

Full Planning Application

Land at Ainsworth Lane,
Knowsley

PP-11312445

Dear Sir/Madam

This application has been prepared by Eden Planning & Development Ltd [Eden Planning] [the Agent] on behalf of our client, Northwest Education and Training Limited [The Applicant].

Introduction

The application seeks full planning permission for the redevelopment of an area of brownfield land at Ainsworth Lane, Knowsley [Ref. PP-11312445 on 5th July 2022]. The development comprises:

'Change of use to an HGV training and testing centre, the erection of a building, widening of the accesses and associated works'

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

- Planning Application Form – via the Planning Portal – ref. PP-11312445
- Planning Application Fee £924 (excl. Portal Service Charge £32.20)
- Site Location Plan (ref. 1295_A_DR_000-A)
- Existing Site Plan (ref. 1295_A_DR_001-A)
- Proposed Site Plan (ref. 1295_A_DR_002-A)
- Proposed Elevations and Floor Plan (ref. 1295_A_DR-A)
- Proposed Site Access Plan (ref. 2792-F01)

The Site

The application Site is approximately 0.39ha / 3,925sqm and comprises hardstanding surrounded by palisade fencing and gates with separate access and egress points. We understand the Site was most recently in industrial use and used as a car park associated with the surrounding industrial premises. There is considerable hardstanding across the Site and there are trees around the periphery of the Site as well as foliage and scrub.

The Site is located at Ainsworth Lane, Knowsley within a designated industrial zone. To the north lies the A580, a major route running through the City Region. Within the Site's immediate vicinity are a number of industrial and manufacturing units.

The Site is circa 800m from the nearest residential neighbourhood, and 20m from a recognised main river. However, the Site sits within Flood Risk Zone 1 and is not considered to be at risk of flooding.

Up to date images of the Site and surrounding area are included in Appendix 1 of this letter.

The Site is currently owned by Knowsley Council and will be leased to NWEAT UK, if planning permission is granted.



Rationale for Development

The Government has previously recognised a major skills shortage across the UK for HGV drivers, with wider implications across the economy. As part of the national skills fund, 'Skills Bootcamps' were introduced, from which this proposal has stemmed.

The application Site is considered well suited for addressing this shortage, positioned; within an industrial area, with suitable infrastructure for HGV's and away from residential uses.

There is a clear alignment between the proposed use and a local need among surrounding occupiers and existing businesses. The introduction of an HGV training centre would contribute to upskilling the local workforce to benefit the longevity and viability of those existing businesses.

The purpose of this application is to allow a new business to occupy a longstanding vacant site within a primarily industrial area, as indicated on the Knowsley Local Plan policies map. As described above, the proposed development includes a change of use to allow the Site to be used as an HGV training and testing centre, together with associated works.

Pre application advice was sought for this proposal by the Applicant and a response was received from Maxine Wishart, Senior Planner, Directorate of Regeneration and Economic Development (attached). The comments received confirmed the Sites suitability for the proposed use and provided guidance as to the key matters to be dealt with in the application.

Planning History

The Site does not have a planning history available to view online. However, we understand the Site was last used as surface car parking to accommodate neighbouring B2 uses. The Site is owned by Knowsley Council and has been vacant for at least 10 years.

Proposal

As described previously, this application seeks permission to allow the Applicant (NWEAT UK) to occupy the site and provide an education and training facility for aspiring HGV drivers.

The key elements of the proposal are:

- A change of use of land from general industry (B2) to an HGV training and testing centre.
- The erection of a building to be used primarily as a classroom and secondly as an office, total floorspace c. 101.57sqm.
- The repair of the existing hardstanding already on Site.
- Marking and dividing the Site into zones for staff and student parking, as well as areas for safe training and navigating



- The widening of existing access to ensure HGVs can enter and exit the Site safely.

Relevant Planning Policy

The relevant development plan is the Local Plan Core Strategy (January 2016), with some saved policies from the Knowsley Replacement Unitary Development Plan (June 2006).

The Site is identified within the Local Plan Policies map as within Knowsley Business Park, a Primarily Industrial Area. Policy CS11: Principal Regeneration Area – Knowsley Industrial and Business Parks, seeks to facilitate a mix of new, high quality employment development in these areas.

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.

The NPPF supports the reuse of land under paragraph 123, which states: *'Local planning authorities should also take a positive approach to applications for alternative uses of land which is currently developed but not allocated for a specific purpose in plans, where this would help to meet identified development needs.'*

Principle of Development

The Site is identified within the Local Plan policies map as within a Primarily Industrial Area. 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 pre-application response recognised that the proposed use is not in conflict with this withstanding allocation. Furthermore, due to the size of the yard needed, and the size of HGV vehicles a town centre location would not be appropriate.

This is subject to compliance with the relevant policy and guidance. Policy CS4.1 supports the enhancement of land within employment areas to meet emerging needs within the sector. The policy also seeks new development to address the skills and education shortages within the City Region.

We note that Policy CS4.7 notes; *"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."*

While the proposed development isn't a traditional employment/industrial use, it clearly supports the employment uses already present within Knowsley Business Park. Additionally, the Site's longstanding vacancy evidences no demand for employment. Therefore, it is believed that the introduction of an HGV training and testing site would comply with policy CS4 and positively contribute to the longevity of the wider area as an industrial park and centre for employment.

Design and Layout

The proposed building is to be positioned towards the front of the Site, adjacent to the entrance point. The size and siting are intended to reflect the previous structure on the



Site and allows for efficient access to services (water/electrics/telecoms) that are essential for the building to function sustainably.

The building design is in a modular construction style and fits within the industrial character of the area, making use of similar colours and materials as those present elsewhere in the vicinity. These include sand & cement render finished with white masonry paint. This approach aligns against the design objectives outlined in Policy CS19, which favours new development which considers the materiality of buildings within proximity.

In light of the comments made within the pre-application, should you think that a temporary change of use is more appropriate on the Site, then a condition will be expected to deal with this restriction. However, we do not consider there is an appropriate policy justification for this decision, given the nationally and locally recognised need for HGV drivers.

Access, Highways & Parking

No new access points are proposed. Access for vehicles is intended to be “in” from the south entrance and “out” from the “north” entrance. This is to ensure safe manoeuvring as the road is a dead end. On Site, it is proposed to store three HGVs overnight (one Class 1, two Class 2), for which there is adequate parking space. Additionally, 24 spaces will be designated for students (max 20) and staff (4). This represents the maximum number of cars expected on Site. There is also provision for motorcycle and cycle parking shown on the proposed site plan.

As requested during pre-application engagement, the application is accompanied by a Site layout plan (ref. 1295_A_DR_002-A) which demonstrates safe and suitable access and egress to the Site. The Site itself was last used for commercial uses that would reasonably involve HGV movements. Whilst the proposed use will involve HGV movements it is relevant that HGV movements could take place without the need for a change of use. To respond to comments received at pre-app stage the proposals include works to improve the access and egress. These may require Section 278 agreement and whilst the applicant is committed to making these improvements, we would not consider it reasonable that these works need to be undertaken in advance of the new use occupying the site given the fallback position.

Traffic generation is not expected to have a considerable impact on the viability or safety of Ainsworth Lane. The three HGVs stored on site are expected to exit and return to the centre twice a day (maximum).

Additional traffic may arise during peak hours when students arrive on Site. However, sessions are intended to be split to minimise over-occupying; morning sessions starting at 7am and afternoon sessions at 1pm. The centre would be closed to students by 5pm each day, although staff would remain on site for longer. It is not considered that this activity would cause excessive risk for road and pedestrian users. The level of traffic is considered to be in line, or in fact less than surrounding uses or those associated with a traditional employment operation.

Hazards and Contamination

The Site is within consultation zones of major hazards / major accident hazard pipeline. The proposed building fills only a small portion of the Site and is not expected to increase footfall to a degree that would warrant concern on grounds of public safety.



Trees

Pre-application advice confirmed that an arboricultural report was not necessary as only undergrowth is proposed to be removed, and not the mature trees which border parts of the Site.

Summary

The application proposes a change of use to support the erection of a building and widening of access so that the Site might operate as a training and testing centre for HGV drivers, for which there is a nationally recognised skills shortage.

Although traditionally an education and training facility might not be considered an appropriate use in a primarily industrial area, it is believed that by providing a facility for the training of HGV drivers, the proposed development would positively contribute to the longevity and economic viability of the wider area (Knowsley Industrial Park). As such, the Site is within a highly sustainable and accessible location for this kind of development.

We trust that the submitted details are acceptable to register this application, given that the Council's validation requirements are met. We look forward to receiving confirmation of the application's validation at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully,



Donna Barber

DIRECTOR

