

EMP DM1

Change of Use

Rock House, Westergate Street, Westergate, PO20 3RJ

Planning Application: AL/72/22/PL

Date: 13/10/22

Site Context

We understand that every community needs, and should retain as best as possible, any local economic development opportunities where appropriate. In the case of Servac being based out of Rock House, there were many reasons why this site was no longer suitable to run the business from. Please note that we live in the residential part, and it was Steve's business that operated from the workshop end of the building. Previous to that, the site was owned by Steve's parents who also ran their business from the premises. The original site was totally residential according to the 1906 deeds.

Steve and I have no desire to 'let out' the building as it had a huge amount of issues that needed rectifying in order to make it viable for anyone else to operate from, and is simply beyond economical repair.

The house is conjoined to the workshop; while this was less of an issue while we lived and worked next door, it was not an arrangement that would be suitable for us and anyone else.

Please note that the layout of Rock House has been reallocated over many decades to facilitate the varying requirements, so doors and windows were opened/closed/blocked up/reopened depending on how best to fit everything, and everyone in. This leaves Rock House exposed from a safety and security point of view as many of the apertures were only blocked off with MDF.

There was also the issue that all of the utilities were mixed between the house and the workshop. To be able to separate these out fully and run new pipework, there has been significant excavation and building work to make the house fully independent with new utility layouts and removal of old pipework.

The development of the site over the decades, was such that a double roof had been laid - one layer of which contains asbestos which will be removed by the specialist teams as appropriate.

The many many layers of concrete at different levels meant it was incredibly difficult to move around using a variety of multi level steps, not conducive to any suitable modern accessible working environment.

The workshop previously operated on a vacuum drainage system, which requires biannual service and maintenance. This is not a suitable system for another tenant to maintain without significant costs.

This has meant that no marketing has taken place, nor will take place to let the site out to

anyone else.

Background of the workshop as used by Servac

Servac's main business is in repairing and servicing vacuum toilets for the rail and marine industries both in the UK and some work internationally. The rail work has grown significantly over the past 4 years. There are many pieces of specialised equipment that are needed to perform these tasks, along with the need for space to work in, and for additional employees.

There are also regulations and requirements for removal of the waste water into mains drainage. This is not a business that is easily relocated, so much consideration went into finding a suitable long term solution for new premises that would improve the quality of the workspace, while allowing for more staff to be recruited to fulfill the increased demands on the business.

Temporary container storage had to be taken for the previous years for spare parts, and additionally for business vans, as there was no more room.

The business relocated to Littlehampton Marina in October/November 2021.

Reasons for relocating Servac business operations to an alternative location within the Arun catchment area included and are not limited to the following:

Strategically, staying in Rock House would have meant declining work and not bidding on future contracts therefore limiting and possibly decreasing any future business value and opportunities. Since the move to Littlehampton, Servac has been able to secure a further 2 year contract with Siemens Mobility and other rail work. This has helped to safeguard the future of the employees and also provided further opportunities for staff development and recruitment.

There was a need for a professional space to meet customers and perform training. Customers can now come to visit rather than having meetings off site.

Improvement of employee facilities including changing areas and dining space.

Improvement to work spaces and workshop facilities. There was simply no more room left in Rock House to accommodate the work, or more staff or more equipment.

Lack of storage/floorspace meant the space was at maximum capacity after several rearrangements of internal walls and racking, workbenches etc. The new site at Littlehampton Marina has been a huge move forward and has allowed for more work spaces, additional offices, dedicated work areas, better racking, more racking, more specialist equipment, improved broadband and parking.

Improved public transport links has meant easy access for both employees and rail and

marine customers to the business.

Improving employment opportunities. The workshop and offices had evolved as the business demands needed to be met, and quite frankly the location was not accessible by public transport for new recruits, nor did it have the expected professional look that is expected from a business. This was due to the rather erratic nature of the building, and although much work had been done to improve the aesthetics, there were many physical and financial limits in place (i.e removing and increasing/changing the double roof which contains asbestos would have meant relocating temporarily to another location which would not have been possible).

Other employment concerns included a mismatch between demand and supply for new recruits having the required skill sets. The new site at Littlehampton has attracted a more varied, and most importantly, a better quality of applicants due to its location and professional presence.

All employees were consulted about the move and have all agreed that the new site is significantly more pleasing, efficient and effective than Rock House. All team members have been retained and more employees have joined.

Health and safety meant that as business increased the frequency of lorries collecting and dropping off goods had increased. Westergate Street has become both utterly congested, contrasted with large volumes of excessively speeding traffic. We were beginning to wonder if the safety of pedestrians was being put at risk even with the appropriate protocols in place for safe loading and unloading of vehicles. One car was speeding and he drove on to the low loader vehicle, as he was not paying attention to the road conditions. People often used to overtake on the opposite path rather than wait for the road to clear. Many other unsafe situations were regularly viewed by the team.

Feedback from other local businesses in the Westergate area

We were not alone in facing some of the business difficulties locally. I am not quite sure when this survey was completed however it seems that many businesses have comments on many reasons to move the business out of Westergate and into an area of economic redevelopment such as LA/Bognor;

https://aldingbourne-pc.gov.uk/media/4268/parish_business_needs_survey.pdf

Reasons listed include no suitable public transport, car congestion, lacking suitable employee options to expand the business as well as running out of room.