



Planning Statement

‘Creation of new artisan farm shop to the rear of The Unicorn Inn Public House’

**The Unicorn Inn Public House,
405 Cronton Road,
Widnes,
WA8 5QF**

May 2025

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1.0 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 This Planning Statement (the 'statement') has been drafted on behalf of the Applicant, to support a full planning application for the following proposed development:

'Creation of new artisan farm shop to the rear of The Unicorn Inn, Cronton Road and ice cream kiosk.'

- 1.2 This statement will address the relevant national and local planning policies that deal with the principle of the proposed development, and the pertinent planning matters associated with the scheme. This will be addressed as set out below:

- Section 2 – Application Site Context
- Section 3 – Relevant Planning Policy – National Planning Policy Framework
- Section 4 – Relevant Planning Policy – Knowsley Development Plan
- Section 5 – Conclusions

Principle of Development

- 1.3 In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, *'...applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise'*. The Development Plan relating to the site subject of this application, comprises the National Planning Policy Framework, the Knowsley Core Strategy (2016), relevant saved policies of the Knowsley Replacement Unitary Development Plan (2006), and Supplementary Planning Documents.
- 1.4 The National Planning Policy Framework is supportive as a matter of principle of development within built up areas, particularly on sites which are sustainably located, and offering additional services and benefits to the wider local community.
- 1.5 It is therefore our view that the development subject of this application is compliant with the provisions and principles of local and national planning policy. Further, that there are other material considerations which also weigh in favour of the grant of consent, and we would therefore kindly request that this application be approved without delay.

2.0 Site Context

- 2.1 The application site is located within the authority of Knowsley Council. The property currently comprises of a two-storey public house with large area of off street car parking for a number of vehicles. The property also benefits from an external courtyard area and beer garden to the rear of the building.
- 2.2 The property is located within the main, built-up development area, and is surrounded to the north, east and west by residential properties, with open fields located to the south (within the Green Belt) on the other side of Cronton Road. There are however noted to be other commercial uses in the wider local area including takeaways, another public house, vehicle garage, hairdressers etc. In that regard the proposed development is deemed to be commensurate with the character of the wider local area.
- 2.3 Being located on the main A5080 (Cronton Road), the site is well located for access to the main highway network. There are also local public transport connections, including bus stops which are available within walking distance of the site on Cronton Road. The site is well positioned for access to other key local services and facilities including schools, places of worship, recreation spaces, community centre etc. The site is also well placed for access into Widnes for additional shops and services.
- 2.4 The Applicant owns and operates the Unicorn Inn, which will be retained as part of this development. The Applicant is however seeking to diversify services on site with the scheme as proposed. The site is therefore deemed to be sustainably and suitably located to meet the needs of the proposed development.
- 2.5 The application site is not understood to be listed, nor locally listed and there are no other listed buildings within the immediate vicinity of the application site. The property is also not understood to be located within a conservation area.
- 2.6 From a review of the Environment Agency Flood Map, the application site is not understood to be located within an area at risk from flooding.

Planning History

- 2.7 From a review of the local planning authority's online search service for historic planning applications, we have noted a number of historic applications on site for various works and alterations. We note that one application for the erection of a single storey side extension with partial demolition and internal alterations to form new male, female and

assisted toilet & baby change, improved kitchen facility with dry & cold store and connecting bin store. new glazed corridor link to garden with associated works to include erection of 2m high perimeter garden fence with 1m high picket fence along car park and installation of new external steel fire escape serving first floor manager's accommodation and escape remains live. Application reference 24/00428/FUL is understood to have been validated in October 2024, and at the time of drafting this report remains awaiting a decision.

Proposed Development

- 2.8 The application proposes the creation of a new artisan farm store to the rear of the existing public house, to be housed within a newly created single storey building, partly located on the site of an existing garage.
- 2.9 The scheme is limited in scale and form and is of a basic construction and use of materials to fit in well with the existing site, wider street scene and to be considerate of neighbouring residential uses. The proposed single storey ice cream cabin is noted to be of the same design and use of materials, albeit to be sited on the site frontage, as per the existing arrangement.
- 2.10 The scheme will secure the retention of the existing off street car parking spaces for the use of staff and visitors to both the public house and proposed farm shop. Although as set out above, the site is sustainably located with good access to wider public transport networks, and key services and facilities, with sufficient off-street parking proposed to service the needs of the entire site.

3.0 Relevant Planning Policy – National Planning Policy Framework Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

- 3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that when determining a planning application, the decision maker must make their determination in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The following sections set out the key development plan policy considerations and material considerations applicable to this application.

Revised National Planning Policy Framework

- 3.2 The Revised National Planning Policy Framework was last updated in December 2024, and sets out the Government's planning policies for England, and how these are expected to be applied. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is a material consideration in the decision-making process, and a summary of paragraphs considered material to the determination of this application read as follows:

Section 2 - Achieving Sustainable Development

***"Paragraph 8:** Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):*

- a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;*
- b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and*
- c) an environmental objective—to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy."*

***"Paragraph 10:** So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development."*

***"Paragraph 11:** Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking this means:*

- c) *approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; “*

“Paragraph 12: *The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.”*

Comment

- 3.3 The application site is sustainably located for the use proposed, with good access to key local services and facilities, including public transport links. The development will be sited within an area characterised by a mix of commercial and residential uses and is located within the defined settlement boundary. In short, the site is deemed to be in a sustainable location, represents the effective and efficient use of the application site, and is for a use which is deemed to be both acceptable and appropriate as a matter of principle.

Section 4 - Decision Making

- 3.4 In relation to decision-making the NPPF states:

“Paragraph 39: *Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.”*

“Paragraph 48: *Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Decisions on applications should be made as quickly as possible, and within statutory timescales unless a longer period has been agreed by the applicant in writing.”*

Comment

- 3.5 The proposed development represents an effective and efficient use of land within the urban area, is broadening the services available to the local community and is therefore deemed to be acceptable. The application is also supported with the required documentation to demonstrate the suitability of the development in its setting, and in relation to its impact on neighbouring amenity and the street scene. It is therefore our view that the development proposed is compliant with the provisions of the Development Plan when read as a whole, and we would therefore kindly request that planning consent be granted.

Section 6 – Building a Strong, Competitive Economy

“Paragraph 85: Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future. This is particularly important where Britain can be a global leader in driving innovation, and in areas with high levels of productivity, which should be able to capitalise on their performance and potential.”

Comment

- 3.6 The National Planning Policy Framework is clear in its requirement for local authorities to support existing businesses to expand, invest and thrive. This scheme will assist in diversifying the offer on site and broadening the services available to the local community. The scheme will support the longer-term viability of the existing public house through shared trip generation and will help to create new jobs for the local community. The scheme is therefore deemed to be seen to be assisting in meeting this need.

Section 6 – Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres

“Paragraph 91: Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered.”

“Paragraph 92: *When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites which are well connected to the town centre. Applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale, so that opportunities to utilise suitable town centre or edge of centre sites are fully explored.”*

“Paragraph 94: *When assessing applications for retail and leisure development outside town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date plan, local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (if there is no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500m² of gross floorspace). This should include assessment of:*

- a) the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and*
- b) the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and the wider retail catchment (as applicable to the scale and nature of the scheme).”*

Comment

- 3.7 This is a proposal for a small-scale specialist farm shop, which includes a small deli and farm/pet sales. The scale and nature of use will not result in detrimental harm to the main town and local centres and will not draw footfall from local High Streets. The scheme is simply seeking to diversify the uses on site, to support the local community with, in effect, a community shop.
- 3.8 It is important to recognise the importance the pub has to the cohesion of the local community, where it serves as a place of meeting and socialising. Groups, such as dog walkers, who meet regularly at the pub would benefit greatly from the provision of the store, given the proposed goods that it intends on selling.
- 3.9 On the basis that harm is unlikely to be caused to the vitality and viability of identified centres within the wider local area, the scheme is judged to be acceptable.

Section 8 – Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities

“Paragraph 96: *Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:*

- a) *promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;*
- b) *are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and*
- c) *enable and support healthy lives, through both promoting good health and preventing ill-health, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs and reduce health inequalities between the most and least deprived communities – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.”*

“Paragraph 98: *To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:*

- a) *plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;*
- b) *take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community;*
- c) *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;*
- d) *ensure that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise, and are retained for the benefit of the community; and*
- e) *ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.”*

Comment

- 3.10 Given the nature of the proposed development, this proposal will enhance social interaction and social integration through the ability for the community to meet informally, within a development which will clearly enhance the availability of services within Cronton and thereby being of significant benefit. By locating services such as that proposed within these types of location, where shared trips can be promoted, will ensure that the facility integrates well into the local community, and has good access to public transport and other key services.

Section 9 - Promoting Sustainable Transport

“Paragraph 115: *In assessing sites that may be allocated for development in plans, or specific applications for development, it should be ensured that:*

- a) appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be – or have been – taken up, given the type of development and its location;*
- b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users;*
- c) the design of streets, parking areas, other transport elements and the content of associated standards reflects current national guidance, including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code; and*
- d) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree.”*

“Paragraph 116: *Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.”*

“Paragraph 117: *Within this context, applications for development should:*

- a) give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second – so far as possible – to facilitating access to high quality public transport, with layouts that maximise the catchment area for bus or other public transport services, and appropriate facilities that encourage public transport use;*

- b) *address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport;*
- c) *create places that are safe, secure and attractive – which minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, avoid unnecessary street clutter, and respond to local character and design standards;*
- d) *allow for the efficient delivery of goods, and access by service and emergency vehicles; and*
- e) *be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.”*

Comment

- 3.11 As set out within earlier sections of this statement, the site is well located for access to public transport links and the main highway network. As such, we are of the view that the site is sustainably located and can provide safe and suitable access for the proposed development, and without causing undue harm or parking issues for the wider retained public house use on site. The level of additional traffic to be created by the proposals is not, in reality, likely to be so significant as to warrant a refusal of this application.
- 3.12 It can be confirmed that the scheme retains off street car parking spaces which is more than sufficient for the use proposed. The scheme will also not necessitate extensive numbers of visitors to the site and will not therefore result in an increased risk to highway safety, nor increase congestion in the local area.

Summary

- 3.13 It is clear for the reasons set out above that the development proposed is in accordance with the paragraphs and requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework. Therefore, in line with the provisions of paragraph 11 of the Framework, we would kindly request that the Council grant consent for this proposed change of use without delay.

4.0 Relevant Planning Policy – Knowsley Development Plan

- 4.1 The Local Development Plan is understood to comprise of the saved policies of the Knowsley Replacement Unitary Development Plan (adopted 2006), the Knowsley Core Strategy (adopted 2016), and relevant Supplementary Planning Documents. This section of the report will address the relevant determinative policies set out within the Development Plan.

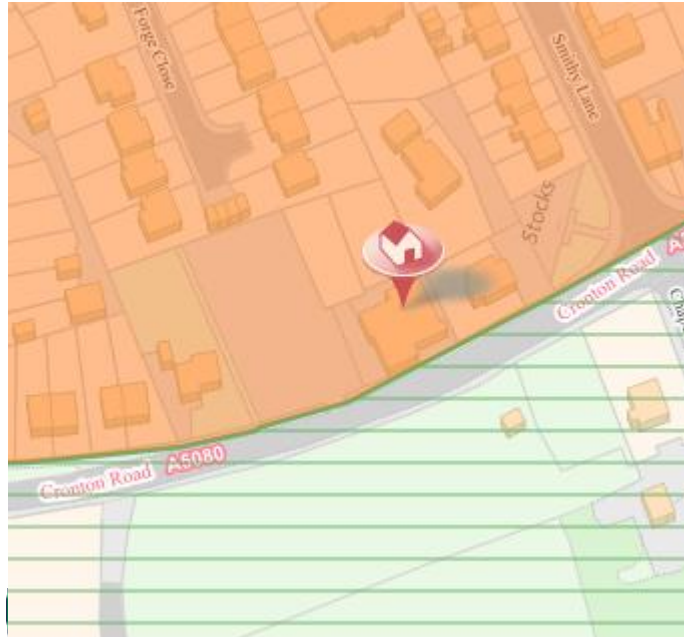


Figure 1: Knowsley Policy Map Extract

- 4.2 As shown in the Proposals Map extract included above, the application site is located within the main built up area and within a Primarily Residential Area. The key policies of relevance to the determination of this application are listed below:

Core Strategy Local Plan (2016)

- Policy SD1 – Sustainable Development;
- Policy CS1 – Spatial Strategy for Knowsley;
- Policy CS2 – Development Principles;
- Policy CS4 – Economy and Employment;
- Policy CS6 – Town Centres and Retail Strategy;
- Policy CS7 – Transport Networks;
- Policy CS19 – Design Quality and Accessibility in New Development;
- Policy CS21 – Greenspaces and Trees;
- Policy CS22 – Sustainable and Low Carbon Development; and
- Policy CS26 – Waste Management

- 4.3 Attention is specifically drawn to the provisions of the following policies:

- 4.4 **Policy CS2** states that new development will be expected to support a number of development principles including promoting sustainable economic growth, meeting identified community needs, reducing health and other inequalities, and providing

opportunities for positive lifestyle and health improvements for residents of all ages. The policy also seeks to ensure that development reduces carbon emissions, adapts to the effects of climate change, reduces the need to travel, as well considering environmental impacts and sustainable use of resources. These technical issues are understood to have been addressed within the application submission when read as a whole.

4.5 **Policy CS6** sets out the hierarchy for the siting of centres to promote their vitality and viability. Policy CS6 goes on to confirm that proposals for retail or other main town centre uses outside of a defined centre will only be permitted if they would complement regeneration opportunities, avoid significant impact upon the viability and vitality of the town, district and local centres, and comply with the sequential test in Policy CS4 (which itself focuses on a town centre, edge of centre, out of centre hierarchical approach). The scheme as applied for is accepted to be located outside of a defined local, district or town centre. However, the settlement of Cronton does not itself have a defined centre, nor does the settlement currently benefit from any form of convenience/community store to meet local needs. As such, whilst the scheme is promoting a retail use outside of an area allocated for such a use, there are clear community benefits to the scheme as applied for. Further, given the very limited scale of the development, and the fact the shop is seeking to sell artisan farm produced goods to support the wider rural economy, indicates that the scheme is in reality offering a varied retail use to that usually anticipated within a main town centre location. The scheme will support not only job creation on site, but also the wider rural economy, and is of a scale and form that simply would not be suited to an alternative location within the settlement. The scheme is therefore deemed to meet the tests last out within policy CS6.

4.6 **Policy CS19** sets out a number of tests for new developments with a view to seeking to enhance local distinctiveness and accessibility of places. These tests include consideration of respect for local character and landscape, creating spaces to promote social interaction, providing safe and secure access arrangements, securing a good standard of amenity for existing and future occupiers, as well as meeting the needs of climate change. The scheme as applied for is deemed to meet these tests and to represent an extension and alteration of an existing building which is proportionate, well considered and respectful of the original building, the street scene and neighbour amenity.

Comment

- 4.7 The application site is located within a settlement boundary and one of the allocated Primarily Residential Areas. The site is therefore deemed to be sustainably located and well positioned to meet the needs of the proposed development in accordance with the provisions of the Core Strategy.
- 4.8 The scheme secures the effective and efficient use of an existing site, without undue harms to neighbour amenity, nor the local highway network. Furthermore, the development is broadening the services and availability of goods to the local community, and is therefore offering significant social benefit, as well as environmental improvement by reducing Cronton residents' need to travel to neighbouring locations for specified goods and services. The scheme is therefore deemed to be wholly consistent with the provisions of the adopted Core Strategy.

Saved Policies of the Knowsley Replacement Unitary Development Plan (2006)

- 4.9 The key determinative saved policies are understood to include:
- Policy H5 – Development within Primarily Residential Areas;
 - Policy T7 – New Development and Walking & Cycling Routes;
 - Policy T8 – Transport Assessments;
 - Policy T9 – Travel Plans;
 - Policy T10 – Access for the Less Mobile;
 - Policy ENV2- Noise and Vibration;
 - Policy DQ4 – Trees and Development;
 - Policy ENV2 – Noise and Vibration; and
 - Policy ENV3 – Light Pollution.
- 4.10 Of the saved policies detailed above specific attention is drawn to the provisions of the following policy
- 4.11 **Policy H5** confirms that new development within Primarily Residential Areas which is for uses appropriate to a residential area will be permitted, provided that the development would not have an unacceptable impact on neighbour amenity, nor adversely affect the character or street scene.

Comment

- 4.12 As set out above, the application site is located within the existing, built-up area and within a Primarily Residential area. The site benefits from sufficient off street car parking to service the needs of the proposed development. The proposals have been carefully considered, sited and designed to not only limit their visual impact on the street scene, but also to minimise harm to neighbouring residents from loss of light, overshadowing, overbearing impacts and general disturbance and activity.
- 4.13 The scheme is therefore deemed to meet the policy tests laid out within Policy H5 and will in fact in our view be a positive addition to the settlement and wider local community.

Supplementary Planning Documents

- 4.14 We have had regard to the list of adopted Supplementary Planning Documents in force in Knowsley, and draw specific attention the following documents:
- Ensuring a Choice of Travel SPD;
 - Design Quality in New Development SPD;
 - Trees and Development SPD;
 - Town Centre Uses SPD; and
 - Shopfronts and Signage Desing SPD.
- 4.15 Of the documents listed above specific regard has been paid to the Town Centre Uses SPD as came into force in 2022. The document provides clarity on matters such as use classes, planning policy within town centres etc, with a focus on hot food takeaways, pay day loan shops, pawnbrokers and gambling uses within defined centres. The document does not appear to provide specific guidance on retail uses outside of defined centres, and in that regard is not deemed determinative to this current proposal.

Principle of Development

- 4.16 In land use planning terms, the site is located within the main, built-up development area of Cronton. It comprises the erection of new single storey structures and partial change of use of an existing public house site, within an established residential street, and would represent an effective and efficient use of the plot, in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan.
- 4.17 Whilst this application represents a move away from the existing single planning unit and associated public house use of the wider site, the proposal does in reality maintain a

community service use on the site, and the adopted development plan is supportive of such new uses, subject to no detrimental impact on neighbouring amenity and highways issues, and such developments being sited in accessible locations, as well as meeting the requirements of the sequential test. The scheme has been shown to meet those tests and is therefore deemed to be acceptable.

4.18 In light of the above, the application is deemed to be in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan, as it relates to the use of the site on land within a residential area. The proposed use would be commensurate with the character of the local area and can be shown to be protecting residential amenity. The local highway network is also not unduly affected by the function of the premises.

4.19 In addition to being in accordance with the provisions of the development plan, there are also a number of other material considerations which also weigh in favour of the grant of consent, and these are set out in further detail below. The scheme is therefore deemed to be acceptable as a matter of principle, and we look forward to working with the Council on a timely positive determination of the application.

Material Considerations

4.20 In addition to the application being compliant with the Development Plan, it is clear that numerous material considerations exist that weigh in favour of this application. These considerations include the material benefit to be achieved for the wider local community through the delivery of a small scale and specific retail use within the settlement, to assist in meeting basic day to day needs. This helps to limit vehicle trips, promote linked trips to the existing public house, which will have additional environmental benefits through reducing the need to travel.

4.21 The scheme does however remain small scale in nature and in that regard is not deemed to result in detrimental harm to the vitality or viability of other identified centres in the wider local area. The scheme will however promote and support the wider local rural economy, promote job creation, and represents a positive investment into the existing site, which will of course then assist in promoting and protecting the long-term viability of the public house.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 This Planning Statement (the 'statement') has been prepared on behalf of the Applicant, to support a full planning application for the following proposed development:

'Creation of new artisan farm shop to the rear of The Unicorn Inn, Cronton Road and ice cream kiosk.'

- 5.2 The proposals forming this application have been well considered, taking into account local context and need, as well as the amenity of neighbouring residents. The nature and design of the proposed development is consistent with the provisions of the Development Plan. The site is well located to utilise an extensive range of nearby amenities and modes of public transport. As such, the site is sustainably located, with sufficient car parking available on site to service the needs of the development and the retention of the existing public house use.
- 5.3 It has been demonstrated throughout this submission that the development subject of this application, accords with the relevant statutory duties and the Development Plan when read as a whole. The proposed development is acceptable in principle, by virtue of the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Knowsley Development Plan. Furthermore, numerous other material considerations weigh in favour of the grant of consent.
- 5.4 Section 70(2) of the Planning Act 1990 and Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that where an application accords with the relevant Development Plan, and material considerations are in favour, applications should be determined positively. As such, based on the above principles, we would therefore kindly request that the Council seek to support this proposal and issue a grant of consent for the proposed change of use without delay.