

20<sup>th</sup> June 2007  
Our ref: J010508/lxl-sxe-103  
Your ref:

Operational Director  
Environmental and Regulatory Services  
Halton Borough Council  
Rutland House  
Halton Lea  
Runcorn  
WA7 2GW

Dear Sir/Madam

**Widnes Intermodal Rail Depot, Desoto Road, West Bank Dock Estate, Widnes  
Alteration and Extension to Rail Freight Terminal**

Please find enclosed a planning application on behalf of our clients, O'Connor Properties Ltd, which seeks permission to make alterations and an extension to the rail freight terminal at Widnes Intermodal Rail Depot, Desoto Road, West Bank Dock Estate, Widnes.

The development proposed will include, the replacement of the existing HQ building with a new three storey office building (B1) and attached employee locker block with high level entrance walkway, the relocation of a trailer workshop, the construction of a new gatehouse, the extension of crane beams and container storage, the provision of new rail sidings, the expansion of existing staff car parking facilities, the creation of new pedestrian footpaths and the provision of soft landscaping.

The application submission comprises:

- 4 copies of planning application forms and Certificate B;
- 4 copies of plan ref. 5181 – PA001 Existing Site Plan / Site Location Plan
- 4 copies plan ref. 5181 – PA002 Proposed Site Plan
- 4 copies of plan ref. 5181 – PA003 Proposed Building Plots
- 4 copies of plan ref. 5181 – PA004 Proposed Workshop
- 4 copies of plan ref. 5181 – PA005 HQ Plot and Access
- 4 copies of plan ref. 5181 – PA006 Gate House
- 4 copies of plan ref. 1109/PR/004altc (B) HQ Building Elevations Plan 1
- 4 copies of plan ref. 1109/PR/005altc (C) HQ Building Elevations Plan 2
- 4 copies of plan ref. 1109/PR/002B HQ Building Floor Plan 1
- 4 copies of plan ref. 1109/PR/003B HQ Building Floor Plan 2
- 4 copies of the Design and Access Statement
- A cheque for the sum of £6,095 to cover the planning application fee calculated on the basis of 1707sqm at £265 per 75sqm (or part there of).

## **The Site**

The 14 hectare site is located to the south-west of Widnes. The site currently operates as a freight terminal and comprises rail sidings, rail mounted gantry cranes, a container storage area and a number of associated operational buildings. The site is located in an industrial area, with a rail viaduct bounding the site to the north, storage warehousing immediately south-west, and the former Tessengerlo chemical works to the south-east. Desoto Road West forms part of the site's eastern boundary and also acts as the only highway access route into the site.

## **The Proposal**

The O'Connor Group own and operate a container storage and transportation business. Within this sector the productivity of a business is closely related to the efficiency and frequency with which transported freight can be processed and the volume of units that can be kept in storage at any one time. My client wishes to expand the business and in order to do so it will be necessary to enhance the current site operation, storage space and loading/unloading principles utilised within the freight terminal.

In order to achieve these goals a number of developments are proposed. Firstly, in order to expand operations on the site, a new three storey office building with a combined floorspace of 1231sqm will be constructed to co-ordinate activities at the freight terminal. This building will be connected at ground floor level to a new employee shower and locker block of 158sqm. A maintenance workshop (302sqm) will be relocated to the north-western boundary of the site and a new gatehouse (16sqm) will be erected adjacent to the terminal's highway entrance.

Loading and unloading principles and freight capacity will be enhanced by an extension to the existing crane tracks and container storage area on land south of the current freight processing area. It is also proposed that new rail sidings will be added to the processing area in the future, as business requirements demand. At this stage the location of the new sidings are shown, however precise details of engineering structures to facilitate them would need to be the subject of further details following the granting of planning permission.

In addition to these proposals, my client wishes to create a new employee car park adjacent to the southern boundary of the site which will cater for any future workforce increase. This will be linked to the proposed office building by a new pedestrian walkway, a section of which will be elevated to provide access at mezzanine level. Landscaping and planting is proposed along the pedestrian footpath and on land adjoining the employee car park.

## **Planning Policy**

The application site forms part of the Mersey Multi Modal Gateway (3MG), a project which is considered to be of great economic importance at both a local and regional level. In 2001 the

North West Regional Development Agency designated the freight park as a site of strategic regional importance on the basis of its potential as a major intermodal freight terminal serving Merseyside, North Cheshire and the port of Liverpool. The designation was confirmed in the Regional Economic Strategy published in 2003

The North West Regional Spatial Strategy 2003 (NWRSS) contains a number of economic policies which set a framework for development plans of individual authorities to play their part in increasing the competitiveness of the regional economy in targeting the key business sectors identified in the Regional Economic Strategy. More specifically, policy EC5 requires development plans to identify Regional Investment Sites and requires relevant authorities to reserve these locations for uses that support the region's sectoral priorities. The list of sites identified in the Regional Economic Strategy includes Widnes, Ditton.

The Halton Unitary Development Plan was adopted in April 2005. Part 1 of the UDP sets out general policies and proposals of strategic importance for the development and use of land in Halton. In accordance with policy EC5 of the NWRSS, policy S20 of the UDP designates 3MG as a Regional Investment Site. The policy stipulates that development on the site should meet the needs of economic sectors that are considered significant in raising the competitiveness of the economy of the North West region.

Part II of the Halton UDP contains policies which seek to achieve the objectives which are set out in part 1 of the document. As a key economic investment site for the borough, the Employment chapter contains a site specific policy for 3MG. Policy E7 states that a 'phased strategic inter-modal rail freight park will be developed on land at Ditton, Widnes in accordance with an overall masterplan to be approved as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)'. The policy goes on to state that any proposed development on the site (including land parcel 255 which contains the O'Connor Group freight terminal) will be permitted in accordance with detailed criteria (E7 a, b, c, d and e).

The proposed alteration and extension of the rail freight park will accord with the criteria set out in policy E7 as follows; firstly, the development is being proposed by a business which will utilise the railway for the transportation of freight. The O'Connor Group is of regional distribution importance and its expansion will give rise to additional new employment opportunities for residents of Halton and surrounding local authority areas. The proposal will not have a significantly adverse impact on the environment or on the amenity of local residents, and would contribute urban regeneration. It is not anticipated that the development will prejudice the improvement of the passenger rail network and, finally, the alteration and extension of the freight terminal will not have a significantly adverse impact on the local transport networks and trunk road network.

In addition to site specific policies, part II of the UDP also contains generic development control policies such as BE1, General Requirements for Development, which seeks to ensure, through detailed criteria, that only appropriate development takes place within the borough.

The alteration and extension of the freight terminal accords with the design principles set out within this policy as explained in the accompanying design and access statement. It is not anticipated that the proposed development will give rise to amenity issues or be incompatible with other surrounding land uses as all adjoining land is of a comparable industrial use.

3MG is also the subject of a draft SPD which completed a period of public consultation in September of 2005. This document seeks to form a masterplan for 3MG, splitting the site into various parcels of land and outlining the most appropriate uses within each. Parcel C covers the O'Connor Group freight terminal and within this area the most suitable use is considered to be businesses that utilise the railway for the transportation of freight. In this regard the proposed alteration and extension of the freight terminal accords with the principles set out in the draft Supplementary Planning Document.

### **Conclusions**

In summary, it is anticipated that the proposed alteration and extension of this rail freight terminal will enable the O'Connor Group to enhance and expand their container storage and distribution business to the economic benefit of Halton and the surrounding region as a whole.

The proposed development accords with both the detailed local planning policies set out in the Halton UDP and draft SPD, and strategic regional policies, both of which advocate the use of the land for employment purposes, and more specifically, a hub for the storage and distribution of freight. The alterations and extension proposed are in accordance with the design requirements set out in the Halton UDP, will not adversely affect the amenity of surrounding uses and will not have a significant impact on the surrounding road network.

Planning permission should therefore be granted for the development proposed.

I trust that you have sufficient information to determine this application. However, if you require any further details, please do not hesitate to contact me. In the meantime, I await your receipt for the planning application fee and confirmation of registration, and I shall contact you in the near future to discuss the timescale and means of determining the application.

Yours sincerely

**Steve Edgeller DipTP MRTPI**  
**Planning Director**  
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