



Sequential Evaluation Report

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

October 2025

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Baltic PDC are instructed by the applicants to produce a sequential evaluation report (the 'SE'), to support a planning application, that is due to be considered by Knowsley Council (the 'LPA') for the following proposed development:

'Demolition of existing garage, erection of a single storey container to be used as a farm shop (class e) to the rear of carpark and retention of recently erected single storey building to be used as ice-cream kiosk (class e) to the front of carpark.'

- 1.2 The application (ref: 25/00293/FUL) is at the latter stages of determination, when the issue of sequential testing was raised by the case officer.
- 1.3 The application stated above includes a single-storey retail unit and small ice-cream kiosk- as detailed on drawing ref: 2009-RA-XX-XX-DR-A-0120 Rev P05. The retail floor space proposed is 42sqm, with ancillary spaces, including store counter.
- 1.4 The applicant's agent confirmed the search area for the SE via email on 28th August 2025. An extract of that email reads as follows:

'On other matters, I still require a retail sequential test to outline the requirement for the proposal and within the location as proposed, i.e. the car park of a Public House. Not sure if I did not explain clearly enough when I discussed this with you as the addendum 3.8 received via email on (06.08.2025) does not provide a retail sequential test.'

The retail sequential test (can be proportionate to the scale of the development and the context of the village of Cronton, however, a small-scale assessment must be evidenced) as we discussed previously, there is a small shopping parade located within a close vicinity to the application site, situated on Hampton Drive, off Smithy Lane (to the north of The Unicorn Inn, south of Cronton C of E Primary School).

Although by the NPPF's tests, the proposal would not be considered to be supported by a sequential test, however, would be required by our Core Strategy, namely (CS6 and CS4) to justify why the proposed development would not be suitable for an existing local centre and why an out of centre location would be warranted.'

- 1.5 This SE follows the guidance set out in the email above.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') sets out the Government's commitment to a planning system that does everything it can to support sustainable growth. Local planning authorities are expected to plan positively for new development. The latest version of the Framework came into effect on 19th December 2024.
- 2.2 One of the Government's over-arching objectives is sustainable economic growth. To help to achieve this, the Government's objectives for planning are to build prosperous communities; reduce the gap in economic growth rates between regions; deliver more sustainable patterns of development and respond to climate change; and to promote the vitality and viability of town and other centres as important places for communities. The strategy for achieving this is set down within chapter 7 of the Framework '*ensuring the viability of town centres*'. Key paragraphs include the following:
- 2.3 **Para 90** of the Framework identifies planning policy as critical to supporting the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities and sets out a series of
- 2.4 **Para 91**, which goes on to provide guidance on the sequential approach to development management, states:
- '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 Local 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.'*
- 2.5 **Para 95** directs local planning authorities to refuse such development that '*fails to satisfy the sequential test...*'.
- 2.6 Guidance supplementary to the Framework comes in the form of National Planning Practice Guidance (the 'PPG'). PPG was published on 6 March 2014 and is a

material consideration in the determination of planning applications. NPPG (**para 009 Ref ID: 2b-009-20190722**) reiterates guidance in NPPF on the sequential test that:

'The sequential test guides main town centre uses towards town centre locations first, then, if no town centre locations are available, to edge of centre locations, and, if neither town centre locations nor edge of centre locations are available, to out of centre locations (with preference for accessible sites which are well connected to the town centre). It supports the viability and vitality of town centres by placing existing town centres foremost in both plan-making and decision-taking.'

2.7 Paragraph 011 (**Ref ID: 2b-011-20190722**) sets out the considerations that should be taken into account in determining whether a proposal complies with the sequential test, as follows:

- *with due regard to the requirement to demonstrate flexibility, has the suitability of more central sites to accommodate the proposal been considered? Where the proposal would be located in an edge of centre or out of centre location, preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre. It is important to set out any associated reasoning clearly.*
- *is there scope for flexibility in the format and/or scale of the proposal? It is not necessary to demonstrate that a potential town centre or edge of centre site can accommodate precisely the scale and form of development being proposed, but rather to consider what contribution more central sites are able to make individually to accommodate the proposal.*
- *if there are no suitable sequentially preferable locations, the sequential test is passed.*

2.8 The SE undertaken for the proposed development, as detailed through this report, has been structured to follow the checklist, as set down above and reflects the relevant policies requirements within the statutory development plan, which is considered below.

2.9 Locally, the LPA's Core Strategy, which was adopted in January 2016, sets out its out-of-centre retail strategy at Policy CS4 and CS6. **Policy SP6** states:

'Policy CS4 Economy and Employment

...

'Town Centre' Employment Uses – Retail, Leisure and Offices

- 5) *New retail and other main town centre uses, as defined in Appendix A: Glossary, will be primarily located within existing town centres in accordance with Policy CS6: Town Centres and Retail Strategy. A sequential approach to site selection shall be applied with locations in existing town, district and local centres of an appropriate scale being considered first, then edge of centre locations and then only if suitable sites are not available should out of centre sites be considered. For edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference will be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre.*
- 6) *Office uses may be located within accessible locations in the other employment areas listed in 2) provided that town centre and edge of centre sites have been considered first in accordance with the sequential approach. The sequential approach, however, will not be required to be undertaken where the office use is ancillary to other employment uses.'*

2.10 **Policy CS6** states

'Policy CS6 Town Centres and Retail Strategy Knowsley's Hierarchy of Centres

- 1) *In order to enhance the vitality and viability of Knowsley's centres and maintain appropriate local service provision, the following hierarchy shall apply:*
 - a) *Huyton, Kirkby and Prescott Town Centres will enhance their equal role in providing comparison and convenience shopping. This will be supplemented by a complementary mix of leisure, health, residential, education, cultural, employment, service uses and complementary evening and night time uses.*
 - b) *Halewood (Ravenscourt), Liverpool Road/Page Moss and Stockbridge Village will retain a district centre role providing a local shopping function to complement the town centres, mainly focused on convenience shopping and services appropriate to local needs.*
 - c) *Local Centres⁸⁷ will provide local shopping and service provision of an appropriate scale relative to the size and function of each centre ...'*

3. Methodology

- 3.1 As stated above, a search area was agreed with the LPA, via email, on 28th August 2025. The area agreed is the *'small shopping parade located within a close vicinity to the application site, situated on Hampton Drive, off Smithy Lane (to the north of The Unicorn Inn, south of Cronton C of E Primary School)'*.
- 3.2 The following Google Earth extract provides the location, as follows:



Fig 1: Search Area (Google Earth)

- 3.3 In practical terms, this means an assessment of the commercial along that shopping parade. This currently consists of a convenience Store, the Parish Council, tutor agency, barber shop, two ladies air salons and a café.
- 3.4 The search area is shown on the LPA's policy map as follows:

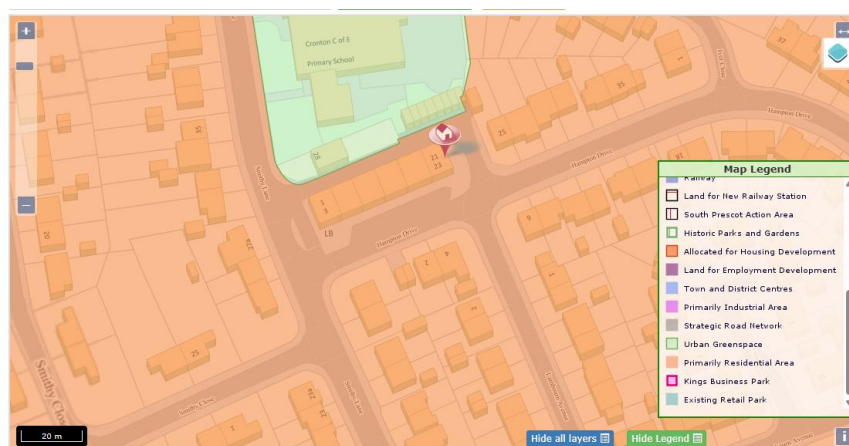


Figure 2: LPA' Policy Map Extract

- 3.5 To ensure that all available alternatives were identified for assessment, several approaches are proposed. A visit to the search area was carried out, to establish if any of the units within the search area appear to be marketed presently.
- 3.6 A desk top search is also proposed, in the event that units are on the market, without the benefit of sales boards.
- 3.7 In light of recent changes to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended), there are now certain freedoms concerning the change of use of properties within Use Class E. To ensure that the evaluation of available alternatives is comprehensive, the search will include all commercial spaces within the defined area. Any limitations are considered as part of individual assessments.
- 3.8 All units identified within these searches were then evaluated and are included later in this report.

4. Site Visit to Hampton Drive

- 4.1 A site visit to the defined search area (Figure 1) was carried out on 01st October 2025, to identify any suitable alternatives to the application site. Photos from the site visit are contained below at figs 3-4.



Fig 3: First half of shopping parade on Hampton Drive



Fig 4: Second half of shopping parade on Hampton Drive

- 4.2 It was observed on the site visit that all commercial units appeared occupied. Premises were all well maintained, and signage across the range of units appeared relevant and specific to the businesses residing within the properties. This is clear from the images above.

5. Online Searches

- 5.1 The following section provides an overview of an internet search of online estate agents and visited site. To confirm, the search included properties to rent and to buy.
- 5.2 Both Rightmove and Zoopla search engines were used to try and establish the range of alternative sites. As part of this exercise, the following search criteria were used on each:
- Minimum floor area (sq.m)- no criteria selected
 - Maximum floor area (sq.m)- no criteria selected
 - Price- 'Any'
- 5.3 It is clear from the following map extracts that no results were found in relation to available commercial properties within this area.

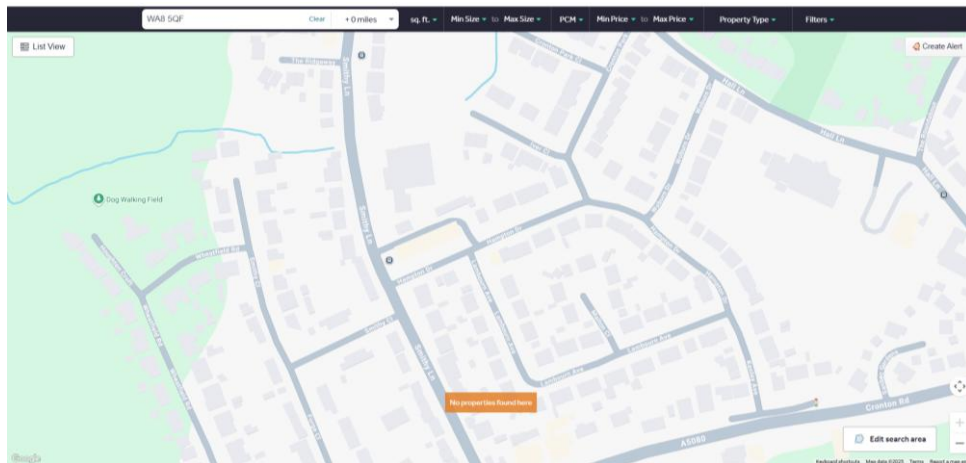


Figure 5: Rightmove Mapping Results for Commercial Properties for Rent

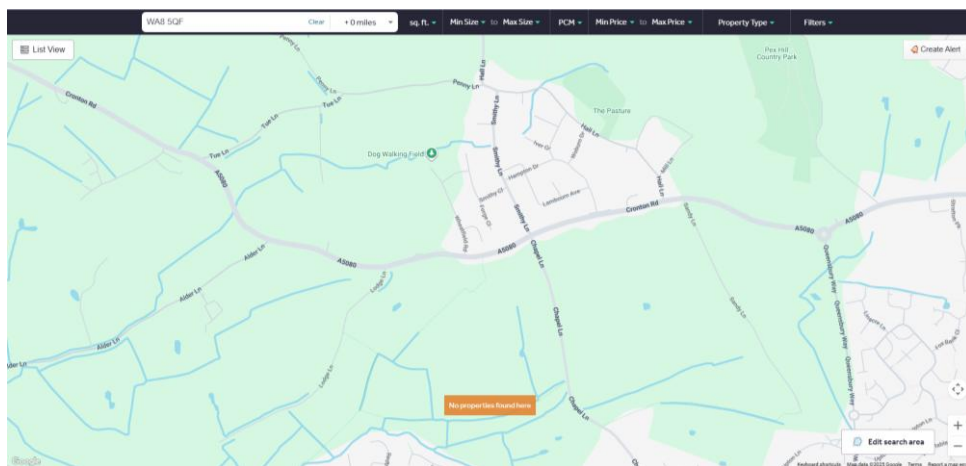


Figure 6: Rightmove Mapping Results for Commercial Properties for Sale.

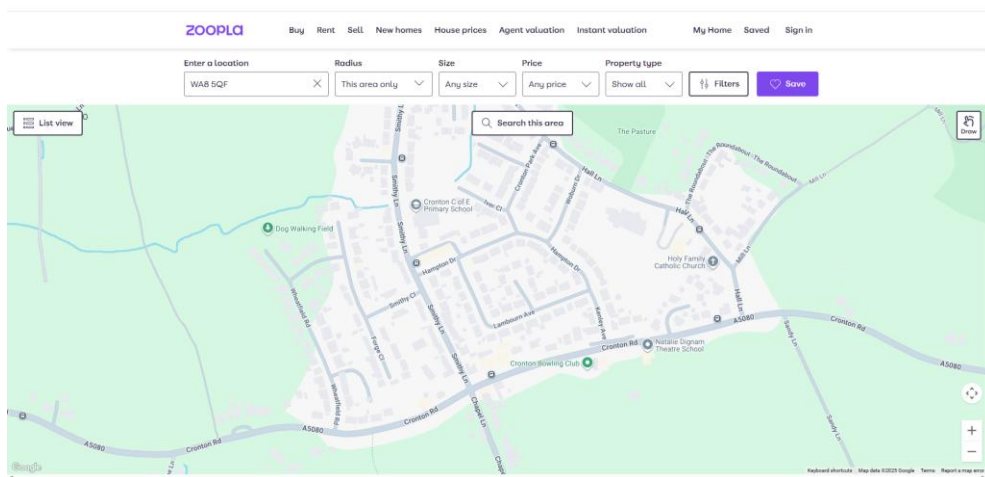
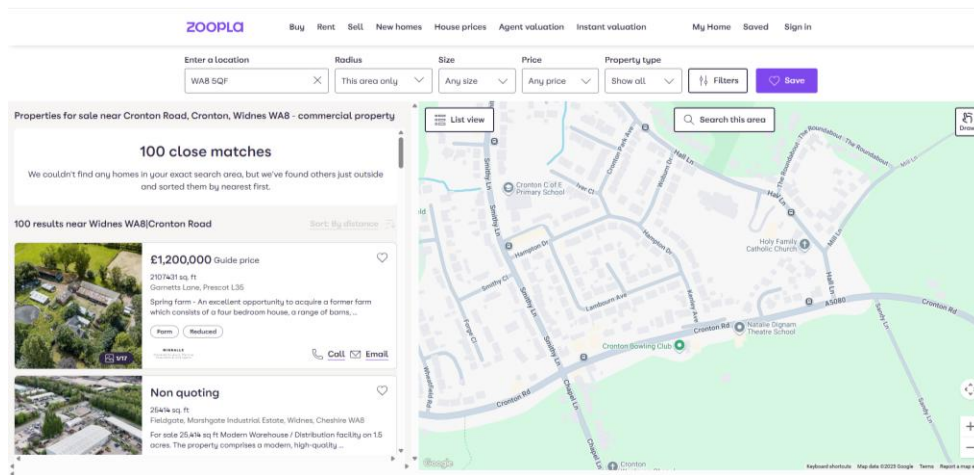


Figure 8: Zoopla Mapping Results for Commercial Properties for Rent



- 7.1 As demonstrated throughout this SE, there are no alternative options within the defined search area. The application site also passes the other policy tests set out within the relevant parts of the development plan.

7.2 In such circumstances, the application site ought to be considered as an appropriate location in compliance with the relevant parts of the Framework and Policy CS4 & Policy CS6 of the Core Strategy (2016).