

PLANNING STATEMENT

APPLICATION FOR PLANNING PERMISSION

Retrospective Change of Use of Land (Use Class E) to form container storage
(Use Class B8)

Land at former Quarry Farm, Ainsworth Lane, Knowsley, L34 9EU



Applicant:

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The application seeks full planning permission to regularise the change of use of an area of brownfield land at Ainsworth Lane within the Knowsley Business Park. The description of development given on the application form is:

“Retrospective Change of Use of Land (Use Class E) to form container storage (Use Class B8)”

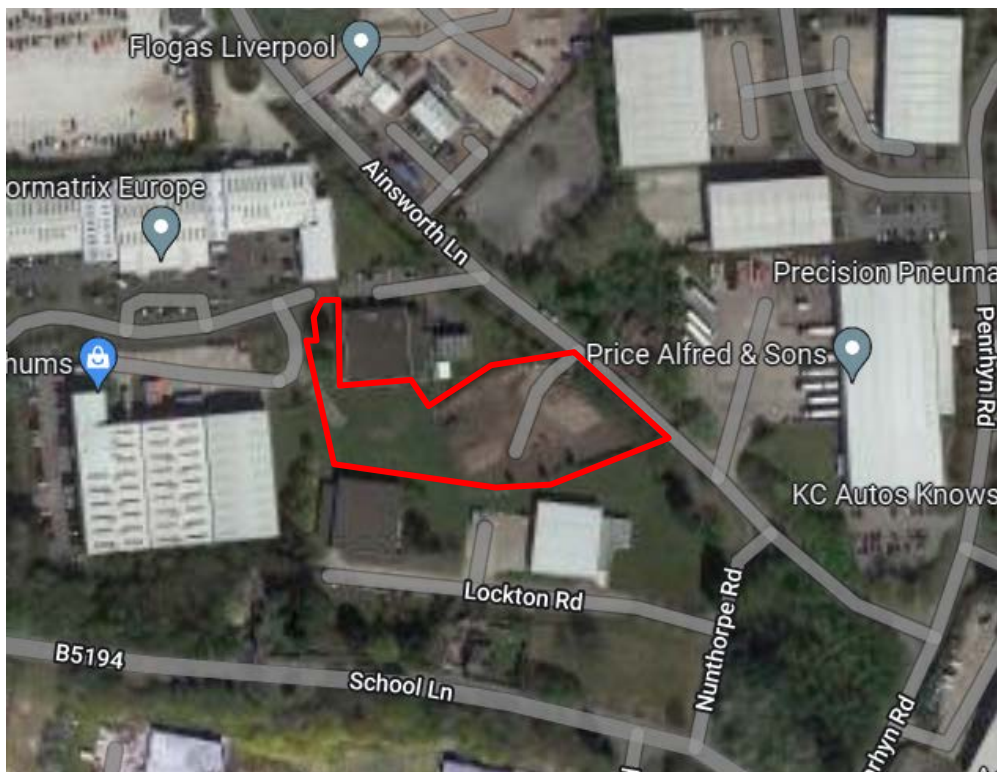
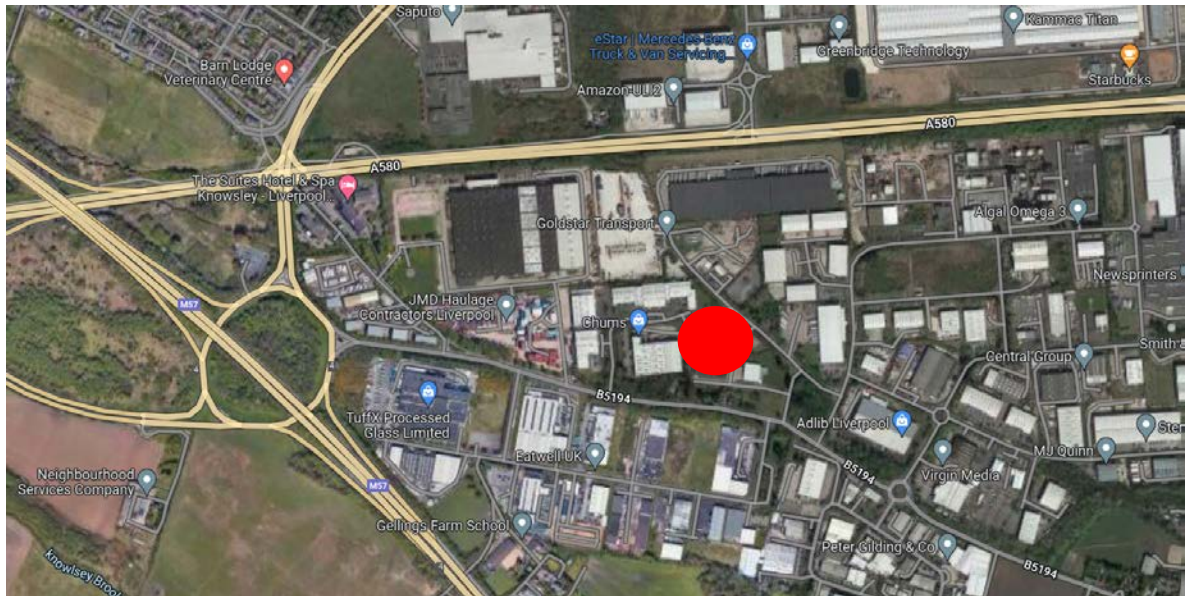
1.2 This application is submitted to Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council via the Planning Portal and is accompanied by:

- Location Plan 1:1250
- Existing Block Plan
- Existing Sections & Elevations
- Planning Application Form submitted via the Planning Portal
- Planning Statement
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Drainage Strategy

2.0 The Site and its Context

2.1 Site Location

The site is located within the Knowsley Business Park and is 800m to the east of M57 Junction 4 which connects to the main A580 East Lancs Road.



Images taken from Google Maps.

2.2 Description of the Site

The application site area measures 0.62 Ha / 6,177 sq. m. (1.5 acres) and comprises unpaved crushed stone surface surrounded by palisade fencing and vegetation. The western section of the site is located off Unity Grove; the eastern part of the site, currently accessed off Ainsworth Lane was previously occupied by Quarry Farm which was demolished in 2013. The eastern sector of the site is set back from Ainsworth Lane separated by Knowsley Brook and a vegetation strip of shrubs and trees with an existing access constructed over the brook.

2.3 The Site is within a designated industrial zone and in the immediate vicinity are a number of industrial and manufacturing units. While the site is primarily industrial in nature, to the south of the site there are two residential dwellings located on School Lane with their boundaries between some 48 - 60 metres. At present there is a separation belt comprising Lockton Road serving existing industrial units; commercial units and tree planting between the site and the existing residential dwellings.

3.0 **Site Planning History**

3.1 According to the Knowsley Council Planning Explorer website the recent planning history for the site is as follows:

- 13/00280/DEMCON - Prior notification of proposed demolition of buildings. Prior approval required and refused – 12th July 2013,
- 14/00827/FUL - Erection of 19 no. incubator starter units within 5 no. blocks use Class B1 (b) and B1 (c), construction of internal access road off Unity Grove, provision of car parking spaces. Erection of cycle and bin stores, boundary fencing together with landscaping and associated works, Approved – 13th April 2015.
- 18/00086/FUL – Application to vary Condition 9 in relation to 14/00827/FUL, Approved – 11th April 2018.

4.0 **The Proposal and Site Operation**

4.1 Current Situation

This is a retrospective application to regularise the current use of the land as a logistics facility comprising heavy goods container storage area. This use has been ongoing

since March 2022. The site forms two portions as shown on the Block Plan accompanying the application. Plot A to the east is accessed from Ainsworth Lane and is used for the container storage. Plot B to the west is accessed from Unity Grove and forms a vehicle waiting area together with staff car parking and includes two 'Portakabin' type temporary buildings used as an office and staff mess, welfare and toilets.

4.2 Site Operation

The site is used by a logistics operator who has a contract with the Mersey Docks to provide short-term storage for containers travelling to and from the docks, but cannot be handled at any specific time. This may be due to a shipping delay or some other reason why a container already in transit cannot be loaded into the docks. It will be taken to this site for short-term storage thus enabling the haulier to continue to another collection or delivery and not waste time and fuel.

4.3 Other customers may not be able to receive their container at a specific time, so in this situation the facility provides short term storage if a container collection has nowhere to go. Again, this frees up haulage contractors to proceed to other collections and not waste time. The facility also offers storage during pinch points when the Port closes and other depots are full to ensure no disruption in vital supply chains such as the distributions of food, raw materials and medical supplies.

4.4 The facility helps hauliers from being tied up with empty containers, which helps reduce the number of HGV's they need to operate, not to mention reducing the miles driven, CO₂ emissions and minimising unnecessary HGV traffic.

4.5 As well as being able to react as a "release valve" to assist hauliers and the shipping lines when there are no other options available like during the expected Port strike towards the end of September, the site offers the short term storage that is vital to the industry and keep shops shelves stocked.

4.6 The site has maximum capacity for 150 no. twenty-foot containers or 75 no. forty-foot equivalents, or combination of both. The containers are stacked up to 3 units high during peak months, other times 2 high.

4.7 The site is only 800m from M57 Junction 4 and is a suitable location as about 90% of road-hauled container traffic to and from the Port travels via the M57. The facility needs to be next to a motorway as no haulier would be interested in a site that was

difficult to get to or involved navigating through town centres or residential areas as that would add far too much time and delay to the operation for an industry whose margins are extremely tight and the cost of fuel is high.

4.8 Rationale for the Development

The location is considered well suited as it is positioned 800m from the motorway junction within an established industrial area, with suitable infrastructure for HGV's and away from residential uses. The number of HGV moves to and from the site would never exceed 66 moves a day.

4.9 The Port of Liverpool has recently completed a major expansion and is now dealing with unprecedented volumes. There is a clear alignment between this logistics facility, its accessible and sustainable location and a need for businesses to access the docks.

5.0 **Relevant Planning Policies and Material Considerations**

5.1 Current Lawful Use

The site currently does not have lawful use for B8 (storage and distribution). The approval 14/00827/FUL for erection of 19 no. incubator starter units gave the site a B1 use, which is now categorised as E under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development etc) (England) (Amendment) Order 2021. Unlike with the earlier B1 category, there is no longer the provision to change this to B8 category (storage and distribution) under permitted development rules, therefore full planning permission is now required to change from the current E designation to lawful B8 use.

5.2 Planning Policies

The relevant Development Plan is the Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy adopted January 2016, together with saved policies from the Knowsley Replacement Unitary Development Plan from June 2006. The Site is identified within the Local Plan Policy Map as within Knowsley Business Park, which is designated as a Primarily Industrial Area. The relevant local planning policies are:

- Policy CS11: Principal Regeneration Area – Knowsley Industrial and Business Parks, seeks to facilitate a mix of new, high quality employment development within this area.

- Policy CS4: Economy and Employment, regards the Business Park as a primary location where new development for employment uses should be focused.
- Policy CS22 also regards Knowsley Business Park as a 'Priority Zone'.
- Saved policy EC2 allocates the Site as B1 (business), B2 (industrial) or B8 (Storage and Distribution).
- Policy CS19: Design Quality and Accessibility in New Development, favours new development which incorporates context-sensitive design, is sustainable and avoids negatively impacting neighbouring occupiers.

5.3 Compliance with policies

Policy CS4.1 supports the enhancement of land within employment areas to meet emerging needs within the sector. We are aware that Policy CS4.7 states; "land which is currently in use or allocated for employment development will be safeguarded from changes to other types of development, except where there is no current or likely future demand for employment uses on the land; or where other uses would bring wider regeneration, environmental and amenity benefits."

5.5 While the logistics facility / storage use is not a light industrial or business use in the traditional sense, the site has been vacant since 2014 and served no useful economic purpose. The logistics use brings wider regeneration, environmental and amenity benefits by supporting business and employment uses already present within Knowsley Business Park and beyond by meeting the need within this sector for reliable and sustainable logistics.

5.6 There are currently 30 no. staff working on site managing the logistics operation and handling the containers. This is viable employment, more so than typical B8 storage use would generate, for example: 'lock up and go' storage units. The site received planning permission in 2015 for 19 no. new business start-up incubator units but this has not yet been completed due to the market conditions not currently being favourable.

5.7 The site is in a primarily industrial area and the majority of buildings in the immediate vicinity are of a similarly industrial character and made up of a mix of commercial and industrial / manufacturing uses. The logistics use is not in conflict with this location. Furthermore, due to the size of the yard needed, and the size of HGV

vehicles, a town centre location, or one which requires access through a town centre or residential area would be totally inappropriate.

- 5.6 The current logistics and storage use does not introduce permanent buildings or structures onto the land, only 'Portakabin' type mobile cabins for mess and welfare facilities and the containers. Therefore when market conditions are more favourable, the 'meanwhile' storage use could cease at short notice and leave no legacy that would make it difficult for the site to be developed for a permanent business or employment use. Consequently, the logistics facility which employs 30 staff and serves local businesses' logistical needs, would comply with policy CS4 and not cause long-term harm to the wider area as an industrial park and centre for employment. The applicant is also aware that an adjacent long-term vacant site on Ainsworth Lane has recently been granted consent as an HGV driver training facility (approval ref: 22/00412/FUL). This demonstrates the flexibility of Policy CS4 to enable the business park to accommodate uses that support the wider needs of local businesses – in that case meeting the training needs of the business logistics sector.

5.7 Site Layout and Design

The temporary 'Portakabin' type buildings that provide staff welfare have been positioned near the Unity Grove access and this is also near to the existing utility services. The building design fits within the industrial character of the area, making use of similar colours and materials as those present elsewhere in the vicinity.

- 5.8 As stated in paragraph 4.6, the site has maximum capacity for 150 no. twenty-foot containers or 75 no. forty-foot equivalents, or combination of both. The containers are stacked up to 3 units high maximum. The containers are a standard height of 2.6m, so the maximum height for 3 units would be 7.8m. The scale and height is proportionate to the surrounding business units.

- 5.9 The site is topped with crushed stone and there is perimeter fencing. An extensive group of trees screens the site from Ainsworth Lane.

5.10 Neighbour Amenity

The Site is within a designated industrial zone and in the immediate vicinity are a number of industrial and manufacturing units. While the site is primarily industrial in nature, to the south of the site there are two residential dwellings located on School Lane with their boundaries between some 48 - 60 metres. At present there is a

separation belt comprising Lockton Road serving existing industrial units, commercial units and tree planting between the site and the existing residential dwellings.

5.11 To date, the facility has been operating continuously for ten months since March 2022. The use has therefore gone through a trial period and to the applicant's knowledge there have not been any complaints around noise, traffic generation or other amenity issues.

5.12 Access, traffic generation and parking

The proximity to the M57 and A580 makes the site a highly sustainable and accessible location for this kind of development. Vehicular access utilises the existing gated entrances from Unity Grove and Ainsworth Lane. No new access points are proposed and no work is necessary to the existing entrances.

5.13 Traffic generation is not expected to have a considerable impact on the capacity or safety of either Unity Grove or Ainsworth Lane. All traffic to and from the site will be to and from M57 junction 4, situated 800m away via B5194 School Lane

5.14 A traffic assessment was undertaken as part of the previously consented application 14/00827/FUL - Erection of 19 no. incubator starter units. This had the potential to generate a maximum of 19 vehicle movements in the peak hours with around 166 movements over the day and was considered to be well below the DfT document 'Guidance on Transport Assessment' quoted threshold of 30 two-way trips in the peak hour.

5.15 The current logistics storage use will generate up to 66 movements a day max (assuming the yard is at full capacity based on the total number of containers that can be accommodated) plus the 30 staff who travel using their own private vehicles. This is fewer than the previous planning consent.

5.16 There is ample space for staff parking and of the 30 current staff on site, 25 use their own vehicles, 1 motorcycle and the remaining 4 use public transport.

5.17 Flood Risk

According to the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning, the site is located within Flood Zone 1, but the Ainsworth Lane site access runs over a small, culverted section of Knowsley Brook measuring 25 sq. m. which is in Flood Zone 3a. This area

represents 0.4% of the total 6,177 sq. m. site area. The remainder of the site required for storage of the containers is shown as "clear" and therefore classified as Zone 1.

5.18 A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been undertaken using data supplied by the Environment Agency. This concluded that the site does not flood, there is no flood risk to this site from Knowsley Brook and there will be no increase in run-off to areas downstream. The site is not within the flood outline of the 0.1 % AEP + climate change flow modelled by the Knowsley Brook Study in 2017. The site does not form part of the watercourse floodplain and as demonstrated above, there can be no issue regarding loss of flood storage resulting from the change of use of the site. A Drainage Strategy has also been prepared and it must be emphasised that no engineering operations such as the formation of impermeable hard surfaces are proposed.

5.19 The Natural Environment

None of the site falls within a statutory protected category. The principal features of biodiversity interest on the wider site are the Knowsley Brook boundary; and the boundary trees and hedges which surround the site. There will be no clearance of any boundary hedges or trees as part of this proposal. There will be no works undertaken within the brook, which is outside of the site boundary and not in the applicant's ownership.

5.20 Other Material Considerations

The Site is within the consultation zones of major hazards including a pipeline and the FloGas facility. Knowsley Council have a statutory duty to consult the HSE with regard to these hazards, but it is not considered the use of the site will have any conflict with these hazards.

6.0 Benefits of the Proposed Development

6.1 This proposal complies with planning policy and is therefore sustainable development.

- The proposal re-purposes a previously vacant site to provide a much needed facility to assist regional logistics supply chains, helping to reduce unnecessary HGV movements across the supply chains and supporting local / regional businesses;

- The proposal will not result in any detrimental visual impact on the primarily industrial area;
- The proposal does not introduce significant volumes of traffic into residential areas or other areas vulnerable to increases to traffic. It is only 800m from a major motorway junction and there will be no detriment to highway capacity or safety to the existing highway network;
- Amenity for the two properties on School Lane would be safeguarded by way of the existing landscape screening and buffer zone which blocks views to the development.
- The change of use and siting of containers will not result in unacceptable flood risk or surface water run off.