaken to market the property over a lengthy period are noted. Officers advise that this provides a compelling case for loss of the employment use to another alternative commercial use, which nevertheless would still create employment opportunities. It is also worth being aware of paragraph 4.3.16 of the Local Plan, the supporting text to policy EM3 on loss of employment land. This defines 'employment land' as including other uses not within the B use classes (as they were then) but for which an employment area is the only realistic location. One of the stated possible considerations is whether a use would require a building with high, blank frontages, which may well be the case for a climbing use. Climbing uses require a certain height clearance that can only regularly be found in industrial or warehouse units and therefore it is accepted that this particular site would be able to provide this setting. Upon consultation with the Planning Policy Manager, it was not considered that a sequential test (demonstrating that this site was the most sequentially preferable for the facility) was necessary for a climbing facility. According to the NPPF, the requirement for a sequential test relates to 'main town centre uses' which include "more intensive sport and recreation uses" which this is not considered to be.
- 6.4 Given the above, there is no in-principle objection to the proposals, as also confirmed by the Planning Policy Manager, subject to all other matters (as discussed below) being satisfactory. Notwithstanding, whilst the proposed change of use is considered acceptable, as other uses in Class E (retail, food premises etc) have different characteristics to the proposed use, they may not be appropriate for this site and therefore a condition is recommended restricting the use of the site to the Class E(d) use specified (Climbing Centre). It will also be conditioned that the retail areas (café and shop) remain ancillary to the climbing centre. The current application has been considered on the basis of change of use to a climbing centre only.

b) Transport considerations

- 6.5 This site is located in an industrial area and is served from Stadium Way, which is an industrial estate service road. A high proportion of the traffic using the road is commercial traffic ranging from light vans to articulated lorries. There is high demand for parking in the area.
- 6.6 The site is accessed from Stadium Way in the north, which forms a priority junction with Scours Lane and wider vehicle access is via the Scours Lane/Oxford Road priority T-junction. It is proposed the indoor climbing centre will operate during the following times with potential for up to 15 full-time members of staff and 15 part-time members of staff.
- 6.7 It is stated that the applicant's core audience generally consists of 16 to 45-year olds, ranging from young professionals to families. The majority of users are between the ages of 18 and 29 (which makes up around 65% of members).
- 6.8 Policy TR5 states that development should provide car parking and cycle parking that is appropriate to the accessibility of locations within the Borough to sustainable

transport facilities, particularly public transport. Local parking standards are set out in the Council's Revised Parking Standards and Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which takes into account the accessibility of the site.

- 6.9 However, there are no adopted parking standards for this specific type of use. Therefore, an application of this type, will be considered on its own merits considering business operations, staffing numbers and anticipated number of customers.
- 6.10 In terms of car parking, the proposal will deliver a total of 16 allocated vehicle bays overall for customers and staff (including disabled parking adjacent to the building entrance).
- 6.11 A Transport Statement has been submitted to support the application and further information has been submitted regarding the operation of the business. Data has been collected from the operational Climbing Hangar site in Exeter as it is anticipated that the proposed Reading facility will operate in a similar manner.
- 6.12 The applicant has clarified that the typical duration of visits by members to their climbing centres is around one hour, and during a peak period on a weekday (between 6 and 7 pm) the entry numbers are up to 45 users in an hour. A comparable level of occupation is expected for the proposed Reading facility. The applicant has undertaken a trip rate analysis of the existing use utilising the Trip Rate Information Computer System (TRICS) and this has established that the existing use would generate 9 vehicle movements in the AM Peak and 5 in the PM Peak. To establish the proposed trip generation the applicant has provided data from another existing walking climbing facility and this has indicated that within the AM peak period the proposal would generate 4 vehicle movements with 34 generated in the PM Peak period. The increase in trips within the PM Peak would be 29 equating to 1 vehicle movement every 2 minutes.

The site will be open between the following hours:

- Monday - Friday: 6.30pm - 10pm.
- Saturday - Sunday: 9am - 8pm.

- 6.13 Data on arrival numbers has been collected from the operational Climbing Hangar site in Exeter to give a daily entry profile of visitors and indication of the level of occupation throughout the day. A comparable daily profile of visitors is expected for the proposed Reading facility. It is anticipated that a peak period will occur between 5pm - 8pm where around 46% of daily weekday users arrive within this 3-hour early evening window. The peak hour is between 6pm - 7pm where 45 members arrive. During the weekend arrivals at the site are much more even throughout the day, with a maximum of 30 visitors arriving between 10am - 11am.

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the number of staff that will be on-site across a typical day.

Period	No. Staff
Weekday Mornings	3 – 4 Staff Members
Weekday Afternoons	3 – 4 Staff Members
Weekday Evenings	3 – 4 Staff Members
Weekends	5 – 6 Staff Members
During Timetabled Sessions	No changes to the above

- 6.14 The applicant has confirmed that there will be no regional or national competitions undertaken at the site whereby people would travel into the premises and that the site will at no time be available for private bookings.
- 6.15 The proposed Reading climbing facility be provided with a total of 16 allocated parking spaces. Anticipated travel / parking behaviours associated with the proposal site have been subject to further analysis by assessing parking demand at the operational Climbing Hangar site in Exeter with 15 parking spaces.
- 6.16 It is indicated that during a typical weekday, the proposed 16 on-site spaces could be fully occupied between 5pm - 6pm only, when some overspill parking could potentially occur. During a typical weekend day the proposed parking provision could be fully occupied for a period of two hours, between 11am - 1pm. The applicant has confirmed that the wider estate at the Stadium Trade and Business Park has an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology management system, whereby car parking is monitored in order to ensure that there is no unauthorised / unsafe / inappropriate parking activity. They have also stated that it has been confirmed by Grip-UK Ltd that Unit 8 has permission to use the wider parking in the estate during times when the adjacent businesses are closed. Given that the peak demands for the proposal will mainly be outside of the peak times for the industrial units this has been accepted and no overspill parking would occur.
- 6.17 The site will also be provided with cycle parking facilities that will further encourage travel via this mode. The proposal will provide a total of 24 cycle parking spaces. 12 spaces will be located adjacent to the main site entrance and a further 12 spaces will be provided within the site as standing bike spaces. There are no specific standards for a climbing centre but a gym / leisure facility of a similar size would require a provision of just 4 cycle spaces, the proposed provision is therefore deemed acceptable. The external cycle stands will be covered, and the cycle parking secured via condition.
- 6.18 It should be noted that the Oxford Road / Scours Lane / Bramshaw Road junction has been recently assessed in relation to application 220637 (Scours Lane - see planning history section of this report) and this has identified that the junction is well within capacity and therefore this proposed development would not have a detrimental impact on this junction. In addition, the Oxford Road / Norcot Road / Wigmore Lane junction has also recently been assessed and this does identify that it is within close proximity of its actual capacity. However, once the distribution split of traffic has been assessed the proposal would generate a reduced number of vehicles travelling through the junction than the 29 vehicle movements identified above and as such this would not have a detrimental impact on the junction.
- 6.19 Overall, the two developments (this, and that at Scours Lane) would result in a minor increase in vehicle movements on the Highway Network and could not be classified as a severe impact given that the Drive Thru application (220463) has assessed the Oxford Road / Scours Lane junction along with the Oxford Road / Norcot Road / Wigmore Lane roundabout junction which has identified that the junctions would remain within capacity.
- 6.20 In view of the above, it is considered that the development if permitted would not lead to an unacceptable increase in traffic or parking on the surrounding highway network in line with policies TR3 and TR5 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019).

c) Design and impact on the character of the area

- 6.21 There are no external alterations proposed to facilitate the change of use, other than the obscuring of high level windows where changing facilities would be and the installation of a glazed frontage to replace the existing roller shutter. A timber bin shelter and cycle store is proposed at the front of the site. Given the small scale of the external works, the proposal would therefore not be considered to detract from the character and appearance of the surrounding industrial area, in accordance with Policy CC7. An informative will be attached, to advise the applicant that any future signage would be subject to separate Advertisement Consent and is not approved as part of this planning application, despite being indicated on the plans.
- 6.22 Further to the above, Policy CC7 specifically states that design should “*address the needs of all in society and are accessible, usable and easy to understand by them, including providing access to, into and within, its facilities, for all potential users, including disabled people so that they can use them safely and easily*”. The building is a public building and as such needs to be suitable in terms of incorporating disabled access. The applicant has confirmed that the building allows access by people with disabilities and those with young children, as providing level thresholds and level access throughout the property and the main public areas of the use across a single level only. Disabled changing and w/c facilities are incorporated. In this instance, given the context of the site and nature of the proposals this is considered acceptable to comply with Policy CC7 in this respect.

d) Impact on neighbouring amenity

- 6.23 Taking into consideration the industrial nature of the surrounding area, and the nature of the proposals, they are not considered to result in any material harm to neighbouring occupiers in terms of loss of light, privacy or overbearing impact. Similarly, Environmental Protection officers have raised not concerns in respect of noise or disturbance in principle (the building is sufficiently located away from sensitive receptors) and the surrounding area. As such the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of Policy CC8.

e) Sustainability

- 6.24 Policy CC4 states: “*Any development of more than 20 dwellings and/ or non-residential development of over 1,000 sq m shall consider the inclusion of decentralised energy provision, within the site, unless it can be demonstrated that the scheme is not suitable, feasible or viable for this form of energy provision.*”
- 6.25 Policy CC2 requires non-residential minor developments to meet ‘Very Good’ BREEAM standards, where possible. Further to this, the Policy does acknowledge that for some uses such as industrial and warehouses it might be difficult to meet these standards. In cases where it might be more difficult to achieve this standard, then “developments much demonstrate that the standard to be achieved is the highest possible for the development.”
- 6.26 However, the applicant has advised that the approach is not achievable and that due to the construction of the building and nature of the relatively minor scope of works, it is very unlikely that a BREEAM certificate would be able to be issued. Indeed, it is considered that significant parts of the building would have to be reconstructed, which is neither practical nor what the planning permission was for.
- 6.27 The building was not originally designed and constructed with BREEAM in mind and it is not practical or reasonable to request external works beyond the scope for which

permission was applied for. As such, the BREEAM credits are unlikely to be achieved. The applicant has provided a list of BREEAM credits and discussed why these are unachievable in this instance, or in some cases not applicable (mainly owing to the refurbishment nature of the proposals). Examples include:

- Project brief and design - the building itself is not being changed the proposed brief does not include any major redevelopment of the building's envelope, services or integral structure.
- Life cycle cost and service life planning - It is The Climbing Hangar's policy to only change elements of the building that require alteration and to not generate additional waste unnecessarily.
- Acoustic performance - It would be wholly unsustainable to replace the existing wall cladding, for example, given the proposed use would not result in substantial harm in terms of noise levels, given the surrounding area is commercial

6.28 Instead, the applicant considers that more appropriate practical measures could be incorporated into the scheme:

- Installing an Air-source heat pump
- Retain and re-use any Mechanical and Electrical services from the existing fit out where possible.
- LED energy efficient lighting with PIR sensors within front of house for low frequency usage areas
- Covered cycle externally and internal cycle storage designed and specified in line with BREEAM guidelines to encourage sustainable access. Internal changing facilities to encourage walking and cycling to the facility.
- Toilet and changing facilities for customers to include automatic timed shut off taps and urinal flush sensors to reduce water wastage, along with energy efficient hand dryers.

6.29 Whilst Policy CC2 requires non-residential minor developments (including conversions) to meet the 'Very Good' BREEAM standards, it does stipulate where possible and acknowledged that for some cases such as industrial units and warehouses it might be difficult to meet these standards. Whilst fully acknowledging the 'downgrading' of this condition, the above commentary is considered in this very specific instance, given the context of the site and nature of the proposals, to be satisfactory, enabling officers to apply some flexibility in the recommendations within the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD 2019 and to comply with Policy CC2 in this respect. It is also considered particularly positive that a decentralised energy source is proposed, which is compliant with Policy CC4 of the Local Plan (2019).

f) Flooding

6.30 The site is located within Flood Zone 2. The most recent use of the site was as offices and warehouse which is classified as a "less vulnerable use" within Table 2: Flood Risk Vulnerability Classification. The proposed use for sport and leisure would also fall within the "less vulnerable use" category of Table 2 and therefore the proposed change of use would not increase the vulnerability to flooding. The Environment Agency did not wish to comment on the proposal and on this basis, the proposal is considered acceptable in relation to Policy EN18 of the Reading Borough

Local Plan (2019). However, some brief details on a flood evacuation were detailed in the supporting Flood Risk Assessment which will be secured via condition. These measures include monitoring the Environment Agency for flood alerts and undertaking visual monitoring of the site.

g) Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

6.31 The proposed development does not attract a CIL charge.

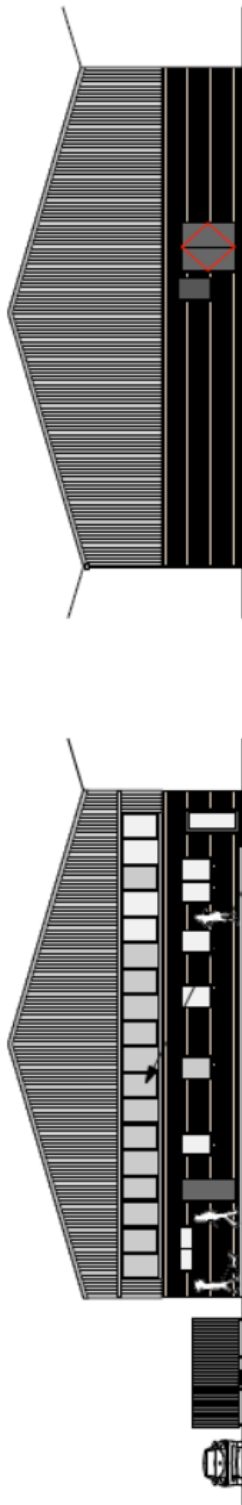
Equality Act 2010:

In determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore, in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 It is considered that the proposal is acceptable when assessed in relation to national and local policy, as outlined in the report. The recommendation is therefore to grant planning permission, subject to conditions.

Case Officer: Connie Davis



01 Elevation A 1:200

03 Elevation C 1:200

Existing fire doors expanded.

Windows to be made opaque where walls or changing facilities are built up to rear.

Vertical timber screen to bin store.

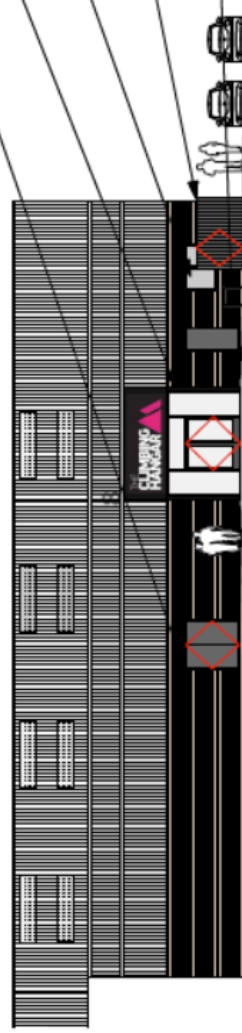
Existing fire doors expanded.

Glazed Screen Inc Doors and signage in existing Roller Shutter opening.

Window to be made opaque where walls are built up to rear.

Vertical timber screen to bin store.

Sheffield cycle stands adjacent to entrance.



02 Elevation B 1:200



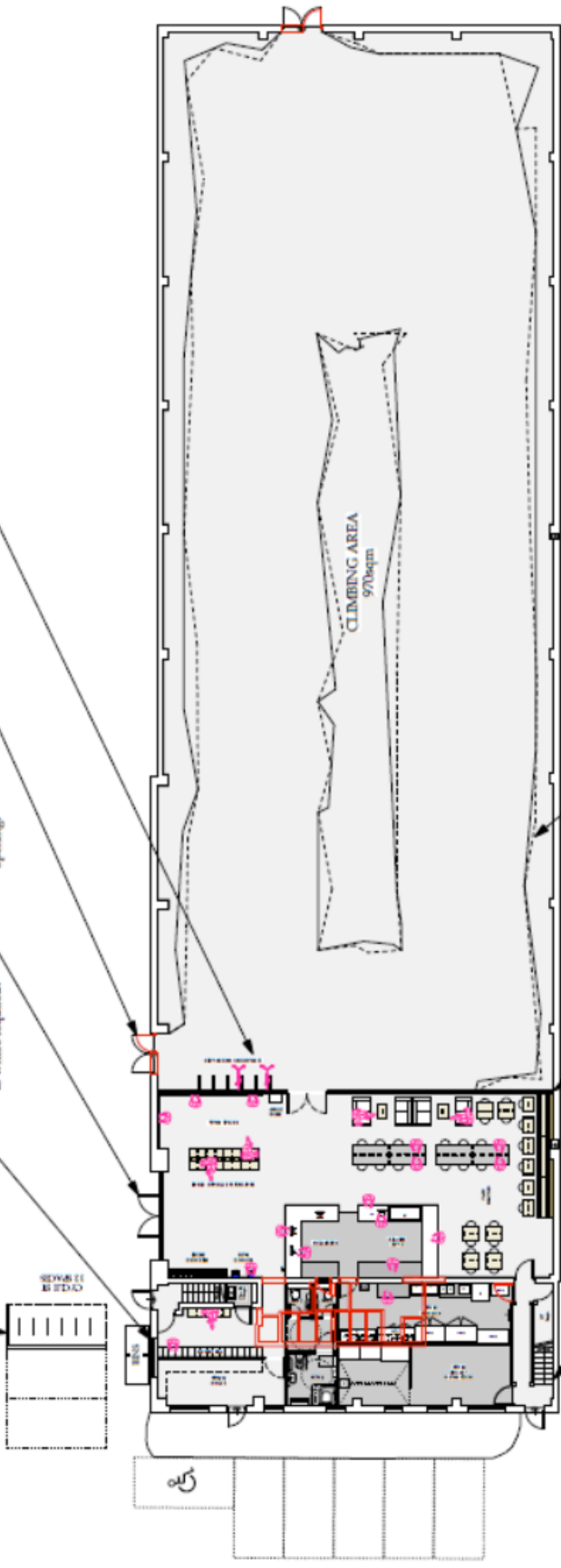
1 car parking spaces used to provide cycle parking.

Windows to be fitted with opaque film and built up to where required.

Glazed Screen and Doors in existing Roller Shutter opening.

Existing fire doors expanded.

Potential extra 12 standing bike spaces



Climbing Walls by Specialist Subcontractor.

New full height wall separating climbing area.

Existing Staircases to be retained.

Rev G: 29.03.22
Scale bar added