



Proposed Redevelopment of Dogs Trust Merseyside Rehoming Centre

Operator Statement

This proposal seeks to redevelop the existing Dogs Trust Rehoming Centre at Whiston Lane, Huyton, L36 6HP. The development will provide an updated range of rescue, rehabilitation and public viewing facilities for dogs coming into our care at the centre from the local area. The development will also incorporate a range of visitor facilities including a dog training school and education facility for the local community.

Dogs Trust is the UK's largest charity dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming of stray, unwanted and abandoned dogs. Dogs Trust is a national charity which operates through a network of 22 Rehoming Centres across the UK and Ireland.

The organisation cared for over 12,500 dogs and rehomed 9,067 dogs in 2022. The charity operates a non-destruction policy - no healthy dog is destroyed - which ensures that any dog which cannot be rehomed can be guaranteed to live the rest of its life in a safe, comfortable, and appropriate environment. Besides our rehoming work, the charity was also able to provide neutering operations for 3,678 dogs around the UK and Ireland in 2022 and provide free microchips for all dogs in our care who are not already chipped.

Dogs come to Dogs Trust via several sources. In 2022, 7,632 dogs were given as handovers from the public and 3,174 dogs were strays given to us by local authorities or transferred from other organisations.

General Background to the Application

The covid pandemic, followed closely by the cost-of-living crisis, has had a significant impact on dogs and their owners. 2022 saw Dogs Trust take over 50,000 relinquishment enquiries from owners struggling to care for their dogs. Regular polling through You Gov has shown that 43% of respondents thought they would find it more difficult to give their dog all they needed, compared to before the cost-of-living crisis began, and 64% of non-dog owners said that the rising cost of living would prevent them from adopting or buying a dog. As a result, we need to continually adapt and develop our operational procedures and ensure our rehoming centres are fit for purpose with the right facilities to meet the next set of challenges that dogs will face.

Dogs Trust Merseyside has been in operation at the Huyton site since 1999 and is the only professional dog welfare organisation operating on the necessary scale to meet the prevention and curative needs of the area and the local population.

Merseyside is one of our oldest rehoming centres, with 67 kennels, split across 5 parasol style kennel blocks each with 11 kennels with a central kitchen area and a line block of 9 kennels. They have 3 puppy kennels in the middle of site, one of the highest footfall areas of the centre, and puts the most vulnerable dogs in our care at high risk of disease transmission. In addition to this, there is one laundry room for the whole site, making infection control a daily challenge and makes basic administration of the site very labour intensive, and reduces the amount of time canine carers can spend on dog welfare and customer service.

The centre team received the 3rd highest number of adoption applications, with 9,825 people applying for a dog from them resulting in the 2nd highest number of rehomes in 2022. Their rehomes per kennel is constantly above 9.5 dogs per kennel, and a 3-year rolling average of 632 gross rehomes (757 in 2022) and 593 net rehomes (669 in 2022, 485 in 2021, 511 in 2020, 708 in 2019). 2020/2021 saw lower number of dogs helped due to the impact of the pandemic, however, since the end of lockdown the Merseyside centre has seen an increase in demand for our services with a 59% increase in the number of owners needing our help from 1,669 handover calls in 2021 to 2,657 in 2022. The centre took the highest number of handover calls from owners in 2022 with 8% of all calls being answered by the Merseyside team.

The older and more basic kennel design at the centre, limits the number and types of dogs that the centre can take in and support. The site currently has limited rehabilitation facilities, with nearly all the kennels being noisy, overlooking each other which creates a more stressful environment for the dogs in our care. We know from experience that we will not be able to adequately manage the welfare of these dogs, so sadly will not be able to help them, which results in us having to say no to 26.5% of handover requests due to the dog's challenging behaviour.

Dogs Trust has unusual and demanding property requirements, which we know from our experiences elsewhere are fundamental for a successful Rehoming Centre presence. The fact that Dogs Trust has had a presence at the existing site for 24 years justifies the proposed redevelopment.

Dogs Trust's work with local communities extends beyond the provision of kennelling for the rescue and rehoming of unwanted dogs. The charity also provides community support on dog (and human) welfare related issues.

The work of the organisation combines both preventative action and curative action. In short, the preventative work comprises:

- Education - to schools, youth groups, existing dog owners
- Dog School Training - making training affordable for most people
- Training of local authority Animal wardens
- Promotion of responsible dog ownership
- Microchipping
- Neutering

- Public Affairs - e.g., Advice and support to government on matters such as compulsory microchipping

Finding homes for abandoned and unwanted dogs - our curative work - is the most obvious principal function at our modern Rehoming Centres. However, both the preventative and curative work outlined above require a modern Rehoming Centre base from which to operate.

Justification of the Need for this Development

The scale of the stray and abandoned dog problem in the UK is a significant one. Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, it is estimated that there were 28,015 stray and abandoned dogs reported as collected by local authorities in the UK. Of those, 374 were ultimately destroyed by local authorities across the country.

Since 1999 Dogs Trust has commissioned an annual survey of all local authorities in the UK. The survey is the only national source of such statistics and aims to provide reliable information about the number of stray dogs that local authorities become involved with, the methods they use for dealing with stray dogs and the ways in which dogs are reunited with their owners. The number of resultant dog-destructions is also highlighted by this survey. Our statistics are the only ones used by the government and public sector bodies when discussing stray dogs and their welfare.

The need for a rehoming centre in any given area is based upon the resident population and the provision, or otherwise, of existing professional welfare facilities helping to address the welfare problems in that area.

There are only a very limited number of other animal welfare/rehoming organisations currently working through limited resources in the local area:

Animal Aid (cats)
 Birkenhead Kennels (dogs)
 Carla Lane Animals in Need (range of animals)
 Cats Protection (cats)
 Freshfields Animal Rescue (range of animals)
 RSPCA (range of animals)

With Dogs Trust continuing its presence at the subject site, we will be able to continue to reduce the number of unnecessary destructions in the region and provide a much-needed rehoming facility in a location which is significantly under- served.

The Merseyside Perspective of 'Need'

The scale of stray and abandonment cases recorded by Local Authorities is of course related to the size of the population resident in each authority.

The 2021/22 Stray Dog Survey for England reported that the Merseyside area has recorded 633 reports of strays, with an average of 158 dogs per Local Authority. This is more than 2X the UK wide average per Local Authority (74). Of these dogs, 29 dogs per Local Authority (5%) were destroyed, compared to the UK wide average of 1%.

Local authority animal wardens around the UK continue to make the following commentary on the common dog problems in their communities:

Many of the strays we seize have clearly been used for breeding, some excessively. We also seize a lot of puppies that have clear behavioural problems and some with serious illness or injury. We also seize lots of Pit-bull type puppies of various ages. We have seen an increase in both puppy sales and the numbers of stray dogs seized'.

'Advertised in the local classifieds are licensed premises (in neighbouring authorities) offering puppies for sale, which we are aware are obtained from Southern Ireland. Unlicensed dog breeding is a major problem for which we do not have the manpower to investigate or bring prosecutions'.

'We have a large/increasing number of reports of dog-on-dog attacks, dog on people attacks and dog attacks on other animals. Very few incidents make it to court'.

'Councils cannot pay for the long-term treatment a lot of these dogs need before rehoming, so we rely on the generosity of rescue kennels and breed-specific charities or welfare groups.'

How can this redevelopment of Dogs Trust Merseyside contribute to The City of Liverpool

We know that a Dogs Trust presence on this site in Huyton provides the following services to the Council and to the local community:

- Provide facilities and support resources for stray and abandoned dogs to the local authorities during and after the statutory period.
- Satisfy the local demand for rescue dogs through responsible rehoming
- Train dogs belonging to the community
- Educate the residents of Huyton and surrounding areas about the importance of responsible ownership
- Continue our base for neutering and microchipping campaigns

Rehoming - The Local Demand for Rescue Dogs

From experience gained by studying the rehoming pattern at our other Rehoming Centres we know that almost 55% of the dog adoptions will take place within 15 miles of a Dogs Trust Rehoming Centre. Such a radius covers the majority of the

Merseyside conurbation and its current resident population of circa 1.5 million and approximately 200,000 households.

The average number of rehomes per kennel per year at Dogs Trust Rehoming Centres is 12.4 (2016), with newer Centres routinely exceeding this. The proposal is to construct principal rehoming facilities with 56 'principal' kennels (Intake, Rehoming, Booked, Puppy) which would therefore, at a conservative estimate, find homes for a minimum of 670 dogs per year from the subject site, approximately 460 of which would be rehomed within a 15-mile radius of the site.

Preventative Work - Proven Benefits

Throughout our history we have increased our investment in a range of preventative measures, including mass neutering, microchipping, education, advising government and public sector officials, and academic behavioural research, as longer-term solutions.

Our Campaigns and Education department forms an essential part of our 'preventative' approach to the unwanted dog problem. We focus on the areas of greatest need, namely the northeast of England, the northwest of England, Northern Ireland, Greater London and Wales.

We now have 29 youth education officers in the UK and Ireland, delivering our message of responsible ownership and safety around dogs to over 425,000 children and young people across the country. Dogs Trust has produced a full range of educational resources for teachers at each primary school stage of the National Curriculum.

Through our regional campaign teams, we work closely with social housing providers, council officers, probation workers and the police to ensure that we reach as many dogs - and owners - as possible.

As part of our commitment to tackling irresponsible dog ownership, we also target those young people who may see dogs as weapons; or use them as status symbols or could become irresponsible owners in the future if they don't receive the correct guidance

Looking to the future the teams will focus on areas around the country with high levels of crime, poverty, unemployment, and deprivation; educating the communities that need it most and supporting the dogs that are most at risk of abandonment and/or euthanasia.

Dogs Trust continues to educate dog owners about responsible ownership, and we are committed to helping owners who want advice on training their dog.

Dogs Trust also continues to influence the country's law makers into providing just and sensible laws which improve dog welfare.

Our Dog School program continues to grow across the country, including across Merseyside and in 2022 helped 14,500 dogs and their owners to build a strong bond and learn essential life skills. The long-term goal of Dogs Trust's Dog School is to hugely reduce the number of dogs in the UK being given up for rehoming, or even abandoned, because their owners are unable to cope with their behaviour.

Description of Proposed Dogs Trust Facilities and Operational Use

Dogs Trust has been regularly acquiring sites for the strategic development of Rehoming Centres for the past 20 years. In this time, 17 sites have been acquired and/or redeveloped. The charity has extensive experience in the planning, design, construction, and operation of rehoming centre facilities for carrying out our main charitable objectives. Some photographs of modern representative Dogs Trust Rehoming Centres are included at Appendix 3.

Site Layout

This proposal will include an extensive range of Dogs Trust Rehoming Centre facilities providing bespoke housing for dogs with different needs. The kennel layout provides separate accommodation for those dogs that are ready and available for rehoming, those that are undergoing pre-rehoming behavioural assessment and those that have been booked and are going through the final pre-adoption process.

A modern well-equipped Rehoming Centre has several specific space demands to enable daily large-scale rehabilitation and rehoming to be undertaken successfully. These are summarised, and described in more detail as follows:

Rehoming Building - comprising:

Reception space for the visiting public – designed and sized to provide a positive visitor experience. There is a proven link between the creation of a welcoming space and an upturn in successful rehoming figures.
Private interviewing and dog-to-family introduction area.
Administration/office space for kennel management personnel.

Rehoming Kennels (15 kennels)

The rehoming kennels are glass-fronted kennels occupied by dogs ready to go to new homes. The visiting public view the dogs in these kennels from within the fabric of the main building. These kennels are located immediately adjacent to the reception area. Each kennel has a 'sleep' side and a 'run' side, linked by a dog hatch which the dogs can use both day and night. There are screens located to the outside elevation of the kennel 'runs' which act as an acoustic barrier while dogs are in the kennel runs.

Sponsor Dog Kennels (2 Kennels)

2 larger kennels with attached gardens that are used for housing our long term 'Sponsor Dogs'. These dogs have some special needs that may mean that they will be with us for a longer period of time and are used for fundraising via our sponsor a dog programme.

External exercise areas –

The Rehoming Building has several external exercise areas which act as playgrounds and socialisation areas for dogs, either individually or in small managed groups. These exercise areas are used through the day within the hours of 8.00am to 5.30pm.

In addition, there will be space for:

- Laundry and general storage
- Food preparation/food storage
- Grooming & dog washing

Dog School Training Hall

The Training Hall has become a standard facility at new Dogs Trust Rehoming Centres. One of the common reasons given by owners when they hand over a dog is that their dog won't do as he's told, or that they find training them very difficult or frustrating. We believed that helping owners to understand their dog will play a huge part in keeping owners and dogs together. Dog School provides a low-cost dog training scheme, aimed at making dog training classes easily affordable for most people.

The classes have proved to be highly popular and through these permanent facilities in this development proposal we plan to bring even more affordable dog training courses into the Merseyside area.

New Admissions 'Intake' Kennels (20 Kennels)

Dogs Trust receives homeless/unwanted/abandoned dogs from various sources. The background, medical and behavioural history of these dogs is not always known. In line with professional and conscientious husbandry practices these dogs arriving at the Rehoming Centre are housed initially in a discretely sited Intake Building while they undergo their initial health checks and other behavioural tests. This facility is entirely self-contained to minimise risk of cross-infection and has dedicated exercise areas and support services - food preparation, laundry, grooming etc. Each kennel has a kennel 'sleep' side and a kennel 'run' side, linked by a dog hatch which the dogs can use both day and night. There are screens located to the outside elevation of the kennel 'runs' which act as an acoustic barrier while dogs are in the kennel runs. This building has several external exercise areas which act as playgrounds and socialisation areas for dogs, either individually or in small managed groups. These exercise areas are used through the day within the hours of 8.00am to 5.30pm.

Booked Kennels (12 Kennels)

Kennels occupied by dogs which are booked to go to their new home. The dogs are held for a short period after the adoption process has begun while they go through their final health checks and/or a neutering procedure.

Each kennel has a kennel 'sleep' side and a kennel 'run' side, linked by a dog hatch which the dogs can use both day and night. There are screens located to the outside elevation of the kennel 'runs' which act as an acoustic barrier while dogs are in the kennel runs. This building has several external exercise areas which act as playgrounds and socialisation areas for dogs, either individually or in small managed

groups. These exercise areas are used through the day within the hours of 8.00am to 5.30pm.

Training and Behavioural Kennel (TBA) (4 Kennels)

This building houses 4 specialist TBA kennels where dogs that need that additional one to one care and training can take place. The kennels are slightly larger than the standard kennel and each kennels has its own attached garden area.

There is a central training area in the middle of the building with attached office and it also has its own kitchen and laundry facility.

The Dogs Trust behavioural team that works out of the TBA building is responsible for all behaviour assessment and centre serving the Merseyside area.

Vet, Staff and Puppies

In addition, we propose to redevelop the existing reception building to provide a Veterinary examination room and operating suite This facility is used daily to carry our initial health checks of dogs arriving at the Centre. The suite is also used to perform routine surgery on dogs, principally neutering operations - all Dogs Trust dogs are neutered and micro-chipped prior to going to their new home.

A new 3 kennel puppy facility on the existing footprint to provide a bespoke facility for the whelping and post- delivery care of bitches and early-age litters.

And on the first floor a larger staff rest room.

Kennel Accommodation Summary

	Existing Kennels	Proposed Kennels
Rehoming	30	15
Sponsor	n/a	2
Intake and Booked	34	32
Puppy	3	3
TBA	n/a	4
Total	67	56

Paul Wass
Head of Property
Dogs Trust