



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 5 August 2025

by **C Skelly BA (Hons) MSc MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y2003/W/25/3365054

Gala Social Club, Brigg Road, Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire DN15 6TZ

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Zirconia Trading Ltd against the decision of North Lincolnshire Council.
 - The application Ref is PA/2024/1236.
 - The development proposed is change of use from a bingo hall (Sui Generis) to self-storage (Use Class B8).
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the change of use from a bingo hall (Sui Generis) to self-storage (Use Class B8) at Gala Social Club, Brigg Road, Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire DN15 6TZ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref PA/2024/1236, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with drawing nos:
22061-C4P-AV-XX-DR-A-0002 Rev P3,
POD_XX_XX_DR_A_STAGE3_TPP_0001_S2 Rev 01,
POD_XX_RF_DR_A_STAGE3_TPP_1001_S2 Rev 01,
POD_XX_00_DR_A_STAGE3_TPP_1000_S2 Rev 01.
 - 3) No refuse-derived fuel shall be brought onto or stored on the site at any time.

Preliminary Matter

2. The Council's planning committee refused the planning application contrary to officer recommendation.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is whether the proposal would result in the unacceptable loss of a community facility, having regard to the relevant provisions of the development plan.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is a large purpose-built building with car parking to two sides, located close to Scunthorpe town. It is bounded to the west by Winterton Road and to the east by the railway line, with the area to the north being vacant land. The surrounding area is characterised by a mix of commercial uses, which are in

proximity to residential properties. The building is currently leased to Buzz Bingo and used as a bingo hall.

5. The proposal is for the change of use of the premises from a Sui Generis use as a bingo hall to a storage facility falling under Use Class B8 and no external alterations are proposed to the building. The existing bingo hall is the only remaining facility of this type available within Scunthorpe.
6. Policy CS22 of the North Lincolnshire Core Strategy (2011) (CS) states that the loss of community facilities or land allocated for such purposes will be resisted, unless there is no longer a need for the land or building in any form of community use, or there is an acceptable alternative means of meeting such need. The supporting text explains that the provision of local community facilities and services is essential to the quality of life of local residents and will reduce the need for people to travel to obtain essential services. It goes on to list the types of facilities where their loss will be resisted and includes a range of cultural, recreational and education facilities, including public houses. Although it does not specifically refer to bingo halls, the use of the wording 'for example' indicates that it is not a closed list.
7. There is no definition of a 'community facility' in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). The glossary of the Framework defines bingo halls as a town centre use. Notably, other examples also listed as main town centre uses include pubs and restaurants which are commonly considered as being community facilities. The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) categorises both bingo halls and public houses as Sui Generis, which is a separate use from Class F.2 Local Community which includes amongst other things shops and halls or meeting places.
8. Paragraph 97 of the Framework says that decisions should guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs. Paragraph 96a) states that decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other.
9. Whilst I have not been provided with detailed information on the levels of usage, the comments submitted in relation to the planning application demonstrate that the bingo hall is considered by its customers to be a location for people to meet and socialise. Therefore, although not meeting the day-to-day needs of the community, based on the evidence before me, and the context of the examples listed in Policy 22 of the CS, I am satisfied that in this particular case, the bingo hall can be considered to be a community facility.
10. The appellant has submitted a letter from Edgerley Simpson Howe (16th April 2025), which states that Buzz Bingo completed a Company Voluntary Arrangement process in August 2020. Buzz Bingo subsequently served notice (29th April 2022) on the appellant, a copy of which has been submitted. In order to avoid the site from sitting vacant a low rent agreement was made between the appellant and Buzz Bingo until an alternative occupier could be found. Buzz Bingo have continued to operate the bingo hall on a flexible basis, following their decision in 2022 to surrender their lease, however, the submitted evidence shows that this rent is significantly less than market value. The appellant has also submitted evidence

which shows that the Buzz Bingo Group as a whole have continued to experience significant financial losses over the last three years.

11. Buzz Bingo contend that they entered into a new lease with the appellant and have no intention of leaving the premises. Buzz Bingo also put forward that the appellant's information relates to the position following the Covid pandemic and that the Scunthorpe club is currently profitable. However, I have not been provided with any details to substantiate this information. The appellant has submitted evidence of the notice served in 2022 and that the existing lease to Buzz Bingo is significantly less than market rents. In the absence of any substantial evidence to the contrary, I am satisfied that the continued lease of the site to Buzz Bingo is no longer commercially viable.
12. Since 2022, the appeal building has been actively marketed for alternative uses on both a leasehold and freehold basis using the Perfect Information Property system, a national database for advertising commercial properties. As part of the marketing of the building, the appellant has confirmed that both of Buzz Bingo's main competitors, Mecca and Bingo 3000 were approached to ascertain any interest in the lease, but neither were interested as there has been a shift in focus to online bingo games. I also note that the submitted evidence shows that Buzz Bingo have been actively seeking smaller, alternative premises elsewhere in Scunthorpe.
13. According to the information before me, the main interest in leasing the building has been from local investors/developers or self-storage operators. With the exception of a proposal from a gym company, which required an 18-month rent free agreement, the appellant states that there has been no interest in re-using the building as a community facility. Therefore, based on the submitted evidence, I am satisfied there is no longer a need for the building in any form of community use as required by Policy CS22.
14. The closure of the bingo hall would mean that there would no longer be any commercial bingo halls in the area. However, the appellant has submitted information which shows that within a distance of 1.5 miles of the appeal site that there are three community venues which host community events and fitness classes, with a further 9 groups and facilities up to 5 miles away. Whilst these community groups and facilities are not directly comparable to a commercial bingo hall, they provide alternative opportunities for socialising and participating in activities.
15. The closure of the bingo hall would result in some job losses. Although the proposed self-storage business would also offer employment opportunities, this would be less than the level offered by the existing use. Nevertheless, the Council recognise that the proposal would support small businesses by offering flexible and affordable storage solutions, which could support startups and small enterprises that may not have the resources to lease or purchase large office or warehouse spaces. The proposal would therefore help to support the growth of smaller/startup businesses and support economic growth in the local area.
16. Buzz Bingo have put forward that the bingo hall retains an active level of footfall for the town centre, creates linked trips and contributes to the nighttime economy. I observed that car parking charges are in place at the site which together with its distance from the town centre and parking availability at nearby commercial premises, in my view, makes linked trips from the site unlikely.

17. In conclusion, the proposal would result in the loss of a community facility, however the submitted evidence demonstrates that its continued use for this purpose is no longer commercially viable and that there has been no demand for any alternative community uses. Therefore, the proposal would result in the acceptable loss of a community facility, having regard to the relevant provisions of the development plan. It thereby accords with Policy 22, of the CS which amongst other things resists the loss of community facilities unless there is no longer a need for the building in any form of community use.

Conditions

18. I have considered the Council's suggested conditions and where appropriate amended the wording to more closely align with the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG).
19. In order to meet legislative requirements, a condition shall be imposed to address the period for commencement (1). I have imposed a condition relating to approved plans for the avoidance of doubt (2). A condition is required in relation to fuel (3) in order to protect the amenity of neighbouring properties and the safety of the site.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons given above the appeal should be allowed.

C Skelly

INSPECTOR